

post-X
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a zine about the future

presented by Future Café

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Post-X is a zine from Future Café

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Introduction

Hey what? If you're introducing a new zine in 2020, and you were mesmerized by the zine culture (the subcultures) of the 90s, then you gotta be pretty riveted by the persistence of this DIY medium, intrigued by the still-vitalizing impact of that o-so-low-tech imaginary, impressed by the will to constitute some other public (in a nation state where no notion of a public sphere makes sense). More to the point: *Post-X* is animated by a recognition that, even in the midst of contemporary crises that grow more critical by the day, the distant future deserves attention. Not the coherence of the imagined utopian enclave, but small thought experiments, creative gestures, faint yet fascinating handholds.

Post-X is being launched by the Future Café, an ongoing conversation among University of Chicago College students that has engaged a great range of topics (Health, Cybernetics, Sex, etc.) asking only that participants speculate intensely, sharing their ideas of how the far future might look, might feel, might taste. It was the archaeologist Shannon Dawdy, my collaborator on the "Materializing the Future" project within the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory (3CT), who originally energized the Future Café. She was convinced (and quickly convinced me) that those students who "are the future" should be offered a forum within which to speculate collectively, and wildly, about it.

Given that the medium of the zine was once known as the fanzine, part of mid-century sci-fi fan culture, you could say that the zine began, in the past, by zeroing in on the future. These days, within the world of science fiction, it is Afrofuturism that has made the most powerful commitment to imagining a future that is not mired in, or crippled by, the present—no matter how dire that present has become. *Post-X* is a promise. A promise to welcome and to publish off-beat insights. *Post-X* is a provocation. Committed to bringing the energy of the Café to a broader public, the inspiring editors insist that imagining radical futures is a responsibility that you have—that we have—right now.

Bill Brown, 2 June 2020

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Cibum Futurum **Maya Ordoñez**

This menu is meant to depict the Cibum Futurum (future of food in Latin) we are headed towards if we don't take action now to mitigate human impacts on the environment. My portrayal is a generous one. I have omitted all crops that require bees to grow, yet I personally believe that if we are unable to keep the bees alive, humanity will eventually collapse as well. Corn, rice, and wheat are either wind or self pollinated which is why all three are present on the menu.

Due to the current rate of ocean acidification and overfishing, I didn't include any wild caught seafood on the menu. Seaweed and algae are very durable and they will most likely be able to continue to grow in our oceans after much of the rest of the organisms cease to exist; they will likely contribute significantly to humans diets in the future. This is why both are included on the menu.

29% of the Earth's surface is land, of that 29%, 71% is hospitable; humans utilize half of this hospitable land, or around 51 million acres, for agriculture. The majority of agricultural land is used for livestock despite the fact that only 17% of the total caloric intake of the world is from meat and dairy. Once land is exploited for agricultural use, the pesticides and toxic waste of farms deplete the soil of its nutrients and microorganisms. It's nearly impossible to regenerate pre-agricultural conditions which leads to the desertification of formerly healthy landscapes. Eventually, we will run out of land to farm.

In the future, humanity will have to find alternative ways to create meat or alternative forms of meat. This is what inspired the in vitro burger, the Koji "bacon" and the insect options on the menu. Even today, there is in vitro meat on the market, although it is not available for mass consumption quite yet. There are also vegan mimics of meat, such as Koji which is a fungus. Koji bacon is available on the market and is created by a company called Prime Roots. We will also inevitably turn to insects; they are high in protein and other nutrients and demand little care.

Also, this loss of land will force humanity to find different ways to farm crops. This is the idea behind the hydroponic salad. Hydroponics involve growing plants within a mineral rich aqueous solution, without the use of soil.

Finally, in the future, we will have a better understanding of the human genome. This will most likely lead to having foods that are tailored to not only to specific age demographics but eventually to the individual. This will provide people with the ability to find a diet that will maximize their personal health.

Hopefully, humanity will take measures that will enable us to maintain the diversity of both our planet and our palates, before it is too late.

Cibum Futurum

Appetizers

HYDROPONIC SALAD	30
<i>Thinly sliced radish, shaved tiger nuts and sea-berries on a bed of kale</i>	
PICKLED ALGAE	15
<i>Served over a mix of golden corn and puffed rice</i>	
RICE NOODLES	24
<i>Tossed in peanut sauce</i>	

Burgers

IN VITRO 70
<i>House lab grown patty with stem cells sourced from the now extinct Japanese Wagyu cattle</i>
INSECT 14
<i>Specialty house mix of cricket, mealworm, termite and caterpillar</i>

Beverages

Water	10
Emmer Wheat Beer	12
Corn Beer	8

Entrees

GRASSHOPPER SCHNITZEL	17
<i>Cornmeal breaded and served smothered in fontina inspired tofu cheese</i>	
SAUTEED "SHRIMP"	70
<i>Sustainably ocean farmed seaweed with the taste, texture and bite of shrimp - served on a bed of quinoa</i>	
GIANT TARO ROOT GNOCCHI	45
<i>Individually wrapped in Koji "bacon"</i>	
GRILLED FISH FILLET	90
<i>House lab grown using a genetic mixture of <i>T. thynnus</i> and <i>S. Salar</i></i>	

Desserts

CORN CAKE WITH ORANGE COULIS	34
<i>Layered with orange slices and mint soy ice cream, garnished with mint</i>	
RICE CREAM SANDWICH	15
<i>Caramelized cricket rice cream between two freshly baked ginger cookies</i>	

*To maximize health benefits and follow regulations, all dishes, including proportions and sides, are prepared using nutrigenetic services (tailored to the genes of the individual)

All prices are scaled according to the 2020 USD

Post-X

Cameron Najafi

"Rivalry multiplied by exponential technology is inexorably self-terminating," (Daniel Schmachtenberger) because as the capacity to inflict harm increases while the incentives to remain... X.

Nick Bostrom argues in his "The Vulnerable World Hypothesis" that eventually humanity's 'progress' will create a "black ball" - a technology that by default destroys civilization.

*A voice said, Look in the stars,
And tell me truly, men of Earth,
If all the soul-and-body scars
Were not too much to pay for birth*

- Robert Frost

Cosmic



Yaden et al. (2016): self-transcendence

in space flight

What is "Post-X"?
Post extinction?

末日

Extinction of Earth-originating intelligent life ("x-risk")?

Extinction of almost all life, but with some destined to

Post "X" — that which we endeavor to cross off from the current drawing board of the current iteration of human social organization?

Rivalry

Extraction, open-loop materials economy, externalities to the commons, systematized oppression, dehumanization, disconnection, addiction, runaway climate change, obliviousness, hatred, blindness, jealousy, fatigue, lies, shit, meat consumption, unnecessary categorization, "I"

What's the difference between an "X" and a "Y"?

*That which God said to the rose,
that made it open,
He said to me
here in my chest*

- Rumi

The Bodhisattva vow:

*May you love and care for yourself wisely, just the way you are
May you be free*

*I vow to free all beings from suffering,
as all beings suffer*

You asked eddies, swirls, laughter, pearls, water flowing, if the honeybee touches down, but loses scent atop the lily pad does she pretend to float, through the cosmos, on a never-ending journey to Somewhere?

We are(n't) creatures.

