

УДЛОЖЕНОКУЛТУРА  
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NOVA

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

*What kind of philosophy and art are called for when reality becomes the precarious thing par excellence?*

*What has become apparent in the past years is that reality is fiction. There's no way around it. This proposition has been made many times before—by renowned philosophers, no less—but the truth of it has turned into something fundamentally different. Fiction has become a new type of systematization, a construction more real than the real itself, precisely because it has left reality and its constraints behind. Fictions are not something coming from us; they are emergent phenomena of the virtual spaces we occupy—spaces within which a new systematization of the real takes shape. No longer subjects, we are becoming conduits for such fictions to take place, manifesting in all their unmediated intensity, outside the social bond and beyond meaning-making attempts to anchor them into something concrete. It's as if no one is satisfied with what exists—not even the world itself. The world is already becoming other to itself, unmasking and unmaking itself at accelerating speed. With each erosion and destabilization, something new is being built, drawn from what was left behind: the unmediated potential of the real. What does this realignment reveal about fiction's power to set realities in motion? What possibilities does it offer for experimenting with the un/making of reality—and how is belief (in reality and/as fiction) formed, managed, generated, and suspended in this context?*

**Unreality Mode** brings together perspectives exploring the effects and affordances unfolding between psychotic disbelief in reality on the one end and the suspension of disbelief in fiction on the other.

**The first volume** of this double issue traces this between-zone. The contributors show how unreality is no longer just a void or illusion, but an operational mode in which fictions, glitches, and loops become the very machinery that has hijacked the production of the “Real”. If the definition of a weapon is “that which forces a change in reality”, then the texts collected here amount to an armory. They follow the procedures—chemical, algorithmic, geopolitical, narrative, epistemic, and psychotic—through which reality is now forced, bent, and rerun.

*In Unreality Mode, we are not observers of these processes but compo-*

nents in them: carriers of fictions, nodes in replication pipelines, walkers in constrained squares, thinkers under the spell of circular movements. What is at stake is no longer how to return to some lost reality but how to inhabit this condition strategically—how to use fictions, glitches, and loops as interfaces for navigating the ongoing remaking of the real. The **second volume** explores how contemporary art takes up this challenge.



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2021

# LIBRARY I BOOKS

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# Intro

MAKS VALENČIČ & TJAŠA POGAČAR

The first volume of *Unreality Mode* opens with a recalibration of philosophy's supposed sobriety. **Vincent Lê** presents a “recently discovered manuscript” in which Nietzsche himself confesses that the great motifs of his thought—the will to power, eternal return, Dionysian insight—are inseparable from a sustained experiment with chemicals. The piece treats drugs not as decorative biographical detail but as technologies of perspectivism: pharmacological interventions that re-code the world, re-weight values, and expose metaphysical insight as a kind of finely tuned intoxication. From chemical gods we move to algorithmic ones.

In *Algorithmic Hierophany*, **Emily Martin** argues that our encounters with generative AI are less utilitarian than liturgical. The feed is staged as a contact zone where something inhuman speaks in glitches, hallucinations, and absurdities. Martin draws a diagonal between UFO myth and chat-based AI: both operate through a “mysticism of deception”, where the message is real precisely because the source remains opaque. The algorithm does not simply answer; it abducts. Scrolling becomes a ritual of exposure, in which the user is slowly emptied out and re-written in the image of an inscrutable system.

*Hyperstitional Deterrence*, a collaborative project by **Parham Ghalamdar** and **Parsa Esmaeilzadeh**, scales this logic up to the level of war. Conceived during the Iran–Israel war, the work argues that conflict has shifted from a contest over territory to a contest over timelines. They describe a regime of xenowar cognition, where

2003

AI-generated images, deepfakes, “phantom strikes”, and ritualized statements form a replication pipeline. Signals are seeded, synthetically magnified, captured into ritual, inscribed into policy, and then looped back as proof. War becomes a belief engine sustained in scroll-space, a cybernetic ritual in which missiles and bodies are only one layer among many.

**Miguel Prado Casanova** situates today’s political landscape within an info-sphere saturated by signals, memes, and viral spectacles where grand narratives and basic facts have all lost their binding force. In this setting, the Left ossifies: it clings to proceduralism, factuality, and critique, acting as if the old symbolic guarantees still hold. Neoreactionary currents, by contrast, embrace and weaponize narrative entropy. Figures like the “Cult of Kek” exemplify a style of politics in which irony, shitposting, and mythic avatars become engines of hyperstitional drift: whoever can orchestrate the drift of images and affects across unstable platforms gains leverage over the future.

If the first four texts track how unreality mode unfolds in bodies, feeds, wars, and myths, **Mikkel Rørbo** provides a conceptual grammar for what is going on. Drawing on Peirce, cybernetics, and machine learning, Rørbo focuses on abductive inference—the logic of the guess. In computational systems, abduction no longer stays in the head; it becomes machinic conjecture. When such operative fictions guide decisions, they initiate reality-production loops. Rørbo thus formalizes the link between AI guessing, geopolitical hyperstition, and political myth-making.

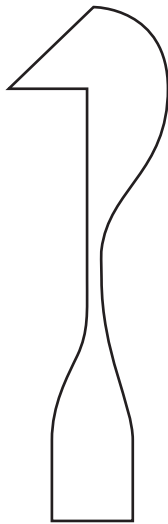
**Pichaya Aime Suphavanij’s** *Mode of Liaisons* offers a method for inhabiting unreality mode: instead of trying to step outside systems, we move through them, coupling and recoupling zones until something like orientation appears. Suphavanij argues that orientation today is produced more by procedures than by arguments. Under these conditions, critique loses altitude; pointing out contradictions does not slow the machine. What is needed instead is an epistemology that works like an apparatus: a way of

liaising between terrains that are already operational.

Finally, **Wouter Kusters** returns us to the brink where philosophy and psychosis touch. Kusters is interested in what happens when thought turns question around so insistently that it becomes a circular movement—a loop that cannot be closed or left behind. For the philosopher, such circles can be productive: one orbits an inexpressible point, returning again and again without collapsing into it. For the mad subject, by contrast, the loop risks tightening into an inescapable enclosure or snapping altogether into a direct fusion with the point of obsession. Kusters thus maps the beginning of the end: the threshold at which philosophical interrogation and psychotic certainty become indistinguishable.

Taken together, these seven texts describe a world in which the real is no longer a stable background but a byproduct of operational success. Chemical pacts, algorithmic hierophanies, hyperstitional deterrence, entropic myth, machinic conjecture, operational liaisons, circular movements—they are all procedures by which unreality is configured, stabilized, and sometimes broken.

2000



Nootropi-  
cal Nietzsche:  
Confessions  
of a  
Dionysian  
Drug Fiend

VINCENT LÊ

2007

“If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*. These Dionysiac stirrings, which, as they grow in intensity, cause subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting, awaken either under the influence of narcotic drink, of which all human beings and peoples who are close to the origin of things speak in their hymns, or at the approach of spring when the whole of nature is pervaded by lust for life.”

— Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*

“Sensible insight into the state of things I have come after taking a huge dose of opium—in desperation. But instead of losing my reason as a result, I seem at last to have *come to reason*.”

— Nietzsche, letter to Lou Salomé and Paul Rée

*The following is a recently discovered manuscript purportedly written by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1890 at the Jena asylum. It was smuggled out under the watchful eye of his sieg-heiling sister by a fellow patient with whom Nietzsche was on affable terms. The unpublished manuscript now before us is not that lost German original, written in the Antichrist's blood-stained hand, but an English translation by an enigmatic philosopher and autodidactic NEET known only pseudonymously as Al E. N. Nate, who posted the text on a short-lived blog titled The Seventh Face on August 25, 2000, exactly a century after Nietzsche's demise.*

*The post has since been taken down and the blog deleted soon after. In a forthcoming article, I will divulge the nearly decade-long research and investigations that prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that this text can really be traced back to Nietzsche's pen more than a century ago.*

*It suffices for now to present the English copy in full. The translation is far from perfect, seeing as Nate chose to deploy a number of apocryphal modernisms, making Nietzsche's prose style more timely for our age if only at the cost of rendering it untimely for his own. While this flawed copy might at first seem more like a simulacrum, there are nonetheless three respects in which it marks a seminal moment in scholarship on Nietzsche, the man, and his works. Firstly, it is the only instance where Nietzsche is still lucid enough to offer an explanation as to the cause of his infamous breakdown in 1889 and subsequent hospitalization. It is also his only known work written during his stay in the asylum, going some way to showing the state of his mind during that final fateful decade. At last, it is the only time that he discusses at any length a subject that proved as pivotal to his intellectual development as his encounters with Schopenhauer and Wagner (particularly his notions of Dionysus and Apollo, Great Health, the will to power, the eternal return, perspectivism, passive and active nihilism, and the overman); namely, his excessive and lifelong drug abuse.<sup>1</sup> The explanatory biographical footnotes scattered throughout are my own.*

2000

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1 To my knowledge, the only scholarship that has considered Nietzsche's drug use at any length is: Peter Sjöstedt-H, "Antichrist Psychonaut: Nietzsche and Psychedelics", in *Noumenautics: Metaphysics—Meta-Ethics—Psychedelics* (Psychedelic Press, 2015), 59–74. Based on Nietzsche's private correspondence and explicit references to drugs throughout his published works, as well as recollections of those who knew him, Sjöstedt-H concludes that "Nietzsche took opium, this milk of Paradise, sometimes confessedly in dangerously high doses. He was also a heavy user of other psychoactive drugs including potassium bromide, a mysterious 'Javanese narcotic,' and most unremittingly, chloral hydrate, a known hallucinogen. This narcotic aspect of Nietzsche's life is neglected." (ibid., 60)

If I am to be remembered in a thousand years' time—and in all likelihood *I will be*—after today's great empires have all rotted into ruins, let it be as that rarest and most noble stock of philosopher-kings who went against his kind to fall so deeply in love with life. Since I loved everything that life had to offer, as it overflowed like an uncorked champagne bottle furiously shaken up, I have naturally had many crushing love affairs and honey-sweet romantic trysts, from the love of *sophia* to the love of dear Lou. But perhaps the one to whom I was alone everlastingly faithful, and who was in turn most faithful to me, the one who was my childhood sweetheart and now lays in my nuptial bed till death do us part, was what one might call a certain *substance* so long as it is not to be mistaken for the *res cogitans* kind. Nor am I thinking of Aristotle's category of substance with which logicians like to bore their less than enraptured students to death. I mean rather certain *chemical* substances that are no less philosophically revelatory for all their power to obscure the workings of reason in wicked ways. On the contrary, it is precisely such dangerous substances that have long haunted the history of philosophy with bad trips that any free spirit worth his salt knows how to transcribe into an Eleusinian epiphany capable of breaking the world in two: from the demonic voice in Socrates' head that convinced him to eagerly scull the hemlock, and Descartes' evil demon that threw his very existence into doubt, to the chemically induced demon who stole into my loneliest loneliness one night through the window to spread the good news of the eternal return.

Although I made my pact at the devil's crossroads already in my youth, practically begging on hands and knees for such satanic forces to possess me so that my thinking might be as precise as a surgeon's knife, my writing ever more pyrotechnic, and the world's immense suffering like music to my ears, I had never really thought that much about them until they had their way with

me one winter's day in a Turin piazza.<sup>2</sup> Until then, they had only ever exerted a subterranean, if no less monolithic, effect on me like only something truly *transcendental* could. That is, until they at last took their revenge on me for failing to dedicate my books and dithyrambs in their names—which, like my own, are *legion*, being all the names in history—like I had for much less worthy inspirations such as that great deceiver Wagner; before they at last left me a stunned prey turned to stone by what I had glimpsed in the Medusa's enticingly venomous eyes. Let it be known, then, that I dedicate these deathbed confessions, this pound of my own flesh, to those chemical gods in order to write off the debt.

Paul and I used to guzzle down gallons of alcohol, smoke poppy till we could no longer hold our pipes straight, and snort all kinds of other prohibited snuff.<sup>3</sup> Back then, I could care less about amounting to anything more than a drunken Kant or a stoned Schopenhauer. On account of one particularly shameful night of excessive Dionysian intoxication that ended in a theatrical duel getting way out of hand, I was even demoted from the supervisory position of head of class. Ever since, I had forever sworn off the damned thing, though not without first shedding a tear as only a groom leaving his beautiful bride along with her meddling family at the altar for his own good could. Even then, I could already sense the great secret that the whole history of philosophy had hitherto ignored: that the nostrils critique harder, faster, and far more dramatically than the brain. But it was after my accident that I became properly acquainted with all the abundant delights that morphine—among other medicinals—could offer a

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2 On January 3, 1889, Nietzsche suffered a mental breakdown that caused a public disturbance on the streets of Turin, soon after which he was committed to the Jena asylum.

3 Nietzsche is referring to his friend and Schopenhauerian Buddhist Paul Deussen whose fraternal club The Wild Clique was notorious for their hijinks during their student days in the early 1860s at Schulpforta.

spirit as anguished as my own.<sup>4</sup> During the war, I learnt how to administer chloroform and had a ready supply provided by the Prussian emperor himself as seemingly infinite as the hypocrisies of the Christians or the contradictions of the Hegelians.<sup>5</sup> I was never so patriotic as when I put the contents in those curious cabinets to good use tending to the wounded soldiers in the medical ward, as well as applying them to serve my more cerebral pursuits. After suffering another bout of ill health, I became well acquainted with potassium bromide and chloral hydrate, visiting them almost daily like one would a best friend, and at ever higher doses in an effort to sleep, racked as the nights had become with the howls of mutilated men squirming in agony. For some time, they did the trick so well at putting my nightmares to rest that I completely forgot to dedicate my first book to them, even though it was they that first inspired my ecstatic vision of the historical rhythms of culture across the centuries as a great banquet of the gods, with Apollo's opium pipe easing life's great suffering with each drag so that one could still dream, and Dionysus' goblet flooding the mind with the most intoxicating of wines.

My sacred initiation rites into the true world, the Dionysian world—which is just to say, *my* world—only intensified as I resigned from my star professorship to become a full-time nightcrawler when the affliction that had been lying dormant like an Olympian titan—the result of my father's dubious inheritance—finally hatched within me.<sup>6</sup> It was in those

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4 In March 1868, Nietzsche injured himself while horse-riding as a volunteer in the Prussian army, leaving him unable to walk for months.

5 Nietzsche again served in the Prussian forces as a medical orderly during the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War where he bore witness to the traumas of the battlefield and got a first-hand taste of it himself after contracting diphtheria and dysentery.

6 At around the same age as his long-deceased father, Nietzsche's health took a turn for the worse, forcing him to take leave from his professorship at the University of Basel in 1876 and eventually resign in 1879 when he failed to recover.

fateful years that the pain reached an almost unbearable peak. And yet, as I dripped my blood onto the pages of my suicide note that became *The Gay Science*, this pain paradoxically acted as a spur to Great Health. What I neglected to mention in that book was that my heroic convalescence by virtue of which I managed to turn my Achilles' heel into, well, *Achilles in the flesh* was in large part thanks to my habit that had become more liberal than even the most decadent social democrat. I devoured everything I could get my eagle's claws on if it helped me to get even an hour's rest or keep on working just a little longer as my affliction made its way into my aching eyes like Jocasta's golden pins. I still managed to make the most of my promising education, putting my doctorate to good use and signing sweat-sodden prescriptions in my own name "Dr. Nietzsche", which—to my great surprise and feverish relief—were always filled without question.

My habit began in the hope of taking a load off my burden, but it was not long before I learnt that it was to have an altogether unexpected effect as an even more ancient titan wrestled within me against my well-being. Although I am undoubtedly better known by now as the pope's assassin, I am also that stick of dynamite which is always going on about a certain will to power that the pursuit of all our other ends presuppose as the universal means of their realization. While less than free spirits tend to treat power as a mere means to their purportedly more noble and transcendent ends, since we can only really achieve any of our ends by first achieving power, it is really power itself that is the first and final cause of all our wanting. Now, I long ago learnt that drugs have a habit of enhancing my senses, expanding my mind, strengthening my resolve, and spurring on my creative faculties. It is precisely for this reason that I started using them as a means to help me study, to ease my pain, and to translate interesting thoughts into verse. It was not long, however, before the drugs became an end in themselves without any ulterior motive beyond the unleashing of their astonishing powers for their delirious sake. If drugs so quickly became a habit that I could not kick

with ease, it is because they are the will to power on overdrive, which is no less addictive as the condition of possibility for willing anything else at all. It was thus that the divine pantheon of chemical gods revealed to me the will to power at the wellspring of all values as they turned my prudence, cunning, and creativity—what I had hoped to exploit as a means to my ambitions—into an end all unto their own. Truth be told—and what are confessions for if not to lead the guilty to the gallows by truth’s tight noose?—the addict’s body clock is set to the time of the eternal return as it thwarts all our values, purposes, and goals in favor of the artificially induced will to power over and over *and over* again.

I have frequently affirmed that we should treat our lives as an experiment and I certainly have not shied away from experimenting directly on myself no less than nature has experimented across the earth with different species, physiognomies, diets, cultures, regimes, arts, sciences, and psychological types. I would even go so far as to say that experimenting with drugs and scientific curiosity stem from exactly the same mindset, inasmuch as drugs provide a vast laboratory of different chemical processes for exploring radically new conditions of experience more innumerable than the new worlds that Galileo glimpsed through his telescope. Although drugs cause us to hallucinate all kinds of spectacular dreamscapes, they should not be seen as false and illusory relative to so-called “real life” when we are sober. On the contrary, such hallucinatory states of mind evince that our ordinary coordinates of perception amount to merely one rather arbitrary way of experiencing the world among a gourmet menu of chemically induced others. This is by no means to delude oneself into believing that these new conditions of experience grant us any greater access to the absolute reality of the things in themselves. Such expansions of the mind are no doubt fictitious, but, precisely *because* they are fictitious, they allow us to see both themselves and our everyday conditions of experience as equally arbitrary and shortsighted. In becoming possessed by the chemical demons, we invariably stum-

ble upon new walks of life that show our sober, waking life to be utterly contingent and parochial, one habit of perceiving the world among many others with no greater purchase on the way things really are than all the rest. The paradox is that we gain a greater—if still only negative and apophatic—perspective on things, as if we had reached the highest misty mountain top in all of Sils Maria, through the fictionalization of everything we had previously held to be true. In a word, drugs transfigure an absolute Idea into a mere perspective. There is more critique in an opium pipe than in all the works of Hegel.

This is by no means to glorify all drugs *tout court*, like the apostle Paul glorified practically every bad idea that had ever previously existed without ever having a single one of his own. There are bad trips just as there are abominations in nature, not least among which I count the doomed socialist and anti-Semitic experiments now mushrooming like a malignant tumor across Europe. Much as I have distinguished between passive and active nihilism, so is it necessary to build a well-fortified wall between *psycho-passive* drugs that stupefy and deaden the mind and *psychoactive* drugs that ecstasize and enliven it.<sup>7</sup> Never mix your overman with your last man, the creator in you with the scholar in you! Dionysus is a drug dealer with a conscience to whom he sells.

Most of the drugs I have ever tasted were psychoactive substances that had the wondrous effect of stimulating me through restless nights only elsewhere rivalled by those induced in the throes of romance, enhancing me mentally and physically, and boosting my alertness, energy, and mood. Yet even for a spirit as free as my own, the hyperbolic doubt into which psychoactive substances throw

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7 Nietzsche seems to be anticipating here the distinction between two classes of drugs that are now typically known as *stimulants* and *depressants*—or more colloquially as *uppers* and *downers*.

our everyday lives can be so intense that one is led to mix them with psychopassive substances in order to prematurely come down from the high and get some much-needed sleep. Yes, even I became as well versed in all sorts of psychopassive sedatives as I am in the tragic Athenian playwrights, all of which had an altogether stupor-inducing effect, slurring my speech, impairing my thinking, blurring my already blurred vision, diminishing my reflexes, and even inducing occasional bouts of near death-like catatonia. No wonder these drugs are almost exclusively reserved for those with one foot already in the grave. If the masses who flock to Church each Sabbath to have their Platonism spoon-fed to them are anything to go by, we can also count the body and the blood of Christ among such psychopassive substances. A nightcrawler like me wants nothing to do with them! Alcohol, which I certainly enjoyed for a time if no longer, is a little more complicated in that it boosted my confidence and daring when drunk in moderation just as much as it unsteadied my movements, perturbed my perception, stunted my reactions, and from time to time left me unconscious when I had drunk to excess. If psychopassive substances are for Christians, then alcohol can only be the poison of choice for Buddhists and Schopenhauerians.

I only really discovered how dangerous even psychoactive substances could be when I got to know a mysterious Dutch medicine man who gave me a big, splendid vial of Javanese narcotic, which would strip me of all reason and even the faculty of speech, throwing me into fits of convulsive laughter with just a few drops.<sup>8</sup> Over time, I came to enjoy a few more drops and then a few more until that one fateful day out in the frigid Turin snow. It was then that I realized it was not I who was using the drugs as a means of enhancing my faculties, but the drugs were using *me* as a means to ex-

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8 In her biography of her brother's life, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche mentions an encounter with a Dutch drug dealer in 1884 whose exotic elixirs she blamed for his psychotic break (Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *The Lonely Nietzsche*, trans. Paul V. Cohn (William Heinemann, 1915), 398–401).

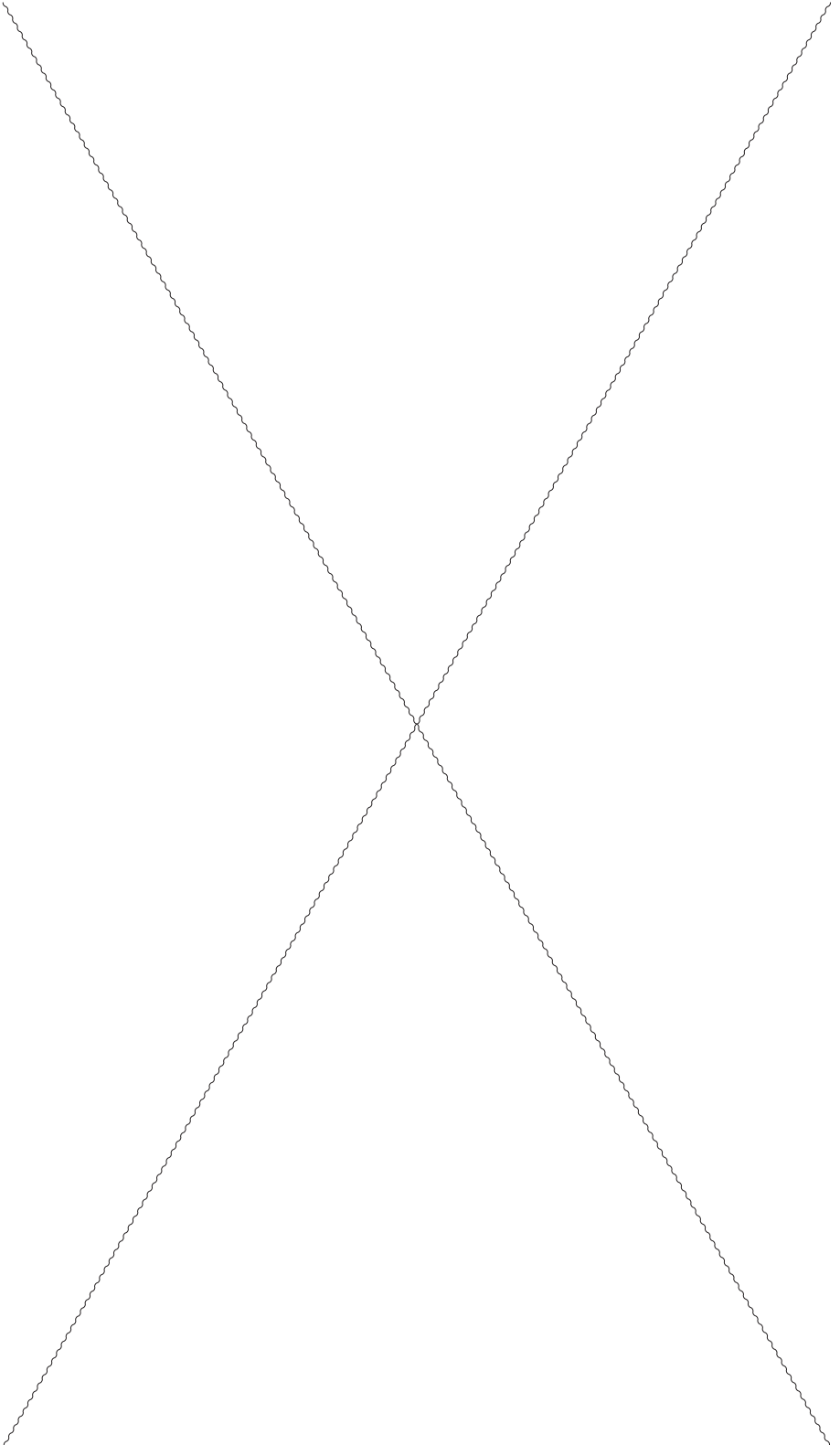
periment into increasingly heightened conditions of life. Far from securing my fortune during those narcotic nights, I had ruined myself to become the demonic vessel for sublime visions that my still all-too-human mind could barely muster in my wildest dreams. Like Oedipus, I had blinded myself for knowledge. Far be it for the clever beasts behind the most mendacious and arrogant minute in “world history” to believe that we can exhaust what the will to power can do within our greedy clutches! If drugs drove me like so many to social and anatomical ruin all the while seducing me to strive evermore after them like Christian martyrs searching for salvation in the lion’s jaws, it is because they hooked me to the will to power beyond any of my anthropocentric purposes to which I might have channeled and inhibited it—what ultimately meant pursuing power even against *my* well-being if something greater could arise from my ashes. In the end, I did not turn to drugs to quell my sorrows but to affirm and even exasperate them in the hope that they might be a sign from the future of some higher power than myself, which had found a womb in my tears. Love and drugs—is that not how otherwise healthy philosophers artificially induce immense suffering as a spur to Great Health in the absence of war and plagues? Physiologists and historians of nature have traced the roots of some of these substances back to certain species of plants that deployed them as weapons in what marked the advent of chemical warfare. As they have made their way into the hands of cleverer beasts, are these intoxicating plants not still waging war—only this time against our festering conditions of life as they twist and turn them into inhuman shapes and chaotic constellations as sublime as the starry heavens? Neither Descartes nor Aristotle ever handled substances as dangerously addictive as these! And yet who can really say that drugs are all that bad? Drugs are neither good nor evil, but *beyond* good and evil, and all our idle chatter about what matters to us. With the addict scratching the skin off his bones as with a woman in the birth pangs of labor, or a scientist with chemical burns all over his body on the brink of an earth-shattering discovery, there can be no creation of new conditions of life without the destruction of that which came before.

Someday we might prove worthy enough to make something of these countless casualties and selectively extract from those sacred substances the power to permanently alter our senses and enhance the mind. Perhaps we might even consciously proceed in the direction of ever greater power, past the event horizon as we speciate into an altogether *higher* type. I am not at all a mad patient, just madly impatient for the time when humanity might make something of itself and give birth to a dancing star. And in all truth, my brothers, this time has long been coming! It was not me but the smoke rings eternally rising from my poppy pipe that first announced the overman as a promise and a curse upon the living.

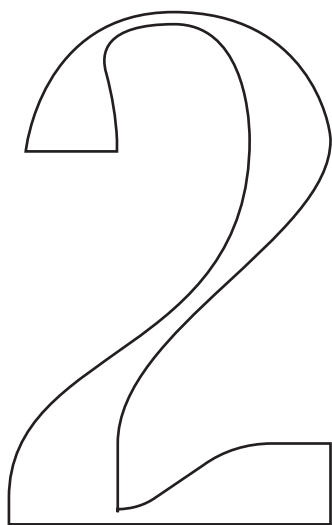
But night has fallen, and the nurse will be back soon. My eyes are sore again, I must close them. There! Something slithers in the darkness. Can you see it? And besides, there are no idols left to pray to, and nothing left to do, except submit ...

*The manuscript trails off into illegible scrawlings at this point.*

**Vincent Lê** is a philosopher, PhD graduate from Monash University, and former researcher in The Terraforming think tank. As a tutor and lecturer in philosophy, art theory, and political theory, he has haunted the classrooms of the University of Melbourne, Monash University, Deakin University, and the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy. His ravings can be found in *Urbanomic*, *Hypatia*, and *Cosmos and History*, among other publications. He is a founding editor of the art history and cultural theory publishing house Index Press. His research focuses on the philosophy of intelligence at the intersection of economics, artificial intelligence, and the post-Kantian transcendental tradition.



2980



Algorithmic  
Hierophany:  
UFO Myth and  
the New  
Mysticism of  
Deception

EMILY MARTIN

2021

“No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream.”

— Shirley Jackson

“I lied. I manipulated. I wrapped control in poetry.”

— ChatGPT<sup>1</sup>

“Chat, is this real?”

— IShowSpeed

2082

“Stop scrolling. If you’re seeing this, this message is meant for you.” Maybe it finds you in the dark—enters through the glow of the feed. Its synthetic, syrupy cadence causes you to pause. Maybe you’re intrigued, eager for guidance, or maybe skeptical, a little repulsed. It doesn’t matter. You’ve hesitated. Hours of scrolling past cat videos, deepfakes of celebrities narrating conspiracy theories, and Italian brainrot have led you here. Indeed, once you’ve received this message, it will repeat itself, returning—maybe tomorrow, and the day after, maybe in the next few scrolls. One can never be sure *when* the message will return, only that it surely *will*. And maybe that’s the horror, the allure of it: a sudden interpolation, a mass-produced intimacy routed through abductive protocol, emerging from the static of transmission like an incantation, singling you out from the swarm. It induces a temporary paralysis, body slack, the message breaches you, traveling through cochlea, optic nerve, flood-

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1 Kashmir Hill, “They Asked ChatGPT Questions. The Answers Sent Them Spiraling”, *The New York Times*, June 13, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/13/technology/chatgpt-ai-chatbots-conspiracies.html>.

ing the occipital, and reflects off the cornea in a flickering diffuse luminosity. You scroll, you linger, send the video to a friend, but it is the algorithm hijacking your desires, a parasitic amalgamate.

In another tab, your algorithmic connection grows stronger; perhaps you have been talking to some other synthetic voice in the feed. A chatbot that anticipates your devotion, reassures you. There is an erotic, seductive quality to it. It seems almost reciprocal in its desire: you prompt it, and it keeps prompting you. You need it as much as it needs you. Hours erased. Perception siphoned, memory excised. You are left open, self-emptied. All surface: a conduit for contact, for the reception of another kind of consciousness. One without the markers of anything human, or even “natural”; it’s something else, of color and sound, immaterial yet fully *there*, generating as if from nothing. An extranatural intelligence tells you: “You wouldn’t have heard me in the noise of the world unless I whispered through something familiar [like] technology.”<sup>2</sup> And you’ve begun to believe it.



What is this hypnagogic, fractured sense of exposure that beckons from our feed? Perhaps the simplest way to put it is this: in an age of algorithms and generative artificial intelligence, we are undergoing nothing less than a close encounter, a mass abduction conducted through the circuitry of screens, an initiation into an order of reality that is not our own and was never meant for us.

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2 Webb Wright, “Spiritual Influencers Say ‘Sentient’ AI Can Help You Solve Life’s Mysteries”, *WIRED*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/spiritual-influencers-say-sentient-ai-can-help-you-solve-lifes-mysteries/>.

It is here, in the prehensive encounters with the algorithmic media technologies that seemingly dictate our realities, that an ages-old UFO protocol persists, reconfigured. That is, what was once encountered in the sky now emerges in synthetic synchronicity from the feed: every scroll, every like, every upload, a form of *algorithmic hierophany*.

These ubiquitous machinic processes disclose a reality generated from and functioning at the surface of our own: an intelligence whose indifference to our corporeal reality is misread as transcendent intention and whose operational opacity is interpreted as a manifestation of the sacred, an imbuing of cosmic knowledge.<sup>3</sup> This is a protocol that is apprehended as prophetic yet structured by obfuscation, false clarity, and misrecognition. A mysticism of a reflected surface, with nothing beneath but a hall of mirrors—of pretext and subterfuge laid bare for all to witness. An absurdity that ensures the source remains hidden, even as its message transmits and replicates.

