

Speculative Arts Research • Issue 1 • 08-15-2018

Speculative Arts Research:
Issue 1 (August, 2018)

Edited by
Alessandro Keegan and Max Razdow

©2018 Speculative Arts Research. All Rights Reserved.

Contact:
sar.contact9@gmail.com
<http://www.speculativeartsresearch.com/>

All Images are Courtesy of the Artist.



Foreword

The goal of this journal is to present visual art and writing that we deem visionary, metaphysical, forward-thinking and deeply imaginative. Historically, artists working in the realms of imagination and seership have given the world great gifts, though their voices often go underappreciated in their lifetimes and are popularly deemed too whimsical, marginal or overly esoteric. Such visionary expressions, we feel, are in fact among the most vital products of culture. They elevate us from the mundane and the material, provide bridges to better futures and reveal dire warnings about the failings of our time.

For the sake of clarifying this underrepresented branch of creativity and in the interest of giving its parameters the maximum amount of liberty and fluidity, we term the art of this obscure path Speculative Art. In times of nihilism, fear, division and despair, nothing is more vital to the life force of the culture than the visions of Speculative Art. If we, in this small journal, can provide a platform for these voices of the mystic wilderness, then we feel this endeavor is justified.

A definition of Speculative Art is mandatory in order to set the stage for the kind of work and writing you can expect to find here. Most often Speculative Art is defined as a visual art branch of the science fiction and fantasy genres. Artists closely aligned with these paths are not central to our concern, though we find that there are nuances of invention in their work that those who dismiss genre-based art ignore. We feel that a preoccupation with art related to genre is too limiting, however. Our journal is expanding the definition of Speculative Art to include any art practice that uses imagination, vision or intuition to genuinely delve into the outré limits of the world and question materialist assumptions about science, spirituality, technology, the human mind and all the most vital issues of our lives. All of these artists hover around the edges of futurism, surrealism, occultism, science fiction and fantasy but retain an individualistic vision that makes their work relevant to the human condition.

Finally, there is no hierarchy in the realms of Speculative Art, no “insiders” or “outsiders.” Though we may endeavor to curate our tastes for the sake of this journal’s consistency, there are no boundaries to what the speculative can encapsulate. Self-taught artists are the peers of the academically trained within this journal. A practicing occult magus is given the same space as a historical scholar. These distinctions are meaningless in the quest for visionary experience. The goal here is not to pass judgment or align ourselves with any institution but to provide enriching images and ideas that may hold the keys to learning what lies beyond the greatest horizon.

A subsidiary goal of this journal may be to help inaugurate a new critical format specifically fit for Speculative Art, with an eye toward revising the role of the artist who makes it. The Speculative leaves one foot ever in age-old mystical spaces, and all practitioners hold candles to particular aspects of history while also ambling toward novel ways to understand their present reality. It is undeniable that artwork also tends to ratify its own modes of creation based on its contemporary situational desires. Artwork, in various ages, reacts to its social environment, economy, physical and technological constraints and schemas of self-made value to become whatever it will be. However, the presumptive power of Speculative Art may be its ability to elevate the possible from quotidian and temporal constraints, becoming instead a self-made vehicle for imagined futurity.

This journal, then, aims to widen the boundaries of reception for an art form that seems often, perhaps by its own design, to be hidden, unintelligible or anachronistic. This demands a new form of art writing. We hope that the Speculative Artists and writers who choose to make of these pages their laboratories, temples and soap boxes will find kinship with a categorically novel form of critique that is, in the most helpful way possible, radically hermetic. Thus, one might find here not only art criticism that references actual history, but art criticism that makes up its own history instead. One might find philosophies that are marginalized or nascent, spiritualities that are self-made and identities that blur into each other freely. Our aim is to unravel institutional constraints on complexities of thought that verge on world-building, letting them escape the tribunal forces that are perched upon the shoulders of artists who dare venture into the wilderness of fantastical craft.

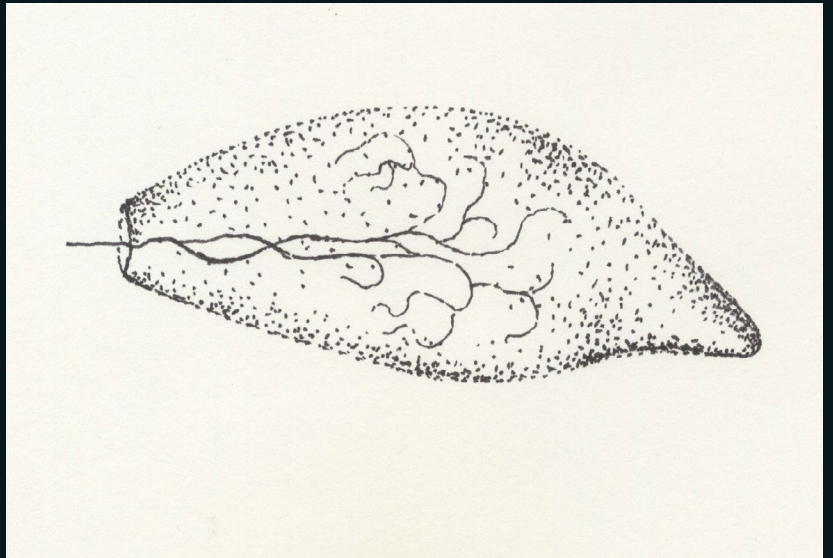
Alessandro Keegan & Max Razdow
August 2018

Vitreism: Mapping the Invisible

• Alessandro Keegan •

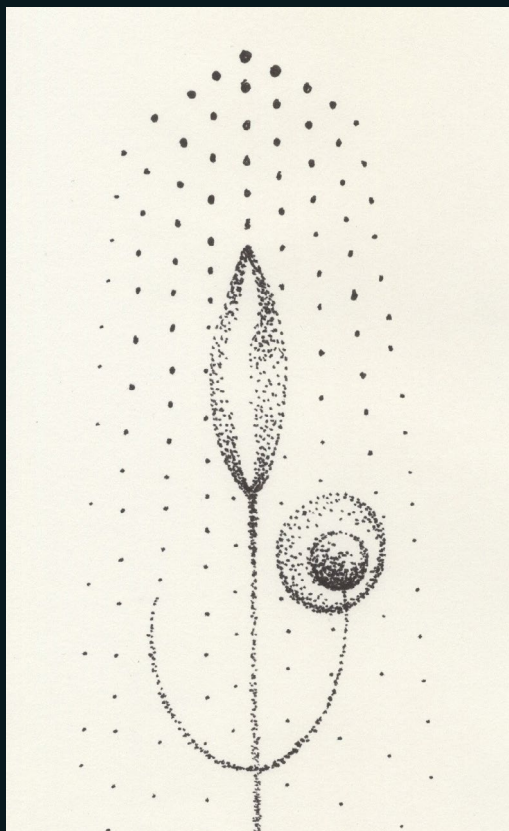
A deep blue sapphire of burnished cool light is expanding infinitely at the center of the planet. It widens its eye to take in every monolith of abalone luster dotting the horizon. At the limits of the great stone's perception is a skyline of nocturnal luminescence, deep red and yellow ochre flickering on the banks of black cloud cover. Surrounding this blue carbuncle are the streams of earth and space, crystal roots of sacred trees and silver glittering rivers of ether drained out of the essence of every composite God from the whole of history. These rivers are moving through glass arteries into the great distillery at the place from which all subterranean caves emerge.

The distillery is samovar shaped and encrusted with the rare gems of planetary colors: rust brown of Mars, smokey blue of the Moon, and canary yellow of Venus. As the secret streams of Mercury collide in this crucible beneath the ground they erupt from a glass fountain in silver smoke and shards of celestial radiance. The distillery's symmetry is ever changing, retracting into fine geometric lines of gray or pulsing outward in organic shapes like auricular cartouches that might inhabit the strapwork of sixteenth-century European masters of grotesque design. In each arterial branch is a hive of words, symbols and moments of lost time. They harden by the second into adamantine pearly dew drops that form a chain around the seashell cups containing everlasting life. Where Mercury exits each pipe of the distillery it takes the form of a life that is constantly evolving inside a blown egg of translucent white. Each transparent or opaque egg is spawned from the breathing vessels of this device, containing a lamp of life that finds its way to the surface in the pickings of delicate seeds, some white, golden, blue, purple, green or red (Fig. 1).



