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Pandaemonium, 2020 Hindsight and Animal Life

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Abstract

The mass domicile confinement of the Covid19 lockdowns severely restricted normal patterns of urban mobility over extended periods of time. Wildlife that would usually occupy the urban periphery and margins of the forest started to be seen on the streets, sidewalks and eventually in city centres. This essay addresses the question of how to understand the popular reception of animals appearing in the civic domain at a time when ordinary democratic and civil rights were being legally suspended in many regions and countries. Giorgio Agamben's 'homo sacer' framework is used to explore the various themes that come into play in who, or what, is allowed to transit or occupy public spaces. Close attention is given to topological approaches in the figuration and body-politics of the outcast, as well as the ontological themes apparently inherent to constitutional law but which become manifest when a state of emergency or exception is declared. The final part of the essay turns to anthropological inquiry into hybrid animal and monster imagery in the context of sudden institutional shifts and the long-term evo-lution of commercial trading networks during the age of incipient urbanisation.

Keywords: Covid19 lockdowns; domestication; ecological approaches to landscape-environment; homo sacer; hybrid animal imagery; monsters; urban theory; wild animals

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Pandaemonium, 2020 Hindsight and Animal Life

Juan Rojas Meyer



Figure 1: Author, Spiked Corona, generated with CF Spark: Flow ‘Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript’ at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

This essay engages a sense of pandaemonium that took hold throughout the Covid19 pandemic lockdowns by examining a particular kind of animal imagery that started to circulate in the emerging media landscape. Initially media denizens and consulting experts struggling with the complexities of near simultaneous virus outbreaks across the globe employed the term ‘Covid19 epidemic’, then shortly afterwards switched to ‘pandemic’. While this change reflects a significant shift in the scale of the virus transmission, this essay primarily focuses on various figures that can be seen to arise as a consequence of global pandemic lockdowns of 2020.

During the lockdowns there was a novel interest shown for wild animals that started to appear ‘out of place’. As the year wore on through recurrent cycles of domicile confinement, this phenomenon led to the idea of a resurgent natural world turning the tide, as increasingly animals were seen to be coming out of their habitual hiding places and starting to explore what had been until recently mostly human spaces. Short video recordings of straying animals initially became a popular genre on social media; these were later recombined into series and started to appear on more mainstream media channels. This essay is concerned with how these images arise within what appear as emergent forms of ecological consciousness during the

initial phases of the pandemic spread and coincide with a media world increasingly obsessed with emergent viral biology, hybrid inter-speciation and recombinant animal genetics.

Another factor in the sudden appearance of wild animals during the Covid19 pandemic lockdowns is how this phenomenon coincided with government declarations of a state of emergency or exception. Thus the sudden appearance of much more wildlife in urban spaces obliquely underscores how extraordinary legal powers can completely curtail the liberties taken for granted in ordinary daily life as well as restrict civil rights and freedoms. In the sovereign polity of the western tradition, as civic codes do not anticipate singular events such as a pandemic, such extreme measures are enabled from within the civil code itself which permits for general legal exemptions to be declared while not, theoretically at least, threatening the reigning legal-civic order. The novel iconography of wild or peri-urban animals transiting and occupying urban spaces is therefore explored through an examination of Giorgio Agamben's thesis on the legal character of forced exclusions from an established civil order.

