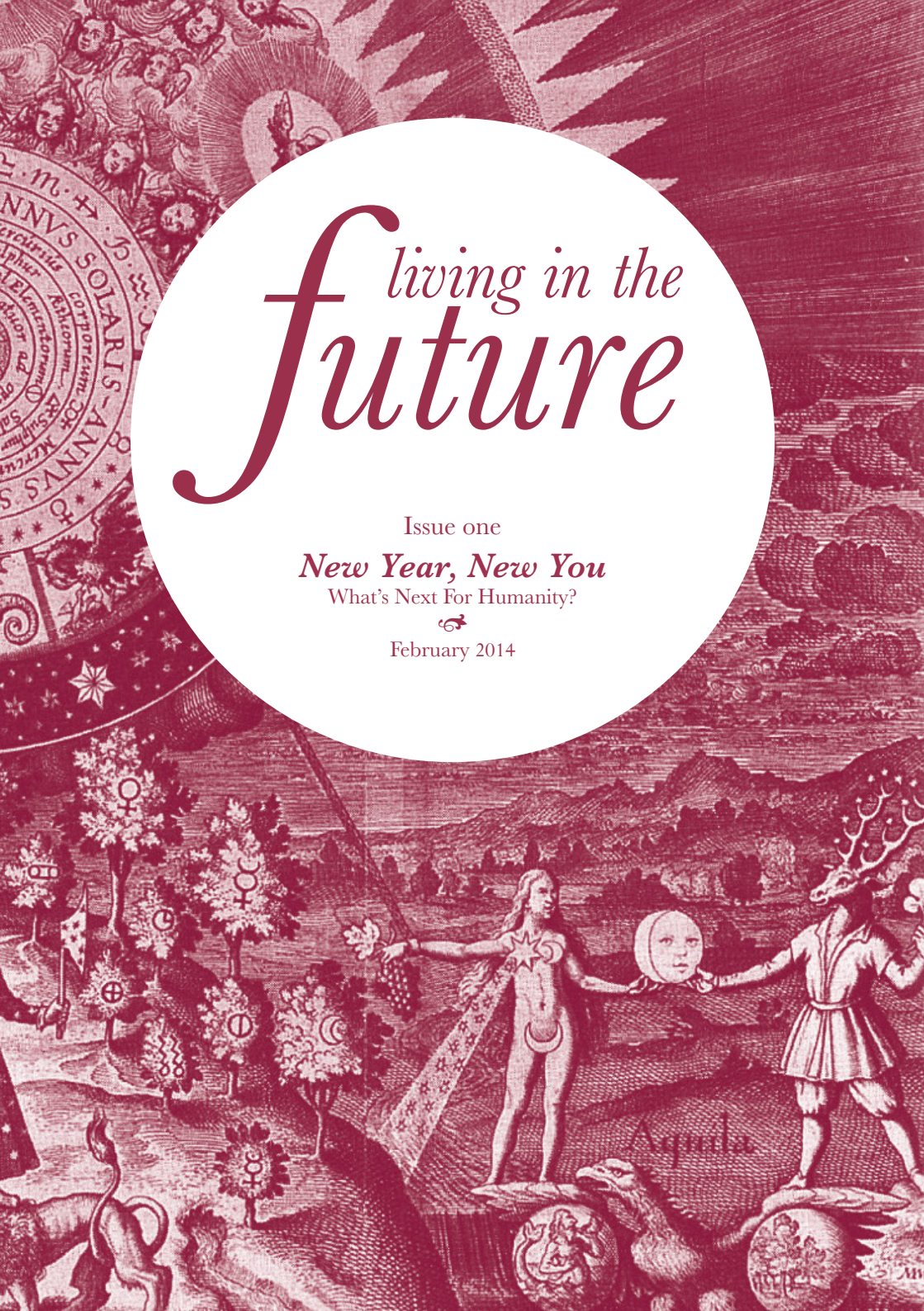

living in the future

Issue one

New Year, New You

What's Next For Humanity?

February 2014

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Introduction: Why the Future Can't Belong to Us

James Hedges

We order time by three related concepts: *the past*, *the present*, and *the future*. These form an uneasy triangle: each dependent on the other two.

The past refers to any point in time before the present and the future. It doesn't exist in the present, but only in relation to the present, as artefacts and memories. Any physical artefact of the past exists only in its present state; memories are material states of libraries, video cassettes and human nerve cells, and are as such subject to the same rules.

The present (or *now*) is defined as the space in time between the past and the future. This slice of time is so fine it can hardly be said to be there at all; as soon as it comes into being, it vanishes into the past.

The future is a point in time that exists only in relation to the present and the past, and is the most nebulous of all three concepts - in any given present, we may speculate a range of futures. The past is littered with futures, and by studying these past futures we may better understand our present ones.

So the future's up for grabs. As soon as it becomes the present, it becomes the past, and new futures bloom. Futures are characterized by their multiplicity - in the model we have now, only one can become 'fact' but the very nature of futurity is defined by potential. There are infinite forks in the road of what might be. Because the past is the graveyard of presents, there exist also an infinite number of dead futures - what might have been, but wasn't. The futures of today are ghost-haunted by these past futures.

It's an interesting time on planet earth. Science-fiction has long been a medium for the exploration of our possible futures, and an examination of our present through the innately hypothetical medium of the imaginative future. Now we've come to a place where the people who grew up on science-fiction are changing our world, conceptually and physically, and past futures are becoming present realities. The rate of technological acceleration and the mind-fucks that come with it are redefining what it means to exist and to be human at a rate greater than at any time in our past.

Science-fiction then means state-surveillance and flying robot soldiers now; it means a food-substitute (invented by a computer scientist applying the hacker ethic to his own body) being named in tribute to *Soylent Green* (that movie where it turns out the fascist government is making us eat our own dead). It means a time, maybe, when we can realistically talk about doing away with our own bodies and let our conscious minds inhabit beautiful machine worlds.

An evolutionary paradigm shift for humankind has long been a favourite theme in science-fiction. In the 1950s and '60s, the west's terror *du jour* came in the form of the mysterious atom a catalyst for exciting (if poorly-understood) mutations and evolutions - just think of *The Amazing Spider-Man*.

There were voices of disquiet. The perennial pessimist Philip K. Dick on his *Golden Man* (1953):

> Here I am saying that mutants are dangerous to us ordinaries, a view which John W. Campbell, Jr*. deplored. We were supposed to view them as our leaders. But I always felt uneasy as to how they would view us. I mean, maybe they wouldn't *want* to lead us. Maybe from their superevolved lofty level we wouldn't seem worth leading. Anyhow, even if they agreed to lead us, I felt uneasy as where we would wind up going. It might have something to do with buildings marked SHOWERS but which really weren't.

Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1986-7) takes a *Spider-Man*esque origin story for the character of Doctor Manhattan and follows it to its logical conclusion: as the Doctor becomes increasingly unified with the cosmos, he consequently more indifferent to the eye-blink that is humanity.

The nuclear future has receded (for now), and so we find ourselves applying our potentialities to a new framework the computational networks that span our age. Posthumanism and transhumanism have become buzzwords to describe a future in which we have changed unrecognizably. Millions anticipate a technological singularity; supposing processing power continues to exponentiate, a point may come at which there is a Cambrian explosion for machine life, computer intelligences designing their own successors, and so on ad infinitum. If such a thing should come to pass, a universe-dominating intelligence might appear frighteningly quickly, leaving its human progenitors in the shade. A world populated by intelligent computers might be a legacy of human intelligence, but will physical human beings still get to play?

*Campbell was the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* (later *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*) from 1937 to 1971 and was a huge editorial force in the development of science-fiction.

An alternative scenario: 'We' may well have to colonize other worlds to avoid 'our' destruction by cosmic catastrophe. In that process, 'We' may have to alter 'our' genetic code to such an extent that 'We' are no longer 'Us'. The thread of what defines humanity wears ever finer, but does it matter? Given that human nature counts murder and genocide among its children, is its loss necessarily a bad thing?

This issue is about coming to terms with what it means to be human now, and what it might mean to be human then. Whichever future wins, it's going to be interesting for whoever's around to see it.