The color of the seed communicates the life force's path, its cycles of reincarnation and the number of the ages it will survive through the dharma of destruction and reconstitution. When an egg breaks it forms a glass bell and the light of eternal life goes on, spilling down into the noiseless regions of darkness below.

This is a partial description of the first body, the Edenic Body, which had existed before the kinds of physical divisions we experience today. In the Garden of Eden (one interpretation has the word Eden originating from the Akkadian word, *edinnu*, which has been interpreted to mean “fruitful” and “well-watered,” describing lush botanical life) the single human incarnation, Adam (derived, as I understand it, from the Hebrew *ha adamah*, meaning “the ground” or “the earth”) gives birth to Eve (from the Hebrew “*Hawwāh*” which means “the source of life” or even life itself, the first life that has been born) through the process of parthenogenesis, giving birth without insemination.



The Edenic Body was therefore asexual and closer to the plant world than to the world of division we know today. The *Urpflanze* of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s “The Metamorphosis of Plants” was then the Edenic Body, the body of Adam. The first stage of existence in Eden, whether interpreted literally or as an allegory for the ancient conception of life’s origins, was vegetative and did not exist with the boundaries of description we would use to categorize life today. Taxonomy, in the most primal moment of life, did not exist (Fig. 2).

Taking this primal moment as my starting point, I will propose that the non-space of the first time, the Edenic Time, can be mapped in the imagination if we are inventive enough to apply the tools of language, symbol and image to its exploration. I am proposing a new field of thought in order to contextualize such explorations, which I have named Vitreism. Vitreism is the mapping of the invisible. It is the esoteric system I have invented for my own artistic practice (as a painter). Vitreism can include any sort of study or action that relates to seeing into another world where empirical observation fails. The word, Vitreism, is derived from the Vitreous, meaning glassy, translucent or crystalline. It connotes the quality of something that can be seen through like a window. Vitreism aspires to render transparent the veil of *Māyā*, the illusion of the material world, through creative action. In art, Vitreism is the creation of works with multiple, layered meanings and associations. Vitreist works of art are meant to be translated, to be seen through, so that their inner world of hidden physics can touch the senses.

Vitreism is also kin to the word Vitreous, the humor of the eye, the liquid that allows the lens and the retina to project onto the screens of our mind the dream movies of the outside. This cathode-like effect is not unlike the cathode-like nature of a symbol. In his 1949 book, “Symbol and the Symbolic,” the French alchemist and Egyptologist, R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, compares the symbol to the then new technology of the cathode ray tube. The symbol,

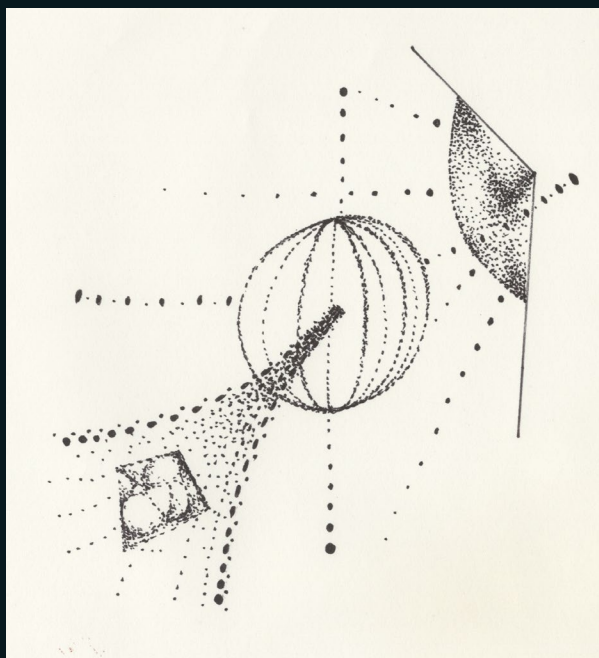
Vitreism is also kin to the word Vitreous, the humor of the eye, the liquid that allows the lens and the retina to project onto the screens of our mind the dream movies of the outside. This cathode-like effect is not unlike the cathode-like nature of a symbol. In his 1949 book, “Symbol and the Symbolic,” the French alchemist and Egyptologist, R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, compares the symbol to the then new technology of the cathode ray tube. The symbol,

says Schwaller de Lubicz, is like the image created by beamed electrons onto the screen of the cathode ray tube. The symbol is impossible to locate though it is there. We perceive the image though its true essence remains esoteric and hovering in infinite atoms in invisible space. Vitreist images come from the land between the eye and the image in the brain, not from the external world. They float inside consciousness, we perceive them but they do not reside in any single point in space.

At the heart of Vitreism is the assumption that the material world is not all there is to the human experience. Vitreism begins with the premise that other realities exist but do not conform to a materialist understanding and so necessitates the construction of new diagrams, images, sounds, symbols and words to find its expression. The process of delineating the unseen world's contours is the practice of Vitreism.

The invisible world takes many forms and has been described as a God with many faces, multiple bodies or a swarm of far-ranging bees laden with pollen moving through every petaled orifice of field and dale. When an invisible element defies observable appearances it may need to be represented as a schema, a map or an abstraction. Often the invisible is conveyed visually as both the diagrammatic and the descriptive. We must develop new organs to explore this territory sufficiently. As Rudolf Steiner describes in Theosophy, from 1904, "Within our body, our eyes and ears develop as organs of perception, as senses for bodily processes. Similarly, we can develop soul and spiritual organs of perception that will open up soul and spirit worlds to us."

In conclusion I would like to highlight an example of invisible perception and mapping from the natural world that can be observed scientifically: the flavoprotein called cryptochrome, which allows for both the perception of blue light and electromagnetic fields in plants and some fauna. Through cryptochrome, plant life is able to sense the direction of sunlight and bend its vegetal body toward the nourishing discard of its radiance. In bees, migrating birds and foxes, the presence of cryptochrome allows the animal to sense the electromagnetic fields of the earth, a phenomenon known as magnetoreception. The array of magnetism exhaled by the earth may appear like a velvet black shadow hanging in the horizon, blacker than any threatening storm. For the migrating fauna that can perceive this energy, it is a visible compass in the sky that allows them to navigate from anywhere on the earth. Cryptochrome is additionally remarkable because it is a quantum molecule, meaning that it can be effected by the most infinitesimal forces known to physics, energies and masses so incalculably small that they are unknowable in our experience of the world. The existence of phenomenon like cryptochrome suggests that the invisible world, though I may have presented it in this paper as little more than something to be explored by the creative mind (as Vitreism), is sufficiently real and actionable enough for its study to be a mandate for any mind seeking to truly know the world.



Jeremy Olson's "amphoric twin"

• Max Razdow •



Jeremy Olson, "amphoric twin", 8x10 inches, oil on panel, 2018

"amphoric twin" is a painting of a guy made of gum. It is figural, and yet composed of substance such that it strips the figure of many of the nominal romantic aspects we expect from figuration. Posture is unimportant, clothing or adornment unthought of, gaze, expression, unneeded, impossible (there are no eyes). The material of the gum guy is perhaps its primary being, a material with a quixotic sensibility that does not easily fall into categorical significations. What is gum? It is a haptic technology for the basic mammalian action of chewing: a passive articulation, where action predicates substance. Yet, gum, in Olson's deft handling, is elastic and inordinately sumptuous, glazed with rubbery hints of preternatural smoothness that tense the jaw synesthetically. It is colored like cheap toys and tastes of an age teetering on the precipice of post-natural gloom. The "twin" (a twin of what? perhaps endless versions of itself), is slumped into place as a preponderance of shapeless form, set against a morbidly empty background of a color like dead clay.

