

SEEDS OF HOPE

HUMILITY

FREEDOM

WISDOM

THE YOUNG SCHPENGELHEIMERS

present

**Uncanny
Hurricane
Hauntologies**

Or:

|Buy Lemons!

With A *Soupçon* Of

Phenomena-Noumena Antinomy



December 2018

[the young schpengelheimers]

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teratophobia	refusal	r/nosleep/emeryville	fever dreams
◆	◆	◆	
r/nosleep	starman	r/nosleep/altamontpass	
	◆	◆	
	the common task	r/nosleep/ghostship	

[table of contents]

[table of contents]	iii
[hauntologies]iv
[introduction]	1
[teratophobia]	2
[r/nosleep]	6
[refusal]	8
[starman]	11
[the common task]	14
[r/nosleep/emeryville]	17
[r/nosleep/altamontpass]	20
[r/nosleep/ghostship]	22
[fever dreams]	24
[the pastadex]	30



[hauntologies]

*between the trenches
claws scrabble on broken glass
the scrim of crisis*

t.y.s.



[introduction]

A spectre is haunting the spectre of Europe. In the long march of modernity, ideas are the really real. But in the shadow of environmental devastation, it has become increasingly apparent that there resides a reality beyond ideas. In this collection, we take seriously the idea that the way in which we think about the world informs the way we live in it. The challenge is not to succumb to the temptation of seeking out enchantment within our ethnographic work, because re-enchantment only emerges from a foundation of disenchantment; any retreat to re-enchantment reproduces the categories of modernity from which we are seeking to escape. But how should we do this work without appealing to disenchantment, or uncritically embracing re-enchantment—to remain in the messy middle? One of the ways in which we work through this problem is to approach our writing as a narrative project, and not just an analytical one.

We focus on a particular narrative norm, sending dispatches from the dangerous ruins. We stand within the bomb cratered no man's land(s) of the Anthropocene. In this land of demons, ghosts, and monsters, we find a means of departing from disenchantment and re-enchantment, and instead turn to *hauntologies*. For Derrida, the hauntology was produced in deep entanglements with/across space and time, as well as disjoints produced by tele-technologies. This produced, for Derrida, an always-already absent presence. In Derrida's vision, one un-haunts time by either manifesting the spectre or banishing it. Here we depart from Derrida and *lean into* the spectre, seeking to find a middle way.

Our spark of inspiration for leaning into the spectre is the *creepypasta*—expressions of the uncanny—horror stories that circulate the internet. These stories constitute a democratization and anonymization of the narrative form, through mechanisms such as the Alternate Reality Game and participatory ontologies. These stories feature weird disjunctions explored through technology, explorations of humanity's place within ecological destruction, the visibility of the uncanny in the everyday, and grappling with the radically Other.

Through the lens of the creepypasta, we construct our hauntology as a playful method of anthropological inquiry through a series of interlinked and complementary concepts. Hauntology is a (cosmo)politics of recognition, and a relational ethics forged in conversation with the radically Other. Through the hauntology, it becomes possible to survive the present, and even imagine a (livable) future produced in ruins—all while modernity strips us of Others. Hauntologies subvert regimes of truth, and instead *engage* with the hoax; you are drawn in and left suspended in ambiguity. This form of being drawn in can be terrifying and discomforting, while still satiating a desire for the inaccessible, metaphysical, and/or paranormal. It is an act of transformation.

With this propositional narrative, we engage hauntologies from our own perspectives, seeking to draw out new visions of the past, present, and future—infected with a hope for building livable futures on a damaged planet. These directions include: a contemplation of horror tropes that deal with the radically Other; a plea for help; the multiple ways in which the dialetheic can become a means of grappling with living in ruins; the creepypasta as an exploration of the diffuse effects of place and history in the present and imaginations of the future; and the layered hauntings and personal changes of working with endlessly withdrawing objects of study.

Come play with us.

Sincerely yours,

with a tinkling rondo of sublime banality,

The Young Schpengelheimers.

[teratophobia]

Nevada Drollinger-Smith

*Damage has defined our border
Wall and manner forged in flame
Knowing little of your wounding
Share our mending all the same
—A Perfect Circle, Feathers*

This essay analyzes the SCP Foundation stories, examining the ways in which these stories deploy horror tropes that rely on a very firm boundary between the human and the other, wherein the human (The Foundation) resolves the tension or fear only through destruction of the other. Simultaneously, the stories generate fear of The Foundation itself. The essay then moves to [Redacted Under Protocol 4000-Eshu] as an example of how these tropes get deployed, and ends in a contemplation of whether horror stories can ever produce a fearful affect without reliance on these tropes.

SCP (Secure. Contain. Protect.) is a subset of creepypasta devoted to the premise of a vague-yet-menacing, global, extrajudicial agency whose aim is to “maintain normalcy, so that the worldwide civilian population can live and go on with their daily lives without fear, mistrust, or doubt in their personal beliefs, and to maintain human independence from extraterrestrial, extradimensional, and other extranormal influence.”¹ The SCP Foundation mainly exercises containment of objects that are in some way anomalous. Living subjects who share humanoid appearance, but have other “anomalous properties” are likewise confined or destroyed by The Foundation. The stories take the form of case file documents for each item, written in unaffected language. Contained objects are classified according to the difficulty of containment.² There are also tales, which differ from the SCP objects in that they provide a narrative, plot, and character development, but there are far more SCPs than tales. There are also Out of Character (OOC) essays, where users contemplate the ethics of the Foundation, its varied origins, and the finer points of difference in the object classes. The aggregate of some 4000 stories is multi-canonical, and The Foundation has an impressive 34 origin stories.

SCP as an organization is not nice, as you might expect. In the SCP Game, Containment Breach, we learn that the Class-D personnel referred to frequently throughout the SCP stories are

¹ The-administrator. “About The SCP Foundation”. SCP FOUNDATION. <http://www.scp-wiki.net/about-the-scp-foundation>. Accessed December 6, 2018.

² There are four commonly used object classes: Safe, Euclid, Keter, and Thaumiel. Objects are not classed according to the danger they present, but rather according to the difficulty of their containment. That said, the objects that are most difficult to contain are also often the most frightening or dangerous, because of their lack of predictability. Safe objects require a specific and conscious human trigger to become active. They are classes as safe because of the relative lack of expended effort and resources on their containment. A Doomsday Button would be considered safe in spite of its ability to effect widespread damage, because humans must interact with it in specified and predictable ways in order to activate it. Euclid class objects which are sentient, sapient, or otherwise require a mid-level effort to contain. The official SCP narrative for this class suggests that Euclid objects are insufficiently understood to be placed into one of the other classes. Keter class objects are objects with a high degree of difficulty to contain. A cat that randomly switches places with any other cat on Earth would be a Keter class object. Finally, Thaumiel class objects are objects that are used to contain anomalous objects. Thaumiel class objects do not necessarily neutralize the anomaly, but rather provide a means to confine the object, lessen its anomalous effects on personnel, or make its workings more predictable.

“disposable class,” used for “testing SCPs, most notably keter class objects” and that they are often garnered from death row inmates, although they might be prisoners convicted of “lesser crimes” in times of duress.³ They may also be SCP Researchers who have been demoted. In the canon called SCP-001:O5 (Codename: Bright, or The Factory), a former military commander is sent to investigate Anderson’s Factory by President Grant. Rumors abounded that Anderson was a Satan Worshiper who used his workers’ bodies in esoteric rituals in order to increase the productivity of his factory. The Factory was raided, and those military personnel who survived the encounter became members of SCP.⁴ SCP then used the eldritch powers of the factory to fuel their own research, entailing the sacrifice of hundreds of Class-D Personnel.

There are three prongs of uncanniness or horror commonly deployed in SCPs. The first is the notion of a non-living object that acts in the world without the involvement of homo sapiens. This is fairly standard supernatural horror fare, except that the nature of what animates objects in the SCP universe is unclear. Films like The Amityville Horror (1975, 2005), The Possession (2012), Oculus (2013), Child’s Play (1988), Annabelle (2014), Poltergeist (1982) and many others riff off of this fear of objects with volition. In each of these cases, a specifically malevolent presence is what animates the object, either the preservation of a malevolent human soul, or a specifically demonic entity. The solution to the danger presented by these objects is typically framed as a return to Godliness, or enlisting the aid of a priestly figure or figures with esoteric Christian knowledge capable of defeating these forces. In the SCP universe, the containment of these objects is usually predicated on research that determines the correct mechanism of containment. The objects in the SCP Universe are almost never neutral, except in comedic framework.

The second is the fear generated by the Radically Other, especially when the other has the ability to do work on us, whether through some form of transformation, or through physical harm. Although not always the case, monsters are often quite familiar to us, drawing on elements of body horror and uncanny resemblance to the human to do their work. Zombies, vampires, and werewolves are classic examples of this, but also figures like The Pale Man from Pan’s Labyrinth (2006), Crawlers from The Descent (2005), or just about any figure from Silent Hill (2006). Ghosts and demons also occupy this position.

Third is the agency itself, its clandestine nature, and the evils it employs in doing its work. The Foundation is ruthless in working toward the completion of their stated mission. Whomever is operating The Foundation in its topmost position is certainly unafraid to sacrifice not only the sentient beings it captures, but also its employees. The clandestine nature of the organization is itself somewhat frightening, but more so is the banality of their evil. The disregard for life, the desire for power and control, and the ability to assert notions of normalcy as a regime of truth. This theme provides a kind of meta-horror that spans across all canons.

