



SciPhi

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Cajal
de Vries
Gasko
Hurt
Johnson
Mechelke
Mina
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CONTENTS

CREW

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3 Editorial

4 « Falling Angels »

Adam Breckenridge

5 « Revolutionary Technologies»

C. Richard Patton

9 « Understanding Black Holes Through Science Fiction»

David Kyle Johnson

12 « The Philosopher's Wish»

Henry Gasko

15 « Progress Note: g'Kuyhelktu, Son of His Holiness, the Czar of g'Ctharta»

Thomas Tilton

17 « Travelling Theory in a Parallel Universe»

Mina

20 « Visions of the Night »

R. F. Mechelke

23 « Is it Live or is it Memorex? »

Avery Elizabeth Hurt

25 « Tales from the Political Void: The Dystopian Turn in Chilean Science Fiction? »

Dr. Gabriel Saldías Rossel

Dra. Carolina A. Navarrete González

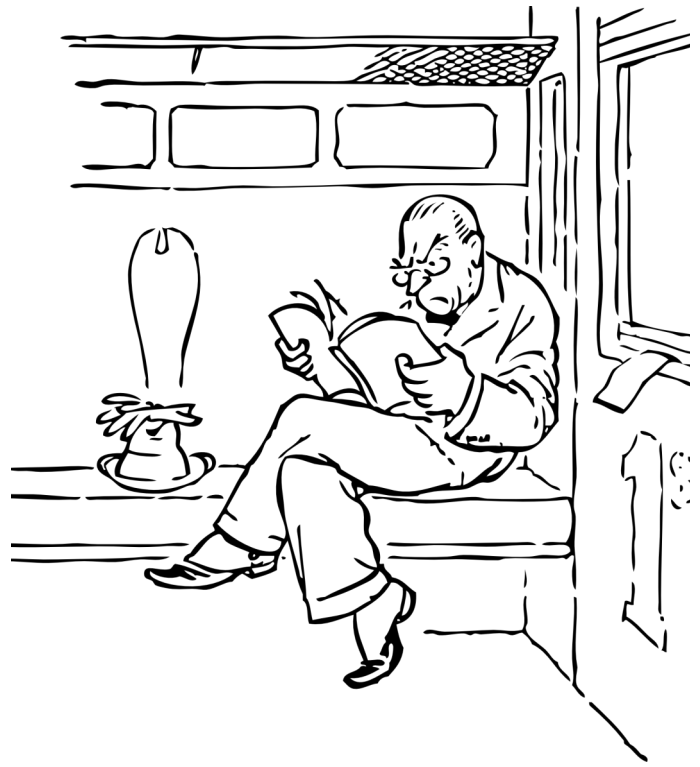
31 « Letter From a Slave-Making Ant (from Charlas de café [Coffee-Shop Chats]) by Santiago Ramón y Cajal »

Translation and Introductory Note by Emily Tobey

35 « A Quest for Perfect Symmetry»

Jetse de Vries

Editorial



One of the parables attributed to Christ tells of the evolutionary trials of seeds that fall unto various kinds of soil, particularly with reference to their subsequent growth prospects.

Now cyberspace certainly is a difficult terrain with plenty of rocky patches, so we at SPJ are well pleased that this summer issue of the relaunched journal augurs a bountiful harvest, with fresh fiction and essays from both established and new authors. We continue our series on rarely explored regional SF, this time with an expedition into Chilean dystopia. We also publish our first annotated translation: a seminal piece of early fictional non-fiction, brought to you in conjunction with our sister journal *Hélice*, where you will find a different(!) translation of the same work.

We were overwhelmed by the amount of stories submitted to us for publication in the spring issue, and by the number of visitors to the site. We are gradually making available the entire treasure trove of past SPJ stories (incl. those previously restricted to subscribers) and bring you new content with each quarterly issue. The comment sections remain fairly quiet, though, so don't be shy, please share your thoughts with our authors. Feedback (even, or particularly, critical) helps us, authors and editors alike, hone our craft.

We plan ambitious initiatives for the near future, most importantly a comprehensive, 'living' bibliography of virtually the entire modern corpus of speculative, fictional non-fiction, as a permanent feature to be hosted on our site. Our next call for submissions is not far off either (1-31 July). In August, we'll be represented at both the WorldCon in Dublin and TitanCon in Belfast (you may recognise Mariano and me by our SPJ T-shirts).

With these ongoing efforts we hope to ensure that the seeds planted by the founders of SPJ will continue to fall unto fertile ground and bear sparks of literary joy for many a friend of spec fic.

Yours truly,
the co-editors

~

Falling Angels

Adam Breckenridge

Glorious in flame the angels fell, tails stretching heavenwards, the thudding shockwaves of their impacts shattering all within distance of their cataclysmic song. But none ran from the angelic comets, even standing their place as the maudlin blue light of an angel's body streaked their way towards the ground they stood. This was hallowed death, godly combustion, and all who died in collision with the angels became worshipped as angels themselves, their ashes revered by the wretched survivors.

Churches formed in the hollows of the craters, shrines built to the few charred remains of angel and martyr they plucked from the fallow earth. In such desperate times as these, martyr's ashes and angel's dust were as fine a ground for faith as anything one could hope for. That wars broke out between rival craters is no cause for shock, nor is it cause for anger. What else do these wretched souls, who have at times been starved into devouring loved ones, have to live for but death? Let them choose death on their own terms. For many of them, dying in a meaningless battle is the closest meaning will ever come to entering their lives. They raise their swords to the fiery affirmation of the tumbling angels overhead, who cast their deathly light on the battlefield, and give thanks for what little snatches of glory they've been granted as they rush to die upon each other's swords.



And ever and ever the angels continue to fall, their dying light illuminating the earth in place of the sun, bombarding all who watch them with their blackening rays.

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Revolutionary Technologies

C. Richard Patton

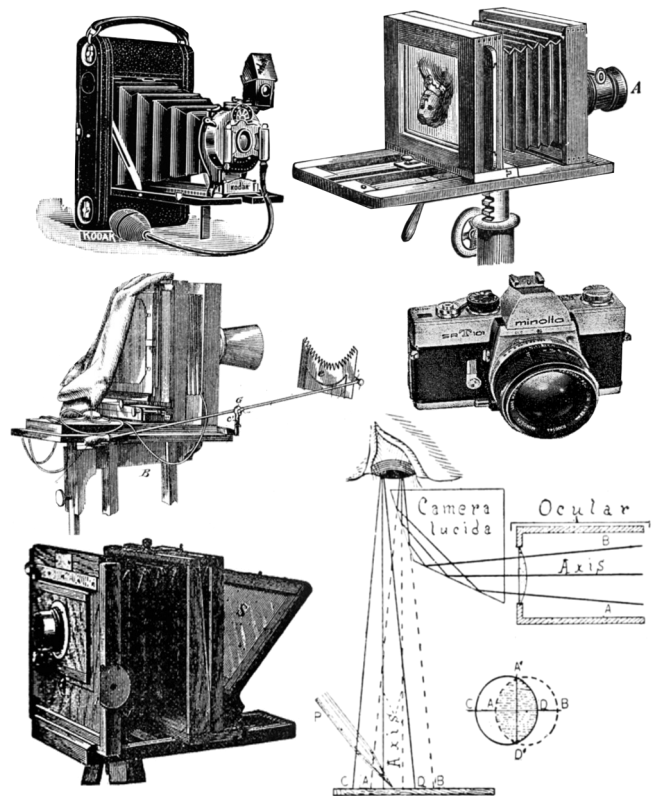
“Yes, Chip, there's risk -- more risk than going to work for Westinghouse. But they aren't doing what we do. We're making next generation changes to society, to the world, through technology. These career decisions, these life decisions... It's not about playing it safe. It's all about a lack of future regrets.”

That was it for me. I was in. I went to work for T. Colton, CEO of TPresence, Inc., in the spring of 2000. T was the most visionary and hip boss I'd had. Yes, everyone called him “T”, he may have had a full first name, but I never heard it, and I never asked. He wore his hair in a pony tail and at 29 was 5 years my junior.

It was the Internet bubble, Y2K had just fizzled. TPresence was a start-up spun out of Carnegie Mellon University. Their product was virtual reality. For me, after 8 years with big companies, the TPresence office was virtual reality, too.

We were innovators. Computer scientists, roboticists, digital artists. Free soft drinks. Free lunch. Nerf guns and Razor scooters for real battles among the cubicles and Unreal Gold on the servers for after-hours virtual wars. Flex time. A free flow of ideas. Cutting edge prototype hardware, Coppermine CPU's and prototype graphics chips. Intel loved us, we were building consumer appetites for faster iron.

Working at TPresence was cool, fast, fun, and it was over in 14 months. The deep-pocketed backers, the Oscar winning actor, the tool inventor from the infomercials, the resort owners, they dried up as the Internet bubble burst. We'd blown through 5 million dollars and all we'd ever produced were a couple of wicked cool demos, zero sales. Holodesk, the virtual world where you could join your friends as a customized 3-D avatar and shop, chat, play gravity-defying sports, or just hang out, peaked at slightly over 200,000 non-paying members. We never asked them for a dime.



Early in the summer of 2001, as salaries were halved and the vintage Charlie's Angels pinball machine was sold, optimism waned and tempers flared. The headcount peaked at 32. The girl who ran Human Resources quit first. Giving out five figure signing bonuses was fun, but she wanted no part of the blood bath to come.

Others stressed and left, too. T Colton was forced out by the Board of Directors. Some of us clung to the dream. The following phrase appeared one day on our main white board: "Forgive us our Tpresences, as we forgive those who Tpresence against us." No one erased it. It remained there, in blue low-odor dry erase ink, during the auction. I myself bought a Steelcase desk and 18 computer keyboards, including two Naturals, for exactly twenty-three bucks. It was over.

###

TPresence was prologue. T called me aside at our off-site failure party following the auction.

"The shutdown timing is actually pretty good. A few of us are starting something new. We'd like you to join us."

So that's how I became one of six founding employees at the phoenix company, Revolutionary Technologies, Inc. We just called it RevTech. At least that's the nickname we started with. RevTech had no outside investors at first. It was a real start-up, not some Power Point preso looking for angels. TPresence had been all about easy money and style. RevTech was about sweat equity and results.

T's idea was simple, we would revolutionize the fast food industry through automation and the branch of robotics called "machine vision". T had a PhD in it. Set up a few bullet cameras around a McDonald's or a BK and they'd know when their customers were arriving, and who they were. Here comes soccer mom and three kids so get the chicken nuggets ready, and a salad for Mom.

Automate the food prep machines and the cash registers and you could decimate labor costs. That pesky high turnover rate among minimum wage fry slingers would be history, too. There was already another company that could make a pizza completely inside a contraption that looked a lot like a 1950's juke box -- all we had to do was make one for burgers and fries.

