

“On a March day in 1887 the skeletons of a young woman and a child were found on top of a windswept hill in southern England. But this was not a case for investigation by the local constabulary, for the simple reason that the two bodies had lain in their shallow grave for about four thousand years. Little would be remembered today about this discovery were it not for one very strange feature of the burial. Nestling close to the very fragile bones were hundreds of fossil sea urchins—balls of flint engraved with a five-pointed star. All appeared to have been carefully buried with the bodies in their chalky grave at the time of their interment.” 1

The process of meiosis was discovered and described for the first time during German biologist Oscar Hertwig’s observation of sea urchin eggs in 1876. Meiosis was shown to be a process by which sexually-reproducing organisms produce gametes such as sperm and egg cells. Meiosis shuffles the genes between the two chromosomes in each pair producing four genetically unique cells, each with half the number of chromosomes as in the parent. This process of shifting identities and recombination is the system by which genetic material has wrapped up the earth, filling it full of all forms of life suitable and unsuitable in and for its natural environment - and as far as evidence holds - 100% of which will go extinct. The pulpy sky’s reflection on a salient expanse of still water is a phenotype of humankind that stretches its filter over our warped view of the descending sun. Variation is the technology brought about by genetics that converts the entropic energy of decay into a black circuit of random output.

“Plant’s best-known work, *Zeros + Ones*, begins in the sea—retelling the story of the Great Oxygenation Event, a catastrophic turning point in terrestrial history in which the earth’s cyanobacterial population produced the most significant extinction event to date via the excessive production of free oxygen, bringing about, in turn, the atmospheric conditions to which we owe the emergence of human life. The lesson underlying such a strange beginning for a book about the convergence of women and machines is that historical time is not as straightforward as we would like to think it is. History is curved, and the implication, perhaps, of *Zeros + Ones*’ queer preamble is that without a mythical origin in which to anchor itself, time repeats with a difference. It is important to point out here that for Plant, this is and always has been the story of matter and the body. This point is taken up by Suzanne Livingston, Luciana Parisi, and Anna Greenspan in ‘Amphibious Maidens,’ a cryptic text written for the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit’s *Abstract Culture* zine in 1998. Here they sketch an alternative temporality, alien to the sober advance of patriarchal time, in a loop that connects the menstruating female body to the iron core of the earth, drawing out an alliance between blood and metal, that—as for Plant, and Irigaray—exploits the linear ‘reproductive obligation’ of the female body as ‘perfect camouflage for a woman who must be traded by a specular economy. She produces an egg,’ they continue, ‘but not necessarily to reproduce. The egg is ambiguous, shot through by dual alliances [and] the effectiveness of a weapon.’ It is a fact that during ovulation, the female body undergoes an increase in voltage, and—following this line of thought—the body is reconceived by Livingston, Parisi, and Greenspan as the ‘breeding ground of anorganic life ... mark[ed by] the force of mitochondrial, non-meiotic self-replication. The egg which she carries with her becomes the production unit of a new egg within which is contained further eggs. The infinite egg. Each repetition is the actualization of one of 400,000 possibilities.’ Thus, ‘the electric body bleeds back from the future. On the seventh day comes return.’” 2

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1. Kenneth J. Macnamara, The Star Crossed Stone
2. Amy Ireland, Black Circuit: Code for the Numbers to Come, e-flux Journal