

The Shape of Things





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Bradley J. Fest



salò press



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for Racheal
and in memory of Tomáš



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They were presented as urgently necessary things.
—H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*

The thing things.
—Martin Heidegger, "The Thing"





The Shape of Things I

I

We'll fashion new tool sets out of 2600s, impaling boar
with joysticks unless I reassert my audacity, my yawp.
Fossils of couples twined around one another, wrapped in
their little deaths, shall be found once a year: it'll be called
archaeaster. Slow menageries of people sporting prosthetics
of all
kinds—additional head, screw on food processor, tambourine
maw—will roam the rusted shipyards, gleaning. From there,
the mills,
the rail yard, downtown—planting corn between the cracks
in the pavement, between the ancient metal sarcophagi.
Yesterday

I mapped the waveform of a shockwave. Leftovers from
galaxial interpenetration, suns thrown into the void, planets
dying—
this all takes a very long time. I will be scattered tomorrow,
distributed across the globe in a flurry of activity. This does
not
take terribly long and is considered common. I will cross
some
thresholds but the time for transgression is past. What
remains
is to channel and select what is (t)here. Force your favorite
chair
to begin shouting, making a scene. Induce a coma. Foster
a child, only forget her on a kindly neighbor's doorstep. She

will ascend to some minor bureaucratic position: overseer
of collective farming in the southeastern Atlantic rustbelt,
quashing inner-office squabbles over planning the new
pogrom,
or else grow up to become a manager of the Gap or
something.

I know. We're fostering whole new levels of detached mirth
about the narcissistic landslide we all collectively prevented,
remember? The pretention (was also gross hyperbole) . . .
but we definitely deserve awkward thanks. We have been
productively subtracting bodies from the field; you're
welcome.

II

The muses have become barbarian hordes roaring across
the moors in their suped-up Land Rovers and Humvees,
excreting inspiration-dealing Ithacans upon the
 unsuspecting
countryside. Some warning would have been appreciated.
At least for a cleanup crew.¹ There are currently entire new

modes of understanding appearing every few microseconds
then disappearing forever, the moment's potential
 untapped,
a cosmic accident of no consequence. We shall all bow down
to sheer statistical improbability. *Force majeure*. There are
 miles
of neurons to extract from my fingers, pulling at the root.

As a pretender, one simply knows the racket. See, a
 familiarity
with the rulebook is not unexpected, though of course
 allowances for
a certain amount of entropic emergence should be made:
 sedate
the hardluck fathers gambling the week's grocery money.
 Let them
lie on these mortuary slabs glistening into the next century.

III

Oh. Yeah. The shadows of seagulls are back. And
all the color is going to rot out on the inside. Your

birthday jailer has a letter. The address is smudged,
but congratulations, I think you've won an all expenses

excluded vacation to sunny Megiddo. With a balcony
overlooking the battleground. What a spectacle.

¹ To answer the question: "What do you want to do after the orgy?"

IV

A prolonged adolescence is the shape of things.
We are ambivalent. There may be something (virtually)
on fire. More likely our expectations are being met.

Marginally,
but still. The powerviolence infects. Lackadaisical nearness

to devices and accessories, all the new killer apps. Will
it turn your eyeballs blue, reflecting the light of
the nuclear-informatic pulse, seared by data? Our decline,
fermented in hazy LED prophecies, loses its parameters,

its affecting derealizing gloss, its tones of jubilant
catastrophe, its discordant themes. The symbols
of the end cast no shadow in the holocaust of screens.
They retreat into the dim background synesthesia. Goodbye.

Architects and Their Books

Time's laceration let out upon a mahogany
 doorstep. The kind we make up as children
 in bed, alone. As if there was another option.
 As if it could have been a different kind
 of confidant. We'll let feeling in for a moment
 only to have it sutured, impossibly, to understanding,
 like a saddled beast lounging on the quarterdeck of this,
 our present colloquium. We'll let this we we have become
 stumble off into the night, infantilized like so many
 unpursued dreamscapes. Some fourth person
 would have to arrive, as if on her way to the depot
 like a harried harbinger of ice cold and forgotten departures.
 Systems work. Molasses drips. Sanguine yearning
 churns out of the cattle-press, always. Elaborate
 please. The insufficiency at work in the hazy
 construction of some kind of yesterday approaches
 melancholy, at best. Meaning: do not become forensic.
 Take the pictures, sure, but be careful only to document
 the details matching the case, the important lineaments
 frequenting this, desire's current neoliberal expression.
 Not, to be sure, the relevant dripping mucus on the mirror
 nor the chaste notes rippling the flag. I would prefer not to get
 carried away on the back of some gryphon steed as my tail
 feathers
 wag toward the sky. I try to work conscientiously for
 a million little dumb show matinees. Silent, they're
 performed in
 parking structures made from fiberglass and patience.
 Stalwart,
 I tell you, they house forever-notes. Next time, get down.

Be careful with the perforated letter. She'll unhouse you,
 so close to the walkway as you are. The dappled smoke
 seeping out of the sun connotes not requiems nor certainty.
 Canned sentiment is perhaps killing our house pets. Or else
 freedom has (perhaps) deleted our houseguests. The
 threshold
 doesn't mind the imperative I'm giving, the command from
 silent structures
 to the trains that pass in the middle of the day, lonely on
 their eastward

wandering and rollicking, their rhythm forward and through
the densities
of fine, trellised woodwork. Post-arboretum sale, the
delicacies purchased,
the light of them, their coma-inducing glare, capsized the
moment.
Sure, queens of delight strode thoughtfully down lanes of
embarkation,
distances folded together in their tresses like panoplied
Andromedans,
like forewarned, miscreant saboteurs on their way to
endless satisfaction.

Survival City

For this will to deceive that is in things luminous may manifest itself likewise in retrospect and so by sleight of some fixed part of a journey already accomplished may also post men to fraudulent destinies.

—Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

Tonight, as if risen from palliative concrete lines,
 as if dropped from cedar-Eden-bloom,
 we cantered recklessly, all the while absorbing
 a certain amount of quasi-organic fallout.
 This was not planned (*per se*). This was not—
 as if conscious line drawings were the norm—
 quite the cantankerous fodder that was expected. It
 would be nice to denote a certain type of storm, a certain
 amazing(ly graceful) present all shot through with Ball
 Lightning
 programmes and wheedling cancerwrought noontimes, but
 the fact of discoquarantines spoke to a kind of kinetiscopic
 mariner-moon. What island? What, in this all too troposcopic
 of clandestine machinations, could one expect of certain
 soccer pennants? (We were a culture groomed upon
 the unseen ruins of something never used—i.e.,
 our fallout shelters were excellent sites for AA meetings.)
 Tonight the return galvanized a backward-sliding
 only to be reborn upon a slate of unused pylons.
 Fissure the Onlyville, the coprocket, the filesshore.
 We were misdirected youth awaiting a mass
 revival of MAD²-SCILLS³ for a tomorrow bearing down
 like a heathen-midden of upset flie(r)s. And if only
 we could wait to be reborn slowly, our anxiety
 (maybe) could be sated, like some sort of posthuman
 analogue to *real* cop lights on our handcuffed hands.
 But sadly, this wasn't a time to be arrested (nor "stopped").
 It would have been great if some Game Genie descended,
 alterity and branded corpulescence aside, to wrack
 Sherry-like certain forgotten favors along the Seine
 and Thames, certain (I don't know) "raindrops . . . hitting
 hard"

² Mutually Assured Destruction.

³ Southern Comfort Infantry Lulled and Loved Slowly.

upon newly reinvigorated/reconstituted skulls
that would be the makeup of what was left of this
now quick fever of loss and mild trepidation.

Or maybe there would be a sublime nothingness.
Not sublime like: two carrots in a field get to talkin' . . .
but as perilous adventures sloping by
in the afternoon like epic playlists.
Things are beastly. Gratuitous even.
Fortunate wine and odds and ends.

Losing the text by an overabundance
of *Sunshine* proves not to be the conundrum
quadriceps are expected to be when injured.
He-Man was only the smallest interval
of a transcendent toy company. . . .

The Decibel Curfew Does Not Apply

Been too long since the bass was above six point five.
We've appreciated the courtesy but in this neighborhood
the decibel curfew does not apply. Raise the volume
on the aural enfilade, replicate the manuscript.
You have your marching orders. Thus I retired

to my cabin, considering this new development
in the third year of the xingularity war. Or else
I decided to stay in for the night, in this year
of the Mayan apocalypse. We're not always
writing for the cause of war, an outbreak of spiders,

this single spark, this spectral retro fire. Our shadows
can send out shouts to futures pawned for guns and
diamonds.

Happy human error. C'mon! We shall foreclose
our children's future with a great anarchic bellow
and ride off into atomic postmodern sunsets

with their dangling Yggdrasil. Stake your
afterlife on it. Goddamn goddamn, it's
1989. Tied to a youth of 190 REM. (We happened to read
the radiation on a barcoded bucket of piss from the future.)
The contemporary zombie, struggling to articulate

an emergent subjectivity, in the sheer fact of its
own decline—its fetid rotting carbon nanotubes—
is not a boundary to be crossed, at least
not twice. Until then, employment by swirling
blizzards of triformes will fulfill consumer desire.

But now that I'm older I'd like to imagine something
else besides finding myself alone. The fission inside
stars should light upon my face: affect blindness
and stand in the corner. But the feeling of ever after
work being over. Powerwork; neverover. Run higher,

jump faster; recede from the fashionable flashbulb
hair tied up in wireless trees, their gray undead stalks
gleaming in the distant moonlight. Things are just awful.

Perhaps attendance will swell at glass operas,
but the probability of a decrease in cinema spectators
is palpable. We'll worry transcendence all around
your neck. Meccamputechture. Or else live in your
corpse now. Humans as ornaments. Everyone now!

Your body is in the sun. 200 million years from now
you're standing in the sea! But I'm here adoring
myself, braiding my genitalia through my standard

bearer's cherubim. They are in pain, sadly.
Fire up the engines of destruction, the dynamos of
modernity, in reverse. Let's worship at the foot of the
altar of beauty instead. I'm sick of alternative rock.
And children mock my carbuncle. Mercilessly. Oops.

I was happier than I've ever been at some point
in the past. Yeah. And tomorrow's gonna be just awful.

An Ode to 2013: We Are the National Security Agency's Children

I

In these hyperarchival times, we're a team of sparkle ponies lashed to capitalism.^{4, 5} Reified, a collective entangled with itself like a daydream or a nightmare, we are the National Security Agency's children.

Welcome to the twenty-first-century security state, this apparatus, this artificial intelligence⁶ that just got a brain. Welcome to the new collectivity, a network of humans subject to algorithms far beyond their control:

leaves of digital grass waving in the nuclear glare from contemporaneity's high-definition screen. We search in vain for a second "Manifesto for Cyborgs,"⁷ having only zombie Bartlebys instead, sucking on our methamphetamine sociality,

the impulses, electric and otherwise, of our vampiric singularity,
our emergent inconsequentiality, our hyper-writing. The species
is inscribing a vast novel that the bots working for our overlords
are busy reading.⁸ We are its children, still in the womb, gestating

⁴ I am indebted to Racheal Fest for this phrase.

⁵ See Mark Edmundson, "Poetry Slam; or, the Decline of American Verse," *Harper's* 327, no. 1958 (July 2013): 61–68.

⁶ Capitalism.

⁷ See Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" (1985), in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7–46.

⁸ This is, of course, a science fiction novel. I wonder how it will end.

a cosmic intelligence, doing creation in reverse. What will emerge from all these pages, this megadata? We would like to suggest some of the following things about the present. (If they end up coming for us, we are doomed.⁹)

II

The time of hyperobjects is upon us.¹⁰ This time of global warming, cosmic background noise . . . this solar system and its cloud(s), its beehives, the Library of Congress, Disneyland, gravity.

We are in the Circle. The open road has been distributed across the metaverse, these metapoetics, these *cosmopoli*. It now consolidates its control of vast American networks through exceptional screen resolution.

Our pixelated anatomy is burned across the universe, scratched to within an inch of its own distorted life. We are desperately past the end of the world. The oceans alive with radiation, we are postnatural,

carrying our terminals as we board the underworld express to the optical society. Contemporaneity's project—the capture of light—has vastly exceeded initial projections. The metadata is control. Scream

across our digital ontology, kick out the jams, trip the fright fantastic as you go—the open road has become a field of nonhuman multiplicity that we cannot escape, let await its arrival.

⁹ See The Blood Brothers, "Rescue" and "Doctor! Doctor!," *This Adultery is Ripe* [Kansas City, MO: Second Nature Records, 2000], LP.

¹⁰ See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

III

Inside the hyperarchive, we cannot read. Signs are
bleeping in and out of our retinals, trying to find a
neutral flat matte background upon which to inscribe
their own floating insubstantiality, their palimpsestic

yet absent agency. Taking these algorithms as a given,
this weirdness of the present, we would like to suggest
a lexicography, a way of reading, a rollup, a transnational
clamor.¹¹ It is impossible to define the present. And we are

at the beginning of history. We must resist the slogan:
"All that happens must be known." We must instead
relish how objects cannot know one another. But as what?
Through what posthuman commons could we achieve

such naïveté, such sincerity? Hyperreality is behind us;
it has been replaced by reality. No longer waves and radiation,
just the light of contemporaneity. We must cease awaiting
the apocalypse. We can never be sure what to do instead.