Earthly

Volcanic eruptions are the sublime that awakens from deep within a planet we do not understand how to care for the sun above our heads nor the sun beneath our feet nor the sun within ourselves

*Emptiness is form,
Form is emptiness*

Untitled *Fion Tse*

My grandfather passed away weeks after the first Covid-19 outbreak in my home country. Not from coronavirus, but from heart failure. He stopped breathing in the doctor's office, during a regular checkup, and the nurses rushed in to break his ribs and rip off his mask to exhale into his lungs. He died in a 4-by-4 feet white cube, antiseptic gel still steeped in the wrinkles of his palms.

The familial consensus seemed to be: at least it hadn't been coronavirus. It was still early days, then, so most cases and deaths got some in-depth coverage on the news. At least it hadn't been coronavirus. At least we didn't have to watch them spiral his picture onto the national newsreel with a PicsArt special effect and slam down 4 blocky bullet points about exactly who, when, where, and how it happened. At least his death and life weren't reduced to a poster child for another "at-risk demographic".

My greatest relief is that at least my grief is still my own, an anchor I can cling to before I go to bed and know that this is something I don't have to share with the rest of the world. In these unprecedented times, during this global pandemic, in the midst of hoping this email finds you healthy and well, sometimes all I want is to stop seeing myself reflected in other people. Tell me I'm still different, tell me I'm still an individual, because if this is the defining moment of our lives, I want to be defined as myself.

So much is going on right now. No, let me rephrase that: so much is televised and broadcasted and talked about right now. It's hard to talk or think about anything else, and sometimes it can feel like my identity lives on the badges I wear on my backpack and in nothing else. This isn't about what politics you fight to the death for or don't see an ounce of truth in, this is about how we redefine ourselves in moments of global crisis. What does it mean to exist amongst other people? – who are you? – what do you matter? Sometimes I see the exact beliefs I hold replicated in other people, and it makes me wonder: am I the vessel that holds thoughts and beliefs and hopes and dreams, or are those the containers that frame me?

These aren't new questions, by any means, but recently I've been pondering it in new ways. The coronavirus pandemic, along with everything else that is happening in the world, is unmistakably an issue that's larger than any one of us. No one can deny that. In many ways, though, each of us is also larger and encompasses more than anything we live and fight and breathe for. As I ready myself to face the world and work for the things I believe in, I want to be able to say with confidence: I am me.

Sunset at Ten *Kimberly Ho*

"When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute — and it's longer than any hour. That's relativity. Time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live." -Albert Einstein

Time has frustrated me for the longest time and it still really does sometimes. It's funny how we crave for an hour to fly by during a transfer flight but wish that an hour would cease to progress if it were spent on a Hawaiian beach. But the way I perceive and understand time now wasn't always like this. It wasn't counted mechanistically. I didn't feel the desire or need to control it.

It used to be easy and natural. I didn't have to think about time coming and going. It came and go, and I lived happily with it. When I was an infant, my mother made sure to feed me exactly in three-hour intervals. My body had a rhythm; I would cry predictably because hunger was my clock. When I was old enough for school, every morning meant I was in the classroom by eight. Events happened and things fell into place before my eyes. It was like magic.

The easiness with time changed the day I learned about death and it wasn't because someone I loved died. Rather, I was sitting in bed besides my mom and I have entered into her state of mind as she contemplated her youth aloud. Her soothing voice put me to sleep quickly. But from that day onwards, time had a conscious meaning. I was introduced to its demanding nature. I began to see how it governs a system where my mother

may be by my side for one moment and then gone the next. More importantly, I learned that there is a rigidity with time that is unforgiving and unyielding.

My mother first exposed me to time. That moment was fragile, and time was never to flow by so freely again. I want the power to control time so desperately, so it doesn't control me. But, counting only makes you count more; there's no end.

We live by the concept of time. We must come and then go. We learn about its rules and live by its parameters. We feel it especially when a loved one passes, or a birthday is coming up. It's a system of counting that preys on our minds.

But it creates and is a space that defines our existence. I've understood it to be a space of limitation and have seen that it can be a space of opportunity. I have not conquered the art of living yet. Rather, I'm learning how to live with time such that it can feel natural again.

My mother taught me about the condition of impermanence when I was no more than eight years old. I find her crouched by a file cabinet in the closet one autumn afternoon. She says the mortgage for our home is finally paid off.

"The house is officially ours," she says sorting through paperwork.

It doesn't make any sense to me. If the house isn't ours, how could we be living in it? She doesn't define mortgage for me then. She says that it means every wood-

en tile in the house must be treasured. My mother explains how I should be living in the house from that day onwards. So after that afternoon, I tiptoe around the house and kiss every wall I pass.

But still my home only continued to accumulate more problems since Mortgage Day. The sewage pipes clogged in less than a year after Mortgage Day. The summer hail in the following July shattered the bathroom window. So, I treasured every wooden tile until I couldn't anymore. The house was completely torn down three years ago.

I listened to my mother, and I tried. But my care never made up for the old age. The tiles that I have spilled soup on and the walls that marked my growth spurt became an agglutinated mass of debris. When I watched the (de)construction men take piece by piece off the roof and wall, I was reminded not only of Mortgage Day, but I also realized my home was much older than I had imagined. The rhythm of life – of youth and innocence – that I have taken for granted all tumbled with the house that day.

Home has a simple rhythm – a way of living that makes living with time feel natural. But while it can feel like a space unoppressed by time, I should have known that ceiling was once considered a modern and finished touch. I wonder if I would've given up loving every wall and tile so thoroughly if I discovered earlier that it wouldn't have made a difference in beating time. I wished I could control its aging, so I didn't have to watch it fall before my eyes. I learned what a mortgage meant. I found evidence in the certificates that my mother laminated as proof of ownership. I proudly bore the title of ownership for ten years. After it fell, I counted seconds and minutes rigorously because that

meant it was only a matter of time before a new home would replace the old.

I seem to have lost the easy progression through time that I was once attuned with and didn't have to control. Now all I hold onto are celebrations for anniversaries of my new home. The lost rhythm is not easy to relearn.

I stopped counting in Paris. It happened naturally, easily, and spontaneously. I am one after many in history who have lived, loved and left Paris. Studying history and French brought me there for ten weeks. It was an experience for "cultural immersion" and living independently away from home was an honest way of growing up and relearning how to shape life with time.

Paris reminds me of home. I can feel the weight of time lifted. Life in Paris maps effortlessly into lazy afternoons in gardens and listening to the synchronized rainwater that would drop on my windowpane. It is riveting to live by an organic and simple progression through time again. There is a rhythm in Paris that I craved. It is a rhythm that frees my desire to keep a tight rein on counting time.

Paris is marked by old age and governed by a pace I become attuned with. My dilapidated home is given a second chance in Paris. Pastel stucco buildings were not torn down and vehicles continued to roll over the historic cobblestone roads. The city coexists with oldness by adding layers to walls of old buildings and covering streets with new pavement. Antiquity has its beauty and value. It is stubborn to the wearing imposed by time, just to sustain a culture that makes Paris feel absolutely timeless. And this is the experience where I feel time pass effortlessly and fluidly.

I use everything forgotten and donated in the communal kitchen. I would end up donating all of my appliances before leaving Paris. But even before that, the kitchen already had a lot of things – forks, pots, spices, cutting boards, expired pasta and olive oil.

