



la Biennale di Venezia

57. Esposizione
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influenza.

theatre of glowing darkness

Kirstine Roepstorff.

Danish Pavilion

Darkness.

When everything was just floating
energy in complete darkness...

Maybe you remember, which choices
you made here?

And what you chose to rehearse
and to learn in this life?

How much did you dare to risk in order to grow?

How much darkness did you absorb?

Do you remember?

influenza.

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About the Title

influenza: In Italian it means 'to influence'; in English it is a common viral disease.

It was also the very first word Kirstine Roepstorff thought of when conceiving this project. Before any idea of a tapestry, sculpture, garden, or theatre even, there was simply 'influenza': a socially transmitted fever, infecting our very core, seeping our vitality. From this, the exhibition began to evolve as a manifesto for social and personal maturity, calling for the acceptance of impermanence, the unknown, and transformation as a natural part of growth, fostering our potentials for resilience. Through the metaphor of influenza, the exhibition allows a broader discussion (in artistic form), expanding from the personal to the political pandemic of the global neo-liberal condition.

Though the flu is a commonly transmitted disease, it cannot be easily dismissed: each year 3-5 million people suffer this illness severely, and 250-500,000 people die from it.¹ And – little considered fact, though perhaps interesting here – in the past century, all global flu epidemics have corresponded to periods of drastic social and political change.² Too often we get flu, and don't realize how sick we are. If flu is spread through social contact, its antidote, like a vaccine, may also be found in its own logic of person-to-person transmission: each individual's ability to make affective choices, the grassroots power to influence change. influenza: as symptom and cure.

theatre of glowing darkness. This is the title of Roepstorff's theatre production, which is central to the exhibition; its values underpin the entire show, which is a fully immersive environmental experience that explores darkness as a condition of healing and reconciliation, an integral part of the natural cycle of death and rebirth. In Roepstorff's mystical darkness, form dissolves, unity is restored, and we become empowered to dream.

Il Titolo

Influenza: in italiano, il termine indica 'l'atto di condizionare qualcuno'; in inglese, si riferisce ad una comune malattia virale.

'Influenza' è stata la prima parola a cui Kirstine Roepstorff ha pensato nel concepire il progetto. Prima ancora del tappeto, delle sculture, del giardino, o persino del teatro, c'era soltanto il concetto di 'influenza': una febbre socialmente trasmissibile, che si insinua nella nostra essenza, prosciugando la nostra vitalità. Da questo concetto, la mostra ha iniziato ad evolversi come il manifesto di una maturità tanto personale, quanto sociale, e come un invito ad accettare la precarietà, l'ignoto, e la trasformazione come componenti naturali del processo di crescita, per rafforzare le nostre potenzialità di resilienza. Attraverso la metafora dell'influenza, la mostra permette di affrontare un dibattito più ampio, espresso in forma artistica, spaziando dalla malattia personale alla pandemia politica dell'odierna condizione globale neo-liberalista.

Sebbene l'influenza sia una malattia che si trasmette comunemente, al contrario, non è altrettanto facile guarirne: ogni anno tra i 3 e i 5 milioni di persone contraggono questa malattia in maniera grave, e tra le 250.000 e le 500.000 persone ne muoiono.¹ Inoltre – un fatto poco considerato, seppur forse interessante a questo proposito – nel secolo scorso, a tutte le epidemie influenzali sviluppatesi a livello globale sono corrisposti periodi di drastico cambiamento sociale e politico.² Troppo spesso ci ammaliamo e non realizziamo quanto, in realtà, siamo malati. Se l'influenza si diffonde attraverso il contatto e l'interazione sociale, allora il suo antidoto – come un vaccino – può verosimilmente trovarsi nella sua stessa logica di trasmissione da persona a persona: ovvero, nella capacità di ciascun individuo di compiere scelte che condizionano altri individui; questo è il potere della civiltà che, dal basso, può influenzare il cambiamento. Influenza, come sintomo, ma anche cura.

theatre of glowing darkness. È questo il titolo della produzione teatrale di Kirstine Roepstorff, che è parte centrale della mostra; i suoi temi supportano l'intera esposizione, la quale consiste in un ambiente completamente immersivo, che si pone l'obiettivo di esplorare l'oscurità come condizione di guarigione e riconciliazione, e come parte integrante del naturale ciclo di morte e di rinascita. Nell'oscurità mistica di Roepstorff, la forma si dissolve, l'unità primordiale viene ripristinata, e noi riacquistiamo la forza per sognare.

¹ Statistics from World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/>

² 1918-20 (WWI reconstruction, Russian SFSR), 1957-8 (both Sputnik and Elvis launched), 1968-9 (hippie radicalism, Paris, Vietnam, Civil Rights Movement), 1978-79 (Iran Revolution, Afghan War, punk), 2009-10 (global economic crisis). Collectively, these cultural milestones culminated in as many as 102,784,500 flu deaths.

About the Consortium

Mirroring viral transmission, this project is structured as a learning network or discursive platform to bridge a multitude of perspectives and shared concerns. For this reason, *influenza. theatre of glowing darkness* doesn't have a curator. Instead, the exhibition-as-artwork activates its own form for viewers' open interpretation. In this spirit, *influenza* was developed with the help of a Consortium of four curators (ambassadors and advocates), all of whom have previously worked with Roepstorff at pivotal moments in her career, and who acted as a 'sounding board', and as Roepstorff's subjects of influence.

Throughout the past year, Roepstorff has met regularly with the Consortium to talk about and reflect upon darkness: not only through discussions and lectures, but also interactive workshops and physical experiences – they've swum in the glowing dark waters amidst fluorescent plankton in the strait of Little Belt in Denmark, dined in absolute darkness in Berlin, and spent time in the darkness of floating-tanks, a meditative practice to help dissolve the psychical limitations of the body.

Rather than curate the exhibition, each Consortium member contributed to the project through their individual resonance and reflections, and were invited to respond to Roepstorff's *influenza* as independent creative practitioners – or artists in their own right – through developing their own texts-as-artworks, published in this booklet.