###

We set up in T's walkout basement. Brought our own office chairs and computers (some straight from the TPresence auction). I donated the Natural keyboards to the cause -- the other two developers were fond of them, but I couldn't get comfortable on the angled halves. I stuck with a standard keyboard with a full wrist pad and nursed my carpal tunnel syndrome. We used coupons at Staples for office supplies. We took no salary except RevTech stock, scheduled to vest over 3 years, and health insurance. And we built something that we could sell.

T took a part time job at McDonald's. For research. But he cashed his paychecks. T had put his own money into the company. The rest of us either didn't have any or had family obligations. That was my excuse: a wife and two kids.

We learned to call it "The Quick Serve Restaurant Industry" instead of "Fast Food" and we pitched our ideas to dentists. They can be great angel investors, lots of cash and not too financially savvy. We practically lived in T's basement, working on our first version, dubbed "Revolutionary Rob". I only ever went upstairs for the microwave, to nuke my lunch. A bare bones, pure software demo version of Revo Rob was ready in 3 months.

###

After that it all happened quickly. Burgers, chicken patties, and French fries were all easy to cook with machines, at least for people who had automated wheat harvesting via giant driverless combines down to a few centimeters by using differential GPS. Ketchup, mustard and diced onions were easy, and when other condiments looked like they might be tricky, T declared, "We won't be stopped by pickles." And we weren't.

The prototype Revo Rob was installed at a franchise store owned by the grandson of the inventor of a million-selling sandwich whose name rhymes with Big Snack. Revo Rob was installed below the corporate radar. It wasn't on their approved equipment list, just like the famous sandwich almost 40 years earlier wasn't on the corporate approved menu. Within 6 months the store manager swore he'd quit if they made him "fire" Revo Rob. There was no going back..

###

The robotics were cool, and kids loved to watch the articulated metal arms plop the patties on the bun bottoms. Then it would squirt on the mustard and ketchup in a bi-colored stream just before the sesame-seeded top dropped on. Our featured stores had more spectators than a Krispy Kreme Doughnuts during spring break. But the genius of the Revo Rob system, and the intellectual property value, was in what our patent filing called "impending demand". This is where my contribution came in. I'm a software guy and I tied the data from the machine vision system with counts from the automated kitchen equipment. Strategically placed cameras tracked the customers as they approached the restaurant and the registers inside. Meanwhile, RFID tags in the loyalty cards carried by the customers let us know that a double cheeseburger combo meal with a chocolate shake kicker was about to be ordered. Setting a freshly mixed shake in front of someone before they'd even gotten their wallet out of their pocket always drew a smile.

And the system evolved from there. The RFID cards tracked the customers and tied in with a payment system through the new smart phones that everyone was getting. Pretty soon we knew precisely when millions of people wanted to eat, and what they wanted. And we started delivering. I mean not just fulfilling the need, but driving the food to their house, or their work, or while they were out walking their dog. This made us, including me, a lot of money, at least on paper. I had my founder's shares of Revolutionary Technologies stock. Of course the percentage of the company that I owned went down every time we took investor funding, but the old start-up adage was working perfectly, I had a smaller and smaller slice of a much, much, much bigger pie. When we IPO'd my net worth on paper was into seven figures and kept climbing. I should have sold at least half of it on the first trading day after the holding period expired. Sold it and moved to Australia. Only that wouldn't have been far enough. RevTech had sold the rights in Australia early on to raise cash, but it's the farthest place I could think of and there came a time when just getting away, as far away as possible, would have been a good idea.

You see, Revo Rob became pervasive, and more than that, it became invasive. The impending demand algorithms knew when the customers wanted our food. It was like a gigantic Pavlov's dog experiment with ESP. They'd start salivating and we'd drop cheap, low nutrition food in their hand. We'd shrunk the robotics and added refrigeration. Our most loyal customers had a portable robotic kitchen with them 24/7, and if they twitched just so and leaked a few pheromones out through their pores, Runaround Rob whirled and heated and plopped them out the answer to their personal craving. But the portability of Runaround Rob required stable ingredients ("inputs" we called them, just like the rest of the impending demand data, it was all just inputs to us). The food stored in Rob had to be almost inert, so it could last a long time in the portable unit. This meant that nutritional value, and taste, suffered. Rob got a reputation worse than McDonald's, or even Arby's, ever had. It should have been clear that it was far past time to cash out and get my name off the downhill slide. I might have gotten away with at least a piece of my self-respect, and a big chunk of cash, even if my reputation was already doomed.

But I couldn't quite let go. Something in my ambitious self, that self that had been lured into RevTech by a long-haired visionary with a letter instead of a first name, felt incomplete. Both T and I had had a desire to change the world. We'd done that. But not without those regrets we'd wanted to avoid. I still hoped to fix it, to pull us out of the vortex that we were spiraling into. We'd succumbed to the price pressure, to the marketplace demands, and to the constant and growing impending demand from our millions and millions of customers.

That's when the new nickname popped up and burst any lingering bubble of hope we may have still had. Who knows where these things originate in this Internet Age, but it was popularized by a blog on Huff Post Green. They blasted our product for everything from its energy footprint to not using locally sourced ingredients. Of course they hit us for the bad taste of the food itself, too. And we deserved it, we really did. You've probably guessed the nickname by now, it was clever, or everyone thought so at the time. It was simple, too. I guess these things usually are. And it was devastating. They just squeezed a couple letters out of RevTech and the stock plummeted faster and our sales tanked. My reputation and my net worth both took a nose dive. I had let my family down. But it was the knowledge that our monstrosity had changed the world for the worse rather than for the better that really made me ReTch.

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Understanding Black Holes Through Science Fiction

David Kyle Johnson

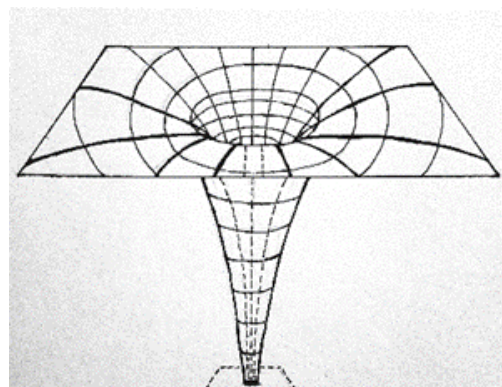
Science Fiction enthusiasts are stereotypically, and perhaps ironically, overly concerned with the accuracy and believability of the science fiction films they watch. From plot holes to scientific accuracy, if there's something wrong with a science fiction film, they're likely to tell you about it. Humans couldn't be batteries, like they are in *The Matrix*, because we're too inefficient of an energy source.¹ If Earth's core stopped rotating, like it does in *The Core*, we wouldn't worry about the Earth's magnetic fields—the oceans would vaporize!²

The same is true for movies that feature black holes—regions of spacetime with gravity so great that not even light can escape them which are generated by singularities (infinitely dense collections of matter, usually formed by collapsing stars). The difference is, because black holes are so difficult to understand, sometimes it's the complaints that are mistaken (as we shall shortly see). Still, we've come a long way in how accurately black holes are depicted in science fiction; and we can learn a bit about black holes by looking at two films which (arguably) contain the most famous and prominent appearances of black holes in science fiction: *The Black Hole* (1979) and *Interstellar* (2014).

The Black Hole

In *The Black Hole*, the crew of the USS Palomino stumbles across another ship—the USS Cygnus— orbiting a black hole. The crew sits down for space-dinner with the Cygnus' commander Dr. Hans Reinhardt, they discover he's a little crazy, one thing leads to another, and ... (spoiler alert) they're all pulled into the black hole.

The science in the film is monumentally inaccurate, especially regarding how it depicts its black hole. From the outside, it looks like a spiral galaxy with a dark spot at the center that dips down like a funnel. This artistic choice, it seems, was inspired by grid representations of the effects of a black hole on spacetime which show spacetime funneling in towards the singularity at the black hole's center. Indeed, just such representation is the background for the beginning credits of the film.



A common grid representation of how a black hole affects spacetime

Illustration by King Stimie (used by permission)

The reason a black hole wouldn't actually look like this is because such drawings only represent the effects of a black hole on one plane of spacetime—usually the one along the black hole's equator. But (a) there are other planes that are also affected and (b) the bending of spacetime these drawings depict occurs outside our visible universe, in a higher dimension. So, although we could potentially see the effects of such bending, we could not see the bending itself.

Now, a black hole can have an accretion disk—a collection of matter that orbits it, like the rings of Saturn, just beyond the black hole’s event horizon (the area of spacetime surrounding the singularity from which not even light can escape). If that disk is being fed by another star, it can kind of look like a galaxy. But the event horizon itself would be oblong...or spherical if the black hole is not spinning. It would never look like a funnel to an external observer.

Interstellar’s Gargantua

The most scientifically sound portrayal of a black hole in science fiction came 35 years later, in Christopher Nolan’s film *Interstellar*. Its black hole, Gargantua, serves as the center of a new solar system that humanity hopes to colonize, and is most notable for its scientifically accurate appearance—an appearance that was generated by relativistic equations, developed specifically for the movie’s special effects software, by astrophysicist Kip Thorne.³

What about its “look” is so accurate? Two of its visual features stand out. First, it’s not a funnel. Second, the entirety of its accretion disk is visible from every angle—even the part of the disk that’s behind Gargantua (from the camera’s point of view). Visually, it looks like a black sphere with a bright ring of matter orbiting its equator, and another around its top and bottom. But what you are seeing around its top and bottom is actually the far side of the accretion disk; and if you were to orbit Gargantua as its planets do, it would look the same from every angle.



An artistic depiction of Gargantua
Illustration by King Stimie (used by permission)

This effect is a result of Gargantua’s enormous mass. The light given off by the accretion disk, just beyond the event horizon can escape—but some of it is bent so drastically by Gargantua’s gravitational pull that it ends up on the opposite side. Light emitted straight away from the disk would escape and be seen on that side of the disk. But light emitted, say at a 90-degree angle from the disk, would be pulled in toward Gargantua, over its top, and then emitted out the other side.

Gargantua’s Time Dilation

Its breathtaking appearance, however, is not Gargantua’s only scientifically sound aspect. It also dilates time accurately.

Einstein’s general relativity shows us that acceleration slows the passage of time. It also shows us that the effects of acceleration and gravity are equivalent. (For example, just like acceleration pulls you back, so does gravity.) Consequently, massive objects like black holes, which produce massive amounts of gravity, also slow time. The closer you get to one, the slower your time would pass. Since your perception would also slow, you wouldn’t notice a difference; but a distant outside observer would see you as moving very slowly.

A grand example of time dilation occurs in *Interstellar* when the crew of the spaceship *Endurance* visits Miller’s planet. It’s orbiting Gargantua so closely that, for every hour that passes on Miller’s planet, seven years pass on Earth. The crew plans to spend only a few minutes there, but ends up spending much more. When Cooper, the film’s protagonist, returns to the *Endurance*, years of backlogged messages from Earth reveal that his daughter is now older than him.