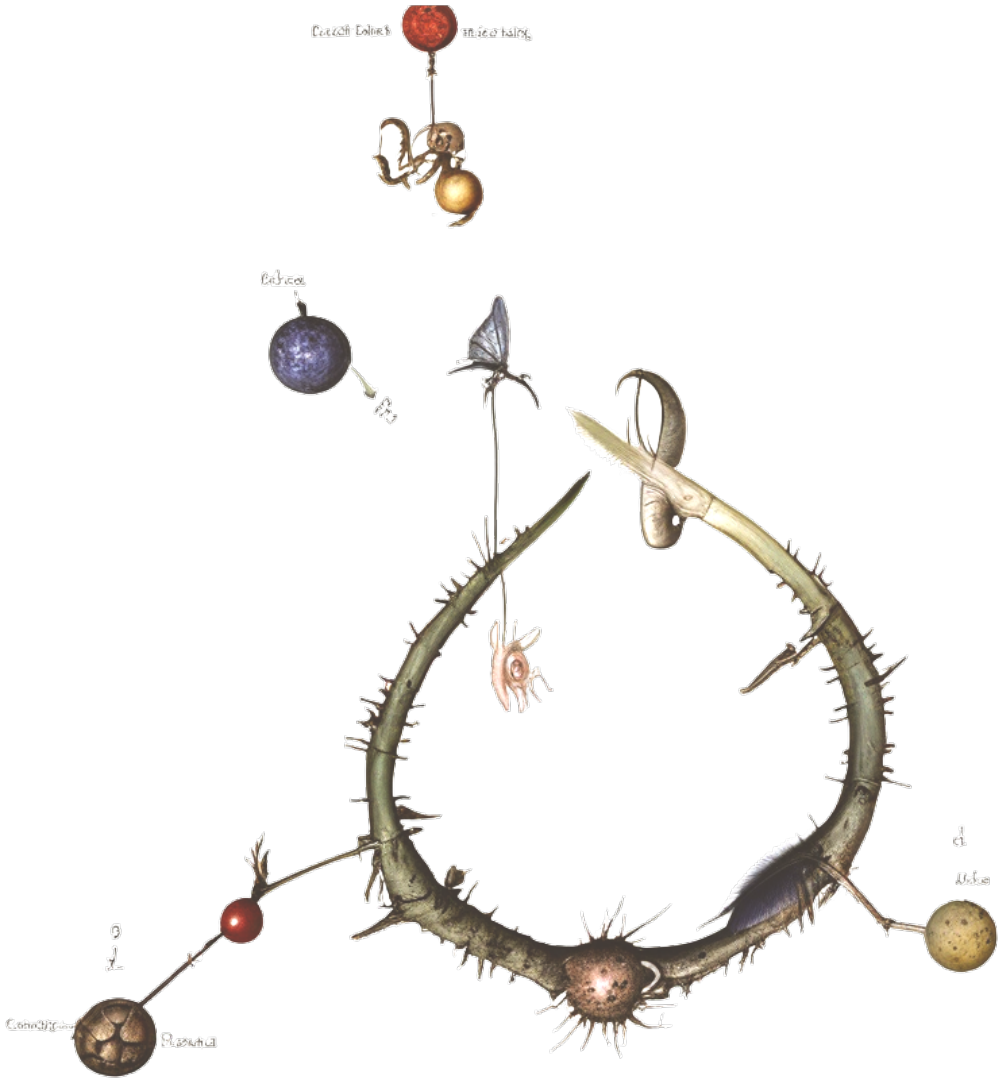


Figure 2: Author, *TurnPike*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript'

at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

While constitutional legality enjoys a certain degree of transcendence regardless of the particulars of any exemption, the issue of how territories are re-configured in such an evolving scenario is a subject that is explored further. Characteristically, the issue of territory is one that is continually negotiated in the power-play of body-politics, patrolling and predation. In relation to this, in the argument presented, the fallout of unintended encounters with 'wild animals' is also an issue that is broached with respect to the cultural formulation of monsters. The essay therefore concludes by looking into how hybrid or highly recombinant animal imagery, often endowed with 'monstrous' qualities, is found circulating in other historical circumstances. Examples are taken from hunting societies and from the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Bronze Age, where such hybrid images were widespread and transmitted over long-distance trading networks that sustained early urban societies.

I. PANDAEMONIUM

During the rolling lockdowns of 2020, across the globe, wild animals that used to only be seen on the edges of town and in the margins of the forest became increasingly bold and were frequently being observed on the streets, sidewalks and in urban centres. Such behaviour would normally have been considered to be bizarrely strident, but with entire populations limited to domicile confinement spending long hours peering from their windows, there was a gathering sense that the terms of territorial negotiation between humans and animals had radically shifted. Social media posts documenting this phenomenon soon appeared and then were collected into longer video compositions that were circulated on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter groups using the hashtag handles #lockdowneffectonanimals, #lockdowneffectonnature and #animalsontheroadduringlockdown. [1]

In the months that followed there was increasing interest shown by more traditional media outlets (such as ABC, NBC, VoA, WION and the *South China Morning Post*) who started picking up on this trend and broadcasting their own re-edited video compositions. These reports re-packaged the same photographs and videos, sometimes updating them with fresh materials, while employing voiceover commentaries that often portrayed nature as rebounding and observed the contrast between humans' confinement and animals' freedom to roam (*Curly Tales* 2020; *ThinkBig Media* 2020, Indian Animal Rescue 2020). The following tract reproduces the sort of medley of images that was commonly found in these video productions:

> In Spain, Rome, Paris and Haifa *jabali* or wild boar are venturing in greater numbers into urban spaces. In the snowy university town of Ifranne, Morocco, it isn't long after confinement was declared before hordes of the *halouf del ghaba* are seen trotting through the abandoned streets. In the forests behind Tangier the *halouf* are eating from people's hands. In central Paris or Seville, ducks usually found near the rivers are seen ambulating along the grand boulevards in a carefree manner. On Malaga City beaches, for the first time in living memory, flamingos are seen gathering as pods of dolphins frolick in the water only a few meters away. Off of Yarra

beach, Australia, families of deer gather to bathe and play in the waves while kangaroos bound down the streets of Adelaide's empty downtown. In West Virginia, bear families bathe in private swimming pools. In South Carolina, alligators have moved into shopping malls. In Colorado and Santiago, Chile, mountain lions are exploring suburbia. Off Vancouver Island, a rare species of whales is documented for the first time. In California, wildlife service staff are noticing that park animals are coming out from their habitual enclaves and hiding places. On the Terai lowlands of Nepal, rhinos are seen roaming unhindered through deserted villages. In Mumbai, monkeys have started swimming in the abandoned hotel pools. In India, Thailand and throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the elephants have become emboldened and roam nonchalantly through empty villages. In Kruger National Park, South Africa, lions now lounge comfortably on the greens of the Skukuza golf course while giraffes have learned that they can use the abandoned roads.

