Brian Kuan Wood
Insurgency of Life

What is life in a world where I am also the architecture of that world? Until recently, the history of Western scientific development has been a history of a brutal spiritualism, where discoveries of cosmic mechanics only further displace the human observer. I might gain access to God's computer in a quest to commune with higher forces, only to progressively discover that material forces are programmed as an inhospitable abyss in which my life means nothing. Science might come to the rescue to draw these material forces back under human command, weaponizing and industrializing their power to limit their threat. From Descartes conceding that we possess an exceptional soul in spite of being animate machines and Darwin's allowing us an aristocratic status in spite of being animals, a brutal self-extinction has haunted (perhaps even guided) the European spiritual imaginary since the Enlightenment.[1] We might eventually consider that mechanical forces and animal survival might have better things to do than conspire to exterminate our human kingdom the moment we observe them. In the meantime, we still need to contend with a world or worlds that serve our every need in the absolute, even amplifying them into architecture, sealing us in and serving us at the same time.

If you find yourself feeling that life is just a game, perhaps that's because it became exactly that. It's not only a matter of racking up likes on a photo or checking your bank account to see how much life you have remaining in the game. On the one hand, your life and movement through the world depends on many things, and plenty of those things can be measured.[2] On the other hand, any world is by definition an enclosure, and there are ways of creating worlds made of measurable things and behaviors that seal off other forms of life and measurement, closing around a user or observer like a glove, surrounding me with echoes of my own choices and actions. The question of navigation concerns the form of life that arises in these "echo chambers" of user-centered design, which could be said to radicalize the position of the observer through exponential increases in computational power, creating what Tom Holert has called "a space that is constantly transforming and being transformed by numerous corporeal extremities moving, gesticulating, touching, caressing in a multiplicity of directions and with varying degrees of intensity."[3] We might move through worlds and sense their ambient coordinates at the same time as those worlds learn from our movements, perhaps even creating the coordinates that we sense. Such self-fulfilling prophesies are familiar to games and virtual worlds that can adapt codes and laws to events within a given framework, but they also seize
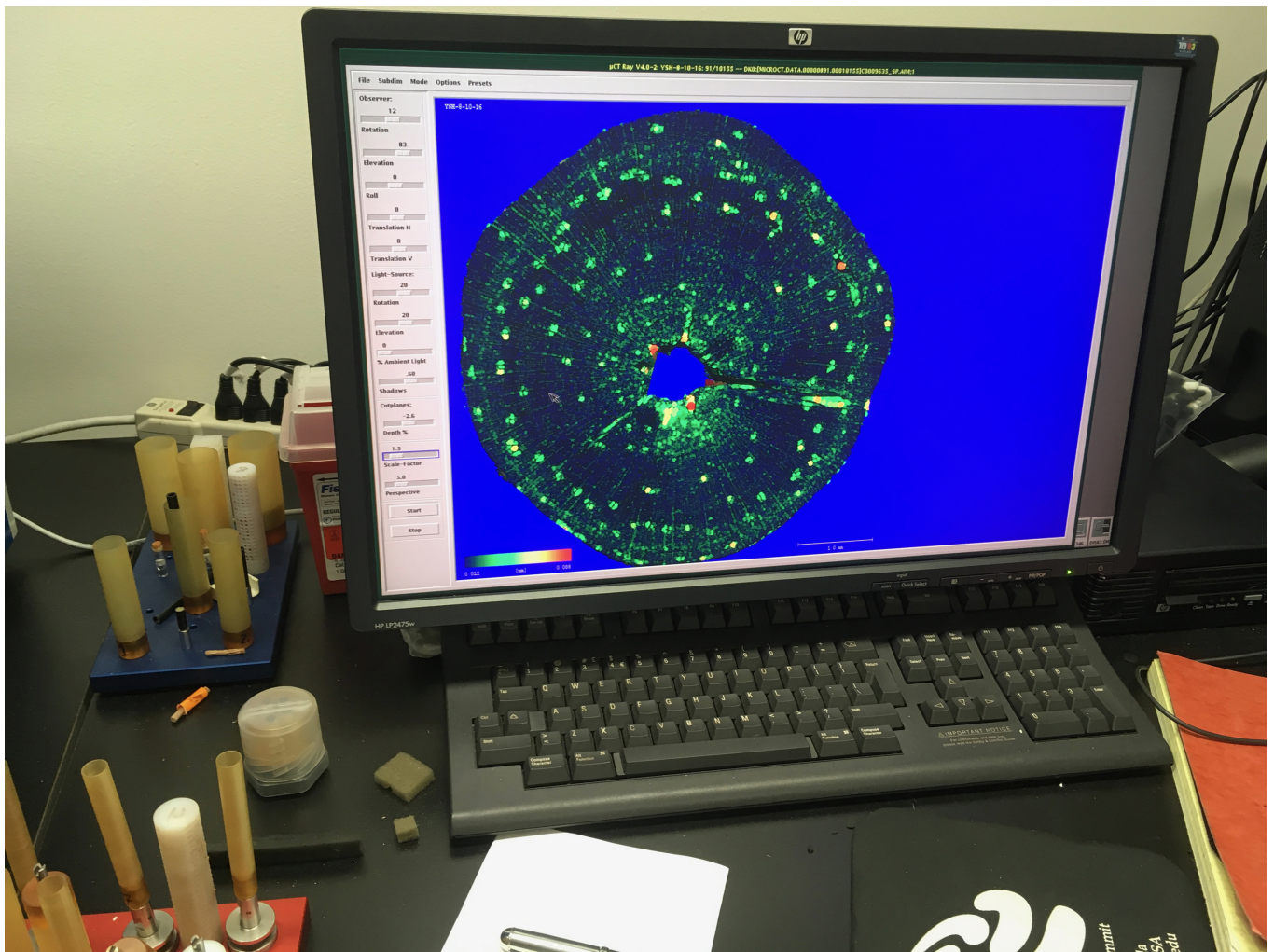
Computed tomography scan showing the increased number of resin canals in a genetically modified pine tree, generated by the lab of Prof. Gary Peter, University of Florida, 2018. Photo: Goldin+Senneby.

