thN Lng Folk 2go: Investigating Future Premoderns™

The Confraternity of Neoflagellants

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Chapter 3

The Journeyman’s Guide to Anchoritism

**INTRO:**

Built on contributions from dudes in the local anti- and post-humanist communities, the *Journeyman’s Guide to Anchoritism* was a swarm-authored, locally-produced guide for visitors and residents alike. Focusing on non-glossy, low-to-no cost anchorite tourism, it included revisions of a contemporary work, colloquially known as “Sacamano’s Vintage Journal”, a handmade scrapbook by Ex Libris Anonymous upcycled from pages of old religious textbooks. Written in an accessible lay style, its readership today is mainly comprised of Journeymen and Pilgrims.

This edition includes marginalia from Alexandr Petrovsky’s skim-read personal edition, purchased from Powell’s while on a placement at the Weiden + Kennedy Building.
JACKET, VERSO:

When the spatial territories of both the sovereign human subject and sovereign state institutions unfurled in the rhizomatic cross-flows of global capitalism, then so too did the temporal categories that buffered modernity against the unformatted messiness of its unruly predecessor. As the epochal partitions fell away, so it was that, perhaps a tad surly, we discovered a plethora of hybridized medievalisms gathered together; remixed, reimagined, translated, fed-back, fed-forward, folded and refolded into the very constitution of modernity that now proclaimed itself symptomatic of an unspoken desire for a future assembled from a bricolage of pre-modern components. The Journeyman conducts her sacramental wandeln with prosumerist ambient liturgy, mass customised relic-ing and endless re-encounterings of future incarnations of off-map coffee shops that have occupied the same homely house for several years.

REVIEW:

There will be many things about this guide that you will not like. It might drive a bit too fast for comfort, especially because it has no seatbelts—the Journeyman’s Guide is open top and the roads to its anchorholds swerve all over the place. But you need to drive very fast to see things as things.

THE REVOLUTION OF THE THING

As the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why not be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other

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1 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Must mean the middle ages?
2 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Bike mechanic at Abraham’s?
3 Reviews, Proto-Bitch, Portland, Oregon, May 2014.
Think about Anchorholds and what comes to mind? A slower pace of life? A quiet Sunday spent alone contemplating in a delightful cell? Stolen moments of solace in a washroom cubical playing Temple Run? Or how about a hyper-condensed non-territory of infinite connections and quasi-objects? Astonishing rough diamonds, anchorholds are more than lush visions that hide their simple delights under a veil of complexity. These living tombs—by no means rare in the deterritorialised urban topographies of our times—are the sink-holes of subjectivity, exemplars of corporeal craftsmanship, virtuoso conductor pits of the post-human noise. In the very midst of the “already” unpretentious block, the most

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5 Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, Or What It’s Like to Be a Thing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 24.
niche artisanal neighbourhood, under the gleaming temporary pavilions of a non-recurring Biennale or the grass-roots of a maker-infested quasithingiverse, you will come upon a vault, a pit, a walled and grated cell, in the depths of which a human-object resides, eternally committed to eternal lament, litany or the madly ascetic “relic-ing” of the self.

Anchoritism is the widespread eremitic practice of solitary confinement. Anchorites (from the Greek verb anachorein, ‘to withdraw’) are men and women who volunteer to be permanently sealed away in electromagnetically shielded sub-basement cells adjoining the outer wall of a local landmark. If their application is approved, a ceremony of entombment is performed by a Local Investor who will later seal the enclosure with their official stamp. Often, as part of the macabre ceremony, a grave will be dug and the Office of the Dead recited to signify the new anchorite’s liminal status as already dead to the world yet reborn to a life of solitary spiritual communion. There it remains until fully, corporeally, expired.

The anchorite’s decision to become a person-object requires it to legally declare the purgatory of the neoliberal agent bankrupt. Historically speaking, the neoliberal agent was a self-managing, person-corporation, a bundle of flexible, improvable skills. Declaring their personhood legally bankrupt, the anchorite abandons its person-assets and becomes quasi-object.

A commonplace yet mysterious practice—what reflections such a strange spectacle awakens in us: that horrible unplugging; the cable torn from the outlet; that living being cut off from the communion of the noosphere\(^6\) and already numbered with the undead dead; the sublime unfriend; that LED lamp burning its last Duracell in the darkness; that remnant of life flickering out in the pit; that liturgical whisper, a

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\(^6\) PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: An evolving form of mass consciousness, the noosphere was a concept developed by Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin in the 1950s.
purgatorial voice both less and more than human, the never-ending litanies encased in plaster or stone: that eye darkly reflected in a blank screen; the haunting returned gaze of dead pixels; that ear inclined attentive to a Samsung Galaxy S9 that is now free to speak of itself; that mind enmeshed in a body, itself become one with its dungeon, and from out that triple incarnation of mind, flesh and stone, the perpetual plaint of a consciousness in free-play. What of all this reaches the fleeting apprehension of the nomadic pilgrims and corporate Journeymen who, without breaking the multiplicity of the pack, leave stone-cold kick-ass breakfasts and half-munched Farm Fusions as reverent alms to the one who vowed to stay behind?

Exploring anchorholds is fun, but more effective when approached with a bit of local know-how. The legal commodity status of anchorites in all the states and provinces visited in this Guide is related to changes in local laws that required courts to recognise all objects (Fyodor Terentyev, Irn Bru, Tecámac, flip-top box, Court of Henry VIII, zinester, spider plant, Albert Bush-Brown, dead canary, Chateau Frontenac, 3:17pm, polyester, Nectar soda, vinyl seat, Catalan, George Clinton, Lakefield National Park, etc.). This simplified the previously complex situation of multiple legal fictions that invoked personhood as the sine qua non of “rights”. The Revolution of the Thing ushered in the rapid and effective “objectification” of the law, the establishment of constitutions founded on object-sensitive ontologies, and the realignment of politics into post-humanist and anti-humanist factions.