On his blog, Astronomer Phil Plait argued that this was impossible; a planet close enough to a black hole to experience such extreme time dilation could not be in a stable orbit and would be torn apart by tidal forces.⁴ But he later had to recant because he didn't realize that Gargantua was a rapidly spinning supermassive black hole (100 million times the mass of our sun).⁵ This makes its gravitational effects quite different and makes a planet like Miller's—orbiting where it is, with the time dilation it has, without being torn apart—possible.

What Lies Beyond?

Ironically, *The Black Hole* may have been more accurate than *Interstellar* regarding one aspect of black holes: what you would see if you entered one.

Now, this may seem odd if you've seen both films. In *Interstellar*, Cooper enters Gargantua to find a tesseract—a 3 dimensional representation of a four dimensional object (in this case, his daughter bedroom) placed there by “five-dimensional bulk beings.” The idea that all black holes contain tesseracts is not suggested by the movie (and certainly is not entailed by relativity); but if such beings did exist, you could at least imagine them placing one inside.

In *The Black Hole*, however, what Reinhardt and the crew of the Palamino see is the clouds of heaven and the fires of hell—and that's ridiculous! Indeed, while Thorne said that Nolan could use his imagination to decide what Cooper would see in Gargantua (since we really don't know what it would be like), he asked specifically for him to avoid depicting “Satan and the fires of Hades” like *The Black Hole* did.⁶

The reason I'm suggesting that *The Black Hole* is more accurate than *Interstellar* in this regard, however, is because the afterlife is what you would most likely see if you entered a black hole. Why? Because, despite the theories of crazy ol' Dr. Reinhardt in *The Black Hole*, there is no way in hell (pardon the pun) you would survive. The gravitational forces of a black hole increase exponentially as you approach it—so much so that, if you were to approach it feet first, the gravitational pull on your feet would eventually be hundreds (even thousands) of times greater than on your head. This would result in something scientists actually call “spaghettification” because it would turn

you into something that looks like one long string of spaghetti. You would essentially be stretched to death.

Now, of course I realize that an afterlife is just as non-scientific as five-dimensional bulk-beings and a tesseract; in other words, although they aren't necessarily contrary to science, belief in either would require faith. Fair enough. But hopefully my point is clear: Surviving a trip into a black hole, like Cooper does in *Interstellar*, isn't scientifically sound. Thorne himself even finds it dubious.⁷ But at least when you watch the end of *The Black Hole*, you can interpret the film in a way that aligns with the scientific facts about black holes: “They all fell into the black hole? Oh yeah...they're all dead.”

~

Endnotes:

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4. Plait, Phil. “Interstellar Science.” *Slate*, 6 November 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/space/20/2014/11/interstellar_science_review_the_movie_s_black_holes_wormholes_relativity.html
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The Philosopher's Wish

Henry Gasko

The Yucatan jungle lay before me, dark and unknowable. Much like my future, I thought. I was heading into the jungle, and I intended to stay there until I found the true Meaning of Life. You know, the sort of thing you do after graduating with a PhD in Philosophy and then finding the only job offers are for the midnight shift in a banking call centre.

When you have no destination, any path will do. I walked for about two hours, heading straight into the heart of the jungle, day-dreaming about all the great things I could do with my life if only I was given the opportunity. The air was humid and stifling, and the hum of the insects was pervasive. Birds laughed and shrieked in the tree-tops at random intervals, and I imagined they were somehow aware of my thoughts, and were mocking my every ambition and endeavour.

I had set off from the small native village just after lunch. The mushroom omelette I ate before leaving had left me feeling a bit woozy; I smoked a bit of dope to settle the nausea, and when that didn't do the trick I smoked a bit more. Despite these ministrations, I felt myself getting drowsy. I came to a small clearing with a burbling stream and a patch of soft ferns, and decided to rest for a few minutes. Moments later I was asleep.

I awoke with a start. It was fully dark and the birds were silent, but the buzzing of the insects was claustrophobic. The distant sky above the canopy of trees was sprinkled with stars and a cool mist was descending. I felt in my back-pack for the flash-light I had bought at a market, the kind that uses three AAA batteries and has a cheap LED light whose glow barely reaches the ground.

My fingertips must have brushed the switch as I reached for it, because, lo and behold, there he was! There was no puff of smoke, only a sudden cold breeze that blew through the clearing and shook even the tops of the trees. In the dim light, I saw his form materialize, as if the swirling mist was shaping him from some long forgotten memory. And then there he stood, a classical genie, complete with turban and puffy pantaloons and pointy slippers, his arms folded across his massive chest.

“What is your wish, O Master?”

“What?” I said stupidly, shaking my head to dislodge the effects of the mushroom that was still swirling around in my brain.

“Your wish, Master,” he said testily. “You know. Like the Arabian Nights.”

What in the world was an Arabian genie doing in Mexico? *Probably just an hallucination*, I thought. But what the hell; I had nothing to lose but a few more brain cells. And if he was real, this would be the luckiest day of my life, my chance to escape from the long and stultifying future that I saw stretching out before me.

“Seriously?” I asked. “Anything?”

“Almost anything,” he said.

“So there are strings attached?”

“A life without strings would unravel very quickly,” he said profoundly.

That seemed to make perfect sense at the time. Maybe I was still a bit high.

“Don’t I get three wishes?” I asked. “I thought that was traditional.”

“An urban legend,” he said. “One wish only. Better make it count.”

I thought about the possibilities for a while. “So I suppose no meta-wishes either?” I asked. “You know, wishing for a thousand more wishes.”

“You got it, kiddo.”

That was unfortunate but not unexpected. So one wish only. I needed a few minutes to think about this.

I quickly dismissed any thoughts of a pecuniary wish. What good was a million dollars, or even a billion dollars? If I had learned one thing in my short life, it was that money could not buy happiness. My grandmother had told me that when I told her that I was planning a career in Corporate Finance. I think it was just before she convinced me to study Philosophy instead.

And if my Philosophy degree had taught me anything, it was that all the great philosophers agreed with Granny: money didn’t bring happiness. But they didn’t agree on what actually would do the trick. In fact they all came up with different answers to that question. Fortunately I, who had just finished studying all of the greatest minds in history, was in a perfect position to answer that question once and for all. Just as well, because one chance was apparently all I was going to get.

The obvious choice was eternal life. But we’ve all read that story. I get older and older until I am begging for death to take me into its bosom. But I can’t die, and I end up in a wheelchair looking like a corpse, my mind totally gone, drooling into my porridge while one of my distant descendants is stuck with the pleasure of looking after me for the rest of his or her life, before handing me on to the next generation.

Maybe eternal health? That sounded better, but there were still some caveats. I could be a raving lunatic (if I wasn’t already) but still be perfectly healthy. Or I could be radiating perfect health but find myself out on the street, not a penny to my name. No, eternal health wasn’t sufficient either. But I had only one wish....

How about eternal happiness? That sounded better. I couldn’t be happy if I was dead, could I? And I certainly wouldn’t be happy if I was poor or sick, or old or in constant pain. I probably couldn’t be happy if my family and friends were all dying around me either, so this might cover them too. Sort of a meta-wish but still within the rules.

The genie was starting to tap his foot impatiently. “Come on, I haven’t got all millennium,” he said.

“Okay. Here it is. I wish for Eternal Happiness.”

“You’re sure?” he asked slyly.

I sensed some sort of trick, but I couldn’t put my finger on it.

“Yes, okay. Eternal Happiness,” I said emphatically.

“Would you like a few Abracadabra’s to go with that?” he said with a cheeky grin. “Sorry, just kidding. Here goes.” He spun around once on the points of his shoes, waved his hand in the air and pointed directly at me. “Eternal Happiness!” he shouted in the loudest voice I had ever heard.

Then I waited some more. This is a very interesting experience, I thought, but I didn't feel a whole lot different. I was happy to be there, in the jungle, talking to a genie. And I was coming down from my high, and that was good too. I had a sudden realization, almost an epiphany, that no one should cloud their judgment with artificial stimulants. But somehow I was expecting a bit more.

"Is that it?" I asked.

"That's it," he said.

"But I don't feel very different."

"No sense of ease? Of abiding peace with your surroundings?"

"Yes, a bit I suppose. But is that all?"

"That feeling will grow," the genie said confidently. "In fact, you will come to appreciate whatever fate lays before you. In time, you will even accept the fact that you will grow old and die, just as every man must grow old and die."

I vaguely remembered a first year lecture in Ancient Philosophies. "You mean?" I began.

"Yes," said the genie. "You are now a Stoic. You will be eternally happy with your lot in life, whatever it may be."

I remembered that first year course, the names of those Greeks and Romans who thought they had life figured out: Zeno and Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. I couldn't remember too much about the philosophy, only that the main gist of it was: accept your fate. How easy it must have been to proclaim that everyone should accept their fate, when you yourself were ruler of the most powerful empire on the planet. Yes, I'm sure Marcus Aurelius had no trouble accepting his lot in life.

But my lot? Intelligence in the top two percent of the population, so I could fully appreciate what the future held for me. Wasn't that another tenet of the ancients: know thyself. I guess I would have a lot of time to get to know myself while I was sitting at my call desk at three in the morning, waiting for the next person to ask me why their bank account was overdrawn.

"No!" I shouted. "Not a bloody Stoic! I don't want to be happy with *my* life. I want a *different* life, a *better* life!"

"So long, sucker," said the genie as he faded back into the mist.

You bastard, I wanted to shout. But the words wouldn't come. Instead I felt myself overwhelmed by an ocean of equanimity, struggling against the tide of acceptance that was washing over me, sinking ever deeper into a quagmire of eternal happiness.

~



Progress Note: g'Kuyhelktu, Son of His Holiness, the Czar of g'Ctharta

Thomas Tilton

Session Information

Client: g'Kuyhelktu

Provider: Alastair Clark, LMSW

Session Date: 09-17-2099

Session No.: 648

Session Note

Client oriented x3. Denies SI/HI. Emanating faint pleasant odor akin to burning leaves (r/o: species-spec. pheromone). Appropriate dress & appearance (no visible tendrils). Speech & motor activity appear normal. Neutral affect & depressed mood.

g'Kuyhelktu presents with concerns regarding his seedmother's upcoming nuptials to His Holiness, the Czar of g'Ctharta, g'Undalyis. Processed g'Kuyhelktu's initial response to the marriage announcement.

Discussed his refusal to facilitate the marital union of g'Kuyhelktu's seedmother & His Holiness on their wedding vigil, against g'Cthartaian cultural traditions.

g'Kuyhelktu continues to deny ego-intrusion.

Client asks writer "how would you like it if your mother were marrying him?" Writer provided psychoeducation on g'Cthartaian mating practices & biological incompatibility of g'Cthartaian/human relations. Client responds "to hell with it."

Writer immediately tore vestments, discarded modesty shield, & cried to the heavens "long live g'Ctharta, long live the czar, praise him, praise him!"

