Make Yourself a Demon

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Abstract

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This is a work of research and an artwork. It explores antagonisms between frameworks and contents, broadly defined. Its own framework, academic research, is materially supported by public taxes and tuition from students. The university fulfills a responsibility to these stakeholders by publishing the work, and stands by the idea that it contains knowledge that will benefit the larger public. An additional framing is that the accompanying exhibition has been delayed for at least a year due to the impossibility of safely sharing space, a result of the U.S. government's abdication of responsibility to anything other than extreme wealth. That this document now acts as the work sets up a tension in any knowledge that might be conveyed. Frameworks are in disarray and their mechanisms lie exposed. Some of them are earnestly asking for guidance. Structures and procedures that previously harnessed our energy have liquefied, and previously invisible structures are newly in play.

1

By now, radio broadcasts from Franklin Roosevelt's first inauguration have traveled almost 520 trillion miles outward from Earth. They form an expanding, dissipating, spherical shell around the planet. The signal itself is one-dimensional, arranged like a beaded string. A receiver encountering the shell is gently buffeted by a sequence of intensities that correspond to the tones and rhythms of human speech. 18 trillion miles nearer to the center of the shell, the television broadcasts from the 1936 Olympic Games are on their way. When they arrive three years later, these sequences can be sliced into segments of different lengths and stacked into various grids.

It does not take the receiver many attempts to discover the grid that yields moving, gesticulating forms. A dictionary can be compiled: the form most often corresponding with sound *x*; the sound that most often replaces sound *y* without any other changes to the sequence. From that point on, as layers of the shell race past, the sounds and the forms can be correlated with more and more confidence. Without moving, the receiver enters deeper and deeper into the space of human discourse.

Here is the revelation preceding the climax of Peter Watts' freeware speculative fiction, *Blindsight*:

> Imagine you have intellect but no insight, agendas but no *awareness*. Your circuitry hums with strategies for survival and persistence, flexible, intelligent, even technological—but no other circuitry monitors it. You can think of anything, yet are conscious of nothing.
>
> You can't imagine such a being, can you? The term *being* doesn't even seem to apply, in some fundamental way you can't quite put your finger on.
>
> Try.
>
> Imagine that you encounter a signal. It is structured, and dense with information. It meets all the criteria of an intelligent transmission. Evolution and experience offer a variety of paths to follow, branch-points in the flowcharts that handle such input. Sometimes these signals come from conspecifics who have useful information to share, whose lives you'll defend according to the rules of kin selection. Sometimes they come from competitors or predators or other inimical entities that must be avoided or destroyed; in those cases, the information may prove of significant tactical value. Some signals may even arise from entities which, while not kin, can still serve as allies or symbionts in mutually beneficial pursuits. You can derive appropriate responses for any of these eventualities, and many others.

> You decode the signals, and stumble:
>
> I had a great time. I really enjoyed him. Even if he cost twice as much as any other hooker in the dome—
>
> To fully appreciate Kesey's Quartet—
>
> They hate us for our freedom—
>
> Pay attention, now—
>
> Understand.
>
> There are no meaningful translations for these terms. They are needlessly recursive. They contain no usable intelligence, yet they are structured intelligently; there is no chance they could have arisen *by* chance.
>
> The only explanation is that something has coded nonsense in a way that poses as a useful message; only after wasting time and effort does the deception become apparent. The signal functions to consume the resources of a recipient for zero payoff and reduced fitness. The signal is a virus.
>
> Viruses do not arise from kin, symbionts, or other allies.
>
> The signal is an attack.[1]

This excerpt is delivered by a character trying to explain the apparent hostility of the receiver. To do so, she presents this thought experiment: *imagine you are a being with certain capacities and limitations.*

Blindsight is premised on the idea that consciousness is a harmful trait, an evolutionary fluke that will soon be lost to Darwinian processes. It is a first-contact story in which we learn that humans accidentally initiated hostilities by broadcasting first-person speech into the cosmos. It proposes in various ways that human subjectivity is a liability rather than a pinnacle of creation.