All of these tropes extend from a kind of boundary-making, quite literally in the sense of sealing a boundary against crossing by the Other. Although boundary-making is often understood as a process of negotiation between actors, only The Foundation is framed as capable of classificatory struggle and institutional order, to which objects respond, often with violence and malevolence. The Foundation assumes that classifying these objects, and seeking to understand their mechanisms, is an analytically and empirically useful pursuit. The Foundation assumes a position in which scientific/magical strategies can make the object fully known. It is when the object reaches back to the human actors, that horror is generated. Yet another horror is generated in the recognition that

³ SCP Containment Breach. “Class-D Personnel.” SCPCBWiki. https://scpcb.gamepedia.com/Class-D_Personnel. Accessed December 4th, 2018.

⁴ SCP Foundation. “SCP-001:O5.” SCP Foundation. <http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-001-o5>. Accessed December 7, 2018.

sentient beings are captured, confined, experimented on, tortured, and sometimes killed. The mechanisms The Foundation uses in producing boundaries are themselves evil.

The Foundation contains all anomalous objects, whether or not they represent a straightforward danger to human subjects. The goal of the organization seems to be to protect a disenchanted populace from re-enchantment. Through its actions, The Foundation constructs normality. Interestingly, this is not a normalcy that The Foundation itself is subject to, and not only because Foundation agents see and interact with the “extranormal” as a normal practice of every day life. Although The Foundation is construed as an agency that primarily conducts research on anomalous phenomena, it is not straightforwardly disenchanted. For instance, in SCP-001:O5 described above, it is obvious that The Foundation has no problem powering its research with an eldritch source. There are other stories referencing Foundation Thaumaturges, who use their magical abilities in pursuit of SCP’s mission, and one of the canons is centered around the “Global Occult Coalition.”⁵

For humans in the glade beneath the nameless stars⁶, protocol reigns supreme. Various anomalous phenomena occur when human subjects apply consistent nomenclative designations to anything in this wilderness beyond the flue. The location here referred to by euphemism, the trail traversed to exit, and the ones who dwell here are never consistently named. Native entities are referred to by changing descriptive designations, such as “the native entity who sits atop a throne of bones and cradles a flaming child,” or “the native entity that resembles a feathered lion with a skeletal ram’s head.”⁷ The initial Foundation team that surveyed the place beyond titles was decimated.

The danger of the wood where words have power is two-fold. First, violation of hospitality protocol results in retribution from the native entities who occupy the land. Although explorers are asked to stick to the central path leading from the well, those who occupy the woods may obstruct the trail subjects must tread. Disregarding the protocols of hospitality may result in verbal rebuke, acts of violence, or anomalous alteration of the offender’s physical, conceptual, or nominative qualities. This is a fear of the near-human (but nevertheless Radically Other’s) perceived threat. The second danger emerges from nomenclative violations. The range of consequences include cluster headaches, multi-sensory hallucinations, psychogenic amnesia, development of non-human physical characteristics, development of non-biological components in biological media (and vice versa), sudden involuntary transport to the wilderness of unnamed things, sudden transport of native entities to the location where nomenclature was used, and fusion of exposed subjects with native entities or architecture.⁸ The dangers emphasized in the

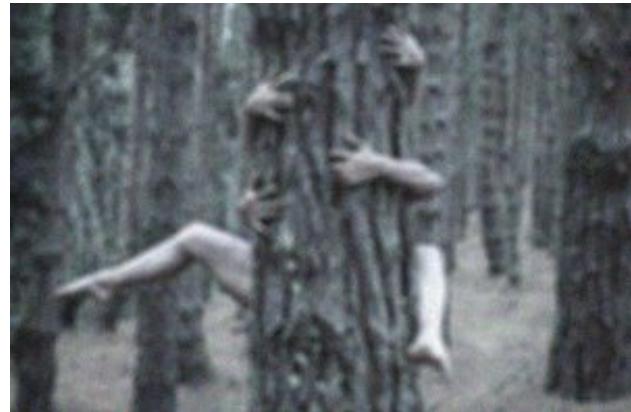


Fig. 1: “Inhabitant of the grove under discussion.”

⁵ SCP Foundation. “Transcript of a Lecture Given by Professor [Redacted] on Thaumatic Workings.” SCP FOUNDATION. <http://www.scp-wiki.net/goc-supplemental-thaumworkings>. Accessed December 6, 2018.

⁶ SCP Foundation. “[Redacted Per Protocol 4000-Eshu].” SCP FOUNDATION. <http://www.scp-wiki.net/taboo>. Accessed December 6th, 2016.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

story are the ones that involve transfiguration of exposed subjects. Although the nameless, countless entities who dwell in the wood are also subject to change when human entities violate the nomenclative taboo, their suffering is rarely emphasized.

The interview log 4000-0215, SCP researcher Dr. Jasper encounters a native entity three times over the course of his research. The entity who bore the gift of cabbage takes an interest in Dr. Jasper, in part because the fluffy one has previous experience with humankind. The Curious entity informs Dr. Jasper that “[w]hen I was a young lad, in a form very different from the one I possess now, I lived on the other end of the well. It's where I was born, where I grew up, and if I dare to dream, where I will someday return.”⁹ The fluffy one describes the other dwellers in the realm of the nameless as refugees from a war. This links (literally via hyperlink) to The Foundation's wiping out nearly an entire species (The Fae) during the days of The Factory, and the prison that was built to contain the remainder.¹⁰ During the interview, the one who the place where names have power is fiendishly difficult to enter into unintentionally, and effectively imprisons those whose once came down the well unless the anomalous effects are evoked.

I selected this story first because I find it troubling and evocative, and second because the story and its surrounding mythos contain all three tropes outlined above. The SCP in question is not the people who inhabit the glade beyond the well, but the dimension of refugee fae itself, and the ability for the geography and architecture to impact human subjects who traverse the perambulatory path. Contact with asylees who inhabit that place serves the goal of understanding and neutralizing it. Second, the interdimensional boat people themselves are construed as monsters, covered in fur, many-limbed, or otherwise weird, with the capability of transforming humans to be more like them, and finally, because in the mythos surrounding this SCP, the banal cruelty of humanity is on fine display.

So what might horror look like in a hauntological context that takes seriously a (cosmo)politics of recognition and the need for a relational ethics in conversation with the Radically Other? Perhaps the presence of the Radically Other cannot only be an occasion for the production of fear and suspicion. Stories such as Tales from the Gas Station and shows such as Santa Clarita Diet (2016), and iZombie (2015) seek to grapple with the monstrous-human in everyday life. Although the latter two focus on the discovery of a cure for the monstrousness, they nevertheless seek to integrate the monstrous figure into a life alongside friends and family. Furthermore, the fear generated by the that horror cannot resolve through destruction of the Other. Perhaps this means that our fear cannot be resolved at all, and we must learn how to dwell in our discomfort, rather than withdrawing from it.



⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ SCP Foundation. “SCP-2932: Titania’s Prison.” SCP FOUNDATION. <http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-2932>. Accessed December 7, 2018.

[r/nosleep]

Nevada Drollinger-Smith

Hey NoSleep.

Not to be alarmist or anything, but I think reading this stuff is changing me.

Let me begin by saying that, for a long time, I've had a somewhat uneasy relationship with reality. Mental illness will do that for you. I suffer from a surfeit of meaning, meaning that might begin with, but doesn't maintain a straightforward relationship to, the evidence of my eyes and body. You've probably all experienced this, too, in the brief moment of wondering whether that noise the furnace is making means that your house is about to explode, if that twinge you feel in your abdomen is really a tumor. The difference is that most people can shrug this off with reason. In spite of years of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and a range of medications, breathing exercises, and automatic thought charts, I remain convinced, more often than not, that something is happening to me. Something is growing in me, changing, mutating, spreading through blood and lymph, and that if I just remain vigilant, I might learn by some tiny sign how to stop it, or at least steel myself against the inevitability.

So, I guess I already know that I'm a somewhat unreliable narrator, but I know I'm crazy and so far, that's mitigated my fear.

I've always been a fan of horror. In my weeaboo teenage years, I watched a lot of Takashi Miike and Masuyuki Ochiai. For the most part, I never found horror that horrifying, except when viewed as a group, the kind of situation where one person's obvious fear spurs six teenage girls to a terror so sharp it borders on giddiness, like when you watch *Ringu* and try to set up some kind of Rube Goldbergian, *Home Alone* shit for the ghost to fall on, but in the back of your mind, you know the fear is generated between people, and part of the game is to urge that fear on in your companions and yourself. I found fear in assault on my body, the sharp smell of snow and the prick of pine needles in my hair, and the feeling of blood and semen frozen between my legs. Everyday horror.

One day, when I was about 16 or 17, my best friend and I were occupying ourselves during the sticky summer night by hanging out at the BP station. We already had two enormous sodas, the 55-Gallon-Styrofoam-Drum-for-37-cents variety, and the attendant looked like he had had it with us hanging around, so we decided to go hang out under an abandoned railroad bridge. Yeah, I know. Genre fans are nodding to themselves that we're about to get chainsaw massacred, but look, it's Muncie, Indiana. Everything in the city closes by 9 PM except Walmart and the Joker's Wild Gentleman's Club. What do you want from me?

While we were sitting there in the soft, mossy earth, being eaten by mosquitos, my friend whispered to me "I think there's something watching us." I lit up a Marlboro Red and whispered back "It's probably just a serial killer." "Can we go, please? I'm getting bored anyway." She asked. I stood up to signal my assent. We started back the five blocks to her house. For the first block, every time we stood under the sickly yellow street lights, she would look behind us. That's dumb, by the way: walk a bit past the light and then look back. I started to feel that prickling sensation on the back of my neck. I grabbed her hand, and we walked faster. Every movement behind us, every flicker of the streetlights became a threat. She said "I think there's a shadow man behind us."

I didn't know if this was part of the game, to urge on the fear, or if it was real. I felt something behind us, now. Something I didn't want to face squarely. "There's nothing there." I said, even though I refused to look back myself. My mouth filled with the taste of iron. She pulled her hand away and we booked it back to her house. Once we arrived, we laughed it off, but the unease remained. We slept back-to-back. I had to face the open window, and I watched the elm tree in the yard for any sign of movement. She faced the closet door. We never talked about it again.