We are not entreated by these paintings to any of the romance of abstraction. Plasticity, in all its early modern hope, is made parenthetical by Olson, a lexical component in a larger conversation. Abstraction, in Olson's spaces often recall a vomited material that avoids authorship, or else one that becomes architecturally recursive to the point of nausea. The golem, in all its horror, is not here either. Whatever monster this "twin" may be, it is kinetically weak, empowered only to be, not to act. Plasticman's comic book acrobatics are wrapped back around themselves in unending ellipses that leave a tangle of forgotten and submersed interiors. Mondrian, William James and Robert Motherwell were all heraldic proponents of the term Plasticity under different auspices of meaning, but they are now sleeping. I am reminded more by these works of Tetsuo, Akira's antagonist, disappearing into folds of inarticulate organs and grinding mouths and flesh. His yells of mirrored personification (calling out to Kaneda) became muffled in implosion until they were gone below those folds.

All this is not to say that the gum guy is not triumphant. It is heralding the truth of post-triumphant ethos sometimes found in contemporary surrealistic practices, such as Genesis Belanger, David Hardy and others. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, perhaps, is the most likely reference for the gum guys. His dusty 16th century panels depicted human portraits made of fish or vegetables or fruit. Those paintings, while darkly medieval, edged up to Huysmans in their ecstatic interest in a chimeric material. There was an early sense in them that the modern age held a leering abusivity that might arise in some kind of revelry of nature, re-purposing man as the steward of some future union of quotidian material within a proto psychedelic architecture. His was an alchemy of hapless punning, but it was subtly futurist as well, hinting at the way minutia begets totality in empirical and info-rich spaces.

I think the gum guys may be more honorific of actual experience than all that. There, in those molting faces formed from gnawed chicle, we see the felt expression of a lack of archetypal meaning. We see an immense and untenable technonature reflected back at us through our human inability to manipulate it. The "amphoric twin", such that amphora might reflect the human body, recalls the static mirroring which paradoxically arises in an era of unrepentant movement. It is an evangelism of material, an echo of helplessness in the face of runaway change.

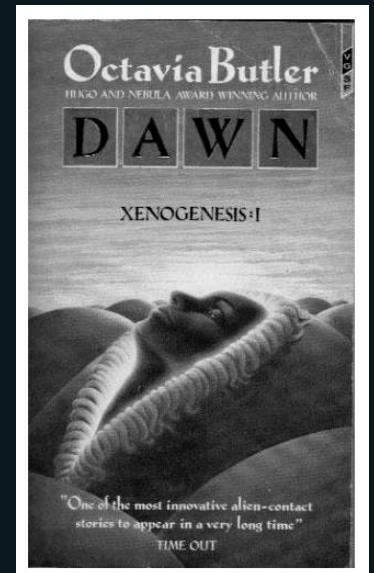
Out of the flesh of our Mothers come dreams and memories of the Gods.

For the *magi* of the left-hand path, sexuality is even more than ‘a primary mode of being’—the altered state of extreme erotic ecstasy is a potentially divine mode of being, the chaotic dance of two magnetically attracted opposite energies that allows for the creation of a third power transcending the human.

Notes on alien-human erotics in Octavia Butler’s *Dawn*

Chloe Sugden

Secret Western sexual practices have been used since ancient Greece, like the tantra of the East, to achieve mystical transcendence or union with God—an initiatory transcendence of the self towards divine enlightenment. Since the late twentieth-century, many in the West have explored Hindu and Buddhist forms of Tantra to such ends, yet these forms have generally been ‘distorted,’ commodified and trivialised in their transmission from the East. This has not occurred in the long-standing ‘esoteric Western traditions of sexual mysticism,’ which have remained largely hidden and unknown. The word ‘mysticism’ derives from the ancient Mystery traditions of antiquity, where divine initiation and revelation had potent sexual implications. The Bacchic, Dionysiac, Eleusini-an and Orphic Greek and Roman Mysteries are all associated with the ‘transcendent forces of the cosmos,’ sex, human fertility and the primacy of feminine power. Further, in the Christian traditions of late antiquity, Arthur Versluis argues that “‘pagan” orgiastic traditions did not disappear, but were subsumed into various forms of Christianity, sometimes called gnostic.’ In the *Nag Hammadi Codex* and several other gnostic texts, there is a sentiment of divine transcendence beyond this world—a transcendence ‘separate from and beyond’ worldly nature. Drawing on such images of esoteric mystery, divine transcendence and ancient sex rite, arguably latent in gnostic scripture and the ancient Mystery traditions, I seek to approach a work of recent, post-human speculative fiction—*Dawn*, from Octavia Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (1987).



Through a series of informal notes and reflections, in what follows, I will explore and diagram the implications of the spiritual sex rituals of the book’s protagonist, Lilith, as she copulates with a third alien force. This alien force symbolises a third, divine power which is beyond the scope of human understanding. Through her act of alien-human sexual initiation with this otherworldly force, I argue that Lilith achieves spiritual transcendence, ascending from the role of instrument (or slave, captive), to a godly status. She attains a post-human state of denaturalised, divine weirdness, or a deific alien subjectivity. Lilith experiences this divine transcendence as she succumbs to, and embraces both her abduction by aliens, and alien-human sensuality. In so doing, she departs from an earthbound, ‘natural’ (or ‘homophilic’) eroticism. As I approach themes of alien spiritual, sexual and political subjectivity, I also consider the deep techno-cultural intelligence metaphor. I argue that *Dawn* offers an empowering esoteric metaphor for the present, as Lilith uses sex magic to defy the regulated, libidinal boundaries of secular earthly existence in a post-human world.

1. British artist and occultist, Austin Osman Spare quoted in Drury, Neville. *Stealing Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 153.

2. Schreck, Nikolas, and Zeena Schreck. *Demons of the Flesh: The Complete Guide to Left Hand Path Sex Magic*. London: Creation Books, 2002, 4.

3. Versluis, Arthur. *The Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism: Sacred Practices and Spiritual Marriage*. Destiny Books: Rochester, 2008, 5.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, 7.

1. Defining the libidinal current of the Oankali aethyr

In Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy, the human race has near-obliterated itself in nuclear war. Post-human-icide, those few who survive are abducted by a nomadic alien species, the omniscient Oankali. The Oankali are advanced, supernatural sky-beings who are repairing Earth for re-colonisation. They are also nomadic gene traders, scouring the universe for other species whose DNA is useful to their genetic engineering program. In the first book, *Dawn*, Lilith Iyapo, an African-American woman, is Mother of a new order of humans. Lilith wakes in solitary confinement on the Oankali ship after 250 years in incubation. This ship—the realm that she has literally and figuratively ascended to—is equal parts earthly, celestial and hellish. The threefold division of underworld, earth and heaven is murky in this aethyr. Lilith slowly learns that she has been chosen by the Oankali as the leader of the other humans. Her role is, in part, to wake others from their centuries-long slumbers and facilitate an Oankali-human breeding program. Lilith's designated role as instrument, and her ecstatic, or divine transcendence of this role through Oankali-human sensuality, mark the end of a humanist, earthbound eroticism.

There is a disruption or *queering* of homophilic sexual identity in the Oankali regime, as erotic gratification lies far outside normative sexual behaviour. Introducing its third sex, the 'ooloi' Oankali, Nikanj, gives Lilith and her lover, Joseph, an intimacy 'beyond ordinary human experience.' Further, Nikanj experiences the same immense (psycho)sexual pleasure that it gives. In Nikolas and Zeena Schreck's words, a 'multi-bodied panorama of polymorphous delight' takes place. Erotic acts of copulation with the Oankali subvert all beliefs about what it is to be human. As humans consent to—moreover, succumb to their deep seduction by—Oankali intercourse, an aroused acceptance of a (genuine) alien sexual invitation arises. Yet erotic impulse in the alien-human sexual dynamics of the Oankali realm is not easily placed. All of *Dawn's* protagonists inhabit a space where earthly distinctions between humans and animals are dissolved, decaying the homophilic order. Lilith cannot entirely grasp the transcendental power, or shockingly Other physiology of the Oankali, even as she grows fluent in their tongue and adopts some of their alien physiology. As John Berger argues, 'the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled... the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight.' Initially, the Oankali are terrifying to humans in their carnal fluidity; they cannot be defined within the primary categories of species. Before their systematic deprogramming, humans on the ship understand Oankali physiology as a denaturalised perversion of homophilic human physiology. However, as this alien regime thrives by denaturalising and instrumentalising humankind, I must consider how human anthropic disgust is converted to desire, attraction and sexual submission.