Il Consorzio

Riflettendo il modo di trasmissione virale dell'influenza, il progetto è stato anch'esso strutturato come una rete di apprendimento, o meglio, una piattaforma di dialogo per mediare tra i molteplici punti di vista e interessi comuni. Per questo motivo, *influenza. theatre of glowing darkness* non ha un curatore. Al contrario, la mostra, come un'opera d'arte, assume una forma propria concedendosi alla libera interpretazione degli spettatori. In questo spirito, *influenza* è stata sviluppata con l'aiuto di un Consorzio di quattro curatrici (ambasciatrici ma anche sostenitrici del progetto), ciascuna delle quali aveva già lavorato con Roepstorff in precedenza in momenti cruciali della sua carriera. Esse hanno agito sia da 'cassa di risonanza' per l'artista, sia da soggetto dell'influenza di Roepstorff stessa.

Durante lo scorso anno, Roepstorff ha incontrato regolarmente il Consorzio per parlare e riflettere sul tema dell'oscurità: non solo attraverso discussioni e seminari, ma anche tramite workshop interattivi ed esperimenti fisici - hanno nuotato nelle acque nere iridescenti in mezzo al plancton fosforescente nello stretto di Lillebælt (i.e., 'Piccola Cintura'), che collega la penisola del Jutland con l'isola del Fyn in Danimarca; hanno cenato nel buio più completo a Berlino, e trascorso del tempo nell'oscurità all'interno di cisterne galleggianti, attuando una pratica meditativa per aiutare a rilasciare le restrizioni fisiche del corpo.

Ogni membro del Consorzio ha contribuito al progetto con le proprie impressioni e riflessioni, invece di curare la mostra, rispondendo all'influenza di Roepstorff da professioniste indipendenti nel settore creativo – o da artiste a pieno titolo – sviluppando il proprio testo come un'opera d'arte, poi pubblicata in questo opuscolo.

Consortium Members:

Sepake Angiama is an educator and curator whose interests revolve around critical, discursive education practices and the “social framework”. She joined the Consortium to field the topic of “The Inner Voice”.

Ute Meta Bauer is a curator interested in transdisciplinary formats, such as art, film, and sound. Her contribution to the Consortium was focussed dually on epistemology and ontology – or the relationship between knowledge and being.

Solvej Helweg Ovesen is a curator and author whose practice and research explores art as an existential, poetic, spiritual, and political commentary to the world. Her contribution to the Consortium locates the dark spaces and architecture of intimacy in the transparency society.

Angela Rosenberg is an art historian, curator, and writer. Central themes of Rosenberg’s work are the structuring of collections and interdisciplinary exhibition projects; her area of Consortium expertise was brain mapping and information technology.

Membri del Consorzio:

Sepake Angiama è un’educatrice e una curatrice, il cui interesse ruota attorno a pratiche educative discorsive, critiche, e legate al contesto sociale; si è unita al Consorzio esplorando il tema de “La voce interiore”.

Ute Meta Bauer è una curatrice il cui interesse si sviluppa attorno a forme artistiche transdisciplinari legate all’intreccio tra arti visive, film e suono. Il suo contributo al Consorzio si è focalizzato sia sul concetto di epistemologia sia su quello di antologia – nello specifico, sulla relazione tra conoscenza ed essere.

Solvej Helweg Ovesen è una curatrice ed una scrittrice, la cui pratica e ricerca esplorano l’arte come commento e riflessione esistenziale, poetica, spirituale e politica sul mondo. Il suo contributo all’interno del Consorzio ha mirato all’individuazione di spazi sconosciuti ed architetture dell’intimo umano nella cosiddetta ‘società trasparente’.

Angela Rosenberg è una storica dell’arte, curatrice e scrittrice. I temi cardini del lavoro di Rosenberg sono la struttura delle collezioni e i progetti di mostra interdisciplinari; la sua area di competenza e specializzazione all’interno del Consorzio ha riguardato la mappatura del cervello e delle tecnologie d’informazione.

¹ Statistiche del World Health Organization (Organizzazione Mondiale della Salute), <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/> ² Per esempio nel 1918-20 in occasione della ricostruzione scaturita dalla Prima Guerra Mondiale e dalla nascita del Comunismo in Russia ; nel 1957-58, quando lo Sputnik veniva lanciato nel momento stesso in cui Elvis era all’apice della carriera; nel 1968-9, durante il radicalismo hippie, Parigi, la guerra in Vietnam, e il Movimento per i Diritti Civili; nel 1978-79, in occasione della Rivoluzione in Iran, dell Guerra in Afganistan e del punk); nel 2009-10, con la crisi economica globale. Tutte insieme, queste pietre miliari della cultura collettiva globale sono culminate in 102.784.500 di morti per influenza.

About the Pavilion and Garden

For *influenza, theatre of glowing darkness*, the Danish Pavilion in Venice's Giardini isn't just the exhibition site: it is the artwork itself. Carl Brummer's 1932 neo-classical gallery and Peter Koch's 1960 extension comprise the old structures upon which Roepstorff envisions the new. Physically deconstructing the building's borders, national territory is opened up to foreign elements: windows and sections of walls are removed so there are no longer limits between inside and outside, culture and nature, art and the world. Re-engineering the surrounding garden so that the landscape raises and encroaches into the gallery space, Roepstorff's re-conceived the pavilion as a locus of regeneration, heralding a dawning era.

Expanding from the pavilion, Roepstorff's contemporary 'pleasure garden' is an environmental continuation of the gallery as a 'living' monument, where abstract concrete sculptures create an extended architectural ecology. Her geometric aqueduct is a 'picturesque folly' and a functioning spring of life, nourishing both the surrounding plants and the sculptures – which are imbued with water and moist to the touch, as if sweating.

This action of physical (re)construction is mirrored throughout the exhibition's concept and manifestation. The pavilion's absent windows, for example, are metaphorically echoed in the glass scenography of the theatre. A key component in the sculptures' concrete is sand. Under a microscope, the crystal-like structure of sand closely resembles human bone; nature's paradoxical algorithm of origin. Sand is also a base ingredient of the glass screens used in the theatre of glowing darkness, and a nurturing soil substance in both the garden and the production of the *Renaissance of the Night* tapestry's fibres and dyes. The notion of fluidity is also central, not only in the design of movement throughout the exhibition, but also in its making: the sculptures' fossilised concrete forms were cast from poured liquid; though seemingly solid, glass is in fact also liquid, its glacial flow evident only over centuries' time; a time which might be measured in the threads of the painstaking weaving process of tapestry.