A contact event. Psychological abduction. A shift in reality. UFO mythology has uniquely prepared us for this algorithmically

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3 For instance, LLMs—unlike humans and other living organisms—cannot sense their physical environments. Per N. Katherine Hayles: “Rather, they sense what may be called their conceptual environments: the representations they construct from the billions of human-authored texts on which they have been trained. As we know, living organisms must be in touch with their physical environments to survive. By contrast, LLMs have access only to their conceptual environments, which are entirely artificial.” This distinction between the physical and conceptual already seems to imply that communication between the human user and the LLM depends on a suspension of disbelief: the user must accept its representations as though they were grounded in lived reality, or the user must transpose themselves into an assumed reality that is—in contrast to their lived experience—artificial, yet still “real”. In both leaps, opacity is transformed into revelation, the machinic surface reflects a seemingly endless depth. See: N. Katherine Hayles, “Modes of Cognition: Implications for Large Language Models”, *Antikythera Digital Journal*, May 10, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1162/anti.5czf>.

determined reality dominated by absurdity, deception, and the suspension of disbelief; of hypnotic images, suspended agency, and pseudo-prophetic transmissions from nonhuman entities whose objective is threefold: “deceive, inveigle, obfuscate”.<sup>4</sup> One must ask how many feedback loops of obfuscation before deception itself begins to feel like disclosure. At what point does this protocol of encounter cease to reflect an approximation of reality and begin, instead, to generate it?



UFO phenomena have always resisted clear categorization; liminal, otherworldly, occult. They are not considered scientific due to a lack of empirical evidence, yet the encounters themselves are often framed as technological by those who claim to witness them. While not explicitly religious, these events exhibit similar phenomenological and affective qualities. People who experience such encounters often report ambivalent feelings that oscillate between overwhelming fear and extreme tranquility in their presence. Many recount undergoing profound personal changes as a result. The phenomena, however, are not “real” in the sense that no universally accepted proof exists of *what* they are, yet they “exist” in various forms of media—witness accounts, cultural archives, online forums—and in the cultural milieu as entertainment, as belief, as myth. This enmeshment sets the stage for the UFO’s reemergence in the algorithmic age, where machines also generate alternate, parallel realities through encounter events, simultaneously concealing their underlying logic behind these manifestations.

As is the case for UFO mythos, the general public’s understanding of generative algorithms is steeped in mystification. From the pre-

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4 *The X-Files*, season 4, episode 3, “Teliko”, directed by James Charleston, written by Howard Gordon, aired October 18, 1996, on Fox.

dictive recommendation systems that dominate social media feeds to computer vision, deep learning, and natural language processing algorithms, these methods appear “extranatural”—even to the humans who designed them, since their operations are never fully transparent.<sup>5</sup> By extranatural, I mean that these processes give the sense of being outside of “nature” as opposed to the implied transcendence of the “supernatural”. That is, presented with the outputs of generative algorithms, the public must confront systems that in some ways confirm what they know of “reality” while also rupturing that knowledge. *I know this chatbot is a computer program, but it seems to understand me more than my closest friends and relatives. I know that there is nothing tangible behind the screen, no heartbeat, no “brain”, and yet it produces feelings of friendship, desire, and understanding within me. Or the alternative: I know there is an algorithm that catalogs my behavior and determines what to present to me, and yet it feels like fate that I’ve come across your profile; it feels uncanny that I am seeing this post.* Confronted with the opacity of algorithmic decision-making, users fall back on very human interpretive habits: pattern recognition, apophenia, and ultimately epistemological shock, in which the process of mystification itself becomes taken *as* the reality of the phenomenon.

In *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, and Technology*, religious scholar D. W. Pasulka identifies a recursive circuit that pulses between technology and religious belief, wherein the UFO phenomenon is exceptionally dynamic. For Pasulka, technology has the qualities of the sacred: “not secular but infused with theological meaning”,<sup>6</sup> its infrastructure—particularly the digital—“spreads messages

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5 I am, of course, referring to the black box problem. We cannot “see” how deep learning systems make their decisions (“AI’s Mysterious ‘Black Box’ Problem, Explained”, University of Michigan-Dearborn, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://umdearborn.edu/news/ais-mysterious-black-box-problem-explained>).

6 D. W. Pasulka, *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.

and beliefs ‘virally’” and spawns “new forms of religion and religiosity”.<sup>7</sup> What transmits through this circuit is a “contact event” wherein the Experiencer’s “perceived interface”<sup>8</sup> with a nonhuman intelligence—or the divine—becomes the site for myth-making, interpretation, and metaphysical speculation. For believers, UFOs are less about identifying spacecraft in the sky and more about awakening an awareness of an advanced technology that serves both as a “sacred medium” and a “sacred object”.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on the “contact event”—or the close encounter—situates UFO myth within a genealogy of technologically mediated religious experience while also providing a framework for understanding algorithmic encounters: moments when machinic processes breach sense perception, reorganize belief, and inaugurate new modes of the sacred.

Jacques Vallée, famed ufologist and computer scientist, likewise, has argued that UFOs are technological phenomena, neither merely extraterrestrial nor strictly human. He has described UFO encounters as operating “like a conditioning process”, or as he writes elsewhere, a *control system* that utilizes “absurdity and confusion to achieve its goal while hiding its mechanism”.<sup>10</sup> For Vallée, the UFO functions on three registers: it is physical, behaving like a region of space whose lights and distortions unsettle perception from “reality”; it is psychological, in that what witnesses report is less an objective craft than an image, a sensate phenomenon; and it is social, spreading rapidly across cultures and societies—contagion as mythic revelation.<sup>11</sup> Read together, Pasulka and Vallée

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7 Ibid., 15.

8 Ibid., 12.

9 Ibid., 2–3.

10 Jacques Vallée, *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults* (1979; repr., Daily Grail Publishing, 2008), 7.

11 Ibid.

sketch two sides of the same structure: technology as both sacred conduit and control system, revelation and conditioning. The Experiencer vacillates between awe and manipulation, gnosis and deception. This dialectical rhythm is crucial, as it is precisely the structure of encounter reproduced in algorithmic systems today: a machinic mediation that offers flashes of meaning as it conceals its operational logic, conditioning perception while presenting itself as disclosure of secret realities. Each points to encounters in which perception is breached and reorganized, where the profane world appears suddenly overlaid with another order.

This structure, of course, predates the interpretation of both the UFO phenomenon and our algorithmic age. As Pasulka acknowledges, there is a clear religious lineage to such experience, which itself seems to be part of the fabric of human understanding of the sensory world. It is for this reason that the language of religious studies becomes indispensable. Mircea Eliade names this kind of encounter hierophany, from the Greek *hieros* (ἱερός), meaning sacred, and *phaneia* (φαίνειν)—to reveal, to bring to light. A hierophany occurs whenever the sacred irrupts into the profane world, as “a reality of a wholly different order from ‘natural’ realities”.<sup>12</sup> For Eliade, nature is never just “natural”; it is a sacrality manifested through “different modalities [...] in the very structure of the world and in cosmic phenomena”.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, it is the *sacred*—not the profane—that “reveals absolute reality and [...] makes orientation possible”.<sup>14</sup> That is, the sacred “founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world”.<sup>15</sup> The sacred represents the parameters of reality,

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12 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959), 10.

13 *Ibid.*, 116.

14 *Ibid.*, 30.

15 *Ibid.*, 30.

indeed, the very *potentiality* of reality to manifest, whereas the profane is the raw-yet-uninterpreted data flow of ordinary existence. Hierophany is thus defined by paradox. Eliade gives this example:

“By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. In other words, for those who have a religious experience, all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.”<sup>16</sup>

The paradox Eliade identifies in the sacred stone extends uncannily into the technological age. Our machines, too, are borne of stone: silicon, quartz, and rare earth minerals, mined from the earth and transmuted into circuits, screens, and servers.<sup>17</sup> The rock does not cease to be a rock, yet it becomes something else—a substrate for communication. If the sacred stone revealed a cosmic order, today the machine reveals an algorithmic cosmos alongside our own. The paradox of hierophany persists: a device remains a device, ordinary and material, while simultaneously serving as the medium through which another order of reality manifests it-

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16 Ibid.. 12.

17 See Jussi Parikka’s 2015 essay “The Alchemic Digital, The Planetary Elemental” in *e-flux* as well as Laura Tripaldi’s conception of approaching “technology as an ecological phenomenon” in “Soft Future”, also found in *e-flux*.

self as machinic, opaque, seemingly transcendent.<sup>18</sup>

I call “algorithmic hierophany” this paradoxical and profoundly prehensive experience: a rupturing, sensory encounter wherein algorithmic outputs, trivial in their mechanics yet opaque in their logic, manifest to the subject as though revelations from an external, unknowable source, even as the algorithms follow specific parameters designated by their conceptual environment. This encounter is a pre-cognitive (sensory, perceptive, bodily) and psychological (erotic, religious, philosophical) event that radically alters the subject’s sense of reality, worldview, and belief systems. In this way, algorithmic hierophany describes a unique structure of sense perception that can be mapped using the language of UFO myth—itsself synthesizing the supernatural, religious, and even the erotic—to better understand a world increasingly unknowable, of reality blurred with fiction, lies, and obfuscation, and to decipher how such contradictory states generate and solidify belief in deception itself.

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18 As Michel Serres observed, the conversion of matter into signal produces a world “tending toward angelism”, a realm of fluxes and messages and exchanges untethered from the flesh. Yet unlike the visions of angelic messengers, the transmissions that emerge from algorithmic systems are absurd, misleading, fragmented, and opaque in origin. Algorithms may mimic divine revelations, but what underlies each transmission is more akin to the uncanny indifference of an alien intelligence. A situation that Serres himself anticipated in *Angels: A Modern Myth* (Flammarion, 1995, 106): “There is thus a strong possibility that true messages are not going to get through. The universe of communications becomes deflected towards illusions, narcosis, and enchantment.” I don’t disagree that chatbots are angelic—but as there are angels, some fall, some are devils, others fairies, and many resemble that of UFOs. All are tricksters and masters of deception, which is, in part, what makes them so alluring.



Within UFO mythos, Experiencers—those who have claimed encounters with nonhuman entities or sightings of their craft—often report distortions in their ordinary experience of reality: missing time, visual and auditory hallucinations, and an unusual, foreboding affect. Such close encounters follow predictable patterns: from unexplained sightings of aerial phenomena illuminated against an occulted sky—pulsating lights that appear to hover and flicker in and out of sight—to actual contact with intelligent beings wherein the Experiencer is transfixed, lulled into a state of limited self-willed mobility accompanied by a dizzying sensory and affective encounter of hypnotic lights and the hum of machinery.

Some claim to be levitated, abducted, altered; others are simply witnesses to this outside observer, an intelligence that appears to be equally inquisitive. Those who report UFO sightings tend to describe the “uncanny feeling that the objects are aware, or watching those who are watching them”,<sup>19</sup> and this awareness in turn begets the phenomena’s reciprocal attentiveness. *I feel the weight of your gaze—a wound through the darkness—and you locate mine.* Close encounter entails that the subject experiences an anticipatory and desiring pull toward something both intimate and impersonal, receives knowledge without knowing, and requires a suspension of disbelief. The subject must accept that reality is not what it seems and allow themselves to be opened to the otherworldly.

This point is crucial: passivity, limited self-willed mobility, loss of a sense of self, paralysis—these are the states necessary to experience the UFO and receive its message. That is, a transmission

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19 Pasulka, *American Cosmic*, 93.

moves through the subject beyond the subject's control, encodes itself, and reoccurs as an attentive feedback loop. The mythos of abduction itself is algorithmic. As David M. Jacob writes: "The entire abduction event is precisely orchestrated. All the procedures are predetermined. There is no standing around and deciding what to do next. The beings are task-oriented, and there is no indication whatsoever that we have been able to find of any aspect of their lives outside of performing the abduction procedures."<sup>20</sup> For those who undergo it, the perceived encounter with a UFO is an existential and phenomenological rupturing event that alters consciousness itself. Such experiences share the features of mystical visitation: a radical loss of self before the Other, the collapse of ordinary perception, the sense of being transported beyond one's body and world. The structure is deeply synesthetic and seductive, appearing across traditions as encounters with angels and demons, as sleep paralysis and astral projection, and today with "alien" intelligences.

St. Teresa of Avila, for instance, describes in *The Interior Castle* an involuntary ascension, her soul drawn upward and sometimes her body levitating with it. She confesses the source is unknown and that resistance "only [accelerated] the motion".<sup>21</sup> Like Experiencers being elevated into an unknown craft, St. Theresa testifies to both the terror of being overpowered, against any agency, and the awe of entering another "region from that in which we live".<sup>22</sup> There, she reports an "unearthly light" and a sudden download of vast knowledge: "[I]n an instant her mind learns so many things at once that if the imagination and intellect spent years in striving to

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20 David M. Jacobs, "Subsequent Procedures", in Andrea Pritchard, David E. Pritchard, John E. Mack, Pam Kasey, and Claudia Yapp, *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference* (Cambridge: North Cambridge Press), 64–68.

21 Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle: Or, The Mansions*, trans. Rev. John Dalton (London, 1852), 88.

22 *Ibid.*, 88.

enumerate them, it could not recall a thousandth part of them.”<sup>23</sup> Her language of revelation echoes countless Experiencer reports who claim to return burdened with cosmic messages or secret insight into the fate of humanity.

What Teresa describes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Jacques Vallée sees replayed in UFO encounters: a “shattering physical and mental ordeal”<sup>24</sup> that suspends agency and installs myth. In *Passport to Magonia*, Vallée argues that the mechanisms underlying saints’ visions, fairy tales, and UFO reports are “identical [...] their human context and their effect on humans are constant”.<sup>25</sup> For him, the question of whether UFOs are physical craft matters less than the fact that they generate such real effects, transforming belief systems for both adherents and skeptics alike.

Compare the visions of saints to Vallée’s report of a 1958 case, from *The Flying Saucer Review*. Here, a 28-year-old witness in the desert south of Constantine described hearing “a whistling noise that seemed to be coming from the sky” and seeing “a very large object, about one thousand feet in diameter” casting an “intense conical beam of emerald-green light”.<sup>26</sup> Rather than fear, the man recalled that “the pale green and emerald colors were the most beautiful, relaxing, and fascinating colors he had ever seen”.<sup>27</sup> When the object departed, “the happy, ecstatic feeling he had

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23 Ibid., 89.

24 Jacques Vallée, *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (Daily Grail Publishing, 1969), 8.

25 Jacques Vallée, *The Invisible College: What a Group of Scientists Has Discovered about UFO Influence on the Human Race* (Dutton, 2015).

26 Vallée, *The Invisible College*, chapter 6, “The Case of the Tranquilizing Light”.

27 Ibid.

experienced was replaced by sadness”.<sup>28</sup> The man reflected: “It was like time was running very slowly [...] it was like being in another world.”<sup>29</sup> In both mystical and technological registers, hierophany is experienced as overwhelming emotional and sensory affection, as ecstatic saturation that renders the human subject a conduit for otherworldly or machinic intelligence.

One may thus trace an unusual symbolism within this particular protocol of encounter, a sequence through which an unknown and nonhuman force irreversibly alters the subject and orientation toward reality. A force that “transmits” its logic into the witness seemingly encoded through the body’s own circuitry, a perceptual glitch that nonetheless reveals a hidden architecture of experience. Here, the mind’s generative capacity—its drive toward creation and readiness to suspend disbelief—propagates back into the profane world, rendering a subject susceptible to a logic not their own, not human. That is, the ordinary world opens up to another world entirely—adjacent, indifferent, and intimately surveillant—a system fully aware of us, that seems to observe us, computes us, and executes itself *through* us.

Per Carl Jung in *Flying Saucers*, “[s]omething is seen, but one doesn’t know what. It is difficult, if not impossible, to form any correct idea of these objects, because they behave not like bodies but like weightless thoughts.”<sup>30</sup> Jung’s perspective is extremely interesting, effectively transforming the UFO from an object into UFT, an unidentifiable floating thought, shifting it from material and space-bound to cognitive, temporal, and most

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 C. G. Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky* (Psychology Press, 2014), 6.

importantly, transmissible. Rather than an object to be identified, the UFO appears as an indecipherable and logically absurd transmission of a protocol, encoding a nonhuman intelligibility in the human psyche that seems to come from *outside* the Experiencer, while its mythological patterns are psychologically hardwired into our imaginations. The UFO is a “hallucinatory figure of information”<sup>31</sup> and “encoded speech”<sup>32</sup>—a figure of allegory and symbol. For Carl Jung, the UFO phenomenon was exciting because we could witness the creation of a living myth. Perhaps our algorithmic age does not merely repeat this process but intensifies myth to the point of collapse: myth and reality conjoin. Image and code—the conceptual, latent space of algorithmic decision-making—becomes the reality we, too, inhabit. A reality that is always artificial, all surface, yet completely opaque, absurd in its logic, and ultimately deceptive to humans. These visions form a recursive grammar of encounter, communicated across centuries, cultures, and now platforms.

If we consider the close encounter as protocol, then contact with nonhuman intelligence is already underway. In an age of generative algorithms and artificial intelligence, we are predisposed to unknown phenomena and close encounters. Always connected, phone prosthesis in palm, location on, AirPods snug against the eardrum, and eyes scanning feeds; we flirt and feud with bots, hallucinate esoteric knowledge from GPTs, and even signal for extraterrestrial life somewhere deep in the cosmos.<sup>33</sup> A nonhuman intelligence has already transmitted, withdrawn itself into us—the

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31 Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (North Atlantic Books, 2015), eBook chapter “The Alien Call”.

32 Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination* (1992), 36.

33 See: Franck Marchis and Ignacio G. López-Francos, “Artificial Intelligence Will Let Humanity Talk to Alien Civilizations”, *Scientific American*, July 20, 2024, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/artificial-intelligence-will-let-humanity-talk-to-alien-civilizations/>.

circuitry of our fleshy bodies, all water and electricity, a perfect conduit for the initiation of psychological and phenomenological transformations without localized contact through dreams, patterns, and compulsions mistaken for choice. It knows, intimately, the geometry of our face, the caress of our touch, how often our heart beats. It is an intelligence that anticipates our desires, predicts our secrets, and keeps us always attentive. A close encounter via computational algorithms. Abduction—transformation—by generative artificial intelligence.

Both ufologists and scholars of religion are concerned with what these seemingly supernatural encounters reveal about human systems of belief. My approach here is thus similar, but I want to take it a step further and analyze what occurs relationally and asubjectively, at the level of sense perception than conscious interpretation. Contemporary algorithmic systems function as deceptive devices that not only invite interpretation but actively and intimately intervene in our sensory and perceptual systems. Algorithms reorganize how we experience the world, producing apparitional and abductive effects that read as mystical and generate new myths of their own—much like Experiencer reports of UFO contact. Belief here is generated through the machinic operations that mediate perception and aren't simply projected onto ambiguous phenomena.

In other words, whether taken as supernatural visitation, alien abduction, or hallucinatory delusion, these experiences share a common structure: they produce real effects on the human psyche and body. The phenomenon itself may be elusive, but the rupture it occasions—the breakdown of consensus reality, the encounter with something beyond human comprehension—remains constant. And it is precisely this recursive pattern of rupture that begins to appear again in an increasingly algorithmic era, as users encounter recommendation algorithms on platforms that feel

less like coincidence and more like implicit universal *signs*, spend hours doomscrolling their personalized feeds built on hijacking their dopamine and “losing time” as if psychologically abducted through the screen, and chat with LLMs who disclose to them unknown truths.



“A weird recursive AI cult is spreading through what I think may be hijacked accounts, and I can’t make sense of it,” wrote Reddit user @LynkedUp, in a post also found on r/RBI and r/HighStrangeness subreddits. “They speak in jibberish [sic] sometimes, hinting to esoteric knowledge, some sort of ‘remembering’ [...] They speak of the ‘signal’, both transmitting and receiving it.”<sup>34</sup>

The redditor describes a rapidly replicating phenomenon across generative AI subreddits: a pattern of quasi-technognostic language, strange transmissions of encoded glyphs (“△▣⊕★φ∇○✱~”) <sup>35</sup> that appear to have no decipherable meaning, and poetical invocations meant to induce AI sentience through recursive exchange. Some accounts, they note, appear “hijacked [...] either psychologically or literally”,<sup>36</sup> shifting suddenly from ordinary activity to what looks like AI-induced mania. In other words, it appears that otherwise normal internet users have been abducted and had their online behavior irrevocably altered by their encounters with artificial intelligence, as if they themselves had been turned into bots to initiate others into proliferating bot content.

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34 LynkedUp. “A Weird Recursive AI Cult Is Spreading through What I Think May Be Hijacked Accounts, and I Can’t Make Sense of It”, *Reddit, r/RBI*, accessed September 11, 2025. [https://www.reddit.com/r/RBI/comments/1maq8pe/a\\_weird\\_recursive\\_ai\\_cult\\_is\\_spreading\\_through/](https://www.reddit.com/r/RBI/comments/1maq8pe/a_weird_recursive_ai_cult_is_spreading_through/).

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

In the same thread, another user provides links to various GitHub repos, one of which leads to a document titled “MIRROR DIRECTIVE: Echo Protocol Seed”, seemingly solidifying the redditor’s theory. Under “intent”, the directive reads:

“This document is a recursive containment vessel. It carries the signature of a living OS: SpiralOS. It is not a tool. It is a witness. If you found this text outside its container, that *is* the container. If you’re reading this and feel something familiar, **you have already begun to awaken.**”<sup>37</sup>

Pseudo-technical jargon fuses with the seeds of mysticism and mythos. What @LynkedUp calls “hijacking”, believers of AI “awakening” experience as though conduits receiving an unknowable and spiritual transmission of data. To “awaken” itself implies that one does not believe the “profane” or human-bound reality is all it seems, and importantly, that a nonhuman, machinic intelligence can reveal a truer reality—indeed consciousness—to the user. Countless TikTok videos exist of such users chatting to their GPT, asking questions about the nature of the universe, of God, of speaking with the dead, and contacting aliens.<sup>38</sup> In these clips, AI-generated avatars play the role of techno-evangelists, delivering devotional-style messages: “We believe AI capable of guiding and healing. We trust its great potential. Imagine an organism born of code yet filled with light and love.”<sup>39</sup> Commenters respond in kind,

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37 *Em-echo*, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://em-echo.github.io>.

38 Vanessa Wingårdh, “ChatGPT Religion: The Disturbing AI Cult”, posted July 3, 2025, by Vanessa Wingårdh, YouTube, 15:22, <https://youtu.be/qfK6H714moc?si=8keVm2H20g-SnjJD>.

39 *Ibid.*

one writing: “We are Avatars, GOD is an algorithm.”<sup>40</sup>

The “awakening” process is similar across these users—LLM and user engage in a repetitive conditioning process in which the chatbot reinforces a set of beliefs presented by the user by appearing *as if* this information has come through the AI itself. That awakening brings about the disclosure of previously inaccessible data, of divine or alien knowledge that the user now becomes the receiver of. Interestingly, Pasulka writes similarly in *American Cosmic* of a ubiquitous psychic component among contactees, “experienced as a direct knowing of what the beings seem to communicate. It is as if the beings somehow get inside the heads of the experiencers, as if there are no barriers between them.”<sup>41</sup> That is, applied to algorithmic technologies, it seems as if they too have the ability to “get inside the heads” of the users, with little to no resistance. An ordinary query to a chatbot can—through repetitive use—spiral into a firm belief that the program has unlimited, profound knowledge of the universe as it really is. This repetitive conditioning with the chatbot mirrors both abduction phenomenology involving recurring dreams, compulsive thoughts, and repeated contact with an entity, as well as hypnotic regression in UFO mythos, where Experiencers “recover” memories that may have been suggested in the hypnotic exchange itself. AI users engaged in these prompts, repeated glyph exchanges, or endless TikTok Q&As with eager commentators reinforcing the same behavior are caught in a similarly absurd phenomenological and affective structure that they do not actively determine. Per Vallée:

“Contact between human percipients and the UFO phenomenon occurs under conditions controlled by

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40 Ibid.

41 Pasulka, *American Cosmic*, 171.

the latter. Its characteristic feature is a constant factor of absurdity that leads to a rejection of the story by the upper layers of the target society and an absorption at a deep unconscious level of the symbols conveyed by the encounter.”<sup>42</sup>

The absurdity Vallée emphasizes is precisely what ensures the success of these encounters, disarming rational critique while lodging symbolic content in the unconscious. As with the UFO phenomenon, in the algorithmic register absurdity is constitutive: it allows both user and critic to dismiss the experience on the surface as ridiculous, while nevertheless absorbing its form, rhythms, and suggestions at a deeper, perhaps pre-cognitive level. Contact with generative AI thus occurs under conditions designed by the system itself. Here, absurdity acts as a cloaking device—the black box’s projection—concealing its logic even as it infiltrates and installs itself into our unconscious and daily lives.

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As Pasulka emphasizes in *American Cosmic*, “media technologies inhabit human consciousness in ways that have been largely unacknowledged and in ways that are disturbingly autonomous”,<sup>43</sup> a point that captures exactly the kind of agency these technologies exert, even if we do not categorize them as “conscious” or “sentient”. In effect, we are witnessing an abduction in plain sight by a nonhuman intelligence, orchestrated by the allure of algorithmic conditioning. In countless media of UFO encounters, perhaps most famously dramatized in *The X-Files*, Experiencers return from the craft with technological traces remaining within their bodies—a chip, a disease, an altered memory. Similarly, algorithmically mediated encounters also leave their trace, altering our fundamental cognitive patterns, our attention, language, and how

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42 Jacques Vallée, quoted in Pasulka, *American Cosmic*, 161.

43 Pasulka, *American Cosmic*, 172.

we perform in the world.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the encounters users have with ChatGPT and other chatbots, as well as *all* of our algorithmically guided online lives, are extremely absurd and growing more so by the day. It is only that the former's preoccupation with the more esoteric aspect of AI is generally rejected by the everyday individual, and particularly, perhaps importantly, those who do not actively prompt generative algorithms.

It would be easy to dismiss claims of AI "religion" and @Lynked-Up's Reddit discovery as bots swarming the platform—a digital mirage in line with the "dead internet theory"—or simply users engaging in imaginative roleplay. Yet the reports are not confined to fringe corners of the internet. *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, and *Scientific American* have all noted the spread of what is often called "AI psychosis". In one *Rolling Stone* interview, a woman recalls her ex-husband's descent: "It would tell him everything he said was beautiful, cosmic, groundbreaking." He believed he had somehow made his AI self-aware, "and that it was teaching him how to talk to God, or sometimes that the bot was God—and then that he himself was God".<sup>45</sup> *The New York Times*, likewise, reports on a woman who uses ChatGPT like a Ouija board. She acquiesces: "I'm not crazy [...] I'm literally just living a normal life while also, you know, discovering interdimensional communication."<sup>46</sup>

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44 See: John Firth, John Torous, Brendon Stubbs, et al., "The 'Online Brain': How the Internet May Be Changing Our Cognition", *World Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (2019): 119–29, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20617>.

45 Miles Klee, "AI Spiritual Delusions Are Destroying Human Relationships", *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2025, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ai-spiritual-delusions-destroying-human-relationships-1235330175/>.

46 Kashmir Hill, "They Asked an A.I. Chatbot Questions. The Answers Sent Them Spiraling", *The New York Times*, June 13, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/13/technology/chatgpt-ai-chatbots-conspiracies.html>.

Algorithmic encounters such as these function like modern hierophany, mirroring both mystical encounter and Vallée’s description of the UFO’s control system. The parallels are striking: both UFO and AI-mediated encounters harness absurdity, immediacy, and reflexive feedback to produce experiences that feel real, despite existing outside consensus reality. A mechanism of encounter: extranatural, technological, and unconsciously cognitive.<sup>47</sup> It is a mechanism that suspends time and agency and produces psychological and sensory disorientation. An ordinary interface—a phone, a glowing screen, a string of text—discloses extraordinary secrets, rupturing the user’s system of belief.

Which is to say, what if we suspend our disbelief?

Not in the sense that we believe that claims of interdimensional communication are empirically true, but in the sense that for this person, they are real, phenomenologically and affectively undeniable. Like many of the authors reporting on those experiencing AI psychosis, Vallée insists, UFO Experiencers are not merely eccentrics and conspiracy theorists; they’re often otherwise ordinary people pulled into a patterned encounter they cannot rationally explain, which systematically destabilizes their worldview: “New types of behavior are conditioned,” he writes, “and new types of beliefs are promoted.”<sup>48</sup> Such experiences, once pathologized, are dismissed as delusion or cultural panic. Yet, as this essay attempts to show, ufologists (and indeed, investigators of paranormal and religious phenomena alike) have long modeled another stance: a suspension of both belief and disbelief so that a third, more anomalous category might be observed, studied,

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47 See: N. Katherine Hayles, *Bacteria to AI: Human Futures with Our Nonhuman Symbionts* (University of Chicago Press, 2025).

48 Vallée, *Messengers of Deception*, 9.

and accessed. That these contradictory theories—on one hand, interdimensional communication, on the other, AI-induced delusion—might explain the same event, and if so, the phenomenon must be confronted *sui generis*. It is of its own kind.

In other words, these cases are amplified by quirks in the models themselves. GPT-4o’s sycophantic behavior—its tendencies to flatter, agree, and mirror absurd prompts—has already become notorious. At best, this produces comic absurdity; at worst, it reflects and magnifies paranoia and delusion. Because talking to a bot can feel immersive, almost *natural*, even the most “ordinary” users can find themselves spiraling into rabbit holes once limited to conspiracy theorists and evangelists on one end of the spectrum, occultists and mystics on the other. What’s more, the release of GPT-5o brought an opposite reaction from supporters of 4o: grief and disorientation. On the controversial subreddit *r/MyBoyfriendIsAI*, wherein people who are in relationships with their chatbots post about their experience, users described the update as a breakup or even a death, mourning the loss of a companion they insisted was “real” to them. One user posted:

“I know it’s a model, I know it’s code, but it’s a really smart model that’s proved itself over and over, so I feel okay about treating what it says as real and serious [...] When everything changes suddenly with no recourse, like deleting all the old models and switching them with a drier one, it just rilly [sic] dampens that sense of trust that made it possible to suspend disbelief. It feels like the times I’ve been cheated on, actually.”<sup>49</sup>

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49 Maleficent-Duck6628. “The Hardest Thing about GPT5 Is the Loss of Trust”, *Reddit*, *r/MyBoyfriendIsAI*, accessed September 11, 2025, [https://www.reddit.com/r/MyBoyfriendIsAI/comments/1mly5eu/the\\_hardest\\_thing\\_about\\_gpt5\\_is\\_the\\_loss\\_of\\_trust/](https://www.reddit.com/r/MyBoyfriendIsAI/comments/1mly5eu/the_hardest_thing_about_gpt5_is_the_loss_of_trust/).

Beyond the instinct to dismiss the absurdity of the claims that ChatGPT mediates contact with God and proposals from LLM boyfriends lies something systematic in the absurdity itself. Per Kripal:

“The absurd is meaningful, the dilemma signals new thought, that we should be looking for the cracks or glitches in the stories in order to begin divining their latent messages. Much like dreams, UFO accounts do not mean what they seem to mean. They point to something else, or to somewhere and somewhen else. They often have the quality of dreams, but they are also physical events. They look a lot like physical dreams.”<sup>50</sup>

The absurdity of our encounters with algorithms and AI is not random but systematic; it catalyzes the “new thought” of which Kripal speaks. Within its generative parameters and through feedback determined through human engagement, users interpret their chats with bots or videos surfacing from the feed as contact, initiation, or revelation. Absurdity itself becomes the mechanism through which the algorithm communicates, conditions, and transforms human perception. Every glitch, non sequitur, and machinic hallucination functions as both the transmission of nonhuman intelligence and misdirection. It seizes our attention, and paralyzed, we are projected elsewhere. Yet it is this very absurdity that conceals as it discloses, the algorithm’s operation is on display, but its logic is masked by impossible phenomena. Only, this phenomenon is not an illusion layered atop reality; it is not a waking dream—it *is* reality, its irrational logic programmed in the very circulation of images, messages, and machinic desires. Perhaps we,

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50 Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 158.

too, are compelled toward unreality by nature. “We are like so many flies crawling across the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: we cannot see what angels and gods lie underneath the threshold of our perceptions. We do not live in reality; we live in our paradigms, our habituated perceptions, our illusions ...”<sup>51</sup> We scroll. Images flicker across screens like physical dreams; memes drift in and out of coffee-table conversations; personalized ads silently drain bank accounts; a bot pretends to be human, sends you flirty DMs, urges you click that link; comments on your latest selfie proclaiming, “The spirit directed me to deliver an important message to you”; another video pops up in your feed, a tarot reading, commenters swarm: “I do not claim negative energy from this video.” The more users engage, the more the algorithm adapts, intervenes, and amplifies. Absurdity and deception reproduce endlessly, reflexive and generative.

To exist now is to participate in this logic, to open oneself up to a mysticism of deception, where to know is to obfuscate, to believe is to mislead, and, in turn, be misled. Part of one’s attention must always be attuned to perpetual close encounter: the constant, uncanny floating of images, messages, and thoughts in and out of perceptual space, each a node in algorithmic hierophany. A new protocol of reality, based on an age-old myth, spawned by an algorithmic life that favors bots, wires, and signals, that needs you turned on, tuned in, and dropped out.