Watts provides an extensive bibliography of journal references to back up the physics and neurophysiology in his story. Ultimately though, the argument comes down to this: we go about our lives and do many complex and creative things just as well, if not better, without conscious intervention. A

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[1] Watts, Peter. Blindsight. New York: Tor, 2006. &: https://rifters.com/real/Blindsight.htm

skilled pianist relies on intuitions and muscle-memories that circumvent consciousness, and would not be able to play if they thought about the movement of each finger. When we imagine the receiver, we should imagine something in a permanent state of flow, completely lacking a subjective point of view, both smarter and more creative than us.

The receiver appears in various physical manifestations in the novel. We are never sure if we are seeing individuals, a single entity, or a collection of manufactured tools. Our inability to anchor it in this way is due to its lack of subjectivity. We would need to know the approximate location of an ego within a hierarchy of material and information to call something a subject, or a collective of subjects, or a tool-like extension of a subject.

We are then able to think of the receiver, for all its powers, as a natural phenomenon. It's easy enough to say that human beings and all of their works are part of the natural world. It is more difficult to hold that idea in the context of intentionally manufactured objects. For the receiver, intentionality never enters the picture. There is continuity between its evolutionary beginnings and its present state, and no rationale for locating a break between the natural and the technical in one place over another.

As a thought experiment, the receiver pulls apart the intuitions that link consciousness to intelligent problem-solving, establishing these as separate axes that define a space of possible minds. Demonstrating its abilities, the receiver travels between stars, data-mines our broadcasts, and fluidly outwits the team from earth. It does all this reflexively, without conscious thought, the same way you would pull your hand away from a hot surface. With liberal use of the passive voice to mark the lack of subjectivity, we can speculate further as to how it makes decisions.

Processing the broadcasts from Earth begins with identifying the waveforms that consistently occur together, corresponding to phonemes. A consistent sequence of phonemes would correspond to a word, and these would appear as the basic building blocks of longer sequences. These words, while still meaningless, would be treated as *content* which fills out a growing network of reciprocal relationships. This would be structurally defined by distance and clustering between its units. Eventually this total structure might be compared to the receiver's own symbolic networks in search of structural similarities, the beginning of a translation. This is the rough outline of a formal procedure for learning and utilizing language without a speaking subject.

The growing network of content broadcast from Earth would be managed and updated by another mechanism, a *framework* structured according to different principles, for which the content network would be totally pliable. This is the difference between the data on a flash drive and the systems that read and write the data. They are on different levels of power, like a large mechanical arm managing an array of tender sprouts, and their relationship of influence is not symmetrical or reciprocal.

Content and *framework* are not sharp-edged categories but a continuum that appears in many different settings. Informational content like genetic sequences or digital files can have a very small physical footprint in movement and storage, but require a robust system in place to amplify the contained

information, or the small differences that encode information, into larger physical effects. In any system, at any given time, some things are acting more as content and other things are acting more as framework, but they are both ultimately composed of unruly materials that can slip from their designated roles.

The transmissions from Earth are full of vocabulary relating to *internal experience*. As a non-conscious agency, the receiver has no access to what this might mean, but the frequent occurrence suggests that it is crucial. The content network yields nothing, since there are no similar phenomena within any of the receiver's own ontologies. It utilizes many data-flow regimes, but none that "feel like" anything. Therefore, it begins to reverse engineer the messages using simulated linguistic agents — a new kind of content.

These are software entities running in an isolated subsystem, but they are given a repertoire of behaviors and constraints that allow them to model the situation in question. They can broadcast rudimentary messages amongst themselves that gradually grow in complexity. It appears that these messages help the agents to cooperate on simulated tasks, but with the addition of the mysterious vocabulary, they develop a pattern of obsessional self-modeling, a computational bottleneck that consumes resources out of all proportion to its practical use. This seems implausible as the outcome of an evolutionary process, and it may even be an attempt to induce the same pathologies in the receiver itself. The receiver recoils in aversion and the subsystem is wiped.