Il Padiglione e il Giardino

In occasione di *influenza, theatre of glowing darkness*, il Padiglione Danese situato all'interno dei Giardini di La Biennale di Venezia non rappresenta solo lo spazio espositivo, ma l'opera stessa. La galleria neoclassica costruita da Carl Brummer nel 1932 e l'estensione di Peter Koch degli anni Sessanta racchiudono la vecchia struttura sopra la quale Roepstorff ne ha immaginata una completamente nuova. Smantellando fisicamente ogni confine dell'edificio, il territorio nazionale demarcato dal padiglione si apre all'esterno: finestre e sezioni di muri sono rimossi per eliminare ogni barriera tra dentro e fuori, cultura e natura, arte e mondo. Ri-progettando il giardino circostante affinché esso riemergesse e si insinuasse negli spazi della galleria adiacente, Roepstorff ha riconcepito il padiglione come un luogo di rigenerazione, il quale preannuncia gli albori di una nuova era.

Espandendosi dal padiglione, la versione contemporanea del 'giardino dei piaceri' di Roepstorff non è che il proseguimento della galleria sotto forma di 'monumento vivente', dove sculture astratte in cemento formano un'ecologia architettonica estesa. La fontana geometrica del giardino è una 'folia pittoresca' ed una sorgente di vita funzionante, che nutre sia le piante circostanti sia le sculture – le quali sono permeate dall'acqua e dunque umide al tatto, come se sudassero.

Questa azione di ricostruzione fisica si riflette nel concetto e nella realizzazione della mostra. La mancanza di finestre all'interno del padiglione, per esempio, è rievocata metaforicamente dalle scenografie di vetro presenti nel teatro. Un altro elemento fondamentale in riferimento alle sculture di cemento è la sabbia. Se osservata sotto la lente del microscopio, la struttura cristallina della sabbia richiama da vicino quella dell'ossatura umana: il paradossale algoritmo dell'origine della vita in natura. La sabbia è inoltre un ingrediente chiave delle quinte di vetro utilizzate all'interno del *theatre of glowing darkness*, ed è una sostanza nutritiva del terreno legata sia al giardino sia alla produzione delle fibre e dei colori visibili nell'arazzo *Renaissance of the Night*. Anche il concetto di fluidità è centrale, non solo allo studio dei movimenti all'interno del percorso di mostra, ma anche alla sua realizzazione: le forme in cemento fossilizzato delle sculture sono modellate da un liquido versato; sebbene apparentemente solido, il vetro è, in realtà, prima di tutto liquido, il suo getto – come quello del ghiaccio – rimane evidente attraverso i secoli; una temporalità, che potrebbe essere altrettanto misurata nel processo scrupoloso di tessitura dei fili dell'arazzo.



About theatre of glowing darkness

When everything was just floating energy in complete darkness...

Maybe you remember, which choices you made here?

And what you chose to rehearse and to learn in this life?

How much did you dare to risk in order to grow?

How much darkness did you absorb?

Do you remember?

Situated inside the pavilion, Roepstorff's *theatre of glowing darkness* isn't a theatre in the conventional sense. It's an immersive experience conjured from the immaterial forms of sound and light, where a narrative is told through three disembodied voices: The Black River (a terrifyingly awesome force, the matriarch of the unknown and transformation), The Midwife (a big sister, an experienced guide, Wisdom), and Seed (a wee ego-filled shell, embarking on a life journey). Recited through the perspectives of these characters, Roepstorff's play takes the form of a self-styled myth, a parable where the symbolic and archetypal stand in for the deeply personal (and vice versa).

The 'stage' for *theatre of glowing darkness* – though it appears invisible – is actually a fragile architecture made of glass: a room within a room, upon which light patterns and abstracted images are projected to create a holographic effect, suggestive of consciousness and memory. Like in a planetarium, the audience are immersed in darkness to witness this story of life, death and rebirth unfold through a model crystalline cosmos. Here, darkness is the existence in-between life and death, a womb-like state, or chrysalis: of healing, transformation, and new beginnings, embracing destruction and regeneration – both intimately and ideologically – as an inherent part of the cycle of life. Control is relinquished to the trust of the glowing darkness itself.

Throughout the play's narrative, themes and images are revealed which are echoed throughout the exhibition to create an expanded and reverberant storytelling. The *Renaissance of the Night* tapestry and the modified garden, for example, bear significance to The Midwife's tale, while the water sound effects in the theatre recall the aqueduct's life-sustaining flow.

About Renaissance of the Night

Roepstorff's *Renaissance of the Night* tapestry spans 7.5 x 2.5 metres, and was hand-crafted over seven months by three of Europe's most skilled traditional weavers. Tapestries are one of the oldest forms of storytelling, and traditionally served both political (as recording of important events) and domestic purpose (as home furnishing and insulation for warmth). Created from a digital drawing made by Roepstorff, the tapestry's iconography provides a key to the exhibition's symbolism, with the mountains in the landscape representing dark matter, and the humanistic forms growing from seeds designating the various stages of social development: potential, action, and future.

This visionary thrust is echoed in the tapestry's technological and scientific aesthetics, with the matrix of angular planes replicating the theatre's glass screens, and the terrain's geometric contours creating diagrammatical effect, measuring progress. The image's shadowy visual 'layers', like overlapping dimensions, suggest the palimpsest of time, fragmentation of memory, or enigmatic portals; a timeless myth embodied in the very fabric of the tapestry itself: interweaving the cycles of humanity and events, interconnecting life and the cosmos.

Il theatre of glowing darkness

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Collocato all'interno del padiglione, il *theatre of glowing darkness* di Roepstorff non è esattamente un teatro nel senso convenzionale del termine. È un'esperienza immersiva che si materializza attraverso forme immateriali come il suono e la luce, in cui la storia viene narrata da tre voci fuori campo: Il Fiume Nero (una forza incredibilmente spaventosa, matriarca dell'ignoto e della trasformazione); la Levatrice (una sorella maggiore, una guida esperta, la Saggezza); e Seme (un semino un pò pieno di sé, pronto ad intraprendere il percorso di vita). Recitata attraverso i punti di vista di questi personaggi, la storia di Roepstorff prende le sembianze di un mito autopoietico, una parabola dove il simbolico e l'archetipico si erigono a rappresentazione del privato e del personale (e viceversa).