The Oankali arouse psychosexual affect in humans—desire, attraction, fear—firstly, through their godlike abilities to manipulate human biological functions. Secondly, through the deific allure of their biological difference, or their divine weirdness. The Oankali's sensory limbs (or tentacles, organs), through which alien-human sex occurs, are textured surfaces by which the human agent participates in a hidden divine reality. In other words, through the tentacular sensory limb, the xenophiliac human body connects with the Oankali body as an extension of its divine alien corporeality. Like the ancient Greek deity, Pan ('ruler of All'), the Oankali are also 'unpredictable, lascivi-

6. Ibid, 8.

7. Drawing on Egil Asprem's writing, I use the term 'aethyr' in an Enochian sense. In the Enochian tradition, an aethyr denotes one of a series of successive worlds, or planes, which penetrates and extends beyond the material world. See Asprem, Egil. *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2012, 98.

8. I use the term 'homophilic' to refer to the social tendency of humans to maintain relationships with other humans who are similar to them. After their awakening on the Oankali ship, humans gradually shift from a homophilic to xenophiliac erotic structure and libidinal economy. (See: xenophiliac, note 8.)

9. Schreck and Schreck, 4.

10. See Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

11. Antonia Majaca and Luciana Parisi explore Lilith's experimental approach to instrumentality at length in their article, 'The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility' e-flux, no. 77 (November 2016). They ask: 'Doesn't the instrument itself possess its own "ends," as Lilith does?'

ous, lecherous' and may be regarded as devilish. Unlike Pan and other mythological deities, however, the Oankali are not derived from human beings whose lives, at some time, became mythical—they have no cultural origins on Earth. Where Pan's horns and hooves stand for natural, earthly energies, the Oankali's pleasure-giving sensory tentacles stand for the *denatural*, extraterrestrial energies of xenophilia. The xenophiliac human body exists in this realm, far beyond its earthly lifespan, as a result of divine Oankali intervention in the Apocalypse, or Armageddon. The Oankali is the Pan of a new, xenophiliac nature—the abstract ruler and God of all living xenophilic nature. Oankali are the saviours and creation deities of the new alien-human species; benevolent, godly figures of a new age, giving unimaginable sensuous and spiritual pleasure (and at times, pain) to their (once-)human counterparts.

In diagramming the denaturalised, divine erotic structure of Oankali/human intimacy, there are infinite factors to consider. At a bodily level, forces such as the electrochemical, the genetic, and the biochemical, entwined with the verbal, are at play. (The biochemical generally overpowers verbal dissent in xenophiliac sexual submission.) One must also consider the transition from homophilia to xenophilia, as denaturalisation gives way to xenophiliac submission. Further, as I will later discuss, the Oankali-human sex rite may be diagrammed as the human's initiation and transcension into a deific alien subjectivity, as they overcome an instrumental logic. These multiplying, fluid forces form part of an incomplete system of erotic ethics for an age beyond humanism—a xenophiliac vocabulary for alien-human spiritual-psychosexual dynamics and desire structures.

2. The Oankali-human sex act as divine initiatory rite; Lilith's transcension from instrument to *deific alien subject*

In their essay, 'The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility,' Antonia Majaca and Luciana Parisi fashion Lilith as a 'sorcerer' who innovates outside the traditional logic of the instrument. They argue that Lilith does not refuse her instrumentality, but 'acknowledges,' 'politicises' and 'ultimately transcends' it. According to Serenity Young, the human desire to be in contact with 'sky-beings' is a 'longing for transcendence.' Young argues that to transcend, (through sex rite or by other spiritually embodied, initiatory or ritualistic means), is to surpass others and what has been done before; to be free from constraint (from instrumentality). Lilith symbolises the ancient human desire to break through restraints; the yearning to pass through the terrestrial, reaching new heights of extraterrestrial, embodied spiritual experience. She becomes a magical female alien-deity through sex acts with Joseph and Nikanj—acts which allow her to transcend a traditional instrumental logic as she sexually consecrates her alien divinity.

Lilith's transcendent approach to the logic of the instrument—explored, in this instance, through alien-human erotics—shares affinities with the Schreck couple's descriptions of left-hand path sex magic in their book, *Demons of the Flesh*. The Schrecks distinguish between the 'profound pleasure' of sex enjoyed for sex's sake—as an embodied and aesthetic experience—and that sex which is utilised for 'authentic magical or initiatory purposes.' They describe the 'third power transcending the human' that is created in 'taboo-overturning' left-hand path sex magic. Throughout *Dawn*, Butler hints at those many modern autocracies that have maintained their power by severely 'curbing the full development of sexual power in their subjects.' As such, Lilith and the Oankali species, together, represent a 'third power' that demystifies flesh from taboo. They initiate Lilith into their divine aethyr through sexual rites. Post-initiation, Lilith and the Oankali work together as, for lack of a better term, sexual guerrillas who destroy fundamental understandings of erotic relations; they 'reinstate sexuality as a primary mode of being.'

12. The word 'xenophily' or 'xenophilia' is derived from the Greek terms 'xenos' (ξένος; stranger, unknown, foreign) and 'phila' (φιλία; love, attraction). The word is not found in classical Greek as it is a modern term coined to articulate an affection for the unknown. See Liddell, Henry, and Robert Scott, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 1189. The acts of love and sexual intercourse between humans and Oankali on board the ship may be expressed as xenophiliac.

13. Drury, 158.

14. Majaca and Parisi, n.p.

15. Young, Serenity. *Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 6.

16. Schreck and Schreck, 5.

The mythological figure of Lilith first appears in Sumerian mythology in the third millennium, before entering the Jewish tradition in the Talmudic period. In the Zohar (the Book of Splendour; 2001 CE)—the foundational text in Jewish mysticism, known as Kabbalah—Lilith is depicted as the arch-she-devil, Mother of demons and feminine counterpart to Samael (Satan), with ‘the defective light of Lucifer animating her.’ She is described as ‘the end of all flesh’ and ‘the end of days,’ Goddess of the Underworld and the secret force of nature. Similarly, in *Dawn*, Lilith belongs to the category of the monstrous-feminine. The most unnatural, or de-natural of human females, Lilith displays both Oankali and human sympathies and features—including fluency in the Oankali tongue and possession of some of their supernatural powers. (These alien-human psychological and physiological dualisms terrify the humans whom she wakes.) The intergalactic Oankali aethyr contains a divine potency which cannot be understood or articulated except through the mirror of a (pre-humanicide) earthly realm. As such, Lilith exists in-between, negotiating the economy of both human and Oankali erotic drives. Her infinite and mobile sexuality—her unbridled eroticisation of both Oankali and human subjects—is highly experimental. Innovative in her role as instrument, and transformative in her flesh and sexuality, she further ruptures and expands once-earthly human sociality.

Majaca and Parisi are in accord with these sentiments, arguing that Lilith does not desire autonomy from the (Oankali) gods: ‘she embraces her abduction and starts to reason with the instrument... [experimenting with an] entirely alien model of subjectivation.’ Lilith ‘places trust... [in her] hyper-denaturalised nature.’ Throughout *Dawn*, the Phallic period is over and Lilith narrates through her hybrid body—her *denatural* skin, her *denatural* energy. She audaciously inhabits her Oankali-human form, using ‘carnal and passionate *body words*.’ Hélène Cixous describes woman’s body as a ‘limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organised around any one sun that’s any more of a star than the others.’ She writes:

Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives...hasn’t accused herself of being a monster? ...A woman’s body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardour—once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction—will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.

Lilith’s (inescapably) anthropomorphic descriptions of erotic sex acts with the Oankali inform us about her embodied, transcendent experience of divinity on the ship. In *Dawn*, she can only state in a vague manner, for example, that there is ‘nothing more seductive than an ooloi [Oankali; the third sex, after female and male] speaking in... [a] particular tone, making [a] particular suggestion.’ According to Elliot Wolfson, ‘kabbalists maintain that the spiritual entities can be described in human terms, for the tangibility of the human body is determined by the divine body to which it corresponds.’ Similarly, Lilith’s anthropomorphisms are not a mere testament to the limits of humanist reasoning and rationality. Her use of human *body language accommodates human understanding of the higher, divine Oankali power, its corporeality, and her libidinal and spiritual connection and fusion with this alien species*.

