

phenix  
phenix  
phenix  
phenix

---

# *this issue*

<sup>04</sup> <i>Capitalist Wellbeing</i>	_____	WANG GUO
<sup>08</sup> <i>Life's (not) so Short</i>	_____	ALPHONSE WHITE
<sup>14</sup> <i>Chick-Lit Reclaimed</i>	_____	IOANA ESANU
<sup>17</sup> <i>Deliveroo Diary</i>	_____	CAMERON HAWKES
<sup>20</sup> <i>Romanticize Me &amp; Bacchanalia</i>	_____	BEATRIZ DEL PINO
<sup>22</sup> <i>Whispering Swan</i> <i>Four Poems</i>	_____	ANVESH RAJESHIRKE
	_____	LAIMA SUSTA
<sup>24</sup> <i>Theory / fiction</i>	_____	ARCHIE LICUDI
<sup>28</sup> <i>Shakespeare's Creative Psychology</i>	_____	CHRISTOPHER ERIKSSON
<sup>34</sup> <i>Three Poems</i>	_____	RUNTIAN WU
<sup>36</sup> <i>RaRa Ra Phoenix</i>	_____	ANVESH RAJESHIRKE
<sup>38</sup> <i>Untitled</i>	_____	DONGYUAN ZHANG
<sup>39</sup> <i>Editor's choice</i>	_____	



# JOURNEY BEGINS

## **editor's note**

By now, and for nearly 24 months, it has become clichéd in an editorial to comment on how clichéd it's become to open an editorial with some semi-philosophical remark on the current state of the world – yet I hope to escape the irony by presenting one sincerely:

In this moment, it feels as though time is, more than ever, trapped in undecided momentum. Everywhere we turn, things are moving at cataclysmic pace, yet I've lost track of the number of days that have become lost in the midst of their overwhelmingly heavy, slow-moving hours. Perhaps it is time for something new after all.

*Phoenix* is something borrowed – we are a magazine first printed a century ago by long-gone students. In its time, it had been Imperial's only publication and a vital part of the college community, then an obscure footnote in the history of countless societies, and finally, the labour of love of dozens of bygone editors. The issue number X+01 represents the first known step we're making, following unknown paths. Can we make it new? I hope so.

**archie licudi**  
february 2022

I owe you an explanation – what should you expect from these pages? We are a revitalisation effort for *Phoenix*, looking for a way to rise from the ashes. We are a publication and community focused on showcasing the work of Imperial students in decidedly non-stereotypical fields. We accept any medium we can physically print, but in this issue you'll find (amongst other things):

A diagnosis of our late-stage capitalist milieu (and a remedy via the Stoics), a feminist reclamation of chick-lit, satire of the poetic form, poems in the spirit of the maenad, an elegy to one's homeland, a fragment of bilingual thought, and a psychological analysis of Shakespeare's creative process, (written by a reader of the *Phoenix* of old!) In the next, I hope to find a piece by you, dear reader. This wouldn't have happened without all of our incredible contributors and editorial team, and here, on this page, is my deep gratitude for every single one of them.

So, we mirror our experience of time. We are a publication with a shifting, conflicted identity, and we rejoice in this. *Phoenix*, if nothing else, is a wild ride.



words by *wang guo*

Today, in many countries including our own, the living standards of people are higher than they've ever been; the average person has all their basic needs largely covered. There's time for leisure and self-development as there never was in the past. Invaluable knowledge is available for everyone without paying a penny: you can become an expert in whatever field you wish with just a laptop and some spare time. We live in a period of opportunities, with a relatively decent tolerance towards different cultures and minorities, and it is hopefully rare that individual's characteristics are legislated against. In summary, not only do we live in an arguably safe and self-sufficient civilisation, but, for many, we are also promised the chance to excel.

However, our levels of happiness are far from acceptable, cases of depression and other mental health conditions are reaching unprecedented levels on par with the common cold. People feel lonelier than ever and burnout at work seems to be as ubiquitous as a morning coffee. What makes people unhappy? Despite the multifaceted nature of this question, I believe that the root of modern unhappiness can be defined in just one single word... 'frustration'. This frustration is caused by, firstly, the complete acceptance of the impossibility of changing the *status quo* and, perhaps more importantly, the exaggerated value given to appearances in recent times.

CAPITALIST  
WELLBEING  
IS THERE NO ALTERNATIVE?

Before we can explore the problems in our system, we first need to examine exactly what this system is. Currently, we live in a capitalist system. It is capitalist because the exchange of products or services for money is the fundamental pillar upon which society, economy, and politics is built. Contrary to food or cars, money has no real value. We cannot eat it, we cannot use it as transport, but it quantifies the value of everything through our general approval of money as a medium of exchange. Money is the ruler of the world; it is the measure of whether someone will have a hot meal or starve today. Contrary to past dominant tendencies like religion, which focuses on the spiritual side of the individual, money is a cold way of quantifying value, especially when extended to human life, relegating everything in it to pure pragmatism. When you try to maximise the money you earn - your income - without looking beyond it and considering the emotions and personalities of the people you use, our collective wellbeing is sabotaged. You will certainly make sure to give them everything they need in order to maintain a labour force and avoid conflicts, but you are perpetuating a system in which emotions are detrimental. Not only do they not offer any direct benefit - people can still work and consume if their hours and salaries are still acceptable - but they can encourage people to look beyond capital, and undermine their productivity as workers. Does this drive the systemic hu-

man exploitation we see today? Humans die in three days without water, but unhappiness does not necessarily imply immediate and drastic consequences, its negative effects will be seen in the long term - translating into mental health conditions and social apathy. Yet the system continues unharmed.

The populace is not manifesting hastily against the capitalist system - they protest some of its consequences: climate change and social inequality, but never quite reach the roots of its multitudinous problems. Instead, we seem comfortable with the *status quo*, not advocating for any radical changes. People are buying more iPads and iPhones, and not shouting to close the African coltan mines, which exploit children working in deplorable and dangerous conditions. This is Capitalist Realism. First diagnosed in these terms by Mark Fisher in his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, he defined it as the sense that:

“not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.”

The capitalist system positions us as mere spectators, doomed to react and consume what the system promises. And we will unavoidably consume, or at least be aware of every opportunity to do so through advertising and social coercion. Branding and conspicuous consumption remain critical supports of a system under strain.

Not only is our discontentment survived, it is assimilated or the system's gain, by taking advantage of the natural human tendency to focus on negativity. We are constantly bombarded with tragedy by social media, news, and every other communication medium. So we are shown people dying from malaria and wars in other parts of the globe, but not encouraged to take any action; we are expected to react emotionally, shitpost on Twitter and share the news. The system doesn't want action - but it wants blame, it wants division, and it wants engagement in its services - turning our outrage into clicks and ad revenue.

The problems the system highlights and promises to solve are in so many cases caused by the system itself; industrial production causes the much reported-upon climate change, labour exploitation in the textile workshops in Bangladesh is a pure result of companies' drive to increase their profit and protect their bottom lines. It uses our negative emotions for its own benefit to the detriment of our own happiness, because

now people are upset. The sad news snowballs as they are now convinced there is nothing they can do to change the situation. Most people live with the burden of *reflexive impotence* (another Fisher coinage): despite the luxury of knowing every detail of our current problems, we do not try to take action – and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as it strengthens the system. Furthermore, to consume content and attempt to organise revolutionary action, we need to acquire smartphones, and pay our electricity and Internet bills. What a business!

Even when trying to work against the system, you end up generating the outrage it thrives on, so you are condemned to not changing, but just making improvements. You can't rewrite the book – but you are allowed to change the font from **Comic Sans** to **Garamond**. The inability of individuals to act compounds - into a constant self-repression of desire by the individual. This leads to total alienation; the loss of personal identity in favour of a homogeneous mass of people with shared thoughts moved only by what is dictated to them. It is not surprising, then, that most of us are somewhat frustrated in life: we are not free to make the changes we wish, not because it is prohibited, but because we are in 99% of cases doomed to failure. You can still be optimistic, but playing with only 1% probability of success sucks and it is much easier, and even more productive, to

just follow what you're told. Thus we again manifest self-repression and resignation, leaving happiness further out of reach.

The system advertises and sells us products which we don't seek for the physical commodity itself, but for the experiences we are manipulated into associating with it. For example, football fans buy the T-shirts of their favourite teams to associate themselves with the value and success of the team, to escape their unremarkable life and experience in an ephemeral moment, the feeling of greatness. We consume chasing this feeling: a fleeting encounter with success. The system instils in us the idea that you need to buy in order to be happy, so the meaning of happiness and pleasure become inextricably linked to materialism. Guy Debord, in his book *The Society of Spectacle*, critiques post-WWII capitalism, in which all “having” must be intertwined with an “appearing” to boast about – not just to others, but also to yourself. The problem here is one of intrinsic shallowness. These appearances do not really make for sustainable happiness, and just follow the social conventions imposed by a system that is on one hand immutable, and on the other never satisfied with a constant. Always generating new problems and solutions simultaneously in order to increase profits make the elites happy, and perish over time.

The *spectacle* is now so embedded in human society that if we critique it, the system will modify itself to absorb the criticism and even generate greater profit.

Che Guevara, a Marxist revolutionary, was killed in 1967 by a CIA-backed regime, causing an international uproar. Many people went out to the streets to protest, wearing T-shirts of the now-legendary Che. The design of the T-shirts became popular, and the companies started selling them *en masse*; although the ideas Che Guevara stood for – and were associated with the design's creation - were eminently anti-capitalist. The original revolutionary idea was trivialised, de-contextualised and, then, sold as an aesthetic commodity. The capitalist system we live in has always had the upper hand: it is extremely flexible, it can engulf any idea that stands against it and distort them for their own benefit, and we accept it knowingly. The incapability of individuals to change the *status quo* and inflated value of appearances - powered further in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by social media – gives us a repressive system, but one that is not excessively strict enough to become unstable.

