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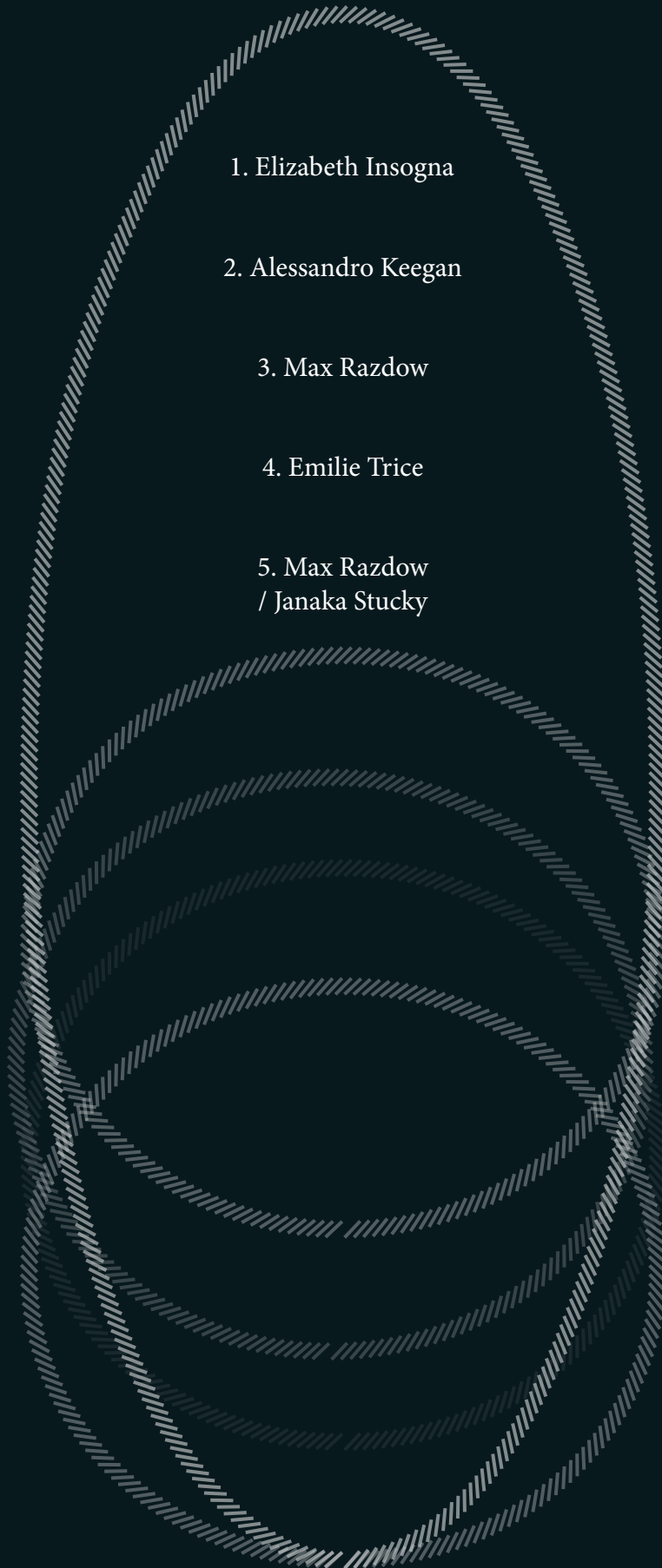
1. Elizabeth Insogna

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Artemisia Transmission Sessions

- Elizabeth Insogna •

She saith moreover that Hecate commanded how images should be constituted to her, and that they were to be surrounded by wormwood....blood, myrrh, storax and other things be burnt: which things if they are done, she would appear, and answer the worker thereof by dreams.¹



There's something specifically transformative about burning plant material, I'm especially woken by the dried and powdered bones and leaves. Over the years, I've harvested and collected so many bones, the dried stalks of the plant, as well as the dried and powdered leaves to burn later or integrate with my work. Each plant has her own specific complex aroma, discerning that which you're attracted and to what degree and how and when is an entryway into the magical practices at hand.

¹ Agrippa, Henry Cornelius, edited by Tyson, Donald, Three books of Occult Philosophy, St. Paul, MN, Llewellyn Publications, 2004, 564-565

Cauldron, Offering

In my garden, wormwood and crone wort are present and surrounded by many other magical plants including Datura, Pokeweed, Rue, Poppy, St. Joan's wort, Elfwort, Rosemary, Yarrow and Motherwort. I work with the plants medicinally as well as spiritually through interaction by day and transmission in the night. Last year, I acquired a plot of land in an organic garden in Long island and was able to create a large space for the plants in this work. I created ceramic offering vessels for each plant spirit in my garden and have been creating an ongoing series of sculptures from my transmissions that hold the plant (both materially and immaterially) in the end. The offering vessels are intended and have been created to stay with the plant and serve as stationary signposts for dreamwork, sun scrying, and a symbol of the invisibility from myself given up and burned for and into the transmission sessions. The offering vessels, are more akin to interactive cauldrons as they are part of a nexus of energy exchange, transmission, transformation, and reconfiguring. The focus of this essay will be on the Artemisias, specifically wormwood and crone wort. Her name stems from the Goddess of the hunt, Artemis, and are strong with lore connected to feminine power in both healing and destructive forms. Crone wort (mugwort) is a slender to moderate stout herb growing wildly in north America with leaves that alternate with five to seven lobes, with silver white beneath and smooth above. Wormwood, native to Eurasia, grows now in North America where it occurs as a casual weed in cracks and waste places with clustered stems and silvery-grey herbage.²

Healing, Holding, Tearing

Visual clues play a strong role in plant work. I personally have a strong inclination toward *Artemisia Vulgaris* (Crone wort), and *Artemisia Absinthium* (Wormwood) from sight, her smell and our invisible energetic exchange. The former is considered such a pest that I've sat through whole lectures that have beguiled on how to get rid of her permanently. Still, she has a long history with witchcraft and those involved in Occult practices, and clearly desires to be near to us and to work with us. In many places, she is considered to be one of the oldest herbs.³ In my garden, I have three huge clusters of Crone wort and honor her there as I pull her babies by the roots and compost them. I had grand ideas of drying, burning and using all that I pulled up, but those ideas fell away when tasked with the prolific quality and continual abundance of the weeds. The weeds are survivors, and certainly outlived my original wormwood and white mugwort seedlings a hundred times over. The first little ones came up so shyly and died so quickly I barely had time to mourn the loss. My current silver blue wormwood has grown to at least five feet wide from a tiny plant, smaller than a hand's width and my crone wort now stands taller than I. I'm attracted to her camphor, color and all of the invisible things that meet us in dreams or unconscious roads, underground paths to forks and splits to Hecate and choice. I've burned her, breathed her, ate her and drank her. I've slept by her numerous times and dreamed of her and received messages from her; clearly linked to abundance, vigor, but also shape shifting, cutting and tearing and doing so to grow.

Cutting

In witchcraft wormwood is traditionally a vigilant member of her garden. She protects borders and veils the in between spaces of worlds, she is said to purify and act as an amulet against the more malevolent forces in the world. Her leaf has a certain hand like quality, a greeting, or an invitation to pass through, to come hither to stay awake in trance states. The leaves of wormwood and crone wort have certain similarities in this respect, though wormwoods are a bit rounder, and to me more connected to the moon or moon light and thus water. This camphorous moon

2 Hutchens, Alma R. *Indian Herbage of North America*, Boston Mass, Shambhala Publications, 1973, 200, 309

3 Roth, Harold, 2004, 2019, https://www.alchemy-works.com/artemisia_vulgaris.html

leaning and fluid like plant with rounded tip leaves and silver blue light like crone goddess hair, seems very much like a being. When I cut I sprig of her, it feels like cutting into flesh. Attracted to her so much was I, I dared to take a sprig with me, as she grew more generous in herself abundantly every day, but still that split felt like a cut into flesh, to my surprise every cut, marked her, stayed with her, and then I became aware of how powerful and vulnerable she is at once; subject to pain, and still able and willing to heartfully give, through the pain.

Movement

She, Artemisia, offers movement of a different kind, it's slow and invites you in toward her, toward the ground in the case of wormwood and into her winged protection in cronewort. She offers movement to visions of purple yarrow and thorned henbane. Plants and snakes near the ground to her, feeling the skin of the earth, feeling the underground, Temple of Artemis. In some respects, the vision of her leaf is like a bird's foot, rounded and airy, full of buoyancy and lift. Her wood base grounds her, she stays close to the ground and reminds us also to stay grounded. Though so many facets touch air, while being close, almost woven together her leaves in an airy quilt float as well. Waterlike gaze is open and connected to the lunar rhythm and water.

Divination, Site, Shapeshifting

Wormwood and Cronewort have long association with divination and so, I've experimented with sun scrying near her with my sculpture vessel cauldrons. Cronewort has been known to protect eyesight as well as give sight. In Great Britain, a wreath either worn on the head or looked through at the Midsummer bonfire preserved the eyes - which leads back to her connection with divination and what a powerful gift vision is.⁴ Her connection to the eyes might be invoked physically through collyries, salves or drops applied directly to the eyes. It's possible that these collyries could transform visual spirits, as these are closest to the imagination - they say if a smooth piece of shining steel - smeared over with the juice of mugwort (cronewort) is made to fume, it will make invoked spirits be seen.⁵ Perhaps the smoke in her scent or the silver gray of her aura which seems to invoke that otherworldly quality is especially potent in over the veil work. The sun scrying led to night visions, and feel that night is her preferred time to communicate and have gained the most through dreamwork with her. Recently she's revealed herself through the concept of multiplicity, abundance and propagation. She is stealth has steadily aided in support for life on this planet, connectivity and is receptive to asking and receiving messages from her.