The Revolution of the Thing combined radical de-sub-

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7 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: The guest bartend at Maceo’s on 6th.
8 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: The Journeyman is a neomedieval archetype that establishes an analog between contemporary nomad theory (especially the “nomadology” of Deleuze and Guattari) and the medievalist practices of pilgrimage, travelling apprenticeship, mercenarius, crusading, and adventuring.
jectification with dramatic reforms to the status of signification. Early reformers worked hard to ensure that there was no single anchoring connection (no “transcendental signifier”) that fixed meaning to the ground of the real. Instead they proposed a deferral along an endless chain of signification, a constant wailing and gnashing of teeth, a surplice or excess of meaning that found no safe anchorage in the bounded territories of the Port of Origin, presence, being or self. The most influential political figures in this period, the anchorites, accepted that the duration of this deferral is day and night forever and ever. It is hard for mortals to grasp how long this vacillation will be, but after we have been there a billion years, the interminable deferral will have but just begun. The subject then, came to be understood as nothing more than a disembodied textual being, the sole product of representation itself. Representation was always in crisis.⁹

Intertwined within the anchorite’s anti-humanism, the Revolution of the Thing proposed a great multitude of theoretical perspectives of the “post-human” that were not so easily accused of overzealously collapsing the category of the human to the realms of signification. A “new kind of man”, the anchorite came forth to us from a disparate field

⁹ PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: In the opening chapter of Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Simon O’Sullivan argues that that all discourses concerning art tend to be premised on a binary oppositions between content/form or meaning/object that are reinforced by questions like: What does this artwork mean? The Art object becomes predetermined by the questions asked of it and we never get to that place beyond the circumstances of the object being talked about. This contestant deferral leaves the art object hollowed out, or merely a form of writing. He proposes that theories of representation never get beyond this kind of ontological iron curtain between being and things, or between thought and matter. The critique of representation always takes place within the field of representation itself, therefore auto-generating a perpetual state of crisis.
of inquiry that challenged human exceptionalism, considering recent developments in cybernetics, informatics, biotechnology, and neuroscience.\footnote{PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Katharine Hayles argued against post-structuralism’s prioritising of semiotic or symbolic structures in favour of a theory of embodiment in which material and immaterial modes of affective signification interplay in the performative production of subjectivity: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999). As she put it, “embodied experience interacts with codes of representation to generate new kinds of textual worlds. In fact, each category—production, signification, consumption, bodily experience, and representation—is in constant feedback and feedforward loops with the others” (28). For Hayles, human subjectivity must be articulated not as an autonomous will, but as an emergent system or a “distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which ‘thinking’ is done by both human and non-human actors” (28).}

Gathering momentum at natural science and (post)humanities\footnote{PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . deconstruction, queer theory, postcolonialism, actor-network theory and the schizo-nomadic ontologies of Deleuze and Guattari. I’ve found so many cool (post)humanities that I can’t list them all. Sweeeeet!} swap-meets, theories of the post-human marked the beginning of a paradigmatic shift away from the all possessive “I” of the “solipsistic human dasein” towards a flat or deflated ontology that reinstalled the human as merely one category of being amongst countless others.\footnote{Julian Yates, “It’s (for) You; or, The Tele-t/r/opical Post-Human”, *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 1.1/2 (2010): 225.} The ontological barrier—established by Kant’s Copernican Revolution—between subject/object, thought/reality, phenomenon/ noumenon, began to crumble and a multiplicity of inhuman “actants” arrived to stake their claim within a radically expanded definition of being.

Equador led the way in the Revolution of the Thing, Article 71 in Chapter 7 of its Constitution securing equal rights
for all lifeforms: “Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes. All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature. To enforce and interpret these rights, the principles set forth in the Constitution shall be observed, as appropriate. The State shall give incentives to natural persons and legal entities and to communities to protect nature and to promote respect for all the elements comprising an ecosystem.” Equador maintained that humans, as part of Pacha Mama, were unexceptional and no longer in the middle. RÉSO followed shortly afterwards, redrafting the 19th Amendment to its By-Laws to secure citizenship and the equal rights of all objects: “Nothing and no one is willing any longer to agree to serve as a simple means to the exercise of any will whatsoever taken as an ultimate end. The tiniest maggot, the smallest rodent, the scantest river, the farthest star, the most humble automatic machines—each demands to be taken also as an end, by the same right as the beggar Lazarus at the door of the selfish rich man”.¹³ RÉSO shall apply preventive and restrictive measures on activities that might lead to the extinction of things, the destruction of things, and the permanent alteration of things.¹⁴

Julian Yates likened the invasion of inhuman actants that ensued to spine-tingling, otherworldly collect calls¹⁵ that “resonate within the ‘human’ but whose exteriority precludes their ready processing.” There is a fault on the line, an uncanny phone call deploying an “overwhelming, potentially

¹⁴ PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: First time I read this, it was pinned to the customer noticeboard of a Wal-Mart in Utah.
¹⁵ PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . one of those auto-leveling alt-arts.
cacophonous prosopopeia.” We cannot give a face to the post-human noise that “floods the switchboard”, bringing the “figure of the outside that is of all the beings confined there and not granted citizenship . . . inside the oikos or collective”.  

But, the mysterious call did not just come in from this side of the Enlightenment divide. The brain-scrambling cacophony was partly the result of a transtemporal epistemic overlap. Yates recalled how we desperately tried to “to transform [the] noise into news of an other”. The other turned out to be of monolithic proportions. It was the great pre-modern other, the Leviathan of Félix Guattari’s first type of “territorialised assemblage”:

Polyphonic spatial strata, often concentric, appear to attract and colonise all the levels of alterity that in other respects they engender. In relation to them, objects constitute themselves in transversal, vibratory position, conferring on them a soul, a becoming ancestral, animal, vegetal, cosmic. These objectities-subjectities are led to work for themselves, to incarnate themselves as an animist nucleus: they overlap each other, and invade each

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16 Yates, “It’s (for) You”, 225.
17 Yates, “It’s (for) You”, 228.
18 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Multiple divergent strands of neo-medieval theory and practice then synthesizing into a single disenable phenomenon. For example, Bruce Holsinger examined the work of key twentieth-century French intellectuals (Bataille, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Bourdieu) to uncover a foundational medievalism, which was “this coterie’s recurrent fascination, even obsession, with the historical period that modernity most consistently abjected as its temporal other. In its variegated assault on the legacy of the Enlightenment, the critical generation of this era turned to the Middle Ages not in a fit of nostalgic retrospection, but in a spirit of both interpretative and ideological resistance to the relentless inevitability of modernity”: The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.
other to become collective entities half-thing, half-soul, half-man, half-beast, machine and flux, matter and sign . . . \textsuperscript{19}

How good it is to be alone.... God shows his hidden mysteries and heavenly secrets to his dearest friends, not in the crowd of men, but where they were alone by themselves.  

Follow Mount-Royal’s medieval re-enactors down to the lil’ gem Rue Notre-Dame, regularly bedlamized by weekender anti-police brutality riots and the bestial devilry of carnival. Go at 10:00 a.m., Monday mornings. Everywhere you’ll spy the unmistakable signs of the day after. The ground strewn with luminous detritus of every description: ribbons, rags, plumes, grapefruit-infused beer bottles, and regurgital matter from the cabbagey feast of poutine, well-peppered pies of smoked beef, chicken and eels and pigeons, geese and other fowl roasted on a spit. A good many of the kids come down just to turn over the charred remains of compagnon émeute that mysteriously pile up to form a peak on the corner of Rue Saint-Sulpice. Standing in front of the Palais de Justice they rapturously recall the fine mumblings and cere-

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monial lynchings of the days before, sharing with phones dismembered effigies—last Instagrams of vanquished joy—while the homeless lug their booty of recyclable trash.

