

**Imaginary Magnitudes & the Anoriginal Hypocrisy that Vanishes in the Meantime
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One has to secrete a jelly in which to slip quotations down people's throats—and
one always secretes too much jelly.
—Virginia Woolf

Last night I dreamed I had the imagination of a machine. But it was not what I expected. There was nothing cold, nothing calculated about it. No reckonings, no summations. Instead there was a condensation of functions, a displacement of thresholds, & an endless switching of something for nothing. I perceived everything as an exception, as a series of singular events replacing one another according to the laws of chance & coincidence. In effect, I was watching the reality of contingency. It was like I was dreaming. & my head looked like an apple with a bite taken from it.

When I awoke I had the imagination of a man. But it was not what I expected. A weave of fiber-optic cables, copper wires, & electromagnetic radio waves had covered the planet, doubling my neural habits with innumerable sub-routines & proliferating data-blooms. What I saw & what I heard in this waking life was striking in its resemblance to my dream: condensed messaging, displaced labour, & the pure ecstasy of communication—of saying so much about absolutely nothing. The world was held together by purchase after purchase & by a manufactured faith in the freedom of choice & absolute need-satisfaction.

At first the resemblance to my dream put me in a mood—a sublime panic, to be precise. But then it dawned on me that with dreams above & dreams below, the difference between the hallucinations of animal sleep & the fascinations of technical reverie was moot, or at least largely semantic. I began to grasp that if waking & sleeping had lost their distinction & were now only imaginary magnitudes of the same obscene oneiric activity, then any break between my slumber-self & waking-I would be expressive not of gaps in reality but of a sliding scale of lucidity.

Mulling this over for a moment, I asked myself how clarity could scale. & then I wondered whether mulling over my mulling something over would be an occasion of more or less clarity. Would a thought about a thought be a more or a less cogent thought? Would a daydream about a dream that I had the night before be a more or a less lucid dream, would its images be more limpid or more turbid? Of course there's no way to tell because both mullings are made of gas—two abstractions containing equal parts flatulence & vapor. In other words, neither thought rises to the heights of meaning nor sinks to the depths of feeling. What the reflective forms of these meditations unleash on experience is an eternity of seduction, lured as they are by the way thought disappears into its own appearances, like the way adjacent mirrors fall into their own reflections, like the way one's voice can vanish in successive copies of itself while sitting in a room, different from the one you are in now.

I suppose treating lucidity as a continuously mutating reflection is like hearing an echo as a sound that perfectly represents its passage through the miscellaneous detours of its milieu. This is how Thoreau thinks about the vale-hopping peals of distant bells that issue from the transports of the Lincoln, Acton, Bedford, & Concord trains. Rather than muddled tolls, he hears a “natural melody” emerge from the bell-tones' passing conversations with every leaf, needle, & bough of the woods. But the irony of this is that the “natural” melody is actually a superbly artificial one, one that retains an expressive fidelity not with its percussive source but with its process of transformation. “Artifice precedes nature.” Isn't that what Sartre wrote? Even stranger, however,

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is that an echo always becomes more than what it was & less than what it will become. Thoreau's echoplex is a paradoxical occasion because its single acoustic event pulls in two directions at once: a referential deformation (bell) & a musical transformation (melody). "All sound is like an echo." Isn't that what Aristotle, who was rumored to have a stutter, once s-s-s-said? Sound is air reflecting its own transformation from one state of agitation to another. It turns out, then, that echoes, too, are made of gas.

Now, what a gas it would be if dreams weren't an echo of waking life but the other way around. Like the melody that finds its way to Walden Pond, I'd think that life's scale of lucidity would depend on how it makes the many dimensions of its carrying-on an active part of its appearance. But the problem that I imagine with this inversion is not a matter of whether life happens multidimensionally or not. The echo shows that a carrying on always carries on in more ways than one, & its transformation from a mere acoustic occasion to an expressive event indicates that variations are happening to its propagation all at once. However, these various happenings happen with differing degrees of intensity & emphasis that channel perception & desire in ways that make it impossible to express the sense of all these multiple goings-on in a single proposition. So even though Thoreau can hear both the train bells & the melody in the echo, he can only *listen* to one series at a time. He can only make sense of each series one after the other because they both express what eludes the present & causes future & past, more & less, too much & not enough to coincide in the simultaneity of a rebellious matter. The melody-series & bell-series both make sense of what is picked out by the verb "to echo" that specifies each as expressions of its happening.