...If that these things that here required be. Thou shall perform, in dreams thou shalt me see.



4 Roth, Harold, *The Witching Herbs*, Newburyport, MA, Weiser Books, 2017

5 Agrippa, Henry Cornelius, edited by Tyson, Donald, *Three books of Occult Philosophy*, St. Paul, MN, Llewellyn Publications, 2004, 134-35

Chambers of Mystery

• Alessandro Keegan •

These stone structures are out of place in our world. You will find them in the Northeastern part of the United States; places like Gungywamp in Connecticut, Mystery Hill in New Hampshire, the Upton Chamber in Massachusetts, the Calendar Chamber of Vermont, or the dozens of stone chambers dotting the landscape of Kent, New York (Fig.1-2). Like deep-shadowed, sentient eyes belonging to the forests and hillsides, these places are watching back at us. Though these structures are thought to be root cellars, hunter's refuges or receiving tombs (to house the dead during the winter when the ground is frozen), their astrological alignments and complexity still confound these explanations. The enigma of the Northeastern stone structures persist in their mystery because they are in places where nothing should be; they reside on re-mote hills, lost valleys and at silent roadsides. They exude the magnetism of the unknown. They are places of darkness that wait in the howling shadow of our blindspot. This dark crater on the field of our understanding cannot last long before we descend down its slopes. Aren't all entrances to the earth invitations to the mysteries? Aren't these underground passages always doorways to the underworld sought by the initiate? Wherever a dark doorway beckons us, the secret side of the mind is allowed to open and imagine.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Gungywamp in Groton, Connecticut, contains numerous standing stones and a few half buried, post-and-lintel stone chambers that resemble the entrances to Viking passage graves. There is one radiating circle of rocks, consisting of large, heavy slabs of stone, which is thought to be a sun symbol. One long, undulating

rock wall in Gunywamp, which runs through a dense area of forest and ascends a large hillside, terminates in a large cairn of boulders. This trail of stones is said to be one of the many serpent effigies found throughout the Northeast, many of them looking like little more than colonial rock walls to the untrained eye. Interestingly, when I visited this site one day, under gray sheets of heavy rain, a garter snake slithered from under a rock in the “sun circle” and reared up as if to strike me. It must have had a nest buried just beneath the stone; but then again, perhaps my presence had angered the serpent spirit of Gun-gywamp.

The existence of solar, lunar and other astrological alignments found among the North-eastern standing stones and stone chambers makes these structures harder to dismiss as colonial root cellars or hideouts for hunters braving the winter cold. One chamber in South Wood-stock, Vermont, called Calendar II (Calendar I is a mostly collapsed stone complex in South Royalton, VT), has an entrance aligned with the rising sun on the morning of the Winter Solstice. Calendar II also has an opening in its corbeled ceiling through which a ray of sun drops down almost exactly at high noon on the Winter Solstice. Such seasonal alignments are common with these chambers and seem beyond the realm of coincidence. Additionally, there is a gray, weathered and lichen-encrusted standing stone (which could be classified as a menhir) about three meters from the opening of Calendar II that also seems to be aligned with the rising sun of the solstice.

A possible clue to the message of the chambers (Fig.3): the 14th century alchemical manuscript, *Aurora consurgens*, attributed to Pseudo-Aquinas, shows the dark-skinned, green-winged Sophia (wisdom) standing upon a silver moon (the pigment of which has oxidized to black over time) and opening her virgin-white dress to reveal a bloody wound in the form of the *vescia pisces*. Within her wound is the tripartite Caduceus, a golden cross on which Christ is crucified with two entangled snakes wrapping their bodies around him like the caduceus of Mer-cury. The dark Sophia, the Black Madonna, is the alchemical language for the *Prima Materia*, the base mater of the earth and the ore-rich depths in which the fermentation of the great work takes place. The body is a black elevator into the depths where all possible and impossible processes can be executed by the feather-light force of a dream. In this dark shadow side, which exists beneath the earth, all the immensity of the celestial heavens are mirrored. These forces of the beneath conduct our bodies from underground like strings tied to balloons. We are subjects of the Chthonic Cosmos, and just as the stars over head may shift ever so slightly the wheels of change on our small planet, so too does an unknown Chthonic Astrology govern us from beneath. In the body-wound of Sophia, rheumatic with blood and fringed with fire, there is another answer to be found in the serpents of healing braided in cyclical eternity. This represents the ladder between the Chthonic Cosmos and the stars above, upon which the waters of Christ-Mercury stream in both directions. Liminal spaces, caves and chambers, are portals between the ethers, catching emanations from both below and above. We are transported along the ladder between the underground and the above in both this life and the hereafter.

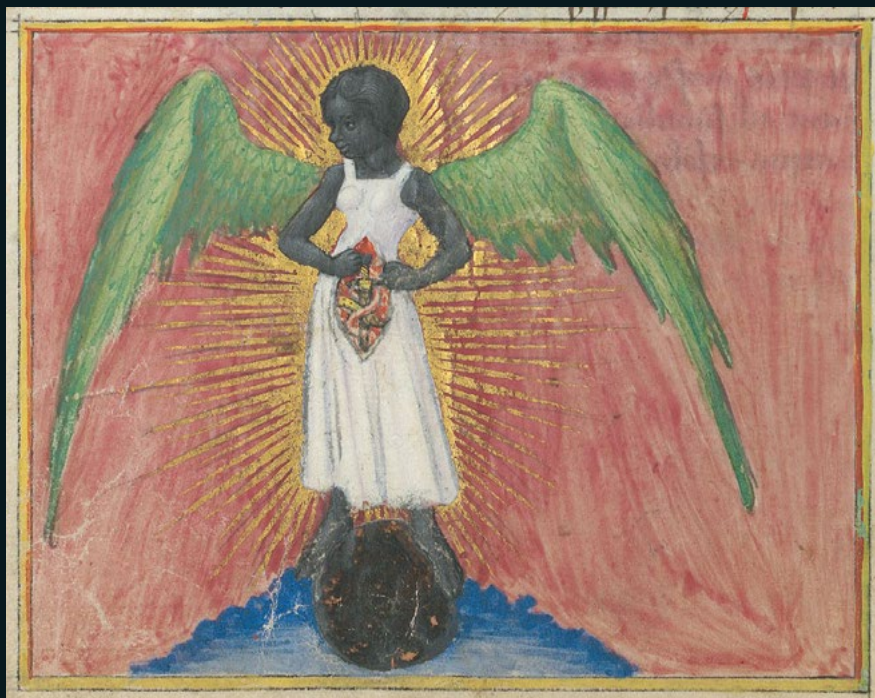


Figure 3

What is behind this symbol of the serpent that persists in the megalithic ages? The body of a snake is a line representing time and its irreversible march forward. Since humanity first observed the ability of the snake to shed its skin, seemingly to regenerate its body, the serpent has been a symbol of the most forbidden knowledge: to be immortal, to cheat death and to be resurrected. Philo of Alexandria, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, writes in his *Questions and Answers on Genesis* that the serpent sheds its skin to discard old age, to appear youthful and tempting when it approaches Eve in the garden of Eden. The Ouroboros, a symbol which shows a serpent or dragon devouring its own tail, appears in the 2nd century papyrus known as the *Chrysopoeia* of Cleopatra. In this manuscript the Ouroboros is accompanied by the caption “Hen to pan” (“The One, the All”) and is also half black and half white to represent the undifferentiated nature of opposites within the universe. Both night and day, life and death, matter and spirit, above and below are joined by this symbol into the one. In the 9th-3rd century BCE Upanishads of India, a similar symbol of the snake as a healing and vitalizing force can be found. The Kundalini, a term from the Upanishads that translates as the coiled serpent, is a spiritual force that travels up focal points of the body, or Chakras, along etheric pathways called Nāḍī. The Kundalini is a source of physical and spiritual bliss connected to the Kaula traditions which venerate Shakti, or the divine feminine in its various forms. Like the Ouroboros, the ringed or coiled Kundalini serpent is an allegory of the spectral energy below the surface of all matter.

This luminous water, a river of silver beneath the earth that is both the source of life and the stream that goes outwardly towards its end, is the serpent egg of the world that had parented itself. The serpent as a symbol is the incommunicable force that is impossible to hold completely in the mind and contemplate. It is the chi, or the kia, wriggling from the grasp of the mind like an eel. In the old testament, when the Hebrews are plagued by snakes, God instructs Moses to raise a bronze serpent nailed to a staff as a symbol of healing. Those who looked upon this image were cured of the venom, as though it were a medicinal charm. Is the snake so elusive that to fix its image is to heal the world? There are some who speculate that this symbol of the crucified serpent predated the Abrahamic god, recalling a serpent god of healing that would have been known to the ancient Canaanites. It may not be unrelated that the Greek god, Asclepius, is represented by a rod wrapped around with a serpent, a symbol of medicine to this very day that is often confused with the caduceus of Mercury. The serpent therefore is the continuous wheel, lit on fire by Vulcan, and the golden nail driven into the cross that releases us from the cycles of death and rebirth by fixing the volatile.