And to be honest, I didn't really think about it much after that. I brushed it off as her playing an elaborate game with me, until the morning of December 13th, 2011 when I lost my mind in earnest. It was a minor injury, I fell on some ice and, as it turns out, fractured my cervical spine. My head snapped against the concrete. I watched the wheels of the public bus go by, picked myself up, and ran to catch it. I didn't go see the doctor right away. It was hard to tell I was injured at all over the humiliation I felt. By the time I came home that night, something in me had changed. The humiliation blossomed into pulsing terror.



Nine years later, and I'm turning into the Francis Wayland Thurston of my own fear. I got here by trying to ask the question of why fiction matters, and what makes people afraid, so for the last few weeks, I've been here on r/nosleep gathering data. The problem is that I'm starting to see some strange things, and I've lost track of whether or not it's a game. As though by accepting the terms of participation, I've opened up something more inside my head. Or maybe something else in the world.

The shadow man is inside my house now, or maybe just inside my head. I see him reflected in my living room window, sitting on the couch, nonchalant as can be. I make eye contact with his reflection, glance to the couch, and he's gone. I tried contacting my friend, you know the one from that sticky summer, and she doesn't want to talk about it. She didn't say she didn't remember it, just that she doesn't want to talk about it anymore.

(By the way, can you make eye contact without a face? Asking for a friend.)

Can you help me, r/nosleep? I tried to rationalize him away. He's just my fear response in overdrive. He's just the result of reading too many scary stories. Didn't your mom tell you not to read scary stories before bed? I know he can't be there. There's no logical reason for him to be there. Unless he found us that night, and held on. How long has he been with me? And what does he want from me? How can you reason away something that's real?

I can feel him right now, behind me, poised to plant a kiss on the curve of my neck. Not a sweet one, a gentle one, but the kind that makes your ears itch while you bend your neck to push it away. Scratchy, hot, and moist. In the dark, he expands. My chest tightens and aches when I breathe, my body rejecting his foreign form. I cannot turn my back to him to get away. He's in the walls.



[refusal]

Taylor R. Genovese

preface.

I never wanted to be at the center of a disciplinal controversy. We do not get to choose our traumas or the ways in which they torment us. The other papers in this collection make that very clear. Trauma haunts us in strange ways. My heart still skips a beat when I hear the notification sound for my email, particularly when it is late at night; morning in the UK. I've always brought my political beliefs into my intellectual analyses, but the experience I'm about to recount galvanized the necessity of being explicitly political while conducting research in the Anthropocene. The Earth is convulsing in a death rattle—its fever is too high; and there are those that see its impending death as an opportunity. The ruins are becoming visible and the silver cord is taut—we no longer have the luxury of remaining politically neutral. A man stands alone on a beach, looking off into the middle distance. As the rising sea laps slowly up his legs, he might remain blissfully unaware that the intellectual distance that has afforded him so much social capital in the marbled halls of the academy means very little to the Bangladeshis, the precarious worker, the white rhino. Through refusal to the old traditions, a hope radiates. I feel its blistering heat on my skin and I have to squint, but I squint through a grimaced smile. It's painful and frightening—comfortable and calm. Refusal is a political dialetheic necessary for living as a survivor on a damaged planet.

toward refusal.

For this provocation, I find Audra Simpson's (2007; 2016) work on ethnographic refusal particularly poignant. In her work, Simpson describes refusal as a generative process. Refusal implies a closure or stoppage, but the act of refusal also generates new openings, new possibilities. Declaring a position and refusing compromise is not an impenetrable wall; rather, it is an explosion of possibilities—what Cary Wolfe (2010, 15) has described as “openness from closure.” Furthermore, the act of refusal moves beyond most conceptions of resistance due to the tendency of resistance studies to exaggerate the importance of the state and its institutions. In the case of Simpson's (2007) work, this takes the form of the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk rejecting citizenship with the United States and Canada in order to refuse not only the state apparatus and settler colonialism, but also the hierarchical relationships tacit within state systems, forcing a restructuring and reconfiguring of the relationship between Western states and the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk on the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk's terms. Simpson (2016, 330) calls refusal the “revenge of consent,” not in the sense of individualized harm in order to render justice, but rather “avenging a prior injustice and pointing to its ongoing life in the present.” In order to illustrate a recent and ongoing movement built upon the abolitionist refusal of dominant elements within anthropology—namely a culture of gaslighting and abuse, including colonial silencing—I will be discussing the campaign against the journal *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

destabilizing efforts.

For those that are not familiar with #HauTalk and the controversy surrounding HAU, I will outline a very brief overview. On November 10, 2017, following incidents with the Editor-in-Chief of HAU that are fully public at this point, I posted a message on my Facebook page, restricted to only my friends list, warning fellow graduate students not to work for HAU as long as the current Editor-in-Chief was still ruling over the journal. Within minutes, one person on my friends list informed the Editor-in-Chief of my message. I was told by the Editorial Board Chair that my private status warning of abuse was “disparaging the journal” and I needed to take it down or I would be dismissed sans honorarium. I refused to take it down. Later that day, I posted a tweet

about suffering from an academic related trauma. David Graeber direct messaged me on Twitter offering condolences and asked if he could help in any way. Since having his name affiliated with the journal was one of the chief reasons I wished to become an Editorial Assistant at HAU, I told him everything that I had experienced.

In June of 2018, Graeber (2018) released a letter, after it was reviewed and commented on by myself and other ex-HAU workers, apologizing for not acting sooner with regards to the abuse from the Editor-in-Chief. This was followed by two anonymous letters illuminating the abuse and gaslighting tactics used by the Editor-in-Chief from former HAU workers, of which I was a co-author for one of them. Other former workers and activist anthropologists took to Twitter and the blogosphere and the #HauTalk hashtag was born in order to virtually organize. The responses from HAU have centered on victim blaming tactics, gaslighting, and ignorance. Their first statement summed up how they view(ed) the situation: “We are concerned by recent destabilizing efforts that have been made towards HAU” (Course et al. 2018). They have yet to admit any wrongdoing and the Editor-in-Chief remains in charge of HAU, despite repeated promises ensuring the community that he is stepping down or has been suspended—this is because he personally owns the journal. This deserves repeating: even if he is suspended or resigns, he still has sole ownership HAU. This irony of the “spirit of the gift” being neoliberalized into the sole property of a white man turns to colonial erasure in that the Māori community was never consulted or attributed by the journal, as pointed out by the Mahi Tahi Steering Committee in their letter to HAU (George et al. 2018). The journal explicitly attributes the concept of *hau* to Marcel Mauss, instead of to the Māori people.¹¹

As Elizabeth Cullen Dunn (2018, para. 1) has said: “anthropology has an asshole problem.” #HauTalk has struck a chord with many anthropologists because it sounds so familiar. Abuse, bullying, and gaslighting is endemic within anthropology—and academia more broadly—but is often thought of as part of the learning experience; something to endure in order to really “make it” as an anthropologist. Many involved in #HauTalk, including my advisor and I, theorize that this comes out of the European schooling model and, more specifically, has spread like a virus from the University of Chicago (Gaymon Bennett, 2018, personal communication). In order to become successful, we are taught, perhaps implicitly, that it is okay to confuse cowardice with maturity. It is okay to make statements about being in solidarity with graduate students and other precarious junior scholars while simultaneously withholding funding or refusing to put your own reputation and body on the line. To become successful, it is okay—nay, admirable—to preach decolonization while simultaneously exploiting Indigenous peoples and knowledge. In anthropology, this colonial violence is *withdrawn* (Morton 2013); not in the sense that colonialism has shrunken back or moved behind the discipline, but instead withdrawn in the Mortonian sense: it is “so in your face that you can’t see it” (Morton 2017, 37).

HAU is a microcosm of the larger problems that haunt North Atlantic Anthropology, and as anthropologists who wish to change our discipline for the better, our destabilizing efforts should target HAU, yes, but they should also begin to spread to every journal, to every department, to every individual and group that is implicitly or explicitly attempting to duct tape the colonial apparatus of anthropology and to perpetuate the systems of abuse and exclusion that are foundational to the old way of doing things. We are a carpet of ambitious termites and we will gleefully devour and topple the structures of the Old Guard. Many of us are also Millennial Anthropologists who have lived through the devastation of late capitalism and the broken promises of a better life called down from the ossified ramparts of privilege. We are children of the Anthropocene and we have very little left to lose. As Durruti said: “we are not in the least afraid of the ruins . . . we carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute” (Van Paasen 1936).

¹¹ I also didn’t find out until the Mahi Tahi letter that the journal leadership at HAU was promoting an incorrect pronunciation of *hau*. Incidentally, the pronunciation sounds more like “who” than “how.”

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[starman]

Taylor R. Genovese

It is an eerie, droning sound, many octaves too deep due to its dwindling power source, as the unintended spacecraft slides gently through the inky vacuum of space.

*I'm stepping through the door
And I'm floating in the most peculiar waaaaaaaaayyyyyy*

The candy red paint on the outside of the craft is frosted over and beginning to be stripped away by radiation and micro-meteorite impacts. The “DON’T PANIC” sign on the console is beginning to shred and the letters are slowly fading. Perhaps the “Don’t” is fading faster than the “Panic.” In the front seat, a helmeted specter stares forever forward. Its posture is uncannily casual, considering the environment, slouched low—right hand on the wheel, left arm resting gently on top the door.