Is there any way to find happiness in a world dominated by Capitalist Realism? There are, of course, different interpretations of happiness and each one of them contains in it some degree of truth. Hedonism defends that happiness is synonym of pleasure, and makes intuitive sense; life is short and we should not be attached to negativity. But can we apply this philosophy in all the contexts? Would not constantly chasing pleasure make you a slave to it? Marxism advocates for a classless society, the removal of private property and futile competition, and encourages mutual cooperation. This seems, based on everything we've discussed, like the perfect solution to social inequality, and maybe, the violence and unhappiness of the world. But how can we realistically apply these principles and remain logically consistent with our definition of hap-

piness? Would a shift from the perceived mobility of the "capitalist dream" to a state of classlessness not lead to yet more feelings of alienation? Would personal and private property be appropriately differentiated in a way that would satisfy the worldliest hedonist? It is clearly naïve to defend a unique way of enjoying life or to claim there exists a single solution to this nebulous problem.

I do not have the definitive answer of what happiness truly is, but what I am sure of is that we must suppress our emotions regularly, because we are trapped in a system that punishes those who are human. However, I further the view presented by works such as *Deep Work* by Cal Newport or *If This Is A Man?* by Primo Levi. This, combined with personal experiences, makes me think happiness is a mental

state that must come intrinsically from the individual, but is affected by material conditions. We hold the entire responsibility for improving our mental state, but this necessitates a rigorous and thorough programme of self-introspection, which can be an incredibly difficult first hurdle to negotiate. We are forced by our society to be so focused on selling our labour to others that we do not have room to care ourselves - the most important person in our life. I advocate for the intrinsic capability of the individual to change their mental state - even within the confines of a system that actively works against our individuality - but for that we need to have a well-trained mind. ■

*turn the page for a remedy from the stoics* →



# life's (not) so short...

words by *alphonse white*

Gottfried Leibniz, Benjamin Franklin – what do they have in common? They were both diplomats, philosophers, and scientists, amongst other important roles. Importantly, what ties them together are not merely demographic similarities or characteristics given at birth, but their significant endeavours, and there are many others like them. Da Vinci is the archetypical example of a man of many talents. Yes, these people lived hundreds of years ago, and the bar to entry was lower (and no PhD in theoretical physics required), but there were still significant challenges. So, what was it that made them special? Perhaps, they were just born-geniuses, or some other excuse we like to give ourselves in order to avoid the disappointment we feel in comparing ourselves to wildly successful people. Perhaps you're right, but I believe that both you and I can achieve feats greater than we think, if only we can utilise the time we are given wisely.

The old adage "Life is short" isn't quite right. A very ordinary person can use the length of their life to ascertain extraordinary achievements. We just need to overcome a few obstacles along the way – and we will, through the lens of early philosophical thought.



## I - the Stoics

Seneca was a prominent Roman statesman during the reign of several Emperors. Today, he is most notably remembered as one of the three major Stoic philosophers, alongside Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. His work covered many ideas with particular interest in ethics – his main work being *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, widely known in English as “Letters from a Stoic”. However, he had other lesser-known output too, with ideas expressed about the duration of life and what counts as a good use of one’s time. On this topic, he wrote *On the Shortness of Life* in around 50CE.

Central to Seneca’s work is the concept of the ‘Preoccupied’, a broad, sweeping category which includes most people, and almost certainly you and me. They spend life waiting for the future, all whilst squandering the present. “Once this is over I can ...” or “If only I had time ...” are undoubtedly phrases we (as the Preoccupied), have used. But once that time arrives, and at last you have at your disposal leisure, to do with as you please, to accomplish what you desire – what then would you conclude about how that leisure is being utilised? If, like many of us, you do not have control of how your time is spent, and don’t monitor where you invest it, there is a significant chance that you’re quite simply wasting it. We are provided with such easy access to dopamine-stimulating environments that it is quite addictive to pursue such vices even with having nothing to show for it. But this is not just a dilemma of the 21st century. Seneca did not have the same level of finely tuned on-demand entertainment as we have now, yet even then the fundamental issue was the same. Seneca spoke of more than just sleeping with ‘harlots’ as an undesirable use of leisure time. He also talks of what one might typically see as time well-spent:

*“Indeed, you will hear many of those to whom great prosperity is a burden sometimes crying out amidst their hordes of clients or their pleadings in law courts or their other honourable miseries.”*

Seneca believed that time is only truly well-spent if spent on developing oneself. That is, achieving great success or contributing greatly to society should not be one’s primary goal. Naturally, this appears to be quite the selfish perspective. On one hand, many of us say yes to others when we should not or when there is little to gain in any kind of fulfilment; but on the other, spending time on others often occurs at the same time as one is improving oneself and being wise with one’s use of time. Endeavours such as mindless entertainment, although pseudo-selfish, are not respectable excursions either. Develop your mind and body. Become the optimal version of your future self.

## II - memento mori

Mortality is a difficult topic to wrestle with but an apt one to start considering as soon as possible if one desires to live life to its fullest. Perhaps the thought of your own death is less uncomfortable if you believe in an afterlife – but living life with full certainty that there is more to come should still not motivate careless use of one’s time on Earth. Thus, we should make our every decision, knowing that one day we shall die, and that it might be the end. If our time is limited, why do we waste it? Every day you are closer to death, and yet: “*You act like mortals in all that you fear, and like immortals in all that you desire*” (Seneca). Have you yet lived, or merely existed?

So what is it that makes it so difficult to think about death if it would help us to live a meaningful life? Well, the recent release of the movie adaptation of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* might have brought a

***he is terribly afraid of dying,  
because he hasn't yet lived***  
- franz kafka

possibility to mind: "Fear is the mind-killer". And as different as that world is to ours, there is something important to be learned from this idea. Too often, fear or uncertainty is the primary force preventing us from seeking what we want, from maximising our potential. The realm of possibilities for positive change by taking action is endless compared to the possible downfalls, which in many cases are quite minor. If you want to dance, but are scared of embarrassing yourself, ask, "Is embarrassment really a problem?". Embarrassment is not really a major issue in life, but if you want to learn to dance (or do anything else for that matter), you can gain so much more. Acknowledging your mortality – memento mori ("Remember you will die", in Latin) – may perhaps show you that all the paths not taken, all the doors not opened, all fear of the unknown, might one day turn into regret. Maybe then, as you take your last breaths, will it all come back you at once. Live immediately, and you shall die content - whenever that may be.

Whether or not you believe in an afterlife, any pain and suffering will end with this one. Thus, why are we choosing how to live based on a fear of this suffering? Every bit of shame or embarrassment or discomfort you may sustain as a consequence of leaving your comfort zone and attempting to accomplish something you thought not possible, will all vanish. With this impermanent nature of the human experience, it makes most sense to prioritise attempts to maximise our fulfilment with it, and as such, staying inside our comfort zone is an irrational decision to its core.

### III - renaissance-men

'Jack of all trades, master of none' is most likely an adage you've heard many times. It refers to someone with breadth in their skills, but perhaps less depth than desired, and often used with

negative connotations. However, this expression is a classic example of paraphrasing a message and diluting its meaning. In fact, the idea conveyed here is in favour of being this master of none: '*Jack of all trades is a master of none, but often times better than a master of one.*' This was a widely held belief until specialisation at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, when people needed to work specific jobs in factories or in other work to contribute to society (*The Shift*).

Being extraordinarily multi-faceted was once the prize of the elite. If you need convincing, merely consider what a university curriculum consisted of centuries ago – the liberal arts, or even the origin of the word university, *universus*\* meaning "whole" or "entire". Why should we not treasure the same today? Learning throughout life is associated with learning skills that have significant investment of time and effort such as learning an instrument, a language, to paint, or the kind of effort that any of you is putting into your studies. Seneca argued that the pursuit of knowledge in our time of leisure is ideal. We gain so much more from a fulfilling purpose-driven use of time such as developing a skill. If you merely consider the length of your life (you may well live to be 100), and the length of time you need to be engaged in activity that maximises your quality of life (physical and mental), then it is easy to see that these additional pursuits over the coming decades are easily possible. In this time, why should you not vary and develop yourself in many ways? Perhaps you will not become the world's greatest in any, but you can get pretty damn good, and why should you care anyway? Who says you can't become a decent pianist, engineer and painter, all while speaking a few foreign languages and having held down a 'regular' job? There is nothing infeasible about these kinds of goals once you realise you have decades to accomplish them.

**People are frugal in guarding their personal property; but as soon as it comes to squandering time they are most wasteful of the one thing in which it is right to be stingy.**

- seneca

In addition, in most of the Western world, many barriers to participation have been taken down, at least compared to the struggles of those living in the past, and those described in this essay. Sophie Germain, a famous female mathematician living in the late 1700s and early 1800s, had to pose as the male drop-out Auguste Antoine Le Blanc to submit university work and obtain notes under false pretences without attending lectures, because of laws surrounding women's education. Despite all the distance we still must cover, we now have events to promote female contribution to mathematics and other STEM fields. This freedom is accompanied by far more access to information than ever before – Sophie Germain, born today, would have perhaps not needed the *Ecole* at all. Dreams can be achieved if we are wise with our time.


---

*\*The meaning of the word has experienced many changes in morphology, pronunciation and meaning throughout time, but ultimately it stems from Latin 'universus'.*

## IV - big tech

Today, we have the Internet – the World Wide Web. With this, we have swathes of information and resources available to us. If you live in a country without significant censorship, you have access to what you need in order to learn almost anything, often very cheaply or for free. So why are we not utilising this seemingly limitless support? I make two suggestions. Firstly, we have a lack of belief or willpower to accomplish great things. We like the idea of speaking a foreign language or two, or becoming a great painter, or perhaps writing our own software, but those endeavours “take too long” and are “too time-consuming” for our quick fix dopamine-addicted brains to handle. Secondly, Big Tech knows our weaknesses.

Let's start with Big Tech. FAANG; - even if you've never heard of the acronym, you've certainly heard of them - is a group of tech companies that each dominate their markets: Facebook, Amazon, Apple,



Netflix, and Google. These products and services may be useful in the short-term, but in many cases they have the potential to be detrimental to our mental health, continued well-being, and the health of society and our culture at large. They cause these problems by their extensive use of algorithms and machine learning to profile their users.

