

Submerged Territories
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Time and Space died yesterday.

There came into our possession a jumbled collection of damaged and unverifiable artefacts.

A large quantity of faded 35mm slides.

Careful examination of this debris began to suggest to us the possibility of notional, obscured territories, spaces both real and imaginary. Previously unimaginable topographies that seemed to simultaneously inhabit the past, the present and perhaps even the future.

What we discovered is neither linear in its historical mapping, nor ordered.

ABOVE US THE WAVES

Beneath the North Sea, about 60 or 70 miles from the nearest land, lies the Dogger Bank.

This large, underwater plateau, a region larger than the United Kingdom, was lost to the sea over a period of 11,000 years.

It has been described as one of the most enigmatic archaeological landscapes of northwestern Europe.

How are we to investigate or interpret this extraordinary, but largely inaccessible landscape?

Stories of a mythical and submerged land have long been told in the fishing communities around the North Sea. These stories were given credence by the bones of large, often extinct, land mammals which were occasionally dredged up from the sea-bed in peaty clumps called 'moorlog'.

When the trawl boats or 'Doggers' as they were known, first fished the Dogger Bank, it was common practice to break up the large cakes of 'moorlog' and discard the detritus in deeper water. Whilst a few of the blocks and some of the bones they contained were brought back to Yarmouth as curiosities, no reliable record seems to have been kept of any of the finds.

Notes from the burial Realm

I recently read a description of the end of the world. It went something like this: Out in the deep, a forest of concrete and steel spires slowly sinks beneath the sea. The detritus of half a continent, washed on to the top of the delta, presses down in the malleable crust. Around the tops of the concrete piles snake a thick tangle of plumbing.

Pipes for water, electricity, gas and sewage. Optical cables, subways, underground car parks, and nuclear fallout shelters. Once in the burial realm, these abandoned foundations can begin their transformation into the urban stratum.

Human aggregate

Pushing back. To PUSH anything back into the past is equivalent to reducing it to its simplest elements.

Traced as far as possible in the direction of their origins, the fibres that make up the human aggregate slip out of view and merge with the very stuff of the universe.

In the mile deep chasm that is the Grand Canyon, which covers a strata span of roughly 1.5 billion years, the whole of human existence, some 2 million years, would fit in a layer only 3 inches deep.

So let us now go further back and examine life on earth in its earliest stages.

ELEMENTAL MATTER

Some thousands of millions of years ago, perhaps as the result of some unbelievable accident, a fragment of matter composed of particularly stable atoms was detached from the surface of the sun.

The profoundly 'atomic' character of the universe is visible in everyday experience, in raindrops and grains of sand, in the hosts of the living, and the multitude of stars.

Observed from certain angles, and considered in its elemental state, the stuff of tangible things reveals itself with increasing insistence as radically particulate, essentially related, and lastly, prodigiously active. Plurality, unity, energy: the three faces of matter.

EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS

Francis Crick, awarded the Noble prize for his work on the double helix structure of DNA, proposed a theory that he termed 'Panspermia' that posits that the earth was 'seeded' with life, probably in the form of bluegreen algae, by an unknown intelligent extraterrestrial species.

Proponents of the theory of Paleocontact maintain that the development of the human race is the direct result of interventions by extraterrestrial intelligence.

Some have gone as far as to suggest that the deities of most, if not all cultures are in fact extraterrestrial and that sudden advances in our technologies provide evidence of their influence.

They argue that it is precisely the gaps that we see in historical and archaeological records that provide the evidence for these ancient extraterrestrial interventions.

Professor Gold, a proponent of the now largely abandoned 'steady state' hypothesis of the universe, suggests instead a 'garbage theory' for the origin of life, proposing that life on earth was not planned, but had spread unintentionally after contamination with extraterrestrial detritus.

Submerged Forests

In 1913, the British geologist and palaeobotanist Clement Reid published a book entitled Submerged Forests. The book hypothesized a submerged land and the possibility of a prehistoric human presence between mainland Europe and Britain.

Reid's ideas had been formulated through observation of ancient root structures visible only at exceptionally low tides.

The Colinda Point

In 1931 a trawler named Colinda, hauled up a lump of Moorlog 25 miles east of Norfolk.

The peat was found to contain an elegant barbed antler point possibly used as a harpoon or fish spear and dated to a time when the area was tundra, about 4,000 and 10,000 BCE.

Ash Keys, Holy Stones & Lucky Bones

Holed stones, also known as hag, witch, adder or snakestones are believed to prevent nightmares. A bunch of ash keys carried in the hand was said to preserve the bearer from Witch-craft.

Quartz pebbles, were popularly known by the name of 'thunder, or rather "thunner staane's," and were believed to have dropped from the clouds during thunderstorms.

Lucky bones were worn as an amulet round the neck to ensure good luck and protect the wearer from fairies, witches and uncanny folk.