I give the plate and fork a thorough rinse before indulging in its usage. I try to do the same with the wooden spoon I need for mixing the spaghetti, but it still doesn't feel clean. I find the spoon in a cup of utensils alongside other spoons and forks of all sizes, inviting me to take it and cushion it in my hand. I answer to its calling and give the spoon its unexpected trim and grooming. I chisel away at the splintered wood that protrudes from its curvature and scrub vigorously at its dark spots. But it wouldn't glitter and shine like glass or ceramic.

Two hours later, I have my meal of spaghetti and salmon ready. I eat in silence and look at what I did to the wooden spoon. I think about oldness and its own unique beauty. One wouldn't need to give a new spoon a second chance by carving it. I think about Mortgage Day. The spoon could have gone to the trashcan a long while ago, but no one had the courage to be the first to do so. I imagine its previous owner was a middle-aged balding man who insisted on pursuing a degree in musicology, which brings him to Paris. He treasured the wooden spoon for its unwavering devotion to food preparation. He valued the beauty of each mundane object in enabling a steady tempo in cooking, a mindless task that would lose mindlessness without a spoon. A kitchen without a spoon would be a kitchen with a fragmented rhythm.

The wooden spoon is worn, and how dare I take a knife to it. Its edges are molded to fit the curvature of the tall pot. The handle is chipped and jagged, probably from

striking it to the side of the pot to draw off surplus liquid. I continue to eat, avoiding direct eye contact with the spoon and its engraved stains that tinted the wood. I leave the communal kitchen hastily to leave the spoon in its natural silence. I hope I didn't disturb too much.

Cooking was one of those things I feel like I should've done less of in Paris. I should've tried more *l'escargot* (French snails) and pastries. I should've taken up more of the dinner invitations to experience the luxurious three-course French meals with bread and wine over two hours. As I count the list, it is not to tell myself that there were so many things that I should've done in Paris.

I can feel how speaking about time in this hypothetical way enslaves my living. I can feel it judging what I do and how I think. I can feel the birth of regret, knowing that I can't control what I could've controlled anymore. I can feel nostalgia emerging as I think through the past. I can feel myself counting time again – yearning to control it.

[... Due to page limit, the middle is not provided.]

Perhaps it was the same hypothetical thinking that has brought my mother to our local CVS to purchase a container of melatonin. The *ifs* and *woulds* and *shoulds* that kept her sleepless at night and preoccupied in traffic. She complained about spending hours falling asleep until she couldn't take it anymore. The white pills came in a heavily advertised and colorful bottle. When I found my way to the tall cabinet in the kitchen where I thought my mother hid my Halloween candy, I chewed on one because they looked like Smarties. They were tasteless and I never took another one after that. I was probably no more than ten then.

Then before leaving for Paris this past summer, I searched the whole kitchen for my favorite water bottle. It seemed like everything was reorganized after I left for college. I found the water bottle in the same tall cabinet where the old melatonin container was placed. It was still there, like it had never moved. There were no more pills in there though. My mother held soybeans in there after throwing all the pills away. The pills didn't promise the "relaxation and maximum strength" that it had advertised on its label. She still wasn't able to control sleep with those pills.

I wonder why my mother didn't just toss the container along with the pills away. It seemed more tedious to unscrew the cap and wait for the pills to empty the container. She said she wanted to keep the container because it had important information she wanted to learn more about. She wanted to learn more about melatonin, which I later discovered was the hormone that regulates sleep-wake cycles. It is produced in the pineal gland of the brain and released when the body is in longer states of darkness.

My mother didn't have to go to work that day when there was a blackout. It was 2003 when the Northeast region of the North American continent experienced the world's tenth largest electricity shortage. She had moved a mattress into my room, and we went to bed as soon as the sun was down. That evening was dreadfully long and dark and quiet. I heard my mother snoring quite loudly besides me.

Years later when I moved into the "big kids" room, I got the room next to hers that shared the same thin wall. I don't recall another snore louder than the ones from the nights of the blackout. My mother is familiar with the word "insomnia"; she can't control when she

will fall asleep. She sleeps in the quietest and darkest room of the house. She thinks it will make up for her lack of melatonin. But, I think she produces a normal level of melatonin, but that won't suffice in quieting her thoughts at night.

My mother would've struggled every night in Paris. For me, staying awake wasn't the problem. It was the twisting and turning. It was the simultaneous sense of timelessness and pressure of time that caused the heart to beat faster and eyelids to expend too much energy to block out the light.

I appreciate the long daylight in Paris. I earn time to be free. I have more time to play, to travel, to work, to live. Moments before nightfall, I beg that the golden luster of the sun would never submerge into the horizon. Still, I can't control when the sun would fade. I can't control sleep either. I could only wish that falling asleep would be like pushing a knock-out button that delivers an immediate response when I trigger it.

I never overcame sleeplessness in Paris. I just choose to stay up longer, until the floor no longer rattles from the train that would crawl beneath my room and the chatter outside my window quiets until only cricket chirps could be heard.

I feel like I already lived a lifetime in Paris.

I write this in my journal during the fifth week in Paris. But I'm not ready to leave. The daylight gets shorter each day near the end of August, but it is still long. It feels long too because most days here are sunny.

It rains today and the whole day feels like night.

I find myself in Le Marais, the heart of hip boutiques,

lively nightlife and tranquil gardens. I turn off my navigation, put on my glasses, and walk. I walk down the street, following the smell of fresh eclairs, turning at a corner that has a picturesque display of shop windows and entering the garden that resembles a place where Ernest Hemingway might write.

I live entirely in darkness today.

The shades of grey in the sky never change despite hours flying by. The thick clouds occlude the sunset and I enter into the evening unknowingly. I meander through the cobblestone streets until rain finally pours. I find myself sheltered by a cathedral. It looks more miraculous and mightier in the night. I pray for peace under the mighty pillars that take me as refuge from the heavy rain. I pray to see the sun again.

When I slept alongside my mother in the blackout, the veil of darkness concealed the hour and minutes hands of the clock. I used to think that the sun was the limitation to our activity, work and life. Now I know it isn't. The sun comes and goes in its own cycle that is independent of time. Time is imposed on everything when it is counted so it can fit things into a perpetual system of counting. It is cyclic and makes me paranoid, and only meeting the sun again can relieve my struggle with counting.

Knowing time doesn't tell me where I am or how I feel. That all comes from living in time instead of counting it. When the sun goes down and the world and clocks are bathed in darkness, time goes on. I lose myself to the night thinking about the purpose of time. I can't watch seconds mold into each other anymore, but I hear can still hear it. I feel my body easily giving in to the rhythmic toll of the seconds. I hear my heart thump and air

whistle through my nose. I tenaciously keep counting to make up for not living in it. If I'm lucky, I eventually lose track of this obsessive counting. I wait more comfortably for the sun to come again.

Time passes in the cathedral.

Time continues to pass until I leave Paris.

I listen to *Gymnopedie* by Erik Satie and sit in Bond Chapel. I know I'm not Paris anymore, but the floor below me rumbles and the birds sing a little louder. I'm taken back to Paris, still obsessed with observing. I learn how easy it is to live in and out of the crowd – to be seen with others while also watching the subtleties.

Sunset at ten in Paris is the most beautiful hour.