As many symbols seem to multiply themselves in various cultures and times, it may be possible that the vast proliferation of folklore concerning dragons (or often monstrous serpents and worms as well) that is found throughout the history of the British Isles may insist on a symbolic interpretation. In one chapter of their 1978 book, *The Secret Country*, researchers Janet and Colin Bord collected a number of examples of dragon lore from England and noticed that almost all of the historical tales place the lairs of these mythical serpents in direct proximity to ancient megalithic sites. Two Bronze Age hill-forts, Cadbury Camp and Dolebury Hill, were said to be homes to a single dragon that would fly between both. Another hill-fort location, of Dinas Emrys, is said to have two dragons that sleep in a lake at its base. The Balluderon Stone, also known as Martin's stone, is an intriguing Pictish slab of sandstone dated from around the 6th-9th century, carved with the likenesses of fantastic beasts and symbols on its surface. One faded carving toward the foot of this stone seems to depict a dragon that may be the origin of local folklore surrounding the stone. It is said that long ago a terrible dragon devoured the nine daughters of a local farmer and was in turn slain by the local blacksmith, whose name was Martin, and this occurred on the site where the Pictish stone now stands. In America, the “Serpent Mound” of Adams County, Ohio, in the United States, dates from 300 BCE and is thought to be the work of the Adena, an ancient indigenous culture that filled the center of the country with burial mounds and effigies of stone and dirt. Measuring about 1348 ft long, the Serpent Mound is a carving in raised earth that depicts a writhing and coiled snake opening its jaws to devour an egg. Interestingly, the serpent was constructed inside an ancient astrobleme, or a long-eroded asteroid impact crater.

It would not be surprising to find multiple geological anomalies connected with the North-eastern stone chambers of America, or any place of mystery for that matter. There seems to be, from my own inquiries and observations, a great number of iron kilns in many of the woods around these locations and the ubiquitous presence of

underground water that passes through the honeycomb-like hollows of the earth beneath. Whenever I have inquired about the mineral composition of locations like Gungywamp, Mystery Hill or Calendar I, I have consistently heard of large deposits of iron or quartz in these locations. I have always found streams, rivers and lakes in close proximity to these locations and they are always fed by or are feeding into an underground sources. It is interesting that quartz is an insulator, meaning that it is made of perfect crystal and can deaden an electrical charge. Iron and other metals, on the other hand, have electrons that move freely around more than one atom and so are optimal for conducting electricity. Quartz then is the lunar, dampening, wet element, while iron is the solar, dry, electrically charged element. If the surges of underground water generate an energy that can be channeled through a body, perhaps the metals and minerals of certain locations act as the avatars of their movement. A balance of lunar and solar elements in a landscape may be the conducting roadways for unseen forces through the earth, water and air.

Clinton Road, located in West Milford, New Jersey, is sometimes called the most haunt-ed road in America. Along Clinton Road, which winds through dense forest and past many ram-shackle abandoned houses, you will notice the tall, stone chimneys of kilns used for iron work rising like the ruins of ancient temples from the curbside thickets. Numerous allegations of para-normal activity have plagued the history of this road but the urban legend most often associated with this spot is that of the ghost of a dead young boy who haunts the stream beneath a bridge just a few paces from a spot know as “Dead Man’s Curve.” It is said that if you stand on this bridge, which is precarious and extremely dangerous, and throw a coin off the edge, the coin will be tossed back to you from the water by the boy’s ghost. I tried this with a few pennies, suspecting a magnetic phenomenon might be responsible for the coin’s return. Though I saw no coins flying back at me, I did see something just as I turned to leave. Lined up along the rocky edge of the bridge were several untarnished coins sparkling in the sunlight. As I picked one up a bead of

water broke on my fingertips and I realized that the coins, though they had been lined up in the sun, were freshly wet with water as if someone had just pulled them from the stream.

Upton, Massachusetts also has one of the most extraordinary stone chambers (Fig4). The Upton Chamber, located in Upton Heritage Park, is aligned with the setting sun of the Summer Solstice and this alignment is echoed by stone cairns on nearby Pratt Hill. In addition to this, the Upton Chamber has the mysterious virtue of being designed almost exactly like a Mycenaean tholos tomb. These tombs of the Peloponnesian Peninsula, such as the “Treasury of Atreus,” unearthed by German explorer Heinrich Schliemann (who believed he was unearthing the grave of the fabled Homeric king) in the late nineteenth-century, are



Figure 4

designed with a long corridor leading to a monumental, corbeled, beehive-like burial chamber. The Upton Chamber is less grand. It sits silently on the forest floor, overgrown with the roots of trees, beside a long row of massive boulders beneath a dense canopy. If you have the courage to walk through the mouth of this stone chamber you will find yourself teetering down a five meter stone tunnel to an chamber that opens into a corbeled beehive room. The ceilings are about three meters high and you can stand comfortably inside, despite the complete darkness. This structure is a small fraction of the scale that the Mycenaean tombs were built on but the complexity of the engineering of such of structure defies easy dismissal. Would a colonial farmer be inspired by archaeological discoveries (unearthed

long after colonial times) to build a cellar for potatoes aligned with the solstice sun?

A more extensive astrological structure exists in the site known as Mystery Hill (also popularly advertised as “America’s Stonehenge”) in Salem, New Hampshire (Fig.5-6). At the heart of this complex is a collection of stone chambers, some of which are interlocked with openings and tunnels. There is also a central stone slab, which bares the proportions of a human body, en-graved with a groove cut into the stone that seems intended for drainage. This may be an ancient cider press but it has, not surprisingly, been named the “sacrificial altar” of Mystery Hill. The Winter and Summer Solstices as well as the Equinoxes are aligned with triangular (manitou) stones that surround the central complex. In walking around the structure of Mystery Hill there is a sense that the central complex, at one time in the distant past, may have been buried entirely underground like the Mithraeums of the ancient Roman-era mystery religion of Mithraism. One of the many underground Mithraeums still remains in Rome beneath the basilica of San Clemente (Fig.7).

A neoplatonic philosopher of the 3rd century, Porphyry, offers one of the clearest interpretations of the Mithraeum in his essay “On The Cave of the Nymphs.” He states that the Mithraeum was a recreation of the cosmos of Mithras diagramed on the earthly realm. Earth, rock and soil, according to Porphyry, was a symbol of all the matter from which the cosmos were made. Porphyry writes, “the Persians call the place a cave where they introduce an initiate to the mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again...”

Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honor of Mithras, the creator and father of all... After Zoroaster other adopted the custom of performing their rites of initiation in caves and grottoes which were either natural or artificial.” It should be noted that in a number of ancient representations, Mithras is shown being born from a rock, nude, already in his youth, with a dagger in one hand and a torch in the other, and sometimes wearing a Phrygian cap. A little understood symbol of the Mithraic mysteries, the Arimanius, is represented as the body of a man with a lion’s head whose entire length is wrapped around with a serpent. It is interesting to see the symbol of the snake emerge among the Mithraic iconography in this context, when we have already seen relationships between the serpent form and underground earth mounds and stone chambers in evidence. The Arimanius has been variously interpreted as a god, the personification of time (Aion) and a allegory for the initiate who has harnessed the serpen-



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

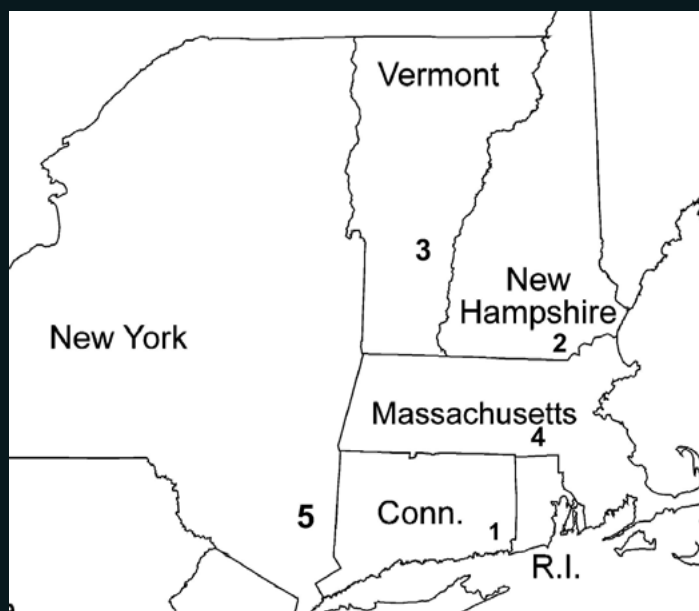
tine forces of enlightenment. The Nabatean culture, which emerged from Arabia and Levant in the 4th century, had similarly centered their religious practices around temples exquisitely carved in the solid stone mountains and underground chambers. Their primary God, Dhushara, was the separator of night and day and most likely represented the Sun or Mercury. Dhushara's wife, goddess Harisha, also seems to have had a solar equivalence. All the Nabatean gods, before the culture was annexed by the Romans, represented these cosmic gods as unadorned pillars or blocks of stone. If some of America's stone chambers are the remains of ancient, subterranean ritual structures, like those of the Nabateans and the Mithraists, they have also joined the long history of pagan sites that have been buried and forgotten under the global re-landscaping of the largely Abrahamic, modern world.

History, as it is written, does not seem to offer easy explanation for these Northeastern stone chambers if they are not simply eighteenth or nineteenth century storage houses. There are, however, seemingly rational explanations for these structures if they are ancient. Most accessible of these is that a Native American tribe, whose name has been lost to history, had once prospered in the Northeastern region of America and had developed a style of megalithic architecture similar to those found in Neolithic Europe. This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. The "Mound-Builder" cultures of the Adena, Hopewell and Mississippian peoples held European Americans in disbelief up until the twentieth-century. It was not until very late in the history of archeology that structures like Cahokia were accepted as vast urban centers of Native American life. "Monk's Mound," among Cahokia's major structures, seems to be a ritual earth mound boasting a footprint (over thirteen acres) that nearly matches the largest pyramid of Giza in Egypt. For centuries archeology offered up every explanation besides a native civilization, including refugees from Atlantis. It should also be mentioned that the painted caves of Altamira, Spain (discovered in 1879) were contested as being a hoax up until the twentieth-century. It was only after the unearthing of multiple Paleolithic cave paintings and insurmountable evidence that popular history yielded to admitting that prehistoric humans had the gift of art.