" Know you the nixies, gay and fair ? Their eyes are black, and green their hair, They lurk in sedgy waters."

The howling of dogs, either by night or day, is still considered to portend death, either in the house nearest to which they howl, or to some of their kith or kindred.

HOWL

“It was a howl in which pain, anger, menace, and the outraged majesty of Nature all blended into one hideous shriek.

For a full minute it lasted. A thousand sirens in one, paralysing all the great multitude with its fierce insistence, and floating away through the still summer air.

No sound in history has ever equalled the cry of the injured Earth.”

I have been listening to the sound of glaciers melting for days now. It sounds incredible, beautifully rhythmic... it's a continuous, ruinous rhythm.

Lost Realms

Archaeologists studying the Colinda point, began to realize that hunter-gatherers could once have roamed across a vast plain that connected Britain to the rest of Europe.

It has been suggested that this terrain of coastal lagoons, saltmarshes and rivers may have been one of the richest geographical resources in Europe at the time.

Could this abundant environment have enabled Mesolithic peoples to settle and form proto-agrarian communities? Could Doggerland be seen as a pre-lapsarian paradise, a lost realm?

Like the runes of a pagan priest we throw out the fragments and speculate. Scanning the shards for patterns; possible futures, probable pasts.

Here be Dragons

The discipline of archaeology implies an ordering and governing of the ancient or original but what we have discovered is neither linear in its historical mapping, nor ordered.

Despite advances in technology our knowledge of the region remains largely obscured, inaccessible and hypothetical. Doggerland remains effectively terra incognita.

How are we to investigate and interpret this extraordinary, but largely inaccessible landscape?

In cartography uncharted or inaccessible areas are traditionally annotated with the phrase 'hic svnt dracones' and populated with the mythic and the imagined. Gaps in the schema become sites of unknown horror, spoken of only by oracles.

This submerged territory does not recognise present day administrative and political boundaries. It defies jurisdiction.

A most extraordinary and terrifying sight.

According to the 18th Century writer Jacques Cazotte, located at the bottom of the Mediterranean sea, just off the Gulf of Tunis is a cavernous hall. This submerged realm is said to be a meeting place for evil spirits; frequented by :
Magicians, Nixies, Jinny-burnt-tails,
Dudmen, Hell-hounds and Dopples-gangers
Boggleboes, Hobgoblins, lubberkins and Leprechauns
Kors, Mares, Korreds, and Puckles
Clabbernappers, Mavkins, Doubles, Corpse lights,
Scrats, Sprites, Fates, fiends and Sybils,
fairies, thrummy-caps, Sylvans,
Shadows, Banshees, and other miscreant souls.

The roof of every chamber, courtyard, and gallery was, he goes on to explain, were made of stone. The walls covered with carved figures, and each court exquisitely built of white marble and surrounded by a colonnade.

It was a most extraordinary and terrifying sight. The floor, which consisted of some greyish, shiny material, rose and fell in slow palpitation. The throbs were not direct, but gave the impression of a gentle ripple or rhythm running across the surface.

Beneath it, seen as if through ground glass, there were dim whitish patches or vacuoles, which varied constantly in shape and size.

The Mirror is Here

The water surface as a mirror is well known in greek mythology and art history. Leon Battista Alberti identifies the invention of painting in the moment that Narcissus sees his image on the water surface “ What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of a pool?”

Here water is not understood as a mirror; as a surface that reproduces an image without manipulating it, but as an interface, which transforms information.

We know of the depths, but cannot separate the possible from probable worlds. We discovered that mirrors have something monstrous about them.... From the remote depths they spied upon us. In them we saw that ‘the present is undefined, the future has no reality other than as present hope and the past is no more than the present memory. The whole of time has already happened and our cosmos is but a vague memory, a distorted reflection.

CATACLYSYM

In 1788 Jacques Cazotte attended a dinner hosted by the Prince de Beauvau. After the meal, with political unease hanging in the air, Cazotte declared himself to be in possession of the power of prophecy. He proceeded to unleash a volley of unsettling and brutal predictions to the gathered guests; describing in minute detail the grim destinies that awaited them.

Extraterrestrial Garbage

Geographies and the territories that opportunistically spring up to inhabit them are merely superficial manifestations of more substratal tendencies of movement.

What appears stable and static is in fact volatile, mutable, unstable.
The brief span of an individual life is misleading. Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory.

It has been suggested by others that cognition is in fact a form of collage. And if this is so, then perhaps consciousness is merely a cult of fragments - pieces torn from here and there and woven back together. A patchwork composed of fragments of memory.

The tools and apparatuses we use to interrogate both the past and the present are unstable, mutable and often inadequate. They are not neutral – they create noise, and in the process of communication, the observer may read these noises as patterns or signals. These chance events have no provenance but are merely produced through noise and only perceived as meaningful.

So, perhaps, just like professor Gold's extraterrestrial garbage, the world contains no meaningful convergences. It is instead just a network of haphazard acts.