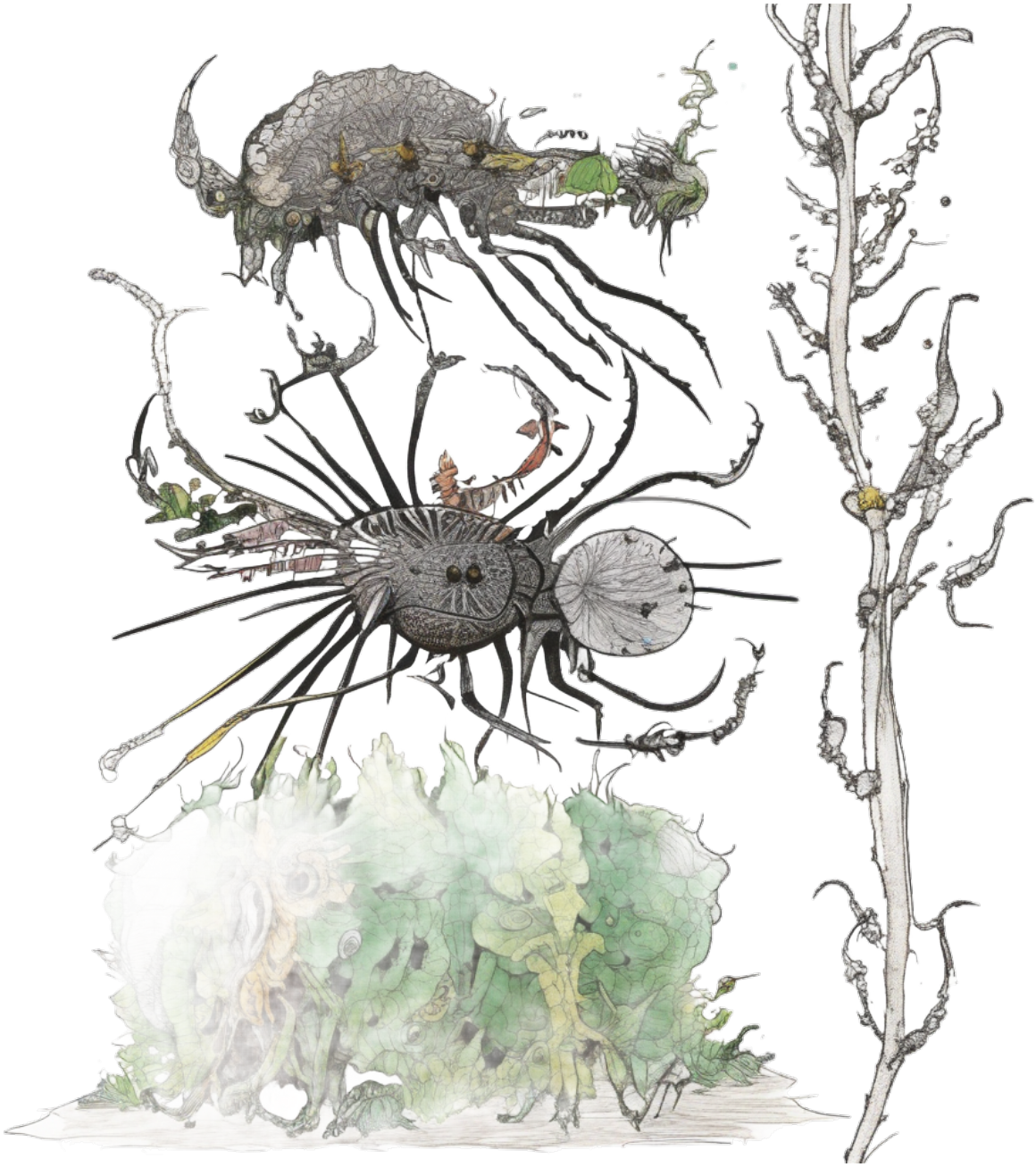


Figure 3: Author, *Virulent Scripts*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

More locally, during the 2020 pandemic, it became evident that increasingly anxious populations enduring repeated periods of domestic confinement had started passing the days looking out of their windows. Taking note of the novel animal presence and behaviour became a common activity, and reports such as the ones cited above often dwell on how animal habits were understood to be changing from cautious trepidation to relaxation, and on how animals were now frequently seen venturing into the mainstays of the built environment. Many commentaries reflected on how the increased animal presence in the urban domain coincided with drastically reduced levels of ambient noise. One of the most remarked-upon aspects of confinement regimes was how birdsong emerged from the remote background to the foreground of urban acoustics. Busy urban lifestyles responsible for noisy environments were acknowledged as having obscured

all these animal sounds and perhaps even having frightened away many of the animals that were now showing themselves.

Another feature of widespread confinement that found its way into news coverage were the falling pollution rates in major cities and built-up urban areas. [2] Northern Italy was estimated to have experienced an up to 40% reduction in pollution levels, and NASA satellite images showed industrial areas of China, including Wuhan province, with smog reductions of up to 30% after two months of shutdown (Watts and Kommenda 2020). [3] News outlets, including The Weather Channel, started to produce before-and-after lockdown carbon dioxide (CO2) and nitrous oxide (NOx) charts and compared the skylines of famously polluted cities including New Delhi, Beijing, Jakarta, Mumbai, Manila, Los Angeles, São Paulo, Caracas, Madrid and Mexico City.

II. THE PERCEPTION OF ANIMALS AND THE ECOLOGY OF THE VIRUS'S ORIGINS

It is possible to suggest that a contributing factor in the changing perceptions of relations between human and non-human animals was the coincidence of freely roaming wildlife and the idea that the genetic evolution of the Covid19 virus itself happened due to an enigmatic animal admixture. Even if the exact mix of species that contributed to the virus's origins has remained an open question shrouded in mystery, the sort of interspecies cross-overs that it came to represent were altogether more menacing. Some scientific publications indicated the horseshoe bat and the pangolin – an endangered anteater common in southeast Asia – as the two most likely candidates (Andersen et al. 2020). In addition, the local wet-markets found throughout much of China and Southeast Asia, where wild and exotic fresh meats are butchered and sold in crowded spaces under unsafe sanitary conditions, became one of the environmental factors thought to have contributed to the virus's genetic evolution.

Although traditional to large parts of Asia, the origins of wet-markets in contemporary China can be historically traced to the period following the first phase of the Communist revolution when the revolutionary Maoist government had closed these markets down in China's larger towns and cities. In China, the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by intense societal turmoil that had produced mass starvation and several great famines that had entire regions falling into a state of general social breakdown with frequent reports of cannibalism (Sutton 1995; Zheng 1993; Yue 1999: 228–262). Faced with these challenges, the Maoist revolutionary government had, ad-hoc, reverted to a form of traditional market to which they were ideologically opposed, in order to provide a variety of meat, including meat produced by butchering wild animals, a policy that became more pronounced during the post-Mao era of liberal reforms (Yue 1999: 263–287).