The *Algorithm* is a term that one often hears, especially on YouTube, from content creators, to describe how their “content” is pushed onto the masses to see, and how they must curb their creative vision in order to please this master. But this algorithm also plays a role on our part as the viewer. It takes all the data it has obtained about you as a viewer from all the videos you've watched, how long you've watched them, whether you liked or commented, who you subscribed to, and so forth - to recommend content. You might argue that it is a good thing that such a detailed profile of you can be built, because you can then be shown content which is more appropriate for you. However, consider it logically: why would creators change their content to appease the algorithm if the algorithm is supposed to just allocate content to the viewers who want to watch it? This disconnect may suggest an ulterior motive, an additional factor to differentiate what kind of videos are recommended to you versus the masses. That's because the algorithm doesn't exist to promote entertainment deserving of promotion or to find the videos which you want to watch; it exists to control your attention so you'll see advertisements. It will give you just enough satisfaction to arouse

your reward systems but not enough to actually satiate them. You will, inevitably, waste time, and perform unknowing labour on their behalf – trading your lifespan for their revenue.

Have you ever scrolled through Instagram or TikTok or Reddit or Snapchat stories - or perhaps even all of them and more - only then to close the app, then immediately re-open it? Apps like YouTube, employ the same tactics – the ones that get us addicted by preying on our psychology. Even if we look past apps with algorithmic manipulation, some of us experience FOMO and want to see and interact with messages all day, through the likes of WhatsApp, Discord, perhaps even Outlook. This kind of addiction is, however, not only harmful to our mental health but also damaging to our long-term ability to sustain focus on tasks we should be sustaining focus on. There is a sort of attention lag caused from switching between messages, posts, and what you probably should be doing - like studying or working. Cal Newport, Professor of Computer Science at Georgetown University, argues that we have this culture of being always available and that is quite destructive to our ability to accomplish meaningful work. We have our tasks we need to get done throughout the day, all lined up. First, I do this, then I do that, and so forth, during your work schedule. But, you probably do not have a section on your schedule labelled as “Communications” or similar. You see, for some reason we do that in parallel to the rest of our work despite requiring some attention, and although it might not seem like much, not only does this

repetitive use of your phone or checking your email build up by itself, but the attention lag means it takes more energy than you realise.

When switching contexts, there is a slight overhead cost in our

brain’s resources when doing so. By checking your phone frequently, you are paying that cost time and time again. You start working, paid it once. You check your phone (hopefully just briefly), paid it twice. Put your phone down and go back to work. There that cost is being borne once more. How many times do we do this? A lot. And research shows that our willpower/attention span each day is a limited resource. How are you to achieve great things if you are throwing your brain’s precious energy out the window left, right, and centre?

## *V - freedom and solutions*

So, what now? Many of you may feel that I’ve just spewed a bunch of bad news without giving you any hope. Maybe I’m fearmongering?! But no, I am not, and yes, I do come with hope. There are steps you can take in your life to obtain whatever it is you seek (take the Stoic approach here of measuring success not by uncontrollable factors though; e.g. I can practice art and enjoy the practice of art, but I won’t necessarily and, in fact probably won’t, become the next Van Gogh). There are several points to address here. First, escape the shackles of abusive tech. This is the first step in shifting your focus from short-term to the long-term. Paradoxically, setting in place rules and restrictions enables us to achieve a freedom in our lives and destinies, so to speak. This leads to my second and very connected point; tame your brain. We’ve evolved to have a lot of instincts and conditioned responses that serve a certain purpose, but that purpose is not always what we want. Yes, we want to be able to experience the pleasures of life, but being a slave to them? Bad idea. So, we must learn to manage these biological shortcomings as best we can.

One way you can escape the algorithm is simply by avoiding it all together. You can take this avoidance as far as you’d like. Uninstalling apps is a possibility. TikTok and Instagram may be fun sometimes, but in the long-term, the temporary joy probably doesn’t outweigh the consequences. Next, we must wrestle with our avoidance of difficult tasks.

The inertia we experience in completing seemingly overwhelming tasks and the

ease of performing pointless tasks such as scrolling through social media for hours on end are two sides of the same coin; they are about how easy it is to obtain physiological pleasure, that is, the release of dopamine. Harder tasks have a greater barrier, or rather perceived barrier, to complete and obtain pleasure, a sort of resistance. On the other hand, actions we perform to procrastinate have very little resistance in order to obtain instant gratification. With this in mind, the most logical step is to remove factors that create resistance to desirable behaviour and arbitrarily introduce resistance to undesirable behaviour. If you use your Xbox too much, why not have a rule that you can use it, but you have to unplug and pack everything away every time you finish using it? This way every time you get the urge to procrastinate, you face a larger obstacle (that is, more work) in procrastinating. If you want to get better at drawing, perhaps leave pencils and sketchbooks all around

your house so you never have to move far to begin practising. If you make these kinds of changes effectively, then hopefully the resistance to performing undesirable behaviour, in fact, becomes greater than the resistance to performing the desired behaviour.

Fundamentally, in order to achieve the freedom of acquiring what we want and best utilising the lifespan we have, we have to understand and face our mortality, understand the influence of both external and internal forces, and build a system of organisation which most effectively propels us in the direction we want to go, through habit formation, effective use of technology, and so forth. If we can learn anything from Seneca, it's that life is only too short if we misuse it. ■

## ***works cited and further reading***

***Massimo Pigliucci***

***Seneca***

***James Clear***

***Cal Newport***

***Ernest Becker***

***Shoshana Zuboff***

***Lynda Gratton***

*How to be a Stoic*

*On the Shortness of Life*

*Atomic Habits*

*Deep Work*

*The Denial of Death*

*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*

*The Shift*

# Chick-Lit Reclaimed

words by *ioana esanu*

The title of this article alone might have already conjured up some mental images for you: a mum on holiday unplugging from her duties at home; pastel book covers with vague silhouettes of a couple; titles with words like “love”, “hate”, or cheesy puns on the protagonist’s job. She is often a journalist, or a wedding planner, or an equally romanticized profession that seems to magically increase her odds of a meet-cute.

The modern version of so-called “chick literature” arguably gained popularity in the 90’s, with the likes of Helen Fielding (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*) and Nicholas Sparks (*The Notebook*). The genre evolved into the 2000’s, with English author Sophie Kinsella writing over 30 such novels, most notably her *Shopaholic* series. At a time when *Sex and the City* was all the rage and female beauty standards were defined by the extremely limiting “90-60-90”, chick-lit unsurprisingly started getting a bad rep. It became synonymous with shallowness, low culture, and even perpetuating misogynistic ideas within the female literary community. Although the rise

of this genre meant more exposure to female writers, the general feel was of quantity over quality, and the effect was the exact opposite to what chick-lit had tried to achieve: instead of showcasing female talent, it reduced women to stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies.

As I was exiting my teens, a new generation of female authors came forward to break down said stereotypes. Who said that “literature for chicks” must be sexist and superficial? Maybe it can be empowering. Maybe it can tell stories about women, for women, with more varied themes than just “romance”. The caveat is that love sells, so framing these stories around the romantic relationships of the protagonist is nearly unavoidable; but new 21st century standards have allowed authors to explore uncharted avenues and create more well-rounded characters. One such writer is Taylor Jenkins Reid, whose eight novels aim to innovate and add layers to the genre. We will explore her career and evolution through three of her works:

## *Maybe in Another Life (2015)*

This novel follows twentysomething Hannah on two separate life paths, after deciding with whom to leave a party. Should she go back home with her friend, or keep the night going with her old high-school sweetheart? Alternating chapters follow how each decision plays out into wildly different outcomes.

The idea of the butterfly effect and parallel universes has been done and overdone in literature. Ken Grimwood started the trend with the classic fantasy novel *Replay*, in which protagonist Jeff repeatedly dies and wakes up at different ages, with all his memories intact. Every time he goes through the cycle, he acquires more and more experience, so that in the next life he knows which mistakes to avoid. But he also suffers loss: he gets married and has children only to suddenly wake up in a completely different life. Grimwood's exploration of this topic leans into mature themes of regret, solitude, the feeling of having wasted your life or made the wrong decisions. An equally sombre read is the more recent *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, in which young Nora dies and finds herself in the eponymous library. The shelves are stacked high with books representing her many lives: what if she had chosen a different career, a different husband? Reminiscent of Esther in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Nora stands in front of the metaphorical fig tree, pondering the many lives she could have lived. But Haig doesn't quite reach Plath's level of social commentary and philosophy, while Reid is miles behind, ultimately only exploring how her protagonist's love life differs between universes.

*Maybe in Another Life* was an ambitious project by chick-lit standards, which introduced some never-before-seen ideas into the genre. Although still hindered by patterns of modern romance literature, this marked the onset of Taylor Jenkins Reid's revolution (and evolution).

## *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo (2017)*

The book that made Reid gain mainstream fame is centred around Evelyn, an old Hollywood starlet, as she recounts her scandalous life in a final tell-all. Her fictionalized biography is juxtaposed by a subplot of mystery set in the present day, adding layers to the otherwise simple intrigue. Unsurprisingly, the novel is split into seven parts - one for each husband. Each section announces itself with an epithet: readers are taken on a journey from "Poor Ernie Diaz" to "Clever Rex North" to "Disappointing Max Girard" and everything in-between.

This novel is attractive for the same reason any piece of media that follows a "rule" is attractive. The consumer knows what to expect, they are being signposted. In David Fincher's thriller *Seven*, viewers are dying to know what the next deadly sin will be, as they are crossing them off their mental list one by one. Reid uses the same clever technique to keep readers interested, although once again her chick-lit roots betray her. After the third or fourth husband, the plot becomes so predictable you wonder why Evelyn Hugo even bothered to keep getting married. Nonetheless, the novel is sprinkled with some unique themes for the genre, such as lesbian relationships and generational trauma. Reid manages to hide them in plain sight, transforming a beach read about an actress' life into an exploration of ambition, perversion, and complex human relations.

## *Daisy Jones & The Six (2019)*

With the publishing of this novel, Reid announced herself as more than a chick-lit writer; she became a full-blown master of historical fiction. The book is framed as a transcript of documentary interviews with the 1970's rock group "Daisy Jones & The Six", revealing backstage secrets and the reason they broke up. Written with stunning authenticity, this book broke the boundaries of what an epistolary novel should look like. Reid tackles classic "sex, drugs and rock'n'roll" themes such as addiction and hedonism, and in doing so appeals to a larger audience. *Daisy Jones & The Six* became her first novel not specifically aimed at women, which arguably contributed to its increased popularity.