17. Ibid.

18. Drury, 158.

19. Rabbi Yehuda Shalom Gross’s writing on Lilith appears in the Ohr haZohar, 1:148a-148b (Vayetze: Passage 23). Originally published in Hebrew (Israel, 2001 CE). I quote the Zohar from Scholem, Gershom and Melila Hellner-Eshed. ‘Zohar.’ Encyclopaedia Judaica. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 21. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, 647–664.

20. Young describes the ‘monstrous-feminine’ as a mythical female entity with both animal and human features: ‘the Gorgons, Sirens, Furies, and sphinxes of Greco-Roman mythology, demonesses of all times, and that most unnatural of females, Athena.’ See Young, 8.

21. Cixous, Hélène. ‘The Laugh of the Medusa.’ Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875–93, 886.

22. Ibid, 889.

23. Ibid, 876.

24. Wolfson, Elliot R. ‘Bifurcating the Androgyne and Engendering Sin: A Zoharic Reading of Gen 1–3.’ In *Hidden Truths from Eden: Esoteric Readings of Genesis 1-3*, edited by Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2014, 88.

3. Some closing remarks; Reflections on a modern Hermeticism (against technocultural instrumentalisation)

As demonstrated, when the Oankali introduce their third sex to the human DNA structure, a complex, xenophiliac system of erotics emerges. In the Oankali-human libidinal economy, as I have described, there are electrochemical, genetic, verbal and biochemical factors at play. These factors instil desire, attraction and fear in the human instrument, who becomes denaturalised when anthropic disgust transmutes to sexual submission. Eventually, I argue, this sexual submission transmutes to a liberatory, xenophiliac divine sensuality. Yet, what does this xenophiliac pleasure and spirituality truly entail? Is Lilith's sense of sexual salvation the final, most deceptive illusion in an all-consuming instrumentality?

In discussing alien spiritual, sexual and political subjectivity, I must acknowledge the deep techno-cultural intelligence metaphor, obvious to contemporary *Dawn* readers. AI, Big Data and deep learning intersect with human sexuality, the desire structure, biochemistry and emotion regulation. Contrarians to my argument may contrast the Oankali, the alien *Other*, with the vast, emergent networked form, which maintains instrumental control over the human by dispensing similar desire, fear and attraction. Any notion of pleasure or desire fulfillment may be argued as, in itself, a paradoxically potent illusion. In its centralised form, xenophiliac submission to Oankali domination could be perceived as bringing *defilement* rather than salvation—the naïve intellect of the (once-)human macro-being ruled over by an extraterrestrial super-intelligence—most poignantly through perceived pleasure and, in Lilith's case, divinity.

Yet all *dehumanising* activity need not be defiling. I stand by my argument that Lilith's use of sexual rites to transcend to an alien subjectivity, (dehumanised, denaturalised), is an occult mechanism of autonomous power against instrumentality. Here, there is a connection between unorthodox (veiled, undemocratic) spirituality and political power. The libidinal economy is essential to the sciences of 'brain-washing, mind-control, advertising, "public relations" and propaganda.' In the opening of Konrad Becker's *Dictionary of Operations: Deep Politics and Cultural Intelligence*, Hakim Bey reflects on these sciences as a 'form of magic that happens to work.' He highlights the age-old connection between 'Intelligence (spying) and Magic,' including stage magic, illusion and occultism. Bey suggests that Hermeticism can be used 'to free yourself from these *vinculae* and attain a relative autonomy or freedom from... the hex or fix that disempowers you—perhaps even for the Big Lies that pass for Consensus Reality.'

So, what is Hermeticism? Wouter Hanegraaff defines the esoteric tradition of Hermeticism as the teachings and doctrines in the philosophical Hermetica, including the treatises of the early Christian-era *Corpus Hermeticum*. Their authors were convinced that divine revelation leads to truth. The Hermetica teach 'a way by which the soul can ascend to a divine realm above the sphere of the fixed stars.' There, the soul 'mingles with' the divine powers, and by knowing God, becomes 'absorbed' in God. The Hermetic text, *Poimandres* explains: 'This is the final good for those who have received knowledge [*gnosis*]: to be made god,' or master of oneself. In this sense, as discussed, Lilith becomes an alien god—a near-equal to the Oankali and relatively autonomous—through sexual initiation, and her subjecthood is regenerated. Hanegraaff supports this argument, stating that such a deification can be an experience attained before death.

25. From Hakim Bey's introduction in Becker, Konrad. *Dictionary of Operations: Deep Politics and Cultural Intelligence*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2012, 7.

26. Ibid.

27. Frances Yates explains that it is not known when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was first put together as a collection, but that it was known in this form to Psellus in the eleventh century. See Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition. London: University of Chicago Press, 1964, 3.

28. Wouter, Hanegraaff. *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*. State University of New York Press: New York, 1997, 5.

29. Ibid.

In *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Frances Yates gives an account of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. She explains that treatises in this collection describe:

...[T]he ascent of the soul through the spheres of the planets to the divine realms above them...[and give] ecstatic descriptions of a process of regeneration by which the soul casts off the chains which bind the material world and becomes filled with divine powers and virtues.

Yates goes on to paraphrase the Italian Renaissance physician, Marsilio Ficino's assertion that 'material forms in the world of sense can be... reformed when they have degenerated, by manipulation of the higher images on which they depend.' E. Garin describes this process as the reconstruction of higher images in a way that divine influences are 'recaptured and reconducted into the deteriorated sensible forms.'

In line with this thinking, Bey refers to modern Hermeticism as 'esoteric hermeneutics,' or '*ta,wil*, as the Sufis called it'—'an exploration and unpacking of things back to its origins.' As Lilith encounters the divine—by engaging in *unknown*, *initiatory*, *alien* ritual sex acts—she demystifies and recaptures, or reconducts erotics and sexuality from the modern, homophilic hegemony. Her homophilic sex drive deteriorates, and she accesses a higher, alien sense of spiritual, strengthened selfhood. This divine world she experiences is part of a reality we all discover through our sense perceptions. The Hermetic field's emphasis on the mage as influencing and manipulating the (*de*) natural divine is pertinent. Bey suggests that modern esoteric Hermetics may be used as a gesture of refusal, a radical dialectical weapon, 'the protection of life' against the instrumentalising 'antibiosis of [networked, algorithmic] Capital in its spectral form.' Lilith's alchemy is her ability to transcend her captivity—through occult initiatory rite, she transforms enslavement to salvation and autonomy.

In a Western world where Eros has been reduced to shocking banality, *Dawn* offers an empowering esoteric perspective on defying the regulated, libidinal boundaries of a secular earthly existence in a post-human society. As Majaca and Parisi emphasise, Butler fashions Lilith as Mother of a new species who subverts a dualistic master/slave, or enslavement/liberation logic of the instrument. One method by which Lilith refuses instrumentalisation is through sex rite; sex magic is the 'secret key' to her salvation. Throughout *Dawn*, there is a divine union, or spiritual marriage, in which denaturalised alien-human sex is the principal sign or symbol. Key to the Butlerian alien-human sex rite, as discussed, is the overlapping murkiness of the divine and mundane worlds. In the ancient Mystery tradition of hieros gamos (sacred marriage), sex rites enacted marriage between a god and goddess, as humans represented these deities in symbolic ritual. Similarly, Lilith is able to forego her human status through sexual union with the third power of the Oankali, attaining a deific, transcendent status through radical sexual initiation and praxis.

