

## Miasma\_A Reader

By Kirsten Cooke

### *Arachnid Networks* Or, Tentacular Being

'The tentacular are not disembodied figures; they are cnidarians, spiders, fingery beings like humans and raccoons, squid, jellyfish, neural extravaganzas, fibrous entities, flagellated beings, myofibril braids, matted and felted microbial and fungal tangles, probing creepers, swelling roots, reaching and climbing tendrilled ones. The tentacular are also nets and networks, IT critters, in and out of clouds. Tentacularity is about life lived along lines — and such a wealth of lines — not at points, not in spheres. "The inhabitants of the world, creatures of all kinds, human and non-human, are wayfarers"; generations are like "a series of interlaced trails." String figures all.

Haraway, Donna, J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, London: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 32.

'More generally, spiders and other small-sized invertebrates (and perhaps even many small vertebrates) are natural candidates for the discovery of further extended cognitive mechanisms, because these extended mechanisms would be especially relevant for small-brained animals. Small-sized animals may have solved the brain-body scaling problems posed by miniaturisation by outsourcing information processing, that is, by extending cognition to the most peripheral parts of their bodies, or to the closest elements of their environment. This ingenious solution may be particularly successful when this closest environmental feature is produced by the organism itself, as in the case of nests, burrows, webs, retreats, and other artefacts produced by animals, because coevolutionary loops could then fine tune the properties and use of these artefacts more closely, allowing cognition to extend in a more complete form. It may be no coincidence that some of the most cognitively sophisticated invertebrates (e.g., social bees, wasps, ants) are renowned for their niche construction (e.g., nest building). We thus have a double prediction: that miniaturisation will select for extended cognition and that niche construction will facilitate the process of outsourcing information processing.

Japyassu, Hilton F. and Kevin N. Laland, 'Extended spider cognition': Springerlink.com [https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/10466/Japyass\\_2017\\_Extended\\_AnimalCog\\_CC.pdf?sequence=1](https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/10466/Japyass_2017_Extended_AnimalCog_CC.pdf?sequence=1) [accessed 28.07.2017]

### *Artificial Sublime*

#### Or, Scientific Apparatus

In his talk 'Hyperstition', at TEDx Table Mountain, Delphi Carstens states that the constant 'Call to the Old Ones' creates an ideology, which attests to the existence of a hidden dimension to nature. Carstens' term the 'Old Ones' refers to the belief that aliens exist on the other side of the technological subject-centred dark mirror and on the alternate face of this technological surface there is a world of objects we cannot know. In this belief, technology is a mirror that can only reflect the human subject's own representations while the scientific images attest to a real outside this technological apparatus. Micro and macro images bring humans closer to a scientific understanding of the universe(s), at the same time they invoke a world beyond the lens that humans can't directly contact. It is the increasing technological mediation of human interactions in the practice of science, which has made the real world of matter appear as more distant and less directly related to subjective reality. Physical distancing produced by technology, counter-intuitively, cultivates the belief in a real that exists behind a veiled reality and maintains the disciplines of theology and philosophy.

Delphi Carstens, 'Hyperstition: Figuring the Apocalypse', *TEDx Table Mountain* (2012)  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdj9ChlRoqU>> [accessed 23 November 2012]

## Condensed Novels

### Or, The New Science Fiction

'George MacBeth: "... *You and Me and the Continuum*, for example, for the first time, is that it is constructed not in continuous paragraphs but in a sequence of short paragraphs, each of which has a heading – in fact they are in alphabetical order. But the key point, I think, is that they are broken up. Why did you move on to using this technique of construction?'

J. G. Ballard: "I was dissatisfied with what I felt were linear systems of narrative... The characterisation and the sequences of events were beginning to crystallise into a series of shorter and shorter images and situations."

George MacBeth and J. G. Ballard, '1967: George MacBeth. The New Science Fiction' in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J. G. Ballard, 1967–2008*, ed. By Simon Sellars and Dan O'Hara, London: Fourth Estate, 2014, p. 2.

## Contingency

### Or, How Life Begins...

'Philosophy's task consists in re-absolutizing the scope of mathematics – thereby remaining, contrary to correlationism, faithful to thought's Copernican de-centering – but without lapsing back into any sort of metaphysical necessity, which has indeed become obsolete... It is a question of absolutizing 'the' mathematical just as we absolutized 'the' logical *by grasping in the fundamental criterion for every mathematical statement a necessary condition for the contingency of every entity.*'

Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. by Ray Brassier, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 126.