It may also be that enigmas of archaeology frustrate our ability to understand them because they are not embedded in the history of the world as we know it. Multiple traditions hold that history is a series of great golden ages followed by great cataclysms that wipe the slate of time clean. Cataclysms are echoed throughout world religions,

from the world-decimating flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh to the similar flood narrative in the Bible. Vedic tradition holds that the world is continually in the process of cataclysmic destruction and rebirth; these are the Yugas, four ages of accession and decline with the Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga, and the age of complete decimation, the Kali Yuga. At the end of each of these cycles the world will be destroyed and begin again, with the world learning the Dharma and the Satya again. If the world does move through cycles such as this, perhaps archeological anomalies that seem inscrutable remain in our world in certain points where their nature, outside of the time cycles, is preserved. It could be possible that enigmas of archeology are in fact remnants of parallel or long-past time-lines of deep history. The megalithic works found in Northeastern America might then be remnants of these past ages that have somehow remained fixed, like insects in amber, in a matrix of unmovable time outside the Yugas, or even this very plane of existence.

The four arms of the cross represent this cycling of the ages. Earthly and heavenly realms may divide themselves into four elements. The cycles penetrate both time and matter. From the grass, into the sealed walls of the human body, a snake of white light emerges. This snake weaves through honeycombs of thought in the brain until it emerges like morning dew on the surface of the skull cap. The penetration of this force, represented as the force of the serpent or the lance of St. George, perforates every cycle of the ages. The more crumbled the surface of the self becomes, like a mountain becoming pitted by caves and fissures, the more the smoke of the eternal reddening is allowed to enter. The light from outside the cycles clings to their interior walls like a luminous syrup sending honey dripping upward and downward. A chamber of stones is the shell bracing against the life hatching inside the cosmic egg. From the sacred cross is stretched the spider's net, full of dew and deadliness as is the whole of nature's plan. Across the world there are pillars of ancient marble which stand against the pressure of time. Down from constellations darkening into the corners of the night, down to the earth that is veined with the amber shadows of early morning and up the ladder again into the soot-black lamp of Sophia.



*Locations of
Stone Chamber Complexes in the
Northeastern United States:*

1. Gungywamp (Groton, CT)
2. Mystery Hill (Salem, NH)
3. Calendar II (South Woodstock, VT)
4. Upton Chamber (Upton, MA)
5. Several Stone Chambers (Kent, NY)



The Wolf of New Rome

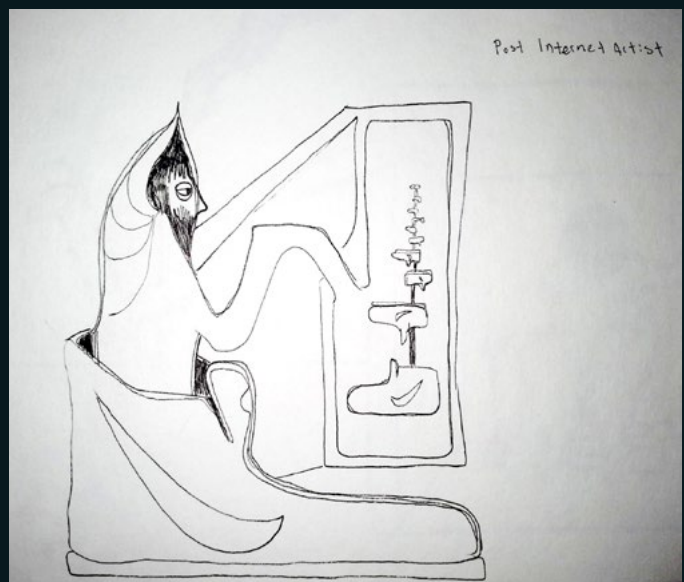
• Max Razdow •

Occasionally, a small sketch may reveal a great and hidden truth. The occurrence of this is similar to how dreams can announce themselves as significant by a well-known feeling that is almost impossible to describe. There is a revelatory quality that may arise in images or dreams, and some lucky times I've found this in drawings I've made, even in very minor renderings bordering on marginalia, and that this feeling is contingent upon both automatism and symbol.

A spare, ball-point self-portrait called The Ice Cream Boy arose to me in a crescendo of association when I was young. I believed in its reflection so strongly that I purchased fabric paint and traced it carefully onto a vintage army jacket, which I wore for several months before losing it at a party. Many years later, my predilection for investigating my own being was traded for different concerns, and several of these "heightened awareness" drawings wandered through notebooks to become parts of larger projects. Others remained entombed, and many were forgotten in their immaculate state. For some reason, at the moment, I recall a lost drawing that held out-sized importance for me: in 2014 I made a tiny sketch depicting a "post internet artist", like a critical lampoon, which I still believe was particularly aligned with some spheres of monadic truth. In considering these rare instances of resonance, I am reminded of my experience cataloging a small handful of dreams over a period that was rich with epic dreaming. Perhaps there is an organ we are not fully aware of, which senses the alignment of metaphorical avatars within a matrix of hidden or holographic truth, and seeks to elaborate this to our conscious selves. Perhaps this is an element of Gnosis, or even an evolutionary remnant once vital to survival. Potentially, it is vital still.



Ice Cream Boy, c. 1997



Post Internet Artist, c. 2014: gazing into a mirror which replaces his hands, he sees his reflection as a refraction into infinity of his current situation (en-shoed).

Some weeks ago, I happened upon an unlikely bookshelf in the library building where I work. It was nestled into a section of stacks providing primary school teachers with books that they might use as teaching tools. Strangely, or perhaps obviously, this area contained a miniature occult section buried within its range of call numbers, supplying books on wizards, witches, dragons and other arcana that a child might find enriching. I took a photograph to send to Kari, thinking how interesting it was that this unheralded part of a derelict college library might even conceal the “The Blue Fairy Book” along with many of its companion volumes in color coded variety, collected by Andrew Lang in the 19th century. This shelf had hues as unlikely as The Lilac Fairy Book and Olive Fairy Book, which I didn’t know existed.

Not long after this chance encounter with the books, I found a moment for intuitive sketching upon an open page. Seeking mindlessness and distraction, on a beautiful midsummer afternoon, my pen worked without effort. It first conjured a pear, then some flames and then a book end, at which point I recalled seeing Lang’s tomes upon the shelf. I think it was this sudden association and recall of a seemingly innocent memory by which I began to recognize some heightened connection to the doodle. And so, I rendered a few of the Fairy Books within the doodle.

My mind wandered off at that point, and I cannot recall the subsequent transformation, but soon the drawing had attained the look of a four legged creature. It was furred and lupine, part bookshelf and part animal, with sinewy legs and balled feet. I began to sense this being as greatly meaningful and pushed it forward to interact with the human sphere, adding a dancing fairy rider atop the books, and I encircled her with flowers. Vectors began emanating downward, and then some teats emerged from below the creature, as if to confirm the interactivity in that direction. It was at this point that I began to think of the She-Wolf of Rome, and I etched a modern city, lightly, below its belly.

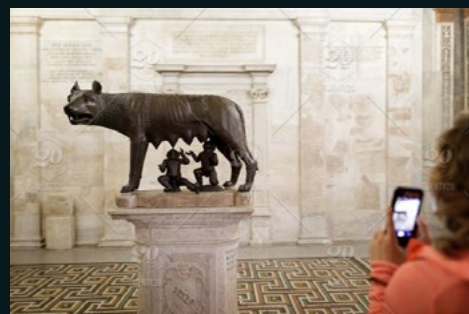
* * *

The mythic She-Wolf of Rome heralds from the story of Romulus and Remus, twins born to the Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, and fathered by either Hercules or Mars. The twins were sent to their sea-death in a basket by a fearful king, and washed upon the banks of the river Tiber. There, the she wolf Lupa found the twins and suckled them to health. Romulus and Remus eventually founded Rome, despite vicious fighting between them which culminated (according to some versions) in fratricidal murder. The malign twins are originary for the internal political strife that Rome is often credited for, and they are a useful metaphor for political dysfunction, as well as aggression and a vampiric relationship with nature, qualities that still shape our experience today.

Considering the relationship of my sketched chimera to the she-wolf Lupa was epiphanic. The way it bent and updated the sentiments of that myth of civic founding lit a candle in my mind’s eye. This, I thought, was no mere drawing. This was an emblem, a banner to consider the future, or the continuation of my craft. It was a flag upon a lunar surface, taking back the symbolic, fantastic, esoteric and automatistic for a new scope and directive. I carved a black titular statement on an open part of the page: The Wolf of New Rome, and it was a new Rome(anticism) that I think I was alluding to.

Below I wrote a subtitle:

“The Essence of Contemporary Motion Away from Surrealism, Toward a Manifestation of...”