*Though I'm past one hundred thousand miiiles
I'm feeling very stiiiiiiill¹²*

Feeling very still while moving at over 70,000 miles per hour is one of the uncanny elements of interplanetary space travel. It is one that is being experienced by the Tesla roadster and its passenger—a mannequin dubbed Starman—after they were launched into heliocentric orbit on February 6, 2018. The extreme speeds combined with the extreme distances—248,890,000 kilometers when at its furthest from the sun, beyond the orbit of Mars—creates, in its own right, an uncanny rupture with familiar human experience. The object of the roadster and the Starman are not only ghostly artifacts flying through space, but they are also haunted by the interobjective relations (Morton 2013) that placed the materiality of those objects into a wide orbit around our star. The roadster and Starman are a sports car and a space-suited mannequin that have achieved, thanks to adequate rocket propellant, escape velocity from our planet’s gravitational pull. But they are also objects haunted by the colonial extraction of materials and the exploited labor of workers and, as such, are also imbued with a certain set of possible futures—futures that are, like Han Solo, encased in carbonite at the behest of tyrannical, capitalist worm-people. What is often

overlooked by other radical academics, however, is that these objects do not only contain the (stripped away) futures of the oppressed, but also those of the worm tyrants themselves—both Jabba The Hut and Elon Musk—who have intertwined their visions of the future within these frozen capsules as well.

Is this what makes the photograph of a visored humanoid sitting in a car with Earth perched behind its shoulder so eerie? Because it is carrying with it so many sets of futures? Is this what makes



Fig. 2: The last transmitted photo of the Starman and Tesla roadster.

¹² Prior to launching the Tesla roadster and Starman, the SpaceX team set David Bowie’s “Space Oddity” to play on an infinite loop out of the roadster sound system. A space oddity, indeed.

it “strangely familiar and familiarly strange—uncanny” (Morton 2013, 65)? The Starman/roadster contains Musk’s hopes of getting the public “excited about the possibility of something new happening in space . . . [to] inspire you and make you believe again, just as people believed in the Apollo era, that anything is possible” (Mosher 2018, para. 9). It could also be a Romanist Triumphal Arch built by the West, signifying the successful campaigns to rob the materiality and future possibilities from Indigenous peoples that occupied the land on which the rare-Earth minerals needed for rockets and circuit boards are exhumed from the ground—not to mention the instatement of ideologies like nation-states, private property, and capital. Starman holds the current futures of the countless scientists and engineers who designed, crafted, and programmed the rockets and car—as well as the lost futures of those same workers; the infinite possibilities and lost wonders that may have been created had they not been forced into toiling for a wage from a billionaire. Starman is a symbol of life; Starman is a symbol of death. The simulacrum of Starman immortalizes Musk, SpaceX, and his crew of engineers, designers, techbros, and investors, but it’s also hard to ignore the sexual/masculine interpretation of mounting a sports car on a phallic rocket in order to hump it into space for eternity—thereby securing one’s legacy. It’s a Duchampian *objet trouvé*, a space-age ready-made—a 21st century version of “Fountain.” The amalgam of ghosts contained in that conjoined object floating in an eternal orbit around our sun is hard to ignore. These ghosts give an uncanny agency to Starman; in a certain hauntological sense, could Starman actually be piloting that car? As Alice Gorman (2018, para. 13) has posited: “The Starman was never alive, but now he’s haunting space.” I’m hesitant to assign a gender to Starman, as Gorman has, but in all likelihood—considering the environmental and patriarchal assemblages in which Starman was created—it is probably a he.

Starman and his roadster are economically and ontologically *dialetheic*—double-truthed (Morton 2013). They were birthed from an ecologically devastating, exploitative capitalist system. At the same time, cameras mounted all over the roadster transmitted images to Earth of our fragile blue marble, facilitating a planetary awareness that allowed for an anticapitalist ecological solidarity—much like in the way the “Earthrise” photograph during the Apollo 8 mission helped fan the flames of the burgeoning environmental movement in the United States during the 1970s. As Morton (2017, 24) argues: when one has a planetary awareness, how can one use a hauntological capitalist logic such as thinking that garbage just disappears or goes “away”? Of course, garbage is merely displaced, usually out of sight and mind of those who can afford not to see it, and, more than likely, away from those who contribute more to climate change through a larger carbon footprint than those who end up suffering from the immediate effects of pollution—not to mention the nonhuman people who suffer the most from human expansion, ocean acidification, and the adverse effects of plastics and other toxins. Garbage, then, is also a specter. These are the inherent contradictions of capitalism; it creates its own destruction. But ontologically, this is also dialetheic—Starman was created through capitalism; capitalism will destroy the most beautiful parts of Starman. We are haunted by Starman; Starman is haunted by us. The Starman/roadster illuminates the multitudes of meaning and agency an object can have. It inspires and it disgusts. “Appearances are liars, but in lying they tell the truth” (Morton 2013, 214). Is there a way to mobilize this kind of object-oriented dialetheic toward ecological solidarity? Perhaps. A revolutionary dialetheic is always being grappled with by radicals—revolution will change everything; also, the status quo will reign, regardless of revolution. Thus sums up the ethos of optimistic nihilism.

After all,

*Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do*

In the end, it’s hauntologies all the way down.

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[the common task]

Taylor R. Genovese

A man stands on a windswept staircase outside of the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow, staring up at the night sky. His shoulders are raised high and his frail frame is occasionally exposed as the simple rags he is wearing whip about him in the October squalls. He ignores the whistles and moans of the wind as it plays its ghostly song through the enormous stone columns holding up the building. His hands are gently clasped behind his back and his neck is craned back, face toward the heavens. Overhead, the Milky Way turns gently in its Sisyphean rhythm, moving slowly through the obsidian blackness. Transfixed, the librarian philosopher Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov watches our galaxy for a long time. It watches him back.

Fedorov was an embodiment of the revolutionary dialetheic. Considered a founder of the Russian Cosmist movement, an ancestor of the contemporary transhumanist movement(s), Fedorov detested the fact that human beings merely accepted death as natural. The Cosmists, in the decades surrounding the Russian Revolution, demanded that humanity's goals should be structured around: establishing universal immortality for human beings, resurrecting the dead, engineering the human body for spaceflight, and the freedom of movement throughout the cosmos (Young 2012). Fedorov referred to these goals as "the common task"—a set of principles that would unify all human beings in the struggle against the universal enemy: death. But this battle against dying, while steeped in meliorist conceptions of scientific progress, was not only a secular struggle; Fedorov was a religious man steeped in Russian Orthodox theology. He argued that intelligence and evolution were a gift to humanity from God—to not learn to conquer death would be an insult to the divine, and, more than that, was akin to Satan worship.

While some consider the principles of the common task to be "contradictions," (Berdiaev 2008) and attempt to write Fedorov off as a mad esoteric (Young 2012), I choose to read them as a dialetheic. Fedorov was religious and a mystic; he was positivist and rational. He was a reactionary-conservative and a revolutionary-radical. To conquer death was not an affront to God, it was an enactment of His word. The Day of Judgement was not necessarily divinely mandated and facilitated by God, rather, it was humankind's ingenuity, intelligence, and solidarity that would gift eternal life and salvation to ourselves, including those who have already perished. This task of salvation, to build the Kingdom of God on Earth (and throughout the universe), was not only a "common task" in the sense that it unified, but Fedorov believed it should also be undertaken collectively and without strong leadership. Fedorov detested the ideas of talent, individualism, and property; so much so that in his lifetime, he never published any of his ideas because he didn't believe that ideas could be owned (Berdiaev 2008). His writing was published posthumously, with the publishers relinquishing all rights and distributing the work for free. According to Fedorov, books and articles were mere egoizing—distractions from the common task. He detested philosophers for this reason and believed that—along with resignation in the face of death—the separation of knowledge from action was "false Christianity" (Tandy 1986).

This shunning of individuality was an embodied practice for Fedorov. Despite being born into nobility, Fedorov lived most of his adult life as an ascetic. He rented a tiny room and filled it with only a hump-backed truck that contained basic ragged clothing. He went months without eating hot food, refused to own any property, and slept only four or five hours a day, using his curved trunk as a bed. He repeatedly rejected salary increases from his employers, and clothes from his friends, including Tolstoy—he didn't even own a winter coat, choosing to wear simple, light clothing, even in the harsh Russian winter (Young 2012); despite this, he was known to often assist scholars in need with funds from his meager pay (Tandy 1986).

Out of this asceticism, Fedorov dreamed up his utopian vision of the world—which he never considered a utopia, but simply the world “as it ought to be” (Young 2012, 48)—which included the eradication of birth as well as death. Children that were born must return the favor of birth by spending their life resurrecting the dead. Eventually, the entirety of the human race would be resurrected and granted eternal life, thereby negating the need to continue to have children. In Russian Orthodox liturgy, the Holy Trinity is *не слияно не раздельно* (*ni slianno ni razdel'no*), “neither fused nor disaggregated” (Young 2012, 48). Fedorov infused this dialetheic into his futurist philosophy. Pride in one’s ancestors is egoism; love of one’s ancestors means sadness and requires their resurrection. Politics, to Fedorov, must be replaced by physics. Egoism and altruism must be replaced by Christianity which “knows only all men” (Tandry 1986). Fedorov’s ideas attempt to enact a universal (male) human solidarity at the expense of that which is radically Other—in this case, Nature and animals (and, what is so often unspoken: women). I can’t help but think what an object-oriented ontological (OOO) Cosmism might look like. How might Cosmism reconcile with the lack of an Other?

Morton writes that “one reason OOO is hard to accept for some people is [that there is] a profound lack in the Other, the realization that ‘the Other does not exist’: there is no Nature, no deep background of meaning—what we took as real is really a projection. What we assumed to be real is just a manifestation of the as-structure” (Morton 2013, 183). One dialetheic that may work within the dialetheics of Cosmism is Morton’s conception of paranoia as a possibility-condition for an Earth-system solidarity. He states: “Because I don’t know whether or not you are or I am a person, I am paranoid, and as this ambiguity becomes ever more intense, I relate to you ever more intimately” (Morton 2017, 161). I am paranoid of you; therefore, I also trust you entirely. This mode of solidarity is akin to being neither fused nor disaggregated. It may be the beginning of a Holy Trinity of Earthling Solidarity—an inclusive Cosmism.