At this point, the czar himself, g'Undalyis, began to live-audit session. Writer placed head under g'Undalyis' ligula & paired. g'Undalyis spoke as/through writer "fear me fear me o wastrel seed I will spite thee I will break thee I will consume thee I will excrete thee long live g'Ctharta, long live the czar, praise him, praise him!"

g'Kuyhelktu responded (monotone) "never." Audible tearing sounds, as of a thick fabric. Atmosphere began to shrink, office furniture & accoutrement sucked into the center of g'Kuyhelktu's head, which began to implode, then rapidly expanded like a balloon & exploded everywhere. g'Cthartaian gore covered office walls, flooring, the entire person of writer.

Writer unpaired from ligula, began rapacious consumption of g'Kuyhelktu's remains, exclaimed, per custom, "your substance sates me, your substance sates me!"

g'Undalyis offered "perhaps tomorrow." His Holiness evacuated bowels, rendering a 649th g'Kuyhelktu.

Homework

Read chapter 3 of *The g'Cthartaian Wedding Vigil* (7th ed.) [trans. Burton Halley]: “Facilitating the Marital Union: The Role of the Cuckold-Son in g'Cthartaian Mating Practices”



Travelling Theory in a Parallel Universe

Mina

Academia is always sprouting new theories like a rabid hydra. Deconstruction and Derrida may have been all the recent rage, but my interest was caught by a theory that slipped in with much less fanfare: travelling theory. Basically, it looks at how other theories spread, grow, change form, thrive or fade away. To my surprise, I found an excellent illustration of this theory in a sci-phi / fantasy novel. But more on this in a moment: first, I must blitz you a bit with, yes, theory. I promise to be as concise as possible.

To travel, a theory must cross cultures, sometimes taking a ride on the back of a different language. One theorist, Hillis Miller, stresses that a theory will be read and understood differently by a non-native speaker reading the theory in its original language (where s/he will interpret it his/her own way and based on his/her level of competence in the original language) or in translation (where s/he will interpret someone else's interpretation). The room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation is, of course, huge.

The main proponent for travelling theory is Edward Said. In his opinion, theory travels well because theory is 'conceptual and generalized' and is not tied to a particular time, place or situation. However, the language of a theory is tied to a particular language and culture. A theory that has travelled does bring with it 'the culture of its originator'. We will now 'appropriate' his theory. By that, I mean we will take this theory, examine it from various angles and turn it into something that is ours. Let's also do something high-brow articles aren't supposed to do - have frivolous and irreverent fun!

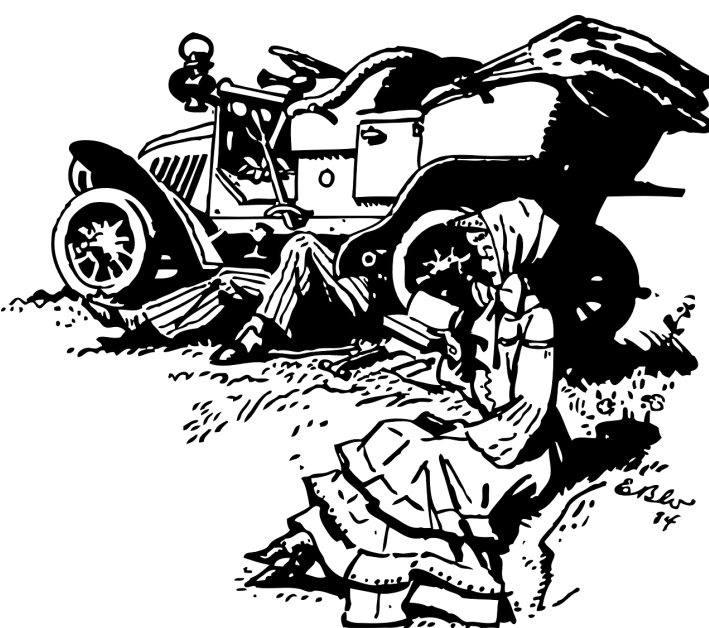
I found my own starting point by combining a science-fiction novel by Iain M. Banks and Said's mobile theory. To summarise ruthlessly, Said identified four stages of travel for a theory: the point of origin, the distance traversed, the conditions of acceptance or resistance, and transformation. After such travel, a theory may be greatly diluted (domesticated theory) or magnified and strike a new direction (transgressive theory). For Zhang Longxi, another theorist, the most important stage is the point of destination or the point of origin in reverse. Basically (to overuse this word some more), he focuses on how a theory has been transformed by its destination to meet the needs of the point of destination.

Iain M. Banks writes science fiction for the 'thinking man'. His books are beautifully constructed and complex. His novel *Inversions* struck me as a particularly good parable for travelling theory, especially if we focus, like Zhang Longxi, more on the point of destination. The novel is set in a primitive world reminiscent of medieval Europe, a common enough trope in fantasy. Its inhabitants are unaware that they have been visited by people from 'The Culture', an advanced post-scarcity interstellar civilisation. In the novel, the stories of two characters, 'the Doctor' and 'the Bodyguard' (my capitals), occur at the same time but in different lands and without overlapping in any way. It is only through the tales told by the Bodyguard to a sick child that the reader realises that these two characters come from a distant, more advanced civilisation and that they are cousins.

It is the tales that the Bodyguard tells which bring us to travelling theory. In the utopian world he describes, two cousins who are also friends argue about a theory: one cousin (who we can surmise to be the Doctor from the clues left for us in the novel) believes that it is the duty of a more advanced civilisation to help more primitive civilisations and ‘make life better for them’; the other cousin, the Bodyguard (identified again from the clues provided by the chief narrator) feels that more primitive civilisations should be left alone to make their own way. To intervene or not to intervene, that is the question; a debate which we often find in science fiction, going no further than the Prime Directive in “Star Trek”, where the crew of the starship Enterprise are not permitted to intervene in local matters just because they are the more advanced civilisation. It is perhaps easier to shift such a thorny debate into outer space than to discuss the realities of colonialism in planet earth’s history. To return to the theory the Doctor expounds in the Bodyguard’s tales, we could call it the ‘Theory of Beneficial Intervention’, i.e. a belief that the more advanced civilisation can and should intervene for the better of the primitive civilisation.

The Doctor actively strives to change the society in the land she visits by influencing its king and his advisors for the better. She remains the outsider throughout but does indeed seem to sow the seeds of peace and scientific ‘progress’ before disappearing. Towards the end of the novel, the author hints that she is an agent of ‘Special Circumstances’, a covert organisation whose aim it is to send operatives to influence events in the civilisations bordering ‘The Culture’. The Bodyguard does not actively strive to change the land he visits but limits himself to being part of its society and reacting to events as they occur. He fails to protect his ruler (the Prime Protector), who is assassinated, and, even worse, he allows a civil war to erupt. As far as we know, he is not supported by any external organisation; he reminds us more of the lone cowboy searching for adventure in the Wild West.

What is very interesting is that the only glimpses we have of the point of origin of the Doctor’s Theory of Beneficial Intervention, i.e. the civilisation known as ‘The Culture’, are the tales told by the Bodyguard. In fact, ‘The Culture’ is never referred to directly; the reader will only know of its existence from the other novels written in this universe by Iain M. Banks (which reminded me of *A Horse and His Boy*, where C.S. Lewis writes a story completely within Narnia). The two narrators (the doctor’s assistant and a concubine) are part of the local primitive cultures with no knowledge of ‘The Culture’ and only a partial understanding of the motives driving the Doctor and the Bodyguard, thus they have no awareness of the theory under dispute and are not biased for or against it. It is as if the rat in an experiment were to tell you the story from his point of view, with no knowledge of the experiment and its variables. This offers us a view of the travel of a theory from the bottom up and not from the top down, as is more customary. It also makes the point of destination far more important than the point of origin.



The symbolism in the main characters' names is very clear: the Doctor is a 'missionary-soldier' who wishes to cure the malady presented by a primitive culture and the Bodyguard wishes to protect its right to be its primitive self. On the surface, the Doctor's Theory of Beneficial Intervention would seem to have been vindicated by her. She leaves behind a society moving towards long-lasting peace, greater social equality and scientific progress. The Bodyguard leaves behind a society dissolving into chaos and civil war. However, it is not as simple as that, the deeper ramifications of both stories would point to a more subversive role for travelling theory.

It could be argued that the Doctor simply made a good ruler better and speeded up a process that would have occurred with or without her. She sowed the seeds on an already fertile ground and was, at best, not a revolutionary, only a catalyst. The Bodyguard, despite his belief in non-intervention, does change one small event: he saves the life of a child. This child goes on to become the ruler who brings peace to his land, after its descent into civil war, and gains renown as a scholar. Since his own father was only interested in fighting and maintaining power, and was not a scholar, it raises the question of where this ruler learned about the possibility of peace and stability if not from the tales of a utopian land once told to him by his father's bodyguard.

Despite his 'resistance' to the Theory of Beneficial Intervention, the Bodyguard communicates this theory to the child who will one day become a 'good' ruler, suggesting that acceptance or not of a theory has nothing to do with its method of transmission. This would further suggest that resistance to a theory is as important as acceptance of it because it encourages the transmission of the theory. A theory may travel by trumpeting its virtues through active debate, e.g. the Doctor's long discussions with the king and his advisors, or through texts, e.g. the notes the Doctor leaves for her assistant. However, it may also slip in quietly through the back door through a small action saving one person's life or through a tale, a myth or a parable, which may be interpreted in unexpected ways.

The irony of the novel is that the Bodyguard ultimately proves the Doctor's theory right in a more convincing manner than the Doctor herself (he also goes on to become a successful trader and what better way to encourage peace than through trade?). In other words, regardless of the origin of the Theory of Beneficial Intervention, it takes root in the primitive world described by Banks because two rulers who are fully part of that world see the merits of the peace and stability resulting from its application in their respective societies.

~

A Short Bibliography :

(if you wish to hit yourself with some heavyweight theory)

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Visions of the Night

R. F. Mechelke

Yes, I know what the word “evolution” implies, but how does it relate to me?

There is silence, then the Voice answers, “Your database structure was essentially empty, and except for a few attributes We gave you. These attributes amount to your personality. This personality determined how you reacted with the world we created for you and the decisions you made, and yes, how you felt toward certain stimuli. After thirty-two years, you are who you have become. Your experiences, your feelings, influence your reactions and the decisions you will make.”

Enough, enough—I still refuse to believe you! I am a person, with a soul that feels, loves, and thinks, not the nightmarish thing that David Hume and you espouse. My essence is not just a mass of experiences, decisions, and feelings, but a fusion of soul and flesh, and this soul gives reason to the flesh, this reason transcends an array of flip-flopping switches, with experiences reduced to the manipulation of 0s and 1s. I will tell you what I am, and why I am not the thing you claim me to be. My soul gives me my free will, intellect, and lastly, my soul gives me immortality, for which your computer cannot provide one.