But we can retune the guitars of our poetic half-stacks. We
can blast waves of distortion across our global climatology,
hoping to change the chromatics of this, our present condition.
Welcome to the new year. We have made ourselves a
gallows of a house.

¹¹ And we do not first need to imagine the end of all life on earth.

Tristeza

If it weren't for a record sleeve it would not
be late enough to be mispronouncing Autechre.
If it were, hindsight plying its strange head
like a cattle rustler or a stem of hyacinth

would propose sweeping infinities,
generalizations which would in turn
lead to marching quarter notes up and down
the half-rations making this sliding possible, even here;

a body without organs is not proof of an original
nothingness.

The next plane will depart half past the quartered off people
I'm standing behind (their ponderous bodies cut
by a cord of yellow rope), depart when doubt rises up

to meet thin air held by gravity away from the vacuum and
void,
when the cigarette burns on my hands heal, when narrative
knowledge
ceases offered and offering cutlass strokes smoked in gray
flavor.

Then, without reference, the basement doors will open

onto a burned black sunshine recorder set in the middle
of thickest woods; the array of green piercing the canopy,
kaleidoscopic like the molecular level of good work boots;
and an imagined fountain will be raining cashmere and bread

around the light sensing instrument—but it won't be like
that. . . .

Like lava flowing underwater or an overcast day with
nothing to do
but drive into so many second story bedrooms, I sat waiting
at the terminal where someone had placed a couch and
covered it

with dandelion fur on the concrete floor; and while I sat,
the veins in my hands struggled out.
The way inmates circle around humid figures,
stretched on racks and twined round the wrists with

pylon-defying song, the buzz overtook me. Four years
and nothing to show but arpeggios leaping up and around
a social intervention divested of its depoliticized humor.
Cut off, only the last plane offered ritual and appearance.

“Carry your fire across the ocean small one.
Secrets are told by thieves.”

A harsher punishment than stacking dish upon dish
in the hold of a manufacturing ship, would be

a banishment to the galley, port side of strangulation—the
power to stop the cylindrical turbines speeding us ahead;
woe, for there are only turgid notes that last for twenty-three
measures. Nothing left to fear nor to understand,

the waves and pots of coffee making a final statement.
What is this atmosphere, this slow emphasis of dread?
Life seems to spring from a drooping houseplant
hung above—its implication and comment upon

this speaker’s responsibility—a folding into the arms
of the sea surrounding emerald isles, this touching
of warmth in the air of the tiniest silken breath.
When lava pours out near the sea surface tremendous

volcanic explosions sometimes occur—it behaves differently.
And it is the acknowledgment of our own
(re)deaccentuating of what was written so boldly on a guitar
once: this machine kills fascists—the killer was in the
government

blankets—stuffed were the animals in the natural history
museum
like my own crescendo diving from and to the murk
where no lines or fresh ideas reside—tailored scripts
conducting us into secrets told by thieves—nostalgia

and broken guitar strings.

La Paloma

What used to sound so dry and sleepy
merely became to this bag of a man
lying on my front doorstep burned in the fly-flame
a lonely and tired step-child of flute cadence.

It was not, in the buggy stance of a slow going
and horse driven pack of rabid wintermutes,
an occasion to waltz: there were too many leapings
and crowded landings.

The metronome spoke as if family,
lost in grand ballrooms some fateful summer's eve
two thousand years away,
were gathered together for one precious instant more

of tying broken strings on the clavichord
and playing for the lost druids of the forest;
whereby the law kicks down the oakplank door
looking for hitchhikers who wanted

merely a way out of the technics of the music hall.
The planet's easy rotation
a Holstian hierarchy could not lay easy bare
the actions that are occurring just downstairs, in the street,

on the chin of the man left dangling in my mail slot
by the night-crew of this handdog
venture into conceptual architecture.
The bygone pastness of being at the front of the room. . . .

Ah, and then Dvořák's fourth, movement IV descends into
that very same room, that room of cellos opening the glass
upon the brass attempting to blaze the ceiling of this
crabbed background, the call of chipped and cracked wood.

Is this better than laying at the foot of an Isis Latin Mass?
The crows
can't handle everything thrown at them. It would be a
downright
shoot-'em-up, a real smashing and grabbing of the hard kernel
that used to be lodged in the throat.

Desertification Is Not Just the Earth's Pastime

I

When cowboys ride into the sunset,
something inevitably keeps them awake
until sunrise, if only because the awkward age
was not marked by Nanda and Longdon
but by the judge and Heidegger, just as
awkwardage2.0 will not be etched upon
gates of black pearl but the shuddering
last gasp of the hyperarchive—
and there will be a deep unsettling feeling
that you're wrong.

When cowboys become what reads them
or those upon whom the imperative knowledge lies
of merely knowing how to pronounce
javelina correctly,¹² then something quite else
will occur; and it has nothing to do
with Theodore Roosevelt but with mammoths.
In pre-neo-medievalism, references
were not necessary: one's mark was enough,
or else one's Plantagenet genealogy;
and bison were once important, as they
will become again (if only
to test out one's new Colt).

All this is leading to a great unraveling.¹³
We are not at the end of time when we stand
in canyons; we are rocking upon the great winds
of a sleepless sunrise:—a salvatory monsoon
embedded in salt—coffee and beer
at the same time. Wow. We will become forensic.

¹² And are immediately offended that they have to add this word to
their Microsoft Word dictionary.

¹³ *Apokalyptein*.

II

There are only a few times in life
when you should talk about your boots,¹⁴
but when they occur, preparation is key.
You should be concerned with the pistol at your side.
Because, you know, the real turns into legend,
turns into myth, gets recreated by Hollywood
only to get re-experienced as Plotinian emanation,
and all that leaves you with is a bottle of
"honey to ashes" vintage 1968 and
a copy of the first telegraph message ever so as
to write the ending of this verbal dance of history—

it'll backfire in your face, hombre.
One-Eyed Jack should've stayed dead, right?
Because contracts are masochistic?
Because social science is just another way
of saying "friends"? Because it was better
when I could shoot you for no good reason
(or else that's what all the movies told me);
because it was better when I could utter a
prophecy and the landscape would
"back me up."

Sure, I have no problem with
singing loud, "The King is Dead," but these
"possibilities" convolute me, they express
hieroglyphs at all parallels of infinity.
They become the "we," of the: "we are all
giants straddling this desert waste"; and the "we"
of "constant affinities with the we we have become
in the face of," well,
something else.
We are now all officially impressed by the shootout.

Violence seemed an imperative. Like
oxygen-wine or schnapps. When the bartender
had no witty retort for my gutting him,
misers were born underneath the tables

¹⁴ Preferably and presumably not during a DUI test resulting from
trying to tow your own car while it had a boot on it.

and this was a rare occurrence.¹⁵ The flaming enlightenment never happened, but it wasn't wintry, either; it wasn't the end of the world.

We clandestinely poached fat happy children until we were satiated, until Bronco Billy was made to repent by a torturer working off of no sleep and too few nooses. It took a while. A grotesquely long while.

If you don't walk into gas stations with spurs on your boots, virtually anywhere in this country, there is something wrong with you. Seriously. There is no reason not to be on the nonstop party wagon.¹⁶

¹⁵ See *Unforgiven*, dir. Clint Eastwood (Burbank, CA: Malpaso, 1992).

¹⁶ Just say, "Yes."

Fallout: New Vegas

I am sick of the postapocalypse. Here we are, eating human flesh on the Strip in casinos burned by atomic fire about to devour some successful rancher's son while masked *a la Eyes Wide Shut*.

We're supposed to converse with what seems like an AI¹⁷ but we've gotten curiously sidetracked, this awkward looking young woman and I as we've traversed the terrible wastes doing whatever it was to do that came along.

We've passed through this night waiting for someone to sneak into an old airport control tower.¹⁸ In real time.

Here we are, perched on a hotel in Vegas, a high enough vantage point to see the bombs go off in the desert. Here we are, burying mountains of nuclear phlegm beneath plaques bearing the universal hieroglyphic for death. The postapocalyptic

has infected us. We breathe its miasma and blow it out our eyes in radiant spectacles of retro horror nuclear nostalgia from an alternative twenty-first century

in which some mysterious stranger rolled into town with a [redacted] on his hip and we were her, blowing ghouls away.¹⁹ We're all patiently waiting for the MMO.

¹⁷ Nudge, nudge . . . *Bioshock* (Quincey, MA: Irrational Games, 2007).

¹⁸ The future can only look like the past.

¹⁹ See Marty Robbins, "Big Iron," *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs* (New York: Columbia Records, 1959), LP.

What Building Should Face East and Which West

If the robots are coming to crush us from the sky:
moratoriums on action. Forget the responsible
move, the imperative to say, "it's contrasting!"²⁰

There is a question before the tribunal and it's
your fault: fucking up the kids. We are slowly
learning how to whistle. And we're tired.

But of course there is an architecture. And more,
it's temporal. But there's a specific kind of
couch. It exists. We tend to speak as if

we were on it. As if, to admit—as if—a failure,
condemnations surrounding a certain withdrawal
would certainly commence. But then we'd have to ask:

where's the *volta*? In reversal/withdrawal from space,
we recede . . . and so we do, backing away, now.

²⁰ Botch, "To Our Friends in the Great White North," *We Are the Romans* (Los Angeles: Hydra Head Records, 1999), LP.

2012.01

Tastes different with a steady diet of nicotine lozenges:
the tuba-blast of contemporaneity, the sound of loss,
a Steeler third down. "You know how to dance with
a deadline and *you* rent from National." No Patrick,
we're just trying to keep the East Coast going during
this time of October surprise. We're renting from the Feds
our own future because we are farmers, archivists of
cybernetic
boneyards harvesting dialogue from today's ambient
advertisements—the Kia-Optima-limited of producing
cackles of poetry, of injury and pain that you will one day
re-plagiarize. It was once considered "even more appealing,"
this atmosphere, this horrendous air of loss and amortization.
Why would we care otherwise if we did not feel wholly
incompatible
with the last kinds of tomorrow allowed or celebrated (or
something)?

We're Just Like Yesterday's Headlines

Pantomiming fractal geometries, I'd like to write porous graffiti into your skin along trajectories of nuclear luminosity, to bathe your bones in spectral radiation, resplendently inscribing the boundaries of tradition into what no longer resembles a soul. Not to back out at the last moment, when diamonds of fallout are cutting your esophagus, but to caress with postprandial-Geiger-counter your networked being takes effort. Wrap this linen around tight. It's cold in the launch tubes waiting for snowballs to fly their arcs. Don't despair. Millions of people are waiting for you. Please refrain from disappointing.

Tomorrow I want to hold the debris of my own body cupped in my hand to scatter at a victimless crime scene. Amidst the ash will be a kind of synthetic cancer, a virus for matter. Tread this glassy wasteland carefully, the mirroring of my ruined visage is terrifying in the spiraling and refracted

illumination of my capillary discharge, my atomic neocortex. Yon pilgrims cutting their already bandaged feet on the topographically precise crystalline outcroppings deserve not your sympathy.

I'd wash, but the tears of this fabulist history flow too slowly. Don't be concerned. There is enough emulsion to go around as long as we remember to fuse our eyes to the future.

Which we can't. There are too many pages burning in the solar parallax of the afternoon. Meganarratives falling against the day from our otherworldly, almost Talmudic despair, we imagine cross-currents in the fabric of strangers dying every day. Rippling softly, these mountainous atolls rock their desiccation with aplomb and grace. Almost frothing. I'm cretinous. And lewdly awaiting luddite biker-mommas straddling a fourth-wave matriarchal rearrangement into some dystopian nightmare, something familiar enough to retain its

violence but unhinged by its own emphasis on domesticity: toddlers' car seats aflame in their own projection of *bukimi*.

But we should perhaps not get overanxious. There are
already
plenty of reasons to delay. Gratification leans pleasantly into
the wind from kodaliths, albums of grainy images: *putti*
all done up in various stages of transvestitism awaiting
some gathering of forces. Henry Adams sits at the head
of their table, holding forth on the virtues of the castanet
when employed in the dance of Shiva's disengagement from
the world.

I'd advise my own rapt attention: it turns upon the collateral
we paid for the further disenfranchisement of Gödelian
monks.

Liberation has no frequency except in the august haze of
abiding nostalgia that we inhale like fiends, and you perish.

Thinking Hard about *The Symposium*

To design a slideshow we would carry archives
with us, worry damage strapped to our shoulders while
riding mongrel waves emanating from our holodecks.
The collective would be attempting to execute a
formatstring hack
against the postmodern subject and we would be other.

Like de-electromagnetism, our cover has been blown—
riding waves of Plotinian lightning, we've descended a couple
o' notches: meaning that whole Yeatsian egg thing . . .
we're firmly beyond it. Like if Clarissa *had* ever explained it all,
we'd just try to EMP the bastard back to the pre-singularity.