In the spirit on this collection: what if we take this concept even further? What would a hauntology of Cosmism look like? What if we assumed that when we look up at the universe, the universe also looks back at us, as I hinted in the opening speculative narrative? Allowing ourselves to be haunted is not a one-way street, for if we assume we live in an animated universe filled with unimaginable intelligences, everything is haunted by everything else. Morton (2017, 145): “It’s like figuring out that one is also a specter in a haunted house of illusions and specters.” The dangerous aspect of this thinking manifests in the repurposing of (Indigenous) animistic religions to fit this model. This is not what I advocate. However, to productively live in the ruins, we must change the way we fundamentally believe the world operates, as well as our relations within that world. Becoming paranoid—which I see as abolishing the privileged position in which humans believe we are at the top of a “chain,” whether that be the food, social, cultural, political, or economic variety—is the first stage in haunting our speciesist assumptions. Cosmism haunts our technological present; Christianity haunts Cosmism; politics haunts Christianity; ...

We are surrounded by ghosts. Let’s lean into them. As Morton (2017, 145) wrote: “We should pray to be haunted.”



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[r/nosleep/emeryville]

Annie Hammang

Hi I'm wondering if a city can be haunted or what haunting really means. I work in this city called Emeryville, and whenever I tell people I work there, their response is almost always, "Emeryville is weird." But the conversation always stops there, they can't put their finger on quite what they mean, but there's this inarticulate weirdness that hangs over it that everyone feels and no one can quite describe. I've heard of haunted houses, or asylums, or graveyards, which are all smaller and more discrete, but I've never heard of a whole haunted city. Here are some details:

Emeryville is a city in the Bay Area, one of those up and coming tech havens (whatever up and coming means). The city is mostly biotech and software companies, along with some bars and restaurants for people on their breaks. It's busy during the day with all the professionals, but no one stays more than a drink or two after work, and the place is mostly cleared out by night. It's hard to explain, but it has this too new, kind of unnerving feeling where all the trees are little and twiggy in that spooky way that still need plastic ribbons to prop them up and all the buildings are made out of the same kind of glass. At first you might call it the feeling of not having a history, all these new shiny tech buildings that look just like each other, but I think it's actually the feeling of something else underneath the too new.

One thing I mean by this are the patches of homeless people around the area. I ride public transportation to work from San Francisco, so I see a lot of homelessness and poverty, and sometimes I tune into it and sometimes I tune out of it and it upsets me and then it doesn't upset me, but then sometimes I realize I've tuned out of it and that upsets me even more because I feel like this is something I shouldn't be getting used to. There's this back and forth of noticing and not noticing usually, but in Emeryville it's only ever noticing, the situation is very pronounced. On the last leg of my commute, I take this free shuttle very cheerfully named the Emery-Go-Round that stops at all the business centers in Emeryville. And because it goes to all the business centers and because it's free, the only people on it are professionals in suits or expensive California casual wear and homeless people looking for a place to sleep, and no one else in between. This feels very intense and close in an enclosed shuttle, but the whole city is like this, the professionals and the homeless, nothing but these two transient populations.

This has given me a certain feeling the whole time I've been working here, but the feeling got much worse recently on a day I took my car to work and decided I would drive somewhere for lunch. I made it to San Pablo Avenue and then had to stop in the middle of this big, busy street because a man was crawling across the street. He had to crawl because both of his legs were amputated, and he was entirely naked. He was crawling very slowly and deliberately across, for a few minutes maybe, like he was telling us something, and every lane of traffic was stopped, until he made it all the way across, and then for a minute after he made it, probably because we all knew there was something more we needed to do but none of us could really go through with doing it, and so we just sat in our cars instead.

When I talked to my therapist about all this, she told me it sounds like my white guilt, and sometimes when she says things like that I don't think a therapist is the right way to deal with these feelings. Guilt just doesn't sound like a strong enough word, it sounds containable and tractable in a way I don't think this.

For example, about six months into working at this job, I was having a meeting with my manager, and I started seeing spots and felt like I couldn't breathe and like I might die. When I said I couldn't see and felt like something was wrong, he asked me if this was my first panic attack. I said I guess so, because I didn't realize that was what was happening, and he reassured me that it was ok, and that this happened to nearly everyone here so I shouldn't feel bad about it. I appreciated that

he was trying to make me feel ok, but what he was saying actually made me feel a lot worse. It's really hard for me to believe that it's normal for it be normal for everyone to be feeling like they're dying and can't breathe or see. This is one of my first jobs out of college and so maybe this is just a normal part of working life that people don't really talk about, but it felt off to me.

Maybe the strangest part of this interaction, though, was when my manager said I get out of the building to relax a bit, and recommended I take this walk to the Bay Street shopping mall, that it was about an hour there and back, and that there was this pretty fucked up sculpture that I might like to see. So I went on the walk, and just outside the parking lot to the IKEA I saw what he was talking about. There was this grassy mound with these basket sculptures and these placards about the Ohlone Native American tribes. It was really confusing, why this was in the middle of an IKEA parking lot, just this mound and this basket and these random facts about Ohlone.

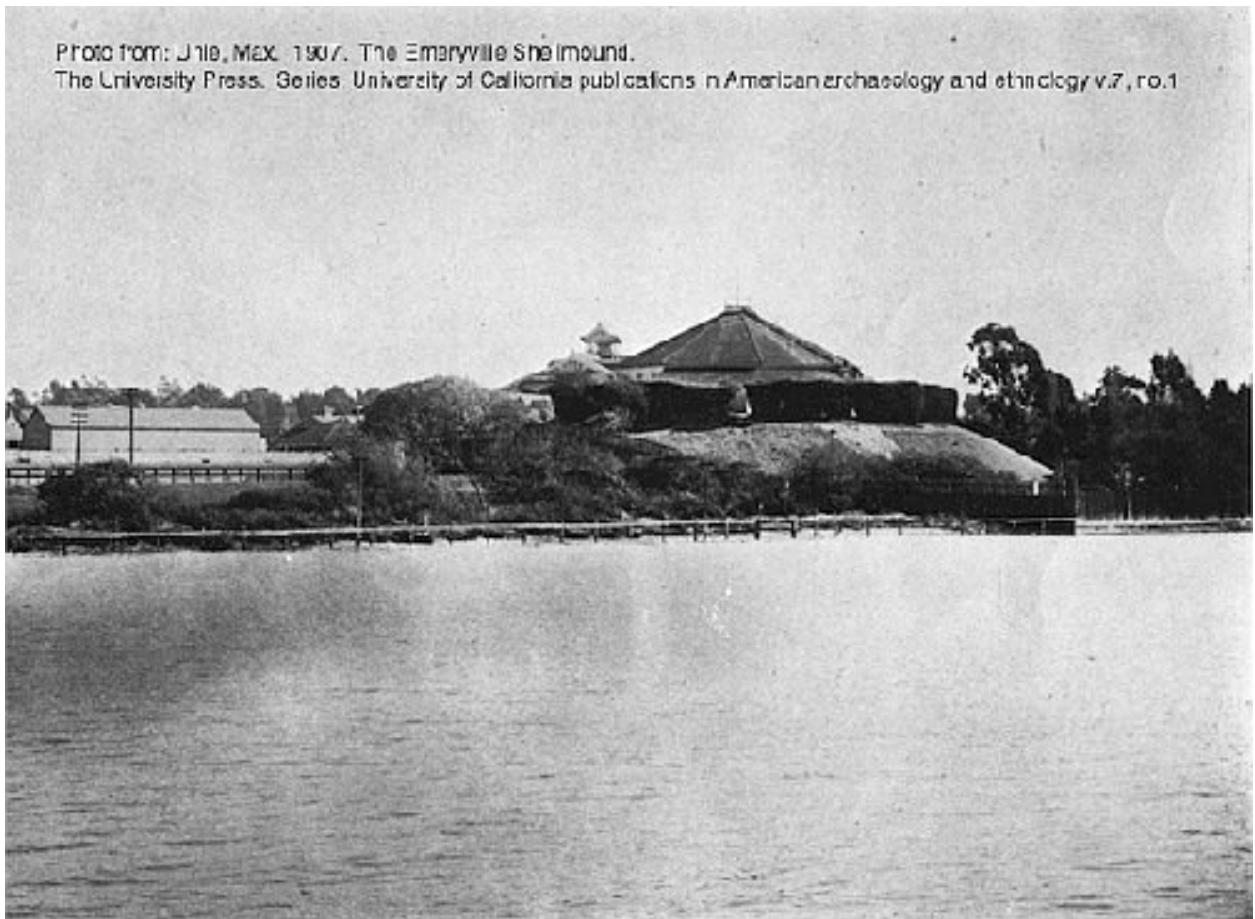
I ended up looking up more about it online, and I found out the IKEA parking lot is on Shellmound Street, which is called Shellmound because it used to be where the world's largest shellmound in the world once was. Shellmounds are sacred burial sites you find by oceans, where people are buried in abalone and mussels and dirt and ash are packed on top, and it builds and builds and this one was so old it had hundreds of Ohlone buried in it. When Emeryville became an industrial city in the early 20th century, most of the Shellmound was leveled to make a paint factory. Most of these industries petered out around mid-century and Emeryville was more or less an abandoned toxic dump for the next few decades.

Then, this one man, the Wareham developer, bought up nearly all of the property in the whole city 1980s and has started developing it into a tech center. When I told some of my coworkers about this part, they really got a kick out of this, and 80s Wareham guy has become sort of a running joke in our lab. We'll imagine 80s Wareham guy sitting in that Game of Thrones chair surrounded by piles of cocaine in his abandoned paint factory and always get a good laugh out of it, but I think there's something to be said about how menacing an imaginary figure he is in our minds and how we need to find something about this to laugh about.