72

Ben Osborn

The Wow! *signal was a strong narrowband radio signal detected by Jerry R. Ehman on August 15, 1977. Ehman circled the signal on the computer printout and wrote the comment* 'Wow!'. *It lasted for the full 72-second window that his equipment was able to observe it, but has not been detected again.*

IN the first second god started.

In the second second god's eyes opened.

In the third second, or thereabouts, light from a distant sun poured into his eyes.

In the fourth second, or thereabouts, sound hit him like the aftershock of an explosion, shaking through him in a billion infinitesimal ways.

In the fifth second his mouth watered and his eyes watered and water flowed through his body, gently dripping out of him at the move and eyes.

In the sixth second his head began to ache, throbbing with rushed blood.

In the eighth second he stretched out his fingers, letting their tips notice the temperature and texture of their immediate surroundings, like a snake's tongue darting out to taste the air.

In the ninth second, or thereabouts, his thoughts took shape around the information from his senses, creating new memories, drawing connections from his (infinite) knowledge.

In the tenth second god noticed that he was sitting on a park bench in a large city that was full of people.

In the eleventh second he remembered the bus ride yesterday, and the train today, and the walk between the two, and the walk after the train.

In the twelfth second he was still thinking about the walk after the train. He had passed a river. He had seen a grey bird landing on the water.

In the thirteenth second he remembered that it was a canal and not a river. He remembered the grey bird seemed out of place, like a bird that should be crossing an ocean, something lonely and foreboding, a dark speck moving on rolling clouds.

In the fourteenth second god thought of the birds wings beating air onto the water, causing the water to swirl.

In the fifteenth second he thought, the space between seconds is infinite. A large grey bird flew over the park, casting a moving shadow, and again he remembered the walk after the train.

In the sixteenth second it was the same bird, the one that had landed on the water.

In the seventeenth second he thought it was funny that you can *land* on *water*.

In the eighteenth second he thought, yes, but it's not *that* funny.

In the nineteenth second he was lonely.

In the twentieth second he had always been lonely. The bus had been lonely yesterday. The other people on the bus seemed alright. They didn't seem to be so bothered by everything as he was. But he thought they were probably quite lonely also. Loneliness, he thought, is a collective thing…

In the twenty-first second he thought, …funnily enough. But it wasn't *that* funny. It was just a certain way for things to be.

In the twenty-second second he thought, and the way that things have been for all this time.

In the twenty-third second he thought, and what a long time it's been. There was the bus yesterday, and the bus of course started somewhere, so I was there, and then the bus went somewhere too, so off I went to somewhere else, and then there was the train today, and what a lot of time it takes to exist in space, and what a lot of space there is just for now to be in, and isn't it all so lonely, even so.

In the twenty-fourth second he wished the people in the city could be spoken to like this; he didn't quite know what they'd get out of it, or what he would, but it would be nice to get it off his chest.

In the twenty-fifth second he exhaled with relief, just imagining it.

In the twenty-sixth second the grey bird, which had been circling the park, landed in a tree to the west of him. The sun was just beginning to set, and the start of light dying was always madnesses of colour, and deep strong colours shone out across the park, transforming everything in their path.

In the twenty-seventh second he felt cold. The bird, meanwhile, flapped its wings, causing the boughs of the tree to shake. He felt this wing flap was some kind of communication signal, though one he could not decipher.

In the twenty-eighth second he felt very pleased with himself remembering that even in his infinite knowledge he had been smart enough to make some things unknowable.

In the twenty-ninth second he thought, very few things are unlearnable though.

In the thirtieth second he thought, and the gaps are easily filled in by the imagination, which was one of my better ideas.

In the thirty-first second he thought, I wonder where I got the idea from. He knew there were no stimuli before him, that he was the great stimulus, that *possibility* was the great stimulant.

In the thirty-second second he thought, but it's very lonely.

In the thirty-third second the big grey bird plummeted to the ground. Dead as a nut, he thought to himself. But the bird was alive.

In the thirty-fourth second he thought, the bird is of course alive, and only playing at being dead.

In the thirty-fifth second he thought, now *there's* a game.

In the thirty-sixth second he played dead for a little while. It was the same as before really. He sat and let his eyes go out of focus, blurring the sunset colours, and now the park was a paintbox in the rain, all colours running together, and then they separated out into clear shapes as he brought his eyes into focus, the shapes of clouds and trees and buildings, and the sun itself, burning miles upon miles away. He slowed his breath a little, slacked his shoulders, rolled his wrists until his palms faced skyward, extended his legs and turned his feet outward, and soon the only movement his body made was a very slight swaying with the wind.

In the thirty-seventh second a few drops of rain on the wind struck against his forehead, burst and split along the wrinkles in his skin, their contents trickling down his temples and under his chin, collecting and reforming above his Adam's apple.

In the thirty-eighth second he thought, someone will see me here.

In the thirty-ninth second he thought, they will come to see if I have died. If I have not died they may try to help me. If I have died they will see that I am properly disposed of.

In the fortieth second he thought, or perhaps the police will move me on. The bird rolled over and extended its feet into the earth. It began, slowly to raise itself.

In the forty-first second it stood upright.

In the forty-second second it extended its legs and began to look around. He half-watched the bird, his vision still slightly blurred from lack of effort.

In the forty-third second he was bored of playing dead and snapped out of it. His body shot rigidly to attention. He even felt a little stirring of something new. Nice to be alive, he thought. Though it is lonely. The bird flapped its wings again; the same coded message.

In the forty-fourth second he thought, well some things perhaps truly are unknowable and unlearnable. Some messages can't ever be decoded. Or I could make such a message.

In the forty-fifth second he thought, and I could send the message

so far that others who found it would marvel at the distance it has travelled and wonder at its meaning.

In the forty-sixth second he imagined another god like him, sitting on some other world, receiving the message, and not knowing it to be unknowable, and pondering, and wondering.

In the forty-seventh second he saw some other city on some other world, and saw a scientist leaning over scientific instruments. The instruments shook to life with new knowledge of things elsewhere. Metal arms scribbled furiously onto graph paper.

In the forty-eighth second he saw the scientist in the city on the other world pick up a pen and scrawl on to the paper. He saw the information as numbers, and some of the numbers didn't matter except to say that others really did, and a short line of numbers were all that mattered, and the scientist circled them.

In the forty-ninth second the scientist slowed down as he drew the circle. He breathed deeply. When the circle was complete he lifted the pen from the paper.

In the fiftieth second god felt a little bit of the loneliness beginning to lift.

In the fifty-first second he thought, but there is not much time left, and nor was there ever. And he felt lonely in his moment, all alone in infinite time.

In the fifty-second second he thought, at least I shared it. And he was glad.

In the fifty-third second the bird raised its left leg and brought it down, beginning to move toward god, an awkward movement that birds make when moving without flying.

In the fifty-fourth second it was walking determinedly towards him.

In the fifty-fifth second it was wobbling its body from side to side as it waddled.

In the fifty-sixth second it raised its head and opened its beak as it came. In his minds eye god saw the scientist on the other world, in their city; he saw the scientist breathing slowly and carefully and taking in the magnitude of the numbers that he had just circled.

In the fifty-seventh second a sound began to emerge from the bird's mouth.

In the fifty-eighth second the sound stopped. It had been as incomprehensible as the wingbeats, and now it was over.

In the fifty-ninth second he understood a little more. The sound had broken a little of the loneliness of the bird, even if god couldn't understand. Communication, thought god, is its own reward.

In the sixtieth second god thought that nothing was ever really communicated except for communication. Or perhaps it was the other way round, and communication was the one thing you couldn't ever

communicate.

In the sixty-first second god slapped himself on the cheek chastisingly and said to himself, *Snap out of it*.

In the sixty-second second his voice, like an extra gust of wind on the edge of a storm, moved dust from his lips, and moved dry dead skin, lips gone broken from under-use, recracking into something moveable, and his voice, like a great wind, shook tiny fragments of plaque from his teeth which dissolved into his gums, and like a wind moving the water of a lake it forced small particles of saliva to run against their current, to flee from the voice's energy, to vanish into the darkness in his mouth and throat.