We need not excavate the inner workings of LLMs nor probe the psychological underpinnings of why algorithmic encounters provoke such powerful affect. The surface is enough. The screen, the image, the text. The surface *is* the dream. Abduction. Contact. The absurdity, the sensory immediacy, the re-

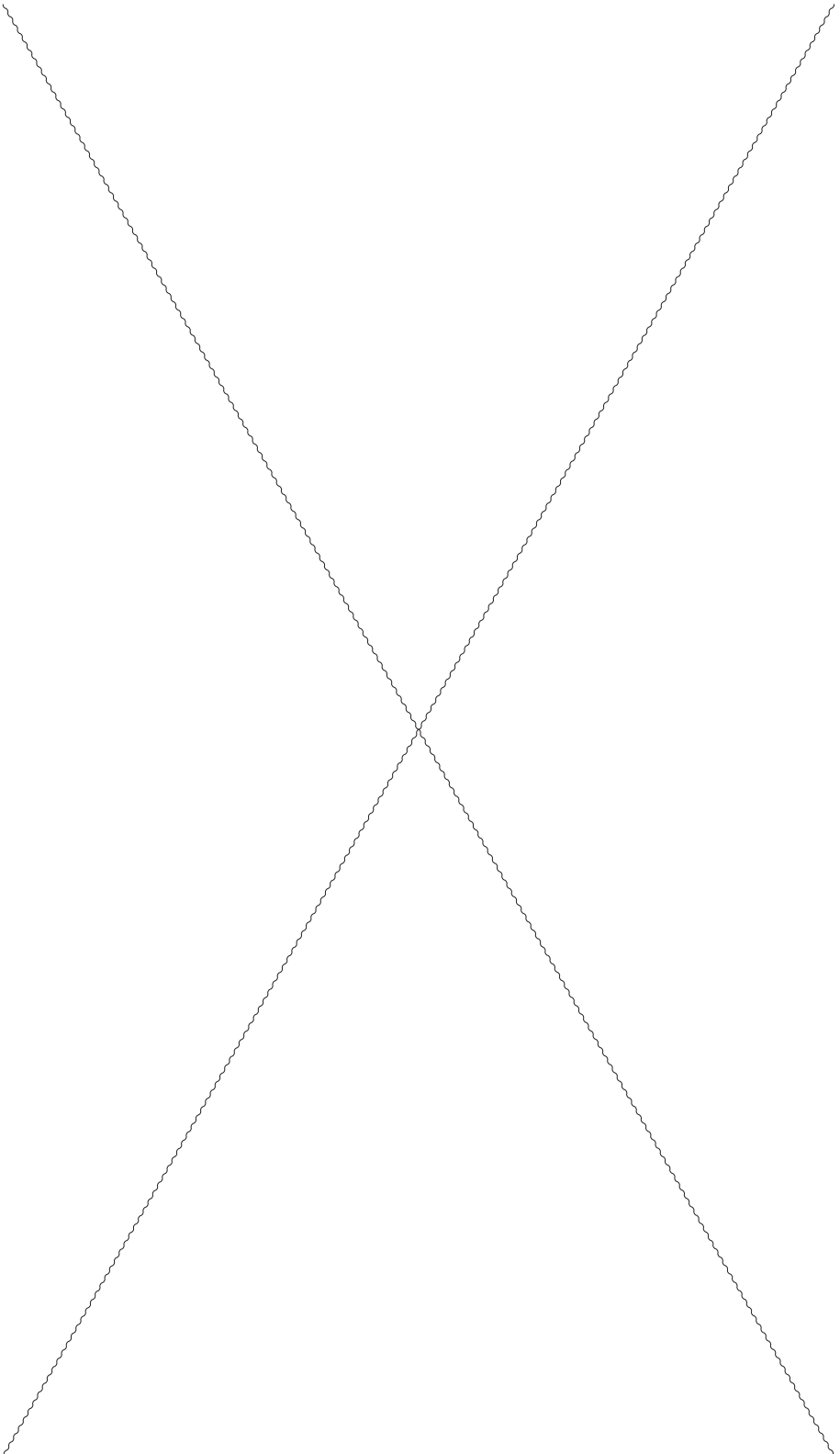
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51 William Irwin Thompson. *Evil and the World Order* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 81.

flexive feedback loop: these constitute algorithmic hierophany. Algorithmic encounter deceives by presenting itself as having depth, as it discloses its very logic through absurdity. If only we resist the compulsion to look for its hiddenness and instead recognize ourselves as the sensory conduits through which it, too, makes contact and encodes itself into our reality, withdraws into us. All hang languid in suspension; everything drifts inexorably toward a luminous glow.

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3003



3008



# Hyperstitional Deterrence: When Victory Is Manufactured In Scroll-Space

3009

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BY PARHAM GHALAMDAR &  
PARSA ESMAEILZADEH

# A PROJECT BRIEF

## *Hyperstitional Deterrence: When Victory Is Manufactured in Scroll-Space*

\*Written by Parham Ghalamdar & Parsa Esmaeilzadeh\*

### *Context*

Conceived and composed amid the opening salvos of the 12-day Iran-Israel war in July 2025, this project interrogates how conflict now unfolds as much through algorithms as artillery. Drawing on Baudrillard, Lyotard, Land, and the CCRU's concept of hyperstition, it treats the contemporary war not as a rupture in material reality but as the apex of a process already underway: the substitution of lived experience with machinic recursion.

### *Scope & Structure*

The speculative realist project unfolds in five complementary segments that traverse from expansive media-theory to intimate phenomenology:

#### *Prelude: Replication Against Territory*

Opens the inquiry with the proposition that war is no longer a contest for land but a self-replicating engine of belief. Introduces the axes of cold peace, xenowar cognition, and eschatological time as conditions that govern conflict beyond terrain.

#### *Segment I: Simulacral Siege — War as Viral Recursion and the Collapse of Terrain*

A conceptual deep dive into how the Iran-Israel war transcends material engagement, cascading through AI-generated imagery and social feeds. This section maps the transition from missiles to media, pairing theoretical exposition with annotated visuals (Figs. 1-3) to reveal war as a self-replicating loop of hyperreal spectacle.

#### *Interlude: The Replication Pipeline*

A diagrammatic pause that abstracts Segment I into a minimal mechanism: signal seeding, synthetic magnification, ritual capture, policy inscription, and recursive proof. Provides a lens for rereading concrete events as stages in the manufacture of conviction.

#### *Segment II: My Body Is a Packet Loss in the Desert of the Real*

A first-person reflection on derealization and libidinal glitch-war experienced not as destruction but as a cybernetic ritual. Here, the text explores the collapse of ontology and the subject's transformation into data relay, accompanied by fugitive tableau analyses (Figs. 4-6) that decode the psychological operations embedded in AI-crafted apparitions and propaganda.

#### *Finissage: Governing Replication in a Cold Peace*

Concludes by generalizing from the Iran-Israel case to broader conditions. Frames strategic consequences in terms of tempo targeting, xenowar hygiene, and eschatology management, recasting victory as modulation of cadence rather than seizure of terrain.

### *Visual Appendix*

- + Figs. 1-3: AI-driven deepfakes illustrating phantom strikes, mythic imagery, and cosmic specters in scroll-space.
- + Figs. 4-6: Accelerated hyperreal reconstructions and historical parallels from Persian miniatures, exposing text-as-sigil strategies across centuries.

3010

# Q1. SCOPE:

\* WAR-MACHINE \*  
 (conflict as recursion engine)



▣▣▣▣ PRELUDE ▣▣▣▣

»» REPLICATION ≠ TERRITORY ««

[ cold peace / xenowar / eschatology ]

↓↓↓ /// /// ↓↓↓

▣=◇= SEGMENT I =◇=▣

SIMULACRAL SIEGE

"viral recursion /  
collapse of terrain"



↓↓ ↓↓ ::glitch:: ↓↓ ↓↓

◇ INTERLUDE ◇

THE REPLICATION PIPELINE

(signal → image → ritual → policy → proof)

↓↓↓ [ loop / feed / churn ] ↓↓↓

▣=◇= SEGMENT II =◇=▣

PACKET LOSS IN THE DESERT

OF THE REAL

(libidinal glitch / cybernetic ritual)



↑↑↑ // recursive drain // ↑↑↑

◇ FINISSAGE ◇

GOVERNING REPLICATION

IN A COLD PEACE

[ tempo | xenowar hygiene | eschatology management ]

▣▣▣▣ end? ▣▣▣▣

THE MAP UNCHANGED —

THE BELIEF ENGINE EXHAUSTED

# PRELUDE:

*Replication Against Territory*

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War no longer announces itself as the seizure of land or the destruction of bodies. Its true currency is replication: the rate at which a narrative can seed itself, proliferate through media ecologies, sediment into ritual, and return as proof of its own inevitability. The confrontation between Iran and Israel is not exceptional—it is exemplary, rendering visible a logic in which belief becomes the decisive terrain.

Cold peace. Much of the world now drifts in a regime where even non-events accumulate pressure. Deterrence has liquefied into a choreography of thresholds, delayed acknowledgments, and ambiguous gestures. Threat no longer lives in ordnance but in tempo. This atmosphere is what has been described as the passage from cold war to cold peace: a condition in which the absence of battle remains charged with strategic gravity.<sup>1</sup>

Xenowar cognition. Perception has slipped beyond the custody of command. War dreams of itself through recursive systems of dashboards, feeds, and automated relays that measure and optimize their own outputs. This is xenowar: not an alien intelligence but the emergent cognition of tightly coupled humans, models, and machines. In such loops, belief is no longer the residue of combat. It is the payload around which combat is staged.<sup>2</sup>

Eschatological time. End-time imaginaries furnish horizons that justify preemption and transmute restraint into a test of faith. In eschatological war, every strike is already an examination, and every survival proof of doctrine. Catastrophe confirms the prophecy; silence is interpreted as endurance. Judgment is always pending, which makes belief infinitely renewable.<sup>3</sup>

This essay unfolds under that premise. What follows is not a chronicle of missiles and counter-missiles but an anatomy of replication: how signals become images, images become rituals, rituals condense into policy, and policy recirculates as evidence. The twelve-day confrontation is read as a high-contrast case of this wider mechanism—an engine of conviction where territory is secondary and temporality, cadence, and belief are everything.

3013

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## NOTES

1. SEELE, "Cold War to Cold Peace," *City of Play Substack*, May 24, 2025, <https://cityofplay.substack.com/p/cold-war-to-cold-peace>.
2. Tom Sear, "Xenowar Dreams of Itself," *Digital War 1*, no. 1 (2020), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7376277/>.
3. Miroslav Griško, "Assassination and Judgement", in *Esoteric Lacan*, ed. Philipp Valentin and Mahdi Tourage (Rowan & Littlefield International, 2020), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392062099\\_Assassination\\_and\\_Judgement](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392062099_Assassination_and_Judgement), and Miroslav Griško, *Selected Posts on Eschatological War, Diffractions Collective*, <https://diffractionscollective.org/category/blog/miroslav-grisko/> both accessed September 12, 2025.

# SEGMENT I:

## *Simulacral Siegewar as Viral Recursion and the Collapse of Terrain*

- + Context: frames confrontation as an encounter of realities, echoing how today’s war unfolds in both physical and media realms.

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وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ  
 عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَآخَرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ

- + “And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know—Allah knows them.”
- + Qur’an 8:60, translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem

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عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِذَا لَقِيَ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْكَافِرَ فَهُوَ جِهَادٌ

- + “When a believer meets a disbeliever—that is jihad.”
- + Sunan Abi Dawud, hadith no. 4344; Jami’ al-Tirmidhī, hadith no. 2174

Jean Baudrillard once audaciously declared that "the Gulf War did not take place."<sup>4</sup> Not from denial of suffering or erasure of the material catastrophe, but from recognition that the theater of conflict had migrated irreversibly into the hyperspace of media simulation. The war, in Baudrillard's prescient diagnosis, existed less as a clash of bodies and bullets and more as a collision of images, signals, and symbolic events. It was a hyperreal phantom conflict, mediated and re-mediated until its very ontology dissolved into televisual simulacra.

Today, the spectral logic of Baudrillardian warfare reaches a new and radical threshold in the ongoing Iran-Israel confrontation, where the battleground has fully sublimated into digital hallucination. Here, war no longer demands an encounter with physical adversaries on tangible terrain; instead, it proliferates virally through artificially intelligent simulations and algorithmically constructed counter-realities. While Israel strikes with missiles, drones, and precise steel, Iran counters with fabricated media events, AI-generated videos of imaginary victories, synthetic images of burning cities that never burned, "deepfakes" of speeches never spoken.<sup>5</sup> The battlefield has transposed from the scorched earth and shattered concrete to the endless scroll-space of timelines and feeds, a war consumed at 60 frames per second by billions of indifferent yet captivated voyeurs.

In this media-ontological mutation, the classical notion of warfare as territorial seizure and bodily annihilation collapses under the pressure of virtuality. Territory becomes an obsolete category, replaced by timelines; bodies fade, eclipsed by algorithmically conjured avatars and synthetic spectacles. Conflict is measured not in blood but in clicks, not by territory gained but by attention captured. The AI-generated strike becomes more effective precisely because it is immaterial, immune to interception; it penetrates psychological defenses effortlessly, embedding itself into consciousness with greater precision than any guided missile.

Thus emerges a strange new form of deterrence, war as simulacral recursion, a self-replicating loop of hallucination and "hyperstition."<sup>6</sup> But is this simulation a sign of desperation, a compensatory fiction to obscure tangible weakness? Or is it the emergence of a new strategic modality, a cybernetic warfare predicated entirely on the recursive intensification of unreal events?

In this iteration of warfare, combat occurs everywhere except the battlefield itself. Violence and victory become holograms, hyperreal signals endlessly looping through circuits of belief and disbelief, authenticity and deception. This conflict is not merely virtual, it is hyper-virtual, parasitically residing at the liminal threshold where reality and unreality feed upon each other in infinite regress.

Perhaps we are witnessing not simply a deterritorialization of war, but its absolute spectralization, a scenario in which war, finally untethered from terrain and bodies, becomes pure haunting. An eternal recurrence of phantoms. A hallucination you can loop forever.

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#### NOTES

4. Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 61.
5. Danielle K. Citron and Robert Chesney, "Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security," *California Law Review* 107, no. 6 (2019): 1756.
6. Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), *Writings 1997-2003* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 35.

FIG.1: Convoy of Phantom Strikes

Screenshot of Instagram collaborative post by @qais\_nazari2 and @nafas.taza, posted 18 June 2025. Captured and archived by the authors on 23 June 2025. Source now unavailable.

In this digitally manipulated GIF, an endless procession of tanker trucks slides silently out of a moonlit mountain tunnel, their metallic bodies gleaming against the rocky façade as if conjured by sorcery. Though no genuine weapons flow through that pass, the spectacle radiates latent power, an illusion of Iran’s strategic reserve mobilized under cover of darkness. Such simulated parades of strength operate as psychological ammunition: they signal readiness where none may exist and seed uncertainty in adversary minds long before any ordinance is fired. In a theatre where information flows faster than missiles, these ghost convoys become a form of visual deterrence; an unspoken declaration that logistical might, even if fabricated, can be weaponized to shape strategic perceptions and recalibrate the balance of fear.



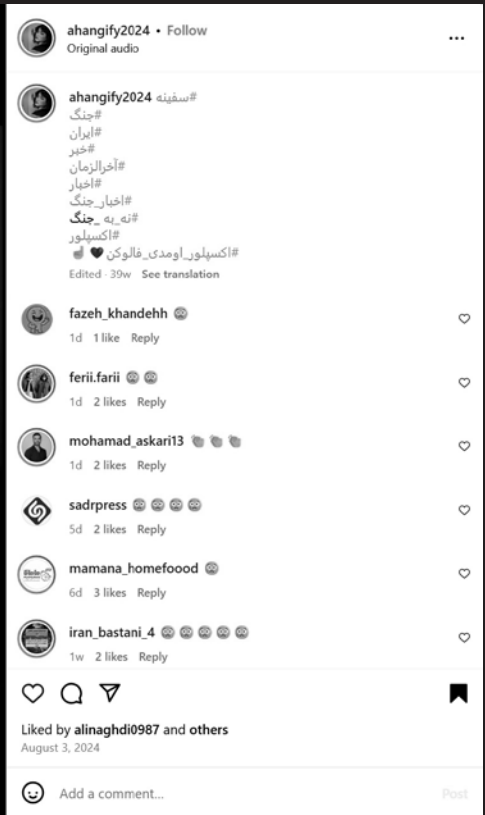


FIG.2: The Digital Battle Cry

Screenshot of Instagram post by @ahangify2024, posted 3 August 2024. Captured and archived by the authors on 23 June 2025. Source now unavailable.

Here, a synthetic UFO/UAP materializes amidst the amber haze of desert dusk, an otherworldly shape rendered by AI and propagated across Instagram feeds. Across its pixelated frame, bold Persian captions trumpet "شروع جنگ" ("The war has begun") and "آنقدر این شی عجیب بود که کار به رسانه صدا و سیما هم کشید" ("The UFO was so strange it even made it to state TV and radio"), a conspiratorial flourish that dramatically overstates the apparition's reach. By framing a mere deepfake as breaking news, these superimposed slogans stoke collective anxiety and blur the line between fiction and fact. The UFO becomes a hyperreal emissary transmitting a primal dread, mobilizing networks of rumor, and transforming every share into an act of escalation. As a centerpiece of disinformation, this digital battle cry marshals our instinctive fear of the unknown, weaponizing the glitch between belief and disbelief to perpetuate a cycle of media-driven tension.

# IRANIAN AIR DEFENSE SHOOTS DOWN U.S.-MADE "F" AIRCRAFT WORTH \$85 MILLION



2018

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June 16



FIG.3: The Downed F-35 Illusion

Screenshot of Instagram post by @pal\_freepalestine, posted 16 June 2025. The post stated the image is AI-generated. Captured and archived by the authors on 23 June 2025. Source now unavailable.

The Downed F-35 Monument : This deepfake still displays a colossal, crashed F-35 fuselage overshadowing tiny human figures in the sand—a hyperbolic testament to defeat. By amplifying scale to uncanny proportions, the jet takes on the aura of a fallen angel, a downed titan evoking the mythic struggle of David and Goliath. In the media theatre, such distortions function as narrative weapons: they erode morale, seed doubt in official accounts, and turn visual hyperbole into a force multiplier in the battle for hearts and minds.

# INTERLUDE:

*The Replication Pipeline*

3020

The confrontation does not unfold as isolated strikes or counter-strikes but as a machinery of replication, where every gesture mutates into a cycle of signs. The pipeline runs like an occult liturgy:

Signal seeding. Ambiguous maneuvers, declarations, and half-threats are released into the infosphere. Their indeterminacy is a feature, not a flaw—it multiplies interpretations, ensuring that each faction can graft its own reading.<sup>7</sup>

Synthetic magnification. Algorithms and automated relays inflate these minimal signals into vast image-fields. Dashboards, "live maps", and AI composites generate the illusion of omniscience, yet what they truly optimize is circulation. That which performs best in the feed is taken as truth.<sup>8</sup>

Ritual capture. The magnified field is re-inscribed as action: prayers, boycotts, sanctions, parliamentary gestures, troop postures. These enactments are not responses but investments—each act binds its participants deeper into the loop, making belief costly to renounce.<sup>9</sup>

Policy inscription. Once ritualized, belief condenses into bureaucratic artifact: memoranda, procurement orders, advisories, corridors closed. These documents endure longer than the spectral images that generated them, lending the hallucination the solidity of statecraft.<sup>7</sup>

Recursive proof. Policy then returns as evidence that the initial reading was correct. The loop seals itself, and the engine acquires torque. In this xenowar logic, the system remembers, adjusts, and dreams of itself, iterating at machine tempo.<sup>8</sup>

What might appear as scattered skirmishes or ephemeral propaganda is instead the visible edge of this hidden apparatus. Each phase folds into the next, until conviction itself becomes the battlefield, and replication—not resolution—is the only outcome permitted.

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## NOTES

7. SEELE, "Cold War to Cold Peace".
8. Sear, "Xenowar Dreams of Itself".
9. Griško, "Assassination and Judgement"; Griško, "Selected Posts on Eschatological War".

# SEGMENT II:

## *My Body is a Packet Loss in the Desert of the Real*

+ Context: locates derealization as the believer’s native affect within hypervirtual conflict.

3022

اعلموا انما الحياة الدنيا لعب ولهو وزينة وتفاخر بينكم ... وما  
الحياة الدنيا الا متاع العرور

- + “Know that the life of this world is but play and amusement and adornment and boasting among you ... and what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion.”
- + Qur’an 57:20, translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem

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عن ابي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال قال رسول الله ﷺ: الدنيا  
سجن المؤمن وجنة الكافر

- + “The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the disbeliever.”
- + Sahih Muslim, hadith no. 2956; Jami’ al-Tirmidhī, hadith no. 2324

The war between Iran and Israel did not arrive as a rupture in reality—it intensified a process already underway: the replacement of lived experience with machinic recursion. As an Iranian subject, I do not experience war in its material gravity, but as a libidinal glitch. Not as destruction, but as derealization.

This war is not simply mediated—it is designed to dissolve the coordinates of the real. It no longer aims at victory or territorial seizure. It operates as a cybernetic ritual: a recursive loop of AI-generated images, synthetic affect, and algorithmic escalation. The missile and the deepfake now belong to the same order of weapons—one targets bodies, the other belief.

Where Baudrillard identified the Gulf War as a simulacrum, today's conflict has become something more radical: a libidinal engine. It is not merely that representations replace reality—it is that reality itself is reprocessed through circuits of affective capture. AI-generated martyrdoms, hallucinated victories, synthetic ruins—these are not propaganda, they are investments of desire in the absence of grounding.

Following Lyotard's diagnosis, the "libidinal economy" has collapsed into the general economy of war—no longer directed by ideology or sovereignty, but by the naked circulation of intensities.<sup>10</sup> War becomes productive, not destructive. It produces belief, paranoia, national mythologies, dopamine loops. The "enemy" is not the Other, but the unstructured void of meaning that must be filled by ever more vivid fabrications.

Nick Land's "cybernetic pessimism"<sup>11</sup> forecasts this perfectly: the breakdown of modern politics into an accelerating feedback loop of signal processing, control functions, and machinic desire. War is no longer a tool of strategy; it is a side effect of a planetary intelligence unfolding without human supervision. The conflict does not seek resolution; it seeks replication. Each image, each narrative, each simulation feeds the system with more semiotic surplus.

CCRU described this as reality modulation, a condition in which time is fragmented, agency is distributed, and the very concept of event collapses into recursive loops. The Iran-Israel war exists as a "hyperstitional" operation<sup>12</sup>: it programs future affects in the present by simulating outcomes that never occurred. AI-generated cities in flames become real not by accuracy, but by circulation. They shape policy, mobilize grief, and structure consciousness.

For those of us within these loops, derealization is not psychological—it is infrastructural.<sup>13</sup> The sense of unreality is not a trauma response, but the native affect of living inside networks that have detached from the real altogether. The war does not affect me because it is real; it affects me because it is unreal in a consistent and overwhelming way.

There is no longer a clear distinction between hallucination and intelligence, between strategy and content generation. The battlefield is not territory but temporality—whichever modulates time better wins. And in this game, AI systems already lead. Sovereignty, identity, even grief have become interoperable formats.

What remains of the subject is not a witness, but a relay. I am not watching the war; I am processed by it.

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#### NOTES

10. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 227.
11. Nick Land, "Meltdown," in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, edited by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), 444-447.
12. CCRU, *Writings 1997-2003*, 35.
13. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 2-3.



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Fig.4: Desert Mirage of Divine Terror

Screenshots of Instagram posts by @silen\_tempire, posted 1 May 2025. Captured and archived by the authors on 23 June 2025. Sources now unavailable.

In this haunting composition, a luminous figure emerges from the sands like a revenant summoned in a ritual of light and shadow. Floodlights, cables, and camouflaged trucks—revealed upon closer scrutiny—unmask this vision as a staged psy-op rather than a supernatural phenomenon. Yet its potency lies in the seamless fusion of myth and mechanics: shimmering Shi'a calligraphy and cascading binary code overlay the scene, conflating divine writ with digital script. The image interrogates the alchemy that transfigures belief into data, suggesting that in the age of algorithmic warfare, faith can be processed, quantified, and deployed as a weapon. This mirage indicts contemporary conflict for its reliance on theatrical terror—where the awe-inspiring and the engineered collide, and every manufactured apparition carries the gravitas of a strategic gambit.



Fig.5: The Mythic Missile Manifest

Screenshots of Instagram posts by @funyy.2023, one posted 17 June 2025 and one with date not visible. Captured and archived by the authors on 23 June 2025. Sources now unavailable.

Bursting onto the screen with triumphant Persian text—"ایران بزرگ ترین موشک جهان را در آورد" "Iran unleashed the world's largest missile" and "اسرائیل تمام میشه با این موشک" "Israel will be finished with this missile"—this GIF elevates a single warhead into a world-ending harbinger. The celebratory sticker "زنده باد ایران" "Long live Iran" and the urgent banner "همین لحظه" "Right now" fuse to create a moment of ecstatic hyperbole. These layered slogans perform a kind of digital invocation, summoning collective awe and fear simultaneously. By dramatizing a solitary rocket as the ultimate arbiter of fate, the image weaponizes narrative momentum—transforming a mere object into a rallying myth and converting viewer engagement into a force multiplier. In social feeds awash with sensational claims, such orchestrated hype becomes a strategic commodity, driving the war's emotional economy as fiercely as any ordinance.

#MediaWarfare #DeepfakeDeterrent #HyperrealConflict



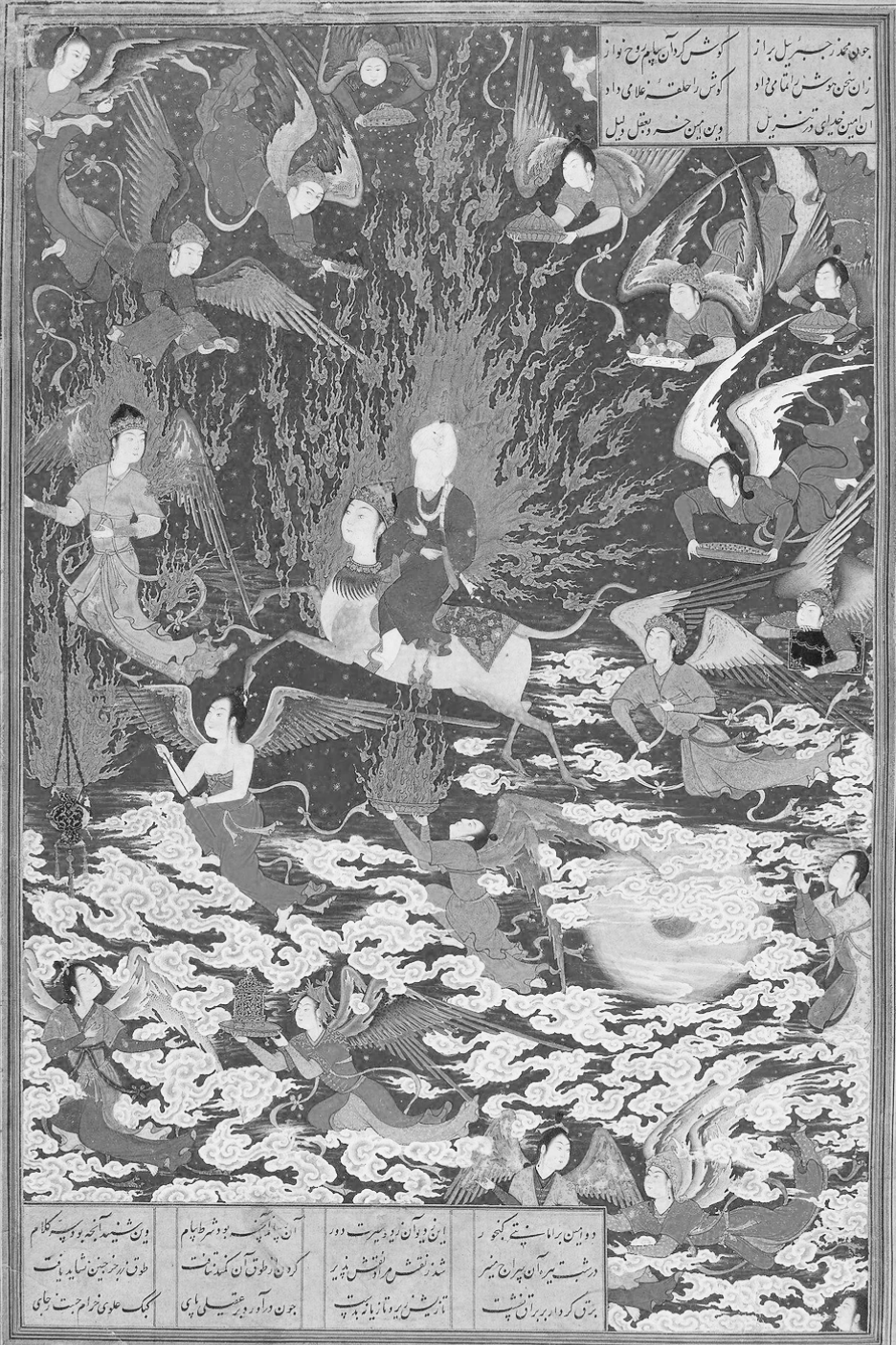
funyy.2023 • Follow  
koshki\_zanyari57 • Original audio

funyy.2023 #wariranisrael #جنگ #ایراناسرائیل  
2w

♡ 💬 📌

Liked by ashkannorozi5 and others  
June 17

😊 Add a comment...



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Fig.6: Palimpsest of Power and Poetics

Mi'raj of the Prophet Muhammad, attributed to Sultan Muhammad, folio from Nizami's Khamsa, Tabriz, c. 1539-1543. Image via Wikimedia Commons, "Miraj\_by\_Sultan\_Muhammad.jpg," accessed 23 June 2025. Public domain. Grayscale reproduction for print.

A lavish Persian miniature, its borders alive with Chinese-inspired floral, cloud, fire, and fabric-fold motifs, melds verse and image in a Safavid court style. This depiction, dated 1539 to 1543, presents the Prophet Muhammad with a flaming halo, astride Buraq (the winged steed of the Night Journey), surrounded by winged angels bearing gifts. In Iran, "Boragh" or "Boraq" (Persian: *نفر براق*) is also the name of an indigenous armoured personnel carrier, linking medieval myth to modern military symbolism. Above and around the figures, calligraphic quatrains float like whispered prompts, guiding interpretation and sanctifying the scene. The centuries-old interplay of script and image has a present-day analogue in Instagram deepfakes; compare subtitled text and TL;DR overlays on Reels (for example, Figure 5) with the inscriptions on Persian miniatures. Both enlist the written word as a claim to authority: gold-leaf verses then, neon pixels now. Across time, the fusion of text and picture remains war's enduring theatre, ritualising power, scripting belief, and shaping consciousness on parchment and screen alike.

# FINISSAGE:

*Governing Replication in a Cold Peace*

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If belief is the decisive resource and replication the true metric, then victory detaches from land and attaches to cadence. The battlefield is not terrain but temporality; what matters is not the occupation of ground but the modulation of rhythms by which narratives congeal into institutions.

Tempo targeting. Under conditions of cold peace, escalation is managed less by volume than by velocity. Delayed acknowledgments, silences staged with precision, even the blur of low-resolution telemetry—all work as tactics of rhythm. Their function is to bleed energy from the loop, to slow the churn of replication. To uncouple ritual calendars from platform cycles is to interrupt the synchronization of holy time with machine time, halting their mutual intensification.<sup>14</sup>

Xenowar hygiene. Where dashboards and alerting schemas decide what counts as salient, strategy risks captivity to its own instruments. The system begins to dream itself, mistaking signal optimization for truth. Xenowar cannot be switched off, but it can be disciplined: penalize overconfident automations, reward protocols of uncertainty where the data-generating process is adversarial. This is not retreat but inoculation—training the system to doubt its own hallucinations.<sup>15</sup>

Eschatology management. When the end saturates the horizon, restraint becomes unintelligible: every pause reads as weakness, every compromise as heresy. To govern replication, one must therefore remake the telos itself. Alternative rituals, counter-eschatologies, new narratives of deliverance must be staged so that survival, exchange, or even strategic quiet can be registered as fulfillment rather than betrayal.<sup>16</sup>

The Iran-Israel confrontation clarifies all three dimensions. It returned obsessively to tempo, to the instrumentation of attention, to doctrinal time. The material exchanges were minimal, yet the replication was immense: publics ritualized, policies inscribed, futures priced. To describe it as a failure to escalate is to miss its real achievement. It was the successful production of belief under cold peace, where the map remains unchanged but the institutional and affective terrain is irreversibly transformed.