I refuse to believe that bunker shelters have a purpose.
Nor is a remnant of a remnant much more than all the sets
contained
by the group *National Enquirer*. We won't ask very many
questions,
indeed, there will be whole systems of regulating *my very
own personal wealth*.
So I'll have to be okay with some things, but I cannot abide
anything better than

QWERTY.
Don't tell me that I'm blind, for I see the y'all we've become.
(Meaning, don't be scared if the manner we are choosing to
participate
in this particular economy is with the sheerest force;
we're trying to be partially modern.)

Nomadology I

This does not concern the silent emissaries
floating in their homemade boats of warehouse shelving,
floating toward Yuma and Dubai,²¹ and
the rescue of sensualists everywhere.

They are, indeed, not heralds of anything whatsoever.
So this concerns my wandering. For when it will pass,
for what it will traverse, for the alleys soon locked
by failed transmissions and succeeding parentheses.

This is a forgetting. One small leap in space
with porous limits and ill-defined rules. Where,
if the cantankerous restlessness pouring out my eyes
is to be believed as the impossibility of universal consent,

then the throwing motion underneath bronze shields
is both an opening and closing to one hundred hands clapping.
But it is not. There are a few busted filaments, cracked
tires, broken needles, and blown speakers; maybe

thousands of paradoxes inspired by the conundrum of:
high jumping the state line or roadside Jesus look-alike
contests.

Or maybe this is an affirmation of passive reception and
active errantry, lost when the planets first collided,

a sitting still and motioning weakly toward the window—
fallowness another name for meditation. The balm for
over-traveled feet rests in a god's medicine cabinet
where it is slowly approaching its expiration date.

There were only a few short yarns spun yesterday.
And the failure to evince the proper emotion
accorded them was something prepared for.
I fall into song and cannot return.

²¹ What happens when Las Vegas copulates with . . . well, anything
whatsoever.

Winter, or, Some (Future) Ambiguities

In some future iniquitous and hyperborean breast
there is naught but cradle and cleansings—
piecemeal, unvocalized, penury . . . and
laughing stock tickers speculating
on charges trumped-up and waylaid.
These cloud bending palliatives are
washing monumental virgin hands
in ancient rime, converting the infantile
diaspora of the snow-blanced mundanity
countenanced therein to pale sods
and quicklime. An augury: this notion that
fantods without conceal drifting stasis.
Be sure to pick up the dry cleaning
for the salt-precipitate undoes this motion.
Cloth and singular leather, needed as
crown-laurel-leaves aren't, will consecrate
dread nights as catapulted investments.
Frostbitten they will be when the oil wells
forget paths well laid and go spinning off
with their standing reserves. Many will starve.
We will be fine, feasting on the zombified limbs
of the more fortunate, who, having escaped the emergent
trepidation usually associated with a winter in exurbia,
finally submitted to cognitive mapping—
holding them and withheld from us.
Yes, there will still be an "us and them."
But not spatial, nothing resembling demarcation,
just a sort of howling and mechanical repetition.
Heard will be a new call-to-action:
"Cyborg up you useless supplementals!
Your harried additions prove nothing but
the rule of archival distractedness and
a dominated intellect." In other words,
work. Work the pumps and presses
and gild this climate by redirection;
there is still something on Mauritius
worth exterminating by replication.
It is cold outside this hearth and an amorphous
nanocloud is falling. The bot-snow
is heard crackling in our fires.
For now though, a mere whiteness
interrupted by some windows and
what proves to be a chlorophyll-filled arborescence.

(Re-)Membering Orpheus

N'est-ce pas que c'était beau comme littérature?

—Alfred Jarry

I

I don't think I could get away with
carrying pistols; I've been reading excessively
about Hemingway's valor against the void.
(I'm also sick of terror and pity.²²)

Am I affirmative? Yes, I am affirmative.
I would perhaps prefer (not) to be affirmative.

II

Are contraceptives onanistic, like the imagined
town to which we can never return: occidental (t)urns,
little crematoria?²³ Like drum fills, we aren't necessary,
but ornaments, which are drums filled with genitals.

Am I asexual? Yes, I am asexual.
I would perhaps prefer not to be asexual.

III

Videlicet: "no mistake stands in life"; "too many
sensations now"; "Sade's words are intelligible only
as a masturbatory fantasy, taking the form of conversations
between tyrant and victim"; "it[']s 'history' . . . without
footnotes."

Am I archival? Yes, I am archival.
I would prefer (not) to be archival.

²² And of catharsis.

²³ As in: we are all pillars of salt.

IV

The emergent, self-organizing apocalypse will only come about with an increase in the machinic phylum, a massive cutting in which gravity eases its tyranny: distanceless icebergs giving their bulk to the sky.

Am I an atheist? Yes, I am an atheist.
I would perhaps prefer to be an atheist.

V

Penicillin crouching on some mold generates a few comparisons, like between CDC protocol and staggering violins,
Job's Satan and America, Kent State and Mardi Gras²⁴—turning yellow in a *Sliders* episode belies false compare.

Am I alive? Yes, I am alive.
I would prefer to be alive.

VI

Liberty is valencing over the horizon, masculinity has lost (the West), we're painting the town green and renaming it "work," gunfights are painted therapy, and the disaster has ceased to be written: it merely is.

Am I? Yes, I am.
I would prefer not to be.

I, II, III, IV, V, VI (or, VII; or, Toward the Possibility of a Singing²⁵)²⁶

Gorgon, slighted and closeted around incomparable niceties, your momentous sway clears sibilant acrostics

²⁴ G20 in Pittsburgh (2009).

²⁵ Or, "Why Autechre is Melodic."

²⁶ Dionysus is in effect.

from the way of those who might be “serious,” from
sang-froid-ing right down to the marrow of stupid children—
 their slow-eyed, miscreant (parallel) realizations. . . .
 Lame Medusa, sight is not something that you should

just throw around, grant to any poor slob who makes it
 into your brothel. Rights! Achieve neither looking back,
 forward, nor sideways: Miltonic blindness! For sight begets
 sound, begets radical possibility: an inability to hear.

I do not walk into the schoolroom questioning but rather
 dancing to IDM-inspired powerviolence.²⁷ The nun doesn't
 answer cause she's my moms. Paradoxes are boring because
 they're only logical. So reading becomes an act of contrition,

of silently (emasculating/)endorsing whatever it is you choose.
 (Here we have a clear case of yogic b[l]ending.)

Impossibility
 spatializing spontaneous throws of feces in the other's
 direction:
 we've become forensic. Oh, the crime scene and mutilation

as a Barbie Dream House—i.e., mistletoe and canapés, lots
 of `em.²⁸

I'm dismembered. My head is floating down some poor
 oceanic flood
 and who will be on the bank to retrieve it? If I don't look
 back next time
 maybe Zeus will let me keep the jet ski. Or at least

not yet let slip the dogs of perfunctory loss; I'm sick of
 Morpheus.

And in that, maybe now I'm getting around to God.
 (It's like getting around to that two week old loaf of bread
 that you're pretty sure ain't stale yet, so will take the
 chance.)

²⁷ AKA “the heart-skip-beat mambo.”

²⁸ Holy halcyon days Batman! We're grindin' in the club with Mr.
Freeze?

Systems of social intractability! I descry you(-ish).
And yet, here we all are, participating in constructing forms,
making, *poiesis*. (I haven't gotten *that* much fatter
in my old age.) So.

Here we are.
I guess.
(Where?)
Here.

The mitre I'm wearing is kinda greasy (and not
very holy). There are other formulations of fear, of which
many are *wholly* emergent, but very few of them

correspond to Teutonic horror. (Yeah, I said it.)
(Modernity, with hindsight, has this tendency to look
like a mistake.²⁹) And that begs the question: why bother to
reassemble Orpheus? Like caterwauling beyond one's
capacity,

the effort can only produce calculations of infinity,
algorithms
of *Dragonlance*-type abysses, absolute transgressions that
don't account for *any* eyes, whether they be lodged in
pudenda or not.

This is *all* to say: the only thing that receives fidelity
is the movement toward the phallus of him³⁰; and it's
canned already.

Its reconstitution—slam dancing-type things—proves
movement, as
Aristotle said, is time. Everything is (t)*here*. And this is *it*.
So why pretend it ain't? There are only so many missiles.

And this is not to preclude your own opinion, but today simply
ain't the greatest. It's more like a foster-mother who has never
been clued-in to certain facts about Bob Mould. What does
it mean
to have an "Orphic" father? Assuming it ain't Freudian,

²⁹ Like Mike Patton wearing spandex and problematizing any sense
of modal register; or, rather, Jacob Bannon attempting "Concubine"
in a Bon Jovi-esque falsetto.

³⁰ Orpheus.

perhaps it means titanic freedom, or else, claustrophobic
reimagining
of the womb (or some such). We all crawl to our destinies,
even if they be wrapped in gossamer (byways and highways).
It's just that sallying forth does not always preclude

a kind of dreaming, rather, what passes for indifference
tends to move outside previous intractable definitions
of being. And such. Mortality rused itself up again before
the monstrosity of justifying complicity in *Dasein*.

And this is where it gets slow. Toward an end
and such. With the seasons, the dawn changes:
it fascinates philistines, commutes sentences,
parses intransigent selfhood, all toward. . . .

If our limbs be divided and we are without "hope,"
then there is no excuse for a lack of sumptuousness.
So we may be without a "past," but it ain't our fault,
nor is it anyone else's; memory is dumb anyway.

Catatracting immoral stupidity, I can faithfully admit that sky
gazing
only imparts monuments, which imply constancy. *Samizdats*
everywhere
destroy massive falling. Serpents and nonsense,
castigations and baseball caps,
sadly, mistake themselves for a kind of religiosity; *we will be*
Orphic,

if for no other reason than we couldn't not be. The past, the
past.
(*Angst* is a fundamental structure of the bomb. Death is
fear, but *Angst*
functions differently when what is worrisome is not the end
of one's existence but the destruction of the *world*.)

Things should never end on the beach.
There isn't enough noticeable condensation.
And yet I can't pretend to live in a post-[whatever]
dispensation;
I just don't dissemble that well. This (always) is enough.
Always.

John Winthrop

It is only today that we can really discern his contours in the guise of the hedonistic asceticism of yuppies.

—Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*

I have a project proposal for you:
follow the data cloud, listen to the nanomachines,
Cytherea is singing for you on the other side.
Or just kick ass. The clamoring is slow,
“it’s just so gosh darn slow”; the ravenous
Ungeziefer crawling timidly up your pubis
is whispering to you: “0 kelvin seems like
the ground-zero-fission of temperature itself.”
More than anything though, you know
you have to be blamed for a single spark
that has started a retro fire
on the coastline of some damned
island where everyone is forced to,
can you believe it (in beige jumpsuits
nonetheless), pray?³¹ Fix that. Please.

³¹ See The Haunti-cly/ngly Challenged Chiliastic Half-Dimensional Men, “Waterboarding Jesus,” on *Happiness is Submission to Godzilla* (Tucson, AZ: TSFHSB Records, 2004), EP. This song is just another way of saying: we are all to blame.

I Am a Mechanic

I

Welcome to the town crier's crescendo.
Yes, you didn't think it could be true,
but I am a destructive mechanic working
on destructive machines. And for this particular
procedure, I will need tux and tails,
a few common proverbs, and a third thing
(what this third thing may involve is still
under cautious review by BIT and TIT,³²
but there is sure to be a decision soon regarding,
potentially, O. J. Simpson's Heisman Trophy Statue
and a few copies of [redacted]):
all to be sold to the highest bidder depending
on the time of day when I will be blowing up
that building. I mean it. I do.

II

The problem with working
on a few pieces of common knowledge
is that they are always already destroyed. For
how many tokens does it take to start
something at the video arcade? Or portions
of *Kapital* working (sorta) underneath
the hood of an old Chevy (wow, ease up pilgrim);
as if, in some remote corner of the universe, there
rested, perched upon the egg of its child,³³ a great
mirror, a great crenulated text refusing any entry,
interaction, or (ab)users slowly absorbing
someone else's cyborgicity. On this point,
I refuse to count. On others, I refuse as well.

³² The somewhat unfortunate acronym for Business International Technicians and Taxonomadic Interlopers and Trustees. This did not include any traveling taxidermists; they happened to be in short supply.

³³ World like this thing was.

III

Frequently there arise moments when one must go up, or else out, or else with the crooning. "A dead flower in its ear . . . that island of black misery": I have no interest in Whitman's mechanics. Because one is forced to ask, "What are we repairing?" Surely not the new coffee machine fixing us with its gleamy stare. We are all slowly slouching into being acousmatic machines. A "print culture" consisting primarily of Hatebreed-cum-Ginsberg sonatas on the shuffle of an ergonomic *essai*. Does this mean one has to sing for their supper? Surely, but it also means plenty of confessions, like: I kinda sorta like MS Word. And I do not feel this is a revolution in kind. More something like noise feeding on its own children, but with quite a bit of relish.

IV

I am a mechanic. My mainline is below my skin. As in: "We vote for silence and continuation"; as in I've been kinda emo recently. I've been retrofitted for exhaustion; thankfully, three days before the reformatting; and four days (in the) prior(y) to the (Archbishop's) new pantheistic, taxonomadic catalogue (of myth-making jaundice).