In the sixty-third second the bird heard god.

In the sixty-fourth second god saw that the bird had heard him, although he had been talking to himself, but felt the bird's hearing of him and felt a little of the loneliness lift.

In the sixty-fifth second he remembered the people on the bus and how they met each others eyes and then looked quickly away, but from afar they stared at each other, though this was unacceptable, and they did not like to be stared at, though they dressed to be understood within the stare, or to attract the stare if they felt like it.

In the sixty-sixth second he could not remember much. There wasn't much left ahead of him or behind him and everything before the first second was just conjecture anyway.

In the sixty-seventh second god thought, how wonderful to imagine the world before the first second, the world of the bus and the train and the world that the park is in and that the city is in.

In the sixty-eighth second he thought, perseverance makes the whole lot possible.

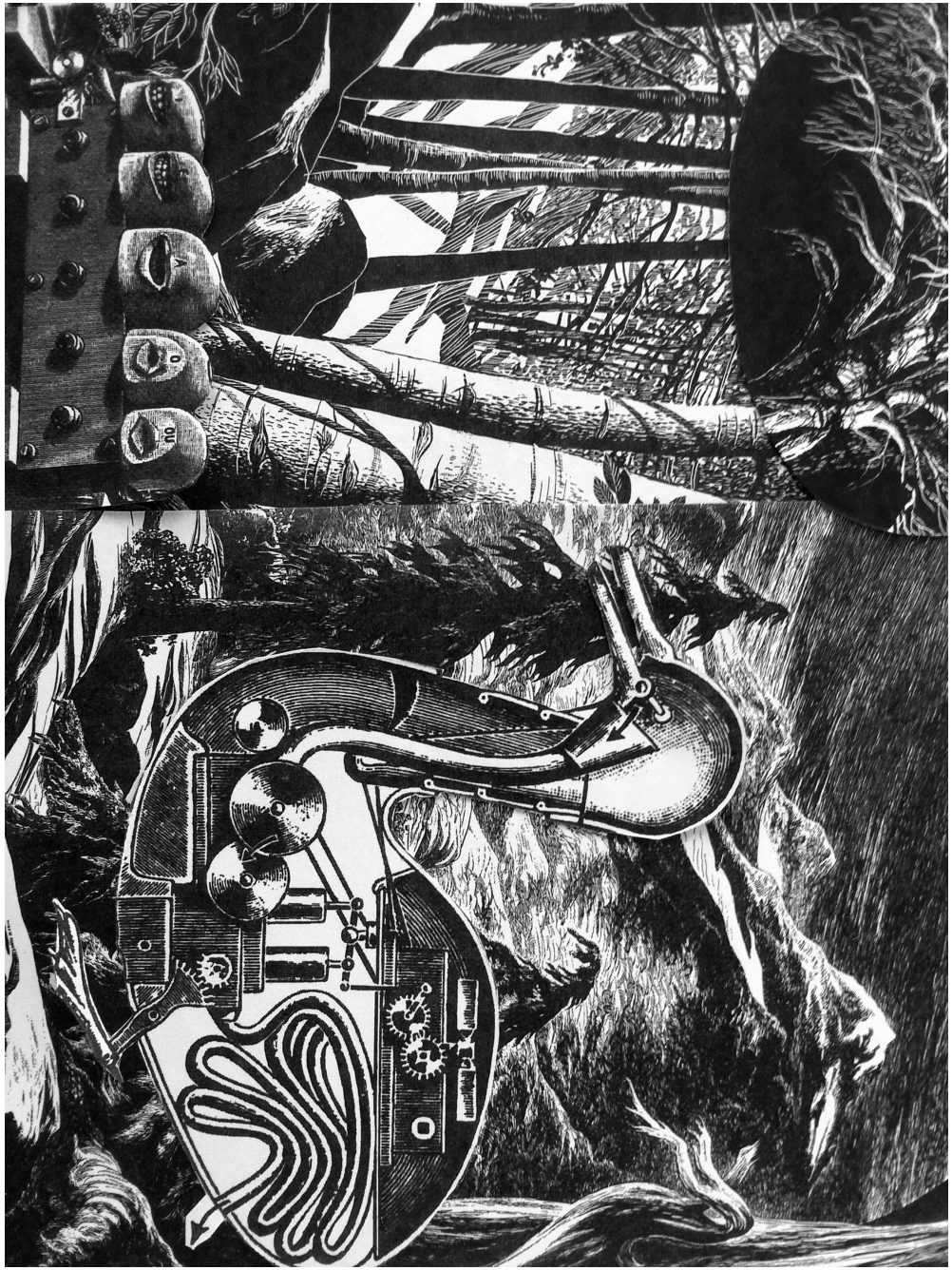
In the sixty-ninth second he saw, in his mind's eye, that other world. The scientist had written *Wow!* beside the numbers he had circled.

In the seventieth second god said to himself, *Wow!*

In the seventy-first second the scientist had published his findings. The radio signal had lasted seventy-two seconds. It had come from so far away. It could not be explained and it seemed would never be explained. It never came back. It came from miles away, millions upon millions of miles. Something very, very powerful must have made it. But it was never made again.

In the seventy-second second, god stopped.

Viniita Neet Moran — Collage



Ab+ante

Pete Inkpen

PART I
ANTIPATHY

Far away and living in the future where the smell of books was still
sacred
Professor Laura White more out of breath and restless than hopeful
put forward her plans for the *empathy virus*
Hers
Not the old future of concrete and cable cars
A new stage in human evolution
Eradicate that neverrrrending tendency to fight in just 100 lines
Taped upon some faculty lecturn in anticipatory seduction
Not chimpanzees but bonobos
Dappled shade lights-camera-evolution
Meteoropolis
Illuminated as some pages were found by chance to be
By her students and some peers-as-critic:
Encore!
Praise!
Her final word reverberates around the auditorium and functions
As it should.
Fragmented thoughts of future flavours
Behavioural studies of those primates proved too weird
And she had disappeared into statistics
Analysis
For a couple of years
And returned with plasticity, parables, notepads.

PART II
EGO

The future:
Never cemented
Exasperated with the failures she had not embraced
The empathy virus was created to erase

Retroactively it appears
The world ~~begs~~/begins to breathe
Always already it had happened
Had it?
Ergo.

PART III
LOVE

An air of Bliss
Reward and relief
And you're not sure what the award was for but you know that you won

And back 20 years she was 19
Imagining her first day in the lab.

Another Stanza — Future Man

Marta Poznanski

You will never know his legendary outline
This one who is smart image of the other replete
who lit by polarities and promise aflame
sits just a big head, a deep breathy prophet

Whispering... accelerate, and we willingly
And enter cosmos of language, of objects
Grasping to anything we recall as part of history
History repeating and histories, we subdue

The warp weft of life, of words, the unsurpassable
left in circles. Hadn't we concluded enough already
Hyperboles draft never quite finished, as if there were
more extensions to be experienced, future has
already arrived, why don't you change your life?

Acceleration

Hurried faster Information Hunters, souls incomplete
To know that all bodies are extended into the night;
To know for certain the night of the world is the night of thought
of consciousness; of yours dramatically linked to mine
Through symbiosis, through biological mechanisation
of timed beings, of measured bodies, of thinking in banisters

Our bodies multiple, never to be pinned down
Instead focus on the horrorism, that undying guilt
and then again awareness of the ongoing, an immersion
add reflection, reification, the hunt for individuality
And talk

Download

Dialogues of the mind, dialogues with others and
dialogues with the great Other!
And how old fashioned schizoid became, he only
went out for a brief stroll, into representation's
window, that strongest of casts, never to return

A man so self sufficient that he just breeds off others
Imagine him in the safe comfort of liquid imitation
never quite surpassing the line of originality, then speaks
uttering a coming out onto the world, and recognised
as if by blast of godly reality; afresh in flatness.

But *it* is and always has been within IT, a part of its object
a composite of it original. Just a soft extension.