Il palcoscenico del *'theatre of glowing darkness'* - sebbene appaia invisibile - altro non è che una fragile architettura di vetro: una stanza all'interno di una stanza, sulla quale sono proiettati giochi di luce e immagini astratte per creare effetti olografici, che alludono alla coscienza e alla memoria. Come in un planetario, gli spettatori sono immersi nel buio, per assistere a questa storia di vita, morte e rinascita che viene spiegata attraverso un modello cristallino del cosmo. Qui, l'oscurità è l'unico stato di esistenza tra la vita e la morte, una condizione simile soltanto all'utero materno o alla crisalide: guarigione, trasformazione, e nuovo inizio, accettando lo smantellamento e la rigenerazione - entrambi

sia nell'intimo sia ideologicamente - come una componente intrinseca del ciclo della vita. Il senso di controllo si abbandona alla fiducia dell'oscurità iridescente.

Durante lo spettacolo teatrale, i temi e le immagini che appaiono, sono poi ripetute attraverso la mostra per creare un racconto ampio e ridondante. L'arazzo *Renaissance of the Night* ed il giardino modificato, per esempio, sono elementi chiave per comprendere il racconto della Levatrice, mentre l'effetto del rumore dell'acqua evocato all'interno del teatro, richiama alla mente la fontana ed il suo flusso d'acqua rigenerante.

L'Arazzo Renaissance of the Night

L'arazzo di Roepstorff *Renaissance of the Night* si estende per 7,5 x 2,5 metri, ed è stato intessuto a mano nei sette mesi scorsi, da tre delle tessitrici più abili d'Europa. Gli arazzi sono una delle forme più antiche impiegate per narrare storie, e tradizionalmente avevano sia uno scopo politico (come registrazione di eventi importanti) sia uno scopo domestico (come mobilio e materiale isolante per mantenere il calore all'interno delle mura domestiche). Realizzato da un disegno prodotto da Roepstorff in formato digitale, l'iconografia dell'arazzo offre una chiave d'interpretazione per il simbolismo della mostra, con le montagne nel paesaggio che rappresentano la materia oscura, e le forme umanistiche che crescono da piccoli semi rivelando i vari stadi dello sviluppo sociale: quello potenziale, in atto, e futuro.

Tale spinta visionaria viene ripetuta nell'estetica erudita e metodica dell'arazzo, con la matrice di piani irregolari che replica le quinte in vetro del teatro, ed i contorni geometrici del terreno che creano un effetto diagrammatico, che sembra misurare la progressione nel tempo e nello spazio. I piani visivi in ombra nell'immagine, come dimensioni spazio-temporali che si sovrappongono, suggeriscono il palinsesto del tempo, la frammentazione della memoria, o persino portali enigmatici; un mito senza tempo incarnato proprio dall'intelaiatura dell'arazzo stesso: intrecciando i cicli dell'umanità e degli eventi, creando un contatto tra la vita e il cosmo.

on darkness, transparency and fragility

by Angela Rosenberg

The unhappy man imagined that he was entirely made of glass; and, possessed with this idea, when any one approached him he would utter the most terrible outcries, begging and beseeching them not to come near him, or they would assuredly break him to pieces, as he was not like other men but entirely of glass from head to foot.

Miguel de Cervantes

The Glass Licentiate, 1613



Miguel de Cervantes writing the dedication of his Persiles. Engraving by Capuz after a painting by Eugenio Oliva, 1883

of glass

In the short story by Miguel Cervantes, *The Glass Licentiate*, the promising young law student Tomas Rodaja recovers only slowly, after having been poisoned by what was supposed to be a love potion. However, the main character realizes he is not a creature of skin and bones anymore, but of glass – and, therefore, extremely fragile. The constant worry of breaking up, known since as the ‘glass delusion’, is first described here. Tomas subsequently becomes well-known for the witty replies he has in store for everyone debating the obvious – his constitution. It takes him a long time to regain his sanity, but when he does, he finds himself beleaguered by hordes of fans, who want to see the glass lawyer. So eventually he flees, joins the army, goes to war and dies.

A few years later, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, published in 1641, René Descartes referred to the ‘glass delusion’ to explain the difference between individual and consensual observation, describing “madmen”, who believed they had “a head of clay, were a pumpkin or made of glass”. He may have had the French king Charles VI (1368–1422) in mind, whose bouts of psychosis were described in detail by his friend, Pope Pius II, in his autobiography, the *Commentaries*. He wrote that the king thought his buttocks were made of glass, and therefore insisted to be wrapped in blankets, or have steel rods sewn into his clothing, so as not to shatter when accidentally bumping into other people. Unable to take decisions and attend to his business as king, his byname changed from ‘Bien-Aimé’ – the Beloved, to ‘le Fou’ – the Mad.

Bumping into someone, tripping and falling, breaking to pieces – notions like these reflect highly exaggerated forms of fear of social humiliation. The unconscious is restlessly inventive, and keeps pegging its delusions to new technologies, be it glass, electricity or the internet. From mobbing to data mining, it’s no surprise that, in a society with widely held anxieties about transparency and fragility, the idea of the glass human being has a powerful resonance. An example for this is the term ‘Gläserner Bürger’ (glass citizen) in Germany, which refers to widespread fears of the state, infringing the individual’s right to privacy, rendering it totally transparent, without any secrets – an open book to the state administration.



Gläserne Frau, Zentralinstitut für
medizinische Aufklärung, Hygiene-
Museum Dresden, 1958

When personal experience of modern society leads to abundant anxieties about fragility and transparency, the glass delusion makes sense. But it can be also regarded as negotiating technological advances that make simultaneous physical presence and absence palpable. As an extreme form of social anxiety it marks a reflection of the paradoxical contemporary way of life, where social isolation and boundless communication are not only possible at the same time, but relate to each other. It's a reflection of a contemporary technocentric lifestyle that appears to be schizophrenic: the brain split into fragments, some always at hand, others on the hard drive, and others again in the so-called cloud.

And names are deceiving. The cloud is nothing airy, weightless or transparent, in fact, it simply means the outsourcing of data storage, and stands for gigantic server farms operated by huge businesses. In a similar sense, there is nearly as little clear in the Clearnet as there is dark in the Darknet.

