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Otherworlds Review #4: Snakes

The Otherworlds Review

December 8, 2017

December 2017 · Sun in Sagittarius · Full moon in Gemini

The avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden. This conviction, which had a brief resurgence in the Spartacus League, has always been objectionable to Social Democrats. Within three decades they managed to erase the name of Blanqui almost entirely, though at the distant thunder of that name the preceding century had quaked.

– Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”

Let us finally conclude the immanence of the smallest scraps of matter. Although their lifespan is of one second, their rebirth is boundless. The infinity of time and space is not the exclusive privilege of the universe as whole. It also belongs to every form of matter, down to the infusoria and grains of sand... Therefore every one of us has lived, lives, and shall live endlessly under the form of billions of alter egos... The stellar systems carry us along

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within their immortality. Being the only organization of matter, they possess its fixity and its mobility all at once. Each of them is but a strike of lightning, but such strikes illuminate space eternally.

– Blanqui, “Eternity by the Stars”

On the 17th of november, when the new moon met the sun in Scorpio – the sign of desire and careful attack – rebels in Olympia, WA began a blockade of the railroad leading to and from the dreadful port of Olympia. This auspicious night for new beginnings also marked a year since the eviction of a blockade of the same line, a blockade erected in solidarity with the struggle of indigenous water protectors and their accomplices against the DAPL pipeline – the Black Snake.

In spiritism, as in other necromantic traditions, it is held that it takes a certain amount of time after death before a spirit can fully take its place among the ancestors. In many traditions, one must wait a year before calling on an individual spirit, as an ancestor, for strength and guidance. It is thought that it takes that much time for the spirit to work through the pain and confusion of their own death, to adjust to the otherworlds and to their new existence in them. When a year has passed, and the departed has joined its ancestral house (or wherever other collective or place it is joining), then and only then can we begin to speak of conjuration.

Yes, the world is full of wandering and lost spirits, those stuck and incapable of moving on. And yes, anyone with a ouija board or tarot cards can get one of those spirits on the line, but to conjure real otherworldly strength means to act in partnership with and to call forth the spirits of a given tradition who form an ancestral line onto themselves. When the state ended last year’s blockade, sent it to the otherworlds, they unknowingly set it on the path that all spirits walk: the labyrinthine meander of the worlds beyond, of the chthonic.

ancestors of freedom are our passages through protected thresholds.

Blessings to Feral Pines and all who passed at Ghost Ship!

Blessings to Robin Agiri: Şehîd Namirin!

Santiago Maldonade Presente!

Twin existences play out more openly when the twins of Gemini find their full moon in the sky of December. Under and over, within and without. There is a blend of the known, unknown, familiar and strange, blessed and cursed. Cold gets colder. The earth spun this way before and the body starts to know this air. The communal web of consciousness takes the breath. The philosophical inheritance of Sagittarius howls.

One labyrinth of solitude might reveal that “the predominance of the closed over the open manifests itself not only as impassivity and distrust, irony and suspicion, but also as love of Form.”

EVOCATION: Earth, 114 million years ago, one morning just after sunrise: the first flower ever to appear on the planet opens up to receive the rays of the sun. Prior to this momentous event that heralds an evolutionary transformation in the life of plants, the planet had already been covered in vegetation for millions of years. The first flower probably did not survive for long, and flowers must have remained rare and isolated phenomena, since conditions were most likely not yet favorable for a widespread flowering to occur.

One day, however, a critical threshold was reached, and suddenly there would have been an explosion of color and scent all over the planet – if a perceiving consciousness had been there to witness it. Without our fully realizing it, flowers would become for us an expression in form of that which is most high, most sacred, and ultimately formless within ourselves. Flowers, more fleeting, more ethereal and more delicate than the plants out of which they emerged, would become like messengers from another realm, like a bridge between the world of physical forms and the formless. Palpable tenets of gaseous sentience, sense perceptions, dial into the spaceless space found at the Olympia Commune, at the Ghost Ship, at the walls of the prison. The spaces are bridges to cross. The spaceless is the “new quality [that] emerges in a leap as the slow accumulation of quantitative changes, long resisted by a stable system, finally forces it rapidly from one state into another.” The doors opened by every act of rebellion, by every spirit of refusal, by the

The golden tablets buried with the Orphic initiates tell us that in the underworld we are given the choice to drink from the waters of forgetting or the waters of memory. Those who’ve seen the mysteries know to resist the temptation of forgetting and to ask for the cool waters flowing from the Lake of Memory. When the dismembered spirit re-members and is re-membered, they gain the strength to join the others of their lineage. Last year’s blockade drank the waters of memory and in doing so joined the collective of spirits hereafter referred to as “the Commune.”