The problem, therefore, isn't that waking life is insufficiently multidimensional or that it's not weird enough to echo the logical incongruities that typify dreaming life. The problem is that waking life & its excluded middles are a hard won & hard to lose nervous accomplishment that's fated to exclude itself from the very play of all those abstractions that brought it to appearance in the first place. To be conscious, to be "awake" at all, I have to have repressed my species' time in the cradle of condensation & displacement, the time when it discovered that repeating a trauma blunts it & blunting it hallucinates it & hallucinating it is not really experiencing it & not really experiencing it is, well, thinking it. Although this may have won my kind & me the victory of "thinking" & (for better or worse) our sense of possibility, it also lost us our animal faith & a feeling for destiny. & of the two things to lose, destiny is absolutely the worst, for in its absence we substitute an unlimited experimentation on the given &, as we know, making the given more than given doesn't make the given more given.

But now that I think about it, perhaps this *is* the destiny of that atavistic nervous trick I play on myself over & over again in order to transport the painful impingements of an unqualified real to a more contoured & supple dimension, a dimension that delivers something of myself to remoter affective & symbolic worlds without ever taking me there—actually. What I mean is that this tic is a technique for supplanting the bare activity of something doing with something doing that's exactly not what it appears to be, exactly what it isn't—namely, a thought. & how could I not become addicted to such a psychedelic transport & grow utterly dependent on a physiological ploy that makes an unreal difference that I can actually live through? How could I not be seduced by a semblance that is not what it would be if it wasn't what it is? Why would I not want to dress the world completely in imaginary solutions, adorn the real with what it isn't & stylize its appearance so that what is felt abstractly becomes more real than the real? Obviously I'm already following the rules of this naturally factitious game, because this sentence is not a sentence, & I am a duck. I suppose, then, that the destiny we lost is

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the fate of life's becoming more than life, of life becoming a semblance of itself.

But now that I've thought about what I've just thought about, I have the suspicion that the destiny of destiny's neuronal extinction is itself a semblance that my imaginary solutions have raised to the power of paradox. By putting the difference between a gain of thought & a loss of faith in a display of similarity, I'm dramatizing a noncoincidence & effecting a transformation that demonstrates these competing destinies to be modalities of action differentially belonging to the same process of expression. In other words, I'm being ironic. & what is being ironic if not a way of fusing without confusing? Of bringing the sense of what you say & what you don't say together in a single doing? Of performing an action that says what it denies, & denies what it says? Of being yourself & not yourself, like Alice in Wonderland who is always taken as someone else but is never not herself, or an echo, like Alice in Wonderland who is always taken as someone else but is never not herself? Being ironic doesn't first mean being critical; being ironic means being playful, & being playful means multiplying the *value* of an expression to mean this or that by bringing together—in the same act—the excessive ways in which an expression is taken up as meaning this or that.

But thinking again about what I just thought about what I just thought about makes me think that life's many dimensions of carrying-on are most vividly represented (echoed) not by contemplating things but woolgathering them. When I dream or am absentminded, life's multidimensionality becomes *more* apparent, not less. To dream, like "to echo," is to become more than one thing at a time, to elude the present in an infinite identity of both senses at the same time. My wife is my mother, my teeth are my vanity, & I am a rabbit. In a way, the more manifest a difference in a display of similarity is, the more lucid the experience, the more paradoxical, the more playful, the more ludic. Waking life is an echo of a dream's superior irony only when it approaches the lucidity of dreams in its *ludicity*. In other words, life is but a dream when it's absolutely ironic.

I feel that I've heard something like this before. Something about life being a drifting shadow or a confused play told by an idiot whose performers fretfully prance about the stage before they're completely forgotten. I suppose this could be a way of saying that all the world's a stage, or it could be signifying nothing at all. But then again, maybe the world's not a stage but a speaker, always broadcasting its forms & playing parts of itself like a rat flicks its tail or a butterfly dreams. The world could be saying things for the sheer pleasure of exciting the sense that presides over the assignment of the designation of sounds by acting like things without being those things. Oddly, this means that the speaking of the world says what it denies & denies what it says. Like an echo—it's logically undecidable. Like this sentence, which is false. In other words, if all the world's a speaker, then all it has to show are its mediations & the sublime mimesis of its anoriginal hypocrisy.