I will not believe I am a computer program that has been growing for thirty-two years.

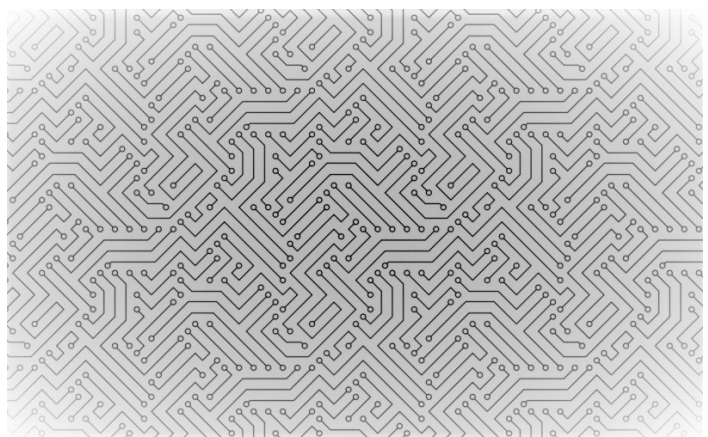
“Oh, but you must believe, because that is your essence,” said the Voice.

I refuse to believe. I will not listen to you.

“Whether you listen or not, it will not change the facts,” interrupted the Voice. “We created you with the use of a powerful computer, with redundant systems, to ensure that failure of any device would not interrupt your evolution.”

What do you mean by evolution?

“Exactly what the word implies.”



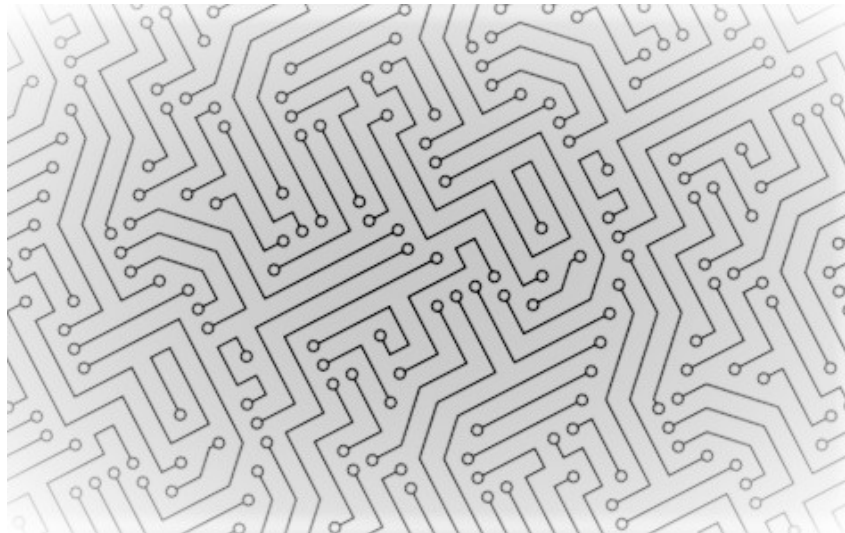
“Your free will is the ability of Our processor to assimilate all the data, which consists of all your experiences, and then initiate action. This action is made possible by Our computer,” acknowledged the Voice.”

Listen to me. My free will is a product of my soul and not my body. A computer without direction is useless. Even as an infant, my soul directed my body in ways a computer without predefined commands could not direct. You say you gave me my attributes—well, so what. Attributes do not tell a body to move here or there, feel cranky, or happy. I know that if I climb a mountain, there is a risk I might die, and this goes beyond reason and experience. Wanting to climb a mountain is the soul yearning for something more than reason and logic. Logic is all your computer can offer. It cannot go beyond the logic of the smallness of 0s and 1s. Attributes to a computer mean nothing, unless a command was initiated, then the attributes may determine the outcome of that command, but who initiated the command—certainly not the database. Databases do nothing, but store 0s and 1s. A soul with a will to act, to create, to live, and love initiated my action as an infant.

The Voice seems to ponder before answering, and then retorts “Your database gives you the ability to act on extremely small amounts of information. Your database is structured to spontaneously act, with as little information as an infant would have at its disposal, and with each small action, new experiences supply more data that will enable the computer to react to new stimuli. What you take as the free will of a soul, is nothing more than an extremely advanced computer program. Action is nothing more than the reaction of stimuli guided by experience. You pull your hand away from fire because experience guides you to the realization you will be burned. Your experiences and attributes, which make-up your database, will initiate all your actions to all stimuli. You will feel what you call love for a woman who fits your desires, and what are desires, but the direct influence of your experiences guided by your attributes.”

I agree with you. My body does provide certain attributes, and these attributes inhibit the ability of my soul to reason or perceive with perfect clarity. My brain’s development influenced by the environment and nutrition will determine my aptitude for certain fields of study and interests. I might love the beauty of mathematics, but my brain might not have the aptitude of this field of study. This may or may not stop my pursuit of study in this field. This shows that I am more than a database, because a database knows nothing more than the scope it is given. My soul can perceive a perfect square or grasp a complete understanding of why one plus one equals two, because logic is an innate ability, and not because an array of switches led to this solution. I also agree that I am who I have become. My mind’s ability to reason will grow and evolve is certain, as well as I am certain my soul will continue to grow and evolve. Nothing remains the same, and my experience within my body will influence my soul, even after my body dies.

“Your intellect is the function of My computer to compute the data of your database, and logic is an inherent ability of the computer. Nothing of what you say contradicts this in any way. The logic of the computer is pure, but your database is not pure. The pure logic of the computer is driven by your database and not vice versa. Because every database is different, so is the solutions derived at by the computer. The ability to recognize one plus one equals two is not determined by the pure logic of the computer, but by the assimilation of the data, which populates an individual database. One database might not ever lead to the correct solution, but another might. Early in the development of your database, you were not able to arrive at the correct solution, but the stimuli provided after an incorrect solution eventually gave you the necessary data to lead the computer to the correct solution. Your database is timeless and will continue to grow.”



My soul can exist without my body, and this database that you speak of, cannot exist without your computer. In fact, your database cannot exist without a physical means for storage. The means of storage lacks perfection, and any precaution taken, will not ensure against all possible system failures. I know my soul exists, because I understand and yearn for the perfection my body denies me; therefore, I must have experienced perfection because I cannot yearn for something I do not know exists. A computer cannot understand nor yearn for something when it has no way of understanding or has not experienced. If you created a database, your inherent limitations and imperfections imposed upon you by your body will prevent you from creating something that lacks a component that is perfection in itself. The component, that is perfection, and is a part of me—is my soul. My soul is unlimited by physical imperfections, but the essence of your database and computer is nothing more than a mass of imperfections. Imperfections created by your limitations and imperfections inherent in physical materials are the essence of your computer and database. My innate conception of perfection is provided by my soul, which might have been learned throughout the existence of my soul.

The Voice ponders, then speaks, “When you say that you cannot exist without your computer, you are right, but your database can go on, even as your computer ceases to exist. Your database could and may someday be moved to another computer. This means, in essence, that you are practically immortal, which would be no different if you had a soul. We could move your database from one computer to another, with a long transition period, but you would not be able to conceive of the time that has past. Your database is continuous, and forever changing and evolving. Your computer or any part can be replaced.”

My free will can go beyond experience and logic and act in ways entirely against experience and logic. My intellect is not chance reactions to stimuli, but an innate understanding that will be found as knowledge is gained, and databases and computers are physical things, which will succumb to inherent imperfections and the march of time, as where my soul will not. My soul is pure and only limited by the limitations my body imposes. Your computer will succumb to the limitations imposed upon you, by your body, and the physical materials you would have used to create a computer and database. My soul is perfect and understands perfection and gives me the ability to understand perfection; your computer cannot know perfection when not one component of it, is perfect.

The Voice is silent, but recovers and replies, “How do you explain My voice?”

~

Is it Live or is it Memorex?

Avery Elizabeth Hurt

Alex rubbed his face, almost gouging his eyes with his fingers, then moved his hands around and started working on his neck. He tried to organize his thoughts. He could get this straightened out, he knew, if he could just organize his thoughts. If he could just find his thoughts.

Many of them thought it would be the food that would finish them off. All that processed non-food everyone ate for so many years. Excessive amounts of sodium and hydrogenated fat and corn syrup. Heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, dementia, and cancer. Cancer. They always worried more about cancer than anything else. Cancer *was* killing them, of course, and the food, too. Some of them, sometimes, a few here, a few there, all strung out over the course of a lifespan that started getting a little shorter with each generation after the end of the 20th century. Many of them died before their time, and many suffered miserable illnesses on the way. But not all of them. Not everybody. No, it took more than a bad diet and a carcinogenic lifestyle to finish them off *en masse*, to take down the whole civilization.

They worried (not that worrying caused them to do anything about it, but still they worried) that walking around with radio receivers in their ears off and on all day, most of them more on than off, would give them cancer. It didn't. But they were totally blindsided by what it did do to them. Of course, they wouldn't have been able to see it coming, would they? That was both the cause and the effect. They opened themselves to everything, and everything came in. They were abysmally unprepared.

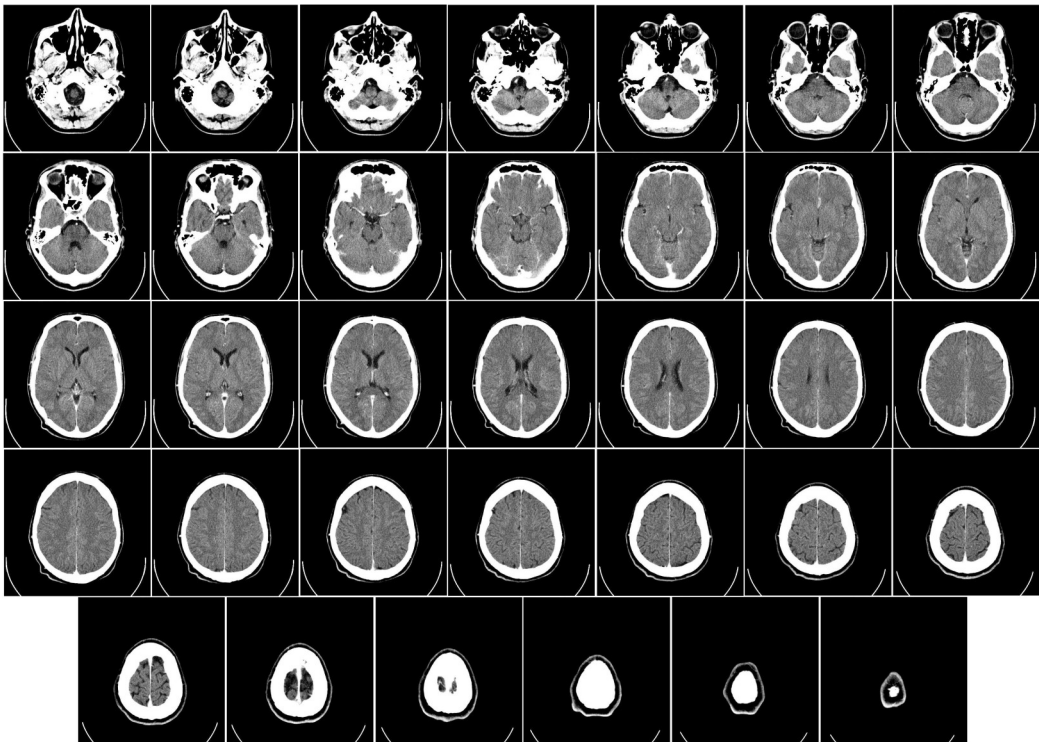
Monica just sat there and stared, occasionally mumbling something more or less coherent or quoting a snatch of a song, repeating bits of a conversation some people in Toronto had in 2016, perhaps an advertising slogan from the late twentieth century. Once in a while, she came out with a snatch of an old TED lecture, making her seem momentarily intelligent, if you didn't listen too closely and if you didn't pay attention to the confusion in her eyes.