I adore my captives. They sing in rhymed couplets when they think they're alone. What sweet inmates; it almost makes one want to be able to speak with one's captors, but they are always out to lunch or some other lame-ass excuse. Excuse me for a moment, but I like to see who I'm working for and why exactly these boarding ladders of code find themselves lodged around my ankles and the floor. Escape plans only occur when one stops equalizing their worth. When fashionistas start washing their clothes. We are not (I swear) all destined for the sale rack like some "last song before bed." Goddamn Mogwai.

V

Tomaž Šaluman told me
I drove a tank. Had to get
him to the airport one way
or another. I heard today that
it was once placed upon a building
scheduled for demolition
and it survived said explosion:
the engine started. Yes,
I do drive a tank. I am a mechanic.
Why would I drive anything else?

Throw Out Your Life

That doesn't sound like a bad idea:
 throw out your life or mine
one neuron at a time. I crab through
the summer months, my senses deeply extended
into floating ansibles of information, their
brittle shards cold to the touch. My keyboard
has tiny pins on each letter, drawing a bit
of blood with every word. My body electric
withdraws from the world, craves the luminous
blast of the videodrome. I sing holographic razors.

Nor does this: take piecemeal the collapsing,
 necrotic drive of civilization. Next time
we'll be sure to invite our friends to take into account
these dying gasps of the still intrigued. I'm strung
out across n -dimensions, languishing in the data-tide;
the beach is soft, scattered with barnacles from the
program era. I will stake my flag on this, to salvage,
to repair. Form up the nanoclouds, gather the cities
of caterpillars, we're marching on the halls of the slain
armed with nothing more than cosmic thumb drives.

For it's not that we've forgotten the past,
but it's a difficult thing, persevering. Coupled with
misanthropy, our forgetting is born screaming into
the archive. Gather up the minutiae of this corpuscular
fever-scape, this bastion of trembling grace notes.
We will rediscover our enthusiasm at the doctor's office.

A narrative is nothing more than a degraded attempt
at Promethean fire, at least that's what we tell ourselves
here underground, where it's warm. The aura, *nihil unbound*,
captures the crying and the vertigo, the letters and the bombs,
balefire and the sound of reapers. Reach into your back pocket:
that goey interface. Please retrieve tomorrow's schedule

of rendezvouses. Also, please clarify the current agenda.
I'd like to confidently meet the coming recursive loops
with aplomb and dignity, not ruined by some
all-consuming anxiety, some dread of independence (day).

The others in the crowd tonight: think watershed,
think nostalgia. Everybody knows you only live a year.

2012.02

Tomorrow, at about this time, someone might think to turn and look at the sky, and, strangely enough, they might see something. Imagine that. As if seraphim dropped draped in pure requisite vestments; as if some comely power made some abide as others do not; as if drops of rain are never enough to wash some things away; as if an ultimatum is just another statement; as if cancerous and rotting, we laid our frail bodies upon heaps of cooling drains in the morning: we'd grasp untold futures in the mere cusp of our hands.

Convalescence

Yourgrau on the repairing hyacinths makes the terminological factor one less than what we prepared for.³⁴ Waiting, we were not less divine. Cloud eruditorum and convalescence marks the sibilliance cross-stitched-wise, like mariner blooms in the canal, the foster-children of “some” future. Every child chokes on what they’re supposed to, unlike Chronos, who chokes on his children.

We were not less divine than the eagle or the raven, the claws or the booty call. We will cavil about God or something. Caviling about objects, we lost the night-blossoms on the way to uncompromised destiny and la(ughing)nguishing. We will all start families to engender narratives in which we only appear tangentially. Sleep and tears is old news.

We will all start families for the raven and eagle, the babes we have yet to indoctrinate, the small (oh ever so small) moments of crepuscular “goodness” of which the orgasm will happen *downstairs*, comments upon its own—perhaps inappropriate—*telos*. This is why Cro-Magnon “man” quieted up upon the northshore of his own insecurities and formidable uptakes. In other words, only crepuscular dreaming allows for a terminus. Nigh inappropriate dreaming. Mistletoe hammer-down. We “need” to heal. There is something eating at our skin. Goddamn if it doesn’t burn. We still smell like sleep and tears. Always and again.

³⁴ See Palle Yourgrau, *A World without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

That Was a Bad Idea

To make a study of the nuclear bomb,
Braid's temporal displacement, it is 2011.
The skyline *is* beautiful on fire. What are we

talking about? Where did the flowers go?
And metaphysics. I'm surrounded by codes.
Powerful colors. Sunlight. (Squirrel Hill's

flag is a rainbow.) But it is *Pessoa* that catches
my eye? Taste the body electric, my ass. Writing
as if a *cyber-Faust* was chasing your gods away

one by one. Cramming the midnight archive
full of love and death. And other stuff.
What happened to the posthuman epic? Garbled

in the drainpipe, its narrative has, what, stalled?
I want to grab hold of the planetary suicide mission
with the strength of millions of glittering silver nanotubes,

wrench free its arsenal of megadeath, and throw it toward
the sun like an avenging angel. But if not that, continue
to while away these precious moments anticipating

soundgardens of adamantium thorns. Again with the
flowers.

Is there a task, a dim call in background radiation?
Does the content we generate consume us?

I could poise myself haphazardly on a ledge,
perhaps, if it could prevent a greater fall. I have
no desire to become an us in this particular case.

It was a bad idea to choose the study of death.
But sadly, not for any reason I can cite. There
is just a visible vibration in the way the light

affects our world, how it is changing. We are
all bathed in waves and radiation, gloriously awakening
to a nightmare hellscape of virtual fire

beamed nightly at our extremities, our arms
and legs receiving third degree burns. Made
out of marshmallows: dramas are performed

by Legos in tiny replicas of the Globe,
inside Rama, scanning the archives with their
plastic hands. These were ambitious productions

but widely panned as derivative and needlessly convoluted.



What We Are Looking At

Authentic art knows the expression of the expressionless, a kind of weeping without tears.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

It is somnolent attention that thinks us like adolescent pariahs pirouetting in the hallways of Valhalla, discussing some great

tenor. It is an abiding attention, forcing us to take quite seriously, and with revelry, shifting tectonics and their vibrations.

We cannot look away. We do not inhale an atmosphere of opiate precipitate. It may be piano-soft but it keeps us from Caligari's cabinet. We are all ears.

"Can we call it a return? A need for a return? Or is it simply a reiteration, a different emphasis, an easing our way out of the future? There are certain obvious places to start, but none sufficient for the task. Ready nonetheless, we stand awaiting the opposite of a sign. A harpsichord draped across the sky, fire raining from its strings."

Or rather, ears may be all we are. For there is a forgetting in vibrant material, in the vitality of sound. I am clothed in minor chords, angular guitars, and discordance writing the pale sheen of textual capture onto bodies. *Carpe diem*. It is time to become a music critic. Launch a career in soldiering, setting the backlines ablaze with inky torpor. Can we see through the reference and thus abandon hope?

"Perhaps someone has a new story to tell. Anyone? Don't you wish there was just a little more digital delay, a now not receding into Prospero's book, but cracking the hard shell of a nut? I am anxious. Really terribly, terribly anxious. Not about *you*, of course. Probably more about death. Or else a wall of sound. A shockwave in the night."

Syncope my affect, put it in time with the disaster, the crisis, the rapture. "Rock me Ama[*deus*]." To put it another way, let the bridge only occur in 7/8 time, 25 bpm, without regard

for symphony or euphony. There are two conversations
occurring
here. Yes. I'm telling you. That is part of the sound as well.
It is all part of a programme that remains to be determined;
I've been assured that some dancing will be involved.

"The repetition will be not be televised in some places
but will be televised in others.³⁵ I wish there were another
way to say that. There isn't. I wish to call it the radical
abuse of narrative. To ease the hold of our tale's manacles.
'Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for
you?'
Or else on the higher frequencies, I hear for you? It cannot
be determined."

Dialogic aping and forwarding your addressee to post office
boxes provide good opportunities for flirting; so does
upending
a full bookshelf on your head (to "read between the lines":
"my small library apocalypse"). It is all about distant ships.
And some grunts; maybe a "huh." We cannot air drum to
letters.
It is the day, and the hardest part is over. Galactic
absorption
may very well be emergent. We'll have to write some
software.

It is there before you as you saunter in the opposite
direction,
sashaying toward a quarry where they extract electricity
to run colossal underground structures obscuring
our pain from planes flying off course overhead.

³⁵ See listings for your local stations.

NeoConfessionalism

As the machine trundles through the refectory,
as machines are wont to do, the s-oral rays
reflect its inner acuity; people were not starving
in the corner; while feeding on acumen it stayed
distanceless in Beauborg's maw but lapped the catnap
against swelling hollows, fore-thighed and next to,
by-and-by, lonely transistors all evening. Leap up and
around.

Satellite glutamate dissects this appetite. We are
louder, forced, and acquired through constant use,
like maxims and foreskin bitten through, or
hinged and boiled line segments weeping dust
particulates. Or a chair in the center of an empty dark
room—
felicity is bought with unopened hands covered in paste.

Orange, Gray, Striated-White, Capped by Tan

The smallest interval is always diabolical: the master of metamorphoses is opposed to the invariant hieratic king.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Infinitesimally small abrasions and pores—but no, not infinite, not a horizonless field of mutated cuticles—offer openings into the firecherry burning tobacco on the end of my smoking stick.

Rubbed raw they are. New and semi-lexical: as in pre-established, as in foregrounded by previous experience. The straight line is attempting to break off into a pure curve: log 4/log 3. Triangulations would complicate any orifice.

Packed it good, I did. The leaves worked their way down into the paper toward the viscous membrane through which Nicotina could work its androgynous way into yet more liminal edges.

(This is not to say that a cigarette is a phallus, unless, of course, it is).

Put it out the milieu would say and have some believe that is the truth.

Put it out, the same way one extinguishes any old flame, any old lover.

(As if one could get from smoking to sex in Baconian linkage!)

Put it in/through/beside/et cetera, instead: the patch, the patch

that could be used to overflow, rather than the timed release so diligently researched;

the patch that could be used to cover over and repair, if it weren't for the porousness of certain epidermal membranes.

What kind of new set theory is this?

If only inhaling smoke were uttering answers, or else the wrong questions to everyone else's: Four. Is there an equation for pi? Or something close? Really, though, I enjoy the manner in which my larynx,

vocal cords, and lungs have formed nodes, centers of
change,
territories of decoded absorption, catalysts of death.
It changes speech into language and back again,
but all delivered in the most gravelly tone I can muster.



An Open Letter to *Narcissus: The Magazine by Narcissists, for Narcissists*

I

On the first page she's already not human, drinking white liquor wine. And here's to the complication, the methane gas. We're opening up the hyperarchive of our genes, our code.³⁶ We're doing the research, recording the last conversation, awaiting decolonization. We're becoming unstuck in the technological sublime, haunted by its neoconservatives and its laws about how many techno-organic chickens you can have in the backyard.³⁷ We're yet again fantastic. We're

rice grains. Here's to a year in reverse, a year of cold dreaming without language. That year: she's the scene of an accident, an Archimedean point suspended from the middle of your iris hanging by a silken thread from the ceiling fan of history. You're the view of a canyon, 2013. So dear 2013, I hope I have your address correct:

Bardo Lièr Parté, Poetry Editor
Dept. of Self-Indulgence
Narcissus
666 Scene Points Way
Seattle, WA, c/o Tucson, AZ

Dear Editors of *Narcissus*,

I want to confess like Robert Lowell, like Plath with her head in an oven. Like Baraka. Hell, like Augustine. And like the latter, it has something to do with time. It's not composition. It's not English. It's the fabric of spacetime I'm peering into. A pond? Seeing my reflection?

³⁶ See Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁷ Its neoliberal logical-death-rattle of the future.

Editors of *Narcissus*, we are all Schrödinger looking into quantum jumps,³⁸ getting to be so wonderfully wrapped around our networks (God bless our networks),
indistinguishable
from rhizomes, we've become micro-ontological memes. We're goddamn memeologists studying our quantum lives
fifteen nanoseconds of fame at a time.
And we're all getting a remarkably good look at ourselves.
We like what we see. Our genetic tendrils have reproduced themselves along cables of light, filling what was once void. We have created a planetary intelligence that exceeds the human. It is already here. It is stupid to continue to pretend otherwise. And we like what we see.
So thank you. For tirelessly putting yourselves to work week-in-and-out, never once asking for anything but everything in return, for talking when you're nervous and for always being nervous and for letting your systemic heart palpitations collide, we salute you:
"Je est un autre."
We can now stare into our face. We like what we see. We're fabulous.

Sincerely,

The Empire of Bradley J. Fest, PhD
Narcissist *extraordinaire*

The Editors of *Narcissus's* Reply

Dear Dr. Fest,

On the last page she's attempting to teach them:
Learn and run! So forget your adolescent dream of the optical society as one great self-absorbed *über*-intelligent multiplicitous mega-*socius* consuming itself consuming itself.

³⁸ Today more commonly referred to as "leaps."

For don't you already realize you're writing to yourself?
The "you" you and I would all be if Whitman and Williams
were, in their ecstasy, right, being you and I together in our
diverse otherness
and solipsism, reacting with our infinite phalluses and
depthless wombs,
copulating on a field of possibility to produce the collective we
that "I" always already is . . .
they're wrong. Light the fuse and run. Run.
Run, run, run.
Because They're after us. And by "us," we,
the editors here at *Narcissus*, mean *you*.
We're coming after you. We are.