The sun has gone down early and there are a few good hours before bedtime. I take the metro to Montmartre one last time. It's known to be a place of historical expression. A place where starving artists have gained inspiration, wandering writers have dreamed in, and lost souls have found distractions. It's a place of modernity – a place that wants to make time easygoing again. I'm suspended in a moment that is entrenched in the past, desiring to see the future.

My friend and I ascend the white marble steps to the top of the hill. He walks slowly for me. I take in the late-night view of Paris. I know the geography now. I can locate the places I've been to. Where the lights are the brightest is the Latin Quarter, where I had the best crepe and gelato. Where the tourists flock to is the glittering Eiffel Tower, where I admired the Bastille Day fireworks. We are mesmerized.

We take a new path down the hill. In front of us is a

windy street with widely spaced streetlights. It's dark, but the map points me in that direction to the metro station. We walk ahead, checking the navigation ever so often. We arrive at the end of the block and find no station where the map directs. I'm slightly grateful for the opportunity to live a little more. The streets intersect three ways. We decide to take the street that is the widest and most full of light. We walk down the slope searching for a new station.

I lay awake twisting and turning in the last night. Last night in Paris. Last time to experience the Parisian sunrise. Last time to walk endlessly down the streets that so beautifully blend from one neighborhood to another. Last time to feel this young and free in a long while.

I wait for the sunrise to come. I beg for the morning night to freshen up my convoluted mind. I wish to forget about my pounding heartbeat.

Daylight is here.

I don't need to count time anymore. I don't want to struggle with it anymore. Time has given me so much.

I am bound to my chair, to the conformities of my room. I'm bound to my thoughts and writing. I need to scribe down every last drop of my feelings and desires. I need to pacify it, move beyond it, release it. It's locked up in my heart, my stomach, my mind. My brain is hardened with emotion, no room for imagination. My stomach is churning. My heart is pumping and aching, my body again foreign to me – uncontrollable and urgent.

Three months ago, the thought of living in Paris was surreal. Now, the thought of leaving Paris shocks me. I can't un-see the beautiful architecture, fashion and way of living. Paris is intoxicating, all shapes and forms

– a city of desire, lust and imagination. I hide away in the corner of my room. I write to recall a space that was once foreign to me, but now so familiar I wish it never escapes away.

I cook a last meal before leaving Paris. I want to complete a space I occupied. I want to add to a story that is built as time goes on. The spoon doesn't look too old and deformed when I leave it. Maybe I'm defensive of my actions. But my experiences and memories are engraved as the dents and chips on the wooden spoon. I become part of a community of people who have met the spoon, used it, and left it. We share an experience in the same place just at a different time. So, I give it one last long look before I place it back on the rack where it was originally found. I hope the next person who comes along will engrave it with more stories.

I tell stories of Paris to my mother. I tell her about my writing. I fully participate in the waiting while we're stuck in traffic. I tell her about my wandering trips in Le Marais where I would turn off my navigation and take a turn at a corner because I liked what I saw. I tell her about fireworks of Bastille night and how I walked almost 20 miles that night to get back home. I don't tell her about the midnight scooter ride to a jazz bar.

There is great energy channeled in the act of telling and sharing that I did not know of before. There is great joy and sadness when I reoccupy that same space but in a different time. My mother understands this energy well. She understands how I feel and why I am so excited by a life that can so effortlessly traverse space and transcend time. I think we are both still trying to balance a method to experience life with time rather than counting it.

A Speech for the Future *cameron Kay*

This speech has been adapted from a radio address given by General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers on September 2, 1945.

Today the ambulances are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won. The air no longer carries death, embraces spread only affection, people pass one another again on the streets. The entire world is quietly at peace. The holy mission has been completed. And in reporting this to you, the people, I speak for the thousands of silent lips, forever stilled in mass graves on every corner of the planet. I speak for the unnamed thousands homeward bound to take up the challenge of that future which they did so much to salvage from the brink of disaster.

As I look back on the long, tortuous months where we kept apart and mourned losses alone, when an entire world lived in fear, when governments everywhere toiled with decisions no human should ever have to make, when modern civilization trembled in the balance, I thank a merciful God that he has given us the faith, the courage, and the power from which to mold victory. We have known the bitterness of loss and the exultation of restoration, and from both we have learned there can be no turning back the hands of time to what was before. We can only go forward and rebuild stronger, aided by the lessons we learned in winning the invisible war.

A new era is upon us. Even the lesson of victory itself brings with it profound concern, both for our future security and the survival of civilization. The destruction wrought by this pandemic, remedied only by unprecedented advances in scientific discovery, has in fact

now reached a point which revises how we think about many aspects of modern life.

People since the beginning of time have sought equality. Various methods through the ages have attempted to remedy the divide between genders, races, classes, and religions. From the start they have been continually upended by the powerful and have never been successful. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The solution involves an improvement in human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.

We stand here today reminiscent of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, who in address at the end of World War II called for the beginning of a new era of peace and progress, a better future transformed by the suffering of the past and an appreciation for the stillness of peace. We did not create the kind of future he envisioned then, but we must do so now. As a world, we have fought the common enemy, Mother Nature, and in fighting her alone, we lost far too many soldiers. We closed borders, we hoarded life-saving supplies and vaccines, we failed to take care of each other, and all suffered needlessly for it.

Today, we stand one nation amongst many that has experienced incalculable losses in human lives and livelihoods. Funerals, weddings, birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, and so many of life's moments went un-

celebrated. Now is a time to grieve our losses but also to begin rejoicing once more in the beauty of life -- not just your own but those of everyone around us. After several months of sacrifice, unshackled peoples are tasting the full sweetness of liberty. The relief from fear.

And so, my fellow countrymen, today I report you that the best of us have served us well and seen us through. Let us not forget the first responders, healthcare workers, essential workers, and scientists. Their spiritual strength has brought us through to victory. They return home from fighting the invisible war at last, covered in invisible wounds. Heal them as they healed us.