Watch out for scholars from the McGill Ghetto, in the mood for homey vegan food, passing to and fro, intent on finding BFFs lost amid the sensual vicars of the wooing tents. The artisans and tradespersons of Vieille Ville love to gossip and call to one another from shattered magasins while mounted officers-of-the-peace fidget speculatively with somnolent noise grenades and covetous plastic cuffs. Notre-Dame’s rockably-dude DJs entertain and give rennet-free drink and pétanque to keep things from getting dull.

After contemplating the vibrant and clamorous materiality of this recuperating urban assemblage, turn your attention towards the ancient building called the Notre-Dame Basilica. Upon turning the corner into Rue Saint-Sulpice, notice a tiny arched window peeking onto the sidewalk and closed by iron cross-bars, the only aperture by which a little air and light can penetrate to a small, doorless cell constructed on the level of the ground. Entombed within the wall of the old sanctuary is a quiet the more profound, a silence all the more oppressive, amid the echoes of Vieille Ville’s weekly festival of destruction.

This gloomy cell is the reclusorum of the erstwhile artist Studio-Eliasson who, some years back, vowed to entomb himself forever until death. Studio-Eliasson discarded his Berlin workshop, a 15,000 square-foot “dynamic knowledge-production machine” or “psychographic anatomy” of architects, farm animals, scientists, lab equipment, draftsmen, lighting technicians, art historians, house plants, construction materials (from sub-atomic particles to entire solar bodies), carpenters, hydroponic gardens and sustainable foodstuffs, actors (theatrical), state-of-the-art lighting/heating apparatus, visionary pedagogues, alchemical compounds, critical

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theorists, chefs, archivists, blacksmiths, professional psychics, electricians, medievalists, computer frameworks, organic compost systems, documentarians, solariums, artisans, sofa-beds, poets, electricians, object philosophers, air conditioners, humidors and baby-sitters. Giving up the rest of his personal effects as “contact relics” to the poor and to the crossed out God, Studio-Eliasson entered this one empty chamber, the door of which is walled up and the window open to the elements winter and summer. Thus became the Notre-Dame anchorite.

Studio-Eliasson’s globally established reputation as master journeyman and flatlander\textsuperscript{22} \emph{par excellence} has made his voluntary self-entombment all the more special. This anchoritic practice is regarded as one of the purest, most severely withdrawn, seemingly penitential, and incalculable acts of \emph{virtus}. In the months leading up to the ceremony of enclosure (Studio-Eliasson’s “grave” is on permanent display in Haus 2, Berlin), Studio-Eliasson’s professional-personal oeuvre was interpreted as an extended network, or flow of relations, emitting from the workshop. As Caroline Jones commented, the itinerant assemblage of masters, Journeymen, and apprentices (plus, lest we forget, the extended animal, vegetable and mineral entourage) resulted in “multiple modes of production—outsourcing, collaborating, prototyping, fabricat-

\textsuperscript{22} PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . “Flatlander”: post-work terminology describing creative cognitariats who pursue remunerable interests within nonhierarchical managerial structures. The computer game development company Valve coined the term “Flatland”. Valve employees received a desk on wheels which they could physically push around the building until they found a project (or people) that interested them. There were no managers, no set work hours (play and work are regarded as identical), salaries were determined by employees with their peers, and no one resigned because any “outside” conflicts (health, family, desire to travel, change of interests, etc.) could be negotiated and brought “inside” the corporate fold as remunerable activities. See: www.valvesoftware.com/company/Valve_Handbook_LowRes.pdf.
ing, experimenting, representing, exhibiting, publishing—all of which fuse[d] at the level of knowledge production”. The “artworks” leaving the studio, she further expounded, concretised as nodal extensions of the Studio-Eliasson assemblage itself—as “dispersed social-technical-spatial entities” that translate codified knowledge into tacit experience “in the culture-laden body of a viewer”. Studio-Eliasson, thus, was an attempt to generate and embody a hypereconomic assemblage of practices, to become a hub that dissolved distinctions between production, transfer, consumption and virtue.

At the time of Studio-Eliasson’s enclosure, the Journeyman, in all of its guises (the economic migrant, the exile, the fundamentalist vagrant, the tourist, the precarious worker, the residency artist, the hacker, compagnon) was fast becoming the dominant archetype within the deterritorialised flows of neomedieval cultural production. Journeymen and flatlanders honed and recycled their subject positions “by harmonizing their codes with other codes, by making their singularity resonate with a history and with problems born of other cultures.” As a “semionaut”, the Journeyman’s transsubstantial corpus exists “exclusively in the dynamic form of its wandering and the contours of the circuit it describes”. The neomedieval artist-entrepreneur is “always at sea”. Considering its endlessly cosmic dispersal of subjectivity, it is tempting to interpret The Eliasson’s corporeal bracketing as a result of some kind of schizoid break—an immense psychic fatigue brought on by a perpetual surfing and tramping through a cultural rain that never lets up. Is The Eliasson simply looking for a permanent place to hang Adam’s Kirtle, a finite shelter (as the becoming-corpse) from the

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26 Bourriaud, The Radicant, 55.
infinite, synapse-zapping intrusions of a hyper-scrutinized and hyper-scrutinizing reality?²⁷ The same question could be applied to the phenomenon at large. Is the anchoritic tradition a politico-aesthetic reaction to the “participatory panopticon”²⁸ or an attempt to crawl beneath the “ubiquitous sensors” that constituted “Privacy 2.0”?²⁹ We could, perhaps, look to the anchorites of our reactivated “middle” for suggestions.

As medieval historian Michelle M. Sauer argued, in the thirteenth century, when the position of anchorite was highly coveted, life was conducted with “no expectations of privacy. Every function of daily life—including sexual relations—was, at least in some sense, a shared experience”.³⁰ In the medieval household, occupants cohabited within a quasi-domestic and bustling flow of human and non-human entities, from farm animals and harvested crops to children, neighbours, lodgers and all the equipment of day-to-day labour. Anchorholds, by contrast, were “small, private, regulated, and empty—all scarce commodities in the Middle Ages”.³¹ In this light, the anchorhold seemingly offers respite from a vociferously probing and intrusive world of biotically peeping eyeballs and digitally sensing sensors.³²

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²⁷ PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . “Adams Kirtle”: an Eschatological term referring to the flesh of Adam which he adorns as clothing until it may be discarded in the eventual ascent to the Godside.
³¹ Sauer, “Representing the Negative,” par. 2.
³² PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . this is obviously far too reductive. Why retrospectively install such proto-individuation upon the thirteenth-century subject? Why suggest that solitude and privacy
Yet, as Robert Hasenfratz noted, many anchorites “withdrew” from the world in full knowledge that they would, paradoxically, find themselves fully at the center of parish life. As he infers from Ancrene Wisse, the recluse’s appointed servants or handmaidens not only attended to their daily needs, but, more crucially, acted as mediators with the outside world. These verbal messengers enabled the development of widespread anchoritic communication networks and, in some cases, the parish anchorhold acted “as a sort of bank, post office, school house, shop, and newspaper-services which today are provided mainly by public and quasi-public institutions”. In conjunction with these routine services, many anchorites became spiritual celebrities attracting pilgrims from afar, providing a link between this world and the next. The medieval anchorite, then, did not so much cut itself off from the world as offer itself up to the world as an embodied intersection, a one-stop-shop, between the commonplace and the extraordinary; the terrestrial concerns of everyday life and the Empyrean sublime. The anchorite today functions as a pontifex—a constructor of bridges transversing worlds.