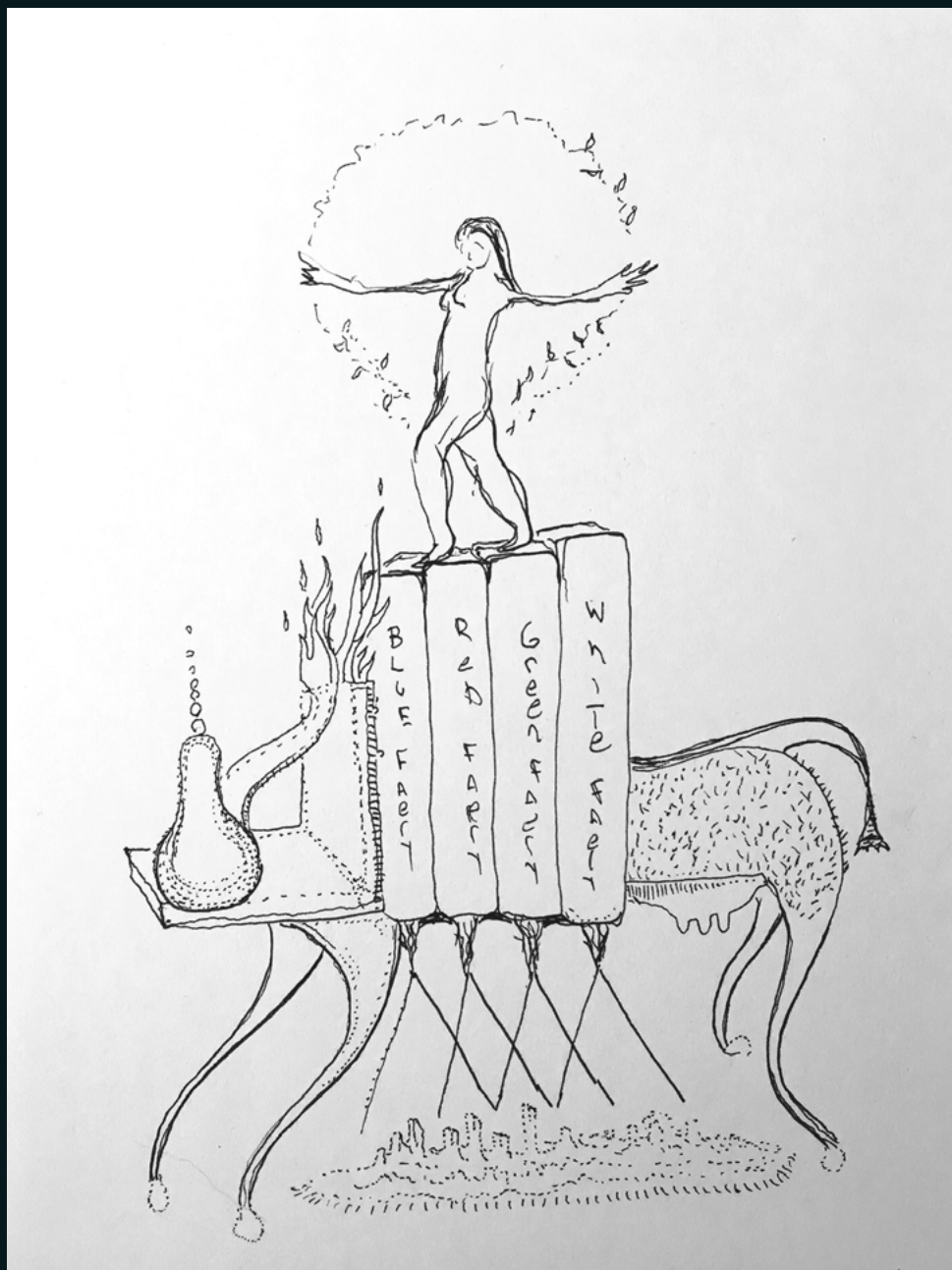


* * *

The Wolf of New Rome opposes all of Romulus and Remus' missteps. She does not suckle two temperamental babies, but is danced upon instead by a fairy, a lesser Goddess who is hopeful, and bountiful, with floral associations to Persephone and other deities uniting femininity with the pastoral. But, she also is in majesty atop the Wolf. She is able to hover above the sublime qualities of nature, and beckons us to join her in that nymphine volition of confidence and communion. Traces of the sublime, which Lupa represents, can be found in much folkloric narrative, such as the Blue Fairy Book, but just as often one finds in those tales a conversational nature, one where the human is not so much in a position of combined possession and parasitism (the baby's familiar majesty of helplessness), but rather in a trance like *procession*, along with the trees and mosses, glamoured by and invited into the land of Fae.

In reference to today, this depiction grants a particular spin on the future, allowing the human to be both above and aligned with nature. Unlike for Romulus and Remus, the human relationship with the wolf is potentially symbiotic or even erotic, rather than natal, defying modern ideas of dominion in favor of a kind of anthrozoological rapture. This same rapture can be seen culturally in the eager, fantastical animal companionship and costuming found in popular otaku culture. This is often represented by Speculative artists, such as Jason Martin, Irena Jurek and Gennevieff Guffman, among many others. In my own painting of 2008, Museum, I depicted what was essentially an idealized version of myself as the "feral drawer," with a wolf mask, and in Metropolis (2016), the Western Wizard wore the mask of the dog.

The Wolf of New Rome also elaborates a new means of social cohesion, illustrated by the cast of colored light emanating from the wolf's teets and over the city. In the drawing, the RBGW (red blue green white) Fairy Books unburden themselves with overlapping vectors of color, which settle over the city, taking the place of Lupa's pure milk of sustenance. This rain of color alludes, in my estimation, to the idea of a new exegetical manifest born of the general cosmological urge, over-washing the civic in a cascade of conjoining theologies. Color, in many populist articulations of exit, is the way that syntax is understood and balance is rendered. In example, in Magic: The Gather-



ing it is through colored “Mana” that a virtual cosmogenesis becomes possible, and the same can be seen in a litany of similar world building efforts. Indeed, these spaces are not to be overlooked as simple play, they are increasingly enveloping, and can also be gateways to new theological endeavors. Spiritual But Not Religious adherents may codify the noetic with principles of one or more traditions of symbolic apprehension --color associations are just one representative example among them. This world view is already nurturing for many, though perhaps its potential to be imbued with subsuming ethics has yet to fully arrive.

The Wolf of New Rome also articulates notions of its own genesis. Its body is graced with metaphors of artistic technique. The beast’s head, which was also its beginning, is a pear, an image of generosity. We are reminded by this of art’s potential gift of free communicative articulation, rather than its commodity status or entrainment to a kind of evangelism of the day-to-day. The pear is a sustaining figment for those who view or consume it, but also plants its seeds. As flames approach the books across its back, The Wolf of New Rome’s articulation is not to remain beholden to the past, through folklore or archetypal adherence, but instead to let the abstractive or prosaic rework the mythic, and see what may flourish in its wake.



MICRODOSING THE PROLETKULT: Psychedelics, the Neo-Comrades and the Multiversal Revolution

• Emilie Trice •

This essay will consider the various impacts of the current “psychedelic renaissance” on our collective future through the works of several contemporary philosophers and writers, among them Donna Haraway, Frances Dyson, Aldous Huxley, Michael Pollan and McKenzie Wark. The *Philosophy of the Living Experience* (1913), written by Alexander Bogdanov in 1913 and analyzed by Wark in their book *Molecular Red* will be a cornerstone of my argument that, as a society, we are approaching a convergence of situations (otherwise known as a tipping point), which has the potential for environmental and socio-economic upheaval, essentially “the proletkult revolution” as laid out over a century ago by Bogdanov. This convergence is comprised of four post-modern developments (each of which influences the other): 1. New understandings of consciousness enabled by emerging scientific technologies; 2. The end of psychedelic prohibition; 3. The rise of Silicon Valley and the Internet; 4. The destabilizing and all-encompassing “trouble” of climate change and neoliberalism.

Due to this convergence, our understanding of consciousness- essentially our understanding of reality as we know it- is changing, as well as our convictions about who we are, where we come from and what our shared future might look like. A metaphorical barometer for such shifts in our collective understanding, at least in North America, is the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association, currently in its fifth edition (published 2013). In light of this coming post-post-modern convergence, it seems likely that the DSM-6’s definition of schizophrenia will need to be adjusted, in order to accommodate a new neurovariant “multiversal” existence, comprising multiple interpretations of what constitutes reality, perception and the self. As a cultural artifact, the DSM reflects the current state of our sociological “norms” and, through collective authorship, it “self-regulates” by updating its definitions as the zeitgeist evolves. Looking much further ahead, the eventual outcome of this convergence could be nothing short of revolution: the fall of capitalism and a proactive collective commitment to restoring balance, both ecologically and socio-economically. This will be the work of the Neo-Comrades.

The Neo-Comrades are the future manifestation of Bogdanov’s “proletkult,” a mash-up term combining “the proletariat” and “culture.” The proletkult is a cultural, social and political movement for the advancement of “labor” (what we would refer to today as “the 99%”) with a three-fold mission:

to change labor, by merging art and work; to change everyday life, by developing the collaborative life within the city and changing gender roles and norms; and to change affect, to create new structures of feeling, to overcome the emotional friction of organizing the labor that in turn organizes nature around its appetites.¹

¹ McKenzie Wark. *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*. Verso (London, New York), 2016, 35.

In 1919 Bogdanov founded the Proletarian University, as his “most ambitious plan for proletkult was in higher education.”² As Wark notes, the Proletarian University’s “goal was not just to transmit knowledge but to transform selves.”³ The proletkult movement sought to advance its mission through three “practices”: “Creativity - to overturn the fetish of the individual creator; to reveal the role of the unconscious in creation....Collectivity - to work in groups...Universalism - to break down the division of labor.”⁴ However, Bogdanov himself stated that there are no universals. “There can be no absolute and eternal philosophical truth” and this last “practice of universalism” proved a “conceptual problem” for the movement.⁵ Wark explains, “Universals are projections beyond the limit of a given experience into a worldview, which may be expressed in literature or philosophy or religion.”⁶ Bogdanov’s philosophy is termed “empirio-monism” and is grounded in his belief that the proletariat should “become co-creators of the whole of social organization.”⁷ This philosophy combined ideas of Karl Marx and Ernst Mach, but also constituted what Wark terms a “detournement of philosophy.”⁸ Detournement is a term borrowed from the Situationists, an avant garde group of social revolutionaries that was active in Europe during the post-war years (1957-1972), and refers to all combined knowledge that came before including folk knowledge (“low theory”), scientific knowledge (“high theory”) and everything in between.



Emilie Trice | мультивселенной I | 2019 | digital collage

One important thinker to emerge from Bogdanov’s Proletariat University was Andrei Platonov. Platonov took Bogdanov’s “labor point of view” and “added the persona of the comrade.”⁹ According to Wark, Platonov was interested in “the struggle to become comrades together...to understand Platonov, then, is to understand what is between com-

2 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 38.