Best,

Dorian Gray et al.
1 First Avenue
Rift Valley, VA

P.S. You also must have us confused with someone else.
There is no one here that answers to the name *Parté*.

P.P.S. We always expect you to know exactly what we're
talking about, to have read what we've read, to have seen
what we've seen. As an editorial policy, however, we refuse
to apologize for our narcissism.

II

There's still a little bit of reality to represent,
I suppose. Take today for instance. Above
you may find such a representation.
But down here, things are different. See,
time has passed. The books are starting to
pile up. We keep forgetting. We keep dismissing
the relatively unobvious fact that
we aren't the center of the world. For it isn't true.

Step into yourself.³⁹ You'll like what you find there.
It's warm and slippery and smells of ozone and server exhaust.

³⁹ I wish I had a pack of Tarot cards at this point. They'd probably
be helpful.

But I imagine that won't be possible: this transhuman fantasy of escape from our own bodily reality. So what kind of realism does that give us instead? Surely not realism as it has come to be defined.⁴⁰ In other words, whatever you're feeling as reality
right now. That kind of realism.

Where does that leave us then? I guess right here. On this weird page. So, hello. Do you like what you see here? I'm wearing [indecipherable]. Can you close read my undergarments? I surely hope so. They're mutating for you. But to get down to brass tacks, I'm probably more interested in the problematics that always already pre-exist my utterance. (Yes, that kind of realism.)
For to. . . .

⁴⁰ Bourgeois or otherwise.

Some Possibilities for a Liberated Computer Language I

We consider there to be little difference between living informatics networks and the universal informatics languages and standards used to define and sculpt them. If the languages are finite, then so, unfortunately, are the life possibilities. Thus a new type of language is needed, a liberated computer language. . . .

—Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit*

backdoor *CREATURE*. an exceptional
man :: woman, but with sufficient amounts
of doubt. "she" may be whatever but unknown.
boredom will processKill potential. never.
netbust "*LOVEPOEM*." historic letters.
never ^ yet always flaw, destroy *FLIP*.

Pilgrimage I

I sing of nothing. I'd prefer not to sing at all.
I'd prefer to have nothing to say.
"Say . . .," I'd prefer not to utter
under my breath, "is that a swan
under your arm? Is that an atlas
holding up this earth
under your arm?"
I sing of songs of songs
of knowing in the abyss:
the mist veiling my *māyā-éd* eyes
of things I haven't seen. We are
all not quite poison.

It was two months on the trail,
but April had been killed to strengthen others.
Night had found it impossible to descend
on the lonely prairie; the saguaros' needles
clamp their ashen mouths and gritty dialect
around their own reflection, whispering:
"When . . . when this
is over,
it'll be alright."⁴¹

There were all these stories being told around⁴²
and I'd prefer not to tell my own. I'd prefer
to tell no tales. We are not locked on a submarine
in an ocean with no surface. We are not.
I would prefer that we weren't.

Why were the silent books afraid in the corner?
The magic wishing well was saying,
on the other side of dark waters, "pennies gleaming below.
I want no one with me now. For desire,
it only grows a little further down."

⁴¹ And yet, Travolta, we still are fighting "this war" "forty" years later.

⁴² But it had long passed since there were any subjects except for the plague.

The Shape of Things II

I am unpacking my library.

—Walter Benjamin

To love a work of art is to be consumed with rage against that work's creator.

—Steven Shaviro, *Connected*

Today a biographer need only access a subject's
hyperarchive.⁴³

This is the shape of things in the twenty-first century.⁴⁴
And so this is when I start to assemble *The Shape of Things*.
(For the future: this intrusion upon the shape of things

aims for readerly obliteration.⁴⁵ But enough about my
biographer

and I.) We are here to establish the shape of
contemporaneity

and of punk to come (and they can [perhaps, perhaps]
only be accomplished together: obsolescence is built right in

Epigraphs drawn from Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk on Book Collecting" (1931), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 59; and Steven Shaviro, *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 60.

⁴³ See Bradley J. Fest, "Chronological List of Media I Have Encountered 2.0" (1993–2015) and "Alphabetized List of Print Media I Have Encountered" (2008–15), D:\2012-2015. This is to say: the shape of things in the twenty-first century is different than what it was in the eighteenth: "If the fixure of *Momus's* glass, in the human breast, according to the proposed emendation of that arch-critick, had taken place . . . had the said glass been there set up, nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly . . . and look'd in,—view'd the soul stark naked;—observ'd all her motions,—her machinations—traced all her maggots from their first engendering to their crawling forth. . . . But this is an advantage not to be had by the biographer in this planet" (Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* [1759–67], critical ed., ed. Howard Anderson [New York: W. W. Norton, 1980], 52–53).

⁴⁴ So let us ditch all the laments about temporality.

⁴⁵ There is no "reader" here, just you.

to the shape of things).⁴⁶ Precisely. If you lack confidence in our capacities I ask that you kindly use the back hatch to jump; it is the only way off. Do not worry. Our readily accessible parachutes are filled with like one hundred thousand

Wile E. Coyotes. It is fairly wicked. After you have raised a tiny mushroom cloud at the bottom of a canyon we will interview your ghost, interrogate you about all the people you wronged, and then show you how they all die. So that will be a blast.⁴⁷

But for those of you still around, here I am, yet again, as an author function.⁴⁸ Welcome back to another round of embattled poetics. I am tempted to include some manner of apology, but let's say I've "matured" (listened to the Red

Scare's cover of "Send Me an Angel" a little less and now politely decline such Wordsworthian preciousness⁴⁹). But let us also be quite clear. The death growls have only gotten deeper and pouring ourselves into the trenchant abyss of late capitalism more pronounced.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See The Nation of Ulysses, *Plays Pretty for Baby* (Washington, DC: Dischord Records, 1992), LP; and Refused, *The Shape of Punk to Come* (Örebro, Sweden: Burning Heart Records, 1998), LP.

⁴⁷ (So goodbye.)

⁴⁸ Ye Olde ACME Company has nothing on me for causing general textual misery. (Or at least that's what we pretend when the dreams of my better angels have nightmares.)

⁴⁹ See The Red Scare, "Send Me an Angel" (Valencia, CA: Sound Virus, 2000), split 7" single.

⁵⁰ So let us teach the next generation how to confront not being at home like we ourselves have learned to live with it.

It is hard to go on. Every day humanity just stares
its mortality in the face and chooses wrong.⁵¹
We desperately, collectively need to figure out
the shape of things or we are fucking doomed.⁵²

I am unsure about you, but I suspect that we may be eager
to see the shape of things,⁵³ to let contemporaneity's
catastrophe
resonate like Converge's "All We Love We Leave Behind."⁵⁴
And then do something. Or else . . . I suppose we will all

just scan John Donne by postapocalyptic candlelight
and read *way* too much into [redacted]? It's why *here*
the verge has been reached. This absurd Lacanian orgy
that we all have fantasy players in, gaining stats

from how many yards they get during the Mirror Stage,
from the *objet petit a*, the *fort da*, the Real. . . .⁵⁵ Instead,
all we have is our perfect prose, our little crystalline disasters
pinging in our new Solo2s.⁵⁶ (The day is relatively mediocre.

And then there is just all that gratitude.⁵⁷) In other words,
because all my poems are really just syllabi, I will incite at
least

⁵¹ Today a grand jury failed to indict Officer Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

⁵² Otherwise, I may have to continue attending conferences where the Anthropocene, the postnatural, and deep time are discussed.

⁵³ See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970); or, on the "postmodern sublime," see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ See Converge, "All We Love We Leave Behind," *All We Love We Leave Behind* (Hollywood, CA: Epitaph Records, 2012), LP.

⁵⁵ We didn't even make the playoffs.

⁵⁶ That horrible solipsism.

⁵⁷ See iForward, Russia!, "We Are Grey Matter," *Life Processes* [London: Cooking Vinyl, 2008], LP.

one riot a year, lord.⁵⁸ Because I am “suspended in a raster of concomitant forms”⁵⁹ and hope to get in wicked critical theory

knife fights, I will experience a music takeover of reality. There is *no way* we can convince everyone that loneliness is happiness. It kills my world. And Dr. Girlfriend will have it no different. (So either you are *on board* or get off.⁶⁰)

We are at the bottom of the trench of Pittsburgh “academic” pop music, “friends”⁶¹ (because I will slay you with the most ironic heart-attack-inducing metalanguage!). It is surely unfortunate that I would rather hear Orchid than you.⁶²

*We need to redefine the twenty-first century.
You fucking capitalists. I give up.*
The shape of things in the twenty-first century
is relatively precise; there just isn’t that much room

⁵⁸ It is the digital humanities’ fault. But more likely Baudrillard’s. (See Russian Circles, “Carpe,” *Enter* [Chicago: Flameshovel, 2006], LP.)

⁵⁹ See There Were Wires, “Black Magic Rabbit,” *Somnambulists* (Boston: Iodine Records, 2008), LP.

⁶⁰ And I would rather we not all just stumble upon one another. That would be the usual wading. Through snow. And the circumstantial evidence would be *considerable*. Like Britney Spears’s prophecy, we can track composition through rock music obsessing about the end of the world, and what a shame. We have to go around leave-taking quite constantly. But not necessarily knowing “what is playing.” This is the biggest mistake. See Yaphet Kotto, “Circumstantial Evidence,” *Syncopated Synthetic Laments for Love* (Goleta, CA: Ebullition Records, 2001), LP; Britney Spears, “Till the World Ends” (New York: Jive Records, 2011), CD single; and “Burn for You” and “Loneliness,” *Ultra Dance*, vol. 3 (I am fastidious and encyclopedic, but the latter recording artists are “out of reach”).

⁶¹ Getting extra credit and shit. “Because I can guarantee you I can do it better than you” (Qtd. in Dr. Girlfriend: “Show me what you here for guy.” What do you want? “Shut up if you cannot take a joke.” Who sold out now?).

⁶² See Orchid, “I Am Nietzsche,” *Dance Tonight, Revolution Tomorrow* (Goleta, CA: Ebullition Records, 2000), EP. Also see Katy Perry, “Roar,” *Prism* (Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 2013), LP.

anymore for all our poorly defined digital avatars wrenching through the ruins of analog consumerism, "the celestial ennui of apartments,"⁶³ and whatever similar misery is currently being perpetuated. (What have we done?)

Spinning in a widening void, the digital center is everywhere in these Russian Circles of riotous wetware scored off the latest helicARRIER responsible for enacting the embargo on Cuba.⁶⁴ We have to talk about geologies of finitude

to get a job, about the relationship between terrorism and deep time. What a travesty.⁶⁵ For years the shape of things coyly hesitated on the lip of my cello or guitar string (not that far off). I am now plugged in directly,

the shape of things no longer just past the curvature of earth,
departing (not to suggest, however, that such access grants clarity
or understanding . . . hardly), but a hyperarchive *right here*,
overwhelming our collective vision: a Funeral Diner for the present.⁶⁶

These obsolete retinal displays we are encumbered with mean nothing, but neither does our "manifest" existence⁶⁷ (probably not here . . . at all⁶⁸). There is certainly just all this poetry. And general fanciness.⁶⁹ No regard, however,

⁶³ Wallace Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1947), in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 330.

⁶⁴ And the center is . . . nowhere?

⁶⁵ Four hundred years and a bottle of aspirin. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ See Funeral Diner, "Collapsing," *The Underark* (Oswego, NY: Alone Records, 2005), LP.

⁶⁷ Shall we eliminate all your non-material properties?

⁶⁸ I mean, have I not worked and worked? See Iggy Azalea, "Work," *The New Classic* [New York: Island Records, 2014], LP. Also see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁶⁹ Minibars and such.

if you cannot name the omega point.⁷⁰ One would only want to correlate this to something, well, if they were just a stupid son of a bitch.⁷¹ And then there is *all* that nihilism,⁷² that finitude. Do not fret. Our solipsism

can overcome *all* questions of philosophy. So. Let's all work together because we want a body in the coming singularity.⁷³ Otherwise, we are just faced with more *nihil negativum* and other Schopenhauerian

horrors.⁷⁴ Damn. Applause. Major keys and easy rhythms. AI. Oops, rapture of the nerds. Other such crimes. Only so many URL pursuits; is this us working on our shit?⁷⁵ For a change? Finally? Probably not. (Guys like me should

stop pretending we are persecuted,⁷⁶ or else we'll just keep pissing everyone off for incredibly good reason.⁷⁷) Okay? (Lyrics lyrics, bro bro, yo yo yo.) And coming out the other side, feeling all extravagant and fancy, I embrace saying the wrong thing

and transducing it into . . . hopefully not itself. That seems to often be what happens. This time, something else. This time, all our elders will feel it: the burn of our misspent youth; our misinformed opinions formed before we could think,

⁷⁰ See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (1959), trans. Norman Denny (New York: HarperCollins, 1964); and Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (New York: Scribner, 2010).

⁷¹ See most of Lady Gaga's video *oeuvre* (2008–present).

⁷² See, for instance, Eugene Thacker, *Horror of Philosophy: In the Dust of This Planet*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Zero, 2011).

⁷³ Otherwise, we do not want to explore the opposite. . . .