With initiation comes the powers, goetic and mantic, to invoke and truly conjure the Commune. The Commune, a composite being – one and many wolves – comes when called by those who know the way to call it forth. That so many “call” to each other, without ever calling the spirits, explains why their so-called communes look more like everyday life than its interruption. When the spirits who compose the Commune (and the spirit of the Commune itself) assert themselves, they make their presence unmistakably known. Time moves differently, old divisions fall away, new roads open, there is an immanence to spirit and potential. Then, and only then, can a moment of space-time be named the Commune. That presence requires a break, a fissure, a doorway between this world and the others. To build the Commune one must open the door and call the spirits through it. To do one without the other (the break and the remembrance) risks fascism and worse.

The anarchists, indigenous activists, punks, queers and other communards in Olympia proved their adeptness in summoning the Commune to full force. For twelve days the spirits flooded to the site of interruption and made it spread. There was dancing, street-fighting, a punk show, coyotes, workshops and discussions, plant medicine, prayer, a piano on the tracks. For twelve days, now-time was given material space. For twelve days, the doors stood wide open.

Yes, the police destroyed the Olympia Commune. They tore its encampment apart, scattered its children, severed its spirit from

this world, dis-membered it. But we arm ourselves with Memory – anamnesis, not-forgetting. We sing the mourning songs of the goetes and in our singing send the Commune on its way, strengthen it for its journey to the waters of memory and forgetting, where it too will make its choice. Our remembering it can only help it to remember as well. It too, if we all do our part, will find its way to the weblike assemblage of ancestral communes, the Commune itself. And when the moment is right, those who know its name can call it back to the Earth.

Over the Oakland Commune hung a banner – Paris 1871, Oakland 2011 – to which we joyously now add Olympia 2017. We mourn the commune, tend to the void it has left in the hearts of those who knew it, but we know it shall return. Just as the wine from the grapes grown on Montmartre hill is pressed and opened and drank as the blood of the communards; as a sacrament of the Commune – the interruption in space-time – which died there with them. We too drink the wine, the waters of memory, and vow to live in the time-between-Communes in ways which anticipate the return.

The Olympia Commune remembered other spirits as well, other stories. It remembered the encampments at Standing Rock which in turn remembered the Lakota prophecy of the terrible Black Snake which would come bearing destruction. The awareness of this prophecy was a weapon in the hands of those who were called to wield it.

Snakes, especially where they involve themselves in matters of apocalypse and prophecy, are found in mythologies and eschatologies the world over. Norse lore tells that when the serpent wrapped around the world releases its grasp on its own tail, it will do so in order to fight the Gods at Ragnarok. But the Orphics also knew that a snake was also there at the beginning, wrapped around the world egg, waiting for the hermaphroditic god Phanes – the light bringer; all genders and species manifest together – to crack its shell wide open with its dancing and thereby bringing the cosmos

ally strive to generate their own actuality through sheer excess and stupefaction.

– Achilles Mbembe, January 2017

The duality of our relationship with reality can also carry us towards armed struggle, especially after so many years of disorientation. We want to see practical results, we think it's possible to go beyond the abstraction of round-table politics, we want to see some concrete action. The urge to construct forms of action for ourselves is sometimes very strong, since we've had to put up with so many years of empty speeches. And imagination? It helps us to bear the clash with reality; in this case it helps us to avoid seeing what we don't want to see. Certainly it slips into and supports fanaticism. But men become fanatical under the yoke of their ideological schemas while we, more often than not, are driven by the violence of our dreams.

– Anonymous, Italy, 1991

The virtual and the actual together make up two mutually exclusive sides of the real. The actual is a given states of affairs that is populated by bodies. The virtual is a 'pure past' of incorporeal events and singularities that have never been present, which have 'the capacity to bring about x, without (in being actualized) ever coming to coincide or identify itself with x, or to be depleted and exhausted in x' while 'without being or resembling an actual x.' In this sense, the virtual includes all potential worlds, everything that inhabits them, all of their really-existing potentials, and their every potential to differ that coexists with the actual.

– Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

nize the danger of this language, but we do not shy from embracing it. Our lineages, our kin: the Boxers, the Ghost Dancers, Carlota Lukumi and the rebels of Triunvirato, the Voudouisants at Bois Caïman, the Yellow Turbans, the black-clad firebrand-throwing women of the Isle of Mona, the maenads – those Dionysian fanatics of old. All those who rejected the armor of Leviathan and sought protection from the spirits through dance, through possession. Fanatic: from Latin fanum, “temple, shrine, consecrated place” – spoken in an ecstatic state; spoken while possessed by spirit. We who have consecrated ourselves as sacer are above all man-made law, partaking only in the sovereignty of the Otherworlds. We are outlaws, wargs, wolves – one and many. We are the affinity group, the gang, the pack. Our informal organizations exist unto themselves, but in relation to civilized society, we are always a threat. And our forms of organization are mirrored in the spirit world, our accomplices are found in all the realms. Wolves on the surface of the earth, snakes descending into the subterranean depths and back again, corvids in the heavens. Always shapeshifting, always mediating between life and death, always accompanied by the howling and hissing multitudes of our collective ancestors.