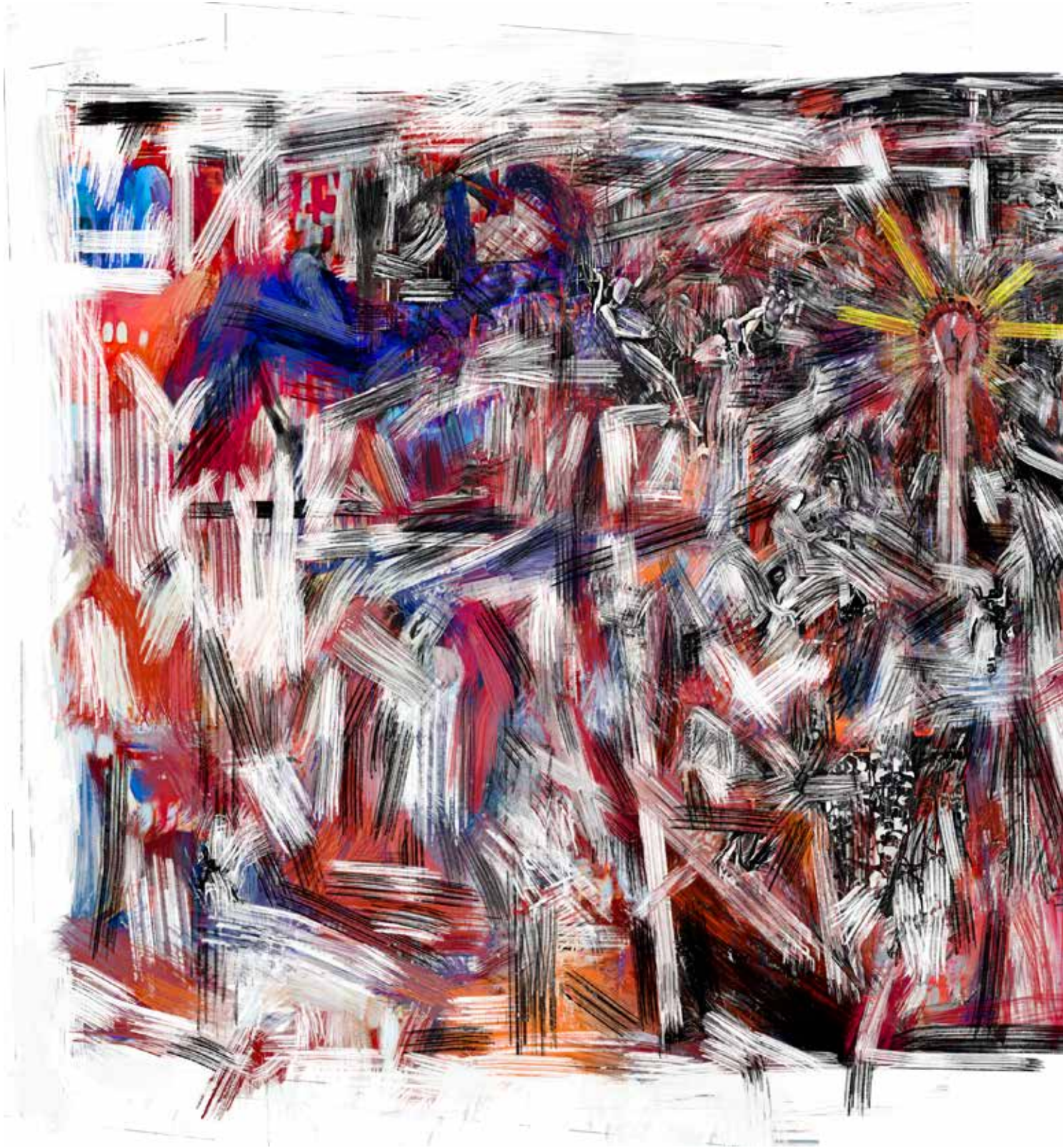
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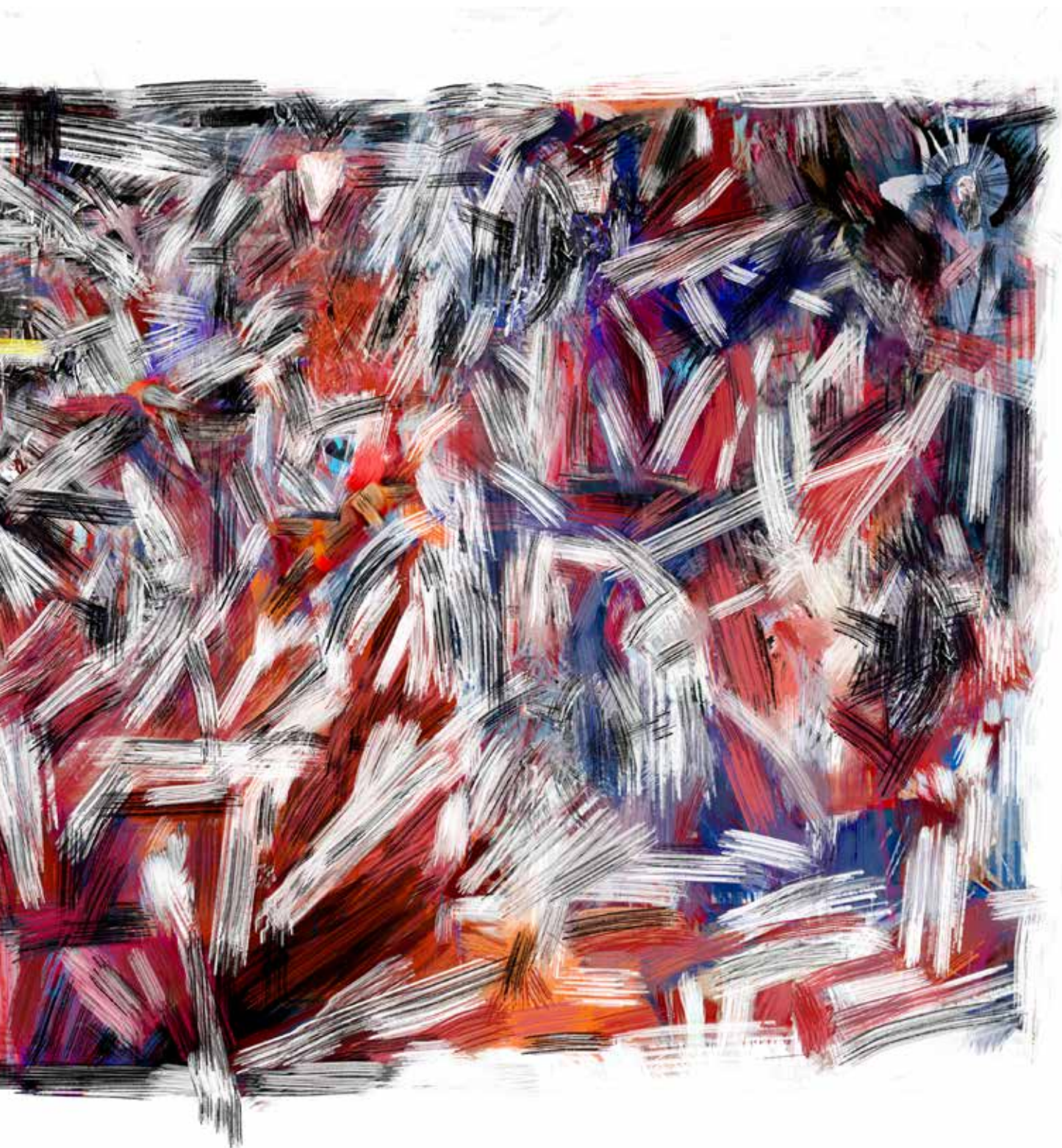




Hope Is Never the Same Thing Twice

Sam Clark





Our Next UFOs *Jack Votava*

Senator Josh Hawley, R-Mo., sponsored legislation this May offering a fascinating and disturbing solution to coronavirus: sue China for damages. In Hawley's view, "the reason we have this pandemic is because the Chinese communist government unleashed it on the world."¹ The fact that this view neglects the scientific, political, and economic realities of the situation does not change the fact that Hawley's xenophobic anxiety is very real, and shared by an unknown but non-negligible portion of the American population. To be fair to Hawley, disease and international encounter have a long, nefarious history. Of course, the central player in this history is the global reality of European colonization. Viewed from a different angle, however, disease and encounter are tied intimately at every scale: from the interaction between persons, to travel between cities, to exchange between nations.

What about disease and the encounter between planets—or galaxies?

Ridley Scott's *Alien* franchise offers creative insight into such processes. A 2017 prequel film, *Alien: Covenant*, revealed that the famous, horrifying, killer aliens of the series were the results of a mutant pathogen unleashed during the otherwise "innocent" process of scouting new worlds. The central imagination of work is hard to miss: if *intraplanetary* encounter is rife with danger and disease, then *interplanetary* encounter is just that much riskier. Perhaps we'd be better off just staying home.