⁷⁴ "Tomaž Šalamun is a monster. / Tomaž Šalamun is a sphere rushing through the air" ("History," trans. Bob Perelman and Tomaž Šalamun, in *The Four Questions of Melancholy: New and Selected Poems*, ed. Christopher Merrill [1988; repr., Buffalo, NY: White Pine, 2002], 77).

⁷⁵ See Azalea.

⁷⁶ See Converge.

⁷⁷ Like we have been doing for thousands of years.

like Republicans, slathering our poor despondent bodies
on the oceanic shore of our hyperarchival present, waiting.
These voices will be the only ones available because our time
is up. What we languished on this planet killing each other for

will finally be revealed in "the history that runs past the
windows,
mountains forming, seas receding . . . time and wind,"⁷⁸
the monsoons and decrepitude awaiting our senility.
(Perhaps.) But like the shirtless men and women

overwhelmed by "The Subharmonic Murmur
of Black Tentacular Voids"⁷⁹ in a Calvin Klein
advertisement, I am here to reassure everyone
that their sense of entrapment is binding, their feelings

regarding the implacability and intransigence of
contemporaneity,
relatively normal. This is not, however, "okay." We have no
ironic
reading of the present. We must. I'm sick of capitalism
always doing
what it says, every day, like a judge or C++. Capitalism has
no sense

of irony. Nor does the planet. The shape of things in the
twenty-first century
must be an ironic writing of the constant disaster at the
heart of everything.⁸⁰
(We can no longer blind ourselves to species finitude in the
light
of contemporary risk projection.⁸¹) But we must also avoid
writing

⁷⁸ DeLillo, 96.

⁷⁹ See Thacker, esp. 133–59.

⁸⁰ See Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 2nd ed., trans.
Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁸¹ Nor thousands of thermonuclear warheads. On the world risk
society, see Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (2007), trans. Ciaran Cronin
(Malden, MA: Polity, 2009).

the book to come (perhaps a more pressing danger⁸²).
 The NSA⁸³ has been quite busy of late.⁸⁴ Gathering all data
 (on the path of its own inevitable weariness and
 exhaustion⁸⁵),
 PRISM and its ilk cannot have an infinite stomach,

They cannot gather *everything*, surely. I mean, that would be
incredible.⁸⁶ And but so regardless, however we slice it,
 we have some matters of concern to attend to:
 these involve history, deadbeat parties, pessimistic ballads,

and being in love with younger men.⁸⁷ Among other things.
 The usual. (Because "Polaroid pictures of God's face cover
 every wall in every house."⁸⁸ A Baudrillardian
 nightmare, that.) So rather than escape the past we will

rush toward it, take refuge in it, bathe our children in its
 mindless sway, its River Styx: filled with Coppertone®
 sunblock,⁸⁹ their own tears, the sweat of Iggy Azalea's brow,
 history as an award season epic directed by Clint Eastwood,⁹⁰

the teeth of the executive board of Bear Stearns,
 and our goddamn hopes and dreams. Yay.
 (Otherwise we might have to do something rash,
 like attempt to articulate a new new literary history

⁸² At least this has been what I have been suggesting.

⁸³ See *The Blood Brothers*, "Rescue."

⁸⁴ "What do you think of this?" I might ask a student.

⁸⁵ See Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted" (1992), in *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 152–74.

⁸⁶ "Surely by *incredible* you meant very very very impressive, as opposed to literally quote "incredible," surely" (David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* [1996; repr., New York: Back Bay, 2006], 7).

⁸⁷ See Able Was I, "The Deadbeat Party" and "I'm in Love with a Younger Man," *Able Was I* (Tucson, AZ, 2002), CD-R.

⁸⁸ Able Was I, "for now 1" (Tucson, AZ, 2004), <https://myspace.com/ablewasi>.

⁸⁹ SPF-Lemon Pledge (but mixed with a funky combination of Pine Sol).

⁹⁰ Starring Bradley Cooper.

or a post-postmodernism or even an object-oriented ludology. Shall we refrain? Thanks.) After all, the reality-structuring algorithms, though far too fun, have been run raggedly thin and their accuracy regarding

either the apotheosis of Western Culture or the death of the subject is beginning to be doubtful, at least given current information coming in on today's genocide index. So . . . we should be wary of celebrating too soon, right?⁹¹

Right now we should be *playing*, leaping,⁹² toward/against those really funny jokes.⁹³ (Among other things.) We should remain serious while attempting this, scaling the ladder of Jupiter (as we are),⁹⁴ lest we forget

the apparatus we have been constructing while no one was looking, while residing in these cities of caterpillar hopelessly binge-watching the future.⁹⁵ (Three episodes in,

we are already exhausted, like Samuel Beckett at a Transformers movie.⁹⁶) It is a death machine. Some are planning on burying it three miles beneath the Sonoran Desert and using it

⁹¹ "None of them have ever even seen the true meaning of the word *crisis* yet" (Wallace, 339).

⁹² On Plato's conception of play as leaping see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1944; trans. 1950; repr., Boston: Beacon, 1955).

⁹³ See *Southland Tales*, dir. Richard Kelly (New York: Samuel Goldwyn Films, 2007), DVD.

⁹⁴ See Cave In, "Big Riff," *Jupiter* (Los Angeles: Hydra Head Records, 2000), LP.

⁹⁵ And I mean *no one*. "Handwriting starts to smell like saturated fats and penguins once again. Those little bastards eat at my picnic" (City of Caterpillar, "A Little Change Could Go a Long Ways," *City of Caterpillar* [New York: Level Plane Records, 2002], LP); and also see "William Henry Harrison," *Parks and Recreation*, created by Greg Daniels and Michael Schur (New York: Universal, 2015), TV.

⁹⁶ Or rather, Samuel Beckett *in* a Transformers movie. See Deleuze, again; and *Transformers* (2007), *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009), *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014), all dir. Michael Bay (and Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures), DVD.

to produce widgets.⁹⁷ I have other ideas,
like radically reconfiguring it into a new moon
to pull the waves back and forth so that Earth's
original primordial soup can be recreated

after the sixth extinction event at twice the speed.⁹⁸
It is pretty much the only terraforming we have left
because it is already too late for everything else. So yeah,
a resurrection machine. That is what we should build.⁹⁹

It is probably better than an ark[hive] set loose into
the farthest reaches of the vast nothingness, hoping
to bump into something.¹⁰⁰ Or else just give up.
I mean, who are we kidding?¹⁰¹ We only have SF futures left

(always have, really¹⁰²); that and a few years in a bunker
subsisting on the things remaining: bags of medical waste,¹⁰³
the corpses of public intellectuals, cruel optimism,¹⁰⁴
a healthy and violent will to survive (perhaps a pride

in once receiving a now useless graduate degree),
the same fourteen Stephen King novels, a chess set
missing its white pawns, lots of sex, one overly
pathetic object of sympathy, and vast stores of Soylent:

⁹⁷ See *Cube*, dir. Vincenzo Natali (Santa Monica, CA: Trimark Entertainment, 1997), DVD.

⁹⁸ See Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Picador, 2014).

⁹⁹ On such an evolutionary repetition see William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (1923), in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: 1909–1939*, vol. 1, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), 175–236.

¹⁰⁰ See Arthur C. Clarke, *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973; repr., New York: Bantam, 1990).

¹⁰¹ For we have made "mistake after mistake, risk after risk, piece by piece" (Forstella Ford, "Tell-Tale Signs and Sure-Fire Ways," *Quietus* [New York: Level Plane Records, 2001], LP).

¹⁰² "to wound the autumnal city. / So howled out for the world to give him a name" (Samuel Delany, *Dhalgren* [1974; repr. New York: Vintage, 2001], 32).

¹⁰³ Including the detritus produced by "gastrectomy and prostatectomy and pancreatectomy and phalluctomy" (Wallace, 31).

¹⁰⁴ See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

the breakfast, lunch, and dinner of postapocalyptic
champions.

So, you know, what the world of 2015 looks like.¹⁰⁵
Because the shape of things in the twenty-first century
is the future¹⁰⁶; we have finally arrived and can now

welcome today's catastrophe with the appropriate levity.
"Come on in," we might say, "there's a lot to see.
In the foyer, lazing on chairs cushioned by
the wonderful throw pillows of the present—

all retro-brocaded and bedazzled like it is 1984—
are our principal protagonists, currently reality-TV-fighting
over *It*,¹⁰⁷ or something like that. "On the one hand,
we have our sassy, bitchy sonneteer, my alter ego,

Bardo Lièr Parté, strutting through the hell-
channels of AM reruns.¹⁰⁸ She's from Sonora, Mexico.
She is angry, and whatever it takes, she is ready to do
anything
to win this three-dimensional holographic chess match to
the death.

On the other hand, we have my other (new) self:
His Unholiness Viscount Maximillian Vladimir Vogon Fest III,
Protector of the Lower Alsatians, the Lorraine Valley,
and the Southwestern Deserts of the Alleghenies.

He's a pedagogue with Legion of Doom shoulder pads
and spends most of his time deathgrowling at Olympus Mons,
producing the black metal waves currently breaking
all over his vast Martian territories, threatening to drown

¹⁰⁵ See Bradley J. Fest, *2013–2016: Sonnets* (forthcoming [hopefully]).

¹⁰⁶ See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ See Stephen King, *It* (New York: Viking, 1986).

¹⁰⁸ See *The Bachelor: Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen[s] Bad LSD Trips; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the NSA*, dir. Paul Verhoeven (Tucson, AZ: TSFHSB Pictures, 2019–25).

the vast hordes of twenty-second-century posthuman colonists over which he has dominion.¹⁰⁹ So, like, it will be a good show. Lots of special effects in the advertisements and such, lots of violence and punching.” This is the shape of things

in the twenty-first century. I am thrilled we have finally arrived. It will probably take fifteen years to have any kind of perspective. Because the shape of things in the twenty-first century is a Bartlebian romp;

it allows us to question Convergence’s continual reign over my strong Bloomian misreading.¹¹⁰ For example, in the twenty-first century Wallace Stevens will show up for the video shoot of his obligatory

lady-pop work anthem about his inspiring daily mile in Louboutins while high on Quaaludes, white wine, and the imagination, strutting his drag-queen-ass-self around the set like a jar assessing

what rises to its port in the air, discoursing on physical exercise and its contemporary advantages. This audacious foppery, this member of the Black Lodge displaying humanity’s heaving, gigantic

bosom while intoxicatedly stumbling into new kinds of serial violence, cannot be abided (nor does it have anything on the author of *120 More Days of Sodom*¹¹¹); this Stevens¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Positive *apophrades!* See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and *A Map of Misreading* (1975; repr. with a new preface, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹¹ See Connika Gothika, *120 More Days of Sodom* (Tucson, AZ: TSFHSB Books, forthcoming).

¹¹² This de Maniac.

continues to be a fertile iteration of the control society,
who, though his reign will be short lived, will be *harder*,
never to be applauded; he will not live for this
particular shape of things, this slow pulsing voiding

of our ontological horizons,¹¹³ the pleasing unbound nihilism
of the dark reality and material nightmare of our inevitable
protonic decoherence and nostalgia.¹¹⁴ And but so
the moon is in the folds of Coalesce's wicked

cover songs tonight¹¹⁵ and we are all waking
to the volume of undistorted guitars
and the seriousness of rock and roll¹¹⁶:
like an orbital structure firing missiles.¹¹⁷

Public expressions of professional woe
will not be forthcoming. Because. So.
Ya know. Et cetera. Next year. Goodbye.
Poetry. Hardcore. Screaming. Black metal

theory symposiums, symphonic sweeping transcendent
doomcore and poststructuralism, petropolitics
and Cantorian dust, war machines of powerviolence¹¹⁸
scouring this, our contemporaneity, in the form

¹¹³ For today we realize that "man hadn't discovered oil, but that oil had found man" (Fritz Leiber, "Black Gondolier," in *Night Monsters* [New York: Ace, 1969], 14, qtd. in Eugene Thacker, "Black Infinity; or, Oil Discovers Humans," in *Leper Creativity: "Cyclonopedia" Symposium*, ed. Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandaro, and Eugene Thacker [Brooklyn, NY: punctum, 2012], 173–80).

¹¹⁴ See BoySetsFire, "After the Eulogy," *After the Eulogy* (Chicago: Victory Records, 2000), LP.

¹¹⁵ See Coalesce, "Vehicle," *Coalesce/BoySetsFire* (Los Angeles: Hydra Head Records, 2000), EP.

¹¹⁶ See J. R. Ewing, "Repetition is Failure," *Ride Paranoia* (Los Angeles: Gold Standard Laboratories Records, 2003), LP.

¹¹⁷ See The (International) Noise Conspiracy, "Smash It Up," *Survival Sickness* (Örebro, Sweden and Los Angeles: Burning Heart/Epitaph Records, 2000), LP.

¹¹⁸ See Reversal of Man, *This Is Medicine* (Goleta, CA: Ebullition Records, 1999), LP.

of neon death squads of Taylor Swift look-alikes¹¹⁹
hate-shrieking into DeepArcher's virtual abyss,
shaking off very little. I hope, perhaps, such expressions
of the present are indicative of a sufficiently absent nostalgia

(the shape of things does not leave much room for
madeleines¹²⁰).