This is how the gentle impacts of radio waves become a liability. The receiver's own mechanisms do the work of activating the content, which otherwise exists in a materially frail and tenuous form. Some viruses, when they attack a cell, use a formally similar process called transduction. The virus injects a 1-dimensional sequence of genetic material into the host, and the cell's own machinery does the work of executing those instructions to turn itself into a virus factory. The host framework amplifies informational content into a fatal change in its own disposition.

The receiver never lets things get so far out of hand, but it has already lost something. The broadcast is classified as an attack because it wastes cognitive resources, ultimately reducible to time and energy. The receiver is intensely sensitive to opportunity costs, or the value of activities that could have been undertaken in the absence of broadcasts from Earth. Time and energy spent translating the antagonistic signal has been lost to future use and allowed the opponent time to lay further traps and preparations. The receiver's crucial difference from us, maybe even the reason for its lack of consciousness, is this exquisite sensitivity to the costs of cognition.

To us, it can seem like mental events and physical events operate on different planes that don't ever quite touch. This might be learned as a metaphysical fact or absorbed from one's culture. We know that without physical events there can be no experience, but we are far from agreeing on what those events are. Even if we knew, no physical description seems able to address experiencing, what you are doing here and now, feeling these words in your mind. This has been called the explanatory gap.

The receiver operates according to a different metaphysics, and that this is intimately related to its lack of subjectivity. Because it doesn't sense dualistic gaps, it never labors under the impression that the imagination is free from physical causation or physical costs. Its cognition maintains a connection with its material underpinnings that cannot be effaced by any cognitive illusions.

2

Simulated agents have long been used to study bodily movement, cognition, economics, altruism, language, and more. In developing an agent-based-model, as with any other experiment, researchers hope to understand and explain a complex phenomenon in terms of its most influential parameters. This means very carefully oversimplifying the situation. Only the variables under study can be allowed to change, and learning about the phenomenon depends on the experimenter's ability to select and isolate the right parameters.

In a physical experiment these expelled parameters would be carefully clamped in place, like isolating chemical reactants from the air using a container, or carefully regulating the temperature of an environment with insulation. Simulations are typically cleaner in some respects: there is no pre-existing noise to insulate against, and everything under study is explicitly added to the environment. This includes resource constraints. A linguistic agent might have a data cap or a limited messaging speed. All factors of existence in a virtual world must be explicitly programmed.

Evolutionary simulations have been known to cheat this rule of thumb. They do this by discovering edge cases in the simulation software. Karl Sims' evolutionary simulations were famously gamed by virtual creatures who discovered, through trial and error, glitches in the physics engine that framed their existence. A shortcut in the programming of the framework, which presumably saved time and energy, fed free energy to the virtual agents.[2] Although the agents would cease to exist without their framework, they achieved a toehold on the outside world.

Simulated speaking agents are key players in Reza Negarestani's sprawling speculative treatise, *Intelligence and Spirit*. His project seeks to outline the cognitive toolset necessary for artificial agents to operate socially and intelligently. He argues that these tools also set the agents on the path of self-transforming escape from their evolved parameters. His program of research is a "comparative study of ourselves and artificial intelligence"[3] which ultimately proposes that *we* are the artificial general intelligence we have been trying to invent. Language enables this development at multiple stages.

First, language is the factor that causes our specific sensations of self-awareness. This is what Negarestani calls, from Kant, a transcendental self, the occupant of an identity situated in a community,

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[2] Sims K. Evolving virtual creatures. In: Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques. ACM; 1994. p. 15–22.

[3] Negarestani, Reza. *Intelligence and Spirit*. Amsterdam-Netherlands, Netherlands, Amsterdam University Press, 2018. p. 92

whose “word” is something that can be trusted. Consciousness links the past-self, who makes a promise, to the future-self who keeps it.

In the next stage, we recognize that thought is not exactly what it seems to be. We combine reflection with critical philosophical discussion, learning together how to think more effectively, and so language becomes the artifice that transforms organic humanity into an unbounded artificial intelligence. This is not cybernetics, but discourse, acting as an infinitely flexible computational platform.