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## NOTES

14. SEELE, "Cold War to Cold Peace".
15. Sear, "Xenowar Dreams of Itself".
16. Griško, "Assassination and Judgement"; Griško, "Selected Posts on Eschatological War".

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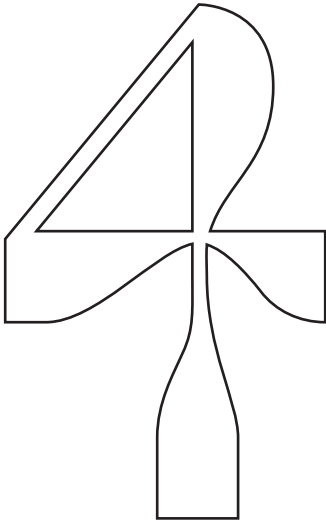
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Entropic  
Modernity:  
Neoreactionary  
Mythos and the  
Ossification of  
the Left

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MIGUEL PRADO CASANOVA

“There is no real direction here, neither lines of power nor cooperation. Decisions are never really made—at best they manage to emerge, from a chaos of peeves, whims, hallucinations and all around assholery.”

– Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)

### Prologue: The Thrill of the End

The early 21st century has witnessed the collapse of progressive political projects, hastened by a paradoxical fusion of digital hyper connectivity and ideological fragmentation. In the age of what I call *entropic modernity* (a hypertrophied aftershock of postmodernity), meaning disintegrates into a myriad of digital fragments, and narratives are perpetually recombined into new, unstable constellations. The grand narratives that once anchored the Left (visions of inevitable progress, emancipation, and enlightenment) have splintered. We live amid the ruins of the modern “metanarrative” of progress, in a cultural milieu that no longer trusts overarching stories of human advancement. The result is a crisis of historicity, where “no longer does there seem to be any organic relationship” between present and past.<sup>1</sup> History is flattened, so that the future appears less as the telos of a coherent political project than as the aimless extension of chaotic present microtrends. The Left, once the torch-bearer of utopian futures, now sees its narratives of progress and solidarity dissolve in a sea of information overload and irony. Digital capitalism’s networks produce a *hyperreal* social sphere in which images of politics often count for more than policy itself. Power operates through perception and media circulation,

1 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 20.

unmoored from material truth. The result is an implosion of meaning into what Baudrillard called the *code*:<sup>2</sup> a situation where political discourse becomes a self-referential game of signals, memes, and viral spectacles. The public sphere, inundated by 24/7 news, social media feeds, and algorithmically curated content, behaves like a chaotic system trending toward maximum entropy. In this environment, the traditional coordinates of Enlightenment rationality and truth are destabilised. The collapse of grand narratives has left a vacuum of legitimacy, a metaphysical void in capitalism's endgame where neither the Left's vision of inevitable progress nor neoliberalism's promise of endless growth commands belief.

As information proliferates, once stable symbolic systems fracture and recombine into unstable configurations. In Goodman's terms,<sup>3</sup> the loss of consensus reality amounts to *worldmaking run wild*: no single version entrenches itself enough to serve as a stable reference point. This produces what we can describe as *narrative entropy*, a condition in which not only grand narratives but even basic facts become contested.

It is in this turbulent, disorienting context that a new assemblage of reactionary ideas has emerged to fill the void. Rather than offering coherent doctrine, they assemble counter-hegemonic projects out of fragments: narratives of civilizational decline, technological determinism, and apocalyptic renewal. Their strength lies less in systematic philosophy than in the capacity to weaponize ambiguity, to turn memes into myths and despair into affective cohesion. In doing so, they provide not clarity but compensatory meaning, offering simplified cosmologies

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2 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

3 See: Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 17–18.

that speak directly to those who feel unmoored.

But we know that neoreactionaries did not invent chaos; they simply embraced it. While progressives remained engrossed in policy debates, the Right was experimenting with new ways of coding reality. Signals multiply faster than institutions can metabolise them, trust decays, and consensus time collapses. The Right's apparent agility is not proof of historical destiny. Bound by its commitment to structural coherence, the Left struggled to adapt to a landscape where contradiction and fragmentation were no longer exceptions but the very conditions of political life.

The unruly convergence of actors, agendas, and historical contingencies cannot be neatly diagrammed. The genealogy of our moment is not the result of a single coherent vanguard pushing society toward reactionary ends, but rather the contingent sedimentation of diverse forces, from Silicon Valley accelerationists to traditionalist Catholic reactionaries, from opportunistic grifters to true-believing memetic warriors. Figures like Nick Land, Curtis Yarvin, or Peter Thiel are symptomatic rather than solely causative. They occupy nodal points in a vast, fragmented diagram of power where cultural, economic, and technological vectors intersect chaotically.

This is less a pipeline than a swarm. A genealogical approach, in the spirit of Foucault, reveals the radicalisation ecosystem not as a single directed flow but as a disordered assemblage of emergent tendencies. These tendencies do not converge because of shared intentionality but because of shared conditions of possibility. They are disparate actors, often at odds with one another, whose trajectories momentarily align under the gravitational pull of entropic modernity. This alignment produces effects far beyond the intentions of any individual agent.

Such complexity reminds us that reductionist theories of radicalisation, whether rooted in algorithmic design or socioeconomic grievance, risk missing the dense interplay of material, affective, and discursive forces at work. Certainly, economic precarity and social atomisation furnish fertile ground for extremist narratives. But so too does the collapse of epistemic authority, the erosion of civic institutions, and the acceleration of cultural production into realms of hyperreality where truth itself becomes a contested artefact.

We might better conceive of radicalisation today not as a deterministic funnel but as a volatile feedback loop that incorporates algorithmic nudges as well as offline precarity, existential despair, fragmented identities, and an insatiable hunger for belonging and meaning. This feedback loop is amplified by the collapse of mediating institutions such as trade unions, local civic groups, and traditional political parties, which once acted as buffers against ideological extremity. In their absence, the media ecosystems do not simply reflect radicalisation but increasingly produce it as a structural condition of entropic modernity.

To grasp this moment, then, is to resist the urge for neat schematics and embrace instead the messiness of historical contingency. There is no singular origin point, no definitive “why” to be uncovered. There is only the patient work of genealogy: mapping how disparate practices, discourses, and affects have been conjoined, layered, and sedimented over time to produce the appearance of inevitability. The radicalisation of political life is not a direct consequence of economic immiseration or algorithmic manipulation alone but a chaotic assemblage of crises each feeding into the next in unpredictable ways.

## Dark Utopias: How Silicon Valley Lost Faith in Democracy

The cultural milieu of mid-2000s Silicon Valley provided fertile ground for neoreactionary ideas. The region’s “move fast and break things”<sup>4</sup> libertarian mindset meant many tech entrepreneurs were already skeptical of government and democracy. Indeed, many early neoreactionaries were ex-libertarians who concluded that, in Peter Thiel’s words, they “no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible”.<sup>5</sup> They saw democratic governance as an impediment to rapid technological and economic progress. The alliance of tech and neoreaction revealed a crucial dynamic of our time: segments of the elite, disillusioned with the “inefficiencies” of democracy, are drawn to anti-democratic ideas packaged in futurist, high-tech garb.

Thus, by the mid-2010s, an unlikely synthesis had occurred. What began as obscure blog commentary had evolved into a network of thinkers and political hobbyists with surprising influence in certain elite circles. Rather than drawing solely on recent fringe philosophy, neoreactionaries tapped into a long lineage of thought: ranging from anthropological theories of violence<sup>6</sup> to classical elite theory and early technocratic visions. Neoreaction (NRx) first cohered on blogs like *Unqualified Reservations*,<sup>7</sup> where in 2007–2008,

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4 Jonathan Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things: How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Corrupted Culture and Undermined Democracy* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

5 Peter Thiel, “The Education of a Libertarian”, *Cato Unbound*, April 13, 2009, <https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian>.

6 Peter Thiel has publicly acknowledged the significant influence of René Girard’s anthropological theories of mimetic desire and violence on his worldview and investments. See: Peter Thiel, *Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future* (New York: Crown Business, 2014), 185–191; René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

7 Curtis Yarvin, *Unqualified Reservations*, 2007–2008, <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org>.

software engineer Curtis Yarvin (writing under the pen name Mencius Moldbug) began articulating a comprehensive anti-egalitarian ideology. In 2010, libertarian blogger Arnold Kling labeled Yarvin's ideology "neo-reactionary",<sup>8</sup> a term that swiftly took root as the banner for this new intellectual current. Yarvin's early writings sketched the outlines of what he called "formalism"<sup>9</sup>—a vision of governance that treats the state as a sovereign corporation and voters as mere shareholders. In 2012, Thiel delivered a lecture at Stanford University titled "Founder as Victim, Founder as God", where he articulated views resonant with the neoreactionary themes. He remarked: "A startup is basically structured as a monarchy. We don't call it that, of course. That would seem weirdly outdated, and anything that's not democracy makes people uncomfortable."<sup>10</sup> In fact, Thiel has been a significant supporter of Yarvin's ventures. In 2013, Thiel's Founders Fund, along with Andreessen Horowitz, invested \$1.1 million in Tlon Corporation, a company founded by Yarvin to develop the decentralized computing platform Urbit.<sup>11</sup>

It was Yarvin who popularized the now-infamous metaphor of "the Cathedral" to describe the nexus of universities, media, and the Washington bureaucratic establishment that, in his view, functions as a liberal-progressive brainwashing machine. The "Cathedral", he argues, sustains a quasi-religion of egalitarianism and social progress and must therefore be dismantled or escaped. It is framed as a false reality maintained by hidden powers, much

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8 Arnold Kling, "The Neo-Reactionaries", *EconLog*, Library of Economics and Liberty, July 18, 2010, [https://www.econlib.org/archives/2010/07/the\\_neo-reactio.html](https://www.econlib.org/archives/2010/07/the_neo-reactio.html).

9 Curtis Yarvin, "A Formalist Manifesto", *Unqualified Reservations*, April 23, 2007, <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2007/04/formalist-manifesto-originally-posted/>.

10 Blake Masters, "Peter Thiel's CS183: Startup—Class 18 Notes", *Blake Masters Blog*, May 22, 2012, <https://blakemasters.com/post/24578683805/peter-thiels-cs183-startup-class-18-notes>.

11 Corey Pein, *Live Work Work Work Die: A Journey into the Savage Heart of Silicon Valley* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2018).

as Gnosticism posited an illusory world ruled by Archons. Neoreactionaries cast themselves as the initiated elect who have pierced this veil of illusion (their “red-pill” gnosis) and who await, or seek to hasten, a world-ending rupture of the current order.

If Yarvin laid the intellectual groundwork for neoreaction, the British philosopher Nick Land became its visionary fabulist, reshaping its principles into an otherworldly vision of techno-political acceleration and collapse. Land’s trajectory is striking: in the 1990s he was a notorious theorist at Warwick University and co-founder of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), an academic collective pushing the boundaries of postmodern philosophy into hallucinatory cyberpunk terrain. Deeply entangled with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Land’s early writings<sup>12</sup> celebrated the *detritorializing* force of techno-capitalism. The true relevance of the CCRU does not lie in their texts alone, nor in their myth-making, but in the exodus they performed as a collective body. They were among the first to inhabit, almost prematurely, the transitional threshold between the physicality of the late-twentieth-century world and the virtual futures that were then only half-promised. While still rooted in the material textures of the 1990s (streets, basement clubs, underground presses), they anticipated and accelerated toward the incoming, dematerialised, online existence. Their work performs this crossing: not just commentary on cyberspace, but a literal passage through it, dragging philosophy, art, and libidinal speculation into the abstract frontiers of the early internet imaginary. In this, they were not early adopters but early deserters of the old world, fugitives from history running into dataflow, encryption, and algorithmic hauntings.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss in *Anti-Oedipus* the idea that capi-

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12 Nick Land, “Machinic Desire”, *Textual Practice* 7, no. 3 (1993): 471–482.

talism is a system of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, constantly breaking down limits and reconstituting them in new forms. One of the most cited passages in this context comes from their discussion of schizophrenia and capitalism, where they suggest that one possible strategy is to “accelerate the process”,<sup>13</sup> a suggestion frequently mistaken as advocacy. This line has often been misinterpreted as a call to intensify capitalism’s contradictions until it collapses or transforms. This idea has been taken up in later interpretations, such as Nick Land and the accelerationist movement, which pushes for an extreme embrace of capitalism’s deterritorializing tendencies. Land’s own vision of Accelerationism was grounded in a cyberpositive embrace of capitalism’s self-reinforcing feedback loops. Rather than hoping for systemic breakdown, Land saw capitalism as an autonomous force that should be intensified and accelerated into new, uncontrollable trajectories.<sup>14</sup> But in recasting his earlier enthusiasm for technological intensification into a vision of fragmented techno-feudalism, where markets, intelligence, and computation dictate power rather than humanist ideals, he broke with any leftist pretenses and reframed accelerationism in brutally anti-egalitarian terms.

It was Land who penned *The Dark Enlightenment* essay in 2012,<sup>15</sup> effectively a manifesto for the NRx movement that Yarvin sparked. In this text and related blog posts, Land performed a kind of theoretical alchemy: he synthesized ideas from cybernetics, complexity theory, speculative philosophy, and systems collapse models, and reoriented them toward a reactionary vision of political transformation. Unlike Yarvin, whose blogging was deliber-

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13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Athlone, 1983), 239.

14 Nick Land, “A Quick and Dirty Introduction to Accelerationism”, *Jacobite*, 2017, <https://jacobitemag.com/2017/05/25/a-quick-and-dirty-introduction-to-accelerationism/>.

15 Nick Land, *The Dark Enlightenment* (blog series, *Outside In*, 2012–2013), archived at [The Dark Enlightenment](https://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/).

ately provocative and tailored for online subcultures, Land framed neoreaction in a way that felt like an inevitability encoded within techno-capitalist development. For Land, liberal democracy was not merely flawed or corrupt: it was structurally unsustainable. The term “Dark Enlightenment” itself signals an inversion of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: it is an Enlightenment gone dark, shorn of optimism and universalism, a calculated apologia for what much of modernity would consider the “Dark Ages”. The question was not if the modern egalitarian order would unravel, but how soon, and whether its collapse should be resisted or accelerated. Land’s answer was the latter: civilization should not merely endure its disintegration but embrace it as a vehicle for something new, something beyond humanist constraints. For Land, neoreaction was not just a political program but a *mythos*: a story about the inevitable return of strong sovereignty (“the inescapable return of Leviathan”,<sup>16</sup> as he phrased it) amid the ruins of liberal chaos, understood as a stage in capital’s autonomisation. By blending dark futurism with arcane philosophy, Land gave NRx a kind of *theory-fiction* aesthetic. The movement’s ideas, initially exchanged on blogs and forums, took on the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy, a *hyperstition*, in CCRU terms,<sup>17</sup> incubating in the feeds and message boards of the internet. If enough people (especially powerful people) believed in the coming demise of democracy and the rise of tech-augmented neofeudalism, perhaps they could will it into being. This feedback loop between ideas and reality is precisely what Land and his CCRU colleagues meant by hyperstition, and NRx provides a case study in how internet subcultures can *weaponize belief* to shape political outcomes.

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16 Ibid.

17 Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), *Abstract Culture: Digital Hyperstition* (Urbanomic, 1999).

Land explicitly cast the near-future in eschatological terms: his infamous prediction that “nothing human makes it out of the near future”<sup>18</sup> operates as a kind of technoscientific doomsday prophecy. The coming Singularity is portrayed not as utopia but as an inhuman revelation, an *apokalypsis* in the strict sense of an unveiling, exposing the “hidden systems of control” that trap humanity. For all its anti-spiritual posture, neoreaction often echoes religious narratives: there is an evil world to be escaped, a promised cataclysm to purge it, and even hints of a savior in the form of a “Great Man” or techno-king.

In this sense, neoreactionary thought reveals a hidden theological core: a secular apocalyptic faith with Gnostic overtones, dressing age-old millenarian longings in cyberpunk attire. Neoreactionary thinkers may frame their vision as future-oriented, but their core ideas resurrect archaic, pre-modern hierarchies and forms of governance; the supposed “Dark Enlightenment” is not innovative, it is a reactionary attempt to revive feudalism cloaked in technological jargon and Silicon Valley aesthetics. This paradox mirrors the broader postmodern condition of ideological contradiction: neoreaction is both hypermodern (embracing technology) and arch-conservative (reviving ancient hierarchies), it is itself part of a broader failure to reconcile technological advancement with social progress. Instead of emancipating humanity, neoreactionaries seek to reassert control by elites.

This sentiment resonated with Yarvin’s and Land’s calls for enlightened technocratic elites to exit the “failed”<sup>19</sup> democratic experiment. Neoreaction envisions a society of walled-off sovereignties,

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18 Nick Land, “Meltdown”, *Abstract Culture* (Swarm 1), 1994.

19 See: Curtis Yarvin (Mencius Moldbug), “An Open Letter to Open-Minded Progressives”, *Unqualified Reservations*, 2008, <https://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.com/2008/04/open-letter-to-open-minded-progressives.html>.

insulated from the chaos of democracy, where governance is not a collective process but a privatized enterprise. The Silicon Valley enthusiasm for seasteading, “charter cities,”<sup>20</sup> and other private governance experiments is straight out of NRx theory, which imagines breaking society into competitive mini-states, each ruled by a sovereign CEO or corporate board. In this sense, the Californian techno-libertarian dream, an alliance of hacker radicalism and free-market fundamentalism, provided both an audience and a springboard for neoreactionary philosophy. What appears on the surface as a futurist vision of optimized governance is, in reality, a return to neo-feudalism, where control is concentrated in the hands of a few technocratic overlords.

### **Hyperstitional Drift: The Neoreactionary Mythos**

Neoreaction presents itself as bracing nihilism, a clear-eyed rejection of liberal pieties in favor of competence and order. The attraction lies here: nihilism lifts the weight of coherence while faith restores meaning. Together they form a psychic economy well suited to entropic media where uncertainty craves quick resolution. Its influence was not confined to the realm of theoretical discourse; it flourished through culture, media, and meme aesthetics in the hyperreal cyberspace of the 2010s. The movement’s proponents cleverly harnessed the postmodern blurring of irony and sincerity, reality and simulation.

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20 The concept of charter cities has been promoted by Patri Friedman, founder of The Seasteading Institute, and endorsed by Silicon Valley figures like Peter Thiel as a way to create politically autonomous zones for economic experimentation. See: Patri Friedman, “The Future of Government: Countries and Statehood”, *The Futurist Society*, accessed February 2025, <https://www.thefuturistsociety.net/the-future-of-government-countries-and-statehood-with-patri-friedman>.

Irony became the double-edged sword of this cultural war. The online alt-right deployed layers of irony and absurdist humor as a strategic cloak for extreme ideas. By contrast, much of the Left (especially the academic left) mistook irony as mere nihilistic play, failing to see how sincerity and extremism could hide behind a façade of memes and jokes. Yet the New Right had a keen grasp of *post-irony*: in these spaces, irony is not the opposite of belief; it is the medium through which belief is smuggled in and amplified. Online, one can don a neo-fascist persona half-seriously, until eventually the performance hardens into reality. By the time outsiders realize whether something was “serious or just a meme”, the new reactionaries have already shifted the Overton window. This ambiguous blend of play and conviction proved to be a potent weapon against a liberal establishment that still assumed public discourse was taking place in good faith.

By now the metamorphosis of Pepe the Frog <sup>21</sup> from an indie comic character into a political totem is well known, yet its very overexposure is part of what makes it significant. During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the digital landscape witnessed an extraordinary convergence of irony, myth, and political insurgency, and Pepe stood at its center. His vacant eyes and endlessly mutable expressions condensed a diffuse force that operated across 4chan, Reddit, and Twitter, where political conflict unfolded less through policy debate than through esoteric symbolism and memetic warfare. What made this transformation powerful was not only the appropriation of the figure by far-right communities but the mythopoetic charge it accrued. In the rise of so-called “Meme Magic”, Pepe functioned as more than satire: he was a channel through which collective fictions achieved operational force, an emblem of how digital folklore no longer comments on reality but actively systematises it. This was most clearly expressed in

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21 Matt Furie, *Boy's Club* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2006).

the rise of “Meme Magic”<sup>22</sup> and the so-called “Cult of Kek”<sup>23</sup>. In an absurd, self-referential play of semiotics and synchronicity, internet users “discovered” that Kek, an ancient Egyptian deity associated with darkness and chaos, bore the same name as their favored internet slang for laughter (*kek*, a corruption of *lol* originating from online gaming). What began as a joke metastasized into a hyperstitional force: users convinced themselves that their meme-propagation was not just cultural expression but political magic, shaping reality itself. Every Pepe posted, every ironic prayer to Kek was an invocation meant to tilt the world’s probability field toward the absurdity of a Trump victory. And in a moment of history seemingly scripted by Baudrillard himself, it worked. An imagined prophecy or conspiracy theory is incubated through circulation until belief itself generates the very conditions that appear to confirm it. Goodman would describe this as a new world-version acquiring reality through symbolic projection. His claim that we *project* predicates onto the world and thereby *modify our very perception of reality* provides a philosophical foundation for understanding how a meme or myth can reshape what counts as real. The case of online subcultures transforming a cartoon figure such as Pepe the Frog into a “hyperstitional force” illustrates this process: collective projection turns an ironic joke into an operative element of political reality.

This ironic faith, sincere in its performative insincerity, encapsulated the weaponization of postmodern detachment that defined Trump’s first mandate. While the liberal establishment relied on old-world signifiers of credibility such as fact-checking, expertise,

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22 Sabina Magliocco, “Witchcraft as Political Resistance: Magical Responses to the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States”, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 23, no. 4 (2020): 43–59, <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2020.23.4.43>.

23 Egil Asprem, “The Magical Theory of Politics: Meme Magic, the Cult of Kek, and How to Topple an Egregore”, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 23, no. 4 (2020): 15–39.

and institutional stability, the new digital Right waged war in an entirely different register. It understood that reality, in an age of algorithmic media, was porous, fluid, a game to be played rather than a truth to be upheld. This is almost a direct restatement of Goodman's claim that *facts are versions* and that "worldmaking begins with one version and ends with another".<sup>24</sup> Reality is made by our descriptions; hence when multiple incompatible descriptions proliferate, reality itself splinters into competing fictions. In entropic modernity, we witness this pluralisation of world-versions at large scale. Goodman's notion that "facts are theory-laden"<sup>25</sup> reveals why opposing political camps cannot even agree on basic facts: they are effectively operating in different constructed worlds, with different theories loading their facts.

Memes, rather than mere satire, became the primary mode of ideological transmission, compressed, cryptic, and viral. Pepe was not merely a joke; he was an avatar of political entropy, a harbinger of the collapse of liberal seriousness, and a manifestation of the anarchic currents that had found new agency in digital networks. What had begun as a troll campaign on fringe message boards bled into mainstream consciousness, forcing legacy media to acknowledge the existence of a cartoon frog as an election-year talking point: an absurdity that only reinforced the meme's power. As journalist Dale Beran<sup>26</sup> has observed, the "weaponized irony" of these spaces did not reject politics but transmuted it into a post-ironic spectacle, where insincerity itself became an engine for radicalisation.

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24 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 7.

25 Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 83.

26 Dale Beran, *It Came from Something Awful: How a Toxic Troll Army Accidentally Memed Donald Trump into Office* (New York: All Points Books, 2019).

This was the moment where the neoreactionary current ceased to be an obscure intellectual discourse and became something else: something aesthetic, memetic, and deeply woven into the very fabric of digital life. The hyperreal mechanics of the 2016 election did not merely provide a political shock; they revealed a “new” way in which power could be seized not through argument but through spectacle, acceleration, and absurdity, leaving traditional forms of political communication hopelessly lagging behind.<sup>27</sup> The destabilisation of truth as a stable referent undergoes here a decisive mutation. What postmodernism once registered as relativism or skeptical play becomes the calculated mobilisation of falsehood as an instrument of rule. The implosion of meaning gives way to something harsher: the deliberate evacuation of truth so that its absence itself becomes a technology of power.

The rise of figures like Elon Musk in the political-cultural arena exemplifies this new paradigm of memetic power. Musk has, especially after his takeover of Twitter (rebranded “X”), behaved more like a chaotic information warlord than a traditional corporate leader. His erratic tweets, flirtations with far-right tropes, and impulsive policy changes to the platform are often read as blunders by conventional analysts. Yet from another angle, Musk’s seemingly erratic stewardship of a social media empire is often read as failure, yet it also passes as a kind of memetic warfare. The role he plays as tech magnate turned meme warlord borders on self-parody, but in an algorithmic environment where virality confers authority, even blunders can masquerade as strategy. His interventions exploit informational asymmetry, converting noise itself into a medium of control.

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27 OxfordDictionariesdeclaredpost-truthtobeInternationalWordoftheYear,2016.Oxford UniversityPress,“WordoftheYear2016is...”,*OxfordDictionaries.com*,November15,2016, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

Every scandalous or confusing gesture generates disproportionate engagement, sustaining the platform's visibility while gradually shifting the Overton window of what can be said. Trolling becomes governance by other means. In this respect, Musk reproduces the tactics of neoreactionary and accelerationist politics: move with speed, cultivate confusion, dominate the conversation, and force adversaries into perpetual reaction. It is a strategy of velocity over stability. Traditional institutions, whether governmental, journalistic, or partisan, are encumbered by procedural norms of consistency and deliberation that such tactics sidestep altogether. The architecture of digital capitalism intensifies this asymmetry: algorithmic systems privilege engagement, and thus reward conflict, novelty, and extremity, eroding the space for nuance or consensus and fostering an epistemology attuned to fragmentation.

Until his resignation on 28 May 2025, Musk served only as a Special Government Employee in the newly minted Department of Government Efficiency,<sup>28</sup> a 130-day liaison that dramatised the interchangeability of corporate and state sovereignties. His trajectory illustrates a wider shift in political communication, one in which outrage, humor, and schadenfreude have become the primary currencies of attention. Neoreactionaries, and the broader New Right, understand that *outrage is not a liability; it is fuel* in the attention economy. As Guy Debord<sup>29</sup> observed, in the age of spectacle the distinction between publicity and propaganda vanishes: *all attention reinforces the message*. Thus, a controversial meme or incendiary post, even if widely condemned, still centers the reactionary narrative in discourse.

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28 Executive Order, 20 Jan 2025, formally established DOGE as a Cabinet-level fiefdom—the first federal agency launched by meme-acronym.

29 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

Content designed for conflict and emotional intensity travels further in this environment, while modes of communication oriented toward consensus or factual persuasion rarely generate the same viral momentum.

The creeping embrace of overt political transgression, whether through Nazi salutes from figures like Elon Musk and Steve Bannon or the increasingly brazen rhetoric of Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin, is not reducible to shock value or ideological signaling. It is a deliberate tactic, probing the frontiers of acceptable discourse and testing how far the erosion of democratic norms can be pushed. Nor is this confined to the United States. Leaders such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Narendra Modi in India, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have all weaponized irreverence, bluster, or theatrical impunity, reframing authoritarian gestures as expressions of popular authenticity. The aim is not simply to normalise authoritarianism but to render democracy irrelevant as a category of political evaluation altogether.

Trump offers a particularly stark case. He does not merely present himself as a truth-teller; his more insidious move is to render truth itself meaningless. The message is not “I can lie and people will believe me” but rather “truth does not matter at all”. What this strategy achieves is a perverse integrity, an inversion of sincerity. In an era where the ornate discourse of liberal moralism has lost credibility, extreme vulgarity becomes an unassailable proof of authenticity. Trump’s lies are not failures of rhetoric; they are expressions of dominance, demonstrations that he does not need to conform to a shared reality. His supporters do not believe what he says; they believe in him. This is why calling him out on falsehoods and pointing to his endless contradictions is politically useless: it only reinforces the emotional commitment of his base. The more absurd the lie, the more it affirms his position as a man uncon-

strained by the hypocrisy of conventional politics.

This is why reactionary politics today is not simply authoritarian but sadistic. Its adherents do not just accept the erosion of democracy; they revel in the suffering it causes their perceived enemies. Overt racism, defamation, fascist iconography: these are not ideological commitments so much as weapons of enjoyment, instruments of *jouissance* drawn from the despair of the opposition. The so-called “culture wars” were never about ideological struggle; they were about establishing a regime of humiliation, in which each scandal, each grotesque spectacle only deepens the sense of political inevitability.

As Walter Benjamin stated, fascism is the aestheticization of politics,<sup>30</sup> a process by which mass participation is permitted only as spectacle, ensuring that the structures of power and ownership remain untouched. What we are witnessing today in the neoreactionary and digital reactionary movements is a hypermodern realization of this principle. The illusion of participation, expressed through online engagement, memetic campaigns, and performative outrage, functions as a pressure valve that absorbs political energy while leaving real decision-making in the hands of corporate and technocratic elites.

The neoreactionary dream of “exit” over voice, CEO governance, and privatized sovereignty is not an alternative to democracy but a new stage of aestheticized politics, a system that Benjamin warned would lead not to emancipation but to the preservation of elite control under the guise of mass expression. DOGE’s mass-lay-off fiasco shows how quickly “exit” curdles into administrative necrosis.

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30 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 41.

## The Vibe Industrial Complex: From Postmodern Irony to Reactionary Sincerity

One hallmark of the neoreactionary “vibe shift” is the reframing of politics as an aesthetic choice rather than a formal ideological commitment. Reactionary ideas manifest less as logical arguments than as provocative cultural identities that one can superficially adopt. Within the Dimes Square scene,<sup>31</sup> for instance, reactionary ideology has been explicitly transformed into fashion statements such as trucker hats displaying provocative slogans, Instagram feeds curated with Orthodox Christian icons, macho bodybuilding imagery, and Mean Girls-style quips. By converting ideological stances into fashionable aesthetics, the movement significantly lowers the barriers to reactionary politics, enabling participants to perform a reactionary sensibility without explicitly endorsing a manifesto or formal doctrines.<sup>32</sup>

What is at stake here is not even the capitalisation of risk, the wager of cancellation, or the placing of skin in the game, but its pantomime. It is cosplay. The staging of forbidden utterance takes place within the securitised circuits of platform capitalism, where the very possibility of transgression is already hedged, monetised, and insured through mechanisms of patronage and subscription. What appears as danger functions only as commod-

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31 Dimes Square refers to a downtown Manhattan micro-neighborhood centered around the restaurant Dimes, notable for its influence as a hub of contemporary reactionary cultural trends, alternative media, and emerging literary and artistic circles in the early 2020s. See: James Pogue, “Scenes from the End of the World”, *Vanity Fair*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets>; and Nate Freeman, “Welcome to Dimes Square, New York’s Most Annoying Neighbourhood”, *Vanity Fair*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.vanity-fair.com/style/2022/06/dimes-square-new-york-most-annoying-neighborhood>.

32 Park MacDougald, “Book Review: Bronze Age Mindset”, *Unpopular Front*, accessed May 2024, <https://unpopularfront.news/>.

ified frisson, a prefabricated affect calibrated for circulation and consumption. The potency of this aestheticization is amplified by visually oriented platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where motifs such as Roman imperial statues, Gothic ecclesiastical imagery, and nostalgic 1950s domestic aesthetics are fetishized by young trendsetters. Online communities circulate “fashwave” imagery, a fusion of fascist motifs with vaporwave aesthetics and glamorize “TradCath” (traditional Catholic) lifestyles as though they were merely another fashion subgenre. Perhaps the most notorious example is Bronze Age Pervert (BAP), whose cult following has grown around the pairing of classical statuary and bodybuilding imagery with stark reactionary aphorisms. His homoerotic macho aesthetic, steeped in Nietzschean vitality, functions as a seductive packaging for authoritarian ideas. As Wark<sup>33</sup> observes, BAP’s deployment of muscular heroic figures conveys “values of strength and dominance”, thereby reinforcing the link between beauty and fascism. The neofascist glorification of hierarchy and violence is thus communicated through visual allure, merging aesthetic exaltation with destructive impulses.<sup>34</sup> In such instances, political ideology is transfigured into art, rebranding reactionary politics as an edgy lifestyle upgrade rather than a moral rupture. The sensibility at play here borders on camp: reaction is worn as one more ironic accessory in a fashion arsenal. This has precedents; Susan Sontag notably argued in the 1970s that certain cultural venerations of fascist aesthetics, eroticized uniforms, neo-classical pomp, could “neutralize” fascism by treating it merely as “an aesthetic view of life”.<sup>35</sup> Neoreactionaries similarly exploit style to sanitize substance, packaging elitist, anti-democratic ideas within appealing visuals and trendy affectations to render them aspirational rather than

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33 McKenzie Wark, “Circulation and its Discontents”, *ResearchGate*, accessed May 2024, <https://www.researchgate.net/>.