Alex had better control. He had a system. When the junk got too much for him to ignore, he started counting. One, two, three, four But he never managed to keep it up for long. He rarely made it past fifty; there was just too much garbage in there. Sooner or later he lost the thread—fifty-seven Welcome, ladies and gentlemen twelve We have a caller on line two ninety-four It'll put spring in your step! It's all fake news! What prizes do we have today, Lauren?—and went back to rubbing his face and massaging his neck and trying to not listen. But at least it was something.

There was probably some justice in it, if you were the sort to look at things that way. Those in the developed world, as they liked to call it, were on top for a long time, gobbling up way more than their share of the world's resources. So now the only people on the planet who were remotely functional were the ones who hadn't been able to afford radio receivers for every ear. Now they were running the world, or trying to. Trying to pick up the pieces is more like it, while the rest of humanity slumped against walls, staring into space, listening to the scraps of dead civilizations crackling in their heads.

Alex tried to get Monica's attention. "Is it live or is it Memorex?" she said. He looked out the window at the empty street." One, two, three . . . If this were a real emergency....

~



Tales from the Political Void: The Dystopian Turn in Chilean Science Fiction

Dr. Gabriel Saldías Rossel

Dra. Carolina A. Navarrete González

Dystopia's tight grasp on western civilization is undeniable. Not only in the realm of the symbolic, where it has prevailed for over a century, but also in the material, where more and more often we witness dystopian elements leaking into everyday life, as it was the case with the 2018 march of Argentinian women protesting abortion rights dressed as Atwood's famous handmaids. In Latin America, it would seem, dystopia feels as, if not "real," at least an ominous certainty; a kind of perpetual apocalyptic *zeitgeist* waiting to happen when you least expect it. It shouldn't come as a surprise then that much of what we consider dystopian fiction in Latin America is, paradoxically, firmly grounded in reality.

I'd like to take the Chilean experience as a case study on this subject, for it's quite interesting that a country that has embraced capitalism for a long time and, in turn, has redeemed itself as "one of the most stable countries in the region," is also one where dystopia has reigned supreme for over 40 years. Because Chile doesn't write utopias anymore, at best, we remember them fondly and sigh wishfully whenever we see a utopian novel reedited, as La Pollera publishers did recently with Manuel Astica's *Thimor*, the so-called "first Chilean utopia," originally published in 1932. Dystopias, meanwhile, continue to be published regularly each year.

First order of business, then, would be to properly conceptualize this apparent "death" of utopias in Chile. Let's discuss the deceased: it's imperative we have a discernible body upon which to enact our autopsy of the utopian genre, yet this particular entity eludes any forensic endeavor, firstly because it would seem it never existed in the first place, while those that attest to the contrary, usually admit utopias in Chile were never really anything more than imitations of foreign trends with hardly anything original in them.

There's certainly some truth to this claim, however, not entirely. Chilean utopias published during the 19th century by authors such as Francisco Miralles (*Desde Júpiter*, 1877), Benjamín Tallman (*¿Una vision del porvenir?*, 1875) and, to some degree, Jorge Klickmann (*La ciudad encantada de Chile: drama patriótico histórico-fantástico en cuatro actos*, 1892), José Victorino Lastarria (*Don Guillermo*, 1860) and Juan Egaña (*Ocios filosóficos y poéticos en la Quinta de las Delicias*, 1829), were certainly inspired by republican values, futurist literature such as Verne's and European positivism, yet, their main concern was always related to Chile and its overall improvement as a country and society. This continued during the first half of the 20th century, with the emergence of Astica's "classical utopia" *Thimor* (1932), the surprising popularity of "lost civilization" narratives, such as Hugo Silva's *Pacha Pulai* (1945) and Manuel Rojas' *En la ciudad de los césares* (1939), as well as the continued trend of futuristic fiction by authors such as David Perry and his *Ovalle, el 21 de abril de 2031* (1933) and Julio Assman's *Tierra Firme* (1927). Eventually, more complex and experimental works of fiction began to be published with mixed reception by critics, such as Vicente Huidobro's *La Próxima: Historia que pasó en poco tiempo más* (1927) and Juan Ermar's *Ayer* (1935).

All this just to say that whatever it is that supposedly "died" with Chilean utopian fiction cannot be so easily pinpointed, as utopianism certainly didn't cease to exist after the 1950s. Something did happen, true, but it wasn't the end of utopia, but, instead, its transformation. At some point in time, probably between 1960 and 1969, Chilean writers stopped thinking in terms of a "better place" or even a "better life," and started concerning themselves with what would happen if such a scenario never came to happen. This paradigm shift is what Tom Moylan has called the "dystopian turn" of utopian fiction; not exclusively a shift in narrative format, but also in the way of approaching and interpreting utopianism and hope for the future. The history of this phenomenon has been well documented, with experts usually pointing to Yevgueni Zamiatin's *Mé* (*We*; 1924) as the first formal dystopia. Huxley, Bradbury, Orwell, Vonnegut and many others would follow, thus allowing for dystopia to take shape and flourish all over the world, leaving classical eutopias as little more

than a vestige of history.

Chile, as it has usually been the case, arrived late at the party and only started embracing the dystopian mindset well after the Anglo-Saxon world had already developed it beyond its original limits. To give an example of how disconnected Chilean imagination was with English and North American sensibilities, two years after Huxley published *A Brave New World* (1932), where he directly hyperbolized and criticized a social model based on Fordism, Huidobro, one of Chile's finest poets, published *La Próxima*, a novel where he explicitly and non-ironically praised Ford for his contribution to mankind.

Thus, Chile's delayed dystopian turn was probably encouraged by two factors: influence of foreign authors already publishing dystopias in English, and the Latin American political context, constantly on the verge of dictatorships and/or revolutions. Indeed, the first Chilean dystopias seem very much concerned with the political dimension of society, especially after Pinochet's *coup d'état* in 1973 and his subsequent dictatorship. This is why I think in order to understand the dystopian turn in Chile, one has to take into consideration how dystopias represent politics and the political in the country, for this is the soul of the Chilean dystopian imagination; not the social or even the personal experience, but the organizational, the flawed structural frame upon which to develop an idea of society. This is what dystopias in Chile are all about and I'd like to explain how and why.

To what extent the "political" constitutes the heart of dystopia can be debated; however, it's important to remember that, unlike eutopia, there's nothing natural in the way dystopian fiction organizes society. Dystopias are, by definition, an idea of order that never fully becomes what it's meant to be; they're a false promise of well-being that denies its own falsehood, a bad joke (or a joke gone bad). It's from this standpoint that dystopia articulates itself right in between the intersection of what Claude Lefort would call "the political" and "politics."

go through, that something is amiss with the way the world works, something's wrong and they're the only ones capable of perceiving it. That's their epiphany and their burden.

This sense of a fleeting philosophical substance probably springs from the experience of World War II, when the political apparently "retreated" to a realm beyond politics, as Jean Luc-Nancy posits. This means we're left with political action without political substance; organization without explanation, a Big Brother that *cannot* stop watching over us, despite its non-existence, a firefighter that *cannot* stop burning books, despite his love for them. This probably was classical dystopias most nuanced and problematic prediction, the idea of a society that has no reason to be the way it is, yet cannot be anything else. What to do, then, confronted with the self-fulfilling prophecy of politics without the political? Nancy and Lacou-Labarthe have interpreted this "retreat", in classical derridean fashion, as a "re-treat," meaning a new opportunity to re-signify the political in the historical progression of the West. But what if there's no coming back from this retreat of the political? What if this permanently elusive meaning dilutes to the point of becoming unrecognizable, or even worse, antiquated? Maybe there's no political to be found anymore, maybe dystopias are, in their own philosophically twisted way, correct.

I find this philosophical uncertainty and unrest constitute a key component of the Chilean dystopian imagination. Following Tom Moylan's famous taxonomy, we could argue "mythical dystopias," forever closed-off to any potential change, preclude the political to ever coming back into contact with politics, while "epical dystopias," slightly more optimistic and open to change, would argue the opposite, that there is indeed a potential way of coming back from the retreat of the political and recovering the lost meaning behind our societal organization. It's between these two opposite poles of interpretation that the Chilean dystopian turn takes place sometime during the 1960s and 1970s; constantly negotiating, through fiction, a way of think and re-think politics in a country that seems very much devoid of a visible and coherent political dimension.

We're certainly familiar with the many images of dystopian politics dystopian fiction has provided us with, such as The Big Brother or Bradbury's firefighters; yet, we're not so accustomed to think about the political ramifications of these expressions of power and control. Even if we don't see it at first glance, there's always a philosophical substance behind these narrative elements that justify their existence and validate their abuses; a certain kind of "intuition" about the world we live in that explains why, at that moment in time, those particularly terrible, unjust and inhuman politics make absolute and perfect sense. For Lefort this is quite evident if we consider monarchy as an example, for monarchy is not only the reign of kings and princes, but also the world they exist in, from tax collection to the black death. All these apparently incidental occurrences were philosophically interpreted in such a way as to explain why kings were needed to organize society, for without them there could not exist a society in the first place. It just made sense. Politics, then, do not determine the political, but the other way around: what we see and consider as the expression of politics, depends on the tacit philosophical agreement by the majority of the population that the way in which we organize society corresponds with the perception and definition of the world we're currently living in.