But what of us when we're not in Ridley Scott's imag-

ination? Are we "alone" in the universe? Professor Avi Loeb, chair of Harvard's Astronomy Department, made splashes back in 2018 when he boldly suggested that an unknown interstellar object spotted floating past Jupiter may have been "debris from an advanced technological equipment" of an alien civilization.² The question of aliens, their spacecraft, and whether or not they've already made contact with us (secretly or otherwise) has been a staple of science fiction and science fact since the days of H.G. Wells. Indeed, aliens and futurity are as closely tied together as knights and medieval ages: finding aliens lies in our future, the history of alien civilizations is a blueprint for our future, and alien technology is synonymous with advanced science—a.k.a. a future that lies within our present paradigm, our scientific "era," but is yet to be fully actualized. In many ways, the concepts of aliens and scientific futures define each other. So where are the aliens? Will there be aliens in our distant future?

Strangely enough, however, it's not difficult to see that the reality of our alien imaginary has a more ambiguous relationship with the past, future, and present than the popular discourse might itself suggest. H.G. Wells, discussing his revolutionary imagination of a future alien invasion in his classic *The War of the Worlds*, recalled a conversation with his brother Frank: "Suppose some beings from another planet were to drop out of the sky suddenly," said [Frank], "and begin laying about them here! Perhaps we had been talking of

2 Avi Selk, "Harvard's top astronomer says an alien ship may be among us — and he doesn't care what his colleagues think." Washington Post, February 4, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/harvards-top-astronomer-says-an-alien-ship-may-be-among-us--and-he-doesnt-care-what-his-colleagues-think/2019/02/04/a5d70bb0-24d5-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17_story.html>

1 Eric Shawn, "Hawley bill would let Americans sue China over coronavirus." Fox News, May 19, 2020. <<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/hawley-lawsuits-china-coronavirus-bill>>

the discovery of Tasmania by the Europeans – a very frightful disaster for the native Tasmanians! I forget. But that was the point of departure.”³

Wells’ comment makes explicit one dimension of the relationship between our present and the alien imaginary: the aliens are already here, and perhaps have been here all along. What could be more alien than our own colonizers? Why look to outer space to imagine terrifying ships of foreign invaders? Wells’ comment also underscores a point about aliens which is much less banal than it at first seems. Much as Wells’ aliens were born from the British in Tasmania, I want to suggest that outer space aliens are much more closely tied to the conditions of our present than any aspect of our future. Our imagination of aliens, alien encounters, or alien technology says far less about Earth’s coming history than it does about our present selves. This premise, however, opens up a new dimension of thinking—thinking about the alien discourse itself—which, ironically enough, makes for an interesting lens to examine our distant future. What aliens will we imagine (or encounter) in our coming history, and what does that mean for us?

Seeing UFOs

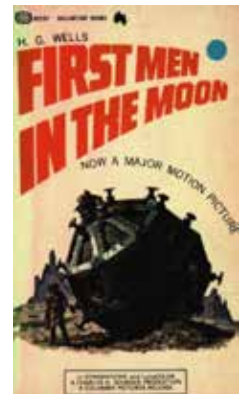
Our imagination of future technology has, admittedly, often been somewhat disappointing. There seems to be a nagging impulse for us to declare: “the future will have cars—but they will be *flying*! We’ll have all the usual normal appliances, but they’ll be *cool*!” Rather than a radical re-imagining of the wonders that could lie in store for us, our science fiction predictions have

been strangely anchored to the mundane realities of our present.

To underscore this point, and ground our predictions of our future aliens, I want to turn to alien’s signature tech: the UFO, or unidentified flying object. Such an object is “unidentified” only in the sense that we are unable to identify its precise position with our modern, scientific discourse; in every other sense, the object is entirely identified, for UFO is exactly synonymous with “freaking alien spaceship.” Of course, it goes without saying that the key word in such a technology is flying, for rolling, sailing, walking, and even teleporting simply do not fit the bill for allegorizing our own imagined apotheosis of modernity, our invention of mechanized flight. To take a journey into our future UFOs, let us revisit the UFOs of our past:

- H.G. Wells, *First Men in the Moon* (1901)⁴

Wells, among the first great imaginers of space travel, conceptualized spaceships in an enduring “cavorite” design. This spherical aesthetic may simply have mirrored the imagined design of ultra-deep sea craft. Wells’ were spaceships without automation, computers, or even modern engines, a technology more suited to a world of steam locomotives than combustion cars.



- Kenneth Arnold, UFO sightings (1947)

Originating the phrase “UFO,” American aviator Kenneth Arnold spotted nine “flying” blue dots going past

⁴ NASA, “Space Educator’s Handbook,” 2013. <<https://er.jsc.nasa.gov/seh/firstpoc.html>> Image provided under Fair Use law.

³ Phillip Ball, “What The War of the Worlds means now.” New Statesman, July 18 2018. <<https://www.newstatesman.com/2018/07/war-of-the-worlds-2018-bbc-hg-wells>>

Mount Rainier in 1947. In a demonstration of the enduring relationship between language, media, and our imagination, Arnold's description of the dots' quality and movement spawned a lasting imagination of alien spacecraft as "saucers" or "flying discs."



- George Lucas' *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977)

Star Wars' spacecraft in many ways set the paradigm for modern aliens. Far from being cartoonish saucers or deep-sea bubbles, Lucas' spaceships are complex, intricate creations filled with bells, whistles, dials, buttons, mysterious tubes, and ornamentation. Besides being interesting from an artistic perspective, these spaceships are scientifically novel. They are no longer "UFOs" proper, for their primitive computers, industrial design, and uncountable controls reassure us that these craft are, far from being magic, in fact completely knowable and compatible with the principles of contemporary engineering, even if we don't grasp all the precise details.

- Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* (2016)

Among the most imaginative recent takes on the alien encounter, *Arrival* portrays aliens as creatures whose mode of existence—especially expressed through their unique language and circular perceptions of time—critically diverges from our own. Appropriately, the alien's spacecraft are reimagined as giant, abstract pods. Far from being the recognizable, industrial craft of Star Wars, these ships are more unknown and unknowable.



The UFOs of the Future

So what will the UFOs look like one, five, or ten generations from now? This question lies partly in the realm of art history, depending upon the creative aesthetics that sci-fi will adopt in the future. However, the question also turns upon the future of our scientific paradigms and our popular understandings of them—what things will strike us as "familiar" or "alien," scientific or magic. Finally, the problem both depends upon and offers insight into the material problems that will structure our future reality: processes of colonization, exchange, modernity, and, yes, disease.

1. The aliens will be more alien: the progression from Wells to Villeneuve is not straightforward or linear, and follows from a wide variety of historical contingencies. Nevertheless, it seems clear that we are growing in our capacity to imagine aliens who are fundamentally different from ourselves—fundamentally alien. Our imagination of aliens is becoming more diverse, specific, and creative, even if it is still tied to the material conditions of our present. As *Arrival* shows, we can now use the alien encounter to explore fundamental problems across a variety of disciplines, including now-popular interrogations of time and language.