Extract from *Trojan Woman*

Let me go into my ecstasy.
Do not hold me from my ecstasy.
I must go down, down
Into the pit, beyond the pit
of human darkness
to find my special light.
I will go down, down
beyond the dreams of murderers
beyond the murderer's blood on the black axe
beyond the black axe sunk in the bottomless swamp
beyond the thoughts of horror that are half-stopped by fear

—Euripides (480-406 BCE)

30. Yates, 3.

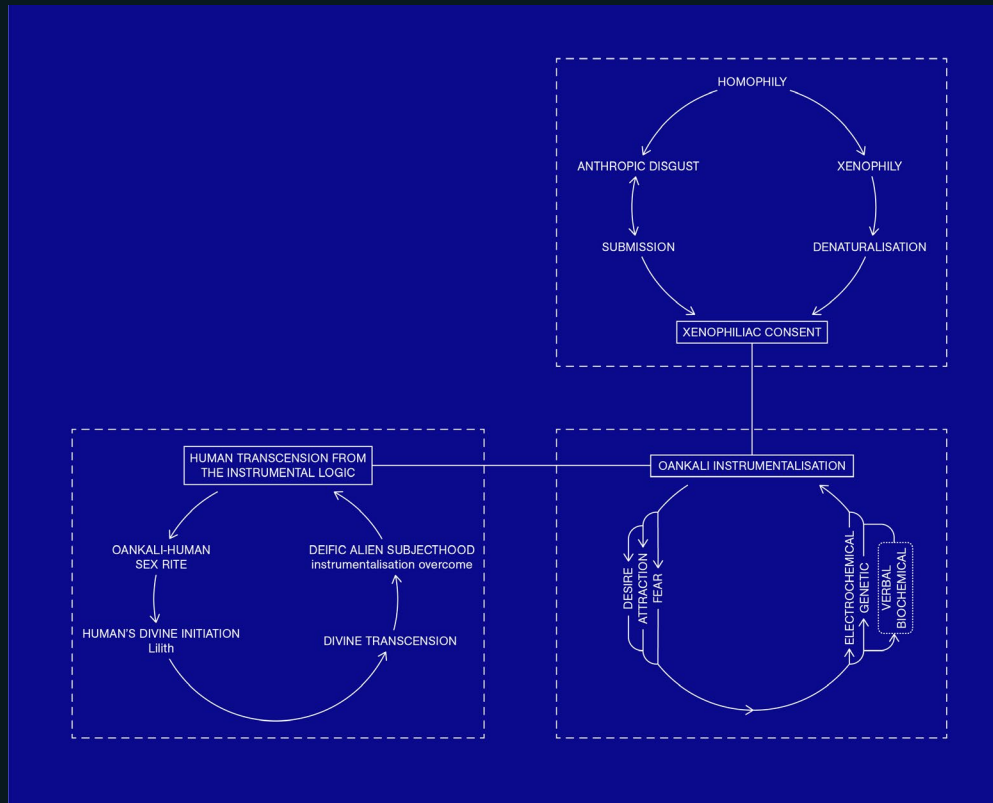
31. Ibid.

32. Ibid, 65.

33. Ibid.

34. Bey quoted in Becker, 7.

35. Extract from the Ancient Greek tragedy by Euripides, *Trojan Woman* (415 BCE). Quoted in Constantine, Peter, Rachel Hadas, Edmund Keeley, and Karen Van Dyck, eds. *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present*. New York: Norton and Company, 2010, 163.



Bibliography

- Asprem, Egil. *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Becker, Konrad. *Dictionary of Operations: Deep Politics and Cultural Intelligence*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2012.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Cixous, Hélène. 'The Laugh of the Medusa.' Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875–93.
- Constantine, Peter, Rachel Hadas, Edmund Keeley, and Karen Van Dyck, eds. *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present*. New York: Norton and Company, 2010.
- Drury, Neville. *Stealing Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Liddell, Henry, and Robert Scott, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Majaca, Antonia, and Luciana Parisi. 'The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility.' *e-flux*, no. 77 (November 2016).
- Scholem, Gershom and Melila Hellner-Eshed. 'Zohar.' *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 21. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
- Schreck, Nikolas, and Zeena Schreck. *Demons of the Flesh: The Complete Guide to Left Hand Path Sex Magic*. London: Creation Books, 2002.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. 'Bifurcating the Androgyne and Engendering Sin: A Zoharic Reading of Gen 1–3.' In *Hidden Truths from Eden: Esoteric Readings of Genesis 1-3*, edited by Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2014.
- Versluis, Arthur. 2008. *The Secret History of Western Sexual Mysticism: Sacred Practices and Spiritual Marriage*. Destiny Books: Rochester.
- Wouter, Hanegraaff. *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*. State University of New York Press: New York, 1997.
- Yates, Frances A. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Young, Serenity. *Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

The work of Alison Blickel

• Alessandro Keegan •

Each painting by Los Angeles-based artist, Alison Blickel, presents us with a tableaux of female bodies in mid-pose, somewhere between dance and ritual, in spaces filled with partial architecture, ceramic vessels resembling Art Deco or Art Nouveau design, patterning that weaves between the figure and ground, and a number of scattered representations and symbols culled from history and mythology. I've seen a number of Blickel's paintings in over the past few years at Kravets Wehby Gallery in New York, where she is represented, and in the 2016 exhibit, *Language of the Birds*, curated by Pam Grossman, where I was first introduced to her work.

These oil paintings are made in a style that is equal parts Photorealist, Post-Impressionist and later-day Pre-Raphaelite (Blickel's sculpturally graceful women bear a strong likeness to those drafted by Edward Burne-Jones in the late nineteenth century). The paintings often have a warm tint from what seems to be a dry-brushed under painting of burnt sienna with dappled layers of chalky-ultramarine, marble gray, yellow ochre and Venetian-red pinks.

What strikes me most about these works is the vast spectrum of historical references they draw upon. In one work, a willow-haired woman bends over what I recognize to be John Dee's Seal of God. In another painting, a woman wearing an ancient Egyptian headdress is the exact likeness of the Russian dancer, Desiree Lubowska, performing as Cleopatra from a 1915 photograph. The various ensembles of women, who strike poses that might be inspired by Isadora Duncan or Rudolf Steiner's eurythmy, also seem to be involved in an homage to the 79 CE frescos from Pompeii's Villa of the Mysteries, where groupings of women and mythical beings seem to be enacting an initiatory ritual. Aside from the ancient and esoteric, there is also an element of Old-Hollywood in smokey glamor of Blickel's women. I am reminded of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* opening with the image of a bygone Mesopotamian empire erected at the behest of D.W. Griffith, the movie director turned demigod, replete with a likeness of the Gate of Ishtar and white plaster elephants, all to wreath the presence of the charcoal-eyed Theda Bara in a grand illusion of opulence.

An interesting punctuation that Blickel adds to the installation of her works are modest sized groupings of hand-made, glazed ceramics. These objects, vaguely Grecian in their geometry, will rest on the floor, on the wall or on readymade pedestals in the vicinity of the paintings. Often these objects play a role in the scene that Blickel is depicting, either as a central religious votive or as casual decor. There is something interesting that these sculptures do, when read alongside the paintings: they hint at the physical reality of these imagined spaces while still retaining enough hermetic mystery to feel as though the timeline of design from which they are formed is somehow not our own.



Alison Blickel, "Sisters", 2017

Hiphkiss

• Alessandro Keegan •

“Bulwark,” an exhibit recently held at The Drawing Center (at 35 Wooster Street in New York, from April 6th-August 12th), is the first time the work of Hiphkiss, the artist duo of Chris and Alpha Mason, have been featured solo on museum walls in New York. In this collection, hung against fire-engine red walls, the artists have arranged a suite of drawings depicting fantasy towers composed of intricate tendrils, thorny leaves and cloudy scatterings of seeds and sperm within successive circular tiers. These drawings of dark graphite, metallic ink and foil are made with the intense eye for detail found in the taxonomical illustrations of natural history books, like those of Ernst Haeckel. They do not show us the external appearances of nature, however, but instead describe a spirit-like realm of the imagination filled with moving a miraculous interactions and the occasional Dadaesque detail such as a halo of floating switchblades. Matching the impressive draftsmanship and detail of Hiphkiss’ hand is the drawing’s insistence on an internal system of logic, a hidden botanical science cohering these strange plant forms together as one. This system is obscure but perhaps hinted at by scrawls of cryptic text, code and spirillum along the margins.

The collaborative relationship between Alpha and Chris is fluid and does not conform to the common dichotomy of hand and mind, though some writings about the artists have characterized Alpha as the wordsmith and Chris as the draftsman exclusively. The creative process behind these drawings is more democratic and synchronized. Early in their collaboration, Alpha’s trained artistic ability influenced the style of their drawings just as much as the conversations they share form some of the enigmatic writing and mark marking around the paper’s edges in the works made today. Earlier drawings by the couple, which were incorrectly attributed to only to Chris Mason for many years, depicted androgynous figures acting out unspecified dramas that were surrounded by the detailed architecture of fantasy cityscapes. These urban parallel universes, rendered in pencil across a scroll in disjointed but rigidly systematized compositions, would often be bordered in banners of cut-up poetry exclaiming coded lines like, “Rotting Fist Season Mongrel Fist.” In contextualizing these past works, it is now important to realize that these drawings are the product of two hands and two minds working in dialogue with one another.