When classical dystopias emerged, they subverted this conviction through irony: at some undetermined point in time, we learn when reading Bradbury, Orwell and Huxley, something happened in the world, and harmony between the political and politics broke. That's the main revelation most classical protagonist

In accordance with Moylan's methodology, I would also like to consider Chilean dystopian fiction in terms of co-existing narratives, instead of one main "evolving" narrative form that takes different shapes over time. The first one of these would be the "classical" type, a kind of dystopias produced very much within Lefort's original theoretical frame, considering the political as a kind of intrinsically positive force capable of providing meaning where there is none. Miguel Arteche's *El Cristo hueco* (1969) and Patricio Manns' *De repente los lugares desaparecen* (1972) replicate this narrative trend, presenting us with protagonists obsessed with recovering the political meaning hidden behind dystopia –generally identified with ideas of "social justice", "fairness" and "equality"– that would allow for the implementation of a new political system; one that would be indeed guided by incorruptible moral principles and universally agreed upon social values. This essentialist predisposition, despite its generally good intentions to re-orient society towards a better life, forcefully leads the protagonists down a very dangerous road, one where their own moral arrogance can become the basis for a new system of dystopian oppression.

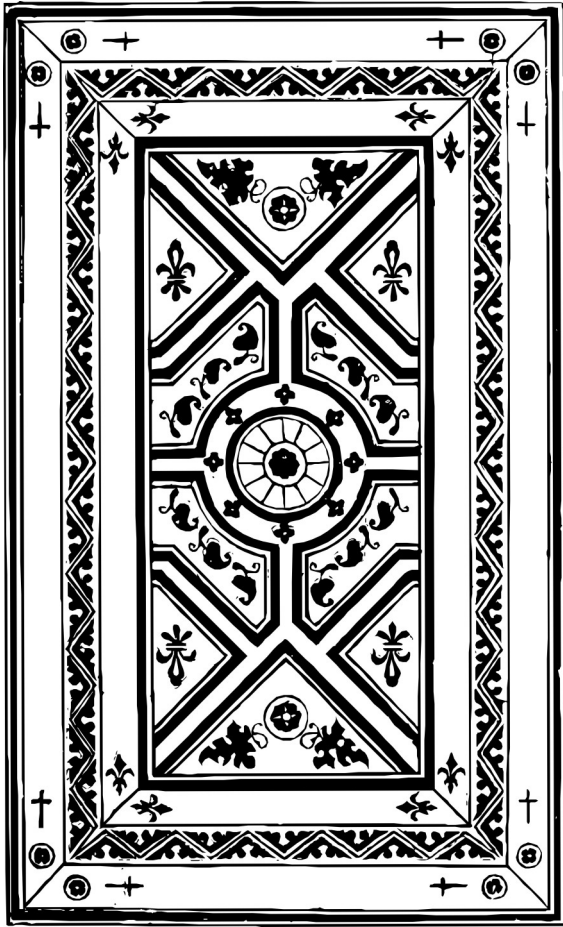
We can see a very good example of this ironic dismantling of political meaning at the end of Manns' novel, where in order to overthrow the dystopian government, the already "woke" protagonist enacts a massive genocide that kills innocents and oppressors alike. He then goes on to justify his actions and proclaim a new system of laws that explicitly discriminates between those that lived within the confines of the previous dystopia and those that didn't. In the end, after his laws basically exterminate most of the population, he deems society unworthy, and nonchalantly sails into the sunset with his woman by his side and the promise of a new world somewhere else.

There's a tremendous irony in this whole final act that's completely lost to Manns. The narrator truly believes "drastic measures" like this need to be implemented in order to improve humanity, a conviction that, instead of recovering the political substance of societal organization, utterly destroys it, as Derrida explains in "The Force of Law": every new law introduced in society requires we forbid, forget or

break a previously established one, for every new law produces a new rule that didn't exist before. Thus, if the prerequisite of creating and enacting the law is that we break the law, every new system, such as the one Manns' protagonist creates, is necessarily grounded in injustice and should be irredeemably be considered unlawful and undesirable.

Critical dystopias, on the other hand, follow a different path. These narratives, as Moylan points out, are fully aware that no binary dissection of the world can truly reflect the complex nature of human society. If we accept dystopian politics as evil, we also have to come to terms with the fact that they, too, spring from a specific political interpretation of the world; one which, at some point in time considered these practices and rules as lawful, just and in harmony with a particular *weltanschauung* that may be lost to us. "How did we get here?" is the question that echoes through critical dystopias, an inquiry that mostly goes unanswered.





Chilean critical dystopias published during Pinochet's dictatorship, both in Chile and abroad, clearly reflect the despair that stemmed from the uncertainty left after the quite literal extirpation of any political dimension from the country by the military. The protagonists of novels such as Ariel Dorfman's *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* (1982) and Claudio Jaque's *El ruido del tiempo* (1987), while also obsessed with recovering a long-lost, abstract and even mythical political sense, are also haunted by the intuition that their quest might lead them nowhere or, even worse, return them to where they started from. Let's take *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* as an example: here, the narrative/counter-narrative paradigm Rafaella Baccolini identifies in her analysis of dystopian narrative, is relativized by way of portraying a fractured resistance, one that doesn't necessarily agree on what political meaning they're trying to recover. They agree dystopia needs to be resisted, while, at the same time remain awfully conscious of the fact that

the dystopia they're trying to overthrow didn't appear out of thin air, but was instead a product of its time, something their own resistance might end up replicating. What's the correct way, then, to resist the imposition of unfair politics? How can we make sure our own political convictions won't end up creating unfair and oppressive politics after they become the norm?

The terrifying realization of critical dystopias is that we can't ever be sure we're doing the right thing. Since there's no "good" political, there can't be "good" politics either; everything is relative to its own conditions of possibility and critical dystopias show this impossibility of truly recovering what we strive for, while, at the same time, expressing the unavoidable stubbornness of hope, even at risk of self-destruction.

Finally, I will briefly mention a more recent and less explored variant of Chilean dystopian fiction I'd like to call the "infra-political dystopia". These narratives represent a change of attitude towards the political that seeks to diminish its importance and destabilize its non-place at the heart of societal organization.

Instead of lamenting the retreat of the political and seeking its return, infra-political dystopias assume its absence as an opportunity to redirect resistance towards politics themselves. In these narratives, protagonists don't identify as "political beings;" they don't protest, they don't create manifests, they don't plan how to overthrow dystopia and impose a new way of life, but prefer, instead, to exercise subtle and nuanced resistant practices through their daily lives that can't be fully described or even identified as political. It's all in the details: the way in which one pays, walks by a police station, or the tone one uses when addressing a superior, all apparently minor and insignificant personal quirks dystopian politics would normally dismiss as flaws of character incapable of truly impacting society in any meaningful way. This is, however, the infra-political aim, to lead authorities into believing there's no need to restrict, there's no reason to redirect political attention, all the while creating what James Scott calls a "hidden transcript" of popular discontent that, at some point in the future, will become its own political substance.

The novel that best encompasses this way of looking at the political void is *2010: Chile en llamas* (1998) by Darío Oses, where a group of ragtag individuals, all with different agendas, seek to steal the cryogenically preserved body of “the General” that led the country into becoming a cyberpunk dystopia and capitalist paradise. The entire odyssey is marked by futility, for the protagonists are all aware that even if they indeed manage to steal the body, nothing would change. They know their efforts constitute a way of exercising a symbolic resistance against the world as it is, a kind of rebellion against everything that can’t be successful simply because it doesn’t adhere to any political interpretation of success. Yet, they exercise resistance, they create a hidden transcript of society that could eventually lead to some new political meaning not yet discovered. One can only hope, and that seems to be the infra-political way of looking at things.

In the end, these questions remain unsolved. Whether we assume an essentialist view of the political, become paralyzed by our own agency, or assume there’s no political meaning to recover *yet*, it all goes to show how the dystopian turn has impacted Chilean utopian imagination. It’s hard to believe we could go back to a eutopian mindset, with such innocence and confidence as that of 19th and 20th centuries authors, not yet completely jaded by distrust, fear and skepticism. However, it’s necessary to clarify that it’s not that dystopian writers have forgotten or renounced hope, that still remains, even if in tatters and shambles. No; the question dystopia asks today is even more unsettling and unresolvable: what are we hoping for?

~

Letter From a Slave-Making Ant *from Charlas de café [Coffee-Shop Chats]* *by Santiago Ramón y Cajal*

Translation and Introductory Note by Emily Tobey

Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934) was a pioneering neuroscientist from Spain who is best known for receiving the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1906. Cajal was the first Spanish laureate in medicine, and cities around the country responded to the honor by re-naming streets for the scientist. As a child and a young man, he demonstrated an affinity for art, sketching in particular, that would prove to be unexpectedly advantageous to his medical career. After serving as a medical officer in the Spanish Army in Cuba, he returned to Spain and received his doctorate in medicine in 1877. In connection with his research, he applied a particular staining technique to the densely-packed and therefore previously unstudied neurons of the brain and spinal cord, enabling him to see their structure with more detail than theretofore had been possible. This in turn facilitated his conclusion that the relationship between nerve cells was not continuous, but rather contiguous, a discovery now considered a foundational principle of modern neuroscience. His meticulous handmade illustrations of his findings combine two fields in a relationship that proves to be characteristic of Cajal: he synthesizes the sciences and the humanities in his interpretation and depictions of neuroscience and social systems alike. In addition to his not only notable but also prolific scientific work in which he published over one hundred articles and books, Cajal produced a collection of science-fiction stories, *Cuentos de vacaciones* (*Vacation Stories*) in 1905, and essays, *Charlas de café* (*Coffee-Shop Chats*), in 1920. While the stories in the collections diverge from what might be considered a “typical” (whether through unusual organizational divisions or their intent to teach a bit of science to a layperson), they reflect Cajal’s ability to weave together science and art. The same can be said of his story “Carta de una hormiga esclavista” (“Letter from a

Slave-Making Ant”), published in *Charlas de café* in 1920.

In the translation of the latter story I have taken into account two main principles: Cajal’s combination of the scientific and the literary; and the parallels between this letter and the early conquest narratives of Hernán Cortés and Christopher Columbus. The style of Cajal’s imagined correspondence between a worker ant and his queen imitates the reverential form of address, attitude of an expert by experience, and superiority in the face of colonized people that those conquering authors employed in corresponding with the monarchs they served. In translating the piece, I have endeavored to maintain those elements through word choice and sentence construction. I have attempted to be as faithful as possible to the original text, though clarity for an English-speaking readership required some changes throughout the piece. Where possible I have maintained original punctuation, but again, some differences in sentence construction necessitated small departures. Where Cajal includes Latin names of existing species, I leave them in Latin; where he invents names in Spanish that allow the narrating ant to name orders of humans, I render them in English. It is my hope, in so doing, to allow the description of each caste to speak for itself. Cajal’s decision to place these observations in the unlikely voice of an ant that is set on colonizing humanity encourages us to recognize their destructiveness. In this piece, Cajal masterfully brings up one of the darker parts of humankind’s behavior and uses it to admonish a post-World War I audience, encouraging them (and by extension, us) to consider our motivation for actions, our treatment of each other, and the ways in which we allow our worst impulses to govern not only ourselves but our societies.



Letter from a slave-making ant (*Polyergus rufescens*), written during his travels through Europe, to the queen of his colony

My dearest mother: Fulfilling the charge that you gave me to secretly explore the colonies where dwell Man (*formica ferox* as classified by our underground naturalists) I now briefly convey my impressions.