One of the Wareham projects was the IKEA shopping mall I had walked to. There was a lot of controversy and protests with local indigenous groups when the lot was getting constructed. They wanted to protect the sacred land, or at the very least be able to rest the bodies somewhere. But the developers said the land and the bodies were too toxic because of all the paint that had seeped into the ground the last century. The most toxic parts (along with the bodies within them) were sent for destruction to an incinerator in Texas, and what was left was capped, by concrete and asphalt, and turned into the parking lot.

These details might seem disconnected, but they feel meaningful and related to me in a way I'm trying to understand. I live with my boyfriend and he's worried because sometimes I won't be able to stop crying when we're watching a movie or I'll just have two drinks and start throwing up, and I twitch a lot while I'm falling asleep, and sometimes in the early morning, when I've just woken up I have this vision of a man in our apartment reading books off our bookshelf at the foot of our bed, and he looks gentle but like something might be wrong with him, he's volatile, kind of like the way I am. I try to tell my boyfriend that these things together feel like some kind of omen, but I can see it doesn't make sense to him and he just wishes I wasn't so sad all the time. But maybe someone on the anonymous internet knows what I'm talking about, or thinks it's important to keep feeling sad, who feels possessed in that way it's unclear if they are haunted or one of the people doing the haunting.

Photo from: Uhle, Max. 1907. The Emeryville Shellmound.
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[r/nosleep/altamontpass]

Annie Hammang

I wanted to follow up on my last post, because I woke up this morning thinking about Altamont Pass. It's about as far as you can go east and south and still maybe call it the Bay Area, and I've driven over it a dozen times, and I realize the feeling it gives me connects to the one I have in Emeryville. They're very different places, but I think something threads them together, in an oblique and snaky way, they share a certain history, and it's making me rethink what question I'm really trying to ask. Some details:

The Altamont Free Music Concert is the thing most people know about Altamont, because it was so marred with violence and a lot of people call it the day the 60s died. Right after Woodstock, California wanted to have its own giant, world building free music festival with all the biggest names in rock and roll. It was originally supposed to happen at Golden Gate Park, but at the last second the venue got cancelled because the city of San Francisco was worried about how it might get out of control. So at the very last second, they moved the concert to Altamont Pass, and in the same spirit of Woodstock, it was entirely free, and any and everyone could come, and they hired sort of unprofessional security, the Hells Angels. But unlike Woodstock, these all turned out to be a perfect storm: too chaotic, too many drugs, too informal security. Someone drowned in a shallow ditch, another person climbed to the top of a structure to see the stage better and then fell off and broke their neck, and then the concert ended early when someone with a gun tried to get on stage and was stabbed to death by one of the Hells Angel.

Part of me wonders about Altamont as a particular place, that turned so differently than Woodstock, and if the same thing would have happened in Golden Gate Park and if the 60s might not have died in quite the same way. Altamont used to be a town about a hundred years ago, really briefly, when the Central Pacific Railroad first came through, and homesteaders took up the land to try to turn the hills into ranches and crop land. Nothing could grow there because it was too windy, though, and lots of people starved and by a couple decades later everyone had left the city. Even before I knew about these details, I always got this spooky feeling every time I drove through. It's still so windy and very sparse, these big rolling hills with lots of clouds in the sky moving faster than you're used to seeing. Besides the highway, the only thing there is a wind farm. It feels like a movie set, which when I stop to think about it is a really weird way to think about things, movie sets are supposed to feel like real life, not the other around. There is this sort of utopianism to it, with a dark energy.

The windfarm was built there in the 1980s and as it turns out, there are a lot of problems with the wind farm also, and a lot of environmentalists don't really like them anymore. Because the windmills are so sleek and tall and top heavy, they're too difficult to maintain. The tops will crack and just fall off before anyone gets to fixing them. Thousands of birds get sucked into them every year too, specifically golden eagles, which are endangered to begin with and also very beautiful. It's like whatever big grand ideas people come in with to this place, the place always manages to make it more violent.

I mentioned last time my boyfriend doesn't understand about Emeryville, maybe because he hasn't spent the time there, but probably more because he doesn't believe in the idea of haunting, and it's part of this rift that keeps getting bigger where we might just not understand each other anymore, but I can see he has this feeling about Altamont, even though he doesn't know how to talk about it, he gets this sad receding look in his eyes every time we drive through there, it's this longing and fear that hurts in a way that only pulls you in deeper.

This is all making me reconsider how I think about haunting and what it means. I know last time I was thinking about the ways a city can be haunted, since it's much bigger than a house, but

I'm starting to think that's not the right question exactly because it's more complicated than that. I think it's very diffuse, and even though Altamont is a long way from Emeryville, they share a certain history, but that history only becomes disconcerting in patches, in ways that have to do with people who have lived and died and suffered in places, but also in things like wind. I've noticed windmills always make me feel scared, and that even though it's been a few years since I thought about Altamont or drove through there, this morning where I just woke up thinking about is the exact same day as the free music concert in 1969. Like these places know things even when we lose track of them and that they talk to our bodies.



[r/nosleep/ghostship]

Annie Hammang

A really terrible thing happened that I can't stop thinking or dreaming about. This is much more immediate and intense than anything else I've talked about because it just happened to people closer to my actual lived life, and it's following me in a different way. A woman I knew just died in a really terrible warehouse fire with 40 other people. The warehouse was called the Ghostship, and there was a big show that night, and a fire started on the first floor. Nearly everyone on the first floor made it out ok, but the stairway to second floor was made out of wood pallets. There was too much smoke, and the floor was this beautiful labyrinth of art and wood and rugs and sculptures, and all those things that made it such a special enchanted space made it almost impossible to find a way out.

They don't know exactly how the fire started, but there had been problems with the electrical wiring, and for several years the renters reported it to the landlord, but he had been dragging his feet in fixing it. A lot of people also say it's the artists' fault for building more or less a tinderbox, or that it's big tech's fault for making everything else so expensive that people need to live in warehouses. There have been a lot of fires in the area lately and no one is every sure exactly where they come from or whose fault it really is. In the neighborhood in San Francisco I used to live in I would see a new burned out building at least once a month. When I'd walk by those buildings burned out I'd hear people say owners set it on fire on purpose, because the property value has gone up so much that the insurance payout makes it worth burning their own building - or sometimes that it's less intentional, and landlords are just being lazy because they know people feel lucky to even have a space to live, and so they can't complain about bad wiring or old smoke detectors or buildings without fire escapes. People also say it's just too hot and it's only getting hotter, that California is slowly setting on fire, and on top of it all it's harder and harder to get out of places because there are so many places and things.

Ara was one of the people on the second floor who didn't make it out. I didn't know her that well, but she had just started this artist collective on the edge of Emeryville, one of the only things the city had going for it. I went to see a show there a few months ago, and everything about her and her house sparkled and radiated, made you see that everything is actually art and that you are actually an artist to even if on the surface you work a boring technician job. Part of me feels a little weird writing about this, because a lot of people knew and loved a lot of people in that fire, and I only met Ara once, I don't think it's my story to tell. But even though I didn't really know her at all in her life, I can't stop looking at her Instagram because there's something I need about how it makes me feel. The day she died she posted this picture of a blue bedazzled early aughts iPod and captioned it "life is short full of stuff," like she knew, and I'll look at the picture and all of the hundreds of comments on it from her friends who miss her and scroll through all the other posts she ever made. I keep going back to Ara's Instagram like I'll find something there, right before bed, because I want to have bad dreams, like the one where I see this woman, next to a burned out building, covered in soot and except for the lines under her eyes where she's been crying, and I feel like I must have seen her somewhere before but I don't know where.



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pleathershorts i fucking need this everywhere all the time. i miss you so fucking much

strawberrymilkmade I miss you a lot. Especially today.

jainabzzz ❤️💜💙💚💛

mamkaveli Happy Birthday Ara Jo. Missing you Mucho!!!! But I feel your spirit always😊

gracerosarioo Love you 💕💕💕🌟🌟🌟🌟

joycaptian I have a feeling Im going to see you soon

cuidense_ Miss u

maryweatherusa LOVE YOU ARA!!!

tinababerina Incredible unbelievable, inimitable woman.

December 2, 2016

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[fever dreams]

Anna R. K. Muldoon

"My grandmother told me that it was a gift to see the angel of death in front of people's houses, to know that he'd be collecting someone there soon. I thought it was a gift too, up until the day I began to see it in front of every house."¹³

In working on this paper, it occurs to me that infectious disease control is a field obsessed with ghosts. Each epidemic curve represents numbers of lives, a way of counting our ghosts on paper, in scientific charts that solidify both guilt and resolve. We reference our horrors in shorthand. When we say "1918," we don't just mean the virus – we mean the specter of millions dead that we could not prevent. "Demographic distortion" sounds technical, but what we mean is an entire generation lost to HIV/AIDS in some countries and how that makes the demographics look entirely strange. Smallpox is both a historical oddity and one of the few diseases that pauses breath for a minute in my community. It's something we only talk about to each other – the way our work leads us always to ghosts, past and future. Whether it's the outbreaks we couldn't stop, the things we didn't know until too late, or the colleagues we toast who died trying to stop the next outbreak, we work in a world that is deeply entangled with the dead at every turn.

Every field studies its own history to some extent, but I suspect the public health obsession with combing through past outbreaks and past actions for clues may be unique. The hunt for understanding and the tools to stop the next outbreak takes us strange places – from repeated self-experimentation by scientists (many of whom did not survive), to exhuming bodies from permafrost to understand 1918 flu, to transcribing the dates of death in cemeteries across the country. We are still seeking clues, whether historical or genetic, that tell us why diseases like plague or cholera, which had been ever present, exploded into massive, population altering epidemics. Through population statistics, studies of DNA, diaries and letters, and study of variation in current organisms, we seek to find the ghosts of infectious ancestors to prevent the emergence of their descendants. We recognize that infectious disease will always be a Keter Class object, containable only by the uncanny nature of our field.