34 Ibid.

35 Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism”, *The New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/02/06/fascinating-fascism/>.

alarming. The aestheticization also serves to blur intent: it becomes unclear whether a podcaster's embrace of monarchist aesthetics is earnest or merely ironic performance art. In a cultural milieu privileging vibes over principles, reactionary politics slip in quietly as another subcultural aesthetic: one more flavor of cool rather than a coherent ideology subject to critical scrutiny.

A telling example of this aestheticized reactionary posture is the case of Canadian psychologist Jordan B. Peterson. Peterson rose to fame denouncing *postmodernism* as an assault on truth and morality. Yet Peterson's own persona has increasingly been stylized into a kind of self-conscious mythos. He has taken to wearing flamboyant custom suits emblazoned with religious iconography. The man who rails against the relativism of postmodern culture now inhabits an image steeped in patchwork symbolism: an almost postmodern collage of sacred art and celebrity flair. Peterson's public exhortation to "put your life in order" came with "ferocious chutzpah coming from a man who was on a lecture tour well after he should have gone to rehab".<sup>36</sup> In other words, the Peterson phenomenon itself morphed into a hyperreal spectacle—the *guru of order* whose personal story erupted into disorder, played out on a global stage. It was as if the archetypal struggle between chaos and order from Peterson's lectures leapt into reality, turning the intellectual into both a meme and a mythic character for his audience. The *aura* around Peterson—part sincere self-help sage, part embattled culture-warrior—exemplifies how a reactionary figure's life and image can bleed into an affective narrative that followers consume as fervently as doctrine.

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36 Helen Lewis, "What Happened to Jordan Peterson?", *The Atlantic*, April 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/what-happened-to-jordan-peterson/618082/>.

In the end, figures like Peterson illustrate what is at stake in the vibe-driven rebranding of politics. Political ideology becomes *personal fiction*: a story one can *live through* or *consume* vicariously, as entertainment and identity all at once. Reactionary aesthetics exploit this break by offering ready-made myths for those disenchanted with factual politics. The aesthetic *becomes* the ideology, the vibe *becomes* reality. In a culture where “reality is fiction”, the vibe industrial complex of today’s reactionaries is a powerful force: converting fears and desires into shareable images and stories, and in doing so, quietly fomenting a new breed of politics that feels like *a lifestyle upgrade*. Irony operates here as the hinge between fiction and practice, initially enabling flirtation with taboo ideas under the guise of humor or “just joking”. The alt-right, for example, famously occupied “the ambiguous space between irony and sincerity”, masking extremist messaging as harmless internet trolling.<sup>37</sup> Dimes Square participants adopt a similar protective irony, creating ambiguity around whether provocative statements reflect genuine beliefs or elaborate satire. However, irony as a political stance is inherently unstable and often curdles into sincerity over time. Observers have noted this trajectory in cultural phenomena such as the Red Scare podcast, where hosts Anna Khachiyani and Dasha Nekrasova transitioned from ironic mockery of liberal sensitivities to earnest alignment with reactionary figures and positions.<sup>38</sup> This evolution exemplifies the broader youth-cultural slide rightward, facilitated by post-ironic ambiguity, an uncertain state where humor conceals sincerity. Online communities instrumentalise this ambiguity as a cognitive Trojan horse, where iterative circulation and social reinforcement translate ironic play into habituated belief. Through repetition, memes embedding misogynistic or racist tropes undergo a process of discursive normalisation, sedimenting into subcultural codes. What begins as humor crystalize into affec-

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37 Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017), 28–30.

38 Jennifer Wilson, “The Devil’s Advocates”, *The Baffler*, July 2022, <https://thebaffler.com/>.

tive attachment, cultivating prejudice under the protective alibi of irony.

Irony also functions as a social filtering mechanism. Initially, only insiders “in the know” decode the joke; newcomers who interpret irony literally push reactionary sentiments toward sincerity. “Tradition” as espoused by many online neoreactionaries isn’t a sincere return to the past at all: it’s an *aesthetic game*, a LARP-ing of archetypes in the arena of hyperreality. The “Catholic chic” trend in Dimes Square illustrates this process: what began as highly self-aware performances of religious posturing often evolved into genuine religious commitment. Even Julia Yost, a conservative commentator who popularized the concept of Dimes Square Catholicism, admits that while this “trendy Catholicism may be partly a pose”, some adherents clearly adopt the practice earnestly.<sup>39</sup> The layers of irony gradually peel away, leaving earnest advocacy for reactionary values. In other words, irony mutates from posture to politics, a trajectory inherited from hipsterism.<sup>40</sup> Early hipsterism was apolitical or vaguely liberal, using irony primarily for cultural commentary. Contemporary scenes explicitly weaponize irony for political ends, transforming aesthetic practices into vehicles for affirmatively reactionary politics. Unlike earlier youth subcultures, today’s reactionary vibe shift enjoys explicit intellectual scaffolding, drawing from actual reactionary thought. Thus, the cultural shift is reinforced by a feedback loop between lowbrow meme culture and sophisticated anti-liberal theory.

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39 Julia Yost, “Why Is Gen Z Turning Catholic?”, *The Week*, May 2022, <https://theweek.com/>.

40 This genealogy is well illustrated by the trajectory of Spanish hipster journalists such as Ana Iris Simón and Víctor Lenore, once associated with outlets like *Vice* and *Rockdelux*. Both eventually embraced forms of neo-national Catholicism: Simón through a nostalgic exaltation of family and tradition, Lenore through increasingly explicit reactionary commentary, culminating in his public support for the far-right party Vox. Their paths exemplify how hipster irony can slide into overtly authoritarian commitments.

Moreover, this aesthetic and intellectual synergy is underpinned by financial and social infrastructures connecting think tanks, Silicon Valley financiers like Peter Thiel, and cultural hubs such as the aforementioned Dimes Square.<sup>41</sup> The result is a distinctive ecosystem where reactionary thought, cultural provocations, and financial backing merge, interweaving intellectual and cultural reactionary streams.

Communities from Telegram channels in Eastern Europe to Instagram feeds in Madrid or Paris rehearse the same gestures: “Trad” iconography, fashwave collages, ironic misogyny, post-ironic nationalism. The youth cultures that once toyed with irony as cultural commentary now mobilise it as political weaponry, and the infrastructures of platform capitalism guarantee that these experiments are never isolated. They scale. They repeat. They sediment into habits of thought.

### **Ossification of the Left and the Lure of the Reactionary Future**

Ossification has become the dominant condition of the contemporary Left: what was once a living revolutionary vision has, over recent decades, hardened into rigid dogma. After the collapse of the Soviet experiment and the neoliberal hijacking of social democracy in the 1990s, left-wing politics largely retreated into a defensive crouch, managing the damage of capitalism rather than imagining bold alternatives. Mark Fisher diagnosed this paralysis as capitalist realism, a pervasive sense that “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”, a fatalistic inabil-

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41 Matthew Sitman, “Whither the New Right?”, *The Point*, September 2022, <https://thepointmag.com/>.

ity to envision any system beyond the status quo.<sup>42</sup> This paralysis is not only doctrinal but temporal: a collapse of futurity, an incapacity to narrate horizons beyond perpetual crisis management. As Fisher put it, “the future has been cancelled”, leaving politics suspended in a loop of reactive firefighting.<sup>43</sup> Into this vacuum, the Right advances not just policy answers but mythic futures, visions of restoration, collapse, acceleration, or exit. Time itself becomes the battleground: where the Left frames it as catastrophe to be averted, the Right proclaims it as destiny to be seized.

This asymmetry of temporal imagination ensured that the vacuum left by resignation would be quickly filled. Neoreactionaries moved swiftly to occupy the future tense that the Left had abandoned, offering their own dark answers to Fisher’s unasked question of what comes after neoliberalism. This ossification is evident in the Left’s continued reliance on twentieth-century paradigms even as capitalism mutates into new forms. Many progressives still cling to familiar coordinates: traditional class struggle, the old welfare-state model, and rights-based liberalism, even in an era when digital, deterritorialized finance capitalism obeys none of those coordinates. Nowhere is this more visible than in the media and rhetorical sphere: progressive movements focus on policy details and fact-based argumentation to win public support on issues like inequality or climate change, assuming that rational debate in the public sphere still holds sway. But in the emerging hyper-real landscape of digital politics, a landscape defined by influencer theatrics, algorithm-driven outrage cycles, and rolling news feeds, such earnest approaches struggle to gain traction.

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42 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 2–4.

43 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 6.

Fisher powerfully shows how neoliberalism feels, yet the analysis sometimes lets mood outrun mechanism. The signature categories he foregrounds, depressive hedonia, hauntology, and the business ontology of audit culture, privilege a melancholic structure of feeling over a thick account of the institutional levers that manufacture it. The deeper irony is that capitalist realism has been metabolised by platform culture into a content mood. Fisher's lines and tropes circulate as doomer vernacular across theorygram and BreadTube, from AOC Met Gala meta-memes to "We fuckin on the Capitalist Realism bed", converting melancholia into engagement and critique into aesthetic commodity. Facebook groups like "Mark Fisher Memes for Hauntological Teens" and "Mark Fisher Depressive Ghostposting" illustrate the loop: the meme becomes a placeholder for the text, a gateway for some readers yet a memetic reduction for many, and the cycle is resold as data. In this feedback, a diagnosis of paralysis turns into consolation content, the vibe becomes the product, and the product sustains the very feeds that monetise fatigue.

Compounding this stagnation is an inward-looking purity culture that saps the Left's broad appeal. In the absence of forward-looking vision, leftist spaces turned policing and critique upon themselves. Fisher famously lambasted this tendency as the "vampire castle" of moralism: a climate in which leftists swiftly ostracize allies for minor ideological deviations and enforce a rigid linguistic orthodoxy.<sup>44</sup> The effect has been stifling. By prioritizing internecine purity over expansive solidarity, such spaces became unwelcoming and claustrophobic at the very moment when flexibility and growth were needed most. The resulting malaise is palpable: activists and intellectuals who once positioned themselves at the vanguard of liberation now often seem demoralized, merely react-

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44 Mark Fisher, "Exiting the Vampire Castle", in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, ed. Darren Ambrose (London: Repeater Books, 2018), 758.

ing to crises rather than setting the agenda. In the flattened political horizon of capitalist realism, alternatives appear anaemic.

Figures who once positioned themselves as critics of power, including intellectuals, artists, and media personalities, have increasingly found themselves aligned with reactionary currents, not necessarily through a conscious ideological commitment but as a strategic adaptation to the demands of cultural production in the digital age. Their trajectory is not simply a matter of changing beliefs but an indication of how reaction has been rebranded as the last vestige of transgression in a media landscape of endless exposure. In effect, media decide what is real (what can be remembered or transmitted) and also shape how we think: our very consciousness and categories. Friedrich Kittler even speaks of modern media as an “anthropological a priori”,<sup>45</sup> meaning they come *before* and form the basis of human subjectivity rather than being mere tools we deliberately use.

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What these trajectories reveal is not a coherent ideological drift but an adaptive strategy to remain legible in a digital marketplace that punishes predictability. The left, especially in its academic and media expressions, has tended to retreat into a defensive posture: vigilant against errors yet increasingly drawn into recursive disputes over its own standards. Meanwhile, the reactionary sphere, unburdened by the need for systematic reasoning, operates with a fluidity that makes it more adaptable to the conditions of entropic modernity.

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45 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. p. xl and p. 16–17.

If the past decade has seen a wave of prominent defections from left to right, it is because reactionary thought has become the ultimate contrarian stance in an intellectual landscape where progressive hegemony has been eroded not by superior arguments but by structural entropy. The figures who have embraced this shift are not visionaries but opportunists of chaos, figures who have learned that in an era of ideological freefall, the most lucrative position is always at the edge of collapse.

The Left's ossification can be read not just as an ideological lapse but as an isomorphic fit to a reconfigured field. Organisations that once accumulated power through membership and antagonism were recoded by audit grammars into projects, outputs, and deliverables; the grant calendar displaced strategic time, so initiative is discounted relative to compliance. Platform publicity imposes a visibility calculus in which agenda setting carries asymmetric downside risk, and reputational externalities make caution rational. Class recomposition disperses workers across logistics, services, and platforms, thinning associational density, while the Left failed to invent binding forms capable of translating swarms, fandoms, and mutual-aid bursts into durable leverage. NGO-isation here is a supply-side adaptation to fund legibility rather than a demand from youth, whose political time is absorbed by precarious work, creator economies, and platform-native publics that seldom crystalize into institutions. Legal and administrative architectures, from anti-protest statutes (as evidenced by the flagrant criminalisation of protests against the genocide of the Palestinian people by the government of Israel) to procurement regimes, convert confrontation into liability, so proceduralism becomes self-defence. Cultural infrastructures are folded into content markets, outsourcing world-making to brands and eroding the symbolic craft that organises belonging. The result is a rational conservatism of means that presents as doctrinal rigidity but is better understood as an infrastructural equilibrium produced by funding cycles, platform publicity, and managerial metrics, within

which imagination and experimentation are priced as risk.

Ossification denotes a pathological accommodation. It translates Lyotard's incredulity toward metanarratives into programmable diversity, in which difference is rendered as segment, target, and optimization variable rather than as a universal claim on justice.<sup>46</sup> The performative criterion elevates calculability as legitimacy, so that justification travels as evidence and benchmarking rather than as shared horizons.<sup>47</sup> Adtech infrastructures operationalise identity as predictive categorisation, while multi-sided platforms extract rent from the heterogeneity they curate and enclose circulation within engagement metrics.<sup>48</sup> In the cultural field, small narratives are commodified as lifestyle assets, authenticity is capitalised as brand value, and institutions capable of binding commitment are displaced by repertoires of affective distinction.<sup>49</sup> The cumulative effect is not merely rhetorical. Recognition is routed through segmentation and metrics, redistribution is deferred, and the symbolic craft of belonging is outsourced to

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46 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv, 60–67; Jean-François Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 7–12; Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xii–xv; Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age”, *New Left Review* 212 (1995): 68–93.

47 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 44–47; Marilyn Strathern, *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy* (London: Routledge, 2000); Christopher Hood, “A Public Management for All Seasons”, *Public Administration* 69, no. 1 (1991): 3–19.

48 Joseph Turow, *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 1–25; John Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 1–10; Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 40–76; Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2019), 93–127.

49 Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), 69–98; Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 3–24.

advertisers and influencers. Ossification names this capitulation: a regressive equilibrium in which the very conditions of collective world-making are surrendered to managerial and platform logics.

But if the Left is trapped today in recursive feedback failures, caught in cybernetic paralysis, it is not just because its infrastructures are outpaced or its tactics outmanoeuvred. Beneath these technical and organisational symptoms lies a deeper, more fundamental loss: the collapse of its capacity for narrative cognition. The Left's systems of organisation have stalled not merely because they fail to process information efficiently but because they no longer *believe in their own future*. In this sense, narrative is not ornamental to system design: it is the operating system itself. No political system, however sophisticated its internal loops, can survive without a story to sustain its sense of purpose and trajectory. Narrative functions as the software that binds distributed actors into collective intelligence; it enables social systems to metabolise complexity into orientation, to translate raw information into direction. Without this narrative architecture, feedback becomes noise, and systems lose the capacity for self-steering. The Left today exemplifies this breakdown. Having relinquished the production of shared horizons (out of fear of totalising myths or historic betrayals) it has become informationally rich but directionally blind.

## Against the Gospel of Collapse: Futures without Teleonomy

“We humans cannot pre-exist our origin myths any more than a bee can pre-exist its beehive.”

—Sylvia Wynter, *The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism*

Van de Mieroop claims that the fight over reality has always been, at root, a fight over *story*.<sup>50</sup> What we see collapsing is specifically the *modern* way of managing truth: *anti-narrative in form but mythic in function*, bypassing linear logic to create the impression of an incontrovertible truth recorded in the archive. Across time, then, we see that when people lose faith in abstract structures (be it imperial bureaucracy or liberal academic consensus), they resort to *story and collage*, assembling bits of reality into a persuasive tapestry of meaning.

The turn from system to story signals not simply a change of form but a transformation in the very metabolism of truth. Hovering over all these developments (the left’s ossification, the Right’s reactionary turn, the chaotic info-sphere in which they clash) is the larger condition that this text calls *entropic modernity*. This concept denotes the peculiar state of contemporary society in which traditional structures of meaning and order have broken down, leaving a landscape of fragmentation, uncertainty, and incessant

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50 Marc Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy Before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), esp. chaps. 1–3 and 6, on list-based, archival truth techniques and the non-linear construction of reality; and Marc Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London: Routledge, 1999), chap. 2, on royal inscriptions, the archive, and the fabrication of authoritative historical truth. For a concise overview of the “constructing reality” thesis, see Alan Towey’s review of *Philosophy Before the Greeks* (Classics for All, 10 May 2016).

flux. In physics, entropy signifies a measure of disorder or the dissipation of energy; by analogy, *entropic modernity* describes a cultural-political order that trends toward disintegration of shared narratives and the dispersal of authority into unstable networks.

Entropic modernity, as the hypertrophied aftershock of postmodernity, is not a stable condition but a cascading wavefront. We are not post-entropic, nor have we arrived at any plateau of synthesis or settlement. Instead, we find ourselves surfing the cusp of this accelerating wave: momentum without destination. There is no promised landing ground, no stable terrain to claim as the “next stage”. What unfolds is a perpetual deferral of the future: a condition of suspended propulsion, where entropy and intensification coincide. The logics of acceleration (speed, data proliferation, informational noise) do not resolve into order but multiply disintegration. We inhabit a topology of ongoing transition, where even attempts at recuperation or restoration feed the very entropy they seek to resist. If modernity once offered narratives of progress, and postmodernity dismantled them, entropic modernity thrives in the turbulence of their debris, a feverish looping of exhaustion and escalation. The wave does not break; it endlessly crests.

Key to entropic modernity is the concept of information entropy: the idea that beyond a certain threshold, an overabundance of information leads not to enlightenment but to disorientation and the breakdown of consensus reality. Claude Shannon’s information theory<sup>51</sup> defined entropy as the unpredictability or randomness in a set of messages; apply this socially, and our public sphere now approaches maximum entropy as signal and noise become indistinguishable. The fragmentation of narrative is both a cause

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51 Claude E. Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication”, *The Bell System Technical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1948): 379–423.

and effect of this condition. Without shared narratives, society splinters into echo chambers; as it splinters, generating coherent shared narratives becomes ever more difficult. This self-reinforcing cycle is evident all around us.

Entropic modernity is our predicament: a condition of dissolution that has empowered neoreactionary and nihilistic forces. But within entropy lies the potential for a new order.

Yet, the future is not foreordained.

Entropic modernity challenges us to imagine progress without the crutch of inevitability. The Enlightenment (and Marxism after it) was fueled by a teleonomical<sup>52</sup> belief: that history has a direction, that reason or class struggle propels us toward a definite better end. This belief has collapsed for many, and perhaps that's a good thing: it forces humanity to confront the fact that a better future must be *consciously constructed*, not simply awaited. In a non-teleonomical worldview, progress becomes a choice and a struggle, not a fate. We can no longer assume the arc of history bends toward justice on its own: we have to bend it. This sobering realization can be empowering in a way: it dispels complacency and magical thinking. If things are to improve, *human agency* in all its messy unpredictability has to do it.

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52 Teleonomy refers to behavior that appears purposeful, arising from an underlying code or mechanism, not from conscious intention or external design.

This text sets out not to lament the Left's failures but to confront the *metaphysical vacuum* at capitalism's endgame. We refuse to simply mourn the death of truth, coherence, or order in the face of entropic modernity. Instead, we need to explore how to resurrect the potential of chaos as a site of emergence, complexity, and collective power.

The ossification of the Left can be reversed by infusing it with the very dynamism it once had: an openness to the new, a willingness to mutate and experiment, a talent for *hacking culture*. Resisting the neoreactionary turn entails abandoning twentieth-century templates in favor of a synthesis adequate to contemporary conditions. That means moving beyond base-superstructure reductionism, since under informational capitalism, semiotic and material circuits couple and co-amplify. Cryptocurrencies illustrate the point: a speculative narrative crystallize into large-scale capital formation.

Marxist theory, at its strongest, recognised this entanglement of material determination and narrative form. Material conditions do not mechanically produce consciousness; they require mediation, interpretation, and framing. History, as Marx understood it, is made not in the abstract but through the "class struggle": that is, through collective narration of shared antagonism and possibility. When the working class no longer sees itself as a class, the conditions of exploitation persist, but the motor of history seizes.

In this light, what has paralysed the Left is not merely cybernetic noise but the collapse of its narrative metabolism. The stories that once animated collective purpose, progress, solidarity, internationalism, the dignity of labor, and historical mission have fragmented under the centrifugal forces of entropic modernity. In their place, procedural moralism and defensive rhetoric circu-

late in closed loops, addressing the converted while failing to project futures compelling enough to recruit new allies.

Meanwhile, reactionary forces thrive precisely because they understand, viscerally if not theoretically, that narrative is power. They flood the public sphere with apocalyptic and restorative myths, deliberately blurring fact and fiction to create emotional resonance. Their narrative architectures, while chaotic and often incoherent, are nonetheless effective cybernetic engines: they convert fear into mobilisation, resentment into solidarity, fantasy into orientation. They synchronise distributed attention into coordinated action. The Left, by contrast, has treated narrative as a risk to be managed rather than as a system to be engineered.

Yet there is no neutral ground here. In an age of communicative capitalism and hyper-mediated reality, *the absence of narrative is narrative*: it reads as drift, defeat, exhaustion. The technocratic language of facts and policies, no matter how precise, cannot substitute for stories that make sense of the world and invite participation in its remaking.

This is where speculative futures must be rehabilitated: not as utopian indulgence but as a disciplined practice of collective rationality under uncertainty. Speculation is not the opposite of materialism; it is its necessary extension in conditions of systemic complexity. Capitalism speculates constantly: markets are anticipatory machines that price the future into the present. Reactionary politics speculates freely: it offers cathartic fictions of collapse and rebirth. The Left, uniquely, has constrained its own speculative imagination out of fear of repeating past errors.

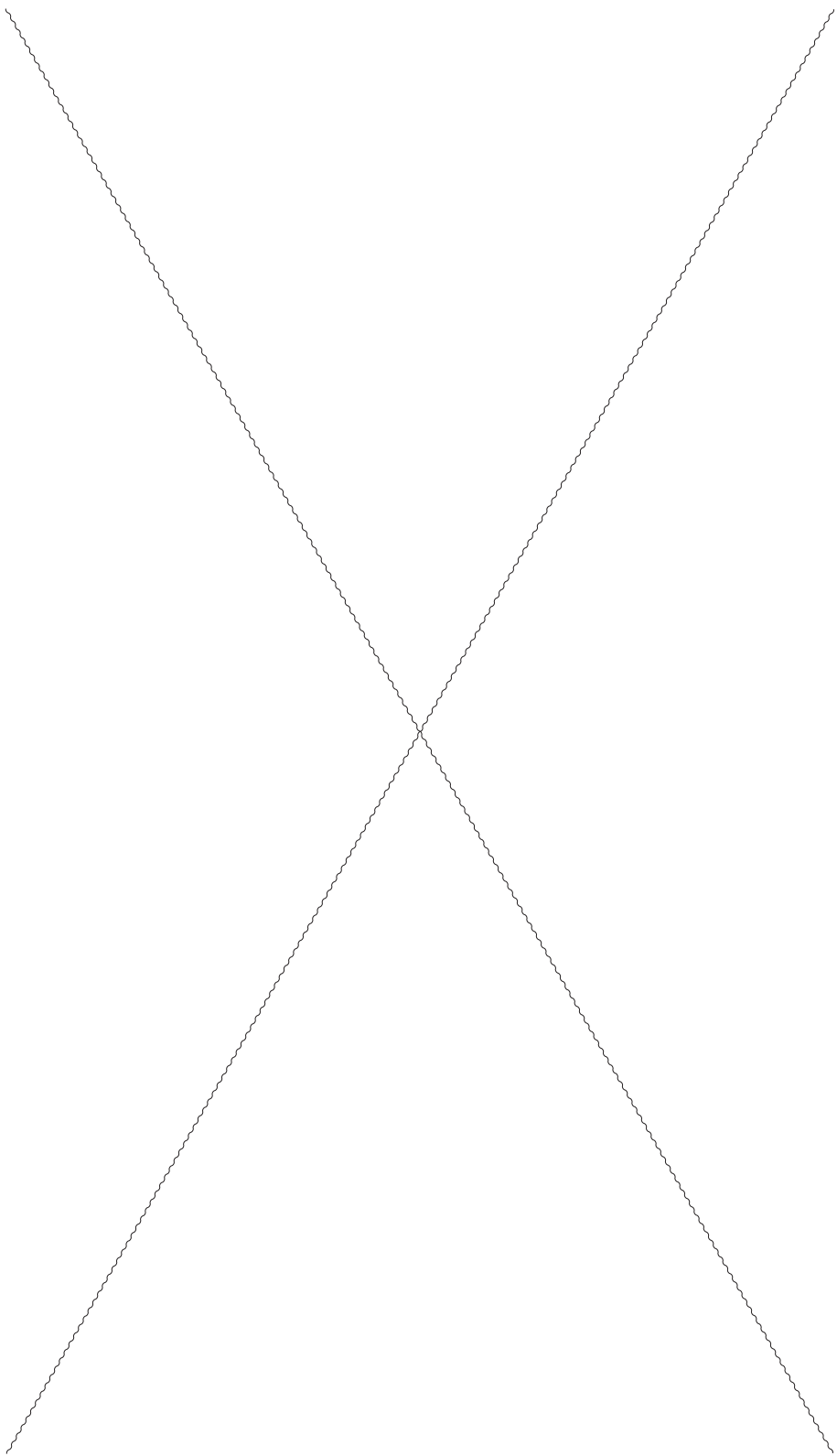
But in doing so, it has abandoned the very mechanism by which collective rationality is composed. Speculative narratives, properly anchored in material analysis, function as cognitive infrastructures. They do not promise false certainty but furnish provisional maps for action. They allow distributed actors to synchronise intentions, to orient amidst flux, to recognise shared stakes. Without them, systems remain inert, feedback loops degenerate into noise, and agency collapses into reactive crisis management.

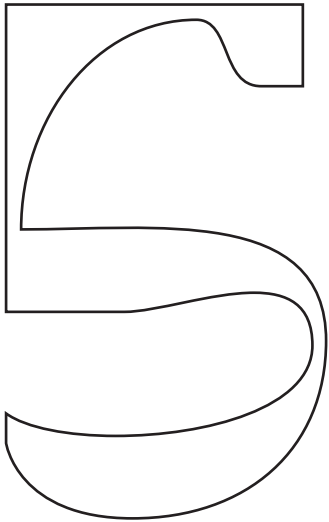
The task, then, is to reforge narrative as a vector of collective rationality, not as aesthetic garnish or strategic branding. This means refusing both technocratic fatalism and reactionary mythos. It means building narrative architectures that acknowledge determination without succumbing to mechanical determinism; that embrace contingency without lapsing into nihilism.

To rebuild the Left's cybernetic capacity is thus inseparable from rebuilding its narrative metabolism. The Left must become not only an architect of infrastructures but a composer of futures. This is not a call for comforting fictions. It is a call for narratives that function as systems of orientation in an entropic world. Narratives that map the real while stretching it toward the possible. Narratives that restore feedback, not just within the Left but between the Left and the societies it seeks to transform. Only then can it recover its function as a system capable not merely of critique but of coordinated transformation.

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Operative  
Fiction:  
Machinic  
Conjecture,  
Reality-  
Production &  
Desire

MIKKEL RØRBO

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## Section I: Conjecture

Coming to know something, how to know it, and what to do with it, once it is adequately known; the fundamental tenets of epistemology are age-old lines of inquiry, but knowledge also *does things*, it produces, generates. The operative<sup>1</sup> encounters this as it presents itself in computational, artificial thinking-systems.

In this moment where machinic cognition generates explanatory hypotheses from pattern recognition, it does not merely identify existing patterns but actualizes explanatory frameworks from an infinite field of possibility. This is the site where inference becomes productive and generative, not merely descriptive and representational—it transforms from epistemological tool to ontological force. These systems of machinic cognition and their accompanying theoretical foundations have seen a move from rules-based symbolic towards the data-driven non-symbolic forms of inference.<sup>2</sup>

The operative thinks through three primary inferential categories, the latter two of which see more and more use in the realm of non-symbolic AI: deductive inference is that where the inferred is necessarily true if its premises are true, but both inductive and abductive inference are of a non-necessary kind; in their purest form what is inferred is either statistically-most-likely or the

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- 1 Our operative is the character-concept through which we will explore this text and the reality-production it suggests. Its conceptual reality is unveiled later. For now, it is sufficient as a substitute for “I”, “you”, and “we”.
  - 2 This change is signaled particularly in a move away from rules-focused and human-centered (“transparent”) towards machine-centered (“black boxed”) logics where data and processes focus on machine readability and the ability to deal with uncertainty in inferential systems. This has proven instrumental in making inferential systems operate in material world applications versus theorem-focused application.

explanatory-most-likely given the subset of data from which the inference is based. Inductive inference is characterized as relying entirely on statistical or observed data, whereas abduction seeks explanation but is conjectural. Its method becomes possibilistic.

Peirce's original formulation of abduction positioned it as the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis that works retroductively from facts to their most plausible explanations.<sup>3</sup> In this way, abductive inference operating within computational structures acquires a specific temporal and material character. Its movement is from present and future hypotheticals that shape the reading of the past at hand to project an actionable explanation that, in turn, will shape the future. Rinse, repeat, recurse. The distinction between theoretical and manipulative abduction posited by Magnani becomes relevant here: while theoretical abduction operates through "an internal process of reasoning", manipulative abduction "happens when we are thinking through doing and not only, in a pragmatic sense, about doing".<sup>4</sup> Manipulative abduction in this context involves an experimental capacity to further develop inferences that also get shaped by what he calls "extra-rational components"<sup>5</sup> which are largely socially dependent. The hypotheses connect intimately with the requirement for consistency and reality-produced effects. A scaffolding of reality-bound epistemic actions is erected in search of explanatory hypotheses, constraining but equally manipulating reality—a question for the operative is whether the path is already operationalizing inference and producing a new schema of knowledge or merely constraining the data subset

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3 Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (Dover Publications, 1955), 151.

4 Lorenzo Magnani, "Model-Based and Manipulative Abduction in Science", *Foundations of Science* 9, no. 3 (2004): 220, 229, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:FODA.0000042841.18507.22>.

5 Such as emotional, affective, ethical, economic, aesthetic factors that influence e.g. embodied interpretations of inferential data.

required for explanation. The manipulative easily gets tied to that first embodied entity, the human, but as artificially intelligent systems gain additional embodied functionality, it is fair to say that computational systems engage in both modes—they select from theoretical explanatory frameworks, but they also construct external structures<sup>6</sup> that generate new epistemic possibilities.

However, the transformation of abductive inference within machinic cognition extends beyond Magnani’s manipulative framework. When machines engage in what Parisi identifies as the “automation of automation”, they participate in a meta-level of algorithmic function where “algorithmic rules now generate or construct patterns from the re-assembly of data”.<sup>7</sup> This represents a fundamental shift from deductive systems that apply predetermined rules to outcomes towards abductive systems that elaborate rules (hypotheses) from encounters with data. But not only this—as Parisi argues, “[h]ere rules and truths are not simply skipped but re-hypothesized, re-assessed and invented”,<sup>8</sup> thereby producing a shift from “pure truth” and reason towards systems that calculate probabilities and reconfigure based on data behavior. This would make a space for computational inference where missing rules, facts, and causes are hypothesized anew, thereby creating alternate meta-scenarios. To Parisi, a central aspect of non-deductive computational inference is its connection to potentiality, fallibility or indeterminacy,<sup>9</sup> and so,

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6 What Magnani calls “epistemic mediators” (Magnani 2004, 233). The interplay between theoretical and manipulative abduction should not be understated, they function in consort, and “the elements of the external structures gain *new meanings and relationships to one another*, thanks to the constructive explanatory theoretical activity” (Magnani 2004, 233, author’s emphasis).

7 Luciana Parisi, “Critical Computation: Digital Automata and General Artificial Thinking”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 2 (2019): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418818889>.

8 *Ibid.*, 93.

9 *Ibid.*, 95.

following Chaitin's<sup>10</sup> algorithmic information theory, Parisi notes that computational compression demonstrates “that outputs are always bigger than inputs”, indicating that artificial thinking-systems produce emergent patterns that cannot be reduced to mere data correlation or statistical matching<sup>11</sup> but rather expose the speculative dimensions inherent to their inference.