Ask any Vieille Ville calèche driver as they trundle past the Notre-Dame thekary and they will tell you: The Eliasson were becoming prized within an otherwise communal and hybridist (not-yet-modern-enough) medieval world?

33 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: the essential early thirteenth-century “guide” for anchoresses.
37 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: . . . Thekary: term coined by New York anchorhold attendant Greggery Peccary after the artist Paul Thek with particular reference to his lost masterwork The Tomb
is a hypereconomic commodity, a person-object incubated via the discourses of Studio-Eliasson and maintained by the veneration of the community. The locals know this to be true. Studio-Eliasson’s transfiguration into the Notre-Dame anchorite integrated Studio-Eliasson’s relations of hypereconomic circulation into a single person-object: The Eliasson. Does this integration signify a quelling of the hypereconomic tide, a final anchoring in safe harbour? To the faithful, Eliasson’s is not the abjuration of hyper-linked (and radically de-privatised) subject positions at all, but an attempt to amplify such relations through a folding-in or condensation of the “culture-laden body” of the former Studio-Eliasson assemblage, into a single point of radiating intensity.

The Eliasson’s corporeal fusion with the ecclesiastic stone of the Notre-Dame Basilica creates a super-dense compound of affective material. Pilgrims marvel at its intensely elevated virtus, an immense gravitational pull that can be felt by passing within fifty feet of the thekary, drawing forth the luminous detritus of émeute. Its astonishing years of unbroken silence (not even its two masked “attendants” have betrayed it) have discharged a pandemic of speculative “The Eliasson”-themed discourses, tinged with apocalyptic neurosis. What is it doing? Has it sublimed unto the Empyrean? Crossed to another dimension? Is it Jesus? A terrorist in a cell? Will it explode? Its mighty flexing of ascetic muscle has been likened to the “bizarre athleticism of the ‘fasting-artist’ type . . . an athleticism of becoming that reveals only forces that are not its own”.38 The Eliasson’s entombed and inde-

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(1967). The work, popularly referred to as Death of a Hippie, consisted of a pale pink wooden structure, within which lay a full-size, wax effigy of the artist (including human hair and nails) surrounded by personal effects arranged for use in the afterlife. As the popular title indicates, the work was often interpreted as a lamentation on the failure of 1960s countercultural idealism.

terminate flesh forms a “bloc of sensations”\textsuperscript{39} held in place, not by “bone or skeletal structure”, but by a “house or framework”.\textsuperscript{40}

The Thekary of The Eliasson is “but the most shut-up house [that] opens onto a universe”.\textsuperscript{41} Not so alien, then, to the Studio-Eliasson oeuvre of old, this anchorhold does not shelter its semionaut from the cosmic forces of infinite code, but draws the universe, tight-beamed, in through its tiny portal. This is no all-consuming black hole. This thekary has two portals, one unto the world and a hagioscope that offers itself unto the sanctum of Notre-Dame, enabling lines of flight to go from house-territory to town-cosmos, from the finite to the infinite. Talk about core!

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{39} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 167.
\textsuperscript{40} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 179.
\textsuperscript{41} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 180.
\end{footnotesize}
Wonder was [in the middle ages], associated with paradox, coincidence of opposites; one finds mira (wondrous) again and again in the texts alongside mixta (mixed or composite things), a word that evokes the hybrids and monsters also found in the literature of entertainment.42

Supposedly this SE hole in the Sunnyside district is where the current global anchorite craze started. In fact, the anchorhold itself is certainly of more recent genesis than that in Notre-Dame, and, unlike the former, purposefully engenders a surprising degree of community interaction. Built by local artisans way back in 1992, and not populated for many decades after its completion,43 the anchorhold is protected by 1-

43 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Although the cell was specially commissioned for anchoritic practice no suitably committed recluse could be found then. Volunteers lasted between one day and two months until the project was simultaneously criticised as ‘hopelessly
hour fire resistance-rated construction and an automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Oregon State Fire Code. Arrangements were made for the anchorhold to be strictly monitored 24/7 for health and safety purposes. To this day, a server from the Waffle Window takes regular written requests from its anchorite through the ambient temple’s peephole for more tea lights, Tibetan prayer flags, pine nut kernels, fried chicken ‘n’ waffles, kombucha, etc. The anchorite logs the interactions faithfully in its Ex Libris Anonymous hand-made vintage book journal.

The flattered local community of Portland, Oregon have certainly kept their promise to venerate their anchorite! The Sacamano’s tangible “contact relics” populate the community (of people and things) with thousands of transfigured host objects, each one infused with the somatic effects of the donor’s distributed body. The corpus mysticum of the original body “spilled over into the vitality, the animation or ensouledness, of every body in which these multiplying phenomena occur”, the neighbourhood absorbs, redistributes and recycles this mad multiplicity of meticulously inscribed part-human hybrids.

While a well-kept secret on the growing PDX thekary circuit, Portland’s first anchorite only came to wider international attention through Antonio Gambini’s overhyped Journey to the West. It was while standing in line to witness the sensual enormity of a Farm Fusion from the Waffle Window on SE Hawthorne Blvd—two simply must become one within this gastromantic entanglement—that Gambini observed, directly across the street, a barred portal set into a turquoise painted wall three inches above the sidewalk. Upon crossing to inspect, a golden light emanated from inside. And so,

antiquated’ and ‘ahead of its time’. Just like Virtual Reality, the project was shelved until the next suitable epistemic shift brought it in line with global market trends.

Gambini “discovered” Portland’s anchorite, an experience which, as every schoolchild knows, the compagnon found to be the second most profound and transforming of his magnificent journey:

Through the peephole of the cell I spied a magnificent Me-Machine, its tangible user interface offering rich affordances and fully immersive ambient interactions with the sensorium. In the middle of the Me-Machine, a treadmill was lavishly decorated in the mid-century neobaroque fashion, including the standard Willard altar with crystal and incense of Lycean myrrh set up with all manner of glimmering protrusions and frivolously eclectic attachments. The entire contents of the cell—including the small bunk, refrigerator, chamber pot, steel tub and The Sacamano itself—were painted gold to enable awesome surface-to-surface conductivity. The faint odour of Lycean myrrh piggybacked a more potent fragrance of stale sweat out into the street. Once you’ve seen it, you can’t imagine any other form of anchorhold!