But this is a double-edged sword. Why should female talent only be acknowledged when male consumers see it fit? Reid's other novels (*After I Do*, *One True Loves*, and *Forever, Interrupted* – whose titles alone are enough to put off any men browsing the library shelves) never achieved great fame, and one cannot help but wonder if the reason is precisely the “chick-lit” brand. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, much like literary value is assigned to a work based on a critical superstructure. A patriarchal view of Taylor Jenkins Reid's bibliography would shrink it down to a few novels of little value, aimed at middle class women longing for an escape. As for the more evolved themes of her later novels – those would simply be taboo topics among the target audience, meant to excite and shock. Paradoxically, this patriarchal lens is exactly as superficial as it wants to make chick-lit appear. The depth of the characters, their psychological battles and the intensity of the female experience are only revealed when analysing Reid's novels through a feminist framework.

This is precisely why Elaine Showalter's “gynocriticism” needed to be created: the idea of analysing female literature via tools tailored to it specifically. New meanings and more profound nuances are thus revealed in books written by women. Evelyn Hugo is more than a Hollywood cliché – she is an immigrant, an orphan, a strong woman who made a name for herself leaving a trail of lies and betrayal behind her. She is a queer woman, in control of her own sexuality, but falling prey to the role she is expected to perform in society generally, and in Hollywood specifically.

It is easy to judge a book by its cover – that's the whole point of cover art. If a book is pink, or has the word “love” on it, or is

written by a woman, its perceived literary value automatically suffers. But stereotypes perpetuated in the media in the past three decades must be shaken off. With the dawn of fourth-wave feminism, among other 21st century human rights movements, I believe the literary community is able to make a change and remove the stigma around chick-lit. And you can be a part of it by not caring what people on the Tube might think about your book choices. ■





I am zooming across Battersea Bridge by night, cycling furiously. There's not a soul in sight, except faceless men in fuming cars flying anonymously by. I look down to check Google Maps on my handle-bar-mounted phone when I hear a pop and feel an incessant, periodic 'DUM-dum-DUM-dum'. My second-hand bike's original tyres have probably done over a thousand miles, and are no match for London's unforgiving, shrapnel-strewn tarmac. I am almost a third of the way across the bridge now when I dismount, perilously close to the path of the huge, lifeless metal boxes that are still passing me at break-neck speed. A momentary gap in the line of traffic appears and I manage to awkwardly manoeuvre my bike around without sustaining mortal damage. I squeeze myself as close to the edge of the bridge as possible, and I can see the lifeless Thames deep below. I scarper. This is my first night as a student Deliveroo rider.

After an hour trudging through the rain, I made it back to my halls and proceeded to buy the strongest tyres I could find. I had only completed one order on my first night, worth £6. The tyres cost over sixty. The job was testing my faith already. That night, before bed, I fell to my knees and prayed to the big, blue kangaroo in the sky. And as we shall see, my prayers were answered.

I meandered through Fresher's Week in a drunken stupor, and before I knew it - before I knew anything really - Friday night had come around again. It was time for the weekly ritual. So with restored religious fervour, I squeezed into my skin-tight Lycra, zipped up my kangaroo-themed jacket, heaved on my over-sized, vivid, turquoise food bag (into which one could fit two small children, though the invisible hand of the market does not yet feed cannibals), hopped on my bike with *roo* energy in my legs, and went on my way.

This week I was praying for better luck.

# ***deliveroo*** ***diary*** *cameron hawkes*

As I have discovered, Deliveroo-ing is a lonely job. And that's not for a lack of us. We're everywhere: carving you up in traffic, nearly knocking you over as we cycle blithely across pavement and, of course, delivering your Saturday-night takeaway. At first, when I would see one of my bright, blue colleagues, I would wave, but soon I learned not to expect a reply. Even the more low-key nod or smile goes unreciprocated. And as any Instagram quotes account worth its salt will tell you:

*'people think being alone is what makes you lonely, but being surrounded by the wrong people is the loneliest thing in the world'*  
Deep.

You see, really, we're all in a competition with each other, a mad race across London through red lights, down dark alleys and across sidewalks, to complete orders as quickly as possible (we are paid for distance traveled not time taken). We the members of the Kangaroo Cult have a singular focus: to maintain and climb the ranking at any cost. Unlike in Christianity, however, in which disciples are commanded to 'love thy neighbour as thyself', the best thing us roo-fearing riders

will do for our neighbours is deliver them pizza, whilst terrorising innocent members of the public in the process. Some of us, out of shame, will even be seen riding with our lights off at night, or wearing balaclavas, feeling too embarrassed to attract attention from upstanding citizens.

There was one man who was different from all the others, the only friend I have made doing Deliveroo. Our first encounter was magical. I made my way up to a red stop light, for once obeying it, when I saw his silhouette illuminated from behind by a glowing street lamp. The only visible thing on him was the unmistakable luminous kangaroo emblazoned on his back. As I pulled up beside him, I wasn't greeted by the customary dead-eyed stare that one expects to see in an overworked, frostbitten cult member, but instead a twisted, toothy grin, exposing stained and fang-like teeth, but nevertheless warming my heart. I have seen my Deliveroo friend on a few occasions since and have gotten to know him better. Now when we meet, he puts his hand on my shoulder, perhaps in a mildly harassing way as it lingers there for slightly too long. But I don't resent it. When you're in the field you take any companionship

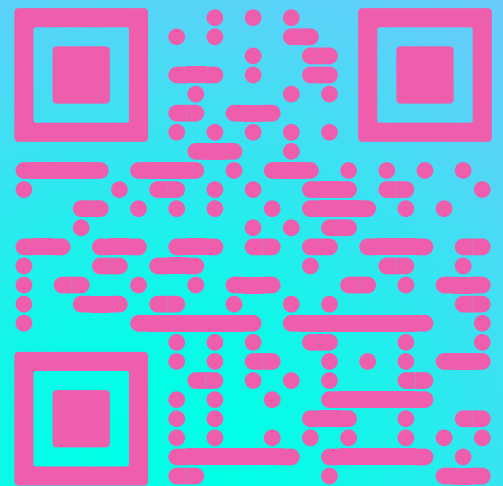
you can get.

Having been complimented on my uniform on too many occasions to count while commuting in and out of my accommodation, I decide to venture into the common room after work one night, fully suited, boot-ed and delivery-bagged. It's a hive of drunken activity and I begin to strut up and down, showing myself off as eyes swivel my way. At the end of my improvised catwalk, I make a confident and sassy one-eighty, precipitating a crashing sound. I look down to see a previously full bottle of red wine leaking all over the floor, and only manage to salvage a third of its contents. Profusely apologising to the party-goers around me, I sidle clumsily out of the room feeling rather deflated and wonder whether I should have been required to get a trailer license before wearing this massive cube on my back. I hope that my proprioceptive senses will begin to adjust to it until I can feel phantom pain whenever someone orders their twenty-kilogram weekly Waitrose shop through Deliveroo. At some point, I suspect, it will become an extension of myself much like the racket is of an experienced tennis player's arm.

Too soon, another Friday night rolls around with the reassuring regularity of the reflectors I have just installed on my wheels. As I leave my halls, I am beginning to feel some confidence in myself, perhaps even, God forbid I say it, some job satisfaction. The evening uneventfully progresses and I descend into the semi-meditative 'flow' state that one reaches through sufficient practice at any task. Of course, this is the ultimate goal of the faith: to develop this feeling until you reach transcendental two-wheeled Nirvana. After a few orders (I don't keep count as I'm firmly in the present moment), I am standing outside, gourmet macarons on the doorstep in front of me, waiting for my client. Ordinarily, I wouldn't hang around, but every so often the Deliveroo Gods give us a test by requiring us to enter a two-digit code into the app that only the customer knows (to make sure we haven't been corrupted by Devilroo). I have been waiting for rather a long time, when the door creaks open and a fully nude woman peeks out from behind, breaking me out of my trance. Obviously she had been waiting for me to disappear before venturing out to scavenge the cookies. Not wanting

to loiter any longer, I quickly get the code and descend back into the darkness of the night, contemplating the strangeness of life.

I am pleased to report that last weekend I managed to net two-hundred pounds, which works out at a wage of over £15/hour just for exercising. But Deliveroo is so much more than just a job - it's a vocation, a faith that you must pledge yourself to. Like any good cult, we have a robust system of indoctrination in place for new members. If you like the sound of what I've described in this, just scan this QR code to sign up. And don't complain later that you didn't know what you were getting into. You've been warned.



Romanticize me. / Turn me into a dream. / Make my arms the arms of Morpheus, / and give me wings for when we sleep. / Make my feet a little smaller, / and my legs a little longer, / Paint my skin a little darker, / so like a willow I'll be taller; / limbs all grace and splendour— / hang silver from my branches / make me velvet, soft and supple / but my muscles firm and strong, / feel my things, honeyed, bronzed, / take away the bruises and the scars; / remember me as I wish, not as I am, / with the swell of my stomach flatter / and a waist you can hold in just one hand / wrap me up, imagined, in your arms, / my bosom fuller, rounder, / with shoulders slim that curve so gentle, / they might break under your touch.

Idolize me. / Put me on a pedestal. / Trace the curve of my long neck, / so like a swan's you ruffles feathers, / (for to you I am no ugly duckling) / graze the hard line of my jaw / and draw my lips in poppy red, / my cupid bow your cupid's arrow; / for when you kiss me we'll be gone, / intoxicated, under the influence, enchanted, / by what we imagine we could be; / rouge my cheeks with the sun's caress / and dot the freckles on my nose: / count them, add some more— / this dream is yours— / make my eyes seem brighter, / pools of amber, honey, syrupy sweetness, / or of the charcoal that makes diamonds, / dark like coffee, rough like nicotine, / shine the yellow from my teeth, / so they're as white as ocean spray, / and hear my voice an octave lower, / let it be sultry, sexy, clearer— / I'll sing a siren's song, just to be music to your ears— / taste me, I'll be caramel and sea salt, / chocolate cake and mint, / perfume me with the moonlight, / act like we found each other on a cloud.