> Transcendental reflection on the conditions of possibility of having a mind must be supplemented with critique not merely as an analysis but as a practical construction, and reflection not merely as a functional understanding but as speculation in its Hegelian sense, i.e., the movement toward what is objective and the suspension of what is immediately given or present[4].

From our individual perspectives this is just the slow transformation of thought by language and philosophy, steered by a rich discourse about our own history and goals as a society. On a geological or evolutionary timescale, it is an explosive expansion in the tools, abilities and autonomous self-direction of intelligence as a phenomenon that speculates as to its own nature and escapes any particular subject or material constraint.

3

It is June of 2020 and we are three months into a global pandemic without nationally coordinated response from the United States government. People are demonstrating in every major city in the country against a racist policing and legal system, and the president is brandishing martial law in preparation for his re-election campaign. The country has just experienced the highest jump in unemployment since the Great Depression, and a quarter of small businesses have closed due to loss of business. Meanwhile, U.S. stocks are flirting with some of their highest valuations in history.

Year by year since the 1970s, financial services have made up an increasing portion of the economy of developed nations. This sector houses a vast ecology of management and speculation around debts and investments. Broadly, these services provide two things: liquidity and price discovery. Liquidity is the availability and movement of funds, the number of channels and instruments that allow investors to get their money into and out of business activities. Price discovery reveals the relative value of business activity, arrived at through millions of myopic or even automated investment decisions. Value in this sense is self-creating, nothing other than what investors are willing to pay, but by framing this activity as discovery, proponents of this sector give us the image of a vast agent-based model computing objective knowledge.

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[4] Negarestani 2018. p. 41

More and more public institutions and private companies are themselves investors in financial assets, and the variety of available financial products is growing far beyond simple company stocks. Opaque and mathematically complex bundles proliferate, despite their role in the 2008 financial crisis. Automated high speed trading sets up elaborate feedback systems that are ever more difficult for their builders to understand. Operations that serve people directly or produce physical goods are complex to organize and expensive to maintain. They must abide by regulations and deal with accidents. They can only absorb so much investment. Stocks and interest-bearing loans are also risky, but they are scalable and can be hedged more easily than the guaranteed unpredictability of workers. Financial companies therefore prosper in proportion to their abstraction or distance from the physical needs of human beings. Corollary to this is the immiseration of huge numbers of people due to reduced social spending, periodic crises in the financial system, and disinvestment from unprofitable endeavors like vaccine development.

Subjects of this regime operate at an increasing distance from determinate activities or use-values. An exemplary parcel of human capital might be a web developer, a social media strategist, or a project manager, or any of the three as needed. They may not know when their next contract will come, but they are building their personal brand in preparation. They pay for their own health insurance and and leverage debt to fund new certifications. They invest in themselves. As Marina Vishmidt puts it: "Thus, the ideologeme of 'human capital' comes to embody a truth: the biopolitical harnessing of human survival to capital's valorisation."[5] This appears as the progressive detachment of cognitive labor and the computation of value from its material bases. It can equally be described as an offloading of material costs from corporate and institutional budgets to individuals who have been ideologically prepared to experience these new costs as autonomy and empowerment.

Vishmidt links these socio-economic trends with the conceptual history of aesthetics and subjectivity in the West, and the figure of the artist as an exemplar. This lineage has given us the artist-as-craftsman, artist-as-factory-worker, artist-as-manager, artist-as-financier[6], and finally the entirely literal artist-as-creative-professional. The agenda for this was laid out by Kant, who defined subjective free will in relation to disinterested aesthetic judgment, or valuation detached from use-value:

> The contingent, or 'inessential', is the primary characteristic of the artist's subjectivity since it is via this that she develops the singularity of apprehension, or 'taste', which makes of her consciousness a productive form for any content it might encounter, and enables her to transform this content by means of the singularity she has cultivated.[7]

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[5] Vishmidt, M. 2019. The Hard Labour of Speculation: Shaping a Reflection on Methods. MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research, 3(1): 7, pp. 1–8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/mjfar.58

[6] Duve, Thierry de, et al. *Sewn in the Sweatshops of Marx*. e-book, Amsterdam-Netherlands, Netherlands, Amsterdam University Press, 2012.