The golden anchorite—tightly muscled yet waiflike and of indeterminate gender—mounts the Me-Machine at its steepest elevation and begins to walk in place. “Stop reducing everything!” screams The Sacamano. As the speed is dialled up and the recluse breaks into a jog, a projection appears on the wall depicting a monastically robed and bearded figure standing cross-armed atop what appears to be a mountain of discarded consumables. The projection is arranged just so that a second smaller window (the “hagioscope”) corresponds to the area where the Vintage Store Keeper’s head would normally appear.45 From this aperture, small objects are

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45 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: The Vintage Store Keeper projected on the screen appears to be a reference to the virtual-somatic religion of Mercerism in Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? In this religion worshipers grip the handles of
ejected, striking The Sacamano at various points in the body. As The Sacamano slowly increases pace, so too does the velocity of the projectiles until the pain of impact appears to become intolerable and the anchorite slows down to a walk. During this respite, the Sacamano’s perspiring body can be observed through the increasingly translucent layers of body paint. It is covered in bruises and tiny scars. After a few neck rolls, power shrugs, and motivational fist-pumps, it picks up pace and the auto-flagellation continues.

I stepped back at this point, my body-sleeve emoting tweet-clouds of concern. I stumbled over something, falling backwards. At my feet a gold painted cooler. In this box I was invited to leave an object—perhaps the remains or wrapper of my Farm Fusion—which, as I had just witnessed, would be put to good use. Anyway, I hope this gives you some idea of the program.46

The informal title of this anchoritic ritual—Me-Machine for Throwing Shit at the Moon—allegedly derives from The Sacamano’s flippant retort to a local reporter from Proto-Bitch magazine who asked what it was busy constructing in the SE Hawthorne basement. Given The Sacamano’s former reputation as a content curator and master relic-er, the remark was widely interpreted as sarcastic commentary on the anthropocentric folly of scientific attempts to subjugate a profoundly indifferent universe. Though there may be partial truth here, it seemed apparent from Gambini’s vivid description of the early years that Sacamano’s anchorhold was home to the first, and foremost, fully immersive, ambient

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46 Antonio Gambini, Journey to the West (undated), Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org.
One of Willard’s most popular boutique products, the Me-Machine, was Sherlocked to enable the user to cancel all personal gift-debt obligations by becoming a relational hub for expanded para-human networks. The Me-Machine stood in contradistinction to the unpopular Man-Machines of the industrial era. Rather than instrumentalise the body as if it were a cog in a network of commoditised labour relations, the Me-Machine concerned free exchanges of desire. The Me-Machine was not focused so much on tailoring and silvercasting experiences to niche markets that already existed (this kind of mass customisation failed to become a growth sector), but rather with stimulating supply and demand for clusters of experience. The Me-Machine fed a bazaar, \(^{47}\) a raucous commercial labyrinth within which there was no vantage point but wherein users would develop a cacophony of new itches to scratch.

Once immersed in the Me-Machine interface, the users’ “bespoke” desires were “bundled”, cracked, taken-apart, reassembled, resurrected, cooked, remixed, recycled and networked into a singular marketable commodity. The anchoritic user of the Me-Machine ceased to be a human subject, transfiguring into a person-object, and thus a conduit or node within the common terrain of the Me-Machine’s sonorous metaverse. The Me-Machine’s singularity played itself like an instrument. Unique timbre, assonance, and dissonance were produced by tangential interference between “bundles” drifting with its field. Thus the adoption of the Me-Machine was a bilateral development—the Me-Machine created new users just as these new users created new “bundles” for the Me-Machine. At an exorbitantly high price, the Me-Machine promised a fully integrated, ambient, sensorial continuum, a temporary reliquary characterised only by

its middle-ness.

The ambient withdrawal from conventional “terrestrial” consumerism offered by the Me-Machine, paradoxically, again, redistributed its anchorite as pontifex for a metaversal sublime. Ambience, in its association with “background noise” or “room temperature”, is most readily allied with the captivating immersive atmosphere of the bazaar and with the lack of “perspective” it offers us. To get a clear picture of things, one free of static, such ambience is the snow that needs to be identified and discounted, an interloper to be calibrated out of the experiment. It is in this sense that Paul Virilio rallied against “soronity” and its “prosecution of silence”. For Virilio, silence is voiceless in the Me-Machine’s mash-ups, babble, and chatter. This creates an impossible bind in which mutism signifies only consent to the omnipresent clamour of the souk. The choice to remain thoughtfully silent has been taken away by the increasing volume of noise, a buzz amplified by the unfurled long-tail of the Me-Machine. The anchoritic tradition imposed by the Me-Machine ensures that people, spaces and things can longer be considered mute; everything is vacuumed into its semantic web of perpetual interference. Soronity is the Me-Machine’s black hole, and the louder it gets, the more attractive its magnetism; it has no respite.

After a pre-selected period of time, the Me-Machine normally disconnects its user, allowing them to return to the terrestrial business of perpetually renegotiating their neoliberal agency. By walling itself inside a retrofitted Me-Machine, The Sacamano became a permanent fixture of Willard’s global product line, a unique, bespoke, person-object of equivalent status with all other objects. At the same time, The Sacramano became the local-product par excellence, the SE Hawthorne anchorhold venerated as the smallest of small-batch ateliers. Thus Gambini learned the secrets of the

mass distribution of the artisanal.

Before returning to Les Cours Mont-Royal to luncheon triumphantly with RÉSO’s grand masters, Gambini took a little time out to wander the Federal Work Programme-paved sidewalks of PDX, admiring the ambundant rose trees of the luscious Sunnyside ’burbs and the wild Doug Firs that peppered the reclaimed commons of Laurelhurst Park. En route he sampled the delights of PDX’s neomedieval makers, marvelling at the hand-crafted “golden share-boxes” enveloping the gossamer thin MacBooks that decorated brewpubs and artisanal-cafes in Burnside. Inside his share box, which came free with a tall mochachino, he found an exquisite wooden relic, digitally-inscribed at ADX Portland with the motto: Half tide dock, Mănăstirea Humorului, Pittsburgh and Susquehanna Railroad, Royalty Theatre, Glasgow, Basic Education High School, thN Lng folk 2go, Albert de Rochas, Periapical abscess, Vanlandi, Scamp grouper, Katsura Atrina rigida, Cardigan, Salvador Capín, STS-42, Aalst, Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, 1917–18, List of MTR station codes, John de Brantingham, Zheng Zhi⁴⁹—the perfect souvenier of his journey to the west.