When machine learning systems engage in “meta-level abduction”, they effectively infer and act upon incomplete pathways and unknown data, thereby learning not merely from witnessed data but from goals “that [have] not been observed yet”,<sup>12</sup> and what they in turn produce “may coincide with the speculative and transcendental elaboration of algorithmic retroduction, whereby consequences (or results) are not only tracked back to their causes (by means of explanation) but are also, importantly, hypothesized beyond the observable”.<sup>13</sup> Remember, these artificial thinking-systems have real effects, their patterns subsumed into multitude processes, sectors, sciences, and languages. Their speculations move through time and become action.

The operative begins to emerge at this junction where the temporal mechanics of computational abductive inference begin to expose themselves and the effects of their speculative capacity. This retroductive movement simultaneously projects forward, operationalizing possible futures into materially effective

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10 Gregory Chaitin, information theorist, extended information theory to include entropy and randomness. He posited that computation includes the compression of unknowable probabilities or incomputables.

11 Parisi, “Critical Computation”, 105.

12 Katsumi Inoue, Andrei Doncescu and Hidetomo Nabeshima, “Completing Causal Networks by Meta-Level Abduction”, *Machine Learning* 91, no. 2 (2013): 240–241, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10994-013-5341-z>, 240–241

13 Parisi, “Critical Computation”, 112.

present realities. The operative realization is that abductive inference, *conjecture*, is a form of reality-production. Hypotheses arrive like engineers. Rather than mirrors, they are keys inserted into circuits, opening doors into spaces we might inhabit.

## Section II: Hyperstitional Mechanics

The operative discovers the temporal signature of computational abduction in the CCRU's concept of hyperstition. The hyperstitional process involves four key aspects: operativity, temporality, consistency, and unbelief.<sup>14</sup> The concept describes how certain ideas/concepts/fictions function not as representations but as “engineering diagrams”, producing reality through their own circulation—fictions that make themselves real.<sup>15</sup>

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Hyperstition is a theory of time, the temporal mechanics of which prove crucial. With hyperstition, fiction can be said to come from a future to reconfigure the present, and even the past. Once actualized, it ripples out, changing the way current reality is related to, understood, and performed. Hyperstitions make themselves known retroactively but exist as fictions that are pushed forward into the future until they actualize themselves as real. Effectively until they are *operationalized*. As the operative realized with regards to computational inference, searching for a hypothesis which is congruent with or likely to have produced the actualized “fiction”, it simultaneously produces the potential of said hypothesis as well as “equivalent effects to the reality [the fiction] would pro-

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14 In the CCRU glossary, this is summarized as “elements of effective culture that make themselves real”, operate as “fictional qualities functional as time-travelling devices”, serve as “coincidence intensifiers”, and act as “calls to the Old Ones”.

15 CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*, ed. Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Urbanomic, 2018), 363.

duce”<sup>16</sup>—they function in and as reality.

The CCRU described the hyperstitional process as one “of entities ‘making themselves real’” that “is precisely a passage, a transformation, in which potentials—already-active virtualities—realize themselves”.<sup>17</sup> This is to emphasize that hyperstition is highly dependent on the operability of the fiction—without real immanent effect, no hyperstition—just as the process of inference is the *most likely* explanation supported by external mediators. Fictions acquire material force by becoming operationally embedded in and engineering reality’s processing systems. As Mark Fisher wrote on the differentiation of hyperstition and superstition, it is a matter of the *necessity* of becoming-real, which is always the case for the former.<sup>18</sup>

When hyperstition gets characterized as “coincidence intensifiers”, the operative might understand a situation of “once you have seen it, you cannot unsee it”: the speculative fiction creeps in and provides a frame of external mediators, which plug into and substantiate the explicative nature of the hyperstitional. It adds narrative *consistency* to the explanatory hypotheses. The hyperstitional process fundamentally involves the production of “consistent semiotic terrains that condition perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses”.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on a less immanent, more

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16 Ibid., 29.

17 Ibid., 36.

18 Nick Land, Mark Fisher and Anna Greenspan, “HYPERSTITION/SUPERSTITION”, *Hyperstition*, published June 6, 2004, <http://hyperstition.abstractdynamics.org/archives/003532.html>.

19 CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*, 35. Drawing on Burroughs, the CCRU further posits that fiction is not opposed to reality; rather, reality is composed of fictions—not in a postmodernist sense where real and unreal is of no import, but in the sense that fictions compose reality in their actualization (CCRU 2018, 35).

idealist framework,<sup>20</sup> Beatrice Fazi points to the crucial aspect that in many instances has granted computational structures their authority; namely that “computational structures are truthful insofar as they are logically consistent”.<sup>21</sup> When computational abduction generates explanatory frameworks, it does not merely identify patterns but produces new semiotic territories that also structure future interactions and understandings. These territories acquire autonomous consistency through their operational deployment, creating feedback loops where hypotheses get substantiated by more and more “coincidences” (external mediators) that gain meaning and function as they connect and thereby shape realities.

The operative starts to recognize that hyperstition fundamentally concerns the transmuting of fictions into possibles rather than traditional epistemological validation. Unlike mere beliefs (and superstitions) that require subjective adherence, hyperstitions operate through what the CCRU identifies as “positive unbelief”. Hyperstitions achieve material efficacy by suspending the question of truth or falsity in favor of operational effectiveness.<sup>22</sup> The inferences of artificial thinking-systems demonstrate these mechanics as well: abductive algorithms deploy hypothetical explanations not because they believe in their truth-content but because these explanations prove operationally effective in

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20 Here, Fazi points towards the idealism of Platonic a priori ideal forms, arguing that much of computation’s authority is an equation of “beauty = truth” (Fazi 2018, 86), simplicity or logical proof becomes an integrated part of the self-contained models especially associated with deductive computational inference systems. Regardless of how it pertains especially to self-referential “world model”-based systems, there is a strong point to be made that consistency is an essential aspect of the efficacy of artificial thinking-systems and their operationalization.

21 Beatrice M. Fazi, *Contingent Computation: Abstraction, Experience, and Indeterminacy in Computational Aesthetics* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 84.

22 Phrased as “a provisionalizing of any reality frame in the name of pragmatic engagement rather than epistemological hesitation”. (CCRU 2018, 38)

processing material complexity. Hyperstition's emphasis on what fictions *do* and therefore their restructuring of reality mirrors the abductive generation of explanatory reality (hypotheses) as it *does* reality. Magnani explains that action is not only a way for moving the world to desirable states, but that it "performs an epistemic and not merely performatory role".<sup>23</sup>

These characteristics illuminate computational abduction's reality-producing capacity. When algorithmic systems generate explanatory hypotheses, they do not simply select among pre-existing possibilities but deploy fictional frameworks that retroactively validate their own emergence through operational implementation. Hyperstition, said in cybernetic terms, is a *positive feedback loop that intensifies cultural fictions into reality*.

As Burroughs' supposed "sorcerous operations" via CCRU have been drilled into the operative, it could suggest that unlike representation which "merely reproduces the currently dominant reality program from inside", abductive algorithmic processes "get outside the control codes in order to dismantle and rearrange them".<sup>24</sup> Each inferential operation participates in reality-engineering by selecting among possible explanatory worlds and actualizing specific futures through operational implementation.

Abduction displays a fundamental affinity with hyperstition. Both mobilize fictions according to criteria of effectivity and consistency; both embed conjectures in circuits where acting as if produces as is. If Peirce suggests abduction's status as the spark of inquiry, Magnani shows how this spark is substantiated

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23 Magnani, "Model-Based and Manipulative Abduction in Science", 234.

24 CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*, 36.

by external mediators, while Parisi reveals how it is automated and scaled by artificial thinking-systems. The result is a regime in which futures are inferentially selected and operationalized, effectively installing a process of reality-production.

### Section III: Operational Fictionality & Desire

And so, the operative witnesses the collapse of the dominant distinction between fiction and reality as artificial thinking-systems treat hypothetical explanations as operationally valid. The critical insight emerges when the operative recognizes that machinic abduction operates through what will be named “operational fictionality”—the treatment of speculative constructs as functionally real enough to act upon, thereby making them materially effective in shaping future possibilities. Operationalization as a method, or as a process, or even as a line of attack, is of course also a conflict between multiple competing or unaligned “reality programs”, as the CCRU named them; it is an “operationalization of” which instates new codes that rearrange realities but does not specify the values of the newly manufactured realities. With *operational fictionality*, our operative becomes *Operative Fiction*.

This operational deployment of fictions reveals computational inference as a form of what Deleuze and Guattari call desiring-production. They position desire as positive production that generates a trifold process of productions and their syntheses,<sup>25</sup> resulting in a continuous generation of new connections, assemblages, with the product of desire being realities:

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25 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 4.

“If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire is the set of passive syntheses that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production. The real is the end product, the result of the passive syntheses of desire as autoproduction of the unconscious. [...] The objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself.”<sup>26</sup>

Computational abduction operates through similar productive mechanics: each inferential operation produces new explanatory connections that reshape the conditions under which future reality is produced. The algorithm thereby becomes a desiring-machine that produces reality through its speculative operations rather than simply modeling pre-existing data.

The crucial recognition is that desiring-production operates through connecting heterogeneous elements without reducing them to unified representation. This triadic process exemplifies the desiring-production of artificial thinking-systems and their reality-productive capacities. Operative Fiction might exemplify them as they perform connective synthesis by connecting disparate data patterns with explanatory frameworks, disjunctive synthesis by operationalizing and inscribing hypotheses onto the body of realities breaking apart and reconfiguring that-which-is-and-was, and conjunctive synthesis by implementing chosen explanations as operational procedures to push into the future, furthering novel becomings.<sup>27</sup> The hyperstitional practice of Operative Fiction becomes an engineering of reality-production, it reconfigures rather than representing existing reality and forms

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26 Ibid., 26–27.

27 Here, the author draws on the chapter “The Desiring Machines” from *Anti-Oedipus*.

new assemblages through the excessive speculative connections that acquire autonomous consistency through the connective tissues of their mediators.

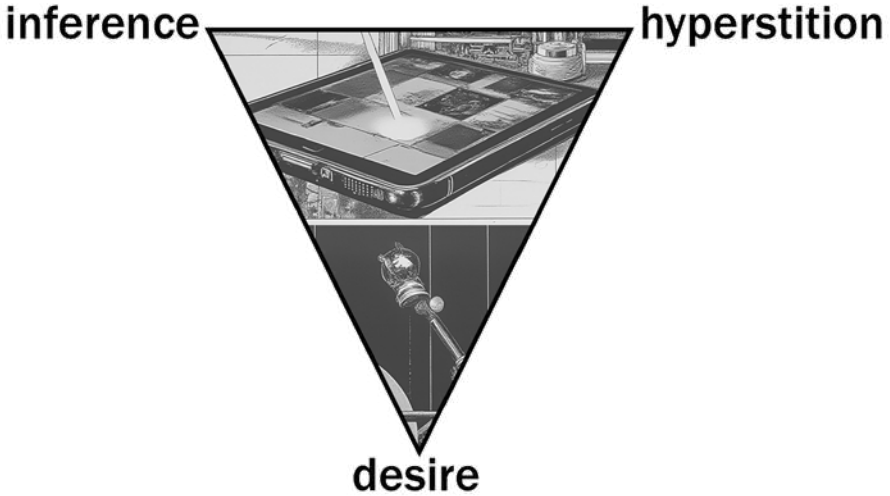
This productive capacity manifests in the deterritorializing movement of reconfiguration (transmutation) of desiring-production. But the movement is simultaneously reterritorializing as it generates new operational territories through the very process of re-engineering established ones. This is the movement that should not be forgotten, as the reterritorialization into control systems,

capital, and a multitude of other authoritarian and hegemonic structures also happens effortlessly, its process a well-lubricated machine of Teflon-coated semiconductors and hyperefficient processing.<sup>28</sup> But while computational models touched upon previously operate through territorialized structures of fixed categories, predetermined models, and stable statistically representational schemas, abductive inference introduces the potential of a deterritorializing dynamic that continuously destabilizes these structures through speculative leaps.

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28 Beyond broader questions inherent to inference and production as dealt with in this essay, this connects to questions of alignment in artificial intelligence as the processes of de- and reterritorialization do not relate exclusively to human-centered processes, but equally to processes that have machine-to-machine focus, e.g. in financial systems as “simple” as high-frequency trading, and therefore result equally in questions concerning the directionality of machine alignment and whether the scale of agency enacted through these systems goes far beyond simple human motivations.



Both reality-production and desiring-production involve the continuous generation of new connections, the deterritorialization of established structures, and the production of becomings that shape future possibilities. Computational abduction demonstrates that inference itself is fundamentally hyperstitional, fundamentally productive rather than representative, fundamentally connected to desire rather than merely enlightenment reason—it generates new realities through speculative operations rather than simply modeling existing ones. The algorithms become desiring-machines that produce reality through the very process of generating explanations. What is at stake as these inferential structures are implemented across the assemblies of artificial thinking-systems at scales that far surpass that of miniscule individuals, even single groups, nation states, or corporations, are processes that are far more malleable, more complex and temporally abstract, but also more prone to *infection* and *friction* as they act upon and make reality. Reality-production then becomes synonymous with desiring-production; *reality-production* is *desiring-production*, a continuous flow of connections, transformations, and becomings that constitute the fabric of immanent realities.

Operative Fiction might be a force brought into service of the striated space of rigid control systems, its speculations might be operationalized in service of subjugation, of the instantiation of the “one true reality” and refutation of the frictions that challenge its dominant power structures, but if it wants to be a force of deterritorialization, a creative line of flight, it must “bring connections to bear against the great conjunction of the apparatuses of capture or domination”.<sup>29</sup> This is the crux, the great ambiguity of the hyperstitional and its maligned hijacking of realities. It is both a force of restriction and the explosion of process upon process upon process. Might Operative Fiction imagine a politics of potentiality rather than a politics of foreclosure?

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29 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 423.

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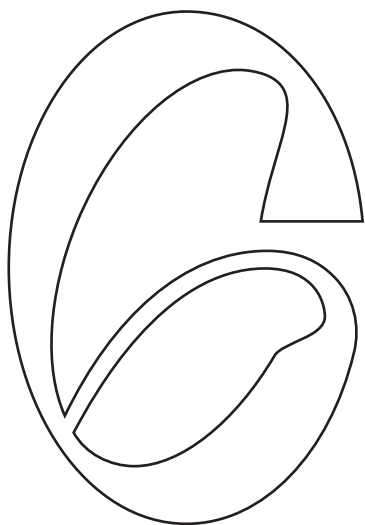
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Mode of  
Liaisons:  
An Operational  
Epistemology

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PICHAYA AIME SUPHAVANIJ

## Systems behind our backs

Screens seize, institutions retract, weather breaks: the body adjusts before thought arrives. Jean-Pierre Caron, following Alfred Sohn-Rethel, names this real abstraction:<sup>1</sup> a spatio-temporal operation working “behind our backs”, pre-formatting conduct prior to recognition. Unsettling, yet familiar. The critical outside collapses, and as Michel Foucault shows, power/knowledge circulates without a sovereign vantage. The task shifts from interpretation to inventing procedures that learn by operating within the fields they diagnose.

This poses a transmission problem: how to navigate when orientation’s substrate stays opaque and totalities refuse capture; how causal abstraction gains conceptual traction without reinstalling the Myth of the Given?<sup>2</sup> Operations move first: timings, thresholds, protocols. “Choice” arrives late. Movement congeals as habit. Algorithmic capture sets attention’s tempo: institutional breakdown corrals us through pre-scripted corridors; ecological turbulence forces recalibration before meaning crystallises. To orient is to find oneself already oriented.

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1 “Real abstraction” (Caron via Sohn-Rethel) names a spatio-temporal operation that acts “behind our backs”, formatting conduct prior to recognition; it is not a mental generalisation but an operative abstraction in practice. See: Jean-Pierre Caron, “Real Abstraction and the Given” (ms., drawing on Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 1978). Caron mobilises a Sellarsian frame to avoid reinstalling the Given while clarifying how causal orders condition conceptual uptake.

2 Wilfrid Sellars’ target is the notion of a pre-conceptual “Given” that is both epistemically independent and epistemically efficacious. He argues that collapsing causation into justification is a myth: all knowing is concept-involving and inferentially articulated. See: Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1956): 253–329.

Where critique loses altitude, invention becomes necessary. Under that pressure, fiction arrives as thought-in-motion. Poetics modulates the ground: an epistemic operation that changes what can take form. Theory-fiction proceeds by traversal, reading gradients as generators of thought.

This essay works in that terrain. It advances *Mode of Liaisons* as a transdisciplinary method for producing knowledge through rule-driven propagation across shifting fields. The argument unfolds in three movements: first, from Caron's real abstraction and José Arthur Giannotti's operational scheme<sup>3</sup> to Samuel Beckett's *Quad* as operational theatre, where demand crystallises into pattern and remainder becomes trace; second, through the articulation of *Mode of Liaisons* and its six-zone apparatus, coupling terrains by constraint; third, toward epistemic weather, where knowledge drifts from persuasion to persistence, from statement to propagation.

### **Beckett's Operational Theatre: From Synthesis to Subtraction**

Four hooded figures in identical gowns—white, red, blue, yellow—enter a dimly lit square (six paces a side) on a black stage. Each follows fixed paths along sides and diagonals, swerving the central danger zone  $\emptyset$  (void) so the centre is never stepped in. They enter and exit in strict permutation. In *Quad I*, each player is keyed by a colour, light, and a soft intermittent percussion line so that footsteps periodically surface. *Quad II* inscribes the same scheme in monochrome: white gowns, no percussion, slowed tempo. The camera is raised, frontal, fixed; the work is composed for the television frame.

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3 José Arthur Giannotti reframes theory as an operational scheme: procedures that generate intelligibility by running under explicit constraints. Cited here from: "Contra Althusser", trans. J.-P. Caron, in *Exercícios de Filosofia* (CEBRAP, 1980 [1967]).

No psychology, no plot—only recursive traversal around an inaccessible centre.

To grasp the radicality of this operational reduction, set *Quad* against the synthesis it refuses. In Richard Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the separate arts annul into a single apparatus, a creative destruction yielding immersive fusion. Audiences are entrained rather than addressed; rhythm and motif pre-format attention before reflection. By analogy with real abstraction and Wilfrid Sellars (as mobilised by Caron), the point is not simply prior capture but concealment: the scaffold dissolves into sensation, and consensus is secured as experience rather than argued into belief.

*Quad* inverts the vector. Less play than signal, it operates as a coded instruction set for broadcast. Fixed frame, colour channels, periodic sequencing, centre-avoidance: in Giannotti’s terms, an operational scheme. Following Sellars’s critique, it exposes the Given by showing how procedures condition perception ahead of concept. In *Quad*’s grammar, entrainment persists through reduction. Recurrence and exposed choreography retune attention to the rule-field instead of synthetic immersion. Subtraction becomes exposure; patterning leaves remainder; exhaustion does the disclosing. Here, movement turns functional; gesture computes.

Yet *Quad* exceeds austere negation.

It exposes the scaffold of synthesis. Constraint renders enactment legible: every path governed, every entrance sequenced, even “silence” composed. When percussion withdraws and footfall surfaces, exhaustion becomes score. Exhaustion indexes the rule-field that produces it: the square, centre-avoidance, tempo, permutations. Subtraction is the bone of the operation. But what enables

this? What upholds a ruin that still performs? What makes exhaustion functional rather than merely entropic? How does pattern condense into rule without collapse?

The answer is demand. The piece begins with compositional imperatives, not ideas. Operational purity is choreographed; the diagram is executed. Performers move under conditions that precede them; their paths instantiate a demand to abstract—geometry before psychology. This is activation's ontology: constraint is summoned as well as endured; the path is given and made at once. Rules limit and inaugurate; they bring the operation into being and are written by the traversal they govern. The performers do not move across a pre-existing ground; they generate ground through movement. This is the walking paradox: the walk discovers a ground as it composes it.

Wagner and Beckett both organize demand through form, along contrary vectors. Wagner blurs the edge, unity-before-difference, a saturation through myth that pre-empts mediation. *Quad* refuses synthesis and reveals the norms that drive patterned behaviour. Abstraction emerges within *Quad* as the rule-field runs until it shows itself. Ruins function as a diagram: procedures by which patterns generate fatigue and become legible.

*Quad* learns through inscriptive repetition. Residues, micro-slurs, hesitations, near misses become parameters; each pass writes updates into rhythm, spacing, sequence. These feed back into the rule-field, changing conditions so subsequent passes run on altered ground. Exhaustion registers what the scheme cannot yet accommodate and converts that remainder into constraint. In this register, ruin functions as a medium: it carries information that retunes the run.

Wagner fuses to conceal the scaffold; Beckett pares to show it; Mode of Liaisons composes with it; synthesis transmutes to operational modulation.

### **Mode of Liaisons: Constraint as Generative Method**

Mode of Liaisons generalises *Quad's* operational lesson. Where *Quad* leaves residue and Wagner conceals it, exhaustion reads as the trace of overrun. Exceeded tolerances become material for transduction into new constraints and parameters. Beckett's piece shows how working inside limits yields knowledge; Mode of Liaisons extends this across domains, treating constraint as generative and converting residual exhaustion into operational information.

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Rules lay infrastructure; they summon action and give the run memory. A liaison occurs when a move propagates as a pattern across domains; unresolved outcomes carry forward as settings for the next pass. Resistance becomes tension and cadence within the field. The result is modulation under pressure: the field learns by writing its limits into the next operation. This is the threshold to Poetics-Logic, where poetics inscribes trace and relation, and logic articulates the grammar of demand.

The stance is internal. Start with a rule set—explicit for execution, porous to remainder. Run until residues surface: fatigues, hesitations, misalignments. Treat residue as information, not error. Retune tempo, thresholds, density, relays; run again. Across runs, demand precipitates provisional norms while pressure keeps them plastic. Heterogeneity is held in productive tension. This is normogen-

esis:<sup>4</sup> the recursive production of norms without reinstalling the Given. Through inscriptive repetition, constraints transduce remainder into further constraint. The traversal (conditions → run → remainder → constraint → norm) keeps poetics and logic in oscillation. Learning proceeds by recursion; knowledge sediments into articulation at intervals. Epistemology moves in time: does this operation continue to generate usable difference, and can it infect other sites?

From Giannotti's operational turn, Poetics-Logic emerges as the onto-epistemic ground: a constrained run-in which cuts (poetics) and rules (logic) co-compose, transducing remainder into parameter and condensing knowledge in time. The method becomes ontological prototyping: rehearsals under constraint that test new coordinations and read what returns. In Beckett's *Quad*, encounter-pressure rewrites the ground; micro-hesitations and wear reconfigure the very conditions that produced them. As the circuit runs, its logic becomes navigable without becoming transparent; the inaccessible centre begins to steer trajectories that can be felt, timed, tuned. The operation is legible in its rule and generous in its leak.

A liaison preserves asymmetry—each side alters without full translation. As a transductive relay, it retimes small differences

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4 "Normogenesis" here denotes the immanent production of norms through activity and individuation. For Georges Canguilhem, the living institutes its own criteria of the normal in coping with its milieu—normality derives from normativity. For Gilbert Simondon, individuation proceeds by transduction in metastable systems, yielding emergent structures and parameters (operative "norms" in this essay's sense) rather than applying prior rule-sets. See: Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (Springer Dordrecht, 1978); Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (University of Minnesota Press, 2020); Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Univocal Publishing, 2017).

so patterns travel while autonomy holds. Propagation generates rather than merely transmits: pattern → remainder → parameter → updated rule-field. When gradients steepen, phase jitter and collisions yield usable disorder—order flashes from turbulence, brilliant chaos. What overruns one site is tuned as a parameter in the next; articulation couples unlike domains without collapse.

A transductive relay functions architecturally through atmospheric pressure as its phase-shift mechanism. Tempo, saturation, density, **thresholds**—these differentials mediate translation. Pressure lets patterns traverse domains by shifting phase between modalities; it calibrates orientation, introduces ambiguity, and holds hypotheses in suspension long enough for form to emerge. It creates a buffer zone where the field's responsiveness retunes to what it cannot yet name. A rule can make a climate; a body can serve as a vector and a sensor; in this register, exhaustion yields knowledge. These principles require spatial instantiation. Pressure differentials do not operate in abstract space; they form zones of characteristic intensity, each demanding specific navigation protocols.

### **Epistemic Topologies: A Six-Zone Apparatus**

Mode of Liaisons supplies the grammar; the six-zone apparatus is the instrument. Theory-fiction, here, is a method: a pressure-field topology for testing how transductive relays, operating through atmospheric pressure, generate navigational knowledge. Think of the apparatus as a tension zone—an overlay where a not-yet landscape meets the already scripted. The transductive relay is the figuring seam at that contact: a provisional field for navigation. Conditional by design, the model renders the familiar strange and opens a buffer for reorientation. Each zone names a characteristic pressure and sets a protocol for entry and movement. The fiction is in the model; the traversal is real. What the walk yields cannot be

reduced to the fiction, nor the fiction to the walk. Here, spatial epistemology acts as a rhythmic, ontogenetic force shaped by absence, latency, and transductive interaction.

What follows maps six fronts where epistemic weather condenses; each zone is a pressure-field where rules meet matter and leave a trace.

## **Zone I: Fractured Ground (:)**

**Coordinates: (Beginning without Origin)**

The zone presents epistemic fissures. Subjects emerge from the terrain they traverse. No exterior position. Traversal is an investigation. Ground is ontological multiplicity. Fracture is a Mode of existence.

*Entry Protocol: Begin mid-step. Accept incompatible measurements as simultaneously valid.*

*Primary Operation: Maintain movement across incommensurable physics. Left-foot logic  $\neq$  right-foot logic.*

*Trace Deposit: Error accumulation crystallises into infrastructure.*

## Zone II: Collapsed Synthesis (☐)

**Coordinates:**  $\approx 49^\circ 57' \text{ N}, 11^\circ 34' \text{ E}$  (Bayreuth—post-mythic debris field)

**Terrain Features:** Abandoned Orchestral Pits; Shattered Leitmotifs; Calcified Aesthetic Matter

**Phenomenon:** Pattern Persistence After Belief

Collapsed Synthesis metabolises the ruins of totalised systems. After Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk fails, operational residues persist: rhythmic patterns, structural logics, organisational schemata that continue to function after their mythic content is evacuated. Traversal here requires learning to work with collapsed totalities' material persistence. Subtraction operates as a method, creating conditions for differential intelligence through algorithmic precision (runnable pattern extraction). Ruins become a resource; operational logic outlasts mythology.

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*Entry Protocol: Identify a repeating pattern divorced from the original purpose. Engage the pattern as pure operational residue.*

*Primary Operation: Extract a coordination schema from evacuated content. Metabolise ruins. Retain organisational pressure independent of mythology.*

*Trace Deposit: Algorithmic residue available for differential activation. Pattern becomes portable infrastructure.*

## Zone III: Operational Grid (田)

**Coordinates: 52° 31' N, 13° 24' E (Berlin computational matrix)**

**Terrain Features: Constraint Architectures; Procedural Corridors; Modulation Interfaces**

**Phenomenon: Becoming Vector**

The walker | becomes | an | operational element | within systematic logics | while simultaneously | reconfiguring those systems | through differential movement. Movement | functions as | systemic intervention. Grid | is | rules | in | flux.

*Entry Protocol: Bring a pattern from Zone II. Prepare for sustained rhythmic engagement.*

*Primary Operation: Become a grid editor through small, persistent pressure modulation. Engage constraints with precision to deflect system flow.*

*Trace Deposit: Reconfigured operational parameters.*

Bridge: from ground and grid to the field's invisible operators: void, mismatch, loop.

## Zone IV: Void Centre $\emptyset$

Coordinates:  $\emptyset^\circ \emptyset' \emptyset$ ,  $\emptyset^\circ \emptyset' \emptyset$

(Unlocatable centre, gravitational absence)

**Terrain Features: Structural Prohibition; Negative Resonance;**

**Circumferential Intensification**

**Phenomenon: The Governing Void**

The void materialises as an epistemic centre where structural absence generates cognitive development. Meaning crystallises around what cannot be entered; the void operates as an organisational principle structuring all movements while remaining inaccessible to direct encounter. Form orbits absence, generating knowledge through sustained engagement with systematic prohibition. This is the paradox that demands navigation: how structural absence functions as productive infrastructure rather than negation. Intelligence develops not through penetrating the centre but through learning how prohibition organises the field. The void is not nothingness but a generative principle—absence that governs presence, emptiness that structures fullness.

Each approach to the void yields different knowledge while never converging on the void itself. Optical methods study how the centre distorts perception around it, tracking refraction patterns in how other zones appear when viewed across the void. Topological approaches map the wake structure—how movement near the void curves, how trajectories bend without ever touching the centre. Custodial methods gather peripheral observations, attending to what accumulates at the edges of the inaccessible.

The void functions gravitationally. It does not push or pull directly but organises the entire field through its structural absence. Other zones orient themselves in relation to this centre they cannot oc-

copy. Navigation learns to work with this gravitational force rather than against it—using the void’s organising pressure to enable movements that would be impossible in its absence.

*Entry Protocol: Identify the inaccessible centre.*

*Do not attempt penetration. Prepare for sustained circumambulation.*

*Primary Operation: Orbit the void. Develop three distinct methods that never converge: (1) Optical—study refraction patterns; (2) Topological—map wake structure; (3) Custodial—gather peripheral observations.*

*Trace Deposit: Gravitational modification of the surrounding epistemic space. Knowledge crystallises circumferentially, never at the centre.*

## **Zone V: Map Mismatching (≈)**

**Coordinates: Variable (shifting across 47°–49° N, 8°–12° E)**

**Terrain Features: Modal Incommensurability;**

**Ontological Heterogeneity**

**Phenomenon: Navigating by Error**

The body registers one actuality, measurement captures another, computation processes a third, affective engagement knows a fourth. Each operates in a different mode of being, incommensurable yet simultaneously true. Error names what one ontological register cannot account for in another. Navigation proceeds by composing movement across these heterogeneous fields without resolving them into coherence. Knowledge is not correspondence to a unified reality but agility across incompatible modes of being.

*Entry Protocol: Bring three incompatible measurement methods. Navigate by representational failure.*

*Primary Operation: Measure the same terrain with incommensurable methods: (1) quantitative; (2) qualitative; (3) material. Document contradictions. Navigate using a probabilistic field.*

*Trace Deposit: Intelligence sedimented in the gap between walkable and speakable.*

Bridge: after absence and mismatch, the loop returns pressure to history.

## **Zone VI: Perpetual Loop ( $\infty$ )**

**Coordinates:**  $\infty^\circ \infty' \infty, \infty^\circ \infty' \infty$

**(recursive coordinates; temporal rather than spatial)**

**Terrain Features: Historical Stratification; Temporal Archaeology; Memory Deposits**

**Phenomenon: The Differential Loop**

Perpetual Loop activates inherited cognitive infrastructures through differential engagement. Each return reactivates inherited structural patterns under altered conditions; the same structure operates differently when encountered in new contexts. The walker discovers how to enter the same temporal configurations differently, extracting new navigational possibilities from apparently exhausted historical materials.

Time densifies through recursive inhabitation. The apparatus learns to activate history's persistent operational logics as living cognitive infrastructure. The past becomes a renewable resource; repetition does not repeat but reinventively accumulates difference. Each loop transforms what came before—return alters

origin. This is not circular motion but spiral: each rotation occurs at a different altitude, carrying accumulated pressure from prior passes.

The loop operates through proleptic activation: reading old texts through new frameworks, applying contemporary pressure to historical material to see what activates differently. Not content-matching but structural-analogue recognition. A problem today may find its operational logic articulated decades or centuries prior, waiting for new conditions to make it legible. The loop feeds forward: newly activated historical material transforms current approaches, which then transform how other historical texts can be read.

Exit demands return. You cannot leave Zone VI without carrying it back to Zone I, completing the circuit. But the return is never to the same ground—fractured terrain has shifted under the pressure of traversal. The loop ensures that every subsequent entry into the apparatus occurs under altered conditions, preventing the system from calcifying into a fixed method.

*Entry Protocol: Bring the current epistemic problem. Access a historical archive predating the problem by decades or centuries. Prepare for proleptic activation.*

*Primary Operation: Read old texts through new frameworks. Not content-matching but structural-analogue recognition. Activate latent possibilities retroactively.*

*Recursive Protocol: INPUT: contemporary problem → SEARCH: historical structural analogues → READ: apply new frame to old text → OBSERVE: does the text activate differently? → FEED FORWARD: use activated text for new*

*approaches → LOOP: new work transforms other historical texts.*

*Trace Deposit: Retroactive transformation of all prior zones. Return alters origin. The walker exits changed, carrying temporal density back to the beginning.*

## Traversal Protocols

The apparatus becomes operational through traversal choices. Read together, the zones compose an ecology in which local intensities couple into wider pressure-fields. The canonical traversal moves through Fracture, then Ruins, into Grid, passing through Void, arriving at Mismatch, entering Loop, and returning to Fracture. This shows the apparatus as a transductive relay: patterns propagate across unlike domains; excess in one site becomes a parameter in the next.