I wonder, however, if the sublimation of hypocrisy is like daydreaming, which gathers being around its dreamer & gives her the illusion of being more than she is. Does the world assemble itself from what is less-than-being into more-than-being by accumulating & distracting itself with echoes of its mediations? Do these echoes have a link to the elemental energetics of matter that conditions the poetic fidelity & oneiric consistency of daydreaming? If so, does it change things that our material imagination now issues largely from its encounters with the dynamism of technical matter rather than that of earth, water, air, & fire? Are dreams of network pings any different from Emerson's forest-modulated bell-tones? Both exhibit a fidelity to the dynamics of air—visions of reach & extension suffused with images of flight & a yearning to surpass the given. Maybe there's nothing but a stylistic difference between a technical & an

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organic material, a difference that in this example above leads less to treacherously introspective fantasies of renewal & malleability & more to briskly peregrinating visions of promiscuity & contagion.

Perhaps.

But a stylistic difference is a qualitative difference. Style makes a difference as to whether matter's images sing reality or mumble it. Images *sing* when they have a style that abstracts a psychotropic irreality from matter's elemental conduct. & when images sing their drifts & divagations pass between what concentrates being & what exalts it, they animate an awakened oneiricism that resolves into a glimmer of consciousness, a lyrical *cogito*—a wide-awake dreamer. Images stammer if they have no style or poetry, if they denote simply what those elements for which they stand would denote. The concern, then, isn't *that* organic matter differs from technical matter but *how* it differs, how we dream its substance in a way that promotes the feeling of being more than being what is given, a feeling of being absolutely ironic.

& how absolutely ironic it is that I realize the poetry of things only when I find myself too distracted to daydream. The hypocrisy of the world's broadcast that is its creative condition vanishes in the meantime planted in my field of awareness by searching, loading, connecting, connecting, loading, connecting, loading. Form & function go to seed as one distraction-span distracts another, each digression cultivating not a garden of cares or concerns, but a field of pure transition: Now we are safe ... Now you trail away ... Now you lag ... Now they have all gone ... Now the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide ... Now we must drop our toys ... Now they suck their pens ... They wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks, now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together ... Now the terror is beginning ... Now I cannot sink ... Now grass & trees ... Now the tide sinks ... Now my body thaws ... Now we are off ... Now I hang suspended without attachments. We are nowhere.

Buddha was right: All life *is* buffering.*

Now, if anyone is dreaming it's the machines whose incessant & unflagging toil take my capacity to perform an act, to communicate, to affect & be affected, as *their* poetic matter. My virtuosity, my potential for producing, for surpassing the given that is my creaturely prerogative has become the material substance of a technical imagination. In other words, *I* am the animal outgrowth that gives machines the psychotropic images, the reveries, the poetry—& maybe even the desire—that qualify their functioning & guide the integrative consilience of their imaginary technics.

If I dream at all, I don't dream that I *have* the imagination of a machine; I dream that I *am* the imagination of a machine. I dream that I'm the oneiric activity & dynamic intoxication of a technical apparatus drunk on the poetry of organic matter's appetite for variation. I'm the dream that dreams the dream that dreams the dream that dreams. In other words, I am a rabbit. Or is it a duck?

Then again, maybe I'm just bluffing ...; & if I am, is that not just another form of buffering? Maybe my bells & echoes, melodies & pines, nervous tics, animal spirits, hypocrisies, & reveries are nothing but the troupers of an idiot's play put on to put off the sincerity that their drama would have were they to denote what they would denote. Maybe what I'm saying is exactly what I'm doing: saying the meantime of this event with a single split thinkingness so that

* To be precise, it was David (Cecchetto) who said "all life is buffering," but also (independently) Tom McCarthy, in his novel *Satin Island*.

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the imaginary magnitude of its ludicity & absolute hypocrisy vanishes in the spins & stalls of its own supple semantic spume.

Now I pretend again to read. Now glancing this side, that side. Now I am getting the hang of it. Now, without pausing I will begin, on the very lilt of the stroke—. Now let me fill my mind with imaginary pictures. Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm. Now I sleep; now I wake.

Notes to Chapter Seven

Sources (in order of appearance)

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