'The nothingth of a second for which the hole existed reverberated backwards and forwards through time in a most improbable fashion. Somewhere in the deeply remote past it seriously traumatized a small random group of atoms drifting through the empty sterility of space and made them cling together in the most extraordinary unlikely patterns. These patterns quickly learnt to copy themselves (this was part of what was so extraordinary about the patterns) and went on to cause massive trouble on every planet they drifted on to. That was how life began in the Universe.'

Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, London: Pan Books, 2009, p. 68.

## Dream Time

### Or, the Descent Down the Hominid's Spinal Cord to Ancestral Time

'As the great sun drummed nearer, almost filling the sky itself, the dense vegetation along the limestone cliffs was flung back abruptly, to reveal the black and stone-grey heads of enormous Triassic lizards. Strutting forward to the edge of the cliffs, they began to roar together at the sun, the noise gradually mounting until it became indistinguishable from the volcanic pounding of the solar flares. Kerans felt, beating within him like his own pulse, the powerful mesmeric pulse of the baying reptiles, and stepped out into the lake, whose waters now seemed an extension of his own blood-stream. As the dull pounding rose, he felt the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water...'

Ballard, J. G., *The Drowned World*, London: Fourth Estate, 2012, p.71.

## EXTRASTATECRAFT

### Or, the Operating System/Medium

'Contemporary infrastructure space is the secret weapon of the most powerful people in the world precisely because it orchestrates activities that can remain unstated but are nevertheless consequential. Some of the most radical changes to the globalizing world are being written, not in the language of law and diplomacy, but in these spatial, infrastructural technologies—often because market promotions or prevailing political ideologies lubricate their movement through the world. These stories foreground content to disguise or distract from what the organization is actually *doing*.'

Easterling, Keller, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*, London: Verso, 2016, p. 15.

## FleshFactor

### Or, Machine=Human=Machine

'... "meme" coined by Richard Dawkins to characterize cultural units of information analogous to genes...'

Stoker, Gerfried and Wolfgang Modera, (eds), *FleshFactor: Informationsmaschine Mensch*, Linz: Ars Electronica, 1997, p. 17.

## Grey Sublime

### Or, The Undead

'*Inhuman* signifies "not human", of course, and therefore includes a world of forces, objects and nonhuman beings. But *in-human* also indicates the alien within (any human body is an ecosystem filled with strange organisms; any human collective is an ecosystem filled with strange objects), and requires as well a considerable amount of the violently inhumane.'

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Grey' in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p.271.

'The undead with the most enduring history of haunting are no doubt ghosts: sublime, frighteningly aesthetic creatures with cerebral narratives and noble pedigrees, tracing their descent from Virgil, Shakespeare, Henry James, Karl Marx, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida. The spectres haunting Europe and its former colonies have a deep history and long postcolonial reach...'

*ibid*, p. 273.

'Yet the zombie's decay is not an indication of its deadness. The zombie is our window into the visceral world to which we have always belonged and into which we are absorbed as food for growth. It is a world we close off from ourselves yet yearn to see. We know we are something more and something less than human, yet we hide the knowledge from ourselves.'

*ibid*, p.281.

## Hooked

Or, the future is hooked into us...

'This moment is now called the Anthropocene after Paul Crutzen, who invented the term. The term is ironic in another sense, because this is the moment at which nonhuman beings – including the being we are a part of, the colossal *biosphere* – begin to make decisive contact with humans, from the very depths of the ocean of reason. The very science and technology that allows human history to intervene in geologic time – this should be an intrinsically terrifying thought – also allows us to know entities that many religions, indigenous cultures, and our own intellectual and spiritual ancestors have long known.'

Timothy Moton, 'X-Ray' in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p. 326.

'Gaia does not and could not care about humans or other biological beings' intentions or desires or needs, but Gaia puts into question our very existence, we who have provoked its brutal mutation that threatens both human and nonhuman livable presents and futures. Gaia is not about a list of questions waiting for rational policies; Gaia is an intrusive event that undoes thinking as usual. "She is what specifically questions the tales and refrains of modern history. There is only one real mystery at stake, here: it is the answer we, meaning those who belong to this history, may be able to create as we face the consequences of what we have provoked."