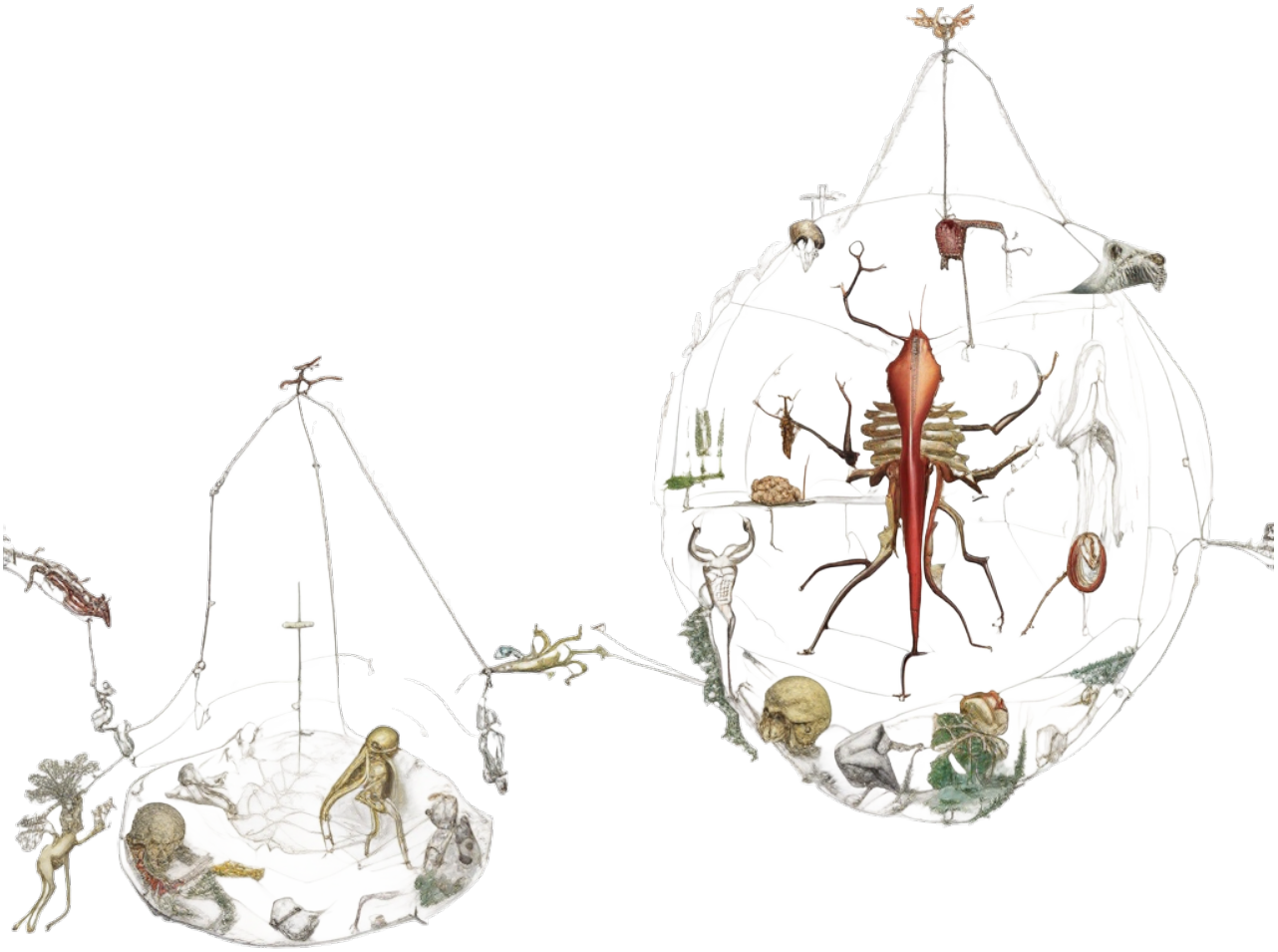


Figure 4: Author, *Hierophantic Gardens*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hy-brids in the style of Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights, c.1503–1515' at crea-tivefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

Ecological arguments that aimed to explain environmental factors contributing to the Covid19 outbreak were also fielded early on. These generally signalled that excessive human encroachments on the natural world had reached a critical tipping point and that as a result, the Covid19 pandemic was an indirect consequence of human overreach and natural habitat destruction. Eminent scientific authorities were sought out for their advice on the matter. Dr. Jane Goodall, who famously documented gorilla societies in an ethnographic manner, during a TV interview exclaimed that wild animals cannot be blamed or demonised for the pandemic '...not bats and pangolins, or snakes and civet cats' (Skavlan TV 2020). James Lovelock, of Earth Systems Sciences and author of the *Gaia* hypothesis of climate equilibrium (Lovelock and Margulis 1974; Lovelock 1979), also weighed into the debate claiming that the planetary scale of human ubiquity is

now making humans into an ideal food source. He responded to the question: 'Is the virus part of the self-regulation of *Gaia*?' with the following explanation:

> Definitely, it's a matter of sources and sinks. The source is the multiplication of the virus and the sink is anything we can do to get rid of it, which is not at the moment very effective. This is all part of evolution as Darwin saw it. You are not going to get a new species flourishing unless it has a food supply. In a sense that is what we are becoming. We are the food. I could easily make you a model and demonstrate that as the human population on the planet grew larger and larger, the probability of a virus evolving that would cut back the population is quite marked. We're not exactly a desirable animal to let loose in unlimited numbers on the planet. Malthus was about right. In his day, human population was much smaller and distributed less densely across the planet, I don't think Covid would have had a chance. (Lovelock 2020)

The statement 'We are the food' is of course unnerving, but it points out how, from an ecological point of view, the networked density of contemporary globalised society provides a largely undifferentiated field for viral agents to exploit.

In the final weeks of April 2020, as European populations tired of rolling lockdown extensions that kept them subject to severe social distancing restrictions, news channels simultaneously adopted the vocabulary of 'the new normal'. Media channels also started to indicate that there wouldn't be a return to the pre-Covid19 world and instead disseminated the idea of an inevitable second and third wave of community transmission that would have prolonged social effects. The French president Emmanuel Macron, in a rambling virtual interview with the *Financial Times*, struggled to piece together the myriad changing factors. Macron went so far as to muse that globalisation's orientation would be radically altered and that humanity itself was on the verge of an existential threshold and shifting into another anthropological phase (*Financial Times* 2020).