Our ghosts and the dead stand in deep relation to each other, but are not quite the same. Perhaps because public health deals so closely with death, the dead are not perhaps as uncanny a presence for our study. There is something deeply uncanny in hearing their voices in writing, but that is true, I think, for every historical researcher. Our ghosts, however, are the evidence of the things we could not stop, will not be able to stop, or have not yet understood. Our objects of study are deeply haunting as well, ever present and uncontrollable, unknowable and yet intensely specific. While our relationship to the dead deeply constructive, I suspect our relationships to our ghosts are more the location of sympoiesis, whether through uncanny horrors or the changes in self that come from haunting.

I tried to write my own creepypasta for this section and found that nothing I wrote was more disturbing than my old textbooks. I remember clearly the level of horror I experienced in some of my first classes and how we all joked about which topics required covering all the images in the chapter or sitting in the shower until the water ran cold. (Everyone in the field has something

¹³ https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1iwylh/what_is_the_best_horror_story_you_can_come_up/cb9fmkx/

that still provides that spine-chilling, creeping horror better than any scary movie.) Infectious disease is a field that deeply accepts the unknowable as foundational to life and one that assumes any illusion of control is only temporary. With that in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising to see science reporters who enter thinking they are studying a single disease write passages like:

I began to think of the human body as a barely explored island of life, home to creatures unlike anything in the outside world. But when I remembered we are just one species out of millions on this planet, the island swelled up to a continent, a planet. (Zimmer 2000)

In many ways, Zimmer believed the object he was encountering was Euclid Class until he spent enough time with it to see the ways in which it is all-encompassing and omnipresent in his world. One of the most beautiful and captivating themes of his book on parasites is his personal realization that he is encountering a world that has been around him his entire life, but entirely illegible until he went looking for it. For Zimmer, parasites become a Keter Class object that is both fascinating and deeply uncanny once seen.

Like Zimmer before his realization, there are parts of the public health and medical world that are comfortable treating infectious disease as a Euclid Class object, containable with the right (scientific) tools and only occasionally (and temporarily) uncontrollable. The reductionist approach to infectious disease is an attempt to separate out the parts of the system that can be understood and controlled, thus removing their uncanny nature. This approach has worked for the development of vaccines and the elimination of rinderpest, smallpox, horsepox, foot and mouth disease (in some areas), and the near-elimination of polio, measles, mumps and more. In each of those cases, however, the creation of a vaccine and our dependence on them for elimination erases the more traditional methods of infectious disease control used in conjunction. Clearly, the smallpox vaccine is among the most successful projects in human health history, but the disease was never controllable solely through the application of scientific knowledge to isolated vaccine development. Control and elimination required intensive quarantine of people, travel bans, intense surveillance, and often violent exercise of state power (Tucker 2001). While a lens focusing on the development of vaccines as the way forward for public health makes infectious disease a more tractable, Euclid Class object, the smallest shift in focus revives the uncanny and often intractably uncontrollable boundaries of infectious disease control.

uncanny education and intractable enchantment.

On the first day of my first class in the School of Public Health, my infectious disease epidemiology professor attempted to warn us all that this field was not what we thought it was. He gave us a series of rules (perhaps more meditations) to survive in the field long term; the first two have stuck with me in everything I have worked on since:

- 1) You can reduce death and you can delay death. You cannot prevent death. You are not God.
- 2) You will never be certain and you will never truly know you did the right thing. You will have to learn to live with terrible mistakes.

Now, after many years, it seems clear he would have loved Morton's *Realist Magic* and incorporated the idea of inextricably connected objects that are simultaneously the things themselves and their interactions as the right way to teach public health. Among the exercises on

day one, he included several that challenged us to see the ways the field we'd chosen sits on the boundary between scientific method and moral judgement, sometimes seeming more mystical than rigorous. Far more than we realized at the time, he was trying to warn us that our field is haunted.

It is not just my particular professor who seems unable to discuss public health from a traditionally disenchanted (at least on the surface) perspective. One of the most popular epidemiology textbooks includes a chapter titled "The Epidemiologic Approach to Causation" that perhaps explains my professor's near-theological opening lecture. After quoting Rabbi Harold Kushner for an opening, it summarizes the internal conflict between competing public health logics:

Whether randomness or a fixed plan causes events – good and bad – is a matter of debate among theologians and epidemiologists. Some epidemiologists, called probabilists, believe that randomness or chance is an explanation for events; others, known as determinists, think that everything has a cause and that chance is merely a term that we use when we cannot explain something because of limitations in our knowledge. (Ashengrau & Seage 2008)

The authors go on to discuss the several forms of reasoning in epidemiology and the moments each are useful, though they are entirely dismissive of determinism throughout the book. They (and I) take it as given that epidemiology is a probabilistic field more open to accepting the intractably unknowable than most modern sciences. The existence of the microbial world around, between, and inside us makes determinism a difficult stance to maintain for long. Josephson-Storm would recognize our inability to divide the uncanny and the unknowable from our (on the surface) scientific work (2017). In a field as deeply connected to the dead and to the unknown, pretending disenchantment holds less sway over the conversation than in our more certain sister fields.

uncontrollable objects.

If any set of organisms illustrates the ways infectious disease requires sitting with the unknowable, it may be the *Borrelia* family of bacteria. Karlen's biography of *Borrelia burgdorferi* follows the organism from an ecosystem in which it was in balance with its multiple hosts through the destruction and re-creation of forests, seeing each interaction as a shifting relationship to new and old objects. The shifting relationships that led to human and animal infection rates increasing in the Northeastern United States made *Borrelia burgdorferi* a visible object of study and then recognized as a near-universally present organism on several continents. The more we learn about the *Borellia* family, however, the more mysterious the organisms become, with recent research showing confused diagnoses and overlapping syndromes that last beyond detectable infection.

Even the single organism *Borrelia burgdorferi* reduced to a name and ecosystem, seems to withdraw from every attempt to understand its relationship to humans and animals, no matter how much knowledge is added to picture. Its relationships rapidly become too complex to comprehend or predict, dense and dependent on each other in ways the defy diagrams. Our methods of control remain stubbornly pragmatic – reduce human exposure to the vector (ticks) through ecological management while we attempt to develop technical solutions.

Like Zimmer, Karlen's journey into the world of *Borrelia burgdorferi* clearly changed how he sees the object. He ends his book with a description of a tick emerging from post-apocalyptic rubble carrying "a minute, slender spiral, hardy and elegant, again a survivor when so many creatures have had their day and gone." (2000) Its very environmental embeddedness and infinitely multiplying relationships guarantee its survival long after humans have passed into planetary memory.

Epidemiologists live in the in-between world discovered by Zimmer, Karlen, and others, attached to the uncanny from many angles. It may be the hallmark of a field that has rejected the idea of complete understanding or control over infectious disease in favor of attempts to better understand how to live in balance with the endlessly overlapping objects and accidents in which we are all embedded. Perhaps *Borrelia*s are simply an example of the object that cannot be reduced to parts or kept in view as a unified whole – the accidents and encounters are so infinitely complex that the organism itself withdraws more and more with study.

That very withdrawal fascinates infectious disease professionals and explains the language so often used in biographies of disease. Authors who examine the history of specific infectious diseases grant both agency and an uncanny quality to their subjects: Karlen on *Borrelia burgdorferi* (Lyme disease) (2000), Zimmer on parasites (2000), Shah on malaria (2010), Garrett on Hanta and Ebola (1995), etc. The near glorification of disease-causing organisms in each of these books is written evidence of the ways the epidemiological approach encourages uncanny relationships to our subjects of study. Karlen's view of *Borrelia burgdorferi* as an agent in its own right is clear from the first chapter: "By looking at the germ's life from its own point of view, one can better see the interplay of offense and defense, a contest that offers one of nature's most intriguing, small-scale spectacles." (2000) Within the first few pages of his book on parasites, Zimmer recognizes the ways they are deeply uncanny objects for humans: "Parasites belong in nightmares, not in doctors' office." (2000) The language these two writers use is in no way unique. I have a bookshelf filled with infectious disease texts ranging from the lurid stories of outbreak investigations to heavy, overly serious encyclopedias on biodefense. Each contains some element of this acceptance of the unknowable, only partially tractable, and ever withdrawing nature of the objects we study. None, however, come close to as chilling as a colleague's half-joke in a tense meeting: "Smallpox is the only perfect evidence of intelligent design."

cross-species sympoiesis.

A second kind of haunting is deeply present in infectious disease control – the permanent process of negotiating the practice, theory, and ethics of the field with the living and the dead. Much as we learn by studying the ghosts of past outbreaks, we also learn by studying the specters of control methods we would find difficult to justify. This strange form of sympoiesis with ghosts is most deeply present when working on the diseases that appear seemingly from nowhere, in the early days before we have a guess as to what will happen. Those early moments involve closed-door conversations that require deep negotiation with the realities of an old field – would we take the actions our ancestors did? Will we have to? Is this the outbreak that will force us to really know how far we'll go to stop it?

A friend of mine has always described those conversations as "Negotiating with the angry dead and an unknown attacker, while standing on quicksand and praying hard." It may be flippant, but it is also accurate. Early on, information is scarce and often inaccurate, but each day of gathering information is precious. The outbreak sets the pace – rapid spread activates an ever shifting ecology of people to argue, to guess, and to cling to the smallest clue; slow spread allows for more negotiation and information gathering (and much less yelling). In the early days, the organism runs the negotiations, becoming simultaneously an object to be studied and an agent to communicate with. Each intervention to contain the outbreak is a chance for the organism to communicate its character, visible only in shifting patterns or continued spread, who is infected and who is safe. In the early days, the disease as an object is fully withdrawn, becoming slowly visible by its relationships, movements, and effects on humans and animals. It is the irony of public health

that we begin and end with withdrawn objects – at first because they are seen only in their relationships, but finally because new information can't reveal the final thingness of the object itself.