upon properties of our organic life, exposing them as programmable worlds as well.

Writing this in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is remarkable to witness how a genetic mutation has prompted a global war against a truly internal threat, which is sometimes speculatively called a revolution for arresting production for a period of internal self-questioning and self-examination. Wars between large powers or revolutionary convulsions of internal and external vulnerabilities tend to be simplified to serve historical narration as political power shifts or as social progress or regress. But they are all we have to measure the scale of the virus, which, coming from inside of organic life itself, seems to confound any political understanding that makes assumptions about bilateral conflicts between inside and outside, or about the terms of social progress.[4] Fortunately, we have Donna Haraway to remind us of the immune system as a preeminently twentieth-century "map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of Western biopolitics."[5] This is not only about staying inside on screens to combat the threat looming outside – as each of us knows, the threat may already be inside our own bodies. It is also about the twinning of technological progress and human self-extinction, whereby even the noble goal of harnessing machines to create energy, prosperity, and free movement for the largest number of people seems futile when the same machines attack humans through weapons of war, accelerating the spread of contagions, or prompt mutations, autoimmune diseases, and cancer. Derrida has written that the sacredness of human life opens a space beyond the living that is also a space of death, linked to technology and machines and dimensions of autoimmunity and self-sacrifice.[6] Earlier this month, I saw simultaneous news reports of mass graves being dug in New York City, while the reduction in air pollution has made the Himalayas visible from cities in northern India for the first time in thirty years.[7] Clearly, this crisis raises serious questions about what sort of productivity we are so eager to return to.[8]

Industrialists and managers are eager to restore the economic circulatory system, even when it risks exposing workers to the virus. Many workers urgently need the income, and many people need the goods and services they produce and distribute – our lives derive from the health of the current economic system and are directly opposed to it at the same time. While the terms of this biopolitical enclosure (or simply: contradiction) have been clear since the early days of capitalist industrialization, it seems to demand something further today.[9] There is a real danger in the temptation to simply embrace our own death and extinction by industrial machines as a natural outcome of an overinvestment in their awesome power, and to stage a retreat into ecstatic pastoralism. We might look to how the disgraceful abandonment of Detroit and its people and industry has been marked by accelerated entropy, the decay of domestic and industrial buildings giving way to wild overgrowth, land reclamation projects, and urban gardening initiatives from the ruins of human industry. Some might have the luxury of seeing this as nature taking revenge on a pollution-producing car industry and the self-consuming runaway productive power of machines that obediently execute a human command and then repeat it until we regret having given that command in the first place. It is strange, however, that plants should have a monopoly over other forms of organic life, where the fortunes of humans are assumed to be the same as the fortunes of machines. Such apolitical pastoralism must assume that it is only natural for the owners of industry to behave like predatory animals, decimating human lifeworlds and then seeking opportunity elsewhere when a technical paradigm shifts or the local population has been depleted.