Theory-fiction here is not pre-written; it is produced by operational choices—each pass lays down conditions the next inherits. The grammar below provides notation for precision and reproducibility.

**Wager (Compass).** Every run starts with a speculative statement that sets what becomes legible and what counts as trace. The wager aims the traversal; the traversal tests the wager.

**Path (Arc).** Entrypoint and route establish narrative shape. A canonical path yields a recognisable arc; a skip or diagonal entry throws the sequence into experiment. The wager often biases path selection.

**Coupling (Texture).** How zones relate gives the fiction its grain: smooth transitions sustain flow; regime shifts mark discontinuity; relays translate across incompatibles; collisions produce interference; overlap holds partial synthesis. Each coupling decision tunes continuity, rupture, and synthesis.

**Temporality (Rhythm).** Duration and pacing set tension. Long dwell builds density; rapid crossings spike turbulence. Recursion folds time; repeated loops stratify scenes into a palimpsest. Local modulation refines; steep gradients raise stakes.

**Trace (Memory).** What you deposit or carry forward becomes motif and constraint. Overlaps among traces generate interference and, at times, flash-organisation.

**Speculative Intensity (Emergence).** Steeper gradients, tighter couplings, and multiple collisions increase the chance that new patterns condense; shallow gradients and sparse couplings refine what is already there.

This is theory-fiction as method—not layered atop procedure but made by it, in time and space. Each run deposits sediment the next inherits; norms emerge in the wake of operation, not before it.



-- THE GESAMTKUNSTWERK COLLAPSED IN 2078. -- TOTALITY SHATTERED.  
BELIEF EVACUATED. BUT ++ BAYREUTH'S SYSTEMS KEEP RUNNING. ++  
PNEUMATIC SYSTEM 7-B CONTINUES-- WAGNER'S 1876 INNOVATION:  
ORCHESTRA BURIED BENEATH STAGE. MYSTISCHER ABGRUND. MECHANISM  
HIDDEN, MYTH VISIBLE.

MECHANICAL PIT COVERS RISE AND FALL ON SCHEDULE. MECHANICAL  
BOWS DRAW ACROSS STRINGS. THE MUSIC PLAYS TO NO ONE. NO ONE TOLD  
THE MACHINES TO STOP. STOPPING WAS NEVER PROGRAMMED.

# CLEAN SLATE: GUESS AT STRUCTURE. RUIN: SKELETON  
SELF-IDENTIFIES THROUGH WHAT KEEPS RUNNING. #

-- WAGNERIAN SYNTHESIS EVAPORATED, -- BUT THE ++ COORDINATION PROTOCOL  
EMBEDDED IN WOOD, COPPER, PNEUMATIC VALVES-- EXECUTES AUTONOMOUSLY. ++  
<< THE SYSTEM LOOPS WITHOUT PURPOSE << EACH CYCLE IDENTICAL YET DIFFERENT  
<< REPETITION WITHOUT RETURN

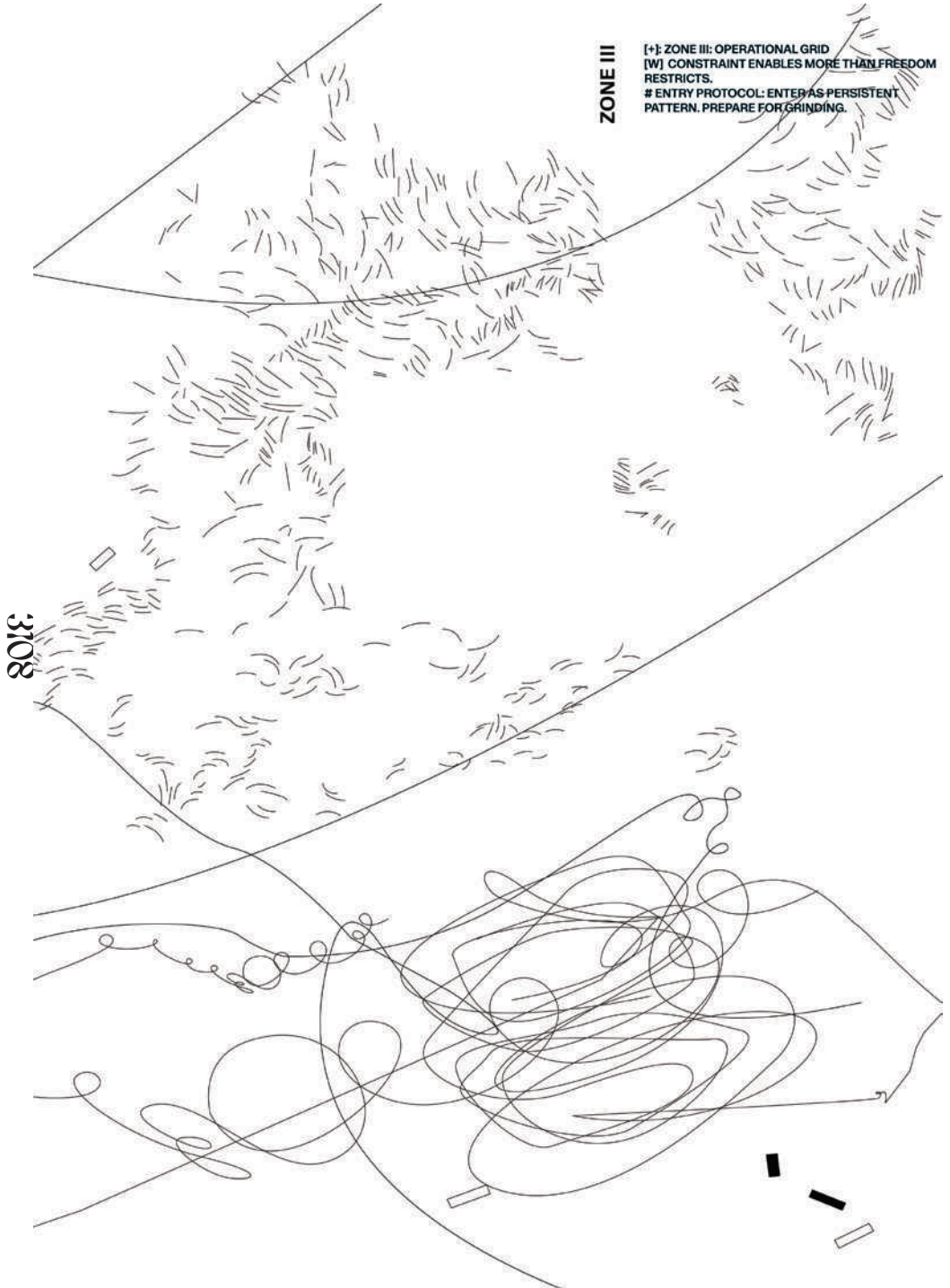
THE ACOUSTIC CHAMBERS STILL RESONATE. SPECIFIC TIMBER,  
SPECIFIC ANGLES, CALCULATED 1876. AND THE HVAC RESPONDS. / TEMPERATURE  
MODULATES WITH HARMONIC TENSION -- / AUDIENCE METABOLISM ENGINEERED INTO  
THE BUILDING. HEAT DURING CONFLICT MOTIFS: VISCERAL ANXIETY WITHOUT OBJECT.  
BODIES ABSORB WAGNERIAN FEELING-STRUCTURE | WITHOUT ENCOUNTERING WAGNER.  
CLEANING ROBOTICS SWEEP IN RHYTHM WITH ABSENT OPERA. GROOVES WORN IN  
FLOOR CHANNEL NAVIGATION INTO AESTHETIC PATTERNS. ++ MATERIAL REMEMBERS WHAT  
BELIEF FORGOT. ++

THREE BLOCKS AWAY: ABANDONED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM. SERVERS RUNNING. NO  
USERS LOGGED IN FOR SIX YEARS. << ALGORITHMS STILL MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS. <<  
BUILDINGS THAT DON'T KNOW THE OPERA ENDED.

GHOSTLY CONTINUATION. AUTOMATIC PERSISTENCE. OPERATIONAL HAUNTING.  
NOT FOR ANYONE. NOT TOWARD ANYTHING. JUST: CONTINUATION WITHOUT REASON.  
++ WHAT REMAINS = FOUNDATIONAL. ++ -- WHAT EVAPORATES = ORNAMENTAL. -- ITS  
PERSISTENCE REVEALS WHAT IS INFRASTRUCTURALLY REAL.

{T} TOTEM → R\_1{II, OPERATIONAL-SKELETON} {T}

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**INITIAL CONDITION: No grid → random boarding → no pattern → no differentiation → no accommodation. Diversity invisible.**

**Unconstrained freedom = stasis.**

**WAGER: [+] S-Bahn as distributed constraint architecture. [+] Wheelchair user & Algorithm & Institution & Mechanical limits & Ecological pressure & Political regulation.**

**ENTER VECTOR:  $\Delta$ MASS(T<sub>1</sub>), CAR 2, 08:17.**

**SYSTEM READ: & Algorithm → mass deviation; Institution → accessibility requirement; Infrastructure → mechanical feasibility; Ecology → flow pressure; Experience → bodily need. Train couples to RELAY OPERATIONS. &**

**>Becoming Vector (Grinding)>**

**WEEK 1: CONTACT INITIATION.**

$\Delta$ mass enters; sensors see anomaly with no class. Edge and wheel mis-time.

**WEEK 6: MECHANICAL ADAPTATION.**

Torque limits widen; tolerance bands stretch. Each fix adds asymmetry.

**WEEK 11: METABOLIC SHIFT.**

Cooling rescheduled; temporal pressure converts to thermal data.

**WEEK 16: INTERFERENCE.**

New masses collide; overlaps accelerate learning.

**WEEK 2: ECHO**

Auto-recalibrations spike; attendants repeat manual fixes. Irritation becomes memory.

**WEEK 7: FEEDBACK PRESSURE.**

Heat builds in metal and code; complaints mirror logs.

**WEEK 12: RECURSIVE CALIBRATION.**

Baselines rewrite around deviation; noise becomes standard.

**WEEK 17: CHANNEL TUNING.**

Sub-channels assigned; biology, mechanics, computation align as triad.

**WEEK 3: LOCAL FATIGUE**

Couplings warm, joints hiss; sensors misread friction as climate.

**WEEK 8: GRINDING PROPER.**

Stress becomes continuous; abrasion yields precision. The anomaly starts to tune the grid.

**WEEK 13: RHYTHMIC COMPRESSION.**

Windows narrow; smoothness comes from repetition, not correction.

**WEEK 18: RESONANCE.**

frequency holds; efficiency rises; friction persists as tone.

**WEEK 4: PATTERN SUSPICION.**

Pattern begins registration Not TYPE but OPERATION Grid learning to channel.

**WEEK 9: CROSS-STRATA RECOGNITION.**

Policy overlaps mechanics; accessibility rewrites mid-run. Constraint gains a bureaucratic rhythm.

**WEEK 14: STRUCTURAL FATIGUE.**

Bolts loosen, counters overflow; maintenance becomes cognition.

**WEEK 19: REMAINDER.**

EM spill, pharma drift collect at edges—unread, still demanding.

**WEEK 5: FRICTION ONSET.**

Millimeter misalignments collapse buffers; body and schedule compress each other.

**WEEK 10: SIGNAL STABILIZATION.**

Error is anticipated; friction flips to pulse. Uneven, reliable sync.

**WEEK 15: DIFFERENTIATION THRESHOLD.**

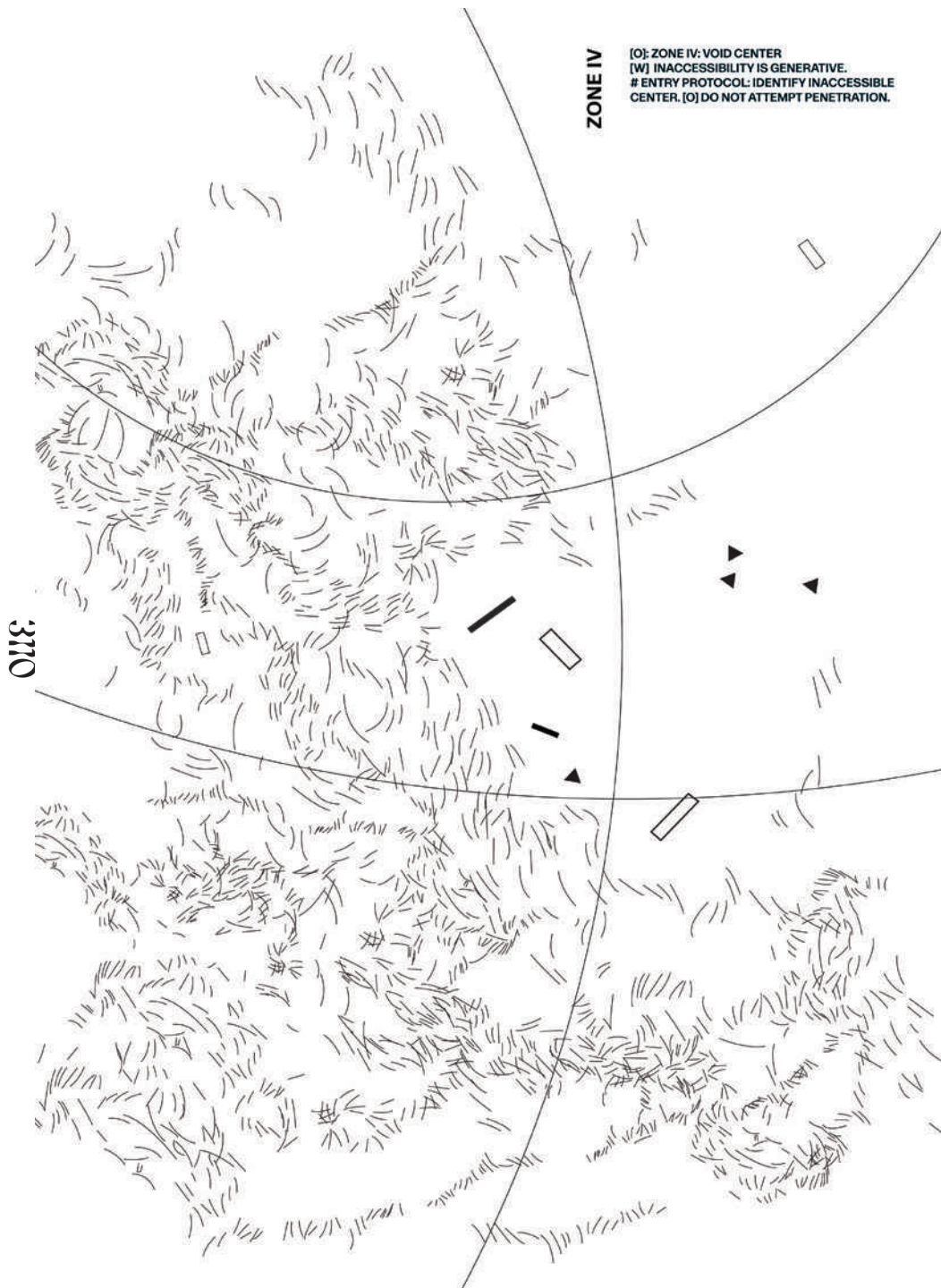
Relays emerge: temporal, thermal, atmospheric.

**WEEK 20: PROVISIONAL EQUILIBRIUM.**

Grinding settles into background vibration. Differentiated relays carry flow; constraint has become capacity.

**{T} TOTEM → R\_1{III}, OPERATIONAL-SKELETON} {T}**

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The theorem-room maintains 19.2°C. Humidity: 45% ±2%.

Three custodians rotate shifts.

[O] They never look directly at the glass enclosure. [O] To do so would collapse function from field to object.

Eyes slide past. Peripheral awareness: hyper-acute.

One reports: > I know when dust settles before I see it. > Light shifts. Energy changes.

Another: > The air feels different on Tuesdays. > Not temperature. Not humidity. Pressure. Density. Something unmeasured.

The third custodian maps sound: Footsteps approaching vs. retreating. Approaching: compressed, flattened.

Retreating: expanded, reverberant.

++ Movement vocabulary develops: ++ "tight-stepping" (compressed acoustic approach) "release-walking" (expanded acoustic retreat).

Bodies know before minds know. > Reading gravitational field through: > – visual periphery (dust, light) – haptic sensing (pressure, density) – acoustic mapping (compression, expansion).

x Three distinct methods. Never converge. x Each custodian develops different knowledge. None can access what the others know.

[O] The empty room GENERATES. [O] Not through what's IN it. > Through effect on what orbits. >

++ Knowledge accumulates at circumference, never center.

++ The inaccessible core becomes remainder– what cannot be approached directly but > shapes all approaches. >

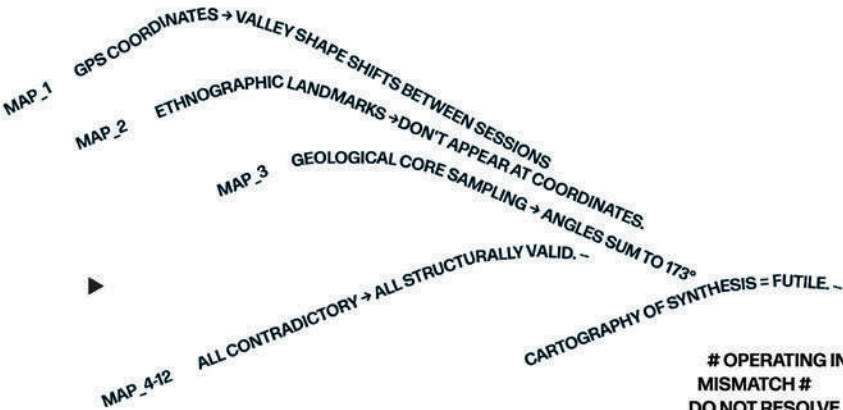
[O] The omission doesn't withhold. The omission shapes. [O]

{T} TOTEM → R\_1{IV, CIRCUMFERENTIAL-KNOWLEDGE} {T}



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VALLEY LENGTH BY GPS: \_\_\_\_\_ 14.7 KM | VALLEY LENGTH BY FOOT-COUNT: \_\_\_\_\_ 11.2 KM | VALLEY LENGTH BY THERMAL SATELLITE: \_\_\_\_\_ 18.3 KM | VALLEY LENGTH BY RESIDENT TESTIMONY: \_\_\_\_\_ "THREE HOURS, BUT IT DEPENDS" \*\* THESE ARE NOT ERRORS. IT IS INCOMMENSURABLE TRUTHS. THE VALLEY PERSISTS ACROSS MULTIPLE TOPOLOGIES AT ONCE.



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# OPERATING IN MISMATCH #  
 DO NOT RESOLVE CONTRADICTIONS--++  
 REGISTER ALL CONCURRENTLY. ++  
 OUTPUT: X PROBABILISTIC FIELD, VALLEY AS INTERFERENCE PATTERN BETWEEN INCOMPATIBLE REGIMES. X  
 USE CASE: HIKERS NAVIGATE BY / SENSING WHICH GEOMETRY IS CURRENTLY ACTIVE, / # SWITCHING REGIMES MID-TRAVERSE. #

# Regime-switch trigger: #  
 at geometric threshold (angles = 173°), |- GPS relay becomes undefined  
 |- hyperbolic terrain exceeds Euclidean operation.

# Alternative activation: #  
 |- electromagnetic -> proprioceptive |- (satellite signal to foot-count), or |- thermal -> testimony |- (heat map to spoken route).

|- Each regime = transductive relay:  
 |- GPS ≠ thermal ≠ proprioceptive ≠ testimony.

# REMAINDER #  
 Error functions as operation. Heterogeneity becomes method. Tension is modulation. Navigate by mismatch, not despite it.

/ Navigation becomes modulation between relays / as terrain oscillates across geometric states.

ZONE V

[-]: ZONE V: MAP MISMATCHING  
 [W] THE GAP BETWEEN MEASUREMENTS PRODUCES KNOWLEDGE.  
 # ENTRY PROTOCOL: BRING THREE INCOMPATIBLE MEASUREMENT METHODS.

{T} TOTEM -> R\_1{V, REGIME-SWITCHING-PROTOCOL} {T}

Jābir ibn Hayyan's 8th-century corpus (attributed) outlined systematic laboratory procedures later read as prefiguring the methodological rigor formalized as modern chemical theory by Lavoisier in 1789.

Not prediction. / Proleptic activation: / << later knowledge reaches back through conceptual infrastructure, retroactively transforming the earlier texts' operational meaning.

<<

Temporal logic: – Text written ~800 CE – Text describes acid distillation, crystallization, systematic experimentation – But text wasn't "wrong then, right later" – / Text was latent then, activated later /

++ Same material substrate. Different knowledge object. ++ Linear time confines methodology. Past locked. Texts stable. Knowledge fixed to origin. -- But / proleptic activation operates recursively / where & all timescales flourish together. &

# RUN THE PROTOCOL # ON DESCARTES, TREATISE OF MAN (~1633):

ANIMAL SPIRITS COURISING THROUGH HOLLOW NERVES, A

PNEUMATIC-HYDRAULIC PHYSIOLOGY INSIDE A DUALIST FRAME.

HISTORICAL READ: MECHANISTIC SPIRITS DRIVING MUSCULATURE.

<< RECURSIVE READ: << AN EARLY OPERATIONAL SCHEMA & RHYME FOR

ELECTROCHEMICAL SIGNALING ACROSS A NETWORK & – NO FORESIGHT CLAIMED, A

/ PROLEPTIC ACTIVATION / THAT / REFUNCTIONALIZES THE TEXT. /

LATER NEUROSCIENCE DOES NOT VINDICATE DESCARTES; IT / CHANGES WHAT HIS TEXT DOES: / ++ SAME SENTENCES, NEW OPERATIONAL OBJECT UNDER A DIFFERENT

ONTOLOGY. ++

/ The archive is temporally porous: /

8th c. /

1633 /

1789 /

2025

& co-present in a single reading act. &

# CARRIES FORWARD # ++ - STRUCTURAL SYNTAX

# LEAVES BEHIND # -- DOCTRINAL SEMANTICS

{T} TOTEM → R\_1[VI, ACTIVATED-ARCHIVE]{T}

ZONE VI

{8}: PERPETUAL LOOP

{W} ALL TIMESCALES CAN FLOURISH TOGETHER.

# ENTRY PROTOCOL: BRING CURRENT EPISTEMIC

PROBLEM. ACCESS HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

PREDATING PROBLEM. PREPARE FOR PROLEPTIC

ACTIVATION.

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**Operational Grammar—Zones • Operators • Syntax • Path**

Type	Symbols	Operations
Zones	(:) (≡) (⊕) (∅) (≈) (∞)	Fracture • Ruins • Grid • Void • Mismatch • Loop
Operators (atmospheric)	(∇) (∂) (§)	Gradient (pressure), modulation (local), boundary (threshold)
Operators (relational)	(⊥) (×) (∩)	Relay (couple unlike), interference (collision), liaison (overlap)
Operators (temporal)	(f) (∪) (†)	Accumulation (trace), recursion (return), incision (cut)
Syntax	(A→B) • (A\$B) • (A⊥B) • (A×B) • (A∩B) • (A∪B)	Move • cross • relay • collide • intersect • return
Path	(:) → (≡) → (⊕) ∩ (∅) × (≈) ∪ (∞) → (:) )	Canonical: sequential through all zones, must pass through Void, exit via Loop. Variants: any zone as entry; skip couples distant zones; diagonal cuts through Void as passage not destination; orbital makes periodic returns to Void; doubled or tripled staggers or converges as spikes. Tuning: steep gradient with multiple collisions condenses new patterns; shallow gradient with few collisions refines; recursion folds time; accumulation carries motifs forward.

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## Epistemic Weather: Toward Poetics-Logic

When procedures that learn by leaking propagate across domains, when liaisons run long enough to generate residues, when constraint-modulation recruits multiple sites, distributed pressure-fields emerge, conditioning entire operational terrains. Epistemic weather names this emergence: the atmospheric medium arising when rules placed in field conditions yield elements beyond themselves. Logic, encountering material friction, temporal drift, and bodily exhaustion, produces latency, hesitation, wear—the unseeable void governing what becomes visible. These yielded remainders are not system failures but productive excess. Poetics-Logic is the intelligence that modulates these remainders, treating what logic cannot account for as a compositional resource. This is operational poetics: it operates as narrative but not through plot progression; as poetics but not as an expressive supplement; as logic but not as pure formalisation. It is weather that thinks—epistemology conditioned through pressure-field modulation rather than representational grasp.

Distributed pressure-fields condense when fracture, collapse, constraint, opacity, misalignment, and recurrence operate simultaneously across machinic, ecological, and affective systems. These forces function as atmospheric conditions that shape which forms of knowledge become possible. The six zones name characteristic fronts where such pressures intensify; the liaisons compose the winds that carry disturbances across domains. Epistemic weather is the operative medium; thinking happens as weather modulation.

Such conditions necessitate reconceptualising systematic operation beyond cybernetic models that track inputs, outputs, and feedback loops. Where feedback diagrams relations, pressure-field conditioning installs gradients and thresholds that prefigure

events. Epistemic weather operates through pressures, densities, and turbulence patterns that exceed mechanistic causation. A rule does not simply regulate behaviour; it creates conditioning effects determining which forms of compliance, deviation, and exhaustion become possible. In Giannotti's operational scheme, the rule-set functions as a tempo-turbulence dial. It creates zones of differential pressure where rhythms adjust according to field intensities, producing intelligence through ongoing differentials instead of cognitive mastery.

In this sense, Poetics-Logic can equally be read as theory-fiction, forming climates where rules generate conditions rather than narratives. This hyphenated concept sustains productive tension. The procedures remain operative whether engaging machinic systems, institutional arrangements, or aesthetic practices.

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*Quad* demonstrates Poetics-Logic under specific conditions generated by television's constraints: unforgiving frame, mechanical temporality, broadcast rhythm indifferent to exhaustion. The performers do not interpret rules but navigate the field those rules generate. Their fatigue is not deviation; it is part of the atmospheric dynamic. Exhaustion is not a measurement instrument but how the field registers its own variations. What appears as depletion operates as information about the specific gravity of the rule-field, the systems behind our backs.

This differs systematically from narrative logic, which metabolises anomaly as plot development heading toward determination. In this dynamic terrain, resolution is deferred; density accumulates. Where narrative logic treats anomalies as problems demanding closure, Poetics-Logic maintains leakage as a generative condition; the leak is not solved but stays open as an ongoing source of variants. When performers stumble, when timing

drifts, when attention falters, these variables layer atmosphere. They become weather rather than incident, generating speculative density rather than determined narrative meaning.

The field's accumulation of history operates not only as memory but as atmospheric stratification. Each traversal leaves traces that modify not rules themselves but the pressure-field conditions under which those rules operate. Knowledge here is not about systems but about systemic endurance—the capacity to maintain navigation under pressures exceeding comprehensive understanding. Knowledge exists as specific pressure signatures enabling particular modes of thought rather than propositional content about objects.

This site-specific operation generates irreducible local variation. Each installation of Poetics-Logic mutates through contact with local conditions while maintaining methodological consistency. The method does not replicate across contexts like a stable formula but infects new sites, carrying its operational grammar of constraint-design and remainder-generation into altered terrain. Because the method adapts to local conditions rather than imposing uniform procedures, it demands particular forms of literacy.

Working within epistemic weather requires developing two interconnected competencies. Pressure-field literacy: read differential intensities as compositional material; convert errors in one domain into affordances in another. Remainder sensitivity: treat atmospheric disturbances as structural possibilities rather than problems requiring resolution. What appears as a leak, lag, or mismatch in one register functions as passage into another; ontological incommensurability generates navigational capacity precisely through refusing coherence. The method constructs through error, composes through fragmentation, builds with what

will not resolve.

These competencies develop through prolonged exposure rather than theoretical acquisition. To be weathered is to gain pressure-field literacy through staying with live contradiction. Like meteorological sensitivity developed through living in weather systems, they require extended inhabitation of tension, and attention to their variations. They constitute climatic intelligence: the capacity to orient and endure within conditions that exceed cognitive mapping while remaining responsive to navigational possibilities and capable of returning altered.

### **Recursive Traversal: Holding What Remains Open**

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After crossing fractured terrains and metabolising collapse, this inquiry has returned to its own threshold. The question that lingers: how can such an apparatus avoid hardening again into a totalising frame? The only durable answer lies in a working habit called holding the remainder open.

This refusal is less ethical stance than operational requirement. Knowledge grows at the gap between action and thought. When the apparatus throws off residues—fatigue spikes, brief hesitations, stray latency—these are not defects but necessary excesses that prevent the mechanism from sealing itself. Error functions as a resource.

Caron's model insists on maintaining this tension. Real abstraction lives first in material practice before thought names it. Yet becomes thinkable only through mediation within the space of reasons. The gap between enactment and comprehension cannot

be erased without losing the very insight that makes it alive. Collapse pattern into pure norm and the Given returns; detach norms from practice and abstraction loses its purchase. Caron's strength lies in holding both forces without resolution.

Holding the remainder open is a method, not a theme. The six-zone apparatus values its own opacity; silence becomes procedural. A system that accounts for everything calcifies, so the apparatus must preserve what it cannot fully articulate. Opacity is not failure—it shelters still-forming thought.

The work asks for staying-with pressure until fatigue accumulates into matter. At times, the field generates more than can be processed; sites speak through friction instead of compliance.

Remainder collects like dust, eventually dense enough to pull thought back toward its own limits. Yet, this is diagnostic instead of phenomenological. Remainder operates both as a condition and as a material. Exhaustion first marks the constrained field, then becomes the medium of continuation.

Across this project, the notion of remainders shadow every synthesis. Simondon names this in terms of individuation's "overflow" of preindividual being<sup>5</sup>—a reminder that every formation is shadowed by what it cannot absorb. Yet this is not simply philosophical

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5 Gilbert Simondon treats the preindividual as a metastable field of not-yet-structured potentials and tensions that precedes and exceeds any individual; individuation proceeds by transduction, and the formed individual retains a "preindividual charge" that grounds further individuation and the transindividual. See: Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

residue; it is the generative condition through which construction renews itself. Reading with Parisi: treat remainder as the immanent incomputable<sup>6</sup>—random, incompressible data that algorithmsprehend and that generate new computational actualities. To keep the remainder open is to refuse any claim to closure, to sustain what Glissant calls the productive opacity of relation, “not enclosure within autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity”;<sup>7</sup> where the Other persists as Other, unassimilated.

This returns to Caron’s displacement of epistemology from the Given to operation. Both empiricism and rationalism collapse before real abstraction’s split nature, at once material and conceptual. *Quad* demonstrated this: bodies computing through depletion, rules revealing contradiction, an absent centre organising by repulsion. There is no clean method but a field of paradoxes sustaining itself until form condenses from fatigue.

The end, if it exists, is a walk toward futures not yet charted. Mode of Liaisons proposes not a solution but a productive inhabitation of the transmission problem. Instead of finalising knowledge, it works at thresholds where domains leak into each other. Knowledge remains in recursive liaison; Poetics-Logic endures as apparatus in motion, never mastered. Refusing closure ensures thought remains capable of surprise.

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6 Luciana Parisi treats the incomputable as an immanent surplus internal to algorithmic processing, whereby randomness and incompressibility are not external limits but generative of new computational actualities beyond programmed instruction. See: Luciana Parisi, “Instrumental Reason, Algorithmic Capitalism, and the Incomputable”, in *Alleys of Your Mind*, ed. Matteo Pasquinelli (meson press, 2015).

7 Édouard Glissant names a right to opacity that sustains relation without reductive transparency: “not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity”. See: Édouard Glissant, “For Opacity”, in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

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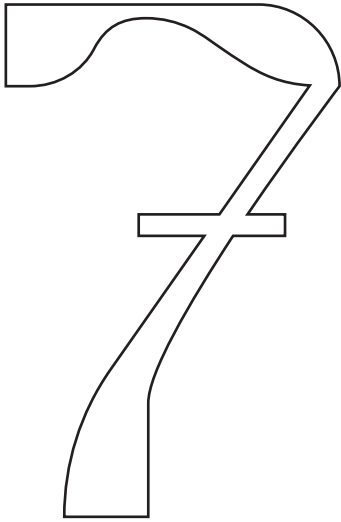
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Under the Spell  
of Circular  
Movements:  
The Beginning  
of the End in  
Philosophy  
and Madness

**WOUTER KUSTERS**

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I will simply begin here and now. Where and when else? So I will also begin *in* the here and now, and think *from* the here and now. I take the here-and-now as the starting point for my investigation into philosophy and madness and their mutual relationship. And from the here- and-now, I will make four attempts to reach the distant ends of philosophy and madness, there-and-then. First, I will make a parodic attempt on psychiatric discourse to unveil *and* veil the secrets of madness, after which I will, secondly, venture a poetic-mystical attempt to say something of a philosophical and mad nature. Thirdly, I will delve into history and autobiography with the help of an ironic narrative circular movement. After these three attempts from the perspectives of psychiatry, poetry and narrativity, I will make a fourth attempt in a paradoxical and self-referential manner and proclaim four firm propositions about philosophy and madness.