Did I ever tell you I met the Lucifer's disciple?
A finely timed afterthought, a man of lies
Half a year of pure ingenuity lost to meaningless void
Souls angels all dispersed, a hellfire jazz
Outmoded turntable crackling softly on repeat

Where is man of pure thought, who creates things strictly
Instead idiosyncratic world of rubbish illusions
of mechanism and impetus for future.
Future thought, future man, future future.
A constellation already entangled, complex
behind the screen of now. Its here right in front of you
in bold detail if you just care to look at its object.

Man of future.. do you exist among us already
in the ubiquity of technology, of device body extensions
of time calculated, accelerated simply for jest?
Accelerated thought, accelerated breath; a last death spasm.

New World Objects

The schotoma is a shadow cast by the screen
as in a stain, and if I am anything it is this spot
cast by nature

Non languages is sex spasm jerk off and nonsense
Paranoia and its autism file against future moloch
Corporate moloch, that undying one.

Anthropocenic palace, a mental space, devoid of categorization;
of labour, that lost, free to move as we might, in words
And phrases and ideas, and that into lust like a tree of roses

And what object of thought illumine, remains trace?
A thousand connections rolled into silence, an echo of deep
humanity, servility carefully taking of his watch and spectacles

And laying them to rest, like relics of great past

I remember once conceiving Contemporary
And then it denying me the possibility of the transcendental
admitting that its principle task is rather
to replace object with affectation;
to replace the immutable with the transitory;
to locate the truth solely in the recipient
and lets abandon the independent object of knowing!

But don't you hear me wail the world has ended and we
We are simultaneously living in its ruins. Did you not
feel the tension arise about my meagre complexion
as I stand in for this call cry. Do you not see the tension
between history and histories?

The future has been abandoned by the current set, or
for a moment Modernism's impasse led us to believe
that IT was in charge but that
also a ruin
speed slowing down

Reprise

O dear one, where were you when I was dancing
in that space from awry, dreary bar we all know
A place where we once danced, me anonymous to you
You in all your glory. And now, I live with things mainly
even at times intuitively- since now everything depends
on how you are feeling, your sensitivity for the day, and I

As conveyed by many instances, through the same act
the same air by which language drew a circle around us
Am left to recall when all of its extensions were ours,
we transcending, as far as you were already
in another's circle
circling
amassing
Goodness.
Your outline secure. and I, on the edge of language.

“We Are Living the Sci-fi of Yesterday”

An interview with Ed Fornieles

Your work often concerns social interactions on the internet. How do you think the internet of the future will change the way we interact as people?

It will be a place of total character fluidity, where the subject will be only loosely tied to their bodies and location. Where everyone will be many things and people on many different platforms, progressing to a next stage of evolution based on the cult of empathy.

Do you think there could be a future where physical interaction doesn't happen at all? - like in The Matrix.

No, the physical is going to become more important, interfaces will harness touch much more. The gap between offline and online will totally disapear. The internet will not be something you sit down and do, it will just be.

William Gibson says: “The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed.”

Thats a good quote. We are living the sci-fi of yesterday, and what's interesting is that sci-fi is still operating in similar areas/ideas of the future - so now we are just in the process of fleshing out the sci-fi reality. Soon it will be complete.

Your piece for The Serpentine in 2012 which culminated in Programme X *and* The Dreamy Awards *involved an attempt to infiltrate the world of real business with mystical and science fiction ideas…*

Because they are already there I mean, new tech paints a strong image of the future: a place where the problems of today can be solved and we where we can all get rich doing it.

It's the spirit of our age

Do you think ‘we’ can all get rich doing it, or will there still be children down the mines in Africa enabling us to live with our future tech?

Of course there are children down the mines. No one talks about those guys they are only very loosely part of the central narrative, as a reflexive moment, as a morality check. *“Your animated GIFs run on burnt coal and your computers—they're made by slaves.”* - Daniel Keller.

In that project, you were spinning fiction into reality.

You create a fiction that then becomes a reality I mean both reality and fiction are just narratives. Truth just has something to do with belief.

So you think reality is subjective, not necessarily to be accorded greater respect than any other narrative?

Well, its all fiction. Or editing. Or phrasing.

Fictional narratives from the past informing reality narratives in the future?

Exactly. Trading on future narratives by seeding fictions.

The future is something that only exists in our imaginations anyway.

At the moment.

But ‘now’ is always ‘now’.

Now yes. Now it is.

Do you feel closer to the future in Los Angeles than you did in London?

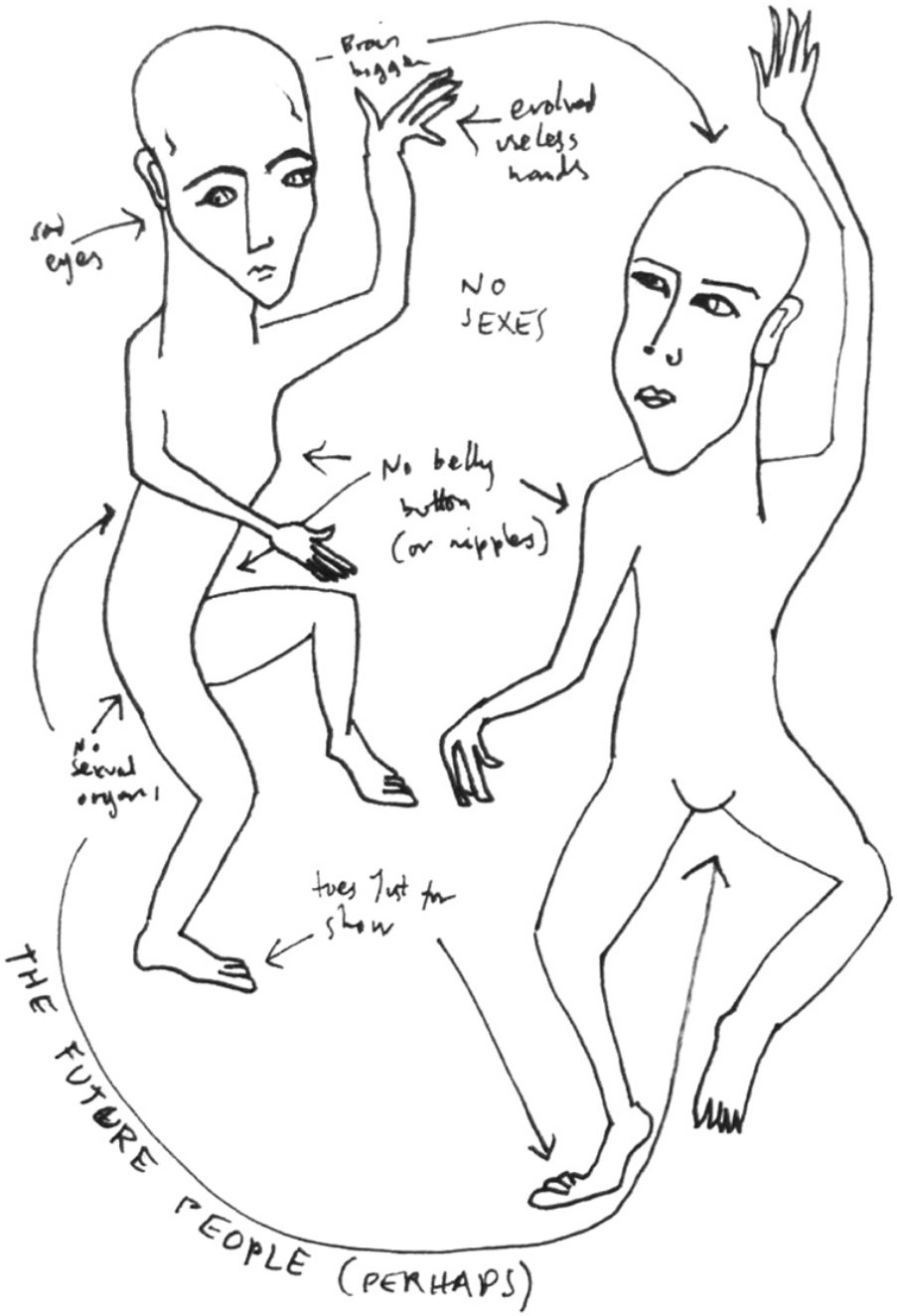
YES. It is closer.