At their foundation, machines are based in extremely powerful observations of the natural world, and are – like ourselves – already products of an ecstatic communion with its functioning. Why must this communion always initiate an autoimmune response where we scramble in a fit of horror to restore command and control through science and pathological mass production? We might consider that there is something poor about this model, that it is clearly stuck in a specific cultural cosmology lacking in the means to live and make a home within the horror of its own limited imagination, much less the mechanisms and organisms of the material world. The recent work of the Chinese philosopher Yuk Hui is crucial in this regard, advocating a "cosmotechnical" view of technology as embedding cultural cosmologies into technical systems, which can only be cultural systems.[10] By detaching technology from the cosmological monopoly of Enlightenment rationality and its apparent enhancement by the Industrial Revolution and Silicon Valley, Hui pushes the question of technology back from forms of brute automation to create a clearing which many diverse reflections of deterministic power can also inhabit. Many of these reflections have been invariably called "art" in the Western world, perhaps because it remains difficult to understand the relationship between productive or technical power and the ordering of physical forces beyond the reach of human craft.
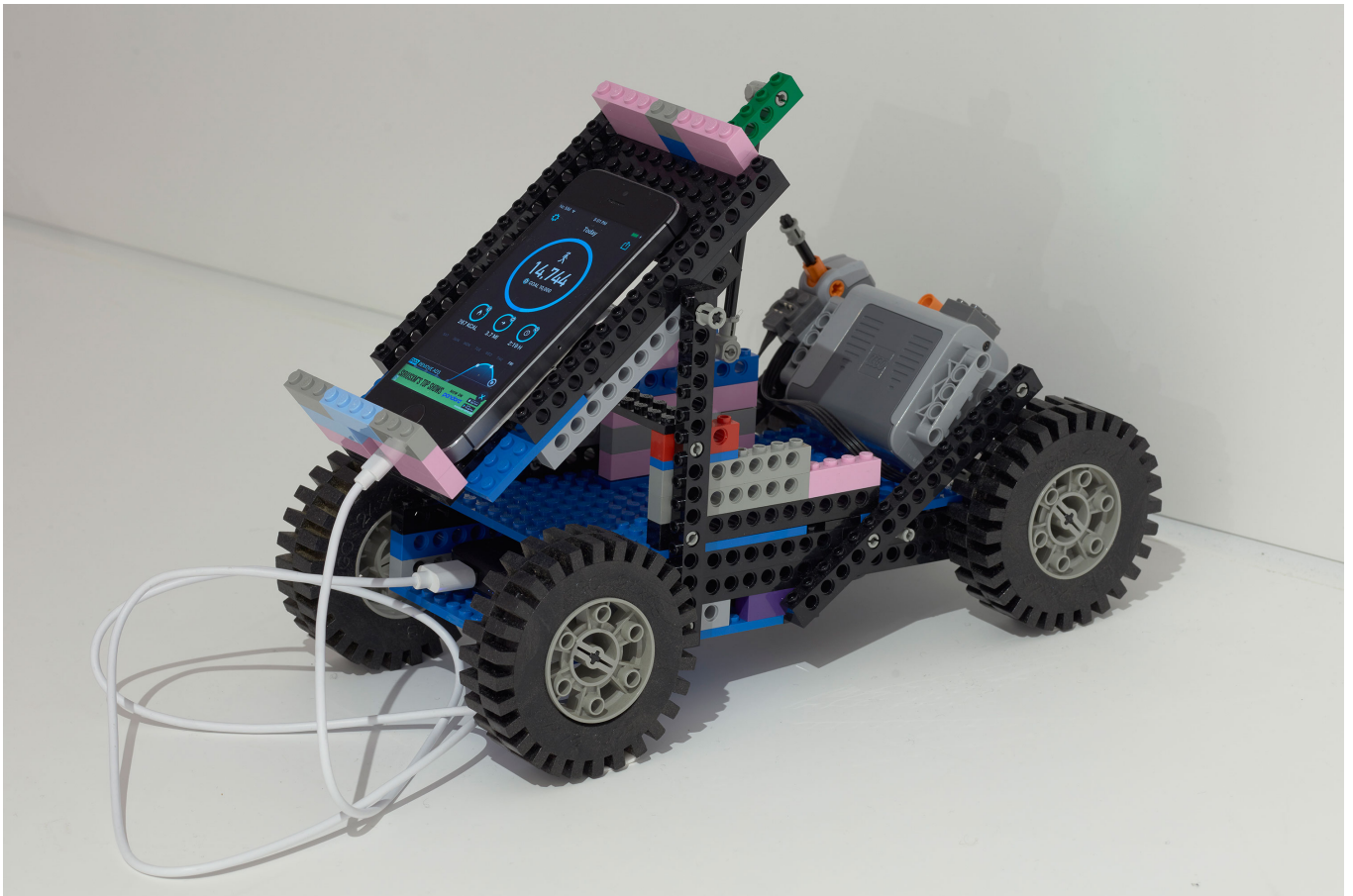
Goldin+Senneby, *Insurgency of Life* at e-flux, New York, 2019. Installation view. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Gustavo Murillo Fernández-Valdés.

Goldin+Senneby, *Crying Pine Tree,* with Katie Kitamura (novelist) and Alexander Provan (editor and permittee of GE loblolly pines). Unboxing performance, Triple Canopy, New York, 2020. Photo: Meredith Morran.

For Hui, Western Idealism remains integral for having deeply registered the pressures of transcendental laws on organic life. In *Recursivity and Contingency*, Hui looks to cybernetics as having resolved the contradiction between mechanism and organism though its use of feedback, which, by "recursively turning back to itself to determine itself," absorbs contingencies omnipresent in nature as "a test that reason has to pass."[11] If Western philosophy is often criticized for relying on taxonomical dualisms of mind and body, spirit and matter, organism and mechanism, it is also saved by its own dialecticism, which creates mutuality and a motor of feedback between these synthetic poles of interiority and exteriority, creating actual complex ecologies rather than simply a vulgar killing of God and enchantment by the blunt object of rational law in the name of progress. The notion of return is crucial to establish common ground between two fundamentally divergent axes of time that Norbert Wiener identifies in the first chapter of his 1948 *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*: the Newtonian mechanistic and reversible time of planetary orbits, and the thermodynamic evolutionary time of organic life. Planets always return to their origin and repeat the same cyclical movement, so any end is also a