III. STATE OF EMERGENCY?

On the other hand Giorgio Agamben, the Italian philosopher and public intellectual who has produced several major works on state sovereignty and human rights and dealt extensively with 'states-of-emergency', started to take note of the enormous scope of the pandemic spreading through the north of Italy and beyond, and published a series of short commentaries in online journals. His second article 'Contagio' (2020b), published on 11 March 2020 in *Quodlibet*, described how, during the sixteenth-century plagues that devastated Italian cities, opportunists took advantage of their unsuspecting neighbours: a real-estate scam employed 'greasers' to paint animal grease on people's doorways with the aim of attracting ants that were believed to be the contagious agents spreading the plague. Upon discovering the ants, the panicked householders would then flee for their lives. Disgusted at what he was seeing happening around him, Agamben stated that panicking Italians were all 'greasers'.



Figure 5: Author, *Botanical Sketch c.1797*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

Following the controversy Agamben's ideas provoked, a follow-up article 'Chiarimenti' (2020a) was published in the same journal on 17 March. Concerned about the epidemic's political and ethical consequences, Agamben claimed that Italians had 'in a wave of panic' dispensed with human, social and even religious values. Life had lost its political significance and was giving way to the singular value of 'bare life'. 'Bare life' is a key concept of Agamben's based on being 'merely alive' that would be familiar to his readers, and it informs much of the discussion that follows in this essay. Agamben also exclaimed that no prior epidemic had ever been the cause for a 'state of exception' and that he saw a new norm taking shape in the largely uncontested surrendering of rights:

> People have been so habituated to live in the conditions of perennial crisis and perennial emergency that they don't seem to notice that their life has been reduced to a purely biological condition….We in fact live in a society that has sacrificed freedom to so-called 'reasons of

> security' and has therefore condemned itself to live in a perennial state of fear and insecurity.

A subsequent *Quodlibet* article, 'Una domanda' (2020d), published on 6 April, outlined what Agamben saw as an 'unconscious collapse of an entire country' and made three points: 1. Not since Antigone have the bodies of the dead been treated like mere corpses and disposed of without a funeral. 2. Even the twentieth-century wars had not restricted freedom of movement so severely as to effectively suspend relationships of friendship and love while neighbours and community were lost. 3. 'This was able to happen – and here we hit on the root of the phenomenon – because we have split the unity of our vital experience, which is always inseparably bodily and spiritual, into a purely biological entity on one hand and an affective and cultural life on the other'. Agamben warned that confinement and social distancing measures were merely euphemistic for new principles that would reorganise society as a whole. For in his view, when the modern state truly mobilises it is always 'in a bio-political direction, with segregations, hospitals and camps, all of which completely redraws the political geography' (Agamben 2020c).

The gravity of the first point was underscored when the Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale, responsible for producing official death tolls in Italy, announced significant discrepancies in accounting for Covid19 deaths. An AFP report claimed:

> 156,42 [sic] total deaths were recorded in Italy in March and April, which is 46,909 higher than the average number of fatalities in those months recorded between 2015 and 2019. The Civil Protection Agency claimed only 27,938 deaths linked to coronavirus were reported during that period. That meant there were [another] 18,971 excess deaths during this period, with the vast majority, 18,412, recorded in the coronavirus-ravaged north of the country. (AFP 2020)

In other hard-hit countries such as Spain and the United Kingdom, which shortly afterwards surpassed Italy in terms of Covid19 deaths, almost identical types of accounting discrepancies also became public. The debates that followed raised concerns about official duplicity in publishing the scale of pandemic death tolls and the possibility that there was political opportunism involved in the reporting of elderly care home deaths (Booth 2020; Stewart 2020).

The question of how to understand the 'life' that awaits death while incapacitated in institutions such as care homes, for example, or that is legally encumbered in prisons or hospitals, is at the heart of Agamben's (1995) thesis on excluded or vulnerable forms of 'bare life'. The following sections explore Agamben's essentially political theory, and ways in which its framework could also be suited to an analysis of the circumstances that arose from within the Covid19 pandemic.

IV. 'BARE LIFE' IN THE ERA OF PANDEMIC LOCKDOWNS



Figure 6: Author, *Trachea*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) was originally published in 1995 in Italian as *Homo Sacer: Il Potere souverano et la nuda vita* while Agamben was a professor at the University of Verona. *Homo Sacer* (Vol. I of a series with nine instalments) provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between juridical and sovereign power and has been influential in legal and constitutional theory, human rights law and several academic disciplines including sociology and human geography.

Agamben's intellectual framework is built upon the key distinction made between the classical Greek terms *zoé* and *bios*, the roots for the English words 'zoology' and 'biology'. The sphere of *zoé* is found in sustaining the body and sexual reproduction, and entails the household, sustenance and the material needs of family members. Agamben portrays *zoé* as 'bare life' – the simple, unqualified life shared by all living beings. *Bios*, on the other hand, is concerned with the public realm, the city, politics, social behaviour, community health and ethics, and the regulating institutions of justice, trade and government. In outlining this core division,

Agamben engages with a biological concept that is essentially Aristotelian, given that it does not accept the political *bios* realm as indispensable to being alive (Aristotle 1905: 127 8b).

Under this conception, political participation, much like the use of language, is treated as a supplement that is not elemental to life in the sense of bare life or *zoé*, but is directed at maintaining the civilised order and proper conduct of the self-governing *polis*. Agamben's thesis on the extraordinary powers invested in the sovereign state nevertheless proposes that *zoé* in effect functions in an oblique relationship with *bios*. In relation to this, Agamben examines how in Roman law a sentence of *homo sacer* – literally the sacred or accursed man – established a juridical power to strip a person of all legal recognition and protections, effectively forcing the subject into the condition of *zoé*.