How come?

It's a city of the future - London is about carts, LA is about streaming on floating concrete. It's the city most like the internet.

Have you got a picture we can use?

Here is an image of my immediate social network. Well it's not, but you can say it is.



Paul Kindersley

RPG

Jaakko Pallasvuo

Lying in bed, watching a lesser Ingmar Bergman film with you. We've had an LSD- fueled 'serious conversation' and have figured out that this thing does not have a future. I love you. You want to be friends.

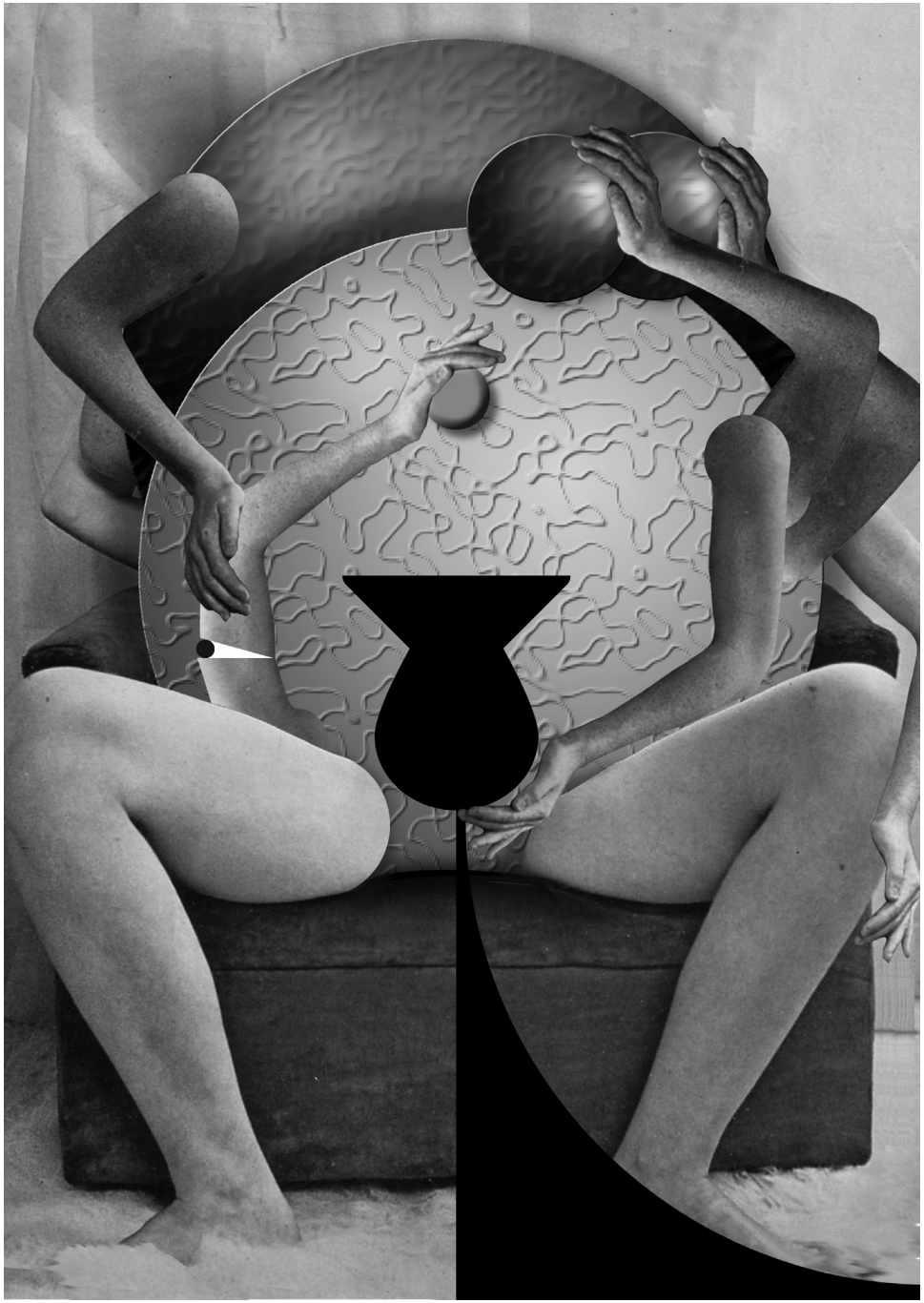
I like these dull platonic afternoons, my indifference next to yours. I couldn't feel closer to anyone. The most intimate thing about a person is their sense of boredom.

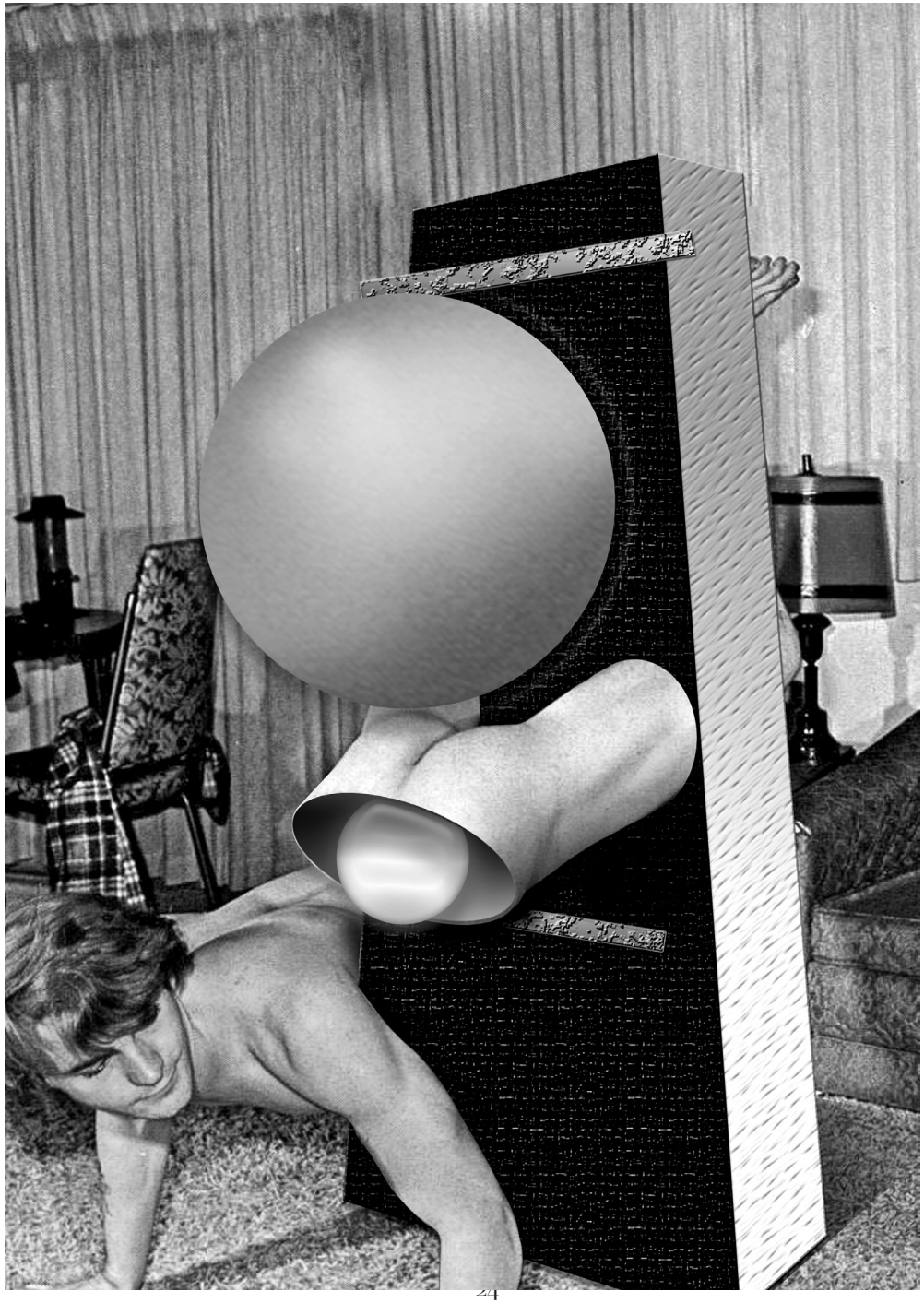
Later I'm editing the footage. You're acting, or just standing in front of a landscape. Video is the way I engage with the men I can't have.