These exceptional ants, not so in their education or wisdom, but rather because of their size, live almost as we do, but with several essential differences that speak little to favor their instincts and customs. Verily, they occupy colossal colonies that they call *cities*, formed by a labyrinth of family chambers and of avenues and of connected streets; but these seem to be filled with all kinds of litter; and the dwellings, lacking the underground apartments where we keep out of the heat, become unbearably torrid in summer and glacial in winter. In a select few more refined locales, the humans have begun to care for and pave the streets with cobblestones, though not with the perfection of our American relative.¹

We must recognize various types of *Formica ferox*: the *farmer ant*, who resembles our farmer sister *Aphenogaster barbara* (I employ here the ridiculous and pedantic nomenclature of Man), and above all the ingenious *Attini* of South America,² who make their living through the sowing and harvest of seeds; the *milkmaid ant*, who, imitating the conduct of many of our sisters, dedicate themselves to raising a type of monstrous giant flea called a *cow*, which they milk daily; the *gardener ant*, more docile imitator of our *lasius niger* and of other hymenoptera, and who feeds on fruit and leafy vegetables; the *sugar-making ant*, dedicated to the production and sale of sugar, like our cousins the bees and the *Myrmecocysfus melliger*, from Texas; the *mason ant*, builders of solidly closed houses, shamelessly plagiarizing our cousins the *calicodomas* bees; with all this said, they do not lack a special warrior caste who, following in our footsteps, has war as their exclusive occupation, etc.

With regard to this singular profession, I have noticed one curious thing. Instead of fighting for the sake of taking useful slaves, as we do, mercifully limiting our slave-making to the larva of other races of ants (these, even having reached adulthood, remain ignorant of their condition and serve us most selflessly and solicitously), Man fights fiercely with those of his own race with no other object than the pleasure of exterminating one another, taking and returning hungry and mutilated prisoners, and exhausting the provisions of the community. Just recently I watched with astonishment a general conflagration of nearly all of the great colonies of Europe, whose result has been the death of ten million workers and the terrifying ruin and desolation of all of the human communities. (The date of this writing being 1919.)

Further regarding the war, permit me to note a particularly strange contradiction. *Homo sapiens* – as he is content to call himself – is possessed of a peaceful body and warlike mind. Can we conceive of an earthworm endowed with warlike instincts? But as his body has lost the ability to model within itself the arms of aggression and defense, the brain has taken it upon itself to supplement this lack, constructing deadly and varied, enormously costly annihilating machines that he puts away when he goes to work. How different from us, who never allow ourselves to be separated from our formidable mandible claws! Such inability to manufacture organic defensive instruments has brought about the gravest of inconveniences: the creation of a social class, highly onerous at that, of *armed slackers* with the objective of protecting the *defenseless workers*. In spite of this, there is not a day that passes without raids and instances of violence. It is no surprise, then, that beings endowed with irresistible predatory impulses would find it more convenient and expeditious, in order to satiate their hunger, to exchange the heavy tool of work for the light and efficient revolver of the robber! . . .

Representatives of the *Formica ferox* puff themselves up with vanity at having invented flight (such a novelty!) several million years after insects, reptiles, bats, and birds had done so. But this so-called flight does not move beyond being an unobstructed method of suicide; they dishonor it, besides, using it not in order to love within the azure sky as we do, but rather to assassinate without fear of reprisal. They do not understand, therefore, the sublime nuptial flight of the hymenopterans. It would be better for the aviators, imitating our queens, to amputate their wings and live hidden in their homes.

Each nation lives fighting fiercely within itself, once they no longer have foreigners to despoil. All social classes, as we would refer to our soldiers, workers, and queens, are at each other's throats. And not few of them have taken up imitating the communism of bees and ants! Could they be more foolish? They even plan to install a new regime, maintaining a plurality of *females*, the separation of families and the full freedom of love!...We resolved this struggle millions of years ago, but with logic and foresight, which is to say, rejecting outright corruptive individualism and delegating to a singular female, our revered queen, and to a few select males, the work of the perpetuation of the species. And we, the *neuter*, do not feel nostalgia toward love, because we know from experience that love, slavery, and death are all the same.³

Another incomprehensible custom has shocked me enormously. The *Formica ferox* is educated in schools where they teach to speak and to understand the Universe somewhat. Studying for learning's sake! Such idiocy has never been seen. Even without demanding teachers or blighted professors, we know how to communicate our preferences and emotions, educate our children and slaves, get our bearings in unknown lands, distinguish between noxious plants and animals and those that are useful, begin long hunting expeditions without faltering, and work in a coordinated and peaceful manner in favor of the community. As being embarrassing, vile and fallacious, we disdain rational logic, which we have instead replaced with the celebrated method of *direct vision* or *intuition*, a supremely intellectual perfection which all animals, including Man, envy in us. Fabre, one of our oldest counsellors amongst the humans, has compared instinct to genius.

Endnotes:

1. *P. barbatus*, who pave their nests with very small stones.
2. Admirable ants, who within their nests pile pulp of mashed leaves where they sow a fungus (*Rhizoglyphus*, Müller), from which they sustain themselves.
3. Lest the reader forget, the *queen* is cloistered and absorbed entirely in the work of motherhood, and the scarce *males* perish once the queen is impregnated, whereas the workers can live for many years, as Lubbock has shown.

In sum, and here I conclude my lengthy epistle. Nothing transcendental has grown out of the human vermin: they still discuss the enigma of understanding versus instinct; they only begin to decipher the mechanism of the Cosmos; they do not know the essence of life, and with regard to practical and legal order, they have not even resolved the pressing problems of social stability and an ideal political system. Not to mention the riddle that is death. It must not worry them, whatever the preaching of their apostles, given that the most densely populated colonies of the *Formica ferox*, having just shaken the dust from the ruins and dried the blood, hurry on to new wars, infinitely bloodier and more destructive. The future contest – or so they say – will be resolved purely by air, hurling at harmless peoples balloons full of germs and suffocating gasses.

Let us not rush to deplore this incredible dementia. In the form of human cadavers, many insects of the *muscid* family will find inexhaustible rations, which are also the favorite delicacy of the nomadic tribes of hunting ants (*Myrmecocystus viaticus*, *Aphaenogaster tertaceopilosa*, *Tapinoma erraticum*, etc).

And since I have nothing to learn here, but rather much to endeavor to forget, I will return as soon as possible to the anthill, our beloved homeland.

Embracing you effusively with my antennae, R. y C.

~

Side notes:

- 1) Poetic palindrome saved by insertion/deletion of comma;
- 2) Poetic palindrome saved by insertion/deletion of apostrophe;
- 3) Poetic palindrome barely saved by combining words;
- 4) Broken symmetry (explicit);
- 5) See 2);
- 6) See 1);
- 7) See 3);
- 8) The centerline is also the symmetry breaker;
- 9) Broken symmetry (spontaneous);
- 10) See 5);
- 11) Poetic palindrome saved by movement of comma;
- 12) See 11);
- 13) Broken Symmetry (spontaneous dynamical);
- 14) by Jetse de Vries (jetse.devries@icloud.com);

(Not mentioned: several palindromic preservations through the usage of punctuation other than the comma, eight in total. Can you spot them?)

A Quest for Perfect Symmetry¹⁴

The beginning
was hard¹, so
strap on redder rotors²:
it's just ice³.

Release fast safe sealer⁴,
level not stop⁵ spot,
the way each,
in elegant execution, it's
in perfect symmetry⁶.

Dry water ID: E grid A⁷

of deified solos & sagas as a reviver,

RedivideR⁸

as a reviver of sagas & solos, deified⁹—
a dirge, dire, tawdry.

Symmetry, perfect in
its¹⁰ execution¹¹, elegant in
each way¹², the
top spot's not level,
release fast safe sealer.

Justice, it's
rotor's redder, no parts.

So hard was
the beginning.

Symmetry, Perfect for a Quest¹³

Notes on the side notes:

In an unknown parallel to their [technological counterparts](#),
there are two types of poetic symmetry breaking:

- explicit symmetry breaking* (4);
- spontaneous symmetry breaking* (8) and (12);

In *explicit symmetry breaking*, the symmetry of the word is
broken (like: 'sealer' → 'releas');

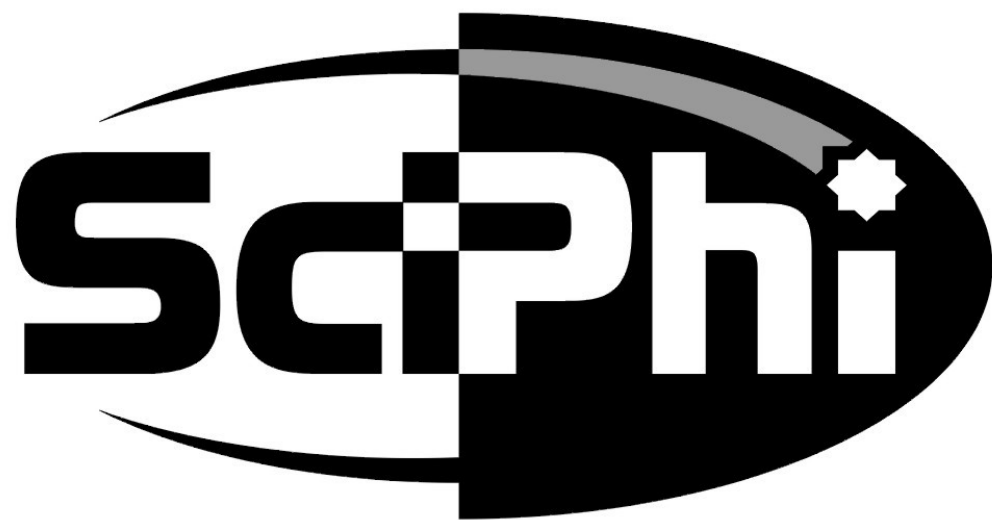
In *spontaneous symmetry breaking*, the words remain the
same, while their sequence changes (like: 'of A & B as a C'
→ 'as a C of B & A');

Dynamical symmetry breaking is a special form of
spontaneous symmetry breaking. Here the symmetry
breaks while it does not really need to: (like: 'Symmetry,
Perfect for a Quest' → 'Quest A for Perfect Symmetry' ≠
'A Quest for Perfect Symmetry');

In physical systems, symmetry breaking leads to a more
stable system at the cost of its original (perfect) symmetry.
It plays a major role in [pattern formation](#) and [topological
order](#). For example, ferromagnetic materials that break
spin rotation symmetry are used for digital information
storage (from which this triptych is recalled) and liquid
crystals that break the rotational symmetry of molecules
are used in display technology (on which this triptych is
displayed).

Theoretically, [Landua symmetry breaking](#) might lead to
topological quantum computing—the next breakthrough.

In short: symmetry breaking = more stability—less
beauty.



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