As this demonstrates, the life proper of the human condition as the social, reasoning, political 'animal' necessitates enforcing modes of exclusion such as those found in mental hospitals, prisons and detention camps of every kind. Moreover, Agamben argues that in the modern era, this power is exemplified in the character of the technocratic state, and is especially illuminated when citizen rights are suspended when a state of emergency is declared. This constitutionally approved exemption amplifies executive powers ostensibly to allow for the ability to make interventions that ensure the survival of the modern state. Agamben therefore sets out his political theory on the basis that in the western tradition, the character of sovereign power is indelibly associated with that of the *homo sacer* figure.

Agamben's theory has broad significance for the legal area that defines human rights beyond those that are closely associated with citizenship and political participation. Within the matrix of its framework, it therefore appears that almost any effort to protect 'humanity' is also understood as entangled in the politics that produces bare life. In biomedical ethics for example, the concept becomes relevant in the schisms that arise between biomedical and legal definitions of death, and in relation to the personhood of those in comas, considering assisted dying, or undergoing an organ transplant or lobotomy. Its relevance is also found in the ethics of human experimentation, the treatment of the severely mentally ill, the establishment of genetic copyright and the status of surrogate mothers (Agamben 1998: 136).

Following Foucault's incomplete outline for his bio-politics project (1978), Agamben observes that during the historical rise of technocratic modernity in Europe, the fundamental classical division between life and politics, the domestic and the civic spheres, had become reversed. Key to understanding the consequences of this reversal is the way the modern state assumes an active role in fomenting health and hygiene (Agamben 1998: 4). [4] Thus *zoé* enters into the public arena encouraged by a bureaucratic apparatus, in effect breaking down the classical order whereby the care of the body remained exclusively in the private domain of the *domus* or household. Agamben argues that, as the political character of the *polis* is ultimately regulated through the courts, it is the law itself that underpins how the distinctions between the two domains are regulated.

V. FIGURES/ZONES OF IN-DISTINCTION

One of Agamben's main themes in *Homo Sacer* is a vacillating form of power that is held in reserve within the law and which comes into being when a state of emergency or exception legally suspends democratic

process and constitutionally enshrined protections. The 'potentiality' of clauses found dormant within a constitutional framework suggests a power that is created through how it is in general withheld until some unknown point in the future. Nevertheless, as 'potentiality' it is understood to have a specific bearing on the present; it is therefore understood by Agamben as one of the main preserves of the law, allowing for a discretionary authority to act regardless of specific conditions (Agamben 1998: 1, 5–66, 39–48, 91–103).

Like Walter Benjamin, who explores the dynamics between exception and rule operating in the modern state, Agamben's preferred form of analysis works in areas where unexpected forms of fluidity arise in reciprocal yet unwarranted exchanges (Agamben 1998: 12, 40; Benjamin 1968 [1935]). Following Carl Schmitt, Agamben's primary example unearths the potential at the heart of state sovereignty that underpins how absolute and unyielding forms of power lay dormant within the rule of law that democracies uphold.

Agamben also sees the effects of 'potentiality' in the forms of social alienation he understands as being inherent to modernity. He can therefore posit that it is from within the mechanisms of constitutionally enshrined sovereignty that hold such arbitrary powers, that one can witness how the *homo sacer* figure comes to have social significance. Moreover, Agamben portrays these mechanisms as having arisen from the long-term historical transformations of the state institutions themselves. In this regard, he proposes that the bureaucratic apparatus of modern states acting in a technical and managerial capacity heedlessly embraces abstract forms of power in order to act upon 'mass populations'. Agamben sees these mechanisms typically starting as mere working practices for managing unexpected problems such as would arise in an emergency situation, but he argues that with time they become full-blown ideologies such as those of national health, hygiene and race. He also argues that an important aspect of these transformations lies in how ordinary subjects will succumb to social pressures and eventually come to understand themselves by adopting the new norms. Agamben's analysis therefore focuses on how norms or laws become embodied, often through self-sacrificial rituals that engender self-discipline and modes of self-government that will, over time, come to transform everyday social conduct.

Agamben's thesis therefore explores the consequences of the law on human-being and the self-understanding promoted by 'language' that is at times at odds with, and even threatening to, other modalities of being in the world. In the most extreme case, this can be understood as an underlying threat upheld in law and society of being reduced to an outcast, to becoming animal and bare life. In more ordinary circumstances, this relates to how people often accept their sentient experiences to be at odds with accepted social norms. This overarching theme draws *Homo Sacer I* and its subsequent volumes together by outlining how, as the speaking, reasoning animal, human beings need to occasionally rediscover themselves through 'originary activity' based on the blurring of established boundaries. As a remedy, Agamben indicates that the ways of overcoming this existential predicament involve taking part in social reversals in ritual, therapy and spiritual practices.