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Our world is going through a rather peculiar moment of dread and confusion – one for which there does not seem to be a ‘proper name’ yet. And yet naming our time is part of what is at stake. In this regard one thing at least is clear – ours is a time of planetary entanglement. But the planetarity of our predicament is not all there is. As it happens, times of planetary entanglement are propitious for all kinds of accelerations or escalations. They are propitious for the renewed production of things, forms and imaginaries both baroque, grotesque and dystopian if only because such forms/things/and imaginaries gener-

into existence. Before he could build his oracular temple at Delphi, Apollon first had to slay the serpent which already held court at that gate to the otherworlds. That his prophetesses thereafter took the name pythia – pythoness – bears this memory. The transgendered shaman Tiresias and the animistic prophet Melampous slew and saved snakes respectively and each gained the true sight by way of their encounters. Snakes unnerve us because of their ambivalence and alienness, their force of interruption. And yet they always come bearing the gift of knowledge. Lucifer too was a light bringer who offered knowledge as an apple from the Tree.

The Black Snake has arrived as the interruption of the sacred waters and the ways of life which depend on them. It arrives as apocalypse and poison and empire. But empire too can be interrupted. It was, after all, a nocturnal vision of a snake coiled around Spartacus’ face which revealed to his wife, a prophetess subject to the Dionysiac frenzy, that he would catalyze the largest slave revolt the Roman Empire had ever seen. They led a years-long interruption of that Empire’s hold over hundreds of thousands of lives, and they did so moved by the illumination of that vision. We live under the reign of the true descendant of that Empire and thus share common cause with the spirits who fought to destroy it. Such remembrance requires knowledge: the knowledge to open the door and to call the spirits through it.

Some within the Olympia Commune responded to the tired call for demands by issuing twenty of them:

make the port a beach again
blow up the sun
the complete destruction of time itself
a brick for every window
a wrecking ball
that, while science still exists, one of us be endowed
with an Adamantium laced skeleton

a swift and brutal end to the exploitation commonly referred to as “science”

the destruction of all dams, and the return of the salmon

no motor boats ever again

that fascists and politicians spontaneously combust

compost the police

release of all prisoners and the Total Destruction of prison, in all of its forms

cessation of all space exploration

the return of the Tasmanian wolf, the aurochs, the dodo bird, the coral reefs, and all other creatures and habitats that have ceased to be

the wilderness

total freedom

the liquidation of Pacific Union’s assets, to be equally distributed among all children

mandatory clown uniforms for all Olympia parking employees

that steve hall fight a bear

From the very first they emphasize their commitment to memory, but we call your attention, dear reader, to the seventeenth.

17. []

This is the door, situated there between freedom and liquidation, thrown open by the Olympia communards. The door is the refusal to play the game of the state’s discourse; the refusal to forget its betrayals and false promises. May we always remember that door that we may call it to presence again. Let us commit its passphrases to memory that we may recall them when we meet again.

Nothing is over; everything continues.

•••

17.

“Every second was the narrow gate, through which the Messiah could enter.” The anarchists of the Golden Age would have understood – they do understand, for our ancestors are always with us – when we speak of devotion. In the Roman battlefield ritual of devotio, a general promised himself and all of the enemy legions to the divine dead and the earth in exchange for victory. A self-sacrifice, but not a christian one: no forgiveness for foes here, no renunciation of the earth. But the Roman devotio served the State, ours seeks to ruin it. Nor is the Revolution to be forever in the future, to be earned through wretched asceticism, the protestant-capitalist work ethic, and crawling progress.

“Liquidating the lie of the transitional period means making the revolt itself a different way of conceiving relations.” When we speak of devotion, we speak of the insurrectionary imminence and immanence of our gods, their fiery and shining presence in our lives, the bolt of lightning that consumed Semele when she asked to see Zeus in his true form, the torches of the Battle Crow blazing from the skull of Cú Chulainn. We speak of “the Idea,” of “the faith,” of Anarchy! Our incendiary goddess, for whom Elia Corti and so many others gave their lives. For it is our lives that we offer, not our deaths. We speak of the hearth fires around which we gather, around which we have always gathered, which have kept the continuity of our communities and our struggles alive even in the bleakest of times. We fight for that which we are already a part of, even – especially – when the war demands negation. At the same time, we fight for the unknown – that is, for our relationship to it, for that which is familiar only through déjà vu. How can the Gods meet us face to face till we have faces?

From the hearth fires of devotion, the torches of liberatory fanaticism are kindled. In a world that has seen so much horror perpetrated by religious and rationalist authoritarians alike, we recog-