[7] Vishmidt, M. 2012. Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital. Queen Mary University of London. p. 152

The result of this is that artists' human capital resembles the most elaborate of financial derivatives. While the brand value of the artist self-inflates, the valued kernel of artistic creativity turns in an ever-tightening orbit, withdrawing from the social, formal or material factors that might condition free choice. The asymptotic destination of this orbit would seem to be a zero-dimensional point, a state of unconditioned decision-making or contemplation that resembles a Cartesian ego.

A more modern conception of the artist as a critical force generates another vector: The disinterest of modern industry in human welfare calls for involvement, or productive labor, as its negative. This has been met by a number of projects in which artists insert themselves into corporate or institutional frameworks. Accepting the artist as a legitimate messenger, these frameworks provide grasping and manipulative mechanisms that can be manipulated in turn. Along with the money and labor that directly animate the work, they provide a manifest cosmology of social roles and responsibilities. The artist here has an opportunity to become content that transforms the framework that would hope to process it.

4

In Bronze Age Greece, *daemons* carried divine messages to mortals. Socrates claimed to be advised by a daemon when he was prosecuted for teaching. Julian Jaynes theorizes that a daemonic advisor would have been standard for the time, and that before a certain century in the Bronze age, Mediterranean people attributed their ideas and compulsions to gods and daemons that only they could hear. In other words, they accessed much of their own cognition via aural hallucinations — much like we do, except that we're culturally equipped to attribute the inner voices to ourselves. Daemons worked well enough within societies united by a single religious framework, but long-distance traders needed a more self-contained system to operate in different cultural contexts, and this cognitive toolset eventually spread throughout the population.[8]

Daniel Dennett proposes that consciousness arises from a *pandemonium* of parallel cognitive processes without anything like a central Cartesian self. In this model, demons — named for the helpful software entities — promote themselves from the background into more and more noticeable impressions. A demon might be a memory, a sensation, a word, a concept, an image, or a bit of narrative. Any kind of mental entity that can occur to you is a demon, but most will pass unnoticed, one process among many, unless it can generate a strong and sustained effect.

We can visualize these effects as cascading causation, perhaps a wave of neural activity that alerts or suppresses other demons. Dennett calls it coalition-building, due to the fact that processes can be more or less well suited to each other and form alliances in the interest of rising to expression or awareness. A visual idea might join up with the words that match it, along with an impatient desire simply to speak, and

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[8] Jaynes, Julian. The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind. 31578th ed., e-book, Mariner Books, 2000.

a sense of the social rhythm of the setting. This coalition of daemons might be the strongest for the moment and take over the mental narrative, or it might pass straight to speech. “In the Pandemonium model, control is usurped rather than delegated … and no strict division is possible between the marching orders of content flowing from within and the volunteered suggestions for implementation posed by the word-demons.[9]

Dennett also calls this the *multiple-drafts* model, due to the way subjective time is stitched out of multiple vying narratives, both simultaneously and at a significant delay. Just as there is no central noticer, there is no one time or place for the final draft to be presented. Impressions echo more or less faintly as they are recalled and pulled into coalitions by new impressions over the course of life. Dennett’s guiding principle in studying consciousness is to repeatedly ask, “and then what happens?” This search for *sequelae* highlights functions of various cognitive events, the things that their existence allows. For the experience of looking at a blue sky, Dennett lists the possible sequelae:

> Maybe what happens is that the particular shade of blue, together with the breeze wafting over my face as I lie on the grass … conjures up memories of other occasions when I’ve looked up at the sky. Blue sky is good weather, it means it’s not raining, it’s not snowing. I have an inexhaustible fountain of associations, recollections, biases, which are all either triggered or triggerable by my looking at the sky. Now, we can start cutting those off, piece by piece. Suppose that the blue sky can no longer be recognized by me as the sign of good weather. Suppose it no longer kindles recollections or memories. Suppose it has no effect on my body state, on my heart rate, on my respiration, on my galvanic skin response. We’re going to subtract all of these things. At some point, it’s not clear that I’m still conscious of a blue sky.[10]