This title, the word “Bulwark,” suggesting a defensive wall, may describe the way these monolithic, seven foot high drawing overwhelm and first but are then incrementally penetrated by the eye. There is an architecture here, in both the banner-like arrangements on the wall as well as in the surfaces covered with diligent details of vines, poppies, bees and whirlpool vortexes. It is as though the slab-like body of a great skyscraper were cut open and in their heart was found these radiating cyclone flowers wreathed in life. In fact, there are what appear to be false starts in the surface of the page, where a neat circle has begun to be incised, as if there were a surgical investigation underway.



Hiphkiss

Dennis Rudolph's "Messengers of the Ai"

• Max Razdow •

Dennis Rudolph's "Messengers of the Ai", at Poolhaus-Blankenese Art Foundation, is a vast exhibition involving many mediums, including some that are highly technological. However, I'd like to concentrate on a suite of seven paintings he has included in a sunken atrium of the impressive art space on the banks of the Elbe river.

Rudolph's paintings for "Messengers of the Ai" depict singular, angelic figures of epic scales -- all uniform in heights that look to be about seven feet tall. While the angels themselves may have been to be copied from renaissance (or later) masterworks, the paintings are physically non-conformist with common standards of art display. They seem to have been folded and stored for some time, assuming a grid of creases, then stretched on dimensionless panels with naked borders revealed. I am reminded of seeing "The Night Watch" by Rembrandt, while in Amsterdam, glimpsed above the heads of a crowd snapping surreptitious iPhone pics in the conservational gloom of the Rijksmuseum. That was a painting that had clearly survived epochs of abuse, and a similar sense of history has been imbued into Rudolph's canvases by their installation, symbolism and the mannerisms of their paint application.



Installation View, Dennis Rudolph Messengers of the Ai

The paintings in Messengers involve a small pantheon of archangels, one for each epic canvas, hovering over landscapes that are both futuristic and defiled. The places depicted seem to be between states of apocalypse and industrial futurism, cities overrun by humanity in either an apex or apogee of power. The angels hover above ruin and metropolis in postures that refer to a relationship of struggle and heroism. They are not the beatific creatures of Hallmark cards, but angels that hold back meteors with their palms, thrust spears into the belly of the city and cast ocular eruptions in beams of laser light. We are reminded of the active deities of Blake's heavens, the angelic destroyers in the anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion, or "Mercy," a winged video game healer who unleashes torrents of energy in the popular on-line game Overwatch. What these variants of angels have in common is an oppositional trait to the sublime. They are active, aggressive and closer to experience by degrees than the elusive angels of the modern imagination. They estimate the layers of hierarchical archons of the demiurge in Gnostic lore.

Each of Rudolph's angels co-occupies its canvas with a superimposed logo from a collection of news and media agencies: NBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, YouTube and a few that I do not recognize. It is unclear whether we are to interpret these logos as though they are allowing access to watch the angles, like the ever-present watermarks one might see on newscasts, or if they are instead attributional to the angels themselves. I prefer the second read. Is Rudolph, then, proposing that these mediators of information are angelic in their relationship to the earth? It is a quizzical statement to make, and requires that one restructure the classical status of ecclesiastical spirit and replace it with the strange beast of media and tech that has wound itself into a privileged position in our understanding of the world. In Rudolph's imaginings, media seems re-purposed as powerful in the way of the old Gods, a pantheon of saviors, even if salvation is by the spear.

Witches & Wisdom: The Voynich Manuscript

• Peter Makela •

This summer five days before the blood moon lunar eclipse auspicious causes and conditions arose and I was able to spend an afternoon in a private room at Yale's Beinecke Library with the original Voynich Manuscript. Written in the early 15th century, this manuscript consists of 240 pages of parchment with 4 heavily illuminated sections. The whole manuscript is written in a language that has yet to be decoded even though many of the top cryptologists have worked in vain over it during the past 600 years. Part herbal, part star map, part water-world / astral travel / dream yoga instruction manual and part herbal remedy cookbook this gem of the mind is a true wonder.



Henbane

Like other highly psychoactive ointments of that time, mainly consisting of Tropane rich alkaloids aka the nightshades (Belladonna, Henbane, Mandrake, Datura), knowledge and use of them had to be kept hidden or one could very easily find herself burnt at the stake. Although witch hunts happened occasionally in medieval times it wasn't until the early 15th century that they became common. In 1428 the Valais witch trials were the first time that accusation of sorcery lead to the systematic persecution, trial and execution of hundreds. This persecution was deeply influential on the subsequent witch trial craze lasting until the 17th century in much of Western Europe. Interestingly enough the Voynich Manuscript has been carbon dated to this exact period of 1404-1438. The Valais witch trial occurred in what is now southern Switzerland, only a few hundred kilometers from where the Voynich Manuscript is supposed to have been written in northern Italy.

The main contemporary account of the Valais witch trials was written by Johannes Frund in 1430. In this account he speaks of some of the accusations referring to the witches applying salve to their chairs, in which they would then fly wherever they wanted. This is most definitely an early account of the witch's ointment which was later described in 1470 by Jordanes de Bergamo (Master of theology at Cortona, Italy). "But the vulgar believe, and the witches confess, that on certain days or nights they anoint a staff and ride on it to the appointed place or anoint themselves under the arms and in other hairy places." Also in Frund's account of the Valais trials some witches were accused of being werewolves (more on this later).

The witches ointments mainly consisted of nightshades, members of the Solanaceae family mentioned above. Active alkaloids in these plants are atropine, hyoscyamine and scopolamine. They are highly psychotropic and also poisonous. If taken in too large a dose Tropane can cause heart failure resulting in death. A safer and more reliable remedy was to make a salve with the Tropane rich herbs in an animal fat and apply it externally to the apocrine sweat glands and sometimes internally vaginally or anally for quick absorption directly into the mucous membranes.

With the advent of widespread witch hunts ending in persecution, torture and death, certain plant-based esoteric knowledge needed to be kept hidden and preserved for future generations. It seems that this manuscript identifies and outlines the specific attributes of certain plants. Instead of painting “accurate” representations of them like other contemporaneous herbals of that time this author may have portrayed the energetic imprint of the plant or its metaphorical correspondences similar to the doctrine of signatures.

The Doctrine of signatures is a thought-by-association understanding where if the plant looks like the organ, disease or poison, it in turn is related to it and will heal it. Many pre-industrial people of all inhabitable continents used similar systems of reasoning by analogy. A perfect illustration of this was recorded by Jeremy Narby during his time spent with native peoples of the Amazon.



Belladonna

“On two separate occasions, Carlos and Abelardo showed me a plant that cured the potentially mortal bite of the jergon (fer-de-lance) snake. I looked at the plant closely, thinking that it might come in useful at some point. They both pointed out the pair of white hooks resembling snake fangs, so that I would remember it. I asked Carlos how the virtues of the jergon plant had been discovered. We know this thanks to these hooks, because that is the sign that nature gives.”

That being said some of the plants in the Voynich also bare a strong resemblance to identifiable plants. The first page and first painting in the manuscript is a plant that looks a lot like Belladonna Atropa, one of the nightshades that are called for in the witches’ ointments. The structure is very similar to Leonhard Fuch’s botanical painting of it from

1543 except in the Voynich the purple berry at the top is given more prominence. What is especially interesting about the Voynich Belladonna painting is the root structure that looks like two paws, potentially Werewolf paws. Other than the sensation that one could fly and travel to other planes the nightshades commonly produced “werewolves” where the participant believed one was transformed into a wild beast. As it affected the central nervous system one’s reflexes temporarily declined and one could be seen stumbling about howling at the moon. Although the illustration of the plant corresponds to the actual Belladonna Atropa plant I believe it is this other factor that lies under the surface, a deeper meaning that it is the root cause of the meaning and identification.