3 Ibid, 39.

4 Ibid. 35-36.

5 Ibid, 36.

6 Ibid, 15.

7 Ibid. 28.

8 Ibid, 13.

9 Ibid, 61. 10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 60.

12 Ibid, 59.

13 Donna Haraway. *The Cyborg Manifesto*, 1995/1991

14 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 61.

rades as a plural but not universal point of view.”¹⁰ The practice of tektology, another pillar of Bogdanov’s proletkult revolution, is a “premature attempt at a systems theory”¹¹ that “makes not only all humans comrades, but all things comrades.”¹² Wark also makes the connection that the Cyborg, as conjured in Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*,¹³ “is a contemporary kind of Platonovian conceptual persona.”¹⁴ Haraway herself clarifies in her book *Staying with the Trouble* that “Cyborgs are kin,” another word for comrades, “whelped in the litter of post-World War II information technologies and globalized digital bodies, politics and cultures of human and not-human sorts.” She updates her earlier *Cyborg Manifesto* thesis by insisting that “Cyborgs are not machines....nor are they machine-organism hybrids. They are, rather, imploded entities....full of multiscalar, multitemporal, multimaterial critters of both living and nonliving persuasions.”¹⁵ This statement, full of multiversal allusions, infers a kind of schizophrenia, one both embodied and immersive, as all boundaries have been blurred. Wark also notes that “Both Marx and Platonov have moments of a kind of schizophrenic vision, where subjects and objects appear to dissolve completely into their constituent processes, not just of production and reproduction but also of disruption and disorder.”¹⁶

The word “schizophrenia” is derived from two modern Latin (Greek) words: *skhizein* ‘to split’ and *phrēn* ‘mind.’ This etymology implies that the mind has broken apart and is no longer “whole,” but fractured. Schizophrenia is currently considered by the DSM 5 to be a spectrum, not a discrete illness, with symptoms that persist and fade, and which may allude to other disorders (OCD, bipolar disorder) that are, by definition, interwoven across the schizophrenic spectrum.¹⁷ This echoes Wark’s observation that “Systems mesh at the margin. Nothing is entirely discrete.” This, he declares, “is the basic principle of Bogdanov’s monism.”¹⁸ It’s also the basic principle of Donna Haraway’s argument that nothing is completely independent or alone. As Wark notes, “Bogdanov’s systems are curiously less autopoietic than they are what Donna Haraway calls sympoietic.”¹⁹ Sympoiesis is explained by Haraway as “collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries,” in contrast to autopoiesis, defined as: “‘self-producing’ autonomous units ‘with self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic and predictable.’”²⁰

However, Haraway also believes that these two terms are not mutually exclusive and that “sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis,”²¹ much like an Ouroboros, or a spiral that swallows its origin. In this context, the theorized schizophrenic should be understood as a dissolution of the modules in the brain that allow our consciousness to separate object and subject. Frances Dyson, in her book *Sounding New Media*, likens this condition to the immersive experience of VR wherein the “user” can no longer distinguish between the virtual and “the real.”²² It is precisely at this fluctuating metaphysical boundary, between embodiment and immersion, that we must “go visiting,”²³ to borrow a term from Haraway (who borrowed it from Hannah Arendt), in order to gain perspective and challenge our assumptions.

In *Sounding New Media*, Dyson discusses the importance of auditory stimuli for situating ourselves within time and space. She cites “the concept of schizophrenia” put forward by R. Murray Schafer” as “‘sounds without a source’ that stand for ‘disembodiment as a feature of modern alienation.’” If a sound has no apparent source, she explains, still citing Schafer, “it does not reside in our world. It radically bisects it...We thus face a choice between a transcendental experience and a psychotic one.”²⁶ The DSM 5 also makes room for religious or transcendental expe-

15 Donna Haraway. *Staying With The Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press (Durham and London), 2016. 104-105.

16 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 165.

17 American Psychiatric Association (APA). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, Fifth Edition. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. file:///Users/emiliatrice/Downloads/APA_DSM-5-Schizophrenia.pdf 18 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 49.

19 Ibid, 60.

20 Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble*, 61.

21 Ibid, 58.

22 Frances Dyson, *Sounding New Media, Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. University of California Press (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA), 2009, 141.

23 Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble*, 127.

24 Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, 292.

25 DSM-5. Accessed online.

26 Dyson, *Sounding New Media*, 132.

27 DSM-5. Accessed online.

riences, noting that “Hallucinations may be a normal part of religious experience in certain cultural contexts”²⁷ and thus, not psychotic. This allowance verifies that social norms are not fixed, but dynamic - meaning these definitions can change depending on context, and will change as societal attitudes (and laws) shift to accommodate emerging subcultures.

The DSM 5’s definition of “gender dysphoria” (previously listed in the DSM 4 as “gender identity disorder”), for example, has recently received more attention in response to shifting societal attitudes towards transgender individuals (see “gender variance” in the forthcoming DSM 6). Similarly, its definition of homosexuality as a mental disorder was revisited and ultimately removed from the DSM in 1973 as prevailing attitudes towards the gay and lesbian communities shifted in the wake of the civil rights movement. As a cultural artifact that seeks to organize “empirical” knowledge, the DSM acknowledges its own intersectionality and the positive and negative outcomes it can cause:

not only determines how mental disorders are defined and diagnosed, it also impacts how people see themselves and how we see each other. While diagnostic terms facilitate clinical care and access to insurance coverage that supports mental health, these terms can also have a stigmatizing effect.²⁸

“Stigmatizing” is an understatement; although homosexuality was scientifically declassified as a “mental disorder” in the 1970s, it has taken decades for the LGBTQ community to receive the same civil liberties and widespread social acceptance as the heteronormative population (not to mention the fact that many church groups also continue to openly discriminate against homosexuals today in 2019). Still, widespread burgeoning acceptance of the LGBTQ community harkens back to Bogdanov’s second pillar of the Proletkult mission: “to change everyday life, by (developing the collaborative life within the city and) changing gender roles and norms.”²⁹ Wark, themselves, is actually gender variant, hence the plural pronouns. The Neo-Comrades are already at work.

Simply stated, Bogdanov’s empirio-monism sought to prove, scientifically (or empirically) that there are no absolutes. Wark notes that, like Mach, Bogdanov’s monism resisted the “physics and philosophy of his time, which insisted too strongly on a version of a metaphysical real that could not be assayed and tested and was likely to be a barrier to further knowledge.”³⁰ This brings us to the first post-modern development of the coming convergence, namely new understandings of consciousness as enabled by emerging scientific technologies. In 2017, cognitive neuroscientist Anil Seth gave a Ted Talk that has been viewed online over 10mil times (7mil on Ted’s website and 4mil on YouTube). In his talk, Seth describes a “renaissance” over the last twenty-five years in the field of scientific research into consciousness, aided by bio-technological mechanics including fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), which measures brain activity through blood-oxygen levels (BOLD).

Such techniques of measuring our innermost biological functions became ubiquitous in the scientific community during the 1990s. Seth concludes his talk by stating that, “Our own individual inner universe, our way of being conscious, is just one possible way of being conscious...with a greater sense of understanding comes a greater realization

28 DSM-5 excerpted note. Accessed online.

29 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 35.

30 Wark, *Molecular Red*. 126.

31 Ted Talk, Anil Seth, 2017.

32 MIT Tech Review, “A Quantum Experiment Suggests There’s No Such Thing As Objective Reality, 12 March 2019. <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/613092/a-quantum-experiment-suggests-theres-no-such-thing-as-objective-reality/>

that we are a part of and not apart from the rest of nature.”³¹ A recent MIT Technology review headline goes even further, reading “A quantum experiment suggests there is no such thing as objective reality.”³² It would appear that Mach and, by extension, Bogdanov were correct in their dismissal of one “metaphysical real.”

With increased interest into the nature of consciousness, and with new technological tools to effectively measure and illustrate the physiology of what was previously invisible, comes a revived interest in the role of psychedelics in accessing alternate states of consciousness and thereby alternate realities - the multiverse. Thus, it should come as no surprise that psychedelics are also currently undergoing a “renaissance,” as noted by Newsweek, one of the most mainstream publications in North America³³ and by Michael Pollan in his 2018 book *How to Change Your Mind*. This renaissance follows more than half a century of legal prohibition in the modern world (as spearheaded by the CIA), as well as centuries of religious persecution (as spearheaded by The Church, writ large).

In 1953, the British writer Aldous Huxley contacted Dr. Humphry Osmond, a prominent psychiatrist who was using psychedelics in his treatment research, and offered himself as a test subject for further studies. Huxley had already achieved literary notoriety in the 1930s with his dystopian novel *Brave New World*, widely considered as uncannily prescient in relation to our present day society. Ironically, his novel depicted “civilized” society as having adopted a self-regulating pill-popping practice using a consciousness-expanding, happiness-ensuring drug called soma that seems to predict the institutionalization of LSD. However, by speculating the division of society into the “civilized” and the “savages,” *Brave New World* still embraces a singular ideology, disseminated via the all-governing authoritative institution, rather than a “multiversal” paradigm. Everything is regulated to ensure maximum social stability and mechanistic optimization - Ford and model T have replaced God and the cross, emotions are engineered, consciousness is conditioned from birth, consumption is calibrated for equilibrium, the labels “mother” and “father” have become obscenities, and the individual has ceased to exist - “everyone belongs to everyone else”³⁹ and “all men are physico-chemically equal.”⁴⁰ Those who do not fit into this engineered society are banished to remote islands with suboptimal climates. It’s a perverse future-mapping of the proletkult revolution, in which the establishment has embraced an orthodoxy of happiness, at the expense of other forms of self expression and pursuits. “That’s another item in the cost of stability. It isn’t only art that’s incompatible with happiness; it’s also science. Science is dangerous...”⁴¹ These characters manifest the cyborg as described by Haraway, “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism.”⁴² They have no mothers and fathers, only institutions. Similarly, Platonov declared that “comrades are orphans by choice.”⁴³ Through this constellation of envisioned “civilized” cyborg comrades, an alternative future society begins to take shape, one in which the pendulum of progress has swung so severely that it has separated from the fulcrum

33 Gander, Kashmira. “FDA Approves Psychedelic Magic Mushrooms Ingredient Psilocybin for Depression Trial,” Newsweek, 23 August 2018. <https://www.newsweek.com/fda-approves-psychedelic-magic-mushrooms-ingredient-psilocybin-depression-1086759>

34 Lee, Martin A. and Shlain, Bruce. *Acid Dreams. The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the 60s and Beyond*. Grove Press; Revised edition, 1994. 65-67

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid, 20.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition, New York, 2006, 47.