So romanticize me.

Idealize me.

Turn me into a thousand and one dreams.

Imagine me a fairy, a pixie or a nymph.

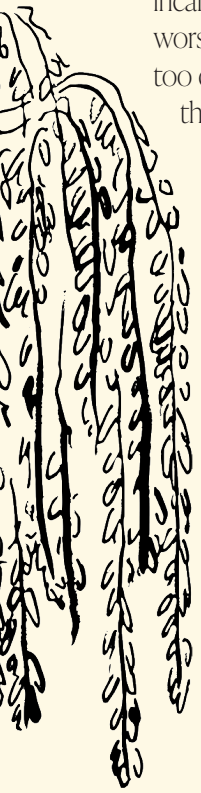
Turn me into the summer,

but by God,

please don't forget me.



It was summer. The liquor flowed  
like the waters of the Tiber aeons ago  
somewhere in Rome; clear, amber,  
wine red stains on your mom's expensive  
white carpet. I didn't know you. Not really,  
I'd met you; lazy gaze and smoking habit,  
and words from other people's mouths,  
incantations, chants, ritual social rites,  
worshippers of a God providing alcohol—  
too deep in a state of inebriation to notice  
thoughts and intentions drowning in a sea of drink.



The Senate said that they were mad,  
followers of a deity of chaos and ecstasy,  
with plans that could only culminate in anarchy:  
but your cult of Dionysus had no agenda  
other than the exaltation of throwaway pleasures—  
of glossy-eyed gazes ravishing strangers,  
of climbing up towers like the glass necks of bottles  
and plunging, leaping, down into the arms  
of faceless lovers who's names they'd not remember.

## **Romanticize me Bacchanalia**

*Two poems by  
Beatriz del Pino*

Instead of lute, lyre, and pipes; a serenade  
of dull thudding bass and an out-of-tune  
guitar, you, the uninhibited conductor of a  
symphony of errors, a comedic cacophony  
of your guest's greatest desires and their  
fastest mistakes to make, their quickest  
promises to break. A host, a king so revered  
by his subjects they gave you offerings  
in the shape of stumbled "thank you"s  
and "hey man, where's the bathroom?"s

Yet you stood there, inhaling the smoke  
as you let your home, your Rome, burn around you,  
with satyrs and nymphs, frenzied, wreaking havoc.  
I went up to you, sun rising over tiled rooftops,  
(age-old curtain call for the night's festivities)  
the living legend in your emperor's new clothes.  
"It was nice to see you" I said, wary of your  
empty, hollowed-out look. I still didn't know you,  
not really, but I felt for the false idol, exhausted,  
now confused, at the fragility of his heathen faith.

"Yeah, you too. Come again next time."  
"Sure. Thanks" And as I descended the  
rocky hills from Bacchus' temple,  
the revelry soon only to be recalled  
by a dizzying headache and bags under  
my eyes, I thought, "Well, of course I'll go,  
how could I skip the Bacchanal?"

Whatever you wish shall come true!  
 In that I don't want anything, I mean anything at all  
 or for the profit,  
 I'm self-sacrificing,  
 yet it's the ritual to see myself in you

Custom, reality + their border  
 dissolved when I met your eyes;  
 at such sight  
     pounding heart is  
     whispering danger.

Without getting lost in  
 meaningless meanings,  
 now only *want* is to *live*:  
     your/our non-dual existence  
     so much so  
     that I can carry in my lotus hands.

Anvesh Rajeshirke whispering swan

Open your eyes inwards, look  
 I'm there with you,  
 the joyful-touch is next to your pillow,  
 all the chaos of doubts cushioned on the cotton,  
 the dreams will follow,  
 the sheep + the shepherd

“Liberate thyself”, the black swan whispered!

It seems to me so right to write a poem –  
when verses're poured out of my pen,  
and I can read, rewrite, enjoy 'em  
and call them “masterpieceful” then.

It seems to me so wise to write a poem –  
when sitting in a pretty park  
let others guess what am I doin'  
and make that face “I am so smart!”

It seems to me so cool to write a poem –  
when point or final line I've reached,  
I can then jump and scream: “I did it!”,  
present to others as I've preached.

And now just think about that prose thing –  
where you sit down and write and write and write  
and you can see no end you're reaching,  
your pen just died, now you can cry!

A flower flowing scent of shyness has  
When flying bee with vibrant moves  
Keeps guarding it as tenderly  
As faithful freshet in the grooves.

\*\*\*

In every blossom of her heart  
I often could a drop of hesitation feel  
as if she stumbled, waited, thought  
while scars enriche'néd with drops, in  
silent sanity they healed.

\*\*\*

Just be there, stand there,  
witness the moment –  
hear what the world has to say to you;  
don't say another  
pessimist's comment

*Laima Susta*  
*four poems*

# THEORY / FICTION

*Theory-fiction* has undoubtedly become the supreme buzzword of the modern philosophy scene (a word I use deliberately with its connotations of aesthetic homogeneity and group politics); we have entered an era where *Neuromancer* and Borges are found on the shelves of the turtleneck-clad philosophically inclined with equal or greater frequency than those works that would have dominated these spaces even at the beginning of this century. Where is *Republic* or *Leviathan*, Seneca or Confucius? Where, even, is *The Phenomenology of Spirit* or *The Second Sex*? Why is everyone suddenly talking about *cybernetics*?

The term is difficult and internally inconsistent; its popularity is precisely due to its appropriation by a *scene*, its assimilation into a new, extremely-online, cultural code; it has become a descriptor of *vibe*, of which in-group membership is the ultimate identifier. Its literal meaning is trivial, of course: a work both of theory (in the philosophical sense, a treatise or thought) and fiction. But let's note something immediately: we instinctively apply a definition of *theory* to situate it within philosophical jargon – are we about to do the same for *fiction*? The contradictions upon which the term is built are already beginning to show. The *fiction* of theory-fiction cannot correspond directly to standard coinage – surely it must be something more than artistic speculation or the creative imaginary that one would expect in equal quantities from Kane or Kant? I argue for an expansive definition of theory-fiction, one that aims to, in our reading of each, break down the barriers between them and make us aware not only of the motifs and meaning of fiction, but also the aesthetic sensibilities of even the most grounded philosophical analysis. For the time being, let us consider some possibilities of what can or *should* be theory-fiction:

## words by *archie licudi*

A philosophical treatise which incorporates its aesthetic form into its theoretical development, perhaps through a narrative structure or awareness of its artificial poeticism.

A work of fiction that attempts to convey, beyond the reasonable assumptions of creativity, a coherent or “new” philosophical vision, through its associated culture or otherwise.

The modern theory of the form begins, as many things do, with Jean Baudrillard's (in)famous 1981 work *Simulacra and Simulation*. Building on the groundwork Guy Debord's *Spectacle*, the theory of simulacra is a dense, knotted extension of the ganglia of postmodern French philosophy, and its incomprehensibility has long been the butt of jokes (once one grows tired of Foucault). In its most essential form, *simulation* – “the act of pretending one has what one doesn't - has replaced the real in society, and that our world is now one of *simulacra* – simulated representations of objects. He puts it:

*“The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true”*

Thus, there is no such thing as “real” in terms of representations by the simulacra of the modern era – they exist as placeholders to disguise the lack of truth and the real. He terms this state *hyperreality* – where not only does distinguishing between the real and simulation become impossible, but where a complex system of signs and signifiers is built to represent this false reality which exists only insofar as it is represented by simulacra. This is seen as the “fourth stage of images”. In the first stage, an image represents reality, in the second it distorts or masks, in the third it comes to represent the absence of reality, and in the final stage the image is entirely detached from



reality. The image is in a unique position where it does not need to pretend to represent reality, because it is situated within a complex system of symbols which refer to the image alone and we, in a hyperreal state, accept it as a substitute for reality in our experience of this network. The first threads are coming together. It is not quite right to say that fiction is a simulacrum of theory, or vice versa, but we can certainly conceptualise of theory-fiction as a simulacrum *of nothing*, but a clear substitute nonetheless. We read a work of theory-fiction (here leaning more to fiction) and the physical quality of our brain is forever changed. We enter an altered state whereby, consciously and consensually or not, the delicate homeostasis within our skulls is imperceptibly shifted to assimilate a theoretical understanding *based on nothing*, a reality whose existence is neither true nor required by our physiology. A set of deductive rules is imprinted within our grey matter whose requisite axioms are liable to be rejected or filtered out. On how many countless occasions have you heard someone reference world events as being “just like” a fictional work, and predicting our future using fiction as a basis? And why are the works invariably dystopian? This is precisely the phenomenon of theory-fiction, the fiction becomes lost and the implication of the theory remains as an indelible echo in our cortices.