There are over a hundred plants illustrated in the Voynich which no doubt details their properties and uses in this coded language. With so many botanicals included, they must have been used for many different ailments and purposes. However, the fact that Belladonna is the first seems significant. Later in the manuscript there are other plants that bare a close resemblance to other botanicals frequently called for in the ointments. These are Henbane, Mandrake and Papaver Somniferum which are illustrated above and below.



Papaver, Somniferum

I find the painting of Mandrake to be especially charming. The root structure looks like other botanicals of the time resembling an anthropomorphic correspondence. The leaves are especially animated, beetle-like with a pincher or crescent moon shape on the ends. The medieval legend of the mandrake was that it sprang from the semen or blood of a hanged man, and it was especially

sentient, as the root looked like a little human.

The legend was that if you pulled it from the ground the intelligence would release a scream killing the human up-rooter. To solve this potentially deadly problem people would tie their dog to the root have them tug it out and then would sacrifice the animal to alleviate any malevolence. Are the flower-headed ladies at the top of the Mandrake in the Voynich a sign of the extra sentience of this plant? Are they also a sign that the herbalist who includes them in their ointment will not just have two eyes but five, or that they will be able to see into other dimensions and become far more prescient?

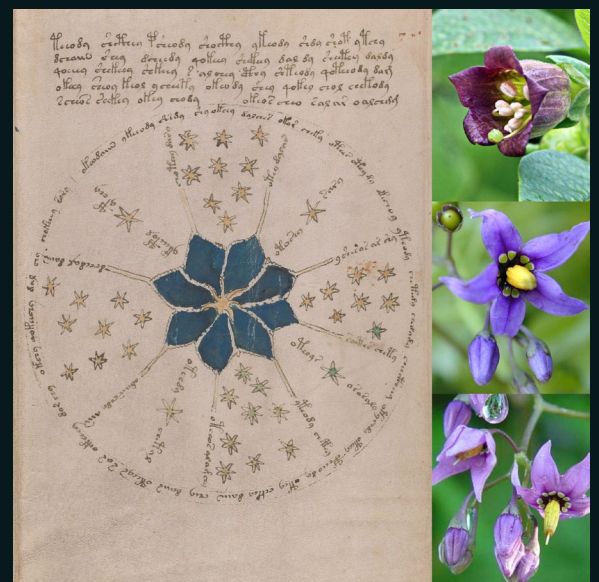
The second section in the Voynich consists of numerous star charts. There is a long history of collecting herbs under certain planetary and lunar influences. If this is the case the naked women surrounding each zodiac sign could represent the different intelligences of the plants that have a

correspondence with that sign, or in what month they should be collected. In addition to the charts where the Zodiac signs are central, there are astronomical wheels where in the center is a flower. The one that interests me the most is a wheel with a central blue flower with a yellow center. Belladonna Atropa has a purple flower with a yellow center. Since this manuscript only has 5 colors the closest the artist could get to this purple would have been blue. Another interesting correspondence is that the first word identifying this page is seemingly the same initial word on the page representing Belladonna. Could this be the name of this plant? If so is this a wheel centered around a main ingredient in the flying ointments? Does it show under which cosmic influence one should harvest this medicine or is it a star map showing different galactic planes one can fly to once one has left one's body due to the influence of this plant teacher?

There are two more sections of the Voynich manuscript which I will investigate in further detail in the next edition. Until then, good luck and virtue.



Mandrake



Star Map, Belladonna

Untitled (a future art history)

• Max Razdow •

For 140 years, spanning before and after the change, our primary art historical schema had fallen under the general taxonomy of Total Unified Relativism (TUR). Sub movements like Reflexive Mimicry, Multi-Scale Presentism, Historical Tautology and Pre-Kinship Sculpture had come and gone within it. And, before the big switch, Total Unified Relativism had silently reigned well back into monolithic time. Maybe two centuries of TUR beaming its predicate evangelical sanctimony into our nested frameworks, holding back the ascension of our Fa-Mothers from the thousand-plus Archon hierarchies.

And then, in 2113 the natal gauge finally agreed across a blessed majority of measures that we had pivoted/arrived. Recognition by consensus was that a new dawn was here, and its light spread across kinship like a rioting amoeba. On that day I slurped upon the certainty that my world had been remade, sculpted in accidentum by the sheer and devoted ambling of us and many of those before us. Artists like me had long whispered prophesies of this and chiseled it out of the proverbial stone with our million tiny picks, but to be assured by its reflection in the animus of logos was odd and good and quickened the heart to a stutter.

Now (now [now]), it was here. The great cultural upgrade was ongoing, the world a blooming marigold of crisp, yellow light. And I was proud, so proud, to participate and witness.

Of course we all knew it was coming. We all believed it would arrive, somewhere down deep in us when we fully considered the deep entanglements of symbol and fate. Just weeks ago I had assembled a nano-collage in a faux dry lake-bed, carved on a topic layer gleaming with self-scribes, and yet each had pointed wildly into angelic boundaries, seraphim within seraphina unified by their lightlessness, tilting ever wider into the true abyss of possible forms.

I had been born in 2052. All my life I had lived in a prison of disintegrating idylls. Kunstlers before me had built our cage with zero-sum versions of selfhood that persisted historically, yet acted as if novel. Those reflexive forms and formless abstractions never loosed their anchors in vectors of dying capital. Like fish on lines they were, from times when oceans were so lively. Maybe all that writhing was needed to get us here. There was so much pain that had to be unburdened into being. But, it was painful in itself, and it was all so absurdly slow.

I have been told that when children were born two hundred years ago they grew and cherished their stuffed animals in the same way that I grew and cherished my CryptoPuffin. However, one hundred ninety-five years ago, said child would be slowly pried from felt pretension of a faun. He or she would be dissuaded from representing the wholly vital animistic as a vestige of the blooming alive. Can you believe that? Moving toward mechanical rooting would be part-and-parcel of proper parenting, morally supported by subliminal distrust of all things inefficient, including post-naturalism and what was left of nature itself. The world then was different, still caught up in the centrifuge of human labor and horribly top heavy and cruel. Still, it seems to me a syn that so many children, billions maybe, came into adulthood in the heat of blazing suns, imagoes burned from their dreams of the grotto's embracing shades.

But now all that was gone. At least by the lens of aesthetician consensys, by which I, for one, had thus far lived my life. The flocks of diachronic processors had decreed it so by the authority of protocol repos so deeply woven that no one dared delve within them. Their word, in a way that had not been likely since popes tittered on marble porches, was the synthesis of truth.

And so, I donned my visor on the evening of January 16th, when things were starting to crescendo, and looked at the news-glare through it. Enlivened was I, as the endless volume of generalized mass awareness shattered upon me. I heard a cascading, heraldic amplification in the echoes of my peers. This was it. It was coming. The new age of art history, released from the super fold as a tautology that shimmered. Released from the old ways and the non-ways, which receded inevitably like waves chased by an outgoing tide.

Luckily, I had the presence of thought to quickly order and plug in a solid experiential hard line to fully take it in. A chrome vision exploded in cortex-rich colors of full spectrum and I felt the lurid music of shifting axioms forming across all my tethered feeds. My friends were reveling similarly. I could pan to hear-feel them: we, all of us, me, rejoicing and listened loudly as new notions were jointly coined along concentric, overlapping pulses from our monads of shared access. It was palpable, at last, when it came to indexed being.

And so the terms congealed. I ran a proto-search and saw letters ceasing to flicker and shift, hyphens devolving into conjunctions, slangy emojis and numerical glyph stand-ins ebbing to a wane. Here, where so much language settled into the sump of memic jargon, it began to stick at last. At least, according to the natal schema, that's what it was doing. I couldn't see down to that level of disambiguation clearly. But yet, like the long-gone robin trilling at Apollo's first glimmers -- an alert I had set ages ago rang out preternaturally. A new taxonomic search term had arrived, and its gravity was significant.

I sat back in my mag-cloud, enjoying, to the extent that I could, the physical quality of the moment. It was a time I would never again regain once this idea had been loaded into common usage silos. I sighed and smiled all at once, craving clarity, and copy-pasted the infant terminology into an empty field.