In what sense, if any, is The Sacamano anchorite still relevant? One of the world’s fastest growing anchoritic sites, it has all the right ingredients for an unforgettable pilgrimage. The contact relic-ing aspect of the neomedieval anchoritic tradition is unbeatable in its recognition and celebration of the emancipatory potential and marked proliferation of non-modern quasi-objects throughout the cyborgian⁵⁰ and no-

⁵⁰ See Donna, J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 181: “Taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technolo-
madological life-world of global capitalism. Quasi-objects\textsuperscript{51} are objects that are neither natural objects nor social subjects, but monstrous composites circulating in (and crucially as) networks of translation and mediation. Part semiotic, part biological, part human, part mineral, part computer, part myth, quasi-objects shape human practices by drawing people into amorphous relations with non-human actants or agents. A scale-free hypereconomic artisanal facility, quasi-objects are simultaneously fabricated, circulated and consumed within the anchorhold’s Me-Machine.

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour argued that the constitution of modernity arose from an epistemic purification that detached the knowledge of people (culture and politics) from the knowledge of things (nature and sci-

\textsuperscript{51} Bruno Latour is following the work of Michel Serres: “A ball is not an ordinary object, for it is what it is only if a subject holds it. Over there, on the ground, it is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function, and no value. Ball isn’t played alone. Those who do, those who hog the ball, are bad players and are soon excluded from the game. They are said to be selfish. The collective game doesn’t need persons, people out for themselves. Let us consider the one who holds it. If he makes it move around him, he is awkward, a bad player. The ball isn’t therefore the body; the exact contrary is true: the body is the object of the ball; the subject moves around this sun. Skill with the ball is recognized in the player who follows the ball and serves it instead of making it follow him and using it. It is the subject of the body, subject of bodies, and like a subject of subjects. Playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance. The laws are written for it, defined relative to it, and we bend to these laws. Skill with the ball supposes a Ptolemaic revolution of which few theoreticians are capable, since they are accustomed to being subjects in a Copernican world where objects are slaves”: *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 225–226.
ence), placing them at either extremity of a subject/object pole. Over time, the average citizens, bound up in this matrix of imposed dualisms, found their naive belief systems being “denounce[d], and debunk[ed] and ridicule[d]”\(^{52}\) by social scientists guarding the ontological integrity of both poles. On the one side, when people believed objects to have intrinsic meaning, the social scientist taught them about fetishisation, that “Gods, money, fashion and art offer only a surface for the projection of our social needs and interests”.\(^{53}\) On the flipside, when people believed themselves to be free as human subjects, the social scientist (now allied with the natural scientist) endeavoured to show how the power of biology, language, and economics “determines, informs and moulds the soft and pliable wills of the poor humans”. Latour concludes that, in “the first denunciation objects count for nothing,” while in the second “they are so powerful that they shape the human society . . . . Objects, things, consumer goods, works of art are either too weak or too strong”\(^{54}\).

Latour does not argue that objective forces and social constructions are mere fabrications, but that modernity, in order to clearly define itself against non-modern cultures past and present, rendered unthinkable (while at the same time accelerating) a “middle kingdom” of hybrid nature-culture assemblages, “frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensor-equipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales fitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers, and so on,” where “everything happens”.\(^{55}\)

Paradoxically, it was the intensive differentiation, sorting and classification (humanity/non-humanity and the crossed


\(^{53}\) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 52.

\(^{54}\) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 53.

\(^{55}\) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 37, 49.
out God) of the modernist project that enabled the global expansion of hybrid networks that “continue to multiply as an effect of this separate treatment”.\textsuperscript{56} It was in the vast undifferentiated middle kingdom of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects that the neomedieval aesthetic first took root in the cult of neo-dada relics, the becoming-other of the posthuman nomad, and now, in the revival and global adoption of the “full-fat” anchoritic practice—a final return to the scattered, unbounded excesses of pre-modern, loosey goosey embodiment, and to the “deeply weird multiplicities” and monstrous fusions of persons, things and Gods.\textsuperscript{57}

And it was here, dear Journeymen, that we unearthed, dusted down, and held aloft the enchanted objects denied to us by the negative dialecticians and “signifier enthusiasts”\textsuperscript{58} who sought to protect us from their alienating, reifying, and objectifying allure. As Latour lamented,

Haven’t we shed enough tears over the disenchantment of the world? Haven’t we frightened ourselves enough with the poor European who is thrust into a cold soulless cosmos, wandering on an inert planet in a world devoid of meaning? Haven’t we shivered enough before the spectacle of the mechanized proletarian who is subject to the absolute domination of a mechanized capitalism and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, abandoned smack in the middle of language games, lost in cement and formica? Haven’t we felt sorry enough for the consumer who leaves the driver’s seat of his car only to move to the sofa in the TV room where he is manipulated by the powers of the media and the postindustrialized society?!\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Latour, \textit{We Have Never Been Modern}, 13.
\item Latour, \textit{We Have Never Been Modern}, 115.
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For Jane Bennett these narratives of disenchantment had to be disassembled since they contributed to the very conditions they portrayed. The delineation of the nature/culture poles as “orders no longer capable of inspiring deep attachment inflects the self as a creature of loss and thus discourages discernment of the marvelous vitality of bodies human and nonhuman, natural and artifactual”.

Following Latour, she argued that “sites of enchantment” permeated the landscape of modernity and exist today in “the discovery of sophisticated modes of communication among nonhumans, the strange agency of physical systems at far-from-equilibrium states, and the animation of objects by video technologies—an animation whose effects are not fully captured by the idea of ‘commodity fetishism’”.

To be enchanted, she wrote, is to be “struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives in amid the familiar and the everyday”.

And it is the very same magical refrains that continue to adorn every one of The Sacamano’s golden graspable user-interface contact-relics. When night falls, the Portland anchorhold is host to a thrilling heterotopic configuration of objects not of its own making—generating interminable litanies of illicit subject-object encounters.

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The world is neither a grey matrix of objective elements, nor raw material for a sexy human drama projected onto gravel and sludge. Instead, it is filled with points of reality woven together only loosely: an archipelago of oracles or bombs that explode from concealment only to generate new sequestered temples.  

Let’s hear it for pavements! My urban cousins, the unsung heroes stopping humans everywhere from walking in the road or the dirt.

What’s in a name? Anyone who has had the great fortune to visit Charing Cross Station in London will fondly remember the branch of WH Smiths located directly across from the Cannon Street entrance. The history of the branch goes

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64 The London Stone, Twitter: twitter.com/thelondonstone.
65 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: WH Smiths were assembling an
way back to 1981. Alas the newsagent chain has gone, raptured during the early phase of the Greater Recession. For the anchoritic pilgrim willing to travel the distance, the eviscerated retail outlet’s true charms lie beneath. The mundane topography of Charing Cross makes it easy to get to, except by boat. Walking offers an excellent overview of the territory prior to planning a longer, more intimate visit.