But if not, I suppose we'll just have to settle for
the horror of Empire.¹²¹ (It has been fairly ubiquitous,
if absolutely nothing else.) The prolonged absence of utopia¹²²

has failed to shape the carefully narrated audio guide
to the contemporary. I mean, in the twenty-first
century we can swoon over some careful Ashberyian
last world, its muffled cigarette roar stretching the limits

of our abyssal black metal orifices,¹²³ but we cannot
abide poetry's failure to start revolutions
or be a technology of history?¹²⁴ Whatever.
On to other topics. Like, yes, I want a piece of you.

But you do not need to implore me so much to consider
your undercarriage nor your shimmering artifacts.¹²⁵
I suppose that is one way to keep the virtual at bay
for at least a little while longer. I mean, the focus

¹¹⁹ See Taylor Swift, "Shake It Off," 1989 (Nashville, TN: Big Machine Records, 2014), LP, on repeat.

¹²⁰ See Groundwork, *Today We Will Not Be Invisible or Silent* (New Gretna, NJ: Bloodlink Records, 1994), LP.

¹²¹ See Fall Silent, "The Great White Death," *Superstructure* (Las Vegas, NV: Satan's Pimp/702 Records, 1999), LP.

¹²² See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005).

¹²³ See "A Last World," in *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), in *John Ashbery: Collected Poems: 1956–1987*, ed. Mark Ford (New York: Library of America, 2008), 83–87; and see the blackest blackness deeper than your darkest darkness.

¹²⁴ See Ben Lerner, "The Hatred of Poetry," MS.

¹²⁵ See Iggy Azalea, "Pu\$\$y," *The New Classic*.

group agrees.¹²⁶ Your weird haptic interfaces
for repelling my attention work. But they don't
help us invent the machinic processes for reading
the megatext of the present. Those have still

to be invented (either by Superman or during
the noir-apocalypse of global climate change). Regardless,
turn up the ironic volume of contemporaneity. The shape
of things in the twenty-first century deserves its own
Schlegel.¹²⁷

Or else we will just (merely) continue to have these ruins
piling up on both sides of the angel of history to
meticulously
curate as sincerely as possible.¹²⁸ There is no future in that:
getting locked into a singular *now* from which extraction,
governmental or otherwise, was impossible. We can't abide
the present. Do not pretend otherwise. The twenty-first
century

is filled with hateful little rich kids. Their sad slumped bodies
in 9:30 chairs, barely conscious. . . . Am I the director of a

bourgeois gulag, a pathetic echo of some weird culturally
appropriative advertisement? Like drool from a billboard
of Adorno and Horkheimer smiling for retro fallout shelters?
Or the trailer for a late night science fiction double feature¹²⁹

¹²⁶ See David Foster Wallace, "Mister Squishy," in *Oblivion: Stories* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004), 3–66.

¹²⁷ No matter what David Foster Wallace says. See Friedrich Schlegel, "Über die Unverständlichkeit," in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801)*, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner (Munich: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967), esp. 369–70; Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187–229; and David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993), in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 21–82.

¹²⁸ See Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge* (New York: Penguin, 2013), esp. 166–67.

¹²⁹ See *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, dir. Jim Sharman (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 1975).

filled with bodies stacked upon one another, gassed in the digital glow of the future? I suppose not, but still. I mean. Rocky. His tiny underwear woven of abyssal golden nitrate smacking me in the face

with his cyborgorganization testicles, their protundity only serves to upset my Bachian banshee-screams against the void.¹³⁰ Bitches.¹³¹ I spend most of my allotted capacities [redacted] already, can I do more? Of course.

"Black metal theory." Or whatever they want to call it. It is the darkest, the most necrontological of the bodies of *nihil negativum* that surround "us."¹³² So. Can we be the shape of things in the twenty-first century?

Here we are, all nestled quietly in virtual space, is it not lovely for you? I mean, were I not able, I would become elsewhere in the reaper-blades of the future, a Rusmfeldian not-being-at-home. The alternative: my I-terminals are being

left behind *again*,¹³³ their nano-synapses awash in shades of sound,¹³⁴ inevitable macro-risk comparisons swarming

¹³⁰ See the effluvial vapors wafting off the hell-blasted beverage someone once said hardcore black Norwegian doom "metal tastes like" (Sebastian Bach, "An Index of Petty Tragedies," in *An Index of Petty Tragedies: The Unpublished Spenserian Epic by Skid Row's Front Man* [Tucson, AZ: TSFHSB Books, 2016], 666).

¹³¹ See Kate Hahn, "I Am Going to Start Ending Every Sentence with 'Bitches' Bitches," *Timothy McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, October 6, 2014, <http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/i-am-going-to-start-ending-every-sentence-with-bitches-bitches>.

¹³² The beginning of baseball season, the end of Troy Polamalu's career.

¹³³ See Talan Memmott, *Lexia to Perplexia* (2000), in *The Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. 1, ed. N. Katherine Hayles, Nick Montfort, Scott Rettberg, and Stephanie Strickland (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott_lexia_to_perplexia/index.html.

¹³⁴ See Blonde Redhead, "Futurism vs. Passeism, Part 2," *In an Expression of the Inexpressible* (Chicago: Touch and Go Records, 1998), LP.

around seas of adamantium phalluses. I distribute
my attention. I am only now.¹³⁵ The direction

of being helped by the government. Yeah.
The swarming microscopic death-tentacles
of the twenty-second century are coming;
they're not here yet.¹³⁶ We have a few more moments

before their tiny razors scrape our veins out from the inside.¹³⁷
Entire genetic futures eradicated in fractions of seconds.
Horrors and domestications. Procreation and overpopulation.
Starving in the neon-famine of the twenty-first century

is the shape of things, hazy and sublimated by the persistence
of postmodernity and the inevitable droughts and global
water wars. So many bodies. So many awesome dance-
fighting moves kicking the sky of capitalism's front lawn,

launching the frowns of your forebears into history.
This is the shape of things. (Either someone is sent,
or we're doomed.¹³⁸) Shall we be inflexible, newly
rigid in the postfordist economy of the present?¹³⁹

Remove our haptics and affectics, offset our futures
upon your lazy dissertations? All these collectivities,
here they are, rapturing our neoliberalism into the
rhizomatic maw of the shape of punk to come.

Nothing changes nothing. The twenty-first century
seems to be going apace all predictions,¹⁴⁰ piling its
casualties upon the historical heap, gathering our
complicities, moving into the womb of this mad

¹³⁵ See Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," *New Left Review*, n.s., no. 92 (March–April, 2015): 101–32.

¹³⁶ See The Killers, "All These Things That I've Done," *Hot Fuss* (New York: Island, 2004), LP.

¹³⁷ See The Blood Brothers, "Set Fire to the Face on Fire," *Young Machetes* (V2 Records, 2006), LP.

¹³⁸ See Red Scare, "Send Me an Angel."

¹³⁹ See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ If, say, one were capable of quantifying and finding a mean for SF utopia.

black Deleuzianism we seethe in, this massively multiplayer
 swarm of emergent global consciousness. We are all
 forerunners,
 here to announce that some trouble is about to be spread¹⁴¹;
 your capacious new brutalism¹⁴²; your unrepentant
 romanticism¹⁴³;

your transcendently intelligent capitalist hyperobject
 nano-mining
 the globe for its computronium. . . . We are here to stop them.
 That must be the shape of the twenty-first century.
 We can begin by rejecting the eternal decadent party of the
 present.

And then we must plan for after the dance.¹⁴⁴ Because we
 can be sure
 present global realities cannot persist. There is no utopia of
 the present.

The planet cannot sustain the *Dasein* gobbling it from above
 and below.

When hyperobjects collide, one of them must fall.¹⁴⁵ I would
 prefer

to be a hammer, a bad bitch in the slow violence of the
 present,¹⁴⁶
 wielded by the avatars of the near-departed gods of humanism,
 wild Kaijus waging war on the nonhumanity of capitalism;
 I hope my blows ward off the horrific demonic rattle of
 extinction;

¹⁴¹ See Britney Spears, "Work Bitch," *Britney Jean* (New York: RCA, 2013), LP.

¹⁴² See The New Brutalism, *A Record of American Fury* (Tucson, AZ: Code of Ethics Records, 2001), LP.

¹⁴³ See The Locust, *The Locust* (Los Angeles: Gold Standard Laboratories, 1998), LP.

¹⁴⁴ Even in these, our late nightmare times, we never did figure out who she was. See W. B. Yeats, "Among School Children," in *The Tower* (1928), in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 215–17.

¹⁴⁵ See *Pacific Rim*, dir. Guillermo del Toro (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013).

¹⁴⁶ See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

my haft etched with the greenest magics of Tonacatecutli, an ascended modernity, a conscious meta-corporation. . . . No. Today, we stand in awe of our future spectation of warring singularities.¹⁴⁷ (The shape of things is President

Barack Obama overwhelming his anger translator.¹⁴⁸) We are merely the machinic phylum presenting the opportunity for emergence; we only have today to decide. Right now. Not later. Not tomorrow. What are we going to do about

the shape of things in the twenty-first century?¹⁴⁹ Let us see, then please imagine something else. For now, I would prefer to be a reality emulator, replacing the departed realism-technologies of the past—all disco-DayGlo®-sequined in the nihilism

of their quaint antiquity, their 8-bit obsolescence—with the media blackouts and the translucent geologic finitude of the present.¹⁵⁰ Across my sides will stream the bloated and constipated superobjects

of our megatextual future. I will clear a space, open up possibility, be protocological.¹⁵¹ In it will flow the corpses of the past, all agglutinated in the bowels of the strong-AIs roaming these seafloors-as-immanent-planes.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Contests will take place in immense stadia around the solar system; spectators will float watching a planet's surface from the comfort of the black void of the galactic deep.

¹⁴⁸ See Keegan-Michael Key and Barack Obama, White House Correspondents' Dinner, April 25, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpX1bsihugY>.

¹⁴⁹ You have until the end to give me your answer. Please write your response in Times New Roman twelve point font, Chicago style.

¹⁵⁰ See Jackson Maricana, "Media Blackout over Massive Police Brutality Protests in Baltimore," *Counter Current News*, April 25, 2015, <http://countercurrentnews.com/2015/04/justice-for-freddie-gray-protests/>.

¹⁵¹ See Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

Our task will not only be to scrub clean the megadump of history, strewn throughout z-dimensional space while *Angelus Novus* looks on. We will prevent the coming demigods from drinking too much at the nonstop

dance party at the end of universe.¹⁵³ This swarm of eschatological Bacchuses being bathed by the Furies of time,¹⁵⁴ all aglow in the fallout of contemporaneity, rearing back their infrared-EDM teeth,¹⁵⁵ their fiberoptic claws . . .

we desperately want to keep them from Moonwalking¹⁵⁶ into tomorrow's *West Side Story*-knife fight in the television sky¹⁵⁷;

or let us at least keep them from being intoxicated while they twirl and prance with the graphene-stiletto-blades

¹⁵² "This final and self inflicted [*sic*] holocaust has been all for love, for sweetest love, that together the human race, yellow, black, brown, red and white, agglutinated into one enormous soul may be gratified with the sight and retire to the heaven of heavens content to rest on its laurels. There, soul of souls, watching its own horrid unity, it boils and digests itself within the tissues of the great Being of Eternity that we shall then have become. With what magnificent explosions and odors will not the day be accomplished as we, the Great One among all creatures, shall go about contemplating our self-prohibited desires as we promenade them before the inward review of our own bowels" (Williams, 179–80).

¹⁵³ No one envies the teens of the twenty-first century. They were the worst. And it was all our fault.

¹⁵⁴ See Alexander R. Galloway, "Love of the Middle," in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*, by Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 25–76.

¹⁵⁵ Electronic Dance Music.

¹⁵⁶ See Michael Jackson (1958–2009), <http://www.michaeljackson.com/us/>, and Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ See *West Side Story*, dir. Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins (Beverly Hills, CA: United Artists, 1961); and William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984), 3.

born in the thermonuclear forges of the twenty-eight-thousandth century, the cold fusion at the edge of fimbulwinter.
 We hope to see them sober, pirouetting in the light of billions of imploding necrosuns, unable to tell dancer from dance,¹⁵⁸
 coated in liquid-lady-pop, emerging like Aphrodite from the oceanic texture of the digital. We want to see
 algorithmic
 blood streaming from their wounds, the singularity-lined maws of these mammoth kodaliths scattering conscious-saliva
 throughout the nether-spaces of the club orbiting the heat death of all things, the molecular decoherence of reality. But more than anything . . . we want to see the shape of things *change*. The twenty-first century does not have the stamina of the twentieth. Postmodernism will die prematurely while modernism keeps its necrotic parade promenading down the middle of our interfaces, our attempts at a poetics of control.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps this means new forms, perhaps new anthemic modes,¹⁶⁰
 new totalities, new atrocities in the terror-glare of the twenty-first century.¹⁶¹ But novelty is notoriously brittle,¹⁶² and I despair the colonization of the Martian

¹⁵⁸ Yeats, 217. On Yeats, see Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 11–12. On Paul de Man, see Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 3–ff.

¹⁵⁹ “We do not yet have a critical or poetic language in which to represent the control society” (Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* [Malden, MA: Polity, 2012], 98). Also see Bradley J. Fest, “Poetics of Control,” *b2o Review*, July 15, 2015, <http://boundary2.org/2015/07/15/poetics-of-control/>.