beginning. Wiener uses film to illustrate: playing a film of planetary movement backwards or on loop would look essentially the same; however, playing a film of clouds moving backwards would appear unnatural, since clouds never return to an original position to initiate the same cycle again. As with organic life, death is not a return to the origin of birth.[12] Much has happened in the meantime: the body has decayed in time and will eventually expire. However, in its lifespan the body also grew, developed, and learned through unexpected encounters that form its experience and knowledge.[13] As Anna Tsing has written, "without the possibility of transformative encounters, mathematics can replace natural history and ethnography."[14]

For Hui, cybernetics effectively combined mechanistic and organic systems through the use of information as "a measure of the level of organization," with that organization being "the capacity to recursively integrate contingencies." Information has form-giving at its root, to give shape or form.[15] Just as cybernetics is neither machine nor organism, Wiener points out that information is neither matter nor energy. Hui continues: "Indeed, information, matter, and energy become the fundamental elements of a new theory of individuation." Information is what gives form and shape to this new world where machines are "no longer simply tools or

Harun Farocki (with Matthias Rajmann), *Parallel II,* 2014. HD video, 16:9, color, sound, 8:38 min (loop). Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR, Berlin.

instruments but rather gigantic organisms in which we live."[16] Ecology is thus not nature but this larger container that mediates and animates flows between matter and life, which is itself an organic machine. It begins to look something like a global economy – a totalizing lifeform that sustains the lives and livelihoods of humans, but also a circulatory system of calculable values and activities. In this sense, a global economic body also becomes a virtual space like gamespace – a navigable model *of* the world that also *is* the world, expressed in metrics. Even today, like gamers or stock traders, we stay at home in hopes of "flattening the curve," monitoring stats until a parametric value falls below a certain point, a threshold reflecting, say, the number of new Covid-19 cases hospitals can accommodate.

The totalizing nature of these gigantic cybernetic "organisms in which we live" scrambles any conception of boundary and boundedness, between inside and outside: we must all share the same world, but simultaneously try to commune with a divine outside, which often consists of tech giants controlling the laws of physics in worlds formed by information.[17] But if worlds are made (and perhaps unmade) according to monopolies over ontological resources, there must certainly be other outsides and other insides. Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli has suggested one-worldedness to be a late-liberal hangover from narratives of human progress, replacing a horizon to cross with a *surround*: a form of enclosure without a wall or gate: "One can go here or there in the surround but it really makes no difference because there are no meaningful distinctions left to orient oneself – to determine where one goes or what one believes or holds true."[18] However, for Povinelli, it is the traffic between worlds or spheres that allows other, new worlds to emerge.

Today, the trillionfold increase in processing power experienced over the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first is slowing down, yet the ways of inhabiting this enormous power are still being explored. The powers to communicate, to organize the transportation of goods and people across distances, to register and synchronize changes in value as they enter and exit various zones have radically expanded the way that space and time are expressed and perceived. Yet these extensions are only possible through the medium of alphanumeric or mathematical calculations, which move through space and time with an ease that objects or human bodies cannot match. Haraway wrote in the early 1990s: "Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals,

electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile – a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore. People are nowhere so fluid, being both material and opaque."[19] While objects and human bodies are distressed or damaged by the pressures of movement, we could say that numbers always arrive at their destination just as they were at their origin. Could we say that worlds – if indeed they are gigantic organisms, cybernetic or otherwise – are also subject to similar stresses?

Weather has always marked a certain horizon for computing. As an absolute outside whose inherent volatility can never be fully mastered, insurance companies will always include a provision for "acts of God," which are usually weather events. Nevertheless, weather prediction was one of the first major challenges given to early supercomputers to test their ability to identify meaningful patterns in extremely complex thermodynamic changes. Today, computers model many other affective and thermodynamic changes, notably financial markets. But in financial markets, feedback works very differently, because human traders are able to read patterns of their own activity. Clouds and weather events, however, do not monitor their own forecasts and have feelings about which direction they are trending in, feelings that could affect or change their direction. Feedback creates this possibility for exponential amplification, whose echo chambers and forms of volatility characterize life inside a large cybernetic organism. On the other hand, it is no secret that much of today's climate volatility results from human industry, and in this sense we may identify mechanisms of feedback that cause natural forces to behave similarly to a computational model, where the architect or author of the model is inscribed *in* the world as well as *by* the world it created. This is what makes the Anthropocene an absolutely technological apparatus.

The Swedish co-artist Goldin+Senneby have recently begun to explore what happens when the human body becomes the site where worlds and their monopolistic interests overlap and come into conflict with one another. Much of their previous work was concerned with processes of extreme financialization and offshore finance as a hegemonic form of withdrawal: "a secretive space that a third of the world's GDP and half of the global money supply passes through" and "a different kind of virtual space to try to inhabit."[20] From conversations with the artist(s), I suspect that their implicit critique of financial abstraction was mixed with an erotics of abstract or virtual space, where disappearing inward promises a kind of negative

freedom from the world of physics and all its demands and desires. In the midst of new technologies of accumulation, one might say that their paradoxical artistic proposal was actually to probe how abstract space could be also a habitable one, at least as a screen on which to project desires of movement that may also be desires for solitude and reflection.