40 Ibid, 74.

42 Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, 293.

43 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 107.

44 Ibid, 55

45 Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, Penguin Press (NY), 2018, 19.

- “stability” cannot be artificially ensured and mechanistically maintained, that is simply a veneer behind which totalitarianism is still pulling all the strings. The Neo-Comrades will thus need to allow for flux in their socio-political equilibrium, in order to avoid simply substituting one authoritarian regime for another. Huxley and Dr. Osmond coined the term “psychedelic” in 1957⁴⁴ which essentially means “mind-manifesting.”⁴⁵

Osmond’s research supported LSD’s positive effects on treating alcoholism, having “cured” more than forty percent of his patients.⁴⁶ That same year, Life magazine published a story on the “magic mushroom” that was seventeen pages long, “laudatory in every way,” and introduced psychedelics to a “mass audience” on a spectacularly optimistic level.⁴⁷ The Beats, especially Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, were turned on to LSD and psychedelics through Huxley and another famous writer, Ken Kesey (who had been part of a CIA-led LSD study) and, in turn, they influenced the musicians of the age, leading to a counter-cultural social revolution that culminated in the 1968 “Summer of Love.” Two other actors in this cultural phenomenon who deserve recognition are Dr. Alfred Hubbard, an ex-spy and pilot who administered LSD to a number of prominent international politicians and helped create Silicon Valley (and who was close friends with both Huxley and Osmond), as well as Dr. Timothy Leary, a Harvard academic and psychologist who became the enfant terrible of the psychedelic movement and contributed to its demonization by both the governmental and academic establishments. In *How To Change Your Mind*, Pollan interviews Peter Schwartz, a noted futurist and engineer, who states, “I have no doubt that all that Hubbard LSD all of us had taken had a big effect on the birth of Silicon Valley.”⁴⁸ A full-blown cultural civil war was thus spawned by the effects of psychedelics entering the North American collective consciousness. The Neo-Comrades were taking shape, defining their postmodern avant garde culture and generating momentum, but they were lacking one major post-modern development to effectively organize: the Internet. The proletkult revolution would have to wait.

The rapid rise of the 1960s counterculture movement was distressing for the US government, which was dealing with an increasingly unpopular (and un-winnable) war in Vietnam, as well as intense paranoia about the encroaching communist threat from the Soviet Union. In order to subdue the counterculture movement and its moral resistance to the war and “the enemy,” they went after the drugs, so as to dismantle the mindset. In addition to being criminalized, LSD was demonized in the press as producing full-blown and irreversible psychosis. The government began a veritable propaganda war, disseminated by the mass media, that led to widespread mistrust of psychedelic mind-altering substances. It was only with the fairly-recent rise of Silicon Valley that the scales began to tip.

A quick Google search on “microdosing in Silicon Valley” returns pages full of article links from media sources as mainstream as The New York Times, The Huffington Post, Forbes, The Atlantic, The Independent and Wired, among others, all published within the last five years.⁵² Microdosing is the act of ingesting “sub-perceptual” amounts of psychedelics. The Silicon Valley workers, the high-tech proletariat, the Neo-Comrades of now, seem united in their insistence that microdosing enhances their creativity, improves their mood and broadens their perception and empathy. This invokes the second practice of Bogdanov’s mission-driven proletkult - “Creativity - to overturn the fetish of the individual creator; to reveal the role of the unconscious in creation”⁵³ - as well as one of the mission’s core goals - “to change affect, to create new structures of feeling.”⁵⁴ In August 2018, The Guardian reported that the first-ever study on the effects of microdosing would take place at the Imperial College in London.⁵⁵ That announcement, however, was predated by another article, published by Newsweek less than one month earlier, declaring that

46 Tanne, Janice Hopkins. Humphry Osmond (obituary). *BMJ* (UK), 2004 Mar 20; 328(7441): 713. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/journals/3/>

47 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 72

48 Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, 183.

49 Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 24.

50 Ibid, 25,

51 Ibid, 24.

52 https://www.google.com/search?q=microdosing+in+silicon+valley&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS702US703&oq=microdosing+in+sili con&aqs=chrome.0.35i39j69i57j69i59j0.4639j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

53 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 35.

54 Ibid.

55 Sarah Boseley. “First ever trials on the effects of microdosing LSD set to begin,” *The Guardian*, 1.Sept.2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/sep/01/first-ever-trials-on-the-effects-of-microdosing-lsd-set-to-begin>

56 Gander, Kashmira. “FDA Approves Psychedelic Magic Mushrooms Ingredient Psilocybin for Depression Trial,” *Newsweek*, 23 August 2018.

the FDA had approved the use of psilocybin, the psychedelic ingredient in so-called “magic mushrooms,” for a drug study on patients with “treatment-resistant” depression,⁵⁶ thereby signaling a potential end of “official” psychedelic prohibition.⁵⁷ The stage is thus set for the second development of the coming convergence, as catalyzed by the third development, Silicon Valley itself.

Like schizophrenia, LSD and psychedelics fracture (and even abolish, albeit temporarily) the ego. “I drink to my annihilation!”⁵⁸ declare the civilized in *Brave New World* before ingesting soma. In his widely publicized and impressively comprehensive book, *How to change your mind*, Michael Pollan provides strong evidence and first-hand accounts that connect the ego dissolution engendered through psychedelics with overcoming one’s fear of death and “laying down the sword” or relinquishing one’s defenses. The loss of ego, Pollan argues, “is the key psychological driver of the experience. It is this that gives us the mystical experience, the death rehearsal process, the overview effect the notion of a mental reboot, the making of new meanings and the experience of awe.”⁵⁹ The so-called “Default Mode Network” (DMN), the part of our brain seemingly responsible for our ego-driven selves, first entered the neurological lexicon in 2001. Recent studies have supported the conclusion that alterations to the DMN are empirically correlated to “ego-dissolution.” Psychedelics “reduce the stability and integrity” of the DMN and other brain networks, reducing “the degree of separateness or segregation between them; that is, they induce network disintegration and desegregation.”⁶⁰ The effects are “phenomenologically resonant with the notion of ‘aberrant salience’ in schizophrenia research.”⁶¹ Psychedelics are thus an apparatus that enable the multiversal fracture of our neurological “default mode network.” This apparatus allows for a significant “becoming-with,”⁶² as described by Haraway, through a “diffraction” of the boundaries between object and subject.⁶³ Embodiment becomes immersion, revealing those invisible threads that link us to everything living and nonliving, to the past and the future, to the multiverse. This is where we find, according to Wark, a “meta-utopian fiction,” but it could also be the apparatus through which we learn to “organize between things.”⁶⁴ Wark: “For perhaps we need a more plural conception of utopian possibility to match the plurality of sensations and the worldviews of the times.”⁶⁵ This is the space where the Neo-Comrades converge and mobilize.

With this shift in our collective perception of what constitutes “reality,” it seems clear that other categories and labels will also need revision. There will be a shift from emphasizing the one to emphasizing the many (although hopefully without the totalitarianism of *Brave New World*). “Universal” will become a pejorative term for those individuals who choose to remain completely isolated. “Multiversal” will be widely adopted instead, as acknowledgement of the many states-of-being accessible through alternative consciousnesses. The stigma surrounding psychedelics and, by extension, schizophrenia will continue to lift. The DSM-6 will revise their schizophrenic spectrum as “multiversal-cognitive variant.” Even Pollan begs the question: “Is it possible that the perceptions of schizophrenics, people tripping on psychedelics and young children are, at least in certain instances, more accurate - less influenced by expectation and therefore more faithful to reality - than those of sane and sober adults?”⁶⁶ Newfound scientific evidence, enabled by new technologies, will converge with new stories about the positive effects of psychedelics in treating disorders like addiction and depression and increasing creativity and empathy. These stories will spread to

<https://www.newsweek.com/fda-approves-psychedelic-magic-mushrooms-ingredient-psilocybin-depression-1086759>

57 Ibid.

58 Huxley, *Brave New World*, 81.

59 Pollan, *How to Change your Mind*, 389.

60 Robin L. Carhart-Harris, et al. “Neural correlates of the LSD experience revealed by multimodal neuroimaging,” *PNAS*, April 26, 2016 113.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1518377113>

61 Ibid.

62 Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 4.

63 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 154.

64 Wark, *Molecular Red*, 122.

65 Ibid.

66 Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, 262.

67 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 132.



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other values,”⁶⁸ write Erin Manning and Brian Massumi in their book *Thought in the Act*. As Haraway writes, “The Capitalocene must be relationally unmade...”⁶⁹ meaning that we need to collectively undo the pathos of capitalism and its self-destructive id: neoliberalism. She poses the question: “What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social?”⁷⁰ The answer: Revolution. Haraway quotes a speech from 2012 by complex systems engineer Brad Werner, “scientifically speaking, global capitalism ‘has made the depletion of resources so rapid, convenient and barrier-free that ‘earth-human’ systems are becoming dangerously unstable,” thus concluding that the only “scientific thing to do is revolt!”⁷¹ Haraway cautiously embraces this imperative, while asking the always poignant and thoughtful question: but how?⁷²

the masses via the internet (as they already are) and maybe even through books (!) thereby unprogramming years of anti-psychedelic propaganda.