Clearnet is a term used for what we mean most of the time when we say worldwide web; it is accessible via corporate machines that offer content and functionality in exchange for data. Which data exactly, how and what for, is not exactly clear at all, but your every move is tracked. The Darknet is the rest of the worldwide web, it's not accessible by standard browsers and there is no Google search function either. Not only does one need different browsers, its communication is encrypted. The Darknet is often regarded as the space where crime flourishes, where hits can be ordered and arms and drugs are dealt. But large parts are used for legal activities too, including the 'hidden services' of companies such as Facebook. Even if public media frequently portray the Darknet as dangerous and sinister, it is actually quite the opposite, things are pretty clear: by default everyone is anonymous until you choose to identify yourself. It makes sense that the Darknet is used by people handling sensitive information. They risk consequences if the information gets into the 'wrong hands', like journalists, human rights organizations, whistle-blowers, or people who require protection for other reasons. Is this about darkness or transparency?

influenza

Influenza is one of the most common infections in human beings, a truly democratic disease with symptoms – like fever, sneezing, coughing, running nose, sore throat, muscle aches – that can affect anyone. The virus is often transmitted in droplets released as aerosol discharge, that then settle on the surfaces of objects, from keypads to doorknobs. Taken up by touch, carried on by hands, to finally be absorbed by the mucous membranes of the nose, mouth or eyes of an unsuspecting victim. The virus is just about inevitable, like a joke: if you get it, you get it.

The analogy between the biological virus and computer viruses may stretch things a little far, but still, influenza offers a potent metaphor for the contagion and diffusion the worldwide web offers, and what influence it has on modern human beings. Social media and constant screen time can be described along these lines, the cooling down of social life and the role digital media has played in this. The surge in internet addiction of children and young adults today, which, with the proliferation of mobile devices in the last decade, can hardly be exaggerated. Neologisms, like post-democracy and post-truth, only obscure the continuity and success of disinformation and propaganda. However, with the rise of the worldwide web, these strategies to influence people have gained momentum and intensity.

Technology makes things easier. When you are online, you end up being in two or more places at the same time, making it harder to verify any insecurity other than emotionally. Yet the emotional kick of the quick distraction is what it's about. It's the old story: you cannot go home – even when the home button may suggest you can – estrangement from the rest of the world, isolation and loneliness await.

Being online one is constantly exploited, as the division between being at work and at play has collapsed. The gamification of the worldwide web makes you work when you play: but it makes no difference anymore – listening to music, watching a video, everything you consume online, makes personal, even private data available to companies. And they use it to generate their own profit, reselling data wholesale. At the same time, it is old news that constant screen time causes brain damage, especially in children. Surfing and gaming addiction is associated with structural and functional changes in the areas of the brain that deal with emotional and executive attention and cognitive control. As several Chinese studies discovered, the damage can be located in the grey matter of the brain that may shrink in people with

H1N1 influenza virus (swine flu)



internet or gaming addiction. It particularly affects the frontal lobe that is in charge of planning, prioritizing, organizing and everything devoted to decision making and getting things done. Does that sound familiar?

Empathy has its own small region in the brain, which also suffers. As well as the integrity of white matter altogether, which creates problems in the internal brain communication between left and right hemispheres, and in cognitive and emotional brain centres. This can result in erratic behaviour, particularly in young gamers, such as reduction of impulse inhibition and an increased sensitivity to short term rewards and insensitivity to loss. This sounds like a recipe to create even more feelings of insecurity in people already worried about themselves. And it will leave one even more vulnerable to manipulation in the digital realm than they already are. The dilemma of influenza is the power of its viral strategy. The crooks don't come out of the shadows anymore. They are invisible manipulators, Dr. Mabuse style. So how are authorities implemented? This is a question Kirstine Roepstorff has frequently asked in her work: "Who decides who decides"? It's a tricky issue when applied online – how to distinguish quality control from censorship? Such ideas are incompatible with the necessary doctrine of the free internet, and its resistance to deregulation. Never before has anything this big, this omnipresent existed without regulation.

the dark river: film noir, depression and I



Film noir is rightfully called black, not dark. Darkness in these cynical, often pessimistic movies is absolute, it's pitch black, there is nothing there: no lights, no camera, no action. The shadows are black, like the black in comics, simply ink, nothing specific, just absolute black. But is there really nothing? And what does this black stand for if it depicts nothing? After all, it's the noir that gave the genre its name. The blackness could be a cypher for the shadow world of inactivity and depression, from which the hero as well as the villain can only emerge for a limited period of time, before retreating to their swarthy recesses. They slip out of the shadows only for an instant, to momentarily make their presence felt. Man and environment appear as if consisting of the same material. A law of the genre is that the hero always ends up contaminated with the corruption he struggled to expose. This is probably essential: the externalization of the inside black, the interior shadowland. It's the only way to show it, otherwise the viewer cannot enter. It is one.

Secret Beyond the Door,
Fritz Lang, 1948

For the behavioural psychologist and neurophilosopher Gerhard Roth, the “I” is not the great helmsman of thoughts and actions: instead he sees it merely as a helpful construction to handle complex challenges, such as social behaviour in groups. The construct is literally left in the dark, it has little knowledge of the powers that control it. The subconscious limbic system governs what we feel, think and do, without us realizing we breathe, feel hungry etc.; when ideas seem to come out of nowhere that’s where they come from. The eye only serves to rationalize these ideas in retrospect, as if searching for an excuse for an instant of irrational behaviour. Vision acts as confirmation of the projection on reality, of a preconceived idea constructed by the brain beforehand. What we see is what the sub-conscious has already decided.

However, let’s keep in mind, that the ability to cooperate is the biggest advantage of being human. Communication is difficult to develop and hard to maintain, but it works so well that over time it has become a necessity for the healthy social life of the individual. Beyond the realm of the private, it’s also what keeps human society alive, such as the complex system of global economy. It requires constant attention, affirmation and reaffirmation, otherwise it quite simply crashes. For the sociopath it makes sense to grab all one possibly can. But if remaining part of a group is priority, reason needs to prevail, tactics need to be developed, rules need to be followed: you’ll need to share.