Recently their work has turned to a more visceral process of embodiment and disembodiment experienced by Jakob Senneby, one half of the collective, who has for the last decade suffered increasingly with multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disorder in which the body recognizes elements of itself as foreign and sets out attacking them. Here the terms of abstraction are reorganized to center on a body in a critical state, retroactively animating Goldin+Senneby's interest in virtual space but with the more visceral (and carceral) urgency of biological limits. Their earlier hope of "becoming virtual" has, on one hand, failed, since the corporeal body reestablished itself as the ultimate limit to any imagination of free movement, while on the other hand, the need to engineer a habitable environment (as a body) has become more urgent than ever.

Goldin+Senneby have said in describing their turn away from financialization that today "power seems to manifest in ever more grotesque and authoritarian guises," and indeed one might argue that the question of self-identity is a symptom of a vast autoimmune crisis in political consciousness itself.[21] Postcolonial thought has always been quite clear on the fact that nations whose wealth are based in extraction and plunder are clearly not qualified for the lofty patrician human rights discourses they promote, as if to launder their own ill-gotten gains. Today, however, they too have been forced to shift from an encompassing patrician discourse to a more detailed identitarian questioning of who qualifies for the care of the state and who does not, which is not only an opening to an apparently legitimate racism (that many will argue was there all along) but also to a more profound crisis of self-identity, an ambient political "who am I?" of many national autoimmune conditions.[22] Here Jakob Senneby's statement seems prescient: "In the internal world, my overactive immune system (multiple sclerosis) has reached a point where it can no longer be ignored. I am becoming less able, but also less interested in inhabiting the ableist fiction of high-performance bodies. My biological experiences have shifted our imaginaries, and require a new kind of fiction to inhabit."

What might this "new kind of fiction" be? In their exhibition last year at e-flux, "Insurgency of Life" (named after an earlier version of this

essay[23]), Goldin+Senneby explored the "becoming virtual" of the body in relation to predatory forms of life and data harvesting, all informed by attempts to counter the disabling effects of Senneby's autoimmune disorder. Maria Lind, the curator of the exhibition, has detailed how the exhibition centered on the *Isaria sinclairii* fungus used in a medication called Gilenya, which Senneby used to take for multiple sclerosis.[24] The artists also found that the *Isaria sinclairii* fungus proliferates in a horrific drama when growing in the wild, seeking out and exclusively growing on cicada nymphs when they are hatching below ground: "After colonizing the cicada, the fungus eventually grows and sprouts from its head." As a counterpoint to the fungus growing in the exhibition space, the show also featured ten small robots built out of Legos using YouTube tutorials, each mechanically rocking a smartphone with an app tracking bodily movement for healthcare insurance companies offering discounts for reaching certain fitness benchmarks. The little robots all had wheels but traveled nowhere, as vestigial leftovers from the original Lego model of a vehicle, before they were repurposed to rack up discount points in a zombie rehearsal of data-driven ableism. These new pharmaceutical or pharmacological fictions are generated by an industrial status quo that harvests insurgent life and colonizes our life at the same time.

As fictions go, the above examples are realist dramas played out in the worlds of organic life and computational measurement, but is it possible to understand them in relation to the more erotic and projective desire to become virtual that Goldin+Senneby seemed to suggest in their earlier work, where disembodiment could be understood as a form of free mobility similar to flight? The question might be similar to asking whether there is any place at all for questions of freedom and escape in relation to the folding inward of biological and computational life. Can we still identify a desirable fiction for relations of production when both relations and production form an architecture of world enclosure? We might turn to artificial scarcity as engines of meaningful community, since at least they restore boundaries and intimacies. Perhaps in quarantine I am, with my family, recreating the conditions of a remote tribe with limited contact, developing our own cuisine and rituals in a blossoming of a thousand kinds of *Innere Emigration* that some may still recall German dissident intellectuals practicing during the Third Reich. But this turn inward already follows the script of autoimmunity – it is a necessary mutation that derives from catastrophic togetherness. Perhaps this is what Paul B.