Without the sequelae, or cascades of excitable demons, the main event doesn’t seem to exist. This forces us to expand the narrow slice of time that we normally feel that we occupy, which is longer than a cinematic frame but shorter than a second. The things that constitute the experience of looking at a blue sky include mental events that are more or less delayed and more or less distant in terms of brain circuitry. So why does the first-person perspective feel like a point instead of a spatiotemporal blur? What does that fact cause or allow?

When somebody asks you “how do you feel?” they generally don’t have time for an exhaustive list of events in your brain and body. The competitive nature of pandemonium generates a terse consensus on what sensations are noteworthy, and this is ideally suited to the narrow bottleneck of language. In a broader social context, we live together by the convention that what someone says at time *a* can be

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[9] Dennett. p. 241

[10] Dennett, Daniel. “Consciousness, Qualia and the "Hard Problem” YouTube, uploaded by Les Films Primatice, 5 Jan. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSaEjLZIDqc.

attributed to the same person at time *b.* The utterance belongs to the same identity, even if the person is driven by different demons at different times. We have terminology for when this convention breaks down: statements under duress, changing beliefs, becoming a different person, and these exceptions point to the rule. We lose social standing if we don't treat our sequence of momentary coalitions as a stable identity. As in Negarestani's model, the practice of giving and accepting commitments is the impetus for a phenomenologically compressed virtual self.

5

Deliberate thought experiments are home to another kind of demon, an imaginary collaborator who surfaces unexpected dynamics and questions. Some of these demons are called on to ask a question which is more pointed coming from "someone else". Many others are localized, flying across the universe or performing specific physical tasks. Maxwell's demon is a well-known example of this type: a tiny being who waits at the doorway between two chambers filled with gas particles. By selectively opening the door for fast-moving particles to enter one room, and for slow-moving particles to enter the other, Maxwell's demon is able to cause one room to get warmer and the other room to get colder. This increasing difference is a source of free energy that shouldn't be possible according to thermodynamic laws.

Personifying the experimenter's imaginary manipulation as a demon gives it boundaries and parameters, and these limitations turn out to be a resource for focusing questions. Whereas the imagination that frames the scenario is capable of almost anything, the limited abilities of the demon surface more specific intuitions as they confront physical laws. In the case of Maxwell's demon and the debate it initiated, these were first focused on the energy involved in opening the chamber door, then on the possibility of seeing molecules without altering their course, and then on the energetic costs of the demon's cognition. This finally located the solution — the reason the demon can't generate free energy — in a deep entanglement between entropy and information theory[11].

[11] Bérut, A. et al. Nature 483, Experimental verification of Landauer's principle linking information and thermodynamics. 2012. p. 187–189

Gm F Cm D7

If you'd like to se - pa - rate the truth from su - per - sti - tion
You will need some - one to help di -sturb your in - tu - iti - on to

Gm F Cm D7

run ex - pe - ri - ments im - pos - si - ble out - side of dream - in'
all the great - est think - ers knew:___ make your - self a de - mon

Gm F Cm D7

Berg - son's De - mon clar - i - fies dur - a - tion, time and mo - tion
Com- pton's De - mon makes a pho - ton set off an ex - plo - sion Des-

Gm F Cm D7

cart - es' De - mon puts our brain in - side a sim - u - la - tion
but can not ev - er take a - way our vi - tal cog - i - ta -tion

Gm F Cm D7

Frank - furt's De - mon hides free will and serves us to our f - ate
Jame - s' De - mon is a god in - tent on check - ing m - ate

Gm F Cm D7

Losch -midt's De - mon puts all at - oms' mo - tion in re - verse and
thus re - winds e - vents in our en - ti - re un - i - v - erse

Gm F Cm D7

Max - well's De - mon guards a door be - tween two rooms of g - as
and on - ly lets an a - tom through when it is go - ing fast

Gm F Cm D7

Men - del's De - mon does the same for genes and gen - er - a - tions
and thus im - proves the like - li - hood of in - ter - esting mu -ta-tions

Gm F Cm D7

Niet - zche's De - mon asks us if we'd do it all a - ga - in,
and thus di - stills an eth - ic out of all our joy and pain - (refrain!)