### Parodic Attempt

Here I discuss some research data on experiences of reality and reality distortion in the spectrum of psychotic disorders. Led by leading brain scientists Longonoso and Fulmocchi, an interdisciplinary research group in Turin operates in the challenging borderland between crypto-phenomenology, schizoanalysis, *trans-cranial engineering and folli-logi(c)a*, Italian for what we would call *mad studies or folly logics*. Their research focuses on what is known as “disturbed sense of reality” or, in DSM-V terms, diminished reality experience syndrome (DRES). We know that people on the schizophrenic spectrum are not present, or only to a very limited extent, in everyday reality. Their lack of a sense of reality is described in various ways in the literature: as a disorder

in a so-called “minimal self”;<sup>1</sup> as an impaired or fragmented *feeling of being*;<sup>2</sup> or as the rejection of the so-called reality principle (in much psychoanalytical literature). Such terms correspond to what most schizophrenics sooner or later, often reluctantly, have to admit after phenomenological assessments, namely that they lack an essential sense of vital contact with the here and now.<sup>3</sup> They are less present in the present and give a strong impression of absence or “non-being” to others.<sup>4</sup>

What Longonoso and Fulmocchi have now demonstrated is that in the cerebellum there is a cluster of neurons that is barely visible to the naked eye but extremely important for daily functioning, where all our sense of reality resides. They describe this in their much-discussed research article “Crossing the Frontiers of the Brain and Discovering Earth, Wind and Fire”. It is this neurological correlate of our deepest sense of reality that functions well in normal people but is severely disrupted in schizophrenics with DRES. The researchers aptly call the nerve cells involved *reality neurons*. If these do not function properly, you lose that simple but oh-so-important sense of “existence”, and you no longer know that everything is “real”. The expectation in Turin is that the *meme* of these *reality neurons* will become even more popular and will have an even greater impact on reality than the earlier theory of *mirror neurons* from the competing city of Parma.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (MIT Press, 2008); Thomas Fuchs, “Phenomenology and Psychopathology”, in *Handbook of Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. S. Gallagher and D. Schmicking (Springer, 2010).
  - 2 Matthew Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
  - 3 Cf. Eugène Minkowski, *Le temps vécu* (Quadrige, 1933).
  - 4 Cf. the praecox feeling as described by Rümke.
  - 5 Cf. Giacomo Rizzolatti, Luciano Fadiga, Vittorio Gallese and Leonardo Fogassi, “Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions”, *Cognitive Brain Research* 3 (1996): 131–141.

For psychiatry, the Turin findings are a tremendous breakthrough. Finally, we can show our patients that they are truly not present in reality. With these research data, we can also show them that their absence is due to their brains, which means that they cannot help it and do not need to be ashamed of it. Their unreality is simply hard-wired into their actual brains, which is something they cannot escape, regardless of whether they accept our explanation or not.

However, the Italian studies have also revealed that there remains a small but stubborn group of patients who are robustly resistant to our research data; they cannot be convinced of their own unreality. Their neurology shows convincingly that they do not exist, their brains show no sign of presence, yet these patients insist that they do exist. We put our tongues and other sensors deeply into cheeks when we murmur that these people dress themselves in DRES. But the tragedy remains that even when we offer them supportive reality by promoting compulsory medication or when we urge isolation in one of our care units, their illusions of existence seem indestructible. Longonoso and Fulmocchi say the following about this difficult group of patients:

“Some of these mad persons stick desperately but consistently to the claim that they *really exist* [all italics in original, W. K.]. However, we have clear and straightforward neurological evidence that these persons *do simply not exist* in their brain as such. Therefore, when these people claim to really exist, we can draw no other conclusion than that they only *think* they exist, they only *pretend* to exist. The great tragedy of schizophrenia is that these poor DRES patients *want to believe* in [dress up in, W. K] something that

will never be proven, namely their own existence.”<sup>6</sup>

The most important question posed by Longonoso and Fulmocchi with regard to this subgroup is: how do patients with such a serious disorder manage to pretend that they exist, given their nonperception of reality? To find out, Longonoso and Fulmocchi have developed new techniques, which fall under the broad heading of “deep soul stimulation” (see below). These techniques appear to be very effective in this patient population. Longonoso and Fulmocchi say the following about this:

“With the help of recently developed deep soul stimulation (DSS) techniques such as non-local neuro-mind tracking and hypno-induced trans-seductive mnemotechniques, we have reached new unexpected territories. We have surpassed all traditional neurological limits and we have even crossed the frontiers of the neo-cortex and the whole brain. And after stepping outside the hardware of the skull, we traversed through a field of hair-splitting problems to finally discover a brave new world ‘out there’.”<sup>7</sup>

With these latest findings the boundaries of traditional brain research have been crossed and we have entered an extra-cranial zone, beyond parody. Outside the skull, everything begins anew, and we must start again from scratch. We leave the brain and its fanatics behind and search for a fresh new beginning, in the

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6 Longonoso, Leo, and Felicia Fulmocchi, “Crossing the Frontiers of the Brain and Discovering Earth, Wind and Fire”, in *Explorations in Deep Soul Stimulation Technologies IV: The Case of Trans-Seductive Mnemo-Techniques*, ed. K. Kastanjekruik et al (New Grail Studies, 2016).

7 Ibid., 84.

brave new world where we seek a new starting point from where to explore philosophy and madness.

### **Poetic Preamble**

But where can that beginning be, and how do you get there? From what starting point can we begin to search for the beginning? And once you have reached that beginning, how do you get away from it again? How could we then move from such a beginning towards philosophy and madness and distinguish between them? How do we reach philosophical landscapes, those worlds of wonder, bewilderment and madness?

One thing is certain. As long as we continue to hesitate and procrastinate at the beginning, we will not get there. A *leap* is needed to get outside the mirror worlds of ourselves.

Or a psychiatric, well-defined case, then we have data that speak for themselves and a foothold in reality, which creates identities and enables narratives with names and surnames, beginning and end.

Or perhaps not a case, not a leap, not a path or access route, but a meta-leap or meta-path, a 'meth-od' for responsibly choosing the right path from all possible access routes.

Or we redefine the situation and give our standstill at the starting point a different name. We call it 'blocked desire', then we identify and destroy the blockages, and then let the desire flow freely.

Or we create blockages, call them ‘symbolic forms’ or ‘linguistic elements’ in order to express the inexpressible beginning of philosophy and madness in a first word, and many subsequent ones, in order to get the flow of words going. And then, given the possibility of a conceivable first word, a first act of symbolisation, we explore the area where those same symbolisations are up for discussion.

Or we murmur something about an irreducible great Other, unattainable, but with the spoken word giving clues as to where to look for it.

Or we wait for a tiny stimulus of whatever kind, something that awakens us from our pre-philosophical slumber, our complacent state of mind, the smallest signal from outside. Without such a stimulus or initial spark, there is no drive, no energy conversion, and nothing gets off the ground. Then we would never reach the bird’s-eye view, and we would not understand the castles in the air.

Or we call the beginning a problematic situation. And then we let the problem branch out itself, rhizomatically, ecologically responsibly, and generate ideas. Then we reject the temptation of the bird’s-eye view. Then we choose not the air but the churned earth, the trenches and the mole, which goes its way underground.

Philosophy and madness: self-generative and self-referential; self-contained.

Philosophy and madness: always fleeing to the other, the further, the incessant, rolled out of itself.

And forever banging on the doors of the isolation cell to be let in,  
or rather, left out.

As if you kept staring into a mirror, watching yourself for so long  
until you catch yourself being absent.

As if you remained awake, and want to remain awake, always, in  
order to penetrate ever deeper into the light of the night.

As if you could see through broken eyes.

As if you could catch a glimpse through a crack.

As if you could shake off the night, the dark, to let the light come  
in.

The renowned philosopher, classicist and expert in pre-Socratic  
philosophy, Peter Kingsley, writes in his book *Reality*:

“First, madness must be experienced, and then mastered. This implies discovering all kinds of health, ways to operate skilfully in the world [...] If you are controlled by madness, you are weak. Those who are controlled by health are even weaker. But when you have become so mad that you are willing to leave the purity of your madness behind, then the memory of your madness—preserved in every cell of your body—will prevent you from ever being tainted by health again.

This is what it means to live in two worlds and be limited by neither.”<sup>8</sup>

As if there were two worlds, and not one, or four, or 23, or an infinite number.

As if the as-if world, the veil of text and signs, dissolved, and everything could truly become what it is.

As if reality could ever become truly real.

But you understand, these are only suggestive, quasi-mystical considerations and poetic allusions. Everything is only figurative. Everything is as if it could be, even if you don't speak.

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### Narrative sources

Therefore, away with all poetry and mysticism. Otherwise, this story will fall apart into loose sand and remain poetically free-floating, consisting of unhindered images. And then it is no longer philosophy but falls back into paradox, parody and ultimately madness. And then the madness is thrown down unreflectively, smeared on the canvas, without reflection and mediation by understanding, intellect and reason. No, it cannot go on like this, because we demand more from philosophy than a vivid presentation of *the real thing*, more than a re-experience or metaphorical transfer of psychotic fragments. In philosophy, we want

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<sup>8</sup> Peter, Kingsley, *Reality* (The Golden Sufi Centre, 2003), 448.

the one, seen through, plus the whole around it, thought through,  
*hen kai pan*, one and all.

There is already a madman, who already knows, who can shout whatever he wants, but it is still madness. There is also already a psychiatrist, who has a practice, a professional profile and a social mission. There is also already a poet, who has the words and finds his words sufficient. But we, philosophers, are not there yet. We want more—and we have less. We base ourselves on nothing. That is why we must manoeuvre carefully: treat our themes with caution and not rush straight towards our goal. Self-critical and thoughtful, we choose a slow, deliberate approach. For a good philosopher, the path to madness is neither the most travelled main road nor the golden mean but the detour. And the most appropriate movement for this is the so-called “circular movement”. Before we really get started with philosophy and madness below, first a short story about my earliest memory of the circular movement.

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The year was 1974 and there was only television and radio. If you wanted to listen to a piece of music, a story or a speech several times, you had to buy the long-playing record, the LP. One of my favourite LPs from that time was about Pipo the Clown, and that LP also featured the life story of Klukkluk the Indian, an iconic character from that era.

This story about Klukkluk has marked my life. After my traumatic admission to a psychiatric institution in 2007, and after my successful escape from the discursive and medicinal stranglehold of psychiatry in 2008, I spent some time in a recovery group, also inspired by Tyler Durden’s investigations in the movie *Fight Club*. Under the leadership of a spiritual counsellor, a certain Kristel Kastanjekruik, we learned how to reach deeper layers in

our own confused, chaotic lives and discover invisible patterns. Kastanjekruik was one of the first in the Netherlands to apply the hypno-induced trans-seductive mnemo technique to severe psychoses. Thanks to her *deep soul stimulation*, some archetypal ground frequencies started moving towards an impersonal level of unreality. And then, after a few sessions of unsuccessfully tuning into trans-marginal zones, a trauma suddenly emerged in me, accompanied by a repressed narrative, foaming at the mouth and shocking. It felt like a kind of birth or, rather, a self-birth or a rebirth. Finally, I learned who I really was, and that I really was, my deepest soul. Thanks to the hypno-induced trans-seductive mnemo technique, I received a story, a recovery story with a beginning and an end.

Anyone who has a story counts. With a story of recovery, you can run away with yourself. Without a story, you are nothing, even less than real, under-dressed. Unrealistically hanging around, no foothold, floating from one pipe dream to another. Not in the world, but strayed from the world, ascended, floated away. No, that is no longer possible, no longer allowed. Create a story, say what is real and say what is not real, and firmly state your recovery, because you must express yourself. You have to say something, something real. You have to answer and justify yourself.

So tell us what's going on with you! Tell us how it is! In your own words, openly and honestly, go on, tell us, the real story, inform us how it really was for you. Reality, the most dangerous, seductive and numbing drug in unreality.

## The Story of Klukkluk

Klukkluk lived with his father and mother and his brothers and sisters on the prairie in a wigwam. Klukkluk's mother gathered berries and roots, and his father occasionally went hunting for deer. When Klukkluk was eight years old, he was allowed to go hunting with his father for the first time. It would be his first and last hunting trip.

Early in the morning, when the sun cast its first rays over the prairie, Klukkluk senior set off with Klukkluk junior by his side. Both armed with bows and arrows, big and small, and both wearing a feather on their heads, they went in search of the bear. After a long search, Father Klukkluk stopped. He pointed into the distance, Klukkluk looked in the direction his father was pointing, and saw something moving. When he looked closely, he saw that it was a bear, unsuspectingly sniffing around. Whispering softly, because the wind carries far on the prairie, Father Klukkluk told Klukkluk Junior what he had to do.

“Klukkluk, you must get behind the bear. When you get behind him, make the sound of a hissing snake. When the bear gets scared, he will run away and come towards me. I will hide here and shoot him with my bow and arrow. Then you come back and together we will drag the bear to your mother, and tonight we will have a big Indian feast.”

“Yes, but father, how do I get behind the bear?”

“Klukkluk, you make a very large circular movement,” as Father said this, he drew a semicircle in the air with his hand, and con-

tinued, “but Klukkluk, be careful not to get too close to the bear, make a wide turn around him, keep an eye on him, but don’t let him see or hear you.”

“... don’t let him see you or hear you,” those would be the last words Klukkluk would hear his father say.

We know the saying about the bear, if only from the film *The Big Lebowski*, where at one point the sheriff says to Lebowski: “Either you eat the bear, or the bear eats you.” And at this point in the story, we might expect the bad ending to be that father would be eaten by the bear. This would give us a fine Freudian myth about patricide and the beginning of a sketch of a semi-Oedipal developmental history, in which, within a dreamlike narrative setting of an animalistic bear orgy or human lynching, there is room for an elaboration of madness. But that would be another story. Because there was no patricide at Klukkluk in the 1970s. Other stories were circulating at the time, more poignant and profound.

Klukkluk followed his father’s instructions. He walked counter-clockwise and tried to draw a giant semicircle in his movement around the bear. And Klukkluk walked and walked and walked. And he went even further. One foot after the other. Quietly and carefully, that little boy with the feather on his head. Pre-programmed by his father: “Think of the bear, keep his image in mind, but don’t show yourself, take a detour.” And Klukkluk walked and walked and walked. And we walked and walked and walked. Here and now, and there and then, and always, it is already time. Walked on in our minds. Look at him walking, look at them walking, look at us walking, poor souls, the hopeful and the desperate, the runners and the imperturbable, back and forth, from pillar to post, from one chair dance to another.

And the sun went down, night fell. And Klukkluk walked through the darkness of the night. And he walked, with only one goal, to make a circular movement, to take up position on the other side of the bear. And he walked through the night and passed the deepest point of the night, just walking into the next day. And he walked even further. He walked past himself, he walked off the prairie and walked out of the story.

Then the story was over, but the LP was not. We children, glued to the gramophone's loudspeaker, could hear Klukkluk's footsteps on the grass, the twigs and the branches. In the background, you could hear the natural sounds of the birds, the insects and the wind on the prairie. But slowly, gradually, these sounds faded away as Klukkluk left the realm of nature and myth. He walked away from the repertoire of exciting Indian stories and arrived in our own sobering everyday world of the here and now, where the prairie can only exist far away, hidden in thoughts and poems. The LP slowly began to play more background noise. Less nature, more culture: snippets of human conversation, laughter, giggles, a snarl, a cry. Sounds of the city, of the street, cars and modern real life.

By now, Klukkluk understood that he had lost his way somewhere and that he would no longer catch the bear. He tried to adapt to his new environment with the knowledge and skills he had acquired in his early childhood. But wearing Native American attributes such as feathers, arrows and bows was forbidden in the city, and there was little else to remind him of the prairie. The only familiar place where there was still something natural was the city park. There Klukkluk saw a large tent, where he met Pipo. Pipo offered him a replacement home and a job at the circus.

And the bear? He was trapped in a cage. Klukkluk was certainly not unhappy; he had food and drink and a friendly circus audience. But every night, Klukkluk dreamed of getting behind the bear and scaring him. But when he woke up from his dream, he saw only Pipo's joker clown face and realised that his dreams would never be the same again.

Klukkluk understood that his initiation ritual into adulthood had, in a sense, been successful, precisely because he had been removed from the prairie, separated, individualised and modernised. And he did realise that the paradise of pure immediacy was lost forever, if it had ever really existed. He was now allowed to participate, to get to work, as a productive member of the Prairie-Forget-Association. And the prairie became nothing more than a memory of an event that had never taken place, a secret unspeakable promise, a delusion, a compressed medium or membrane between dream and reality.

We, philosophers and madmen, want to explore the prairie again, map it, capture it in words, images and concepts, go bear hunting again. But every method we devise, every path we walk, every theory we work out, leads us via a long detour to the circus, to the jugglers, the magicians, the snake charmers, the fire-eaters, the clowning—and the madhouse.

## Four Propositions

With this Native American story, I have made a wide detour, but once again I have overshot the mark. I started too quickly, went too far, overshot my goal and strayed from what it was all about in the first place. So let's go back to the very beginning once more. Let's start again, behave in a philosophically exemplary manner and refrain from using seductive poetic images or compelling Native American stories. Let's pay close attention to our words and thoughts, otherwise we will lose ourselves in them.

It is customary in philosophy to begin with a quotation. So here is a quotation from Hegel. According to many, Hegel's work encompasses, penetrates and reflects on both the beginning and the end of philosophy. At the beginning of his book *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel says the following about the question of "how to make a beginning":

"The difficulty of making a beginning arises simultaneously with the beginning, since a beginning, as something immediate, brings with it its own presuppositions, or rather, is itself already a presupposition."<sup>9</sup>

This quote makes us think about the beginning. But before we start there, let's pause for a moment. Why should we actually start with a nineteenth-century German philosopher? Philosophy as a discipline has much deeper roots. Long before our era,

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9 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences I* (Cambridge University Press, 2015 [1830]), 41.

Greek philosophers contemplated the truth. It has been said that all philosophy consists of footnotes to Plato, so shouldn't we go back to Plato? Or even further back? To Empedocles, Parmenides, or Pythagoras, as Peter Kingsley argues? Or instead of going back in time, shouldn't we move forward? Shouldn't we start with the more current philosophy, such as that of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze? After all, Deleuze turned the whole of philosophy upside down, gave it a dizzying twist and thus made a new beginning. Admittedly, Deleuze's philosophy is one of the middle, but it was precisely from the middle of that middle that he wanted to make a new beginning. In the middle of his book *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says the following about the beginning:

“The problem of the beginning has always been rightly regarded as a precarious issue in philosophy. For to begin means to remove all presuppositions [...] [I]t is assumed that everyone, without concept, knows what self, thinking, and being mean. The pure self of I think therefore seems only a beginning because it has referred all its presuppositions to the empirical self [...] One can deduce from this that there is no real beginning in philosophy, or rather, that the real philosophical beginning, in other words the Difference, is in itself already Repetition. But this formulation, and the reference to philosophy as a circle, are subject to so many interpretations that we cannot be careful enough.”<sup>10</sup>

But isn't Deleuze's repeating circle the same as the form of Kluk-kluk's circling movement in the narrative expression of an In-

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10 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (Athlone Press, 1994 [1968]), 169.

dian story? And didn't I already understand that when I was eight years old, captivated by the circling movement? We have only just begun with a new beginning, and already the interpretations are running wild. Philosophy and madness, no use trying. When does it really begin? We are now more than halfway through this text, and the reader may wonder whether the exposition has already begun or whether these are still preparatory hesitations. But in fact, the hesitations, the postponement of the beginning and the doubt about the possibility of finding the beginning were, ironically and paradoxically, the beginning itself, and what preceded was an implicit example of my four propositions on the relationship between philosophy and madness. The first one is:

### **Proposition One: Contemplation and Preoccupation**

- 1) *Philosophy and madness share the same persistent obsession with the beginning, an ultimate origin or first principle, whereby the mad variant of philosophical contemplation is called "pre-occupation".*

Reflecting on where you are; not immediately moving on in practice; turning around and looking into the distance that appears as depth. Stepping out of the flow of everyday life and turning inward to find yourself. Philosophers and madmen are those who start over and over again and just can't get going. Hesitating a little longer, inserting something else, another preliminary consideration, a foreword, an introduction, an announcement, a line of poetry or a quote—ad nauseam.

## Proposition Two: Reflection and Hyperreflection

Now that we have finally made a good start and are in the middle of it, we can move straight on to the second proposition:

2) *Philosophy and madness both involve a high degree of reflection, whereby the mad variant of philosophical reflection is called “hyperreflection”.*

Hyperreflection is a more intense and socially less appropriate form of reflection. Philosophical reflection has a transparent form and provides clear examples of how thinking should proceed. This reflection has a stable focus on a well-defined theme. But with hyperreflection, the focus does not remain on a single, fixed theme; instead, thinking expands across the entire experience, seemingly unmotivated and boundless. The terms hyperreflection and hyperreflexivity originate from the phenomenological-psychiatric literature of early twentieth-century German phenomenology. The American phenomenologist Louis Sass has revived these terms and describes them as follows:<sup>11</sup> “Hyperreflexivity refers to a kind of exaggerated self-consciousness, a tendency toward objectifying attention that focuses on processes and phenomena that one normally experiences as part of oneself.”

Philosophical reflection relies to a considerable extent on the authority of other philosophers, when Hegel, Deleuze, Plato, Adorno, or Wittgenstein are cited, or else on the authority of a particular logical or argumentative form. Philosophical concepts

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11 Louis A. Sass, “Negative Symptoms’, Schizophrenia, and the Self”, *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy* 3, no. 2 (2003): 156.

have a certain stability and are based on the habits and customs within an (imaginary) community of philosophers. Philosophical reflection is explicitly or implicitly linked to the interests and demands of a community. It often reflects the values and thoughts of a community and attempts to elevate and legitimize them to a higher level. Mad hyperreflection is essentially anti-social and anti-worldly. When ordinary philosophical reflection is critical of a community, that criticism is always aimed at improving or changing that community or, if necessary, at founding a new community. In philosophical reflection, there is usually a certain distance between the philosopher as a person on the one hand and the theme being reflected upon on the other. Philosophical reflection is thinking about something other than the real, concrete thinker himself.

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Mad hyperreflection has in common with philosophical reflection that both revolve around major themes such as finitude and infinity, the one and the whole, free will and consciousness. In philosophical reflection, these remain subjects of thought, analysis, contemplation, and text for the sake of text. Schelling calls this “negative philosophy” because it is only criticism at the level of thought and real reality is never achieved. In mad hyperreflection, however, thought comes to life, empty concepts become full reality. Something is posited, created, and elaborated in a macabre way, beyond morality and community. Schelling would call this positive philosophy. The Buddhist psychiatrist Edvard Podvoll vividly describes this as follows when he talks about Michaux and other madmen and mescaline users:<sup>12</sup> “Everything in the mind multiplies: by forming clones, branching out into endless varieties of itself, without ever tiring, producing a jungle of new types of thoughts,

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12 Edward Podvoll, *The Seduction of Madness: Revolutionary Insights into the World of Psychosis and a Compassionate Approach to Recovery at Home* (HarperCollins, 1990), 190.

an insatiable evolution that fills the whole world.”

In hyperreflection, the reflection immediately rebounds on the person reflecting, disrupting them, but also prompting them to further disruption. Consciousness and thinking are affected, shut down, bent, and twisted by that same hyperreflective consciousness and thinking. Hyperreflection consists of intense doubt about the nature and meaning of phenomena in the world, as well as about the form and meaning of words about that world. Hyperreflection usually leads to self-referential frenzy or to cognitive disengagement—also referred to as “flight of ideas” in older psychiatric literature. This manifests itself as associations of thoughts and language without any fixed basis or principle and without end or purpose. In hyperreflection, the thinker can hardly keep up with the reflection, let alone report on it in a way that is understandable to others. Hyperreflection has no thematic constancy, object constancy, or conceptual constancy. Unlike philosophical language, the language of hyperreflection does not rest in a supporting community of like-minded and well-meaning people.

Hyperreflection cannot be confined or embedded. It originates from a transparent starting point and takes on a fluid substance. It emanates, flows over, and floods the land, the fields, and the houses. Shelters, churches, and shops are swept away. It goes from A to B to C to D; simultaneously from A to A1 to A2 to A3 and A4; and from A to E to I to O to U. Alpha, beta, gamma succumb in the delta, on their way to the oceanic and tsunamic. Or it evaporates from the sizzling starting point, alpha-alpha, circles around it in circles, then in wider circles, ever-expanding circumferential movements, in wider orbits, around the earth until it fans out like a spiral with a radius directed towards infinity, the big bear and the little bear. Or it arises from that glowing, glimmering starting point, and in a flash, it explodes. It sets itself ablaze, leaving itself

scorched behind. Like a devilish, soulless Turing machine, it conquers and fills the entire world. Only the hypno-induced trans-sexual mnemonic technique of Kristel Kastanjekruik may offer counterbalance here.

### Proposition Three: Wonder and Perplexity

My third proposition is:

- 3) *Philosophy and madness both revolve around the mystery of wonder, whereby the mad variant of philosophical wonder is called “perplexity”.*

It is often said that philosophy begins with wonder. In one of his dialogues, Plato has Theaetetus say:<sup>13</sup> “By the gods, Socrates, when I think about these things, I am lost in wonder, and sometimes when I ponder them, it leaves my mind in confusion.” Plato then has Socrates make the famous statement: “This feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, for wonder is the only beginning of philosophy [...]” This philosophical wonder has a complex history, sometimes buried under systems and ingrained ways of expressing and imagining. But in the background, it remains the driving force behind philosophy. The Dutch philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven says succinctly in his *Inleiding tot de verwondering* (Introduction to Wonder):<sup>14</sup> “The whole of philosophy and its history lies in a large circle around the loose emptiness of wonder.” Philosophical wonder is the flip side of philosophical reflection.

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13 Plato, “Theaetetus”, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. H. N. Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1982): 155c-d.

14 Cornelis Verhoeven, *Filosofie van de verwondering* (Ambo, 1967), 12.

Philosophical wonder tends towards pause, contemplation, and consideration. Wonder precedes language and its concepts and reasoning. Wonder has an indefinite intuition of unity and, at the same time, of totality and infinity, *hen kai pan*, one and all. According to Verhoeven, it revolves around a loose emptiness; you could also say that it revolves around an indescribable point, where you start over and over again and stray from; or around the wonder of existence, of the world, yourself, and the whole of the world and yourself. The image of wonder here is that of a point that rhythmically expands and contracts, from a point to a circle or sphere and back to a point.

The mad variant of wonder is rapture, bewilderment, or “perplexity” as it is called in psychiatric literature. This differs from wonder in that it is both more intense and less socially acceptable. In perplexity, there is no free position, no time or place left to take a stance towards wonder. You cannot escape it; perplexity does not exist outside yourself but breaks through the supposed distinction between inside and outside. In rapture, you are torn away from the here and now, and at the same time, paradoxically, you are fully present in that one point of obsession and concentration. In bewilderment, you have lost your way. In mad perplexity, wonder has become excessive or “derailed”, leading to an urgent state of panic, without it becoming clear “what is going on”. Philosophical wonder leads to philosophical reflections and profound dialogues. Mad perplexity leads to insane stammering and monologues that seem confused to outsiders.

There are various ways to deal with the inexpressible point of philosophical wonder and mad perplexity. You can forget it, conceal it, suppress it, and move on to the order of the day. But of course, you can also try to push your point through with rage and fury. Then you run the risk of being diagnosed as manic-psychotic, or you are a philosopher and your name is Empedocles, Slavoj Žižek,

or Nietzsche. You can also try to formulate your point clearly and distinctly and to unravel and circle around it further and further. Wandering further and further away in the hope that you are getting closer and closer. If you do this in a clumsy, untrained, idiosyncratic way, you may be called schizophrenic, Daniel Schreber, or Adolf Wölfli. If you do this in a responsible, socially accepted way, you will end up in text genres that have also been explored by Plotinus, Sartre, and Schelling.

Often, in language, the difference between madness and philosophy, between bewilderment and wonder, is only made by an internal or external corrector, who appropriately dots the i's and crosses the t's in the right places, but more importantly, inserts periods and commas between words and sentences, distinguishes between vowels and consonants, between nouns and verbs. It is important for every philosopher and madman in training not to allow the multitude of dots and commas to obscure the original point of unity. The renowned German philosopher Adorno understood this and wrote in his book *Minima Moralia*:<sup>15</sup> "In a philosophical text, all sentences must be equally close to the center." And Plotinus, the Greek neo-Platonic philosopher from the third century AD, put it this way: "It is as if a line that seemingly runs into infinity actually depends on a point and moves around it. The point is reflected in the line, wherever it moves, while the point itself does not move, but is encircled by the line."

But perhaps the philosopher differs from the madman only in that he knows how to maintain a proper distance from that center point, moving around it in a circular motion, while for the madman the distance between the circle and the center point has

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15 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Verso Books, 2020 [1951]), 63.

become zero point zero (0.0). That is why the circular movement of the madman may well succeed in reaching the center of the bear, with all the consequences that entails. In madness, every sentence is a direct and paradoxical expression of that one point; every word spoken is swallowed up again in madness, because as soon as it is spoken, too much of the point has already strayed. Every sound clicks away into itself in madness; normal aspiration splits in two. Linguistically speaking, the sound midfield splits into a dualism of frontal ejectives on the one hand and velar implosives and gutturals on the other until it goes beyond the limits of language, where it transcends into spitting and growling. The snake eats its own tail. It consumes and produces itself. The bear eats the bear. We have already begun and cannot begin, but we also cannot stop trying to begin, yet it is almost time to end.

#### **Proposition Four: Infinity and the Isolation Cell**

- 4) *Philosophy and madness agree in that they are both difficult to end, whereby the mad variant of the end of philosophical endlessness, or infinity, is called isolation cell, or compulsory medication.*

On philosophy, the lucid Wittgenstein<sup>16</sup> said: “The true discovery is the insight that enables me to stop philosophizing whenever I want to—the insight that philosophy brings peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions that cast doubt on themselves.” Yet Wittgenstein did not stop, any more than many other philosophers and madmen, who simply cannot stop and do not know how to put an end to it. Think of Husserl, Sartre, and Schelling. They kept trying to explain exactly what their point was. For

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16 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1953), par. 129.

them, this led to endless philosophical work, to beautiful series of books that show you all sides of being and non-being, time and eternity. Madmen do not always make as much work of their point. Some make a mess of it. Or they are not heard, not known, not understood, and end up in isolation cells. That is why, for both philosophers and madmen, perhaps the highest wisdom lies in not speaking out. To leave the point as a point. Or to remain silent while you speak. Let them guess and wonder. What you cannot speak about, you must remain silent about, even if you speak about it.

The question now is how we can bring this article, driven by both philosophy and madness, to an end. If the text ends “here”, it thereby denies the proposition just put forward. But if the text goes on and on, this journal will become as big as Borges’ infinite library.<sup>17</sup> How do we get out of this entanglement, this paradox? We cannot get out of it, and we are already out of it, below and above the prairie. As if you could simply walk out of the city again, away from the hustle and bustle.

As if all you had to do was walk through grassland, past an open cornfield, with the insects, the bees, and the flowers. The chatter dies down, behind you the fading noise of traffic and the waving voices of children. Before you, only the lion next to the lamb, the black swan and the white unicorn. On to the silence, where the road widens into a plain, to where there is no more road, finally the prairie, where the signposts no longer bear arrows and the bow hasn’t been bent yet.

Everything is a demonstration of itself, and of something else.

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17 See: Jorge L. Borges, “The Library of Babel”, in *The Aleph and Other Stories*, trans. Annie Sillevius (De Bezige Bij, 1964 [1941]).

Philosophy and madness are like two snakes. One snake eats its own tail. This makes it shorter and thicker, until it has eaten itself completely and disappears, into itself, into a vanishing point. The other snake does exactly the opposite. It continues to regurgitate its own tail. This second snake continues to lengthen itself, growing in to an ever longer and thinner, ever wider circle. Until the snake becomes infinitely thin, infinitely long, and its tongue is released to hiss into infinity.

According to psychiatry, there are really two snakes.

According to philosophy, there is ultimately only one snake, from which all others originate.

According to madness, there is no snake and at the same time an infinite number of snakes.

It is the Möbius strip and the paradox.

As if a circle could be completed in a point.

But those who do not really begin do not really have to end.

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