Preciado meant when he closed a recent article with the imperative: "We must go from a forced mutation to a chosen mutation."[25]

If worlds are indeed elaborate fictions, we might also understand them as metafictions that maintain a permeable fourth wall between stage and audience, placing the viewer or reader in a reflexive or even contradictory relationship with the storyline and its mechanics. Often new political narratives – in revolutions, for instance – must also reveal the constructed nature of existing narratives, breaking the authority of what was actually a dramaturgical and performative enclosure. There may be a painful reckoning when political imagination is limited to pragmatic options already determined by the regimes it seeks to overturn, but that is also where world-building shows its immense power. In researching autoimmunity, Goldin+Senneby encountered the work of Ed Cohen, a professor in the department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Rutgers University whose own experiences with an autoimmune disorder led him to examine autoimmunity as a living contradiction whose consequences can nevertheless be lethally real. Cohen writes that, "In theory autoimmunity shouldn't exist, since self should not 'discriminate' from (or against) itself as non-self while remaining itself … immunologically speaking what makes a 'self' itself is its self-tolerance." [26] In the same article, he traces how the logical and *bio*-logical impropriety of the term "immunity" became bio-political when, at the 1866 International Sanitary Conference in Constantinople, it was borrowed from a formation of medical, diplomatic, and economic imperatives to limit the spread of the cholera pandemic. The Latin *immunis* had, since the Roman Empire, been primarily a legal and political term for exemption from duties and services, but in the context of the conference came to be used for certain locales deemed more hygienic, and therefore exempt from economically restrictive quarantine measures: "If a nation was deemed 'relative[ly] immune' (in a biological sense) from cholera, then it could remain entirely immune (in a legal sense) from quarantine." [27] Following the conference, Robert Koch, a German medical and military officer, began to visualize pathogenic bacteria (especially cholera, anthrax, and TB) "through the cultural lens of 'invasion' that had crystalized around cholera … Indeed, when he looked at the 'comma bacilli' that he famously defined as cholera's 'cause', he saw them as the actual vectors that enabled cholera to 'invade' Europe; therefore, *by metonymy he characterized infectious pathogenesis itself as a form of bacterial invasion*." [28] A Russian zoologist, Élie Metchnikoff, countered that: "if bacteria 'invade'

larger organisms this cannot be a one-sided battle, or else we'd all just be collateral damage. Instead, he conceptualized infectious disease as an inter-species struggle in which an infected organism mounts its own 'defensive' response and then, mobilizing the juridico-political term that the International Sanitary Conference settled on, he named this defensive capacity immunity.[29]

Against the backdrop of such a metafiction of immunity, we might look towards mutation as "a new kind of fiction to inhabit," particularly one that reopens the possibility of change to engineering. But the question remains: Is it even possible today to approach mutation in a way that does not simply extend immunological metonyms for foreign invasion or defense, or worse, ableist fictions of control? In a parallel project Goldin+Senneby have been working on called *Crying Pine Tree*, the artist(s) have become interested in what they call "performative writing practices within biology" and how the field of synthetic biology fundamentally challenges our understanding of life itself. In their own words: "The performativity of synthetic biology can be found in its shifting the entire field of biology from an analytical one – reading and classifying forms of life – to one where genetic inscription produces new lifeforms."[30] On the discipline that took form at MIT around the turn of the millennium, they offer the example of Drew Endy, a pioneer of synthetic biology who struggled to make a computer simulation of the mutating T7 virus and consistently failed. Eventually, he reached a breakthrough when, instead of making a model that would predict the virus, he successfully made a virus that followed his model. Goldin+Senneby gleefully conclude: "He could not adequately represent biological 'reality,' but he could create a new reality that mirrored his failed representation!"

Against this comedy of worldmaking, the artist(s) note how the culture of genetic engineering is deeply invested in the notion that all forms of life are programmable, and therefore open to reprogramming and rewriting, which on its own could have enormous artistic potential. However, the terms of this programmability may have already been decided, and they seemingly "go hand in hand with a desire to optimize – to genetically enhance longevity, immunity, efficiency" – essentially repeating all the supremacist pathologies we know too well from the West's brutal history of monsters of reason. *Crying Pine Tree* is thus a tree programmed to have its sap production (which is known to be a source of biofuel) "upregulated" to the point of drowning the tree itself in a circular and runaway productive ableism. The question remains open: What is a programmable lifeworld without these

male fantasies of infinite potency and growth that are only doomed to narcissistic self-annihilation?[31]

Remember how we used to know some kind of technical intervention was underway? A rupture, interruption, glitch, or discontinuity would break the fourth wall. Eventually, we would get used to static, hiss, cracks and pops, knowing that technology always aims for continuity but falls short in its performance. We might even reclaim some distance in celebrating these failures as inscriptions of its hubris, just as many artists find rich material in the widening of these cuts and interruptions, recognizing their auto-insurrectionary capacity and even humanity in their error. Worlds, on the other hand, are by definition continuous and self-contained – they must sustain a logic of continuity to exist at all. This is what makes Harun Farocki's *Parallel* series particularly virtuosic for forcing computer game worlds to perform in Brechtian mode, opening up a kind of dimensional comedy. In fact, this is what makes a huge amount of his work virtuosic, since so many of his works actually deal with attempts to engineer seamless behavioral or mediatic continuities in social life and political consciousness, but his touch seemingly reduces their totalitarian ambitions to joyfully failed fictions.