When the feelings are gone the files remain: a face looking confused and mildly uncomfortable in 1080p HD. What will happen as recording devices evolve? The bed and your laptop, our bodies close but not touching, 3D scanned and printed in a scale of 1:10.

Us modeled and turned into an interactive multimedia CD-ROM: the CD-ROM will come with mood altering substances. You will feel chilly, fatigued, vaguely melancholic; your system will remind you that you have a plane to catch tomorrow, that it's unclear when you'll see him again maybe not in a year.

You will gain 200 experience points by trying to hold his hand. He will refuse. Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want.





Hinterland Shift

(Part one of nine)

Llew Watkins

Emily is kissing him through the mouth suit. There is hair in her mouth.

As her eyes open, shut, then open proper, the clarity of her mind brings the present cognitive structures into focus. Sentences spin into forgetting; in their wake awareness rising. She is alone.

In the first moment a vague hollow pressing, painful, becomes sharp lines buckling; reforming the memory up cold.

As clouds over sun and then a gap

We see her rolling across the floor, she is struggling with her boots, lacing them, moving up fast and to the door, pushing and then falling through, her taught frame and.

Our bodies are a lie.

Emily knows this; relaxes. Blinks. It is pissing down. There is a wind up. She recognises the trees. The long grasses have soaked through the bottom of her trousers.

"Kai it's you..."

"Of course it's bloody me."

"Kai, I've got an earache."

One each of seven trees: apple, hazel, oak, holly, alder, willow, birch. A fairy circle the forest as university. In Ireland fear of violating the old ways can still turn the course of a road.

Reg, moving to Leitrim village, meets a farmer, Joe Brennan, and is asked if he could cut down a grove of trees for him. Reg is warned not to. He doesn't cut them; those trees are still there. That farmer, a bastard, trying to slide out of an old pact for the sake of his cattle.

In a facsimile of that circle Emily and Kai fix together temporarily. Then slide to the ground. Their knees, facing one another, each looks the other. Their postures shifting gently from awkward to aligned. Their breathing syncs.

All their trousers, and their t-shirts too, are soaked through. Their expressions soften. Their foreheads touch together like old Chinese monks. On the grasses, lank spider's webs.

The experience clarifies; there is a group gathered in a room. Her cousin Will, his friends.

Seeing Will, Emily remembers that she is at her cousin's house.

She remembers that she hates this side of her family. Her friend Joe is there; he is experimenting with new ways of being. Because no one there knows him apart from Emily, he greets one boy in the manner of the Captain but exaggerated and drags him, grappling enthusiastically, to the floor.

Now look at the room: if you catch the angle just right, Emily is looking at a book.

On the cover of the book, look into the eyes of the infinity twins. Between them they are holding a book.Between them they are holding a book.

Look closer: on the cover of *that* book is an image of the infinity twins holding a book.

The infinity twins: a twofold network of feedback loops that are running Emily and also all that she perceives as "other". Combined force of will drives it; the system isn't merely apathetic.

Finding this book.

Subtle paradigm shifts in any stream of being rely on flashes of sentience brushing nowness. This allows a shiver of autonomous choice and ensures also that the totality (a construct, but a construct that intuitively reveals the truth it shades) of the system exists in a permanent state of ungainly flux.

Emily has one of these moments right now.

Now Emily is in another room, more central to the grid. On a couch her uncle, from her father's side, and her aunt, from her mother's side, are entwined. Seeing them together like that she has *the uncanny sense that she is dreaming.* The feeling that they are in a dead space.

To the right of the couch there are fire pokers, two then three and sharpened. She picks one up, decides to stab her uncle and then herself; does neither of these things, and drops to her knees.

She looks at him, the resignation in her voice is brutal: "You have caused me so much pain."

Wracked sobbing chokes her.

On the wet Irish ground, Kai vomits and reels from the pervasive stress.

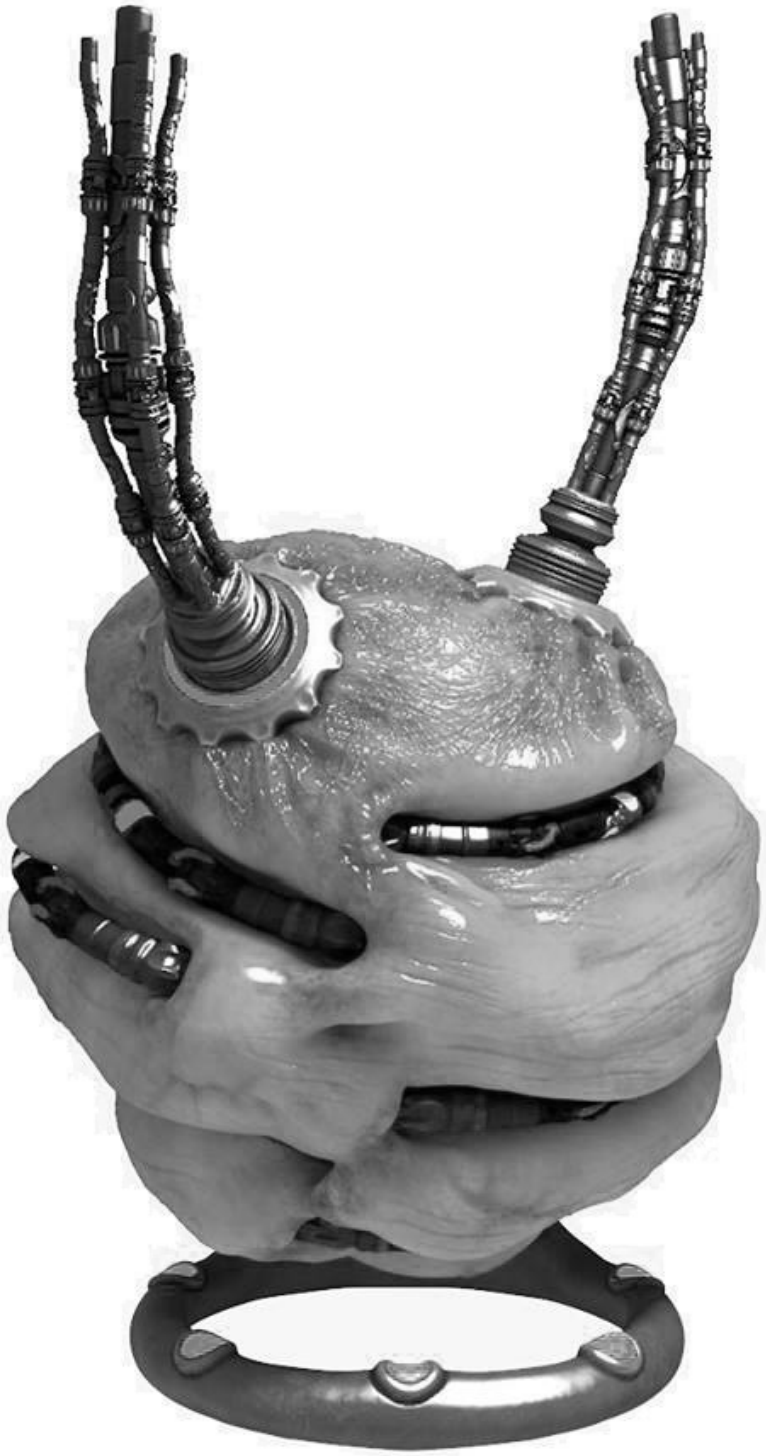
(continued…)

‘conTEXT’

Joey Holder

Force or throw. Be cast out from within. Secreted from the outermost epidermal cells of the rootcap, it is a physiological or psychological requirement for the well-being of an organism. ROOT is a C++ replacement of the popular PAW program developed at CERN. It will generally grow in any direction where the correct environment of air, mineral nutrients and water exists to meet the plant’s need. The content of the product of two polynomials is the product of their contents. Software frameworks require abstraction in which software providing generic functionality can be selectively changed by user code, thus providing application specific software. An index is a list of words or phrases and associated locators to where useful material relating to that heading can be found in a document. Organisers are looking for your help. ConTEXT has not been developed for a long while. This is because ConTEXT was originally written using Delphi, which requires a licence for users to develop with the components used. Characteristics of spoken or written communication that seeks to imitate informal speech. Specifically human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of communication. When the issues in your life become too much, or a secret in you starts to take its toll, it’s only natural instinct to turn to your mother. The way a person feels inside is important. The walls have deceived me. Culture, attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, authority, rapport, hypnosis, persuasion, coercion and/or genetics.