Such “activated” stories will allow for what Haraway describes as “ongoingness”: that is, nurturing, or inventing or discovering or somehow cobbling together ways for living and dying well with each other in the tissues of an earth whose very habitability is threatened.”⁶⁷ The Neo-Comrades will emerge en masse and collectively organize, both digitally via the internet and IRL.

While Silicon Valley has played an important role in connecting the masses via the internet’s myriad social and web-platforms, Silicon Valley is by no means innocent in the acceleration of socio-economic inequality; despite their (self-proclaimed) best intentions, they are knitting - and trapped in - the fractal web of neoliberalism. We now arrive at the fourth and final development inherent to the convergence - the all encompassing trouble of neoliberalism and climate change. Capitalism will have to be replaced with another system in order for any social or cultural movement to sustain itself. “The capitalist economy is formally dedicated to quantitative growth, over and above all

68 Erin Manning and Brian Massumi. *Thought in the Act*, Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, London), 2014, 12.1

69 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 50.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid, 47.

72 Ibid.

Ironically, the solution comes from a schizophrenic mathematician, John Nash, who won the Nobel Prize in 1994 and was the subject of an award-winning movie from 2001 entitled “A Beautiful Mind.” Nash’s prize-winning theory on governing dynamics argued that it’s best to do what is “best for the individual AND the group.” This theory is at odds with capitalism and neoliberalism, which is inherently individualistic - ie “I win if I do what is best for me and me alone” or “what’s best for me is best for everyone.” The Nash equilibrium is also considered to be a foundation of what’s come to be known as game theory. Game theory connotes play, which Haraway identifies as “the most powerful and diverse activity for rearranging old things and proposing new things, new patterns of feeling and action and for crafting safe enough ways to tangle with each other in conflict and collaboration.”⁷³ If we can collectively enact Nash’s model, if we can replace capitalism with collectivism, we might just stand a chance of slowing our collective extinction enough to regain some equilibrium.

Donna Haraway wrote, “I want to stay with the trouble and the only way I know to do that is in generative joy, terror, and collective thinking.”⁷⁴ As Platonov stated, “We are all comrades only when the trouble is identical for everyone.”⁷⁵ Climate change makes the trouble identical, and thus makes us all comrades - we are all inhabitants of this earth, this ecosystem. Becoming fully immersed in the ecosystem, as Pollan writes, necessitates that we “cultivate this mode of consciousness...(which) requires us to transcend our subjectivity...widen its circle so far that it takes in, besides ourselves, other people and, beyond that, all of nature.” He goes on to confess, “Now I understand how a psychedelic could help us to make precisely that move, from the first-person singular to the plural and beyond. Under its influence, a sense of our interconnectedness...is felt, becomes flesh.”⁷⁶ If equilibrium (or whatever is closest) is what we are collectively aiming for, in order to restore some balance (or something resembling harmony) to our ecological and socio-economic systems, then Nash’s theory offers one empirical bridge for an alternative construction. Psychedelics offer an apparatus to help us understand the urgency of this bridge-building, to see ourselves as we really are, enmeshed in nature and each other, a plurality manifest throughout the multiverse. We must unite science and spirituality in order to evolve, without succumbing to totalitarianism. Microdosing might not be enough - we need to shatter the ego in order to go visiting the multiverse - then we must return, with stories, to effect and sustain meaningful change. We can cross over, from disruption to stabilization, or at the very least we can learn to navigate the surf, to ride the waves, if-you-will. As Neo-Comrades, our acceptance and exploration of the multiverse and variant states of consciousness will be critical for the proletkult revolution. It is also critical for our survival.

⁷³ Ibid, 150.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 31

⁷⁵ Wark, *Molecular Red*, 75.

⁷⁶ Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, 271.

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The Eternal Ledge: Janaka Stucky's *Ascend, Ascend*

• Max Razdow •

Ascend, Ascend was legendarily evoked by Janaka Stucky: written upon a two-hundred foot long scroll during a creative vigil at the “Star & Snake” artist residency, in the lakes region of New Hampshire. Like its intensive psychical manifestation, the scope that Stucky attempted to portray in his poem was ambitious, striving to depict a movement through hidden spheres, over arcs of mortal dissolution and re-substantiation, to reveal the quality of its presence in the now. Or, as Stucky calls it, an attempt to “establish the ecstasy that can never be established.” Stucky’s verse navigates by providing a union of opposites, which is not unfamiliar in Surrealism, alchemy, or poetry in general, but has been reinvented by the poet in a way that is substantial. While it is Stucky’s deep connection to concepts of self-hood and the cosmological firmament which allows him to lucidly navigate this realm, it is also worth looking at some of the underpinning techniques of the poem’s artistry that allow us to follow along.

Stucky uses principles of multivalent mapping in *Ascend, Ascend* (i.e. combining naturalism, astrology, alchemy, qabalah) to unfold layers of symbol that tend toward infinite iterations of felt and imagined phenomenon. But, over and over again, these utterances are paired with notions of non-dual thought, which tend toward an aporia of signifiers, seeking a realization of the inseparability of form and nothingness. The collision of these ideals results sometimes in a sense of blindness, where opposites congeal and also negate each other, and it may be that this very paradox powers the aphoristic and illustrative invocations that *Ascend, Ascend* locates. The formula of creation revealed in Stucky’s verse could be imagined as a force arising when two lesser forces pull upon each other, to dissolve the material that binds them to unleash energy (like in nuclear fission). Stucky refers to his own process by revealing its rooting in the most deeply mysterious temporal iota, the now:

“The secret immediate movement

From which the milk of our unknowing

Pours forth.”

In *Ascend, Ascend* we encounter all of this experientially like we experience breathing. Stucky seems conscious of this. Each couplet lasts approximately the length of one breath, existing in the realm of incantation as much as in the written form. In the poem’s breathed structure we are often given two distinct images which intermingle in opposition to each other. The first, perhaps the breath in, develops as a constructive Surrealism, marrying opposed schema that are braided through subtle correspondence, such as environmental and bodily imagery, or metaphysical notions and geometry. Then, we

are entreated to the breath out, where this image is given its antimatter: decomposed violently, expunged by abjection or set against Zen notions; and thus destroyed to be rebuilt in a different way:

“I ascend with agony a diamond forming

Like tears drying

In ten-thousand-year-old

Excrement of the dead.”

Stucky’s technique recalls the Vedic principles of Pravritti, the tendency to manifest, and Nivritti, the tendency to reabsorb into nothingness, two dialectical forces by which reality may be experienced. It also allows movement through an incredibly dense morass of symbol without immediate ideation, allowing the dreamer, dying a new death with each stanza, to wander anew.

This craft of constructing and negating churns image into image, creating an environment of flux, and allows Stucky to proceed in looking for passage where passage seems impossible. Readers may experience a plenum, where the intrinsic and extrinsic are tightly woven, and in relation to the larger themes in *Ascend, Ascend*, we can consider Stucky’s couplets as microcosms of the whole. Hence, a fractal geometry is revealed. However, *Ascend Ascend* is also successful in transmitting the experience of passage because its protagonist (or narrator) locates this macrocosm for us by way of signposts of repetition. This may be one of the more utilitarian lessons to be found in the work, for artists and writers wishing to create art that reverberates as cosmos. *Ascend, Ascend*’s repeated phrases anchor readers in space and become rungs on imagined ladders running up, down and across the axis mundi.

In stepping back (for a moment) to consider the historical framing of *Ascend, Ascend*, it may be useful to locate its relationship to *Howl*, Alan Ginsberg’s similarly beatific, epic poem from 1956. There are many similarities between the works, such as psychonautical conception stories, mutual ambition to find transcendent qualities in the mundane world, and the metaphoric utility found in impious language (for which Ginsburg, sixty five years ago, got in a lot of trouble). However, it is revealing to also look at the different ways that these themes are navigated in the two poems, separated by much cultural shifting. Ginsberg’s voice is often political. He engenders the transcendent process as a struggle of an imagined group of “angelheaded hipsters”, who are both wildly enlightened and hopelessly meager in their vasculations against cold realities. *Howl*’s struggle is one of a group of individuals vying for upheaval against the oppressive dominion of hardened structure, and while he does at times lionize this contingent, he often seems dubious, as well. *Ascend, Ascend*, meanwhile, is generally apolitical and inwardly focused. While certain turns of phrase pausit horrific

external gargoyles lingering for the traveler along its path, and mentions of a voiceless mass seem to recognize a haunting, Hobbesian image of humanity or culture at large, the journey generally seems to reflect the movement and perspective of a single soul against an essentially metaphysical backdrop. Exegetical experience is not, for Stucky, wrapped up in a generalized political mobilization, but instead develops as personal transformation, though the latter does not neglect the former entirely.

In this, there is affirmation. *Howl* asks how on earth we will find a connection to “the starry dynamo and the machinery of night;” *Ascend, Ascend* provides an answer: by empowering those things which are otherworldly and well loved, rather than ourselves in relation to them:

“And to the candle I give a spear

To the morning star a body of hemp

To abiding shame an ax

To the expected guest an oak tree

To the house the cemetery of the world around it...”

In this cathartic arming and unburdening of that in which we find universal love, perhaps we can leave behind the noetic, and turn both inward and outward: inward toward a locus of dynamic being, and outward toward the entire universe, which may respond. Indeed, a step toward Ginsburg and Stucky’s shared goals of cultural enlightenment may not be to pick up the spear too quickly, but to first turn to the spectral world for the perspective of the eternal, and swing from this precipice, with the brutal accuracy of the now.