But attempts at totalitarian world-building continue. Today we might paradoxically perceive the traces of world-building technology in seamlessness and consolidation, which can be radicalized as healing – the elimination of cuts and ruptures and rifts in space and time that were there previously. You might know you are in one of these worlds when tensions magically disappear. You forgot about the genocide. That ancestral homeland your grandparents were expelled from might be magically welcoming you back. Just when you had gotten used to being on the shit side of history, you became a winner. You never wanted to be Superman, but you might accept a less bounded version of yourself. What happened? Why are friends and family members contacting you from beyond the grave? Do you feel an uncanny sense of wholeness setting in? Do you suspect that your biography is writing you, rather than the other way around? This healing can be a wonderful thing, but confronting it as an engineered mutation in a much larger world enclosure remains a challenge for the future.

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1
Though Marx was an admirer of Darwin, he wrote: "It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and the Malthusian struggle for existence." Marx to Engels, June 18, 1862, in *Selected Correspondence*, ed. S.W. Ryazanskaya, trans. I. Lasker (Moscow: Progess, 1965), 128. Quoted in David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital (London: Verso, 2010), 191.

2
Unless you are God, who doesn't depend on anything or anyone.

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Tom Holert, "Ships in Doubt and the Totality of Possible Events," *e-flux journal*, no. 101 (June 2019) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/101/272862/ships-in-doubt-and-the-totality-of-possible-events/.

4
And not just any threat, but a virus – a nonhuman force that overwhelms all of humanity like films in the 1990s when, apparently struggling for planetary-scale adversaries following the Cold War and Fukuyama's declaration at having arrived at a universally satisfied state of being, Hollywood looked to weather events, ecological aberrations, alien invasions, and that sort of wild or sublime outside for ambient horror. I remember that many of these films carried a sense of desperation in the way they conjured apocalyptic threats that seemed to come mainly from having too much time on one's hands, not unlike the way people sealed off in the virtual worlds and *Truman Show* bubbles of wealthy neighborhoods are haunted by visions of rapists, burglars, or minorities appearing as if from their own guilty conscience to ruin a way of life they suspect conceals a hidden violence already. Today, just such an ambient violence has merged with human bodies and human lifeworlds to assert its own universalism in the negative.

5
Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), 204.

6
Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (Routledge, 2002), 87: "The price of human life, which is to say, of anthropo-theological life, the price of what ought to remain safe (*heilig*, sacred, safe and sound, unscathed, immune), as the absolute price, the price of what ought to inspire respect,

modesty, reticence, this price is priceless. It corresponds to what Kant calls the dignity (*Würdigkeit*) of the end in itself, of the rational finite being, of absolute value beyond all comparative market price (*Marktpreis*). This dignity of life can only subsist beyond the present living being. Whence, transcendence, fetishism and spectrality; whence, the religiosity of religion. This excess above and beyond the living, whose life only has absolute value by being worth more than life, more than itself – this, in short, is what opens the space of death that is linked to the automaton (exemplarily "phallic"), to technics, the machine, the prosthesis: in a word, to the dimensions of auto-immune and self-sacrificial sup-plementarity, to this death-drive that is silently at work in every community, every auto-eo-immunity, constituting it as such in its iterability, its heritage, its spectral tra-dition."

7
Hart Island in the Bronx is a little north of North Brother Island, where Typhoid Mary was quarantined: https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/10/headlines/new_york_city_workers_dig_mass_graves_amid_surge_of_covid_19_deaths. See also: https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/9/headlines/air_pollution_plummets_worldwide_amid_coronavirus_lockdowns. Of course, Delhi's nice views aren't necessarily changing the fact that graves are being dug there too: https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/nishitajha/coronavirus-india-covid-19-burials.

8
Bruno Latour even compiled a questionnaire: http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/P-202-AOC-ENGLISH.pdf.

9
"The new industries only became important with the change from the tool to machine and from workshop to factory. This involved the transformation of the working middle classes into a toiling proletariat and at the same time transformed the wholesaler into the factory owner. This process involved the disappearance of the lower middle class and the emergence of a society in which workers and capitalists were sharply differentiated. But this process of social change was not confined to industry in the narrow sense of the term. It occurred also in craft work and even in commerce. Former masters and apprentices were replaced by large capitalists and workers. ... Craftsmanship was now replaced by factory production. ... The result was that the small master could no longer compete with the big factories and so sank to the position of a mere worker." Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 24.

10
See, for example, Yuk Hui, "On Cosmotechnics: For a Renewed Relation between Technology and Nature in the Anthropocene," *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* 21, no. 2–3 (2017): 1–23.

11
Yuk Hui, "Introduction: A Psychedelic Becoming," in *Recursivity and Contingency* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019), §2, "Invisible Nature, Visible Mind."

12
Unless you are a Buddhist or Benjamin Button, of course.

13
Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*: "Life also exhibits such complexity, since it expects the unexpected, and in every encounter it attempts to turn the unexpected into an event that can contribute to its singularity."

14
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 28.

15
Middle English *enforme*, *informe*, "give form or shape to," also "form the mind of, teach," from Old French *enfourmer*, from Latin *informare*, "shape, fashion, describe," from in- "into" + forma "a form."

16
Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*.