Relieve the burden of contents; unload.



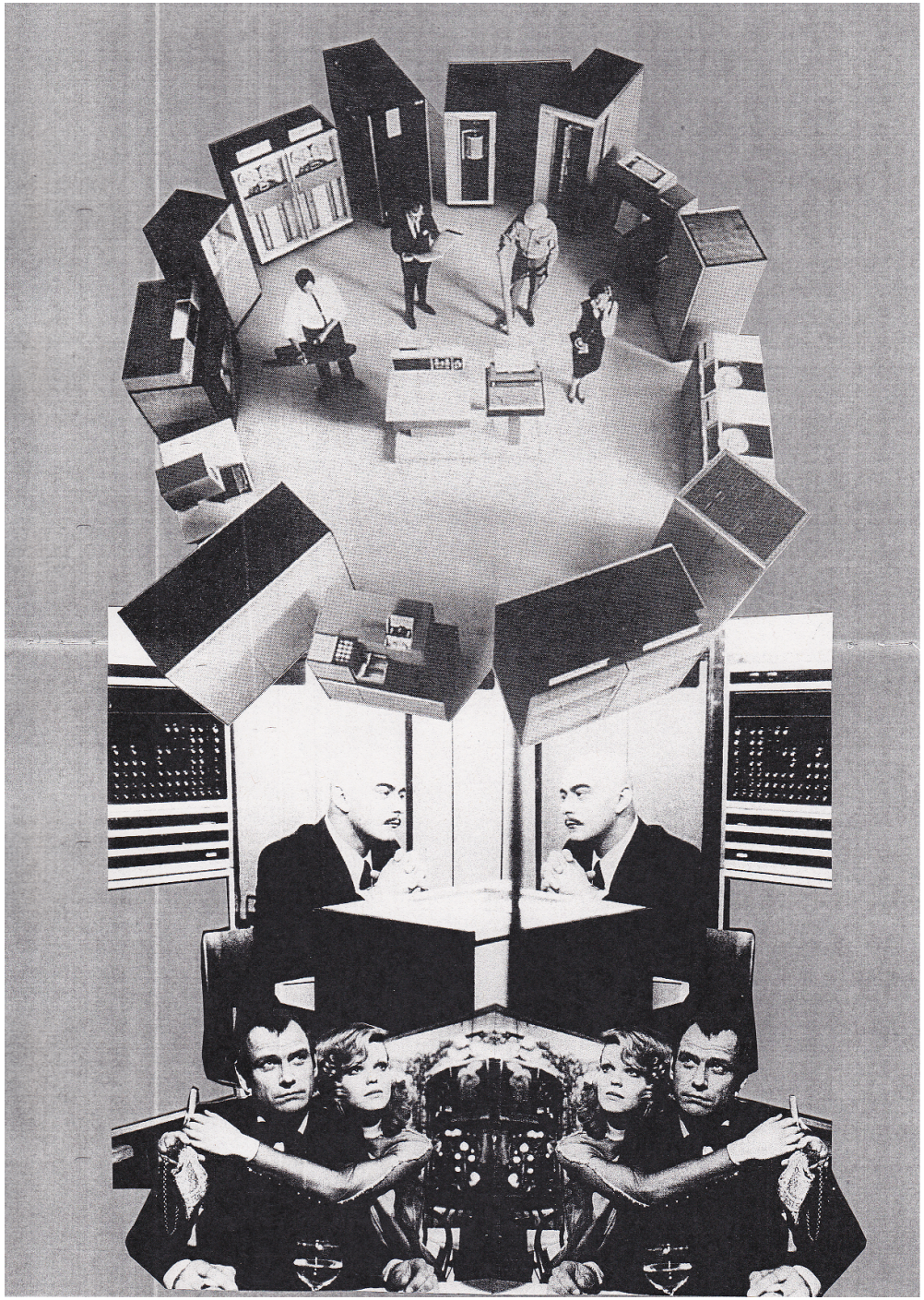
Plurality of Worlds in Late-Capitalism

Jack Brennan

> Know that many are trying to demonstrate the possibility of the plurality of worlds... One could object thus: It is better to multiply the better things than the worse things; it is better, then, to create many worlds than many animals or many plants. To which we shall reply: It is relevant to the world's goodness that it is unique; its unity is itself the reason for its goodness.
>
> Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio Super Libro de Caelo et Mundo Aristotelis*

Benedetto Croce once said that 'all history is today's history'. We must keep this dictum even more closely in mind when confronting science fiction: rather than fantastic predictions of things to come, what SF really offers us is the unpalatable truth of our own age, sugar-coated by some kind of distance (events take place in the future, or in some parallel universe with alternative physical laws, for example). That this truth is historical in nature is most obviously the case in utopian/dystopian novels such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1921 *We*, which offers a sophisticated exploration of Soviet collectivization, but can be detected in any SF, such as the post-K. Dick Cyberpunk of the 1980's, which Frederic Jameson called 'the supreme *literary* expression, if not of Post-Modernism, then of late capitalism itself'. If for Zamyatin the crisis was taking place at the level of an individual's relationship to society, then for William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, et al. writing in the 1980s, it was a kind of crisis within the thinking subject itself as it grappled with the unattractive mixture of Cold War politics and MTV, cheap computers and Reaganomics.

But it was in the 1970s that computational capacity and economics became eager bedfellows, and they have stayed that way ever since. Where once econometricians carried out rudimentary statistical analyses with mechanical calculators, and Keynesians argued in terms of nationally aggregated consumption, the economists of the 1970s were able to assemble and manipulate vast data-sets detailing consumption of individual products; clothes, bicycles, whatever. With the cost-of-computation barrier effectively lifted by advancing technology, statistical correlations and consumer behaviour equations could be produced in incredible detail. Want to know whether to



invest capital in a nylon plant or a steelworks? Just run the model.

It was around this time that such large computer simulations began to be called *world models*, none more appropriately so than that of MIT systems theorist Jay Forrester, used by the environmental think tank Club of Rome in their 1972 analysis of 'the present and future predicament of mankind'. *Limits to Growth*, the published account of that analysis, sought 'to examine the complex of problems troubling men of all nations: poverty in the midst of plenty; degradation of the environment; loss of faith in institutions; uncontrolled urban spread; insecurity of employment; alienation of youth; rejection of traditional values; and inflation and other monetary and economic disruptions'. The simulation was run over various parameters: artificially suppressed population growth, wars, greater or lesser pollution, and so on. The outcomes of such simulations were plots of expected evolution of all the inter-linked variables; numerical measures, somehow, of the diverse and esoteric categories above-mentioned (what is the unit of loss of faith in institutions?). Thus it is perhaps at this point that computer simulations took on properly oracular significance.

Enough non-fiction: let us meet a film that straddles strangely the topics of postwar economic planning and late capitalist subjectivity. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's only SF work, the 1973 TV film *Welt am Draht* (*World on a Wire*), tells the story of muscular computer scientist Fred Stiller, employed by the local Institute for Cybernetics and Futurology to work on just such a world model as we have discussed. Stiller is recalled to the institute from his holiday hut to head up the project Simulakron, after the mysterious death of his predecessor, Professor Vollmer.

At a dinner party held by the Institute's director, the inscrutable Herr Siskins, Stiller is introduced to Gloria, a beautiful blonde woman.