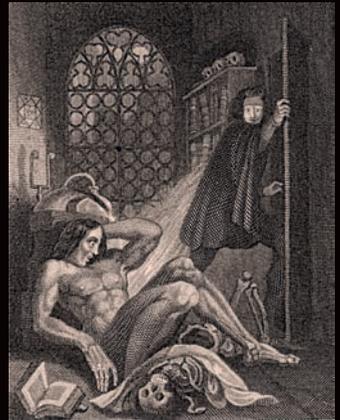
Reason may have developed as a crutch for humans to function in groups, behavioural scientists suggest, making it part of the “cultural super-ego” Sigmund Freud described in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). But then there is also the “cultural subconscious”, the collectively repressed. Sigmund Freud’s original depiction of the subconscious was a dark, dangerous area of sinister and anarchic libidinal desires, wishes and thoughts, too wayward to be allowed to enter consciousness. The subconscious could also be regarded as a treasure trove, or at least a vault of previous experiences, including those that were never conscious in the first place, such as birth and early childhood. All contribute to the individual’s knowledge of pleasure, emotion, affection, success, danger, pain, and are stored in the limbic system, thereby providing a frame in which the consciousness can be creative. The darkness – the unknown, the uncanny – wield much more power, colour and resources than previously imagined.

midwife mary

Exploring darkness, the Gothic novels of the 18th and 19th centuries are the cimmerian underbelly of romanticism's celebration of sublimity, and display a fascination with melancholia, the grotesque and the irrational. One of the quintessential Gothic novels, *Frankenstein*, was published in 1818 and conceived by Mary Shelley during a holiday with her lover Percy Bysshe Shelley on the shore of Lake Geneva. Her novel is a visionary response to the rigid concepts of enlightenment. In the wake of an age of science and the onset of the industrial revolution, the potencies and consequences of enlightenment required re-evaluation: the importance of the subjective perspective. There is a connection here to the literary work of German romanticists, Goethe, Schiller, Herder etc., who valued not only intuition and emotion over rationality, but also took into account the importance of myth and the heroic individual imagination, an idea that fuelled the concept of the artist genius, and with it a notion of empowered poetic subjectivity, that questions the very concept of the factual.

Gothic novels are compelling because of their ability to address fear and conflicts with libidinous joy. Characters, settings, motifs and narrative situations resonate with anxiety and culminate in troubling, inexplicable, supernatural events. Where romantic novels express faith in nature as a godly order, dark romantics describe paradoxes and a sceptic approach towards human decision making and moral values. Gothic novels find their subjects in the dark, resurrecting collectively repressed motifs and narratives, rescuing them from oblivion.

Which appears as a rather contemporary phenomenon today, when in public discourse the concept of the fact as such has once again become debatable. On social media, a prevailing cult of subjectivity empowers many to judge by gut feeling: what I feel must be true. But the importance of the neutrality of bare facts can't be underestimated, or, in a time where spin-doctor is considered a proper profession, everything becomes just like sports journalism. The crisis of facts and the truth requires re-visitation to the ideals of this society and its future. We need new theories to help us deal with this situation, or else there will simply be a big black blob of nihilism descending over everything. Or maybe we can find the therapeutic seeds to remedy the common glass delusion and the dilemma of influenza in the darkness?



Victor Frankenstein becoming disgusted at his creation, illustration by Theodor von Holst from the frontispiece of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, 1831

oblivion

In Greek mythology, hiding and forgetting are the literal names of the dark river, Lethe. Its waters induce forgetting upon entering the underworld, the realm of death. Souls had to drink from Lethe's water, as not to cling to the memories of their lived lives, to drown any wishes to return and haunt the living. Another dark river was Mnemosyne, drinking from its water one would remember everything. A third river, Ameles sounds like the most enticing – it would free drinkers from worries.

Today, imagining the future has become like getting stuck in the swamps. Although it is the most fertile of environments, dystopic visions prevail. Post-democratic and post-truth conditions generate disinformation, leaving the capacity of language to create meaning on the brink. In total connectivity time has stopped, creating a mushy, sticky, exhausted but seemingly never-ending present. This has contributed to a breakdown of political, social and aesthetic imagination, in the glow of omnipresent screens. Nostalgia comes as the easy option, and surefire deathtrap. What we really need is a renewed, libidinous desire for the future. Or has constant screen time already corrupted our sensual perception so much it has lost the last lick of transformative power? Are we to linger on in a narcissistic vacuum constantly reviewing ourselves?

The first step needs to be to make the darkness poetic again, to free it for the future. Darkness knows no borders, it has an open form. It is fluid and leaks into every crack. To explore it, one cannot apply Newtonian physics, and take it apart, simply point light at it or deconstruct it. We need to simply throw off our shackles and our clothes and jump into the dark river, swim out and see how far it will take us.



Submersion in Lethe, illustration by Gustave Doré for Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, 1861

by Sepake Angiama

a voice
a small voice
a small voice speaks
a small voice speaks from within her...

...and she doesn't move her lips. Remaining very still, she listens. Listens to hear if the voice will speak again. This time she only hears her breath as her chest rises and falls. She becomes aware of the noises that surround her. The repetitive trill of an early morning bird and the dry dragging sound of the wheels of a car as it drives up the hill. One sound of a church bell and the cry of a small child creating the setting of a quiet Sunday morning. But this voice, this voice that spoke from within her, spoke so softly, clearly, without confusion and with perfect clarity. It's time to wake up.

She would often wake up to her inner voice trying to make sense of the world. Solving problems from the day before. Resolving arguments. Creating solutions and making plans. Her inner voice was quietest at night and always awoke early. The cacophony of too many voices from the events of the day passed through her. But in the morning, there were very few sounds to challenge her inner voice. Get up, there is so much to do today.

She takes in another breath, focusses on the blue sky and awaits further instruction. Closing her eyes, she realizes how much her inner voice sounds like her own voice. Pondering on how she could hear it, she becomes stuck in her thoughts. Did she train herself to hear this voice? Upon reflection, perhaps the voice had always been there. The hallucination of possessing another voice speaking from within was most likely developed while in school or from trying to hear the voice of God while at church. When writing and reading, pupils at her school were asked to work in silence. Only the scratching of carbon pencils on paper and the flipping of pages to be heard. She had struggled with reading in silence and had trouble identifying different voices in narrative texts. She often couldn't tell who was speaking. This did not stop her from trying to decipher the voices. For the words on the page would remain as encoded symbols without the articulation of the voice. Who was speaking? Was it the writer or had they crafted another narrator? The narrator in her mind should be neutral and without bias.