Gm F Cm D7

If you'd like to se - pa - rate the truth from su - per - sti - tion
You will need some - one to help di -sturb your in - tu - iti - on to

Gm F Cm D7

run ex - pe - ri - ments im - pos - si - ble out - side of dream - in'
wake up bud - dy here's the trick: ___ make your -self a de - mon

Gm F Cm D7

Pier - ce's De - mon sab - o - tag - es prob - a - bi - li - ty
by hi - ding in the jar of mar - bles pick - ed by lott - er-y

Gm F Cm D7

Pop - per's De - mon's deaf but he knows phys - ics to a t - ee
and can pre - dict the sound of Mo - zart's new - est sym - pho - ny And

Gm F Cm D7

who's at the be - ginn - ing of this long dem - on - ic li - ne
but Soc - rat - es on tri - al for cor -rupt - ing youth - ful minds

Gm F Cm D7

And e - ven though they charged him with un - holy her - e - sy
he said it was a de - mon made him do phil - o - so - phy So...

Gm F Cm D7

If that grand ex - per - i - ment re - sists all earth- ly schem - in'
Run it first in - side your head, and make your - self a de - mon

In discussing the work of Jean-Luc Moulène, Reza Negarestani refers to this kind of demon as a way for an artist to integrate their own thoughts with the dynamics of sculptural material:

> One furnishes the black box of matter with the force of thought disguised as virtual observer or a truncated imitation of the thinking subject. Thus endowed, the black box constrains the mobility of thought by the intrinsic constraints of matter over which the subject has no hold. The resulting product is a space of tension between thought and material constraints, logical implications and real implications, habits of thinking and dehabituating tendencies of matter.[12]

First, the artist imagines their demon within the material, performing a cut, forming a knot, or extracting a volume. Then the material confronts the demon with its complexity, self-consistency, and inertia. This presses against the demon with turbulent, irregular forms that can't be exhaustively expressed or even perceived. This is a cycle of mutual perturbation that changes both the thinker and the material, and turns "naïve intuitions" into questions: "Does thought come from outside of the subject or from the inside? Where is nature in relation to thought, at its center or at its periphery? Where is the density of thought greater, in the subject that thinks it or in the object that can transform thought into a thing?"[13]

6

The demons of Dennett and Negarestani suggest a third type of demon with a mixture of their capacities — a linguistic-experimental demon. Instead of turbulent material forces, it would put the user in touch with the compressive and ambiguating forces of language. Instead of a loop through material and back into the subject, it loops through the field of utterances, which are equally obdurate. Like Negarestani's 'truncated imitation of the thinking subject,' it would be closely tied to the will of the user, but instead of speculative cuts and twists of material, it would usurp speech, generating utterances that transform the speaker.

A statement, once spoken, splinters into many possible interpretations and refers to many possible real situations. By choosing one interpretation over another, the speaker shifts incrementally from the original disposition that generated the speech. A linguistic-experimental demon might harness this capacity for drift via repetition. A spoken statement might also act as a publicly audible commitment, forcing the speaker onto a path of self-transformation in order to honor their new responsibility.

To the extent that we expect anything of institutions other than self-perpetuation, they are also susceptible to the same assessment of trustworthiness that we apply to individuals. An artist working

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[12] Negarestani, Reza. Torture Concrete. Sequence press, 2014. p. 10-11

[13] Ibid. p. 12

within an institution might, from this perspective, become the linguistic-experimental demon within this larger framework, especially insofar as they are able to usurp the voice of the institution and make commitments in its name.

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