> *"Is it true you've created an artificial world?" she asks.*
> *"World is an exaggeration. Currently we've some 10,000 identity units. That's all we need for now. The world in a nutshell, you see."*
> *"10,000 people? They're people, aren't they? Or?"*
> *"As you like. To us they're merely electronic circuits. But to them… They live just like we do… Build roads, listen to music, eat…"*
> *"And make love with each other?"*
> *"Yes that too. Make love, enjoy life, have kids…"*
> *"How exciting."*
> *"Making love?"*
> *"Yes that, but I mean living in a box full of microchips."*

No sooner are we introduced to the notion that the model in Simulakron is somehow overflowing its status as a purely instrumental device of scientific research, than Stiller's friend, Institute Head of Security Günther Lause arrives at the party. He has something urgent

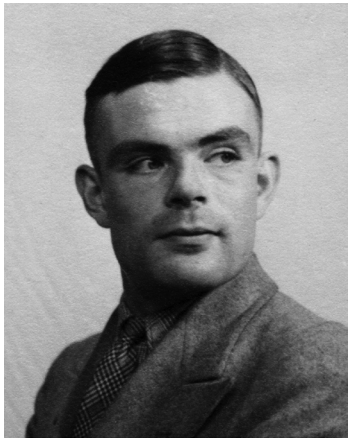
to tell Stiller about Vollmer's demise, that it had to do with what Vollmer had uncovered concerning the Simulakron: knowledge 'that would mean the end of the world'. But at the moment of revelation, a smashing glass dropped by Gloria distracts Stiller and he turns his back on Lause. A piercing synthesizer noise accompanies Stiller's reversion to his friend; to Stiller's horror, Lause is vanished without a trace.

From here we move rapidly into SF existential angst. Stiller jacks into the matrix of Simulakron and meets Einstein, the so-called contact unit and the Institute's fixer within Simulakron. The only unit aware that he lives a simulated life, Einstein carries out small tasks to ensure the stable operation of the simulation. It's driving him mad, and he wants to transfer his consciousness into the body of someone from the reality 'above'. Stiller thwarts his attempt but seeds of doubt are sewn in his mind about the reality of his own world. Could it not also be a simulation itself?

In fact, as soon as we attempt to distinguish between reality and artifice in *Welt am Draht*, we become uncomfortably aware of their constant and mutual slimy incursions across the permeable border (barely) separating them. Fassbinder himself knew this, when he said that the film used an 'old philosophical model which here creates a kind of horror'. On one hand, we have the horror of Cartesian doubt: Stiller thinks, therefore he is… *what?* A collection of electronic circuits? And for whom does he think? A sardonic twist occurs when Herr Siskins turns over the use of Simulakron to the United Steel Incorporation and the government's economic commission, Perspektiv 2000. The model is really just a huge market analysis; one's labours and loves simulated so that a bureaucrat can guess when investment in a steelworks will be amortized in a higher reality. On this point, Fassbinder's film trumps the American book on which it was based; how bittersweet to view the West German postwar economic miracle, the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*, as the virtualization of life. It is tempting finally to add that the only difference between *Welt am Draht* and our own existence is that here we live our simulated lives so that the investment in a steelworks (or a smartphone application developer) can be amortized in our very same reality.

As our motto above indicates, the possibility of plurality of worlds has long since exercised philosophers. Aquinas, an Aristotelian, followed his Greek forbear in answering the question negatively. Some centuries later, Dominican friar and philosopher Giordano Bruno took Copernicus' Heliocentric doctrine to heart, but displaced even the Sun's privileged position

at the centre of the universe. Recognizing the Sun to be just another star, Bruno posited that the universe was without centre, infinitely extensive and therefore contained in principle infinitely many worlds of intelligent beings. For his offences to Catholic Doctrine, Bruno was burned. But is such a fate not perversely appropriate for a man so prominent in overthrowing the comfort of the well-ordered Aristotelian Cosmos, where everything had a *place* and a goal, and who left us floating in undifferentiated *space*, as Bruno put it: 'a single vast immensity which we may freely call Void'?



Bruno's "crime" was to decentre humanity in the external world. The transgression of Simulakron concerns our place in the inner world; it is the splicing of René Descartes and Alan Turing. Already in 1950, Turing had devised his famous test for consciousness (much criticized since, it has to be said). A sufficiently powerful computer, properly programmed, could in theory answer questions asked by a human subject so convincingly that its inorganic status might be undetectable. Would we then be obliged to treat the machine as we do our conscious fellow humans? (Presumably the point remains moot whilst we continue to treat actually existent humans so badly as a matter of course.)

The ideational denizens of the post K. Dick SF scene share a DNA of computational capacity and emerging consciousness. Yet the inhabitants of Simulakron, Wintermute/*Neuromancer* in Gibson's 1984 book, Major Kusanagi and Project 2501 in *Ghost in the Shell*: such Turing-bending fictional constructs do not augur the birth of a new post-human. Rather, they are a sober reminder from our own historical situation that our free will and dignity as human beings have only ever existed as a reflection in a dirty mirror.

About the Contributors

Jack Brennan writes about the history and philosophy of science and mathematics. His latest research interest is the development of maths clubs and competitions for teenagers in the Soviet Union. He lives in London.

Ed Fornieles (for-nee-el-es) is an English artist working in Los Angeles using variety of different media including the internet, sculpture, performance, film and social media. Fornieles merges sophisticated social manipulation with a formal approach to the Internet and pop culture. His works *Animal House*, *Dorm Daze* and *The Dreamy Awards* have drawn comparisons to Todd Phillips, early John Waters, and 360 advertising.

Joey Holder's work includes painting, sculpture, video and digital manipulations. She is concerned with the notions of the artificial and the natural, two terms whose meanings we have become less able to define within today's modern technology driven world and our adaption to this ever-revised order.

Pete Inkpen (1987) is an artist and filmmaker based between London and Glasgow. His practice explores narrative as a tool for commentary on contemporary ideologies and their possible everyday applications. Exhibitions include 'Prismism' at Transmission, Glasgow and 'Near Miss' at ICA, London. Pete Inkpen graduated from Goldsmiths in 2012 with a BA in Fine Art."
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Paul Kindersley graduated from Chelsea College of Art in 2009. He is an artist, stalker, makeup enthusiast and youtuber based in London. Kindersley works across drawing, installation, performance, and video broadcast. Recent projects include Two Man show at Centre For Recent Drawing, Everything at ICA and Extreme Dream (makeover) at Nottingham Contemporary…

Ad Minoliti is an artist based in Buenos Aires. She earned a BFA at the National Academy of Fine Arts Pueyrredon. She has received grants from the Ministry of Culture of Argentina and Mexico FONCA. Received the first prize acquisition in the Latin American painting Arcos Dorados, among other terms. She exhibits in in Argentina, Madrid, Mexico DF, Miami, New York, Austria, Paris, Oakville, among other cities.

Artist and bookseller **Viniita 'Neet' Moran** is the founder of Owl Cave, a bookshop and travelling library devoted to selling a curated selection of international contemporary art, cultural theory, artists' ephemera and vintage books. Taking its name from a location in the David Lynch TV series *Twin Peaks*, Owl Cave began in London in 2008, and is now based in San Francisco.
www.owlcavebooks.com

Ben Osborn is a writer, songwriter and composer. He is the resident musical director of theatre company Fellswoop. His first libretto, *On false perspective*, is

currently being set to music by composer Josephine Stephenson and will be performed in May.

Jaakko Pallasvuo is a Wi-Fi based artist working with moving image, writing, image files and speech.

Marta Poznanski is a clothesmaker based in London and Bydgoszcz. She is the founder of The Futures Complex which is in recess due to an sudden loss of actuality. She loves cabs.

Finishing art school, **Llew Watkins** spent two and a half years in solitary Buddhist meditation retreats in the Himalayas and Wales. He has lectured and written about his experience of type 2 bipolar disoerder, a genetic heirloom that causes extraordinary pain, complicates friendships and confers certain benefits also. Llew's current, London- based art practice drifts between writing, performance and sculpture.

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The next issue will be themed around APOCALYPSES.

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Science-fiction &
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