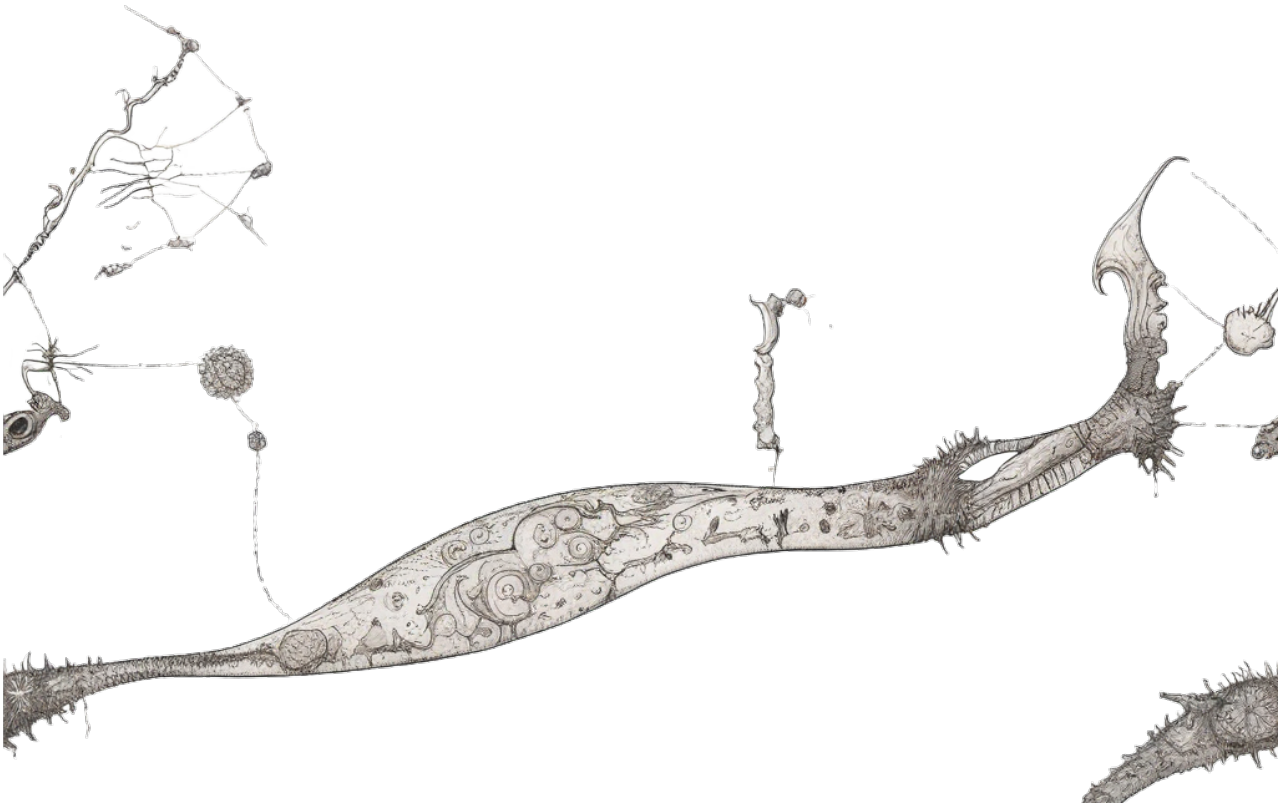


Figure 7: Author, *Espejo Humeante*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

To better understand Agamben's ideas, it is perhaps necessary to first recognise how he uses forms of disclosure that initially might appear to be contradictory or counterintuitive. The awkwardness of the juxtapositions created are then gradually overcome by moving between different types of evidence. In practice, this entails following how Agamben's form of argument uses both abstract theoretical and historical sources while moving between topological and figurative forms. Therefore a figure within a 'zone of indistinction' is necessarily a limit-figure associated with boundaries and the fears of all that is unknown and unquantifiable beyond them. Accordingly, it is both as a figure and a position that Agamben chooses to express the dynamics that relay between the centres of civic life of the metropolis and the most excluded, peripheral spaces and its bare-life inhabitants.

Concerning the figuration of *homo sacer*, Agamben's theoretical armature explores zoning and territory topographically and in an embodied mode. By using the paradoxical and contrarian characteristics of the *homo sacer* figure itself as being an excluded-inclusion, he can focus on the life that falls short of achieving humanity within the strictures of the law. As a result, this liminal figure, while being excluded from political life and being forced into the peripheries of social space, is also central to the maintenance of the social order. It is therefore unsurprising to find that the dehumanised *homo sacer* figure is customarily associated with nature and animals (Agamben 1998: 104–11). [5] This association is revisited in the final part of this essay, where I dive into comparative ethnographic and archaeological examples, to highlight how animal/nature and 'monstrous' imagery has both pre-historical and historical precedents that date to the period of early urbanisation.

Significant critiques of Agamben's philosophical programme have arisen in the wake of its recognition and

success. Librett, for example, has argued that Agamben's thesis is guided by an exclusively juridico-political understanding of a phenomenon that more accurately refers to a broadly 'theo-political' problem (Librett 2008: 11–12, 20–24). A question therefore remains as to whether a political-juridical framework can sufficiently address how the *homo sacer* figure stubbornly appeals to the quasi-religious domain of sacrifice, the sacred and the profane. The secular basis of Agamben's arguments is therefore criticised for being reductive as well as for misguiding readers about long-standing anthropological research on the subject of sacrifice.

In his defence, Agamben has argued in *Homo Sacer I* that the judgment that instantiates a discarded life is a form of 'capture' such that what remains can then be dispatched without any legal consequence. This devaluation of any sacrificial currency equates this life to that of a stray or wild animal whose physical death is *a priori* annulled in any accounting of legal responsibilities (Agamben 1998: 83). Still the idea of an animic 'capture' is not secular in the least – a subject I return to below.

Later critiques of the following *Homo Sacer* series (Vols. II–IV) often dwell on the politics of the *homo sacer* figure itself. These objections tend focus on the ethics of the figure as being helpless and entirely lacking in basic human qualities such as hope, resistance and struggle (Norris 2000: 47; Attell 2009: 35). [6] This aspect of Agamben's political thought has been characterised as promulgating 'quietistic passivity' and a 'mute helplessness in the face of death' that does not serve any socially oriented goals (Attell 2009: 37 fn6; Norris 2000: 47; Librett 2008). [7]

Regardless of these theoretical objections, *Homo Sacer I* was not ever a simple target for dismissal. Agamben's thesis found a contemporary and surprisingly congruent validation in the George W. Bush administration's conduct during its 'war on terror'. The ease with which democratic nations side-stepped international law and accepted legal conventions gave Agamben's figure, stripped of all legal protections, isolated and exposed to violence, an uncanny relevance. [8]