Alien technology becomes more alien the more it becomes a "UFO." Star Wars' spacecraft offer us a veneer of science, of knowability, that reassures us that

we may “identify” them scientifically; *Arrival*’s space pods offer no such guarantee. The alien technology of the future will not be flying cars, flying toasters, or even flying spaceships. Rather, such technology will be more magical, more fantastical, in that it will rely on new popular understandings of science—including perceptions of the “quantum” realm or the seemingly limitless power of computers—to abstract away from alien technology’s scientific nature while still anchoring them to the current scientific discourse.

2. We will become more alien: Coronavirus has shown convincingly that it is possible for us to have fundamentally new collective experiences, new modes of relating to one another. Our email inboxes, news media, and political leaders assure us that what we are experiencing is “unprecedented.” This is largely false in the sense that there is of course much global precedent for the experience of pandemics, public health crises, collective action against social problems, etc.; now, we merely confront some particulars of such a situation at a different scale and in a specific manifestation. We ought therefore to be at least a bit more surprised that such a situation, which was preceded and foreseeable, has caused us to embrace such novel modes of being.

If nothing else, this situation is a demonstration of the fragility of our encounters, and the always-looming radical possibility that such encounters, whether between people, nations, or planets, might be rewritten. In such a sense, we are becoming more alien from our past selves, more unknowable and unexpected.

3. We will never encounter the UFOs: We might think that the alienness of aliens is predicated on the gulf between our own existence and theirs. When a bridge over such a gulf is created, the alien ceases to be alien.

On the other hand, coronavirus has shown that we can have “alien” experiences while still perceiving their alienness; this dimension rises from the rupture that we experience with the past. Would bacteria on Mars be alien? Such a discovery would evidence extraterrestrial life, but it would be likely to precisely localize such life within the scientific paradigm of the present. Such life would be “overidentified,” it would have its alienness stripped from it before it ever got the chance to encounter us.

What we learn is that aliens are at once always too real and not real. Aliens are the British in Tasmania: real, present, and dangerous. Aliens are too our future selves, unknown and perhaps unknowable. In this sense, the historical situations that we find ourselves in guarantee that we are always dealing with other individuals, cultures, and structures which are “alien” to us—the sense in which aliens are too real. On the other hand, space aliens stand often as an empty signifier for us to stage the encounter with an unknown or future version of ourselves. Filling that signifier, making the encounter with aliens known and definite, defies the very existence of the concept.

In the end, such thinking risks turning into linguistic semantics, depending more on what we understand the word “alien” to mean than our actual material futures. However, what is clear is this: UFOs, in their full unidentified glory, must continually elude us, both in future artistic and cosmological encounters. They are a structure of our imagination which cannot be manifested into reality without losing their essential quality. Any physical space aliens of our future will therefore be merely scientific aliens, divorced from the magic and estrangement of the encounters which provoked their discursive existence in the first place.

A Message from [Your Local Broadcaster] **Peter Forberg**

A Message from [Your Local Broadcaster]¹

You live in a nation. You live in a nation home to a great deal of diversity. Here many people from many walks of life congregate, and together you share in this nation. You share a great deal: You share a flag. You share an environment. You share a government. You share a city. You share a sports team. You share an internet. You share a nationality. You share a history. And, importantly, you share a trajectory.

This is a good thing. Everyone who lives here seems to have a vision for the future that we can all agree upon. There might be some disputes on the *how*, but everyone wants the same result. Namely, people want to be free to make decisions, decisions that benefit themselves and their families. They want economic prosperity through virtuous means and hard work. If you have kids, you want to know that they will grow up to lead a better life than you did and live in a better world.

Your main path to this goal is through your fellow citizens. Together, you and your fellow citizens can work to build a better nation for everybody. This can't happen all at once, and it can't please everyone all the time. But if work begins in the community, then it will be the people, not the politicians, who have determined the fate of this nation.

The future, then, is bright. With the help of your fellow citizens, you know that you can build something great, just like [historical figures]⁴ did. And while there may be ups and downs, this system, the system you have right now, will prevail.

Your main way of addressing these problems is through political action. Politicians are best equipped to deal with these kinds of issues, and their ability to compromise is what separates them from you and your quarreling neighbors, as seen in [historical achievement].² People who think themselves politically active are engaged in an ineffectual performance.

The future, then, will be tenuous. Electoral politics is slow-moving, and it might seem at times that you've made ten steps forward only to end up five feet back. But, if [historical figures]⁴ were able to figure it out, then today? We can, too.

This is a problem. Not everyone who lives in your nation seems to want to live in this nation. Some, in fact, many, have a great deal of grievances. You do not share these grievances. Some people seem to feel entitled to things that they have no right to deserve, things that might even threaten your well-being. They want things given to them, or worse, kept from others. If you have kids, you're worried about how people might treat them based on their background.

The future, then, will be difficult. There will be many losses, and at the lowest point, more losses than gains. Many more. But what [historical figures]⁴ did seemed impossible at the time, and to live up to their radical history, we must be willing to lose a lot.

The root cause of these problems is a failed political system. Politicians no longer derive their power from the people, but from [hostile entity]³ which works to sow division in your nation. They are motivated by the wrong reasons, and their interests outweigh any desire to compromise, as seen in [historical failure].² Moving forward, we need new political actors.

The future, then, well, it's mostly impossible. We shouldn't hope to be there for it, let alone remembered for our actions today. We'll be condemned, more likely. [Historical figures]⁴ rose from the ashes; not from the past. They built a new present from dust.

And you know all of this to be true because you listen to other people; you listen to what people tell you.	And you know all of this to be true because you listen to other people; you listen to what people tell you.	And you know all of this to be true because you listen to other people; you listen to what people tell you.	And you know all of this to be true because you listen to other people; you listen to what people tell you.
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Sometimes, you even listen to the people you disagree with.	Sometimes, you even listen to the people you disagree with.	Sometimes, you even listen to the people you disagree with.
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You're able to tell right from wrong, and now the only information you receive is the information that comes from the right people, the people you've <i>chosen</i> to hear.	You're able to tell right from wrong, and now the only information you receive is the information that comes from the right people, the people you've <i>chosen</i> to hear.
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And, better yet, you believe them.

Endnotes:

¹ The broadcast should be determined by the information we have acquired about the listener. Truly, this is a narrowcast, the narrowest of casts, but based on the private information our collaborators have provided, we will know how to make the listener feel like they are a part of a larger public.

² It is best if these are the same event.

³ This can be many things, but the final input should be based on the private information. Ideally, we will input a corporation, an individual, another nation, or a particular group of people characterized by shared traits.

⁴ It is best if these are the same people.

Raveyard *Jack Demchak*

The concert was bad, 12 dollar ticket, but they didn't seem to care. Covered in a stranger's body glitter, someone sporting a stolen homemade choker constructed from tiny cube letters strung together that read "pussymoneyweed". The letters bumped into each other in sweaty clumps, a run on sentence born from ideas that happen while sharing some borrowed coke done in bathroom stalls, snorted off the tip of a friend of a friend's fake neon pink nails. It smells like sick and poor decision making. One of the girls in the group's nose bled shyly, as if the blood was afraid of what awaited it outside the body, mixing into the glitter that clung to her upper lip that had rubbed off from someone else's mouth while they'd made out to the music, only half dancing to the thump thump thumping bass. She kissed the girl the first time because of her necklace, eyeing a prize, and the second time because she tasted like a 7-11 slushie.