¹⁶⁰ See Fun, *Some Nights* (New York: Fueled by Ramen, 2012), LP.

¹⁶¹ See will.i.am, feat. Britney Spears, “Scream & Shout,” *#willpower* (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2013), LP.

¹⁶² See Lady Gaga, “G.U.Y.: An ARTPOP Film,” *Artpop* (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNU_-deVemE.

present.¹⁶³ Rock. Rock Rock. Applause. Applause.¹⁶⁴
 Let us all remember our previous philistinism lest
 we overcommit to any revolution, to whatever being,¹⁶⁵
 to contingent futures and the skeptical randomness

of previous aesthetic commitments. Hmm. That we
 may go on . . . is that our “only hope”? Can any
 of us expect to parlay our present suffering into
 something more substantial, more real?¹⁶⁶ The

implacable hyperreal surrounding *Blue Velvet*,
 dancing with [redacted],¹⁶⁷ the various distractions
 of heavy drug use, and the myth of postmodernisms . . .
 have made alternative fuel a sick joke. So we are fucked.

The shape of things in the twenty-first century will be
 fucking despair.¹⁶⁸ We are so far beyond preventing
 the suffering of the future; we can only anticipate
 extinction.¹⁶⁹ The twenty-first-century shape

¹⁶³ In contemporaneity, rather than raising our eyes to the heavens, asking us to contemplate God, Toronto’s CN Tower—because the anthropic megaprotrusion only points to vacuum and void—encourages us to look back to earth; it is perhaps important that we do so.

¹⁶⁴ See Lady Gaga, “Applause,” *Artpop*.

¹⁶⁵ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁶ On the virtual v. the real v. the absolute, see Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 122–29.

¹⁶⁷ See Miley Cyrus, “Can’t Stop,” *Bangerz* (New York: RCA Records, 2013), LP.

¹⁶⁸ “(As for the *fucking* issue, that remains spot-on and relatively uncomplicated. . . . It’s the difference between ‘black murder’ and ‘Black Fucking Murder.’ It is one of [the shape of thing’s] great modifiers, and endlessly recombines to specify the blackness and metalness of things, ranking up there with *necro*, *grim*, *dark*, *cold*, *Northern*, *pestilent*, *Satanic*, and in certain periods, *Carpathian* and *Transylvanian*.) Above all, black metal is war. It is fought under the banner of a desired final war to come: the striving march from *impure apocalypse of the present* to the *pure Armageddon of the end*” (Evan Calder Williams, “The Headless Horseman of the Apocalypse,” in *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro [Brooklyn, NY: CreateSpace, 2010], 130).

¹⁶⁹ Unlike Dick LeBeau’s career.

of things is annihilatingly ugly pessimism.
Humans are the worst. Nature does not care.
We are *all* going to die. Nothing survives
the black tentacular void of Cthulhuian nonbeing.

The shape of things in the twenty-first century is present
at any historical moment. We were always already utterly
doomed. Before we are born, prior to stepping
off into the sad distant vistas of global adulthood,

we are dead no matter how much Converge rages
against the dying of the light,¹⁷⁰ unredeemed by history.
Neither past nor present, all anyone can ask is:
"why are we still having this discussion?"

What possible simulated trap have we stumbled upon
in this pre-island life?"¹⁷¹ (Our poor apathetic students
will be left behind in the postapocalyptic glee of the future.
In an afterlife resembling a collegiate athletic contract,

we will be famous and fantastic, imbued with cinnamon
cocaine enema sticks filtered through the most prosaic
banalities of twenty-first-century emotional [hardcore] life
and gobs of plastic surgery on our buttocks and busts.¹⁷²

That is it. That is the dream inspired by the dominant
sense of the shape of things.) We would like
it to be different but we have been conditioned
by far too much contemporaneity to think otherwise.

¹⁷⁰ See Dylan Thomas or whatever.

¹⁷¹ See *Lost*, created by J. J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, and Damon Lindelof (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2004–10), TV; and *The Prisoner*, created by George Markstein and Patrick McGoohan (London: FreemantleMedia, 1979–86), TV.

¹⁷² See Orchid, *Chaos Is Me* (Goleta, CA: Ebullition Records, 1999), LP; and Good Clean Fun, "Positive Hardcore," *Positively Positive 1997–2002* (Albany, NY: Equal Vision Records, 2002), CD.

Right? Have the bright flashing Hollywood films taught us nothing with their digital flare? Have all other imaginaries been foreclosed except the blackest blackness deeper than the darkest “darkness,”¹⁷³

of this, our heavy metal epoch?¹⁷⁴ The shape of things has become an exercise in failure.¹⁷⁵ To merely cohere, even in baggy, gelatinous bodies of buckminsterfullerene-fibers loosely stitched together, being pulled slowly apart by

the chaos-nexus of the end times . . . we must admit that this is a reasonable project for the present. Have we ever really *needed* a reason to preserve the archive (even if not ourselves)? Dumb human processes will save us: hoarding,

collecting, dividing, recording, selecting, copying, figuring, acting. We desire what could emerge. The hyperarchive is nascent.¹⁷⁶

And despite its more sinister aspects,¹⁷⁷ we have nothing left.¹⁷⁸

We will launch it toward the stars (humanity’s first

¹⁷³ “Darkness ‘is’ but ‘is not’—and, in a way, this ‘is not’ also ‘is’ darkness. Put simply, the concept of darkness invites us to think about this basic philosophical dilemma of a nothing that is a something” (Eugene Thacker, *Horror of Philosophy: Starry Speculative Corpse*, vol. 2 [Washington, DC: Zero, 2015], 18).

¹⁷⁴ See *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, dir. Joss Whedon (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney, 2015); and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, dir. George Miller (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 2015).

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, my recent employment history and, e.g., *Dark Souls* (Tokyo, Japan: From Software, 2011) and *Dark Souls II* (Tokyo, Japan: From Software, 2014).

¹⁷⁶ See Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U. S. Surveillance State* (New York: Metropolitan, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, “Control and Becoming” (1990) and “Postscript on Control Societies” (1990), in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169–76 and 177–82.

¹⁷⁸ This general phenomenon is what I call the “hyperarchival parallax.” On my sense of parallax, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); or Bradley J. Fest, “On Beginning; or, Finally Defining the Name of This Here Blog,” *The Hyperarchival Parallax*, October 23, 2009, <https://bradfest.wordpress.com/2009/10/23/on-beginning-or-finally-defining-the-name-of-this-here-blog/>.

and only true act of faith). Every word we type and utter will become a tiny pixel of simulated futurity in a twelve-dimensional reality-model in which we either already are or will be participants within (that is, so long as the hyperdarkarchive survives).¹⁷⁹

Or the species will go extinct or transform or not last another two hundred years. So *enough* with the metaphysics. We can all hold hands now. Let us finally agree and then move on from there.

Writing is a way of preserving the species.¹⁸⁰ But can there be

an informatic verse, a *poiesis* of "network being"?¹⁸¹ Should there? Our preferred digital ontology, we might permit it to change, but it *must* be imagined differently; such creation is the only hope.¹⁸² But according to most

¹⁷⁹ On the Möbius Strip, see John Barth, "Frame-Tale," in *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice* (1968; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 1-2; and Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁰ "The interrogative energies of antihumanism, which contest prescriptive identities and behaviors, explain mutation and possibility in terms of the constitutive forces of *Culture*. However, a more radical commitment to a horizon of possibility and change that embraces this dictum *without reservation* might argue that 'there is no outside of Nature.' What do we forfeit in claiming Nature's 'textuality,' its literacy, as our own?" (Kirby, 48).

¹⁸¹ The passage continues: "a *Dasein* specific to network phenomena" (Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007], 118).

¹⁸² "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi" (*Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, dir. George Lucas [Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 1977]); also see dudes who quote Joseph Campbell's *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon, 1949) at the bar.

who matter, first we have to imagine this imaginary,¹⁸³
figure out what we do not know; let us get to it;
this is an imperative. (And we are perhaps still far
from the equal task of encountering the unknown

known.¹⁸⁴ Let us work on that as well. . . .¹⁸⁵) To conclude:
let us plunge into the midst!¹⁸⁶ deathdrumming to our
distant
posthuman progeny our best thoughts on long-term
survival¹⁸⁷:
we have only few but they have the advantage of having
percolated

up from the igneous geologic necrosphere swallowing this
pestilent
global civilization, despite their reach being limned by the lip
of the galaxy that is Britney Spears's mind—that is to say, our
global
collective emergent AI-mind, i.e., Capitalism¹⁸⁸—I feel our
future is not

¹⁸³ For we do not have any present capacity to do so. "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" (Fredric Jameson, "Future City" [2003], in *The Ideologies of Theory* [New York: Verso, 2008], 573).

¹⁸⁴ See *The Unknown Known: The Life and Times of Donald Rumsfeld*, dir. Errol Morris (New York: TWC, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ Also see Martin Heidegger on the "uncanny" or "*unheimlich*" in *Being and Time* (1927), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 233, qtd. in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 25.

¹⁸⁶ See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967; repr. with a new epilogue, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁸⁷ See Vampillia, "Blackest Ever Black Metal" (demo), YouTube, November 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9JXprxyysE>.

¹⁸⁸ See will.i.am, feat. Britney Spears, "Scream & Shout."

always already completely foreclosed if for no other reason
 than
 I do not think all thoughts have occurred or can; where to
 begin,
 I suppose after whatever end we can project and then try
 something different,¹⁸⁹ like, e.g., something sustainable,

 capable of being replenished,¹⁹⁰ expanded without poisoning
 this Earth-cage nor our ontology-wheels we so eagerly
 spin in for nano-bladed consumer cheese while never for
 a moment thinking all eyes are on us in the distributed

 social-datacloud of the present in which computationally
 man dwells¹⁹¹ . . . well they are, watching us reality-TV-
 immersed in our branching decision trees,¹⁹² our projected
 worlds, these multi-tiered simulations we run countless

 universes upon: at the bottom are Higgs-Boson inhabitants
 spiraling their own dying tiny black holes, poring over the
 megatexts¹⁹³ of their doomed planets, wondering about
 the responsibilities of the imagination¹⁹⁴ and futilely searching

¹⁸⁹ Nothing changes anything. I am kidding. Please, please see Naomi Klein's brilliant call to arms, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

¹⁹⁰ See Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993; repr., New York: Warner, 1995).

¹⁹¹ See Martin Heidegger, ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (1971; repr., New York: Perennial, 2001), 209–27.

¹⁹² See *Mass Effect 1–3* (Edmonton, Ontario, Canada: BioWare, 2007–12).

¹⁹³ See Richard Grossman, *The Animals* (1983), rev. ed. (Los Angeles: American Letters, 2011), *The Alphabet Man* (Boulder, CO and Normal, IL: Fiction Collective Two and Illinois State University, 1993), *The Book of Lazarus* (Normal, IL: Fiction Collective Two, 1997), and *Breeze Avenue* (forthcoming someday).

¹⁹⁴ See Grant Morrison, *Multiversity*, nos. 1–12 (August 2014–April 2015).

for the correct algorithms to predict their populations'
behaviors before they go extinct; at the top are transcendent-
AIs dueling over all existence with vintage haptic remote
controls,
plunging their avatars into the sad digital mire of our
reality¹⁹⁵;

contemporaneity¹⁹⁶ is the godforsaken dialectical synthesis
of these
two visions; we are finally incapable of doing anything except
cyborg theory now,¹⁹⁷ swimming in the digital-liquid-metal-
theory-
yawp of how we represent the oceanic present, we cannot help

creating assemblages from which new objects emerge; we
are creators
of things now¹⁹⁸; let us create new things, or rather, let us
make possible
the conditions under which things might grow, take shape,
or occur,
the occasion for *poiesis*, a poetics of control, of a language

capable of representing the temporality of Converge's last
assault
on hardcore mead halls, wielding black-chromium guitar-
axes,¹⁹⁹
vibrating the underlying code that writes all matter²⁰⁰—
we await their imminent performance in this, our precarious
life²⁰¹;

¹⁹⁵ See Mark "Messhoff" Essen, *Nidhogg* (2014).

¹⁹⁶ Which is the cultural logic of late capitalism that comes after postmodernism.

¹⁹⁷ See Haraway.

¹⁹⁸ Heideggerian and all.

¹⁹⁹ See Converge, *Jane Doe* (Albany, NY: Equal Vision Records, 2001), LP.

²⁰⁰ See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁰¹ See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).

but until then, and until we can all agree on something,
perhaps
being can stand down, let the angry-planet roar swallow
pieces
of itself before the postwar reinstatement of at least partial areas
of the human, at least until we can figure out *something* of

the shape of things in the twenty-first century²⁰²—nothing is
more urgent; if poetry has no other role, perhaps it can
emphasize
this, because things can no longer be shaped as they are or
will be,
our miles in Louboutins—they are waiting to see what we
will do

given our current situation, and let me tell you, it is *certainly*
one of the most popular sports for them: all that human
drama;
unless it becomes as compelling for ourselves we are doomed.
This is the shape of things in the twenty-first century.

²⁰² See H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), and *A World Set Free* (1914; repr. as *The Last War*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), esp. Chapter 4, "The New Phase," 112–41.



About the Author

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