Perhaps the knowledge that public health investigations always begin with a mystery explains the near-mysticism that permeates the detailed studies of individual diseases. They are simultaneously themselves and their effects, defined as disease only in their relationship to particular other species. Those definitions and negotiations become even more complex with the realization that fragments of viruses and bacteria that have infected human ancestors are incorporated into our DNA (Belshaw et al 2004). Lynn Margulis describes the near-mystical view of infectious organisms that results from growing knowledge of those encounters best:

The more balanced view of microbe as colleague and ancestor remains almost unexpressed. Our culture ignores the hard-won fact that these disease “agents,” these “germs,” also germinated all life. (1998)

Whether discussing our embeddedness in microbial worlds or their ghostly presence in our DNA and organ structure, Zimmer and Margulis capture the impossibility of distancing ourselves from the living world of microbes and the dead we study. For this field then, the object of study is the interface between the visible and invisible. Whether by scale (human vs microbe), by time (living and dead), or by clarity (the knowable and the unknowable), it is always only partially visible, withdrawing more with every attempt to pin it down.

Infectious disease work then, whether official like mine or through encounter like Zimmer, changes the people in the field, making it near-impossible to see the object as disconnected from its relationships. The density of aesthetic relationships in each study, whether between temporally distanced humans or between the organism and its environment forces acknowledgement of sympoiesis. If every encounter with the organism is a conversation that changes both the person and the object of study, the two become deeply linked over time. Whether through ethical negotiation with the ghosts of our field (and sometimes the people who made those choices), study of those dead and dying, or encounters with resolutely mysterious illness, the encounters create each of us as we attempt to negotiate our own obsessions and decisions.



[a note on living with fever dreams]

In writing this paper, I have come to see both my field and my colleagues differently. There has always been a running joke that infectious disease folks and first responders are the craziest members of the public health community. At conferences, you can find us in the bar or outside chain-smoking and chatting with each other long after our colleagues have made the responsible decision to go to bed to make that 7am session. There is always a moment when conversation slows and someone asks “So how are you sleeping?”. We shrug. We order another drink. We nod. We recognize the question is a way of saying we aren’t. We toast the ghosts and change the topic. The hauntings of this field permeate our lives in ways that encourage strange toasts and unspoken nightmares. But then, our nightmares are really all the same. We carry them together in the question “So how are you sleeping?”, in 3am conversations, and in reckoning with our dead outbreak after outbreak.

Living with the deeply haunted, however, seems to also lead to deep commitments to life, to joy, and to each other. Those late night post-conference discussions and deep connections between people who have worked together are both a symptom of haunting and a meaningful way of life. In ways I have not found true outside response and infectious disease communities, there is a communal appreciation for each connection, each beautiful thing you find among the living, and the understanding that everything is temporary. (A friend repeats the refrain “Live now. Live deeply. Live while you can.” at every one of those late nights. And we do.) Because we are haunted, we are often a closed and coded community, but we are also deeply and permanently connected to the world around us and to each other. In the end, our hauntings bring us closer to life, even as they keep us deeply in conversation with the dead.

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[the pastadex]

The following is an appendix that outlines one or more pieces of online participatory fiction that each of the authors found useful while working through their writing for this collection. We encourage you to use the search engine of your choice (or click the links) to find them and journey down the rabbit hole.

Nevada Recommends: Psychosis was one of the first creepypasta I read. It takes shape through the protagonist's daily handwritten journals over the span of five increasingly frantic days. Through the bulk of the story, you only meet John's friends and companions through their telepresence in his life, which prompts his frantic text-message query: You seen anyone face to face lately? I appreciate the ways this story grapples with the theme of isolation, and the ways in which teletechnologies play with our sense of the real. BEN drowned is a pasta originally posted to 4Chan by username Jadusable. Jadusable purchased a used (seemingly bootleg) copy of The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask. The cartridge still had a save game, under the name BEN. Part of BEN's appeal is knowing that, in my own experience playing video games, it's easy to become invested not only in the story, but in the clump of pixels you're driving around, and the mood of the game can have a profound effect on the player. (Playing Silent Hill is why I still have a heart-stopping reaction to air raid sirens...) Jadusable's experience playing the Haunted Majora's Mask moves from Twilight-Zone to gut-trembling fear over the course of play. This creepypasta includes "Let's Play" style YouTube videos, and eventually became an Alternate Reality Game. Tales from the Gas Station is alternately gut-busting and panic inducing. Tales from the Gas Station finds the uncanny every day with deeper mysteries: raccoons behind the grease trap, random small garden gnomes appearing for no discernible reason, a man named Keiffer who is killed and buried over and over again, a figure in a trench coat who stares at the doors for hours without ever coming in, plants like infant hands growing from the dirt, and hey, what's that rumbling sound coming from beneath the gas station? As absurd as this story seems at times, there are two themes that emerge that matter: the protagonist's ability to integrate the weird happenings as reality, and the theme of environmental precarity.

Taylor Recommends: The first piece of online participatory fiction I ever experienced was the story of John Titor in 2000. Circulating on use-net and early internet forums, John Titor claimed to be a time traveler from 2036 who lived and fought in Central Florida after the United States had broken up into five regions following a nuclear World War III in 2015 that killed nearly three billion people. He posted photos of his time machine, schematics from his user manuals, and answered questions about what the post-apocalyptic United States was like. In April 2009, I was browsing the Something Awful forums when a particular thread caught my attention: "I am an alien, and I would like to talk to you about it." The self-proclaimed alien went on to explain that we should address him as Mr. Boone, a name he had taken from the first person he had encountered after landing on Earth. He said he had been visiting our world since 2007 and was doing so recreationally. He had landed in the United Kingdom and chose Something Awful because it was the "Internet area comprised of the largest mix of differing and open-minded intelligences." In all he answered 531 questions over the course of three months, along with several lengthy posts describing his world, his life, and how these life-forms capable of star travel interact with one another. As a teenager and young adult, these stories fascinated me and I have returned to re-read them many times over the course of my adult life, including immediately before I wrote my three chapters for this collection. They continue to captivate my imagination and invite me to lean into the hoax—to be unabashedly taken over by the story without fear of being perceived as a sporter of tin-foil hats. It's amazing what your imagination is capable of when one ignores the societal shame that is unfortunately placed on adults when they are seen engaging in play and games.

Annie Recommends: ([Link](#)) In 2015, Scott Carrier learned that seven black churches burned in the ten days after the shooting at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. All of seven fires were recorded by local authorities as lightening strikes (what insurance coverage still calls an act of God). Carrier was surprised this hadn't been reported on, then was surprised further that it wasn't reported on because it was nothing out of the ordinary; there are often multiple church fires any given week in the American South. He drove to each one of these churches to learn more about the fires and racism and left three weeks later with more questions than he came with. Carrier is a white man and nearly everyone he talked to said racism was not a problem here, and also, that racism was a terrible problem here, often within the same breath; friendliness and unfriendliness would vacillate quickly, and most of his conversations ended abruptly when he could get people to talk to him at all. He studied anthropology as an undergraduate and is committed in his journalism to a certain cinema verite (or rather, radio verite) style. To capture this string of encounters in their true confusion and ambiguity, this story is one of his mostly lightly produced, with the interviews left largely unedited.

Carrier doesn't use the word cosmopolitics; he is an anti-institutional type I would guess considers himself as an agnostic, but a tour of burned churches certainly bespeaks a commitment parallel to interrogations of the secular and its degradations. Stochastic violence is co-arising with an erosion of knowledge systems (of fire and other objects), with the lines those systems have marked between nature and culture, or acts of violence and acts of God. Carrier never found out what the fuck happened, and never will, and that is the point. It is a really real scary story that bleeds between its truth regimes, true/false epistemologies and uncanny ontologies. I've listened to it so many times, and it tacitly props all the things I've written here.

Anna Recommends:

- Oranges ([Link](#))

In "Oranges," a neighborhood is infected with a demon who encourages paranoia, hatred of oranges, and exclusion of anyone who isn't also infected. The narrator maintains her sense of reality, but watches everything around her fall apart. The story draws out both the fear of the unknown and the ways ideas can be as infectious and frightening as any physical danger. (Buy lemons!)

- WTF is going on in Pinal County Arizona??? (Otherwise known as the Arizona Zombie Scare) ([Link](#))

I first heard about this story from a friend who found it not knowing in was a hoax and was utterly terrified by it. The story describes an unknown disease emerging in a town and spreading while state and federal employees cover it up. The comment threat illustrates the difficulty of telling the difference between people participating in the genre and those genuinely confused about whether it is real.

- I am the Apocalypse ([Link](#))

This study has elements of classic zombie stories, but is narrated by one of the zombies. It doesn't go into the early days of the outbreak, but captures some questions about how to decide what and who are the problem in chaos. I am also captured by the circle in the narrative, from original zombie narrator, to his wife's perspective, then to his wife waking up a zombie.

- Hybrid Outbreak ([Link](#))

This story is a story of creation and innovation gone wrong and the dangers of messing with life. The narrator is responsible for the creation of a super-soldier race that attempts to take over the world. His haunting becomes manifest when the original creature comes

for revenge. The story draws out the intertwining of subject and researcher and the ways choices (in this case terrible ones) create endless hauntings.

- Demonic Ebony Virus Outbreak ([Link](#))

In DEV, a demon infestation leads to mass hysteria and an unsolvable medical mystery. The inability to find a cause for the illness ignores the experience of the sick girls and leads to their deaths. The story is not truly about the disease, but rather about what we classify as disease when we can't see it and how we respond.