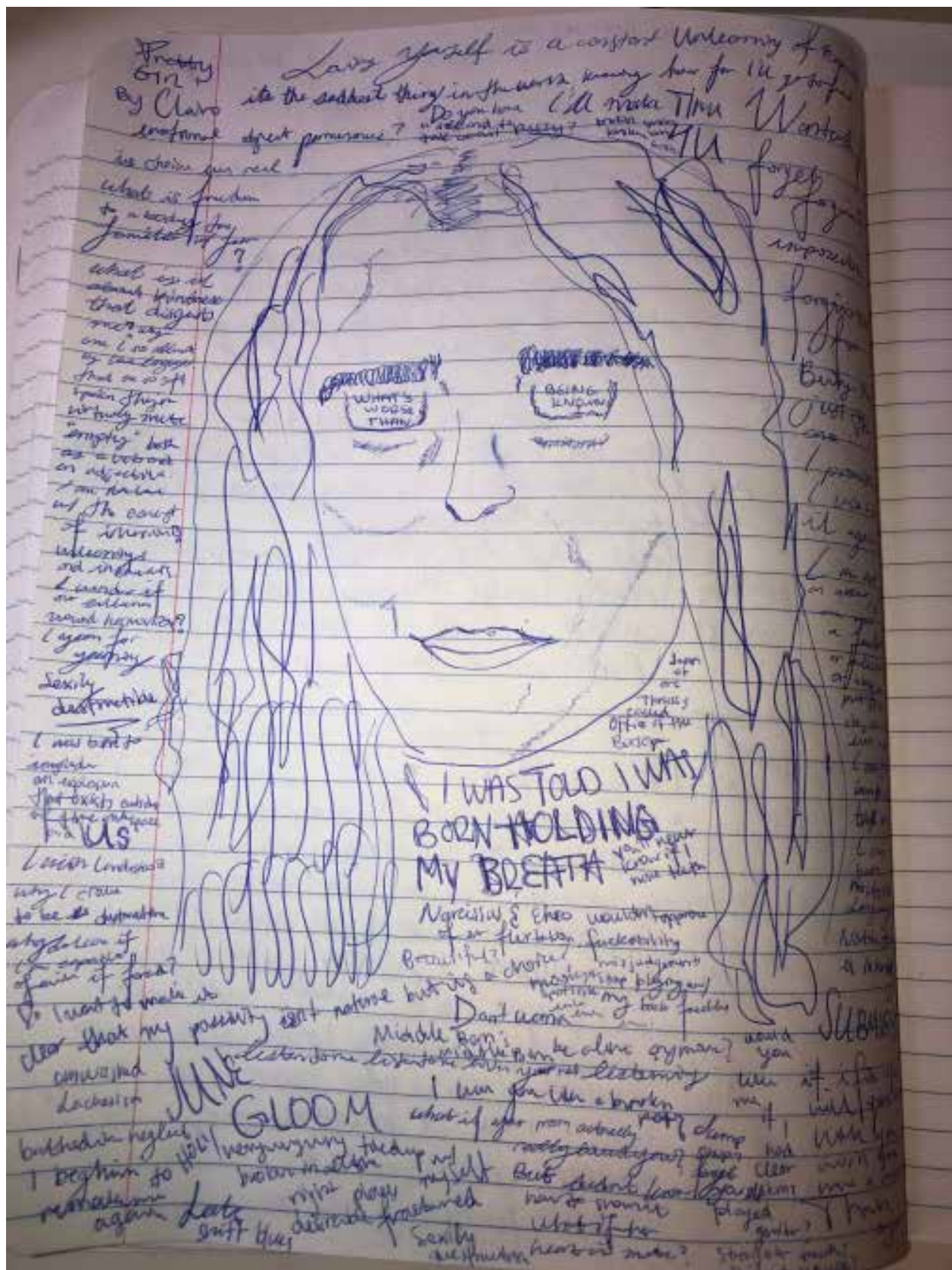
But now the show is over and so is slushie girl, and the concertgoers stand on the street corner outside the venue, swapping stories of melting their bodies into the crevices of someone behind them, of how they couldn't hear or see because of the deafening airy chords and the overpowering light show. They know they should've brought jackets, their mother's collective warning ringing in their ears as they sat on the curb side by side with one another, only sparsely covered in mesh tank tops and hairless skin. They look like something that might be drawn on ancient greek pottery, both women and monsters, hunching in awkward waves, dropping over themselves, heads balancing on knees, bare ass on the sidewalk, winter everywhere.

Soon there is no one else left but the concertgoers, having forgotten which one of them was supposed to call the uber, phones either dead or dying, no passerby caring enough to stop and ask them if they are okay. One of them drunkenly rubs her nose bleed all over her cheeks absentmindedly, relishing the texture of the liquid on her skin. Another has fallen asleep. The last is rubbing an apocalypse of cum off her skirt from a coat room handjob. She can't return it now.

The bright white letters advertising the venue from the outside have gone out, leaving solely the hazy red interior lights on, casting bloated shadows that give the venue the look of a burning church. There's a dead rat tipped onto its side, half in the gutter next to them, the sleeping girl resting her head on the carton of cigarettes that rodent had used for its last supper. Flies have only just begun to notice the body, and began exploring accordingly, probing the freshly rotten flesh of the city rat who was simply looking for a good time, no different than the concertgoers. Time is stretched thin and long and menacingly, with only echoes of the concert existing in the group's mind, pulsing in their blood with fervor. The loneliness of it all hurts, the vacuum universe created in the aftermath of the intensity of the concert, where all that noise, color and life is cut off all at once, is open and endless and wild and empty.

Where are they again?

People from Nowhere *Jack Demchak*



Untitled ASH-ANTI



Acknowledgements

This issue is due to the wondrously creative and curious University of Chicago undergraduate community. The *Post-X* submissions are diverse speculative imaginations that emote hope, fear, confusion.

The strength of Future Café is that futurism pushes us to think beyond ourselves and allows for our ideas to be unbounded. I remember Shannon Dawdy, who organized our roundtable, introducing our 2018-2019 meetings with this sentiment. As an exemplary teacher attuned to her students (whom she really treats as collaborators), Dr. Dawdy inspired the inclusiveness and care that grew in the space of Future Café.

Our contributors have channeled different worlds and their creations span medias. We are grateful to Peter Forberg, Kimberly Ho, Cameron Kay, Cameron Najafi, Maya Ordoñez, Timnah Rosenshine, Fion Tse, Jack Votava, Ashanti Owusu-Brafi (ASH-ANTI), and Jack Demchak.

Thank you to our advisors over this year, Anna Searle Jones and Bill Brown. We are grateful for your commitment to us and your guidance and patience. Along with his introduction for this issue, Bill has been an engaging voice in our discussions. Anna has worked hard to create a home for the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory (3CT) in Foster Hall.

Finally, thank you to my co-organizers of Future Café 2019-2020, Livia Miller and Sam Clark. Livia has been designing our posters and put together *Post-X*. Sam has brought infinite thoughtfulness and insight to our conversations. I am in awe of your contributions to our conversations (in and outside of Future Café) and to this project.

Each work has different concepts of what *Post-X* focuses on. We end this term with the commitment to focus on the future of racial, economic, health, and environmental justice.

Carolyn Hirsch, 2 June 2020

Layout, graphics & cover art by Livia Miller, 2020

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