Haraway, Donna, J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, London: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 32.

## Hyper-Objects Or, Beyond Human Measure

'I am calling these gigantic nonhumans *hyperobjects*, objects massively distributed in time and space relative to humans.'

Ibid, p. 326.

## I-Ching

Or, Alternative Knowledge Systems

'Aloud he said, 'How should I approach Wyndam-Matson in order to come to decent terms with him?' He wrote the question down on a tablet, then began whipping the yarrow stalks from hand to hand until he had the first line, the beginning. An eight. Half the sixty-four hexagrams eliminated already. He divided the stalks and obtained the second line. Soon, being so expert, he had all six lines; the hexagram lay before him, and he did not need to identify it by the chart...'

Dick, Philip, K, *The Man in the High Castle*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2001, p. 18.

'We are absurd,' Mr Tagomi said, 'because we live by a five-thousand-year-old book. We ask it questions as if it were alive. It *is* alive. As is the Christian Bible; many books are actually alive. Not in metaphoric fashion. Spirit animates it. Do you see?' He inspected Mr Bayne's face for his reaction.'

Ibid, p. 72.

## *Informed Intuition*

### Or, Perverting Bergson...

'But if, digging below the surface of contact between the self and external, we penetrate into the depths of the organized living intelligence, we shall witness the joining together or rather blending of many ideas which, once associated, seem to exclude one another as contradictory terms.'

Bergson, Henri, *Time and Free Will*, trans. by F. L. Pogson, London: Elibron Classics, 2005, p. 136.

'Probably animals do not picture to themselves, beside their sensations, as we do, an external world quite distinct from themselves, which is the common property of all conscious beings.'

Ibid, p. 138.

Bergson suggests that beneath the conscious ordering practices deployed by human subjects there is a universal intelligence that unites all things through pure duration. Pure duration can be accessed through the human subject's intuition, once individuals have sacrificed their conscious processes. Bergson theorises an osmotic relationship between subject and world, through de-centering the subject and activating material consciousness.

*Perverting Bergson* – an awareness that experience and research informs any intuitive process.

An *Informed Intuition* is not coextensive with the world, as there are other times/spaces/ways of seeing (e.g. machine vision), but it does deploy a different model for engaging with the world's systems and ways of seeing. A perverted Bergsonian is influenced by their landscape (consciously and unconsciously); they feed off it, digest it and spew it out – reconfigured and denatured. An informed intuition is an embodied landscape of many entities and information, which then situates itself within an immersive environment. Within this immersive environment, a visceral spontaneity (or informed intuition) to matter and aesthetics is privileged. Informed intuition is not at one with this immersion, the embodied landscape does not dissolve into its surroundings to commune and mix with other entities, but it acts as a filter that engages with these other bodies (times/spaces/visions/coding). These alternative bodies always problematizing a mono or smooth anthropocentric response by opening up the human body to contingency.

## **Machinic Vision**

### Or, Invisible Frequencies

1. 'X-rays confuse the common sense difference between light and matter, since they can directly wound and destroy life, even as they illuminate it, brighter than bright.'

Moton, 'X-Ray', p. 311.

2. 'They see you so intensely that in sufficient quantities they kill you – X-rays (also known as gamma rays) give the lie to the artificial division between perceiving and causing that has plagued philosophy and ideology at least since the Kantian time.'

Ibid, p. 314.

**Or, Allatonceness – instantaneous information super-highways**

'Ours is a brand-new world of allatonceness. "Time" has ceased, "space" has vanished. We now live in a global village... a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space. We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us.'

McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, Co-ordinated by Jerome Agel, London: Penguin Books, 2008, p. 63.

*Pig-Function*

**Or, humans as unwitting avian tools**

'Avian Interlude

A third party bears witness to the co-implicated history of pigs and human agriculture, and the transference of the pig-function to humans: The robin. It is in England's island ecosystem alone that robins became 'the gardener's companion' – a tame garden bird fond of accompanying humans in their horticultural pursuits. When deforestation and the hunting to extinction of wild boar stripped robins of their previous habit of attending upon boars, waiting for their foraging to turn up the earth and excavate worms and grubs, their habitat shifted and they became companions to humans instead – particularly in the garden, where humans fulfilled the Pig Function, turning over the earth to uncover their morsels.'