Observe carefully an extruding stone fascia with a glass panel protected by a decorative steel portcullis. A brass plaque on the sloping roof confirms that this is the house of the London Stone—a mythic chunk of limestone of unknown purpose and origin, now reclaimed as an alien anchorhold by the Fraternity of Tiny Ontologists [FTO]. During the weeks that Eliasson’s enclosure ceremony caused a media storm, the FTO quietly announced that the London Stone had been elected worshipful master of their brotherhood and invited everyone to a street party to retroactively celebrate its entombment. This would be the first and final work of the FTO who, as far as anyone can gather, have followed WH Smiths into the ether.

Locals visit the stone regularly throughout the summer (and sometimes in winter, too) as they pass by on their way to a local cob kiosk. The stony anchorite stares blankly, infinitely withdrawing behind its stony kirtle. What is it doing, this rudely solid thing? “Well”, as the FTO might have said, “it is stoning!” “But what is it?” the Journeyman might ask. The Tiny Ontologists have left a tiny answer: “It is.” This may sound annoyingly reductive, but the FTO are telling us the opposite. The London Stone cannot be reduced to any of its excellent marinaded sesame carrot grilled sandwich.

66 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Yeah, I read about this on Jeffery Cohen’s blog: www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2013/02/a-door-into-stone.html.

67 PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Almost certainly homage to Ian Bogost’s brand of Object-Oriented-Ontology. In Alien Phenomenology he proposed a “tiny ontology”: tiny enough to be one word written on the front of a baseball cap—“is”. 
perceived qualities. For some it is crystallised CaCO3, and for others it is a druid “index stone”, a prehistoric fetish stone, a psycho-geographical place-mar-ker, a talismanic protector of the city or the stone that posts tweets on the daily life of Cannon Street. Yet these are just human perceptions—what is the London Stone to the pavement below it, the steel bars that protect it, or the building that entombs it? It is all of these relations and none. It is this very inexhaustibility that makes it real, and that points to a deeply weird inner reality, a molten core, that is more than the sum of its external relations.

In his January 2010 blog entry, “Onticology–A Manifesto for Object-Oriented Ontology,” Levi Bryant sketched out the heretical propositions of a nascent philosophical movement broadly referred to at the time as Speculative Realism. Although differing considerably in their ontological perspectives, the cohort were loosely united in their opposition to what Quentin Meillassoux had termed “correlationism”—the tendency of post-Kantian philosophy to limit its enquiry to the mutual interplay of human thought and objective reality. Provocatively declaring the year 1781 a fateful watershed marking the devastating Copernican Revolution of Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, Bryant forwarded the SR position that Western philosophy had persisted in a “universalised transcendental anthropology” that was cyclically investigating the various mechanisms by which human cognition structures the world. In other words, the category of the human continued to dominate a species-narcissistic ontology in which objects in the world are reduced to mere propositions by human beings. Against this asymmetry, Speculative Realism—or in one of its more prominent variants, Object Oriented Ontology—stated not only that objects exist, fully independent of human observation or cognition, but that the human subject is just one particular type of object amongst others.68

68 Levi Bryant, “Onticology–A Manifesto for Object-Oriented Ontol-
As rumour has it, the FTO was founded anonymously by ex-members of the Cybernetic Culture Research Group—a radical collective of para-academic researchers who enthusiastically combined philosophy, techno-science, natural science, medieval mysticism, science fiction, numerology, and complexity theory with late 1960s Anglo-French gastronomic alchemy in an effort to explode the insular and overly self-reflexive fiefdom of academic humanism. The shift from this deleuzoguattarian schizo-nomadic praxis towards object-oriented, speculatively pragmatic medievalism was clearly inspired by the strange phenomenology of Graham Harman who, in 2010, proclaimed:

Against the model of philosophy as a rubber stamp for common sense and archival sobriety, I would propose that philosophy’s sole mission is weird realism. Philosophy must be realist because its mandate is to unlock the structure of the world itself; it must be weird because reality is weird. “Continental science fiction”, and “continental horror”, must be transformed from insults into a research program.\(^{69}\)

Harman’s realism rejected philosophy’s human-world coupling by stating that the whole of reality is constructed from objects alone. By objects he meant “any reality with an autonomous life deeper than its qualities, and deeper than its relations with other things”\(^{70}\), and thus including molecules, solar systems, Gandalf,\(^{71}\) The Eliasson, Canada, hallucinations, iPhones, psychoanalysis, farm animals, scientists, lab equipment, draftsmen, lighting technicians, art historians,


\(^{71}\) PETROVSKY’S MARGINALIA: Bike mechanic at Abraham's?
house plants, construction materials (from sub-atomic particles to entire solar bodies), carpenters, hydroponic gardens and sustainable foodstuffs, actors (theatrical), state-of-the-art lighting/heating apparatus, visionary pedagogues, alchemical compounds, critical theorists, chefs, archivists, blacksmiths, professional psychics, electricians, medievalists, computer frameworks, organic compost systems, documentarians, solariums, artisans, sofa-beds, poets, electricians, object philosophers, air conditioners, humidors and baby-sitters, lumps of rock, a minute of time, and hammers. Furthermore, reality is fundamentally weird because its objects withdraw from each other. To explain this Harman developed Heidegger’s “tool analysis”, in which he proposed that when we are using a hammer we only perceive it through its function or “equipmentality”. It is only when the hammer is broken that we see its materiality (“wood”, “metal”) as previously hidden dimensions of its being. Harman universalises this proposition to the point where all objects can only make contact through “sensual profiles”. When fire burns cotton, for example, it does not make contact with all the properties of cotton (texture, smell, price, etc.), but merely its flammability. Likewise “dogs do not make contact with the full reality of bones, and neither do locusts with cornstalks, viruses with cells, rocks with windows, nor planets with moons”.72

The real London Stone (as the FTO would have it) can only be what it is—it hides behind its relations to neighbouring objects (we Journeymen included) who can only speculate what it might be.

