

Unintended Consequences

Programs are buggy formal logics are inherently incomplete machines break down projects are abandoned and systems hacked. Humans are literally infected by abstractions.

This is no bad thing, because like the virus which produced variegated tulips of a rare beauty, infection can be creative too.

— Andrew Goffey, *Software Studies*

Unless otherwise noted, the text is a collage of several sources:

E.T.A Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, translated by John Oxenford

Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theater," translated by Idris Parry
Jacques Offenbach and Jules Barbier's *Tales of Hoffmann*, translated
by Charles Henry Meltzer

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated by Samuel Garth

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Ouroboros

May 17th, 2015 – 7 pm

Conrad Prebys Experimental Theater

Paul Hembree, composer

Program:

Apocryphal Chrysopoieia (2014-15) – 10 minutes
live digital audio-visual media

Paul Hembree, computer
with Drew Ceccato, saxophone

(Take 1)

Berserker A-Bomb (2014-15) – 60 seconds
solo piano

Kyle Adam Blair, piano

Ouroboros (2014-15) – 20 minutes
three movements for ensemble
and live digital audio-visual media

Rachel Beetz, flute
Curt Miller, clarinets
Drew Ceccato, saxophones
Rachel Allen, trumpet
Dustin Donahue, percussion
Stephen Solook, percussion
Todd Moellenberg, piano
Eric Moore, cello
Matt Kline, bass
David Medine, conductor
Paul Hembree, computer

– **Intermission with refreshments** –

(Take 2)

Berserker A-Bomb (2014-15) – 60 seconds

Ouroboros (2014-15) – 20 minutes

Ouroboros – Text

I.

Unknown Material

In a way, individual scientists, scientific movements, tribes, nations function like artist or artisans trying to shape a world from a largely unknown material, Being. Working on this material, they build a variety of manifest worlds that they often, but mistakenly, identify with Being itself.

– Paul Feyerabend, “Theoreticians, Artists and Artisans.”

Secret Alchemy

secret alchemical experiments
a fallacious desire after higher wisdom

*a blue flame began to crackle upon the hearth
all sorts of strange menists lay around
With red-hot tongs*

the sculptor exercised skill

taking gleaming masses out of the thick snake, which afterwards were hammered

carving a form, as Nature could not with its art compare

a marionette with the right specifications

without my eyes, but with deep holes instead

Never guilty of affectation

joints cracked

the limbs,

*hands, and feet, severed off,
afterwards putting them back again, one after the other,*

would be just what they should be,
lifeless, pure pendulums, governed only the law of gravity.

all around became black, a sudden cramp darked through bones and nerves

The human spirit can't be in error when it is non-existent.

II.

Figure Sculpture

We may look upon the long tradition of figure sculpture and the brief interlude of formalism as an extended psychic dress rehearsal. The Greek obsession with 'living' sculpture will take on an undreamed reality.

— Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*

Synthetic Biology

Research on artificial life does not perform experiments on living matter, but rather involves experiments with simulations. The phenomena being reproduced and studied are not life-phenomena, but abstractions. A more accurate appellation might be "synthetic biology."

— Edward Shanken, "Life as we know it and/or life as it could be"

Spectacles

*Spectacles glisten and sparkle
A thousand eyes stare and glittered
and all those flaming eyes kept in colder and colder confusion,
shearing forth their blood red light*

**Pleased with the idol, the sculptor admires,
adores, and desires.**

*Never had a glass rendered objects so clearly and sharply
radiant beauty yet with eyes singularly still and dead
Nevertheless,*

It caught the carver in its deceit

*looked more keenly through the glass,
moist moonbeams rising
flashing with constantly increasing life
Fire penetrates the innermost soul*

**clutching with burning arms,
and hands as cold as ice;**

*a pulse began to beat
life's blood flows*

flushed with blood

the dream breaks with humming and scraping

Aria

She

had the advantage of being weightless.

playing the hapsichord with great dexterity,

a puppet not afflicted with the inertia of matter

while singing a virtuosos piece

The birds in the bushes

In the heavens the orb of day,

Speaks to the young girl Of love of love!

Voilà! The pretty song, Voilà! The song of Olympia. Ha!

propelled into the air

a voice like the sound of a glass ball,

clear and piercing.

All that sings and resounds

Has its sighs in turn,

Moves its heart that trembles with love

Voilà. The little song, Voilà, voilà, The song of Olympia. Ha!

Dance

*The somewhat strange arch of her back
and the tasp-like thinness of her wrist*

**The marionette glances against the ground only lightly
through this momentary check, renews the swing of limbs**

*In her step and deportment
something measured and stiff*

The limbs are only pendulums, and follow mechanically of their own accord.

**When the centre of gravity is moved in a straight line, the limbs describe
curves**

the feet of the figure

shaken in a haphazard way

dangled in the most hideous manner

they fall into a kind of dance.

rattling with a wooden sound on every step

Catalytic Relays

Arbitrary transcodings, uncritical transpositions
of artificial life, neglect the qualitative,
affective transformations in sonic culture. But
they are never closed systems, instead
catalytic networks of relays connecting analog
domains to one another.

— Steve Goodman, *Software Studies*

Perhaps

Were I to believe that I had actually created
life in a computer, I might think of our
relationship to the cosmos somewhat
differently. But that does not mean I am
unchanged.

— Edward Shanken, "Life as we know it and/or
life as it could be"

III.

The Cherubim

*Paralyzed
Her swollen, deathly-pale countenance had no eyes,
but black holes instead - she was, indeed, a lifeless doll
the eyes stolen ... there you see the eyes!
a pair of eyes lay upon the ground, staring*

**we've eaten of the tree of knowledge
paradise is locked and bolted,
cherubim stand behind us**

*madness setted in its burning claws,
clutched the soul, destroying every sense and thought
A circle of fire! Spin round, circle!*

**We have to journey round the world
perhaps it is open at the back**

*Crying out words merged into one hideous roar like that of a brute
Pate as death, screams of fire flushed and glared from rolling eyes*

**as thought grows dimmer
grace emerges more brilliantly**

*Rearing frightfully, like a hunted beast
Springing high into the air*

But grace itself returns when awareness has gone through an infinity.

*punctuating words with horrible laughter
shrieked out in a piercing tone
Spin round, wooden doll! - spin round!*

Grace appears most purely in that form which either has no consciousness,

*raging about the gallery,
lapping high in the air and crying,
Circle of fire spin round! spin round!*

or an infinite consciousness.

*Suddenly still as if petrified,
pretty eyes - pretty eyes!
over the railing
stone pavement
head shattered*