Field Club, 'Whey to Go: On the Hominid Appropriation of the Pig-Function' in *Collapse Volume VII*, ed. by Robin Mackay, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011, p. 131.

*Poememenon*

**Poem+meme+phenomenon**

The poememenon is to poetics what primary process is to modernity: an incremental noumenal incursion that cannot be derailed. What makes it at once real and novel is its utter unaffordability in terms of the anthropically regulated economy of (poetic) possibility that can only comprehend the truly new as catastrophic. Extreme experimentalism confronts restricted economical openness with a violent disregard for ontological continuity.

Amy Ireland, 'The Poememenon: Form as Occult Technology', *Urbanomic* (2017)  
<https://www.urbanomic.com/document/poememenon/> [accessed 01/07/2017], p. 9.

## *Point Clouds*

### Or, Machine Environments

- A virtual skin of points rather than pixels
- Viewer inside the cloud, which is the turning object or event'

Interview with Mer. Maggie Roberts [Orphan Drift] on 25/06/2017 at ACME studios (also present: Stephanie Moran, Lucy A Sames and myself)

## *The Raft*

### Or, Humanitarian Entrepreneurs – how to negotiate crisis tourism without negating the crisis

'\_\_\_\_\_ Another news piece, this one apparently done a few years later. Again, we are on the *Enterprise*, but this time the atmosphere is different. The top deck has been turned into an open-air refugee camp. It is swarming with Bangladeshis that L. Bob Rife plucked out of the Bay of Bengal after their country washed into the ocean in a series of massive floods, caused by the deforestation farther upstream in India—hydrological warfare. The camera pans to look out over the edge of the flight deck, and down below, we see the first beginnings of the Raft: a relatively small collection of a few hundred boats that have glommed onto the *Enterprise*, hoping for a free ride across to America.'

Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, p. 109.

## *The Reproductive System*

### Or, transmitting machine DNA: self-producing mechanical cells

'During the week, they explained, the boxes had devoured over a ton of scrap metal, as well as a dozen oscilloscopes with attached signal generators, thirty-odd test sets, desk calculators both mechanical and electronic, a pair of scissors, an uncountable number of bottle caps, paper clips, coffee spoons and staples (for the lab and office staff liked feeding their new pet), dozens of surplus walky-talky storage batteries and a small gasoline-driven generator.

The cells had multiplied—better than doubled their original number—and had grown to various sizes, ranging from shoe-boxes to attaché cases to steamer trunk proportions. They now reproduced constantly but slowly, in various fashions. One steamer trunk emitted, every five or ten minutes, a pair of tiny boxes the size of 3 X 5 card files. Another box of extraordinary length, seemed to be slowly sawing itself in half.'

Sladek, John, *The Reproductive System*, London: Mayflower Books, 1970, p. 31.

***SNOW CRASH***  
**Or, Viral Wetware**

“Here in the First World, everyone has already been vaccinated, and we don’t let religious fanatics come up and poke needles into us. But we do take a lot of drugs. So for us, he devised a means for extracting the virus from human blood serum and packaged it as a drug known as Snow Crash.

“In the meantime, he got the Raft going as a way of transporting hundreds of thousands of his cultists from the wretched parts of Asia into the United States. The media image of the Raft is that it is a place of utter chaos, where thousands of different languages are spoken and there is no central authority. But it’s not like that at all. It’s highly organized and tightly controlled. These people are talking to each other in tongues. L. Bob Rife has taken xenoglossia and perfected it, turned it into a science. . .

“He also has a digital metavirus, in binary code, that can infect computers, or hackers, via the optic nerve. . .

“The metavirus is everywhere. Anywhere life exists, the metavirus is there, too, propagating through it. Originally it was spread around on comets. . . But comets are slow and radio waves are fast. In binary form, a virus can bounce around the universe at the speed of light. . .

And if they hit a planet with another civilized culture, where people are listening to the stars in the way Rife was doing, then that planet gets infected, too. . . Except Rife was smart—he caught it in a controlled manner. He put it in a bottle. An informational warfare agent for him to use at his discretion. When it is placed into a computer, it snow-crashes the computer by causing it to infect itself with new viruses. But it is much more devastating when it gets into the mind of a hacker, a person who has an understanding of binary code built in to the deep structures of his brain. The binary metavirus will destroy the mind of a hacker.”