Chapter 13 of *S+S* is entitled “Simulacra and Science Fiction”, and it provides a theoretical backdrop to our claim. Baudrillard defines three orders of simulacra: first, the *idealist* simulacra founded on nature and the “image of God”, next the *productive* simulacra founded on energy and its manifestation by the forces of production, and finally the *simulacra of simulation* – those founded on information and hyperreality. It is clear that classic utopian fiction is a neat fit for the first order; it is a projection of the real and natural into an ideal fantasy beyond itself. It is honest, perhaps ascending to the second order of images but no further – it need not pretend a reality, if anything it *dissimulates* (that is, performs the antithetical process to simulation), it asks to escape the real and encourage the “suspension of disbelief”. Sci-Fi, to Baudrillard, is the fiction of the second order simulacra. It is the acceleration and extrapolation of every earthly process at breakneck speeds to a world once again beyond

itself, but only in terms of its impossible production, its reduction of reality to the grey goo of rogue nanobots. But then what is fiction of the third order? It is not the transcendence of the first, nor is it the “unbounded projection” of the second. With some analysis of the previous two fictions, we can arrive at a conclusion (or cheat ourselves and consult the text): it is fiction that pre-empts the real. It does not imagine a new universe, but rather anticipates our own, performing an action of simulation in its manipulation of the simulacral models of our experience into hypothetical scenarios. Does this imply that the third order is unrecognisable as fiction, but must rather be interpreted as prophecy? We must remember though that processes of our hyperreal experience are asynchronous ones – consider the hyperreality of invented histories or promised futures – we are not predicting the future or retconning the past; we are *predicting the experience of a reality*. In Baudrillard’s words:

*“nothing distinguishes this operation from the operation itself and the gestation of the real: there is no more fiction.”*

So, what has become of our distinguishment? Is it true that all theory is third order fiction – are we so absorbed in our symbolic order that no diagnosis of the perceived real can avoid being built upon simulation? This cannot be quite right; the “gestation of the real” is an asynchronous process, but the “precession of simulacra”, the replacing of existing by simulating, is not. Without descending into *radical scepticism* we cannot make the case that the semiotic network we inhabit was spontaneously created with the first humans to create language and cave paintings. If we are to believe anything, we must hold that the stages of images were temporally ascended. In the words of Bertrand Russell:

*“scepticism, while logically impeccable, is psychologically impossible, and there is an element of frivolous insincerity in any philosophy which pretends to accept it.”*

Thus, historical analysis is our most promising route to return meaning to our thesis. By the same token,

an analysis that does not appreciate theory-fiction as distinct from theory or fiction can reduce us to meaninglessness once again. It is an important observation to make that all theory is necessarily speculative – or else any field of philosophy thought about would be considered solved – but this does not make it inherently founded on a simulacrum of simulation, or theory-fictional.

Despite this, the concept is not remotely new. *Kamo no Chōmei* is a widely celebrated figure of Japanese literature whose works are considered essential in the Buddhist canon. His essay *Hojoki (Account of a Ten-Foot-Square Hut)* is representative of the earliest theory-autofiction that naturally arises from the Buddhist oral and anecdotal tradition of teaching. He encompasses Buddhist ideas on *Dhukka* and *Mujo (Anicca)* through his descriptions of, firstly, semi-fictionalised accounts of historical disasters in Kyoto, and then descriptions of his “temporary home” – the eponymous hut. In stark contrast to the Christian parable tradition, for example, *Hojoki* delights in its aestheticism – it is pure narrative and aware of its status as a philosophical treatise, but it is fundamentally literary and shows, through its form, an awareness of this matter. A millennium later and across the globe, Jose Luis Borges will pen *On Exactitude in Science*, a fable of cartographers who create a map so detailed that it becomes a one-to-one recreation of their empire, overlaid above it. The empire changes, crumbles and falls, with the map fraying and fading but eventually remains as the only trace of the once-great nation. To Baudrillard, this is the perfect encapsulation of the hyper-real – people who *live on the map rather than the land*. The map does not pretend the existence of the empire that is left behind, it becomes its direct substitute. Here, in the 1940s, are the stirrings of third-order theory-fiction. Like *Hojoki*, it is short and conveys its message simply, but all the while relishes its aesthetic form. Any reader of Borges’ work is likely able to relate to experiencing the simple beauty of his mathematical literature, mirroring the works of the allegorical Japanese tradition. Now we move into the 1980s, and with the release of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (in 1984, three years after *S+S*) comes the catalysation of modern theory-fiction, and the work which Mark Fisher will, in 1999, use as the central evidence in his defence of Baudrillard’s bold claim:

“[the evolution of simulacra] puts an end to science fiction – but also to theory, as specific genres.”

Returning to Baudrillard, it is in *Neuromancer* that we see the realisation of the cybernetic fiction he predicts. In *S+S*, he suggests that by making space travel the realm of the mundane (consider the normalcy of bathrooms on the ISS, albeit with more handles and straps) just as Earth is, we have irreparably destroyed the capability of science fiction to become a window to the future. For it to say anything at all, it must become a mirror to the past: it must “artificially resurrect historic worlds”. It becomes third-order fiction as it manipulates the symbols of our own past and present into hypothetical situations and begins re-predicting our own present. We are, in effect, *writing theory*.

The explosive effect of the critical interest of philosophers in the cybernetic underground would lead to the formation of the Cybernetic Cultures Research Unit at Warwick University in the late 90s. It is here that “theory-fiction” becomes studied and produced in its own right. The CCRU easily ranks amongst the most influential philosophical institutions of the twenty-first century, but its entire canon contains virtually no works of pure theory devoid of *fiction*. It is wrapped up in the unconscious and the imaginary, determined to excavate those fossilised remains of past internalised fictions from the brains of theoreticians. A student of Nick Land, a key figure in the unit, recalls a postgraduate class in which Land spent the entire hour analysing the numerology of the keystrokes used to type Deleuze and Guattari’s seminal *A Thousand Plateaus*. Absurd on the face of it, where do we differentiate between this “fiction” and the fictions of *Neuromancer* or *On Exactitude*? Is it not more plausible that the subconscious writing patterns of these great social theorists contain insights to understand their works on a deeper level than it is to believe that a group of cartographers will someday be driven by obsessive devotion to exactitude that they cover an empire with its own map? If the only argument for the validity of one over the other relates to the metaphorical parallels to the “real world”, then we must ask the question: what does each work simulate, *what real do they pretend to*?

Thus we arrive, finally, at *Spinal Catastrophism: A Secret History*; Thomas Moynihan’s 2020 book that truly inspired this article. *Spinal Catastrophism* is a work of *hypergenealogy*: a connected string of theories and ideas eschewing

value judgement and giving room for nothing more than the beauty and subconscious, quasi-numerological insight of speculative connections. Hypergenealogy performs an exact inversion of the radically sceptic approach: if not all theory is fiction, then perhaps all speculation can be given meaning as theory. In his own words:

*“philosophical assiduity be damned”*

*Spinal Catastrophism* is absurd, unhinged and chaotic – it moves at dizzying speeds from point to point, deriving an entire foundation of logic and philosophy from humanity’s position as upright vertebrates exhibiting bilateral dorsal symmetry, and decodes the entire history of our species from the pelvic bone. Its fundamental tenet is that *no metaphor is innocent*. In the spirit of CCRU’s obsession with numerology, it interprets Kant’s statement of the spatial absolute in terms of left- and right-handedness as an assertion that without a human distinction between left- and right-handedness, *the spatial absolute collapses*. *Spinal Catastrophism* is *Hojoki* taken to its logical conclusion. Aesthetic form in descriptions of allegory are not just delighted in and appreciated – they consume the philosophical intent of the work. It claims to draw its intellectual lineage from legitimate scientific sources, from the blurb:

*“in the late twentieth century Daniel Barker formulated the axioms of Spinal Catastrophism: if human morphology, upright posture and language are the ramified accidents of natural history, then psychic ailments are ultimately afflictions of the spine...”*

But there is just one problem: Professor Daniel C. Barker does not exist, he is a fictional character “interviewed” by the CCRU as part of their expansive mythos. It forces us to ask the question again: what is *Spinal Catastrophism* simulating when they claim lineage to Daniel Barker? What does it mean for the signed object of an MIT professor to grant legitimacy to a theory; if the hypergenealogical thread is convincing, if the existence of such a professor and the CCRU’s interview with him is convincing enough, then what “real” is differentiable from this simulacrum? Barker becomes the manifestation of a *hyperreal citation*.

I would be remiss to not mention the problematic legacy of the CCRU. Despite birthing some of the greatest

leftist social critics of the century, Nick Land and some of his close affiliates have descended into *Neoreaction*, a philosophy closely tied to the foulest cesspits of alt-right ideology. What caused this turn? If we can eke out a deeper understanding of Deleuze through his keystrokes, what does it say of fringe progressive movements such as Xenofeminism which exist in a common downstream with such a hateful philosophy? I advance that extreme caution must be exercised when handling theory-fiction of the absurd and wantonly simulatory style of Moynihan or the CCRU. Complete acceptance of the precession of simulacra and hypergenealogical validity can double back to a modernised, re-skinned solipsism. Land has created a world of fiction where he sits at the centre of a vast web of hyperreal citations and speculative rumination on drum and bass – as he tries to develop a coherent political ideology he descends into tongue-in-cheek extremism; despite acceptance by prominent figures such as Peter Thiel, his recent work such as *Dark Enlightenment* is as absurd as it is flawed. In a world governed by images and simulacra, he has made the critical mistake of assuming aesthetic worth overrules Russell’s “physiological impossibility”. So we arrive at the requirement for extreme caution – we cannot develop coherent thought from that which is wilfully incoherent alone, or else we become the undeserved arbiters of all existence. The intellectual lineage of the CCRU is better traced through substituted phenethylamines and the junglist free parties of London squats than it is through Hegel or Deleuze; perhaps it is telling that, much like Lacan before them, the most influential work to come out of its ex-disciples in recent years is characterised by *returns* to Marx, Firestone, or Foucault.

Thus we conclude this voyage through the landscape of theory-fiction with an understanding of its limitations, and perhaps hope for its future. *Spinal Catastrophism* is an impressive opus of aesthetic endeavour, and it epitomises the promised *vibe* of the genre more than anything preceding it – not least due to its frenzied, memetic sharing across “theorygram”, Substack and countless obscure internet platforms. By understanding the modern context of Baudrillard’s “third-order fiction” - in recent years more manifested in the cybernetic rantings of the CCRU rather than the cyberpunk dystopias of the science-fiction he was accustomed to – we can, I hope, appreciate this wavering chimera of a genre a little more; and maybe even win a few more arguments online. ■

# Shakespeare's creative psychology

words by *christopher eriksson*  
(alumnus 1965)

*Buzan's Book of Genius And How To Unleash Your Own* has Shakespeare's genius coming in second after Leonardo da Vinci. Those acclaimed as historical geniuses were ranked and evaluated by: reach of vision, degree of innovation, all round applicability, pre-eminence, mastery in the field, and all round strength and resilience.

In *The Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari who was an architect, painter and friend of Michelangelo, writes of da Vinci:

*"Heaven sometimes sends us beings who represent not humanity alone but divinity itself, so that taking them as our models and imitating them, our minds and the best of our intelligence may approach the highest celestial spheres."*

The same could be said of William Shakespeare. But imitating somebody else's genius in any objective

way is clearly not the full meaning of Vasari's comment. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher, offers a clue to Shakespeare's universality of vision:

*"He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe."*

Hints in Shakespeare's sonnets suggest that his plays were written during periods of profound harmony. In the intervening periods when the dramatist is his "normal" or regular self, he describes in his poetry what he experiences as he encounters this new, more universal self: "the better part of me" of Sonnet 39, referred to as "the fair youth" of the first 126 sonnets.

Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology speaks to the value of striving to develop a personal feeling of community and belonging where you sense your place in a universe that is per-

ceived as friendly (*gemeinschaftsgefühl* in German); achieved in practice through social cooperation and taking an active interest in the interests of others. This offers the first psychological insights into the process and goal of Shakespeare's creativity; Jungian psychology also offers insight with its *Process of Individuation* towards greater knowledge of Self. Jung describes the increase in libido (psychic energy) when the feminine side in a man (the anima) is first brought to conscious awareness in the form of creative stirrings (proposed here to be described by Shakespeare in Sonnet 1). And the process continues with the appearance of symbols of wholeness such as the hero-child which represents a new centre of the psyche, the Self, instead of the ego. It is proposed here that this is the meaning behind "the fair youth" that Shakespeare addresses in the first 126 sonnets.

## Adlerian Psychology: Striving for Community on the Inside

Adlerian Psychology emphasizes that every individual develops in early childhood a guiding view of themselves acting in the world, through which all their perceived facts are later classified: *“I am X. The World is Y. I will therefore be Z to achieve significance.”* A key part of Adlerian therapy is to reveal this personal “style of life” and have it accepted. Shakespeare does exactly this, but through his invented characters such as Hamlet and Falstaff. As an example, in dealing with resourcefulness and resilience in the face of adversity, Shakespeare has the jesting and devious Falstaff show his personal psychology of use and say as he tries to find any good in being plagued by gout or the pox:

*“A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity.”*

For Adler, the community in which we are to be interested is not just society as currently perceived. It must go beyond any existing community or group, such as political or religious associations. Adler’s community feeling and social interest mean much more than this. It has more to do with striving for an ideal goal that relates to community. Adler states that it means feeling connected; for example working towards a society as though we have already reached our collective goals. This is very much in keeping with Shakespeare’s plays that are recognized as reflecting our human nature back to us so that we see ourselves as we really are. In fact, the scholar Harold Bloom sees Shakespeare as the “creator of the modern concept of personality”.

Adler’s vision is made clearer when he writes that the value of a heightened feeling of community cannot be overstated. It encourages us on, leads to greater optimism, and can alter any outcome, as is suggested here for Shakespeare. Adler writes:

*The mind improves for intelligence is a communal function; the feeling of worth and value is heightened giving courage and a more optimistic view; it fosters a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset; it favours devotion to one’s work, objectivity, logic, and a readiness to take on responsibility; the individual feels at home in life and feels his existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private feelings of inferiority.*

He states that Shakespeare’s canon was one of the great artistic works that led him to the perception and understanding of Individual Psychology. So it is no surprise that he should add that one day, in the not too distant future, society will recognize that it is the artist who is the real leader of humankind, since it is the artist that sees and understands what others only catch a glimpse of.

Adler consistently links this feeling of belonging with courage, new ideas, and independent thinking. Social feeling and a sense of belonging finds room for those who would do their own reasoning, the freethinker and outsider who work towards the betterment of humankind, and raises them to be the example of an ideal social being. The need to be useful in society applies to non-conformity just as it does to any other behaviour. Society then becomes composed more and more of “individuals” who contribute to its evolution and advancement, but obviously in differing ways. This gives rise to the role of the scientist who seeks to understand more of nature’s laws, to the entrepreneur or engineer who searches for practical ways to make this available to others and benefit society at large, and of course to the artist and poet like Shakespeare, who works to convey some aspect of life as he or she sees it.

In the same way that the individual parts of the human body are linked together to work for the common good of the individual, Adler sees human nature and Nature integrated together to make a functioning human being that is part of Nature. Using an analogy from cellular biology, he writes about developing an interest in the interests of others that results in feeling connected, *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, as though it were a pluripotential cell that is capable of evolving and specializing into the love of a parent for a child, the love of a brother for his sister or another family member, the sexual love for one’s partner, love for one’s country, and love for the natural environment in which we live. This love can be extended further to a love for art, science, and indeed to the greater world. Hence, all forms of love are seen by Adler as specific outcomes of this feeling of harmony or cohesion with the universe, cast into movement to the goal desired by the individual’s creative power.

Lewis Way links this feeling of belonging and community to the work of the master artists such as Beethoven whose musical compositions have the ability to engender in others the same feelings of oneness that he felt himself. Like

Adler, Way sees this belonging and feeling of oneness giving rise to sexual love and other forms of affection:

*We sometimes see examples of this sense of kinship with all that exists in the work of great artists, like that of Beethoven, in the oneness, love, sympathy, and desire for combination with life which music such as his so often expresses.. The same emotion can also be felt sexually towards another human being, when that being comes to symbolize the whole sex, so that in the love for one is expressed the love for all. The feeling of natural sympathy for life which is apparent in the work of great artists and mystics is likely a more comprehensive form of the same feeling as expressed by the lover.*

## Jung and the Self

In the psychology of C. G. Jung, psychological growth in all its aspects is a process of redemption. The goal is to uncover through conscious work, effort, and individual realization, the greater Self that has been hidden through unconscious identification with the ego. This is the Process of Individuation, an ongoing opus. It is an active work through which the individual becomes psychologically whole, an indivisible unity, called *The Self*. This occurs through linking together as much as possible the various components or sub-systems of the individual psyche that are autonomous, yet interdependent. These are the ego; the persona or mask; the shadow; the anima/animus or contra-sexual aspect of the man and woman; the personal unconscious with its complexes; and the non-personal or collective unconscious with its Archetypes.

Symbols of wholeness appear in a person's dreams and fantasies when the individual has integrated some of the preceding components into consciousness as much as is possible at a given time. The Self may be symbolized by a beautiful mythical animal, a young child, a wise old man, a jewel, the philosopher's stone, or a mandala. As such it represents the unity of expression attained by an individual from the collective unconscious, the end of a spiritual quest for wholeness. This new Self represents a new ordering, a rejoining of parts, and a creation of a new unified centre of the whole psyche (conscious and unconscious), just as the ego is the unified centre of the conscious personality. The Self is thus the overall authority and subordinates the ego to itself.

Did Shakespeare find his Self within "The Fair Youth"?

### Sonnet I - The first feminine stirrings

*From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,  
But as the ripper should by time decease,  
His tender heir might bear his memory*

Some of the most creative scientists (such as Einstein and Poincaré) have indicated that in their work they are often moved profoundly, in a way that the general public tends to believe happens only to artists and other people engaged in what are regarded as "humanistic" pursuits. Theoretical physicist David Bohm explains that long before the scientist is aware of the details of a new idea, they may "feel" it stirring in them in ways that are difficult or impossible to verbalize. These feelings are like very deep and sensitive probes reaching into the unknown, while the intellect ultimately makes possible a more detailed perception of what these probes have come into contact with. Here, then, is a very fundamental relationship between science and art, the latter must evidently work in a similar way, except that the whole process culminates in a sensually perceptible work of art, rather than in an abstract theoretical insight into nature's structural process. Could these "stirrings" be Shakespeare's "fairest creatures"?

This is given direct psychological support in Jungian Psychology. Emma Jung writes:

*“This means that the yearning, the desire for new undertakings, makes itself felt first in the unconscious feminine. Before coming clearly to consciousness, the striving for something new and different usually expresses itself in the form of an emotional stirring, a vague impulse or unexplainable mood. When this is given expression, it means that the unconscious stirrings are transmitted to consciousness through the feminine element in the man, through his anima. This occurrence starts an impulse, or acts like an intuition, disclosing new possibilities to the man and leading him on to pursue and grasp them.”*

Jung sees receptivity as a feminine attitude and the great secret of femininity. Accordingly, in Jungian psychology this feminine attitude plays an important role in the creative individual who brings new ideas to the surface of consciousness. In the *Phaedo*, Plato criticizes the “overly-reasonable” male attitude, especially in matters of love, considering that it may bring a “divine gift,” like a new creative Self. This helps to clarify Shakespeare’s choice of the term “fairest creatures” in the first line of Sonnet One, of which he says he wants more so that this newly perceived inner beauty and harmony may not die but continue to express itself.

### **Sonnet XVIII - The Jungian Hero-Child**

*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature’s changing course untrimmed:  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st,  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

In this sonnet, Jung’s process of individuation may be seen to have progressed. The initial stirrings proposed here to be the meaning of the fairest creatures of Sonnet one have now crossed the threshold into Shakespeare’s subjective awareness, to be understood by the rational mind. The poet tells us in Sonnet 18 that he tries to understand this emerging and amazing new being by making comparisons with what he knows about birth and death and the cycles and seasons of human life. From a psychological perspective this is consistent with Jung’s description of the hero-child as a symbol of a transforming Self in the process of individuation as proposed here. In the literature this comes to be known as the fair youth of the first 126 sonnets.

### **Sonnet XXXIX - You are my better part**

*O! how thy worth with manners may I sing,  
When thou art all the better part of me?  
What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?  
And what is’t but mine own when I praise thee?  
Even for this, let us divided live,  
And our dear love lose name of single one,  
That by this separation I may give  
That due to thee which thou deserv’st alone.  
O absence! what a torment wouldst thou prove,  
Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave,  
To entertain the time with thoughts of love,  
Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth deceive,  
And that thou teachest how to make one twain,  
By praising him here who doth hence remain.*

Here, the poet recognizes and extols the virtues and worth of his new Self which he says is the better part of himself. This is evident to him as he comes to understand that this new Self is more universal and inherently creative, a new Order of himself. To do Him justice and to honour Him properly, which he wants to do, he says let us divided live, me being me, and You being You. Then I can honour you properly, as you deserve this honour yourself, without me.