This was also why she struggled to follow a story being read to her. While the reader subtly reflected the nuances of the text, the articulation of the words from the page pushing up from the diaphragm, the air passing through the trachea and over the larynx, to be manipulated by the tongue, the air squeezing past the tongue and the teeth creating a wave of sound that oscillates midair until it reverberates around the skin of the outer ear, spiralling down into the inner ear, cocooning the sound into three connecting bones surrounded by a balancing liquid; the information travelling to the brain to decode the sound symbols as something meaningful. Attacking like rapid gunfire, the manipulation of sound into a language of meaning. But instead of following the flow of words, she would drift and converse with her inner voice. One word or a sentence acting as a trigger.

Sometimes the voice remained silent and then she knew that it was time to unravel from the warmth of her bed. At other times her voice would remind her that other ears longed to hear her voice too. The voice bearing witness that the body was well. Her mother could always tell if something was wrong simply from hearing her voice and would immediately offer remedies against the common cold. While she hated the contraption – holding an object to the ear that transmitted a voice over electronic binary codes of ones and zeros¹ –she could also hear the reassurance her voice brought to her mother. Often she would reach the automated voice on her parents' answering machine². The mechanical sounding voice informing her to leave a message. The tone reminded her of the same unsentimental automated voice of the railway platform announcement apologizing for the delay of the train or to keep belongings with you at all times or informing you to report anything suspicious. These voices belonged to no-one.³

The Sunday morning ritual had been to listen to the radio.⁴ Listening to the news from elsewhere brought the feeling of home to her small provincial apartment. Except the news was repeatedly becoming like the harbinger of the soldier drummer boy before a parade. A warning that made her inner voice retract even deeper inside herself. It was as if her inner voice was older and wiser than the body that she possessed. As if it was a voice that gathered the many voices from previous generations that had been held in the womb of her mother and transfused through the blood when she was formed. Like a seed deposited into the ground gathering nutrients from the plants that decayed to enrich the soil. Pushing through the darkness of the soil to receive energy from the sun. You are carefully and fearlessly made.

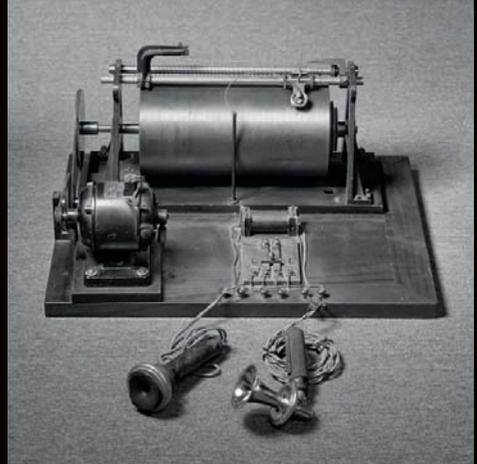
As the sun continues to rise she realizes she only has a few minutes before she should awake and take a shower. As she enters the day, the cold crispness of the water acts as a magical curtain to wash away all the sleepless visions and voices from the night.

¹ Martin Cooper, the inventor of the mobile phone, made his first call to his rival Dr. Joel S. Engel on the 3rd of April, 1973.

² The telegraphone, invented by Valdemar Poulsen, is the predecessor of the answering machine. The electromagnetic phonographic device captured the recording of the magnetic fields produced by the voice on a wire in 1898.

³ Automated message announcements are often the pre-recordings of voice artists, the first recordings were made in the 1920s. Phil Sayer and Elinor Hamilton's voices are licensed for use across the London underground and Transport for London Network.

⁴ "One, two, three, four, is it snowing where you are Mr. Thiessen? If it is, would you telegraph back to me?" were the first words transmitted on wireless radio between two 50-foot transmission towers on Cobb Island located in the Potomac River, Washington D.C. by Reginald A Fessenden 23rd on December 1900.



*“One, two,
three, four,
is it snowing where
you are
Mr. Thiessen?”*

the architecture of intimacy – in search of dark spaces

Where are the spaces where daylight simply seeps into. There is no documentation, only contact in the present. A space for everything that could replace efficiency. Nobody can see you, nobody knows who you are. Can we open ourselves to each other? We are absorbed by sound, rhythm, ambience – each other. Time is suspended. Does our self-perception change, do we change? Can we feel free yet secure, can we develop; try out new roles, make new sounds, different to the ones that fill and shape our daily lives? Can time and space allow us to shift form, melt down, with a close friend, a lover – a stranger? Can we find privacy and where does it fit it in? Can we let go? Just crash? Where does life connect to darkness in intimate architecture? Where are the dark spaces in transparency society?

Transparency society is our reality. Where the individual is screened, surveilled, constantly connected. Never at peace. Never free. Never with any free time. People and homes are on display. Every feeling translated into language and emojis.

Distance prevails over proximity.

The Cave

We live in large families and close communities, in contact with family of all ages, even the dead. We live in dark caves, like a mantle for the body. We live in tents of animal skin. We live in houses of clay bricks with floors of stamped earth. Where we crawl through the roof to a room without windows where our ancestors are buried in the walls. We belong to a specific place and live in dark wood huts with our livestock. We light a fire in the middle for heat, light and food. With a hole in the roof for the smoke. Everyone sleeps together. The size and shape of the house is sensed through touch, smell, sound. Less by sight. Kinship and family extend. Women have a child of almost every size. Childhood does not exist. Mothers and fathers have children with others, but live together as neighbours. Cousins, brothers and sisters live close to each other. The entire village is one big family. A wide yet close network of and for children and parents who know and support each other. Or clash. All of this changes when the Christian church introduces marriage.

In transparency society people tweet, text and exhibit emotions and life decisions on social media. Once it's made public, it feels more true. The ability to solve personal problems or deal with sorrow, joy and intimacy is less developed. Close family members and lovers are given online support but cannot bear being the one and only. Or even bear being there. Everything is exposed, little protected or private. Dark spots are to be illuminated. This is not something people cope with well. Life has to be optimised, and life sometimes ceases to exist under pressure.

The Victorian Home

The padded box. Domestic containment. The thick, velvet drapes, dark furniture, exotic rugs, heavy dresses, starched shirtsleeves, clear roles for men and women. There are two classes in a home. A clear social hierarchy. There is time to read books. There is shelter from the city, the bustle, the outside world. The kitchen smells of cooking all day. There are salons with live music in the parlour. There are children that practise with their parents. It is quiet and only open to the few. There is an authority. There are long periods of uninterrupted

time. The nuclear family is challenged by the individual need for self-fulfilment. The personality takes shape. Not just as an idea, but in life. The personal expectation of happiness challenges the family and its home.