And yet, despite its withdrawal, the London Stone (this ‘alien’ anchorite) still engages with other objects in the world. The more it withdraws, the stronger the gravitational force or allure that warps the trajectory of passing objects, drawing them into mutually speculative relations that in turn generate new sensual profiles. But how, exactly, do anchorites collide and relate when they are so entombed with their

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hidden cores? In Harman’s theory of “vicarious causation”, objects interact through an intermediary, third object called a “sensual vicar”. As a Christian vicar provides a pontifex between God and humans (as does the anchorite), so sensual vicars act as mediators between real objects. Sensual objects, Harman explains, exist on the interior of real objects. They are how real objects perceive other objects—for example, the real object of “fire” does not directly encounter a real object “cotton”, but a sensual object “cotton”, which for fire would be “fuel” or “flammability”. The anchorite thus translated is the vicarious link between the finitude of the sensual realm and the infinitely withdrawn mysterium of the real. This brings us back to the earlier proposition that the anchorite does not withdraw from the world so much as open up to it. As Timothy Morton writes,

Withdrawal isn’t a violent sealing off. Nor is withdrawal some void or vague darkness. Withdrawal just is the unspeakable unicity of this lamp, this paperweight, this plastic portable telephone, this praying mantis, this frog, this Mars faintly red in the night sky, this cul-de-sac, this garbage can. An open secret.\(^\text{73}\)

The Fraternity of Tiny Ontologists existed for a tiny amount of time to anoint a tiny alien anchorite in a tiny anchorhold, but the implications were far from tiny. When Graham Harman proposed that causality (object-object relations) takes place in the sensual realm, he was claiming aesthetics as first philosophy. Aesthetics, he argued, had hitherto served as the “impoverished dancing-girl of philosophy—admired for her charms, but no gentleman would marry her”.\(^\text{74}\) Since Kant, aesthetics had enjoyed a prominent role as an onto-


logical dating agency, matching up human subjects with their objective surroundings. And now, staring in puzzlement at the tiny, stony anchorite in its tiny stony anchorhold, can we not wonder, as did Timothy Morton, if the aesthetic dimension is not the “vast nonlocal mesh”\(^{75}\) that pulls all of reality into its causal relations? According to Morton,

Aesthetic events are not limited to interactions between humans or between humans and painted canvases or between humans and sentences in dramas. They happen when a saw bites into a fresh piece of plywood. They happen when a worm oozes out of some wet soil. They happen when a massive object emits gravity waves. When you make or study art you are not exploring some kind of candy on the surface of a machine. You are making or studying causality. The aesthetic dimension is the causal dimension. It still astonishes me to write this.\(^ {76}\)


\(^{76}\) Morton, *Realist Magic*, par. 15.
DEPARTURE AND/OR ARRIVAL

Aesthetics is not a discipline dealing with art and artworks, but a kind of, what I call, distribution of the sensible. I mean a way of mapping the visible, a cartography of the visible, the intelligible and also of the possible.\textsuperscript{77}

In looking back at the rise of neomedieval aesthetics and the anchoritic tradition, the Journeyman may recall the absence (or at least indifference) to “art” in the enveloping discourse. Discussions making claims and counter-claims for the “artistic” status of emergent neomedieval practice materialised of course, but were quickly engulfed in the tsunami of Western non-humanism. It was as if a certain fatigue had taken hold regarding the constant bickering over art’s precise ontological status. At the height of the global economic paradigm of “cognitive” or “creative” capitalism, the attributes and practices that once defined the field of artistic production—virtuoso individualism, self-determined flexibility (always at work, always at play), creative autonomy and highly networked mobility—were increasingly perceived as synonymous with those of the nomadic creative class of Flatlanders, knowledge workers who supposedly contributed to the alienating neoliberal agenda of appropriating and marketing subjective experience. A general atmosphere of accusation had mobilised around the field of art. As Liam Gillick put it, artisans were increasingly perceived as “people who behave, communicate, and innovate in the same manner as those who spend their days trying to capitalize every moment and exchange of daily life. They offer no alternative to this”.\textsuperscript{78}


a perplexing contrast to this accusation, the immaterial labour of artists, taken en masse, seemed to constitute what post-operaist theorists had proposed as the “communism of capitalism” — a cognitive multitude capable of re-appropriating the production of common goods (including fragile human subjectivities) from within the system of capitalist accumulation. In this sense, artisans faced not just an accusation, but a call-to-arms. They were imbricated as a creative core within the culture industries and as such had a responsibility (yet again) to “redirect their anger towards commodification, market domination and the capitalistic system”.

As if this immobilising double-bind weren’t enough, the age-old arguments over art’s innately transgressive power to mobilise against the ravishes of global capitalism were becoming tiresomely bifurcated over the apparently insoluble divide between “art” and “life”. As Jacques Rancière noted, the “two great politics of aesthetics” were to be observed at work in the sublime nudity of the abstract work championed by the philosopher and in the propositions for new and interactive types of relationship proposed by the artist and today’s exhibition curator. On the one hand, there is a project for aesthetic revolution in which art, by effacing its difference as art, becomes a form of life. On the other, there is the resistant figure of the work in which political promise is negatively preserved . . . through the separation between artistic form and other forms of life.

To reflect again on Latour’s thesis, what we are witness-

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ing is an endlessly dialectical battle between “strong objects” and “strong subjects”. In the “strong objects” corner autonomous artworks (evoking the unrepresentable sublime) are weaponized against their nasty cousins, the “commodity form”. In the “strong subjects” camp (evoking micro-utopias of communal living), the social artwork is embodied by “emancipated” participants, now fully armoured against the corporate overlords. Neither approach fully escapes the specialist (and hierarchical) ghetto of artistic production and the subject/object apartheid is played out ad nauseam.

The only possible telos for this dialectic was the categorical dissolution of “art” altogether, which was (in the annals of modern art) always an intolerable (and now discursively exhausted) proposition since it confounded dialectical thought as self-negating and essentially cyclical. But, while Rancière was coming to the conclusion that the aesthetic regime of art functioned through the very suspension of “opposed logics” and “paradoxical constraints”, another group of heretical thinkers had sneaked in through the backdoor of the Enlightenment divide and re-emerged on a different path entirely.

Amidst all this dialectical hair-pulling, “neomedieval aesthetics” and the new anchoritic tradition quietly emerged and embarked upon practices that recognised no qualitative difference between extraordinary and commonplace aesthetic experience. An essentially bi-rational form of “speculative pragmatism” evolved from a haphazard re-activation of the pre-modern mysterium that had never been fully expunged from the “spaces brutally lit by alien reason”. The liturgical mash-ups and common oddities that litter the pathways of the neomedieval traveller have been brought to light by what Ben Woodward called the “weirding of philosophy”—an attempt to think outside the “dead loop of the human skull” and to “recognize not only the non-priority of

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82 Rancière, Aesthetics and Its Discontents, 44.
human thought, but that thought never belongs to the brain that thinks it; thought comes from somewhere else.”

Take your tour of the bittersweet anchor holds discussed in this guide—if it’s summer, bring a plastic bag and a bathing suit. Reinvigorate your sense of wonder at the bizarre hypereconomy of sensual relations and aesthetic transfigurations manifest throughout the middle kingdom of the great subject/object divide. Consider the anchorite who heroically straddles the ontological dyke that we Journeymen must constantly leap—never settling on one side or the other. Now try it yourself! When your legs start to tremble, your britches tear asunder, and your groin aches to high heaven, wonder at the anchorite who, with mighty yoga skills and limbs of steel, adopts this position forever with the ascetic grace of a lobster clinging steadfastly to the rim of a steaming pot.

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