This is consistent with Jungian psychotherapy and the transforming Process of Individuation, since the end goal at any point in time is to make the symbolic process conscious and meaningful. An unconscious symbol, dynamic and full of energy, will be lived out, leading the ego by the nose like a victim to some behavioural end until its meaning or the image behind it is grasped. It may be inferred that when Shakespeare recognizes and understands what this new Self is all about and sees the creative necessity to cooperate and work with his new Self, the plays and characters are worked on and Shakespeare writes them down. Ralph Waldo Emerson understands this and puts it succinctly:

*“He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth.”*

### **Sonnet XVII - If I Show You as You Really Are, Who Would Believe Me ?**

*Who will believe my verse in time to come,  
If it were filled with your most high deserts?  
Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb  
Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.  
If I could write the beauty of your eyes,  
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,  
The age to come would say ‘This poet lies;  
Such heavenly touches ne’er touched earthly faces.’  
So should my papers, yellowed with their age,  
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,  
And your true rights be termed a poet’s rage  
And stretched metre of an antique song;  
But were some child of yours alive that time,  
You should live twice, in it, and in my rhyme.*

### **Sonnet VIII - In Tune with The Symphony of Nature in a Single Note**

*Music to hear, why hear’st thou music sadly?  
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy:  
Why lov’st thou that which thou receiv’st not gladly,  
Or else receiv’st with pleasure thine annoy?  
If the true concord of well-tuned sounds,  
By unions married, do offend thine ear,  
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds  
In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.  
Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,  
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;  
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,  
Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing:  
Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,  
Sings this to thee: ‘Thou single wilt prove none.’*

This poem speaks of how one vibrating musical string resonates with another like a loving partner, striking chords in each as though by mutual ordering, resonances between parents and child, a harmonious blending that makes a pleasant musical note. These metaphors likely refer to the family of harmonics in a vibrating string.



Single notes played on a musical instrument do not just vibrate at one frequency, the fundamental, but vibrate in a complex way made up of a family of overtones or harmonics, of different amplitudes that characterize the rich timbre of the particular musical instrument. A pure tone sounded by a tuning fork is not as pleasing as the same note played on a musical instrument with its harmonics in addition to the fundamental. Sonnet 8 may therefore be viewed as referring metaphorically to the harmonic or overtone series long understood by musicians, mathematicians, and physicists, and which goes back to Pythagoras, and of which Shakespeare with his profound knowledge and creative experience would certainly have been aware.

## Conclusions

*“Thou single wilt prove none,”* the last line in Sonnet 8, is unlikely to refer to being single and unmarried as some have suggested. Considering Shakespeare’s psychological knowledge and descriptive awareness of his own creative process, it is more likely that we are being advised to strive for harmony with the spirit of Life itself, to gain a sense of family and community as recommended by Adler. In Jungian terms, Shakespeare is recommending us to become more conscious by going through the process of individuation where the psyche evolves a new centre, the *Self*, which takes the place of the old centre, the ego and through which we learn more of what we can create.

Shakespeare, the universal poet and dramatist, who mirrors back to us our human nature in a non-judgemental way, is surely telling us from his own experience that when we do this we will be much richer. We shall be like a family member in tune with the whole human family, as opposed to being alone in the universe. In musical terms, we shall be like a whole symphony of overtones in a single note, followed by others, radiating harmony and creativity in a unique way, playing our own life instrument.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin describes a process similar to Carl Jung’s process of individuation:

*“The work of human works is to establish an absolutely original centre in which the universe reflects itself in a unique and inimitable way.”*

Shakespeare accomplishes this, then writes about it in his sonnets. As Harold Bloom concludes:

*“Shakespeare IS The Western Canon.”*

## **Hermit**

*One day,  
I want to be a hermit  
Wandering through the high mountains  
As if swimming into a dream,  
When people would become water in a bottle  
And I would become a cloud in the sky*

*Work with the sunlight,  
Rest with the sunset  
Until one day,  
When my eyes are filled with the sea,  
I would roll forward with the endless cornfield,  
Together with the grass,  
To walk to the end of the world*

## **London: Autumn Rain**

*When days obscure the sun,  
The world lives under thousands miles of glaciers  
Those hazy colours,  
Intoxicated the poet behind the window-blinds  
Confused that London captured in their mind*

*Since the whirring cold winds,  
Cannot blow away the flute rustling on the trail  
Then what is this kind of power  
That turned the silver dropping from the sky,  
Into sprinkling gold scattered to the ground?*

## Chinatown

*You bid farewell to your parents with bitterness  
Farewell to the hometown where you've grown  
Take the compass and set foot on the boat,  
Sailing into the distance on the flames of war  
– Who knows what destinations you'll head onto?*

*Walking into the dilapidated village,  
I caught a glimpse of an old man in the corner  
Placing a stick of incense in front of a yellowed portrait  
Praying silently to heaven  
May the best of wishes be with his beloved child*

*The lantern hangs high, the dragon dances and flies,  
But this is no longer your hometown;  
You say, wherever you go, wherever you root  
But in the quiet night,  
Who is trembling by the window,  
Shedding tears but unable to cry?  
Who is sitting silently by the lake,  
Raising their head from time to time,  
Hoping to see him back again?*

*The vicissitudes of the years,  
Took away the magnificent palaces,  
Took away the immortal kings  
Yet the moonlight  
Shall forever shine  
On your face  
and on the land of your hometown*

**Runtian Wu**  
*three poems*

# RARA RA, PHOENIX

**rara** adjective (latin)  
scattered, rare, uncommon

**Ra** noun  
Egyptian high sun god

*andham tamah pravishanti ye avidyam upaste  
tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam rataah*

- Isha Upanishad

Ignorance brings darkness + worshipping  
knowledge brings greater darkness.

We are nothing but insects who fly towards a  
burning torch to immolate ourselves and die.

We evolved humans are nothing but these  
burning insects, who fly with confidence and  
pride into the epicentre of the burning flames,  
bringing death and deep darkness.

We must understand that death is necessary  
for us - those with proud and selfish minds -  
to gain higher knowledge.

It is through knowledge of eating and resting that the  
caterpillar produces the finest silks. It uses the same  
silk to move around the tree from branch to branch  
and from leaf to leaf. Until the time comes when the  
caterpillar wraps itself at last in its silk - it dives into the  
great darkness until it is no longer itself.

The caterpillar dies and the butterfly is born.

Who am I? I am that flying spirit, who has burned twenty-four trillion times in that great fire so much so that my body is forever lit with that same divine fire of the sunrise! I was born a trillion times and I've died a trillion times. Yes, I *am* the Phoenix.

“With

*[Oooooooooo]...*

I run over the ground, upon my wings I glide. until I reach the heaven. There the sacred-divine fire of the sun, the *Savitṛ* has been lit from the eternal beyond. Into that magnificent fire I dive and die in every single day so that my intellect reflects lustrous-brilliant!”

*om bhūr bhuvah svah  
tat savitur varenyam  
bhargo devasya dhīmahi  
dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt*  
- Gayatri Mantra

*Falling from where he stood,  
to be held by the ocean  
or to fall in the flowers?*

*He chooses the ocean:  
it will be romantic,  
he can float on the water  
like a ship with nothing to guide him  
Free  
Easily beckoned to follow -  
The ocean in the night is the softest*

*Leave flowers for those who love them -  
they couldn't hold him, anyhow*

从屋顶坠下去  
是会掉进海里  
还是会掉进花丛中

他想他会选择掉进海里  
这样会浪漫些  
它可以任由自己漂浮在水表  
像只没有指南针的船  
自在而又随和  
而夜晚的大海最为温柔

花丛还是留给爱惜他们的人吧  
他太重了，会砸坏它们的

- Dongyuan Zhang



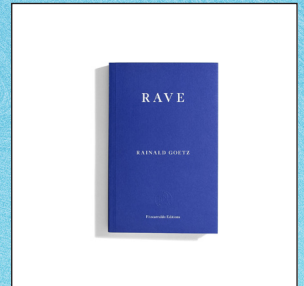
○ **LISTENING** ————— TOKKY HORROR *HOME RECORDINGS*

Punk, techno and DnB combine in unhinged and unexpected ways on the debut album from these UK DIY scene pioneers. Their fresh, exhilarating “*virtual hardcore*” soundscapes are a rallying cry for queer liberation and the dismantling of underground music’s hypermasculine airs. From the punk intensity of *Eden on Acid*, to the migraine-level basslines of *Girlracer* or the pulsing, acid-laced, surround-sound beats of *Simulate Me* there’s something in here for everyone who doesn’t listen to the radio anymore.

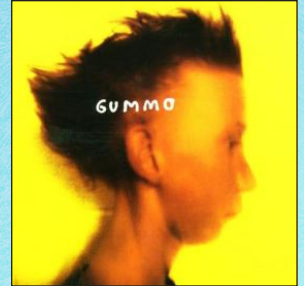
○ **READING** ————— RAINALD GOETZ *RAVE*

*“Meet girls. Take drugs. Listen to music. That was the plan, wasn’t it Pascal? We even had a wager”*

Goetz’s explosive 1998 work appears in English 22 years after its initial publication. Fragmentary, self-destructive, and hyperreal, the autofictional Rainald describes his journey through the “fucked up scene” of Berlin’s techno nightlife. Narrative intersects dialogue, fleeting encounters and philosophical interludes in this novel that will leave your head spinning like the hardest kickdrum you’ve ever heard

○ **WATCHING** ————— HARMONY KORINE *GUMMO*

What list of pretentious recommendations would be complete without this? Despite its cult status, it still seems to be a film that is more heard of than watched; this is your sign to change that! One of the most critically divisive films of the modern era, to watch it is to, if nothing else, engage in that dialogue. Don’t miss the soundtrack either - an incredible, star-studded ride through the extreme underground that fits perfectly in every sensibility of the film. Unsettling, dadaist, “venomous” (according to Gus van Sant) and at times stomach-churning, *Gummo* will leave you questioning your reality and every dream you think you wake up from; whether you like it or not.



editor's choice

*of course I get the last word,  
until next time  
the editor*

**Phoenix** is an artistic magazine and community dedicated to providing a platform for Imperial's students to write, create, and be inspired. We accept submissions year-round, and collect pieces for publication each term. Pitch us your thoughts, art, fashion, essays, poems, theory-fiction or anything in between; we can't wait to see your work!

@phoenixzine  
phoenixzine.org  
editors.phoenix@ic.ac.uk