17
Vladan Joler and Matteo Pasquinelli recently published their *Nooscope* modeling the limits of artificial intelligence ("how it works and how it fails" through "the broad spectrum of errors, limitations, approximations, biases, faults, fallacies and vulnerabilities that are native" not to "a monolithic paradigm of rationality but a spurious architecture made of adapting techniques and tricks"), https://nooscope.ai/

18
Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "After the Last Man: Images and Ethics of Becoming Otherwise," *e-flux journal*, no. 35 (May 2012) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/35/68380/after-the-last-man-images-and-ethics-of-becoming-otherwise/: "But if the dominant image of this theory of desire and democracy begins as a horizon, it ends as something very different. If liberal democracy is the *horizon* of desire already inscribed in the fight for recognition (the orientation and end of human becoming, and thus the end of history itself), then when liberal democracy has been universally achieved, human historical becoming collapses into a satisfied human state of being. The horizon then becomes what I will call a *surround*, a form of enclosure without a wall or gate. The surround is without an opening. It is an infinity of homogeneous space and time. It is an 'everywhere at the same time' and a 'nowhere else.' One can go here or there in the surround but it really makes no difference because there are no meaningful distinctions left to orient oneself – to determine where one goes or what one believes or holds true."

19
Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs*, *and Women*, 149–81.

20
From a talk by Goldin+Senneby at School of Visual Arts' MA Curatorial Practice November 2018 https://www.macp.sva.edu/crying-pine. All following quotations by them are from the same lecture. See also the wonderful 2017 documentary *The Spider's Web: Britain's Second Empire* on Britain's transition from a territorial empire to a financial one (where financial presence replaced bodily presence) as a broker for money laundering. Key in this is the special status of the City of London, designed from its inception as an exceptional and extra-political accounting shell game: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=np_ylvc8Zj8.

21
See Yuk Hui's essay "One Hundred Years of Crisis," *e-flux journal*, no. 108 (April 2020) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/108/326411/one-hundred-years-of-crisis/.

22
Jacques Derrida, "The Pharmakon," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 101–2: "The immortality and perfection of a living being would consist in its having no relation at all with any outside. That is the case with God (cf. Republic II, 38 lb-c). God has no allergies. Health and virtue (*hugieia kai aretē*), which are often associated in speaking of the body and, analogously, of the soul (cf. Gorgias, 479b), always proceed from within. The pharmakon is that which, always springing up from without, acting like the outside itself, will never have any definable virtue of its own. But how can this supplementary parasite be excluded by maintaining the boundary, or, let us say, the triangle?"

23
Which has been completely rewritten from zero, so we might

say that this essay is named
after their exhibition!

24
Maria Lind, "What Is Wrong with
My Nose: From Gogol and Freud
to Goldin+Senneby (via
Haraway)," *e-flux journal*, no. 108
(April 2020) https://www.e-
flux.com/journ
al/108/325823/what-is-wrong-
with-my-nose-from-gogol-and-
freud-to-goldin-senneby-via-
haraway/.

25
Paul B. Preciado, "Learning from
the Virus," *Artforum* (May–June
2020)
https://www.artforum.com/pri
nt/202005/paul-b-preciado-82
823. "We must go from a forced
mutation to a chosen mutation.
We must operate a critical
reappropriation of biopolitical
techniques and their
pharmacopornographic devices.
First, it is imperative to modify
the relationship between our
bodies and biovigilant machines
of biocontrol: They are not only
communication devices. We
must learn collectively to alter
them. We must also learn to de-
alienate ourselves. Governments
are calling for confinement and
telecommuting. We know they
are calling for de-collectivization
and telecontrol. Let us use the
time and strength of
confinement to study the
tradition of struggle and
resistance among racial and
sexual minority cultures that
have helped us survive until now.
Let us turn off our cell phones,
let us disconnect from the
internet. Let us stage a big
blackout against the satellites
observing us, and let us consider
the coming revolution together."

26
Ed Cohen, "Self, Not-Self, Not
Not-Self But Not Self, or The
Knotty Paradoxes of
'Autoimmunity': A Genealogical
Rumination," *Parallax* 23 no. 1, p.
29. https://womens-
studies.rutge
rs.edu/images/Fac_Articles/E d-
Cohen-_-Self-Not-Self-Not-
Not-Self-But-Not-Self-or-The -
Knotty-Paradoxes-of-Autoimm
unity-A-Genealogical-Ruminat
ion.pdf

27
Ibid., p. 32.

28
Ibid., p. 32 (Emphasis in
original).

29
Ibid., p. 32.

30
See also Sophia Roosth,
Synthetic: How Life Got Made
(Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2017)

31
Consider the seemingly endless
stories of patriarchs who
dutifully protect their families
while also creating a
combustible model trainset
world made of their own fears
and lies, from *Breaking Bad* to

the *Godfather* trilogy to *The
Sopranos*, to name just a few. I
remember years ago reading
Slavoj Žižek describing Roberto
Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* as a
"reverse of the decline of
paternal authority," which seems
to suggest that celebrating the
patriarch as an empty sign leads
to a far worse kind of strongman.
"Why Is the Truth Monstrous?" in
The Fragile Absolute (London:
Verso, 2000), 75.