Stephenson, Neal, *Snow Crash*, London: Penguins Book Ltd., pp. 378–9

***Swamp Dwelling***  
**Or, fissures for displaced forces**

‘There are ravines. Presences something between molluscs and deities squat patiently below eight miles of water. In the lightless cold a brutality of evolution obtains. Rude creatures emit slime and phosphorescence and move with flickerings of unclear limbs. The logic of their forms derives from nightmares.

There are bottomless shafts of water. There are places where the granite and muck base of the sea falls away in vertical tunnels that plumb miles, spilling into other planes, under pressure so great that the water flows sluggish and thick. It spurts through the pores of reality, seeping back in dangerous washes, leaving fissures through which displaced forces can emerge.’

Miéville, China, *The Scar*, London: Pan Books, 2011, pp. 1 – 2



## Sympoiesis

### Or, Worlding-with

'*Sympoiesis* is a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer "world game," earthlings are *never alone*. That is the radical implication of *sympoiesis*, *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. *Sympoiesis* enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it.'

Haraway, Donna, J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, London: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 58.

## The Three-Body Problem

Or...

1. Machine Vision – non-human agents
2. Algorithm – technical medium
3. Mer. Maggie Roberts – human filter or 'informed intuition'

'I then introduced a third sphere, and to my astonishment, the situation changed completely. Like I said, and geometrical figure turns into numbers in the depths of my mind. The sphereless, one-sphere, and two-sphere universes all showed up as a single equation or a few equations, like a few lonesome leaves in late fall. But this third sphere gave "emptiness" life. The three spheres, given initial movements, went through complex, seemingly never-repeating movements. The descriptive equations rained down in a thunderstorm without end.'

Liu, Cixin, *The Three-Body Problem*, trans. by Ken Liu, London: Head of Zeus Ltd., 2014, p. 207.

## Trash / Flows: Wastelands

### Or, Edgelands

'The concept of landscape is gaining a new dimension not only in the field of Urban Studies and the systemic approaches pursued by sociologists. People are also optimistically advocating the Parliament of Things (Latour) or investigating the autopoietic network culture of trash or human dependency on non-human communication clusters. Such holistic approaches may be based on trust or shadowed by apocalyptic forebodings. But in either case, the landscape (which is to say, the dynamically networked communication currents in matter itself) is an actor, and no longer simply a passive backdrop to the accumulation and interaction of objects. Any landscape able to process information independently subsequently joins forces with landscapes of a similar composition. Interventions in such circumstances appear to be not so much regulations or controlled arrangements; rather, the currents technician himself is now deployed solely in this strange undead-living landscape, which manipulates him rather than he it. The material landscape and its currents, the dark and vibrant matters, themselves become active agents in our habitats. Here, the opposite of crystallization and glassy immobility defines the end (or the new beginning): untrammelled autonomous proliferation.'

Fisher, Mark and Reza Negarestani, 'TRASH / FLOWS: WASTELANDS' in *SPECTRAL CTM.12 – Festival for Adventurous Music & Related Arts* (2012) <http://www.ctm-festival.de/archive/festival-editions/ctm12-spectral/> [accessed: 27/06/17]

## *Wipe Cycle*

### Or, Technology as Landscape

*Wipe Cycle* — a 1969 work by minimalist painter Frank Gillette and autobiographical filmmaker Ira Schneider, was one of the first video installations to propose the existence of an information environment as a new class of landscape.

Judson, William. D. (curator), *American Landscape Video: The Electronic Grove* (catalogue), Pittsburgh: The Carnegie Museum of Art, 1988

## *Writing's Photography: The Rise of the Web*

### Or, Disjointed Form-Content

'A persistent dethroning of Western/Eurocentric cultural ideals (the white, male genius; the canon; the author, them authenticity in general), a horizontalization of the hierarchical structures embedded in the highly coded deployment of inherited forms, metrical regimentation, the use of particular registers of language, etc., and a general destratification of writing practices and methods of reading lie behind the seminal literary upheavals of the last few centuries, rapidly intensifying in the late twentieth century with the advent of writing's photography: the rise of the Web.'

Ireland, 'The Poememenon', p. 8.