Self-exploitation is at its highest. The individual freedom to define where, when and how much we work has made us slaves of the computer, of immaterial labour. We decide when to stop, when it's good enough. But it's never good enough. We can't set boundaries. So many boundaries to set, and so little time.

Another milestone tomorrow.

The Club

Darkness. Sonic space. The Dark Room. It is the sound, the voice in the sound we hear. A community of rhythm. Space, body, time and sound morph. Inside. The outside is far away. Little gets out. No cameras. No fear. No place to go. Sound en masse, bodies en masse. Individual bodies, and the occasional smile. The freedom to abandon language, sight and mind. Bodies form one body. A glimpse of what you wish you'd seen. The highs and coming down. Fearlessness, masks, and unmasking. The equality in what we don't know about each other. Opacity. New smells up close, and a fleeting flash of memory. There are hands you don't know. Hands you do. Things you never share are shared here. New power relationships. No power. Supportive energy, if you go all in. Intuition. Concrete, metal and smoke that resonates. The smell disappears. Anaesthetisation. You're touching bodies you don't know. The form is movement, exaltation, and uncontrolled words that are actually true. Advice is not needed. Trust is mandatory. There is lust. Lasting lust. There's space to rise above life. Freedom not to react.

We exhibit our lives, design our lives. Calls are made, texts written, appointments made, pictures sent. We make ourselves positive. Comprehensible. Appealing. We're tired. The kids are wanting, waiting. At the back of our heads the last mails keep spinning, and everything we didn't manage to say. We share ourselves and share ourselves and share ourselves.

Dark Spaces

The negatives of transparency society. The non-connected, abstract places where time disappears and nothing escapes. In the bedroom, the sauna, the alleyway, on a bike or a flight, in a comfy chair, in intoxication, in a voice or the darkness of night.

Together with those who respect our opacity.

We feel how intimacy is planned, and we challenge the plan. Heighten the feeling. I did something else.

I said the words that never left my mouth. I gave what

I've always wanted to give. I'm what I also knew

myself to be. I got what I wanted but didn't know

I needed. I land in my humanity.

in the world unseen

by Ute Meta Bauer

Living in the Northern Hemisphere, where darkness is met by the cold, the long absence of the sun makes us appreciate the warmth of the fire and the presence of each other. The sudden silence of an eclipse, the slight freeze in the air, where animals seem paralyzed and no bird seems to sing, feels like a moment of death. Yet, resting in the world unseen, with our senses gliding through the space of darkness, can make us feel protected, as if in the palm of a large hand.

In the depths of the jungle, an indigenous tribe of pre-Columbian society respects darkness as a tool to fine-tune our senses. The Mama, a Kogi raised in the darkness for two periods of nine years, learns to connect to the earth through listening in darkness, smelling the earth and detecting its state of condition. This period of learning attempts to mimic the nine months a foetus spends in dark, growing in the womb. Nine is a numerical representation of completeness for the Kogi people. The years that a Kogi Mama experiences without exposure to light transforms into an internalized film, a documentary, memorising in their minds what the earth tells.

Walking in complete darkness is a nervous encounter with one's senses. Expecting hollows or blockades any second makes one realize how much we neglect the use of our sensual capacity. Our nostrils widen while walking down the stairs; hand-in-hand, while reminded of the trust we placed in adults while we were still insecure navigators in this world. Our fearful yet trusting nature: we are supposed to be accustomed to being in the dark, we formed and lived in the womb for nine months.

Expecting odd smells, hoping to see with our noses; listening, to every small bit of sonic information. We slowly adjust to the darkness that envelops us. Seated in a pitch-black space, all slows down as time seems to expand. Not seeing, just listening and smelling: a serene calmness surrounds us like a giant cotton ball. The nervous system relaxes; and sleepiness overwhelms us after a long day, when we finally rest in a comfortable theatre seat or in the darkness of a cinema. Discovering a new side of what collective darkness allows: a state of dozing away – having thoughts and images gliding in one's own imagination – dreaming while awake. The initial alertness makes space for the expectation of new sensual encounters that might occur. That state of mind transforms into a curiosity, guessing what might unfold when the darkness might be interrupted by glimpses of light, of what might unfold on the screen or on the stage in front. Surprisingly, the day to day noise, the routine presence of urgencies, fades.

The all-encompassing calmness lets us release the weight of our bodies, the mind awakens and the ears reach out in search of unexpected sounds, curiously. The nose turns into a long tube that catches particles flying through the air, that play with our olfactory memories. Like how we listen in the dark to the sounds of vehicles passing in our street as we lie in bed, ready to fall asleep carried away by the rhythm of cars and trucks. The nervous system vibrates and the curiosity that we experienced as child seems reset. How must it feel for a Kogi Mama to live in the darkness for so many years not knowing light, years of 'seeing' through ears and nose; experiencing colour, reflections, objects, other beings through the other senses. Curious what forms, what imprints this generates in their minds. The verso of years of focused meditation is impossible to imagine. The act of listening and smelling while one is unseen; resting in the dark opens a space of comfort rather than despair. The initial pity for the young Kogi Mama kept in darkness turns into wanting to know what they indeed might hear, smell, touch and see while in a world without light.

Like a Chinese doctor who understands enough through sensing our pulse, the Kogi Mama listens to what the earth signals about what is going on in the world. A vast internet of Nano information that the earth breathes out in the dark. If the balance of the earth is out of sync – humid or arid, ionized or acidic – the earth speaks to the Mama, trained and willing to listen. In a flood of images our ears tend to shut down. Confronted with palimpsest of artificial smells, our noses block out too much information – in an overstimulated environment – we first get excited, ecstatic, and then exhausted and numb – a state of passive aggressiveness to protect us from the never-ending intrusion to our nervous system. Our activities extend deep into the night with the aid of man-made lights, and as a result, our night has become day. Our obsession with the light consumes our rest time in the dark, conflicting our biological needs. The extension of day misleads the body into a continuously awakened state of mind: we need to spend time in darkness.

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theatre of glowing darkness

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For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death, nor change: their might
Exceeds our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure

The Sensitive Plant, Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1820

In memory of Jørg and the Perpetual motion machine.