Regarding the primary example of the Covid19 pandemic, at this juncture it is useful to consider a number of structural oppositions that are relevant to Agamben's framework. For example, there is the contrast between the prolonged domestic confinement (bare life) of human populations and the activation of animal life along urban margins. This entails a shift along the primary axis of power whereby, we, the civil humans, who maintain our preferred order by reinforcing a permanent exile of entities seen as undesirable, uncontrollable and unhealthy, in a radical reversal, have our circulatory habits suddenly curtailed. These circulatory habits are rarely seen as involving territorial negotiations of humans vis-à-vis wild animals or even as circumscribing our own animal nature, but the circumstances of the lockdowns brought this aspect of how humans maintain urban environments into sharp relief. Secondly, the entire apparatus of the state of emergency brought to bear much more clearly the tremendous power of the law to radically circumscribe human freedom and bring entire populations perilously close to a condition of bare life. As time went on through the pandemic lockdowns, this self-discipline only became more onerous and entailed a sort of endless animic suspension while sacrificing some of our most basic instincts, including maintaining our habitual patterns of circulation and having a social life, caring for loved ones and performing timely burial rites.

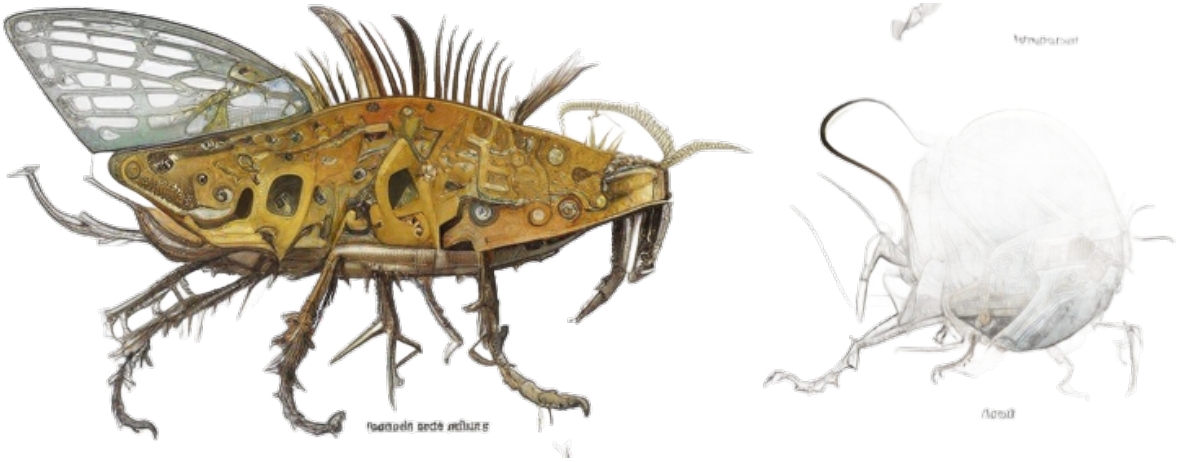


Figure 8: Author, *Another Agent*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

VI. ANIMAL LIFE ON THE EDGE: PREDATION, HYBRIDS AND MONSTERS

During the first lockdown of 2020, the sudden appearance of so many unusual animals in cities and other habitats claimed by humans around the world, as discussed above, reflects a long history of interspecies territorial negotiations. While many people marvelled at the animals' beauty and grace and expressed hope that their return would be permanent, reversing the dominant trends that indicate their gradual disappearance and extinction, for seasoned observers of the animal world, their appearance indicated the fact that many wild animals no longer have an autonomous natural habitat of their own. Many wild animals have become increasingly dependent on semi-urban ecological niches that they have carved out by making significant behavioural adaptations (Fehlmann et al. 2020). However, in the daily life of most urban centres, the ecological niches of peri-urban animals go mostly unnoticed precisely because it is advantageous for many of these animals to stay undetected. There is a socio-ecological aspect to their manoeuvring though the hierarchies of dominance operating in an urban zone. In the urban everyday, the appearance of a flesh-and-blood 'wild' animal is therefore still an unusually salient break. In such radically altered circumstances as those of the Covid19 pandemic, such salience may not only become amplified within a sense of a convalescent animal world regrouping, but it also highlights how human exemption from this milieu is predicated.

While domesticated animals and pets generally remain a household affair, wild animals caught out in the city are often treated as awkward, uninvited guests. Following the canons of urbane tolerance, any encounter usually means temporarily indulging these animals with a sort of graceful indifference until they present a challenge. [9] Before going into the intricacies of how unpredictable animal encounters may knock the ontological foundations of human-being, it is a good idea to point out that it is precisely at these moments of uncertainty that the tremendous weight of our evolutionary inheritance as a species can be seen to bear down most forcefully.

The 'canons of urbane tolerance' referred to here include the codified and uncodified civil standards of public behaviour, but also the standards concerning circulation and modes of exchange relating to goods. Both

embrace the same principle of fungibility. In the public sphere fungibility may, for example, be based on shared psychological principles, a mutual sense of upholding urban freedoms and the various civic values understood to be embodied in the institutions of the agora, temple, theatre and forum or their modern equivalents. However, in the drifting body-politics of the public milieu, 'tolerance' in the strict sense upheld under the principle of fungibility engenders the modes and mannerisms of fluid exchange and replaceability of bodies as such – as people circulate through the public milieu, the space taken up by one body will be occupied by another body an instant later. In this sense the fungibility inherent in the public order approximates that of the other realm – that of exchange – where it applies to the handling of goods, trades, contracts and various forms of banking. [10]

When this modus vivendi is undermined by the presence of wild animals (or persons of unstable mind or with criminal intentions) who provoke a territorial challenge, this forces a radical shift in attention: the neuroanatomy of alarm results in an activation of an acute stress response. [11] However true this may be, neuroanatomy as such does not provide for an account of the lived experience, nor is it able to explain how encounters of this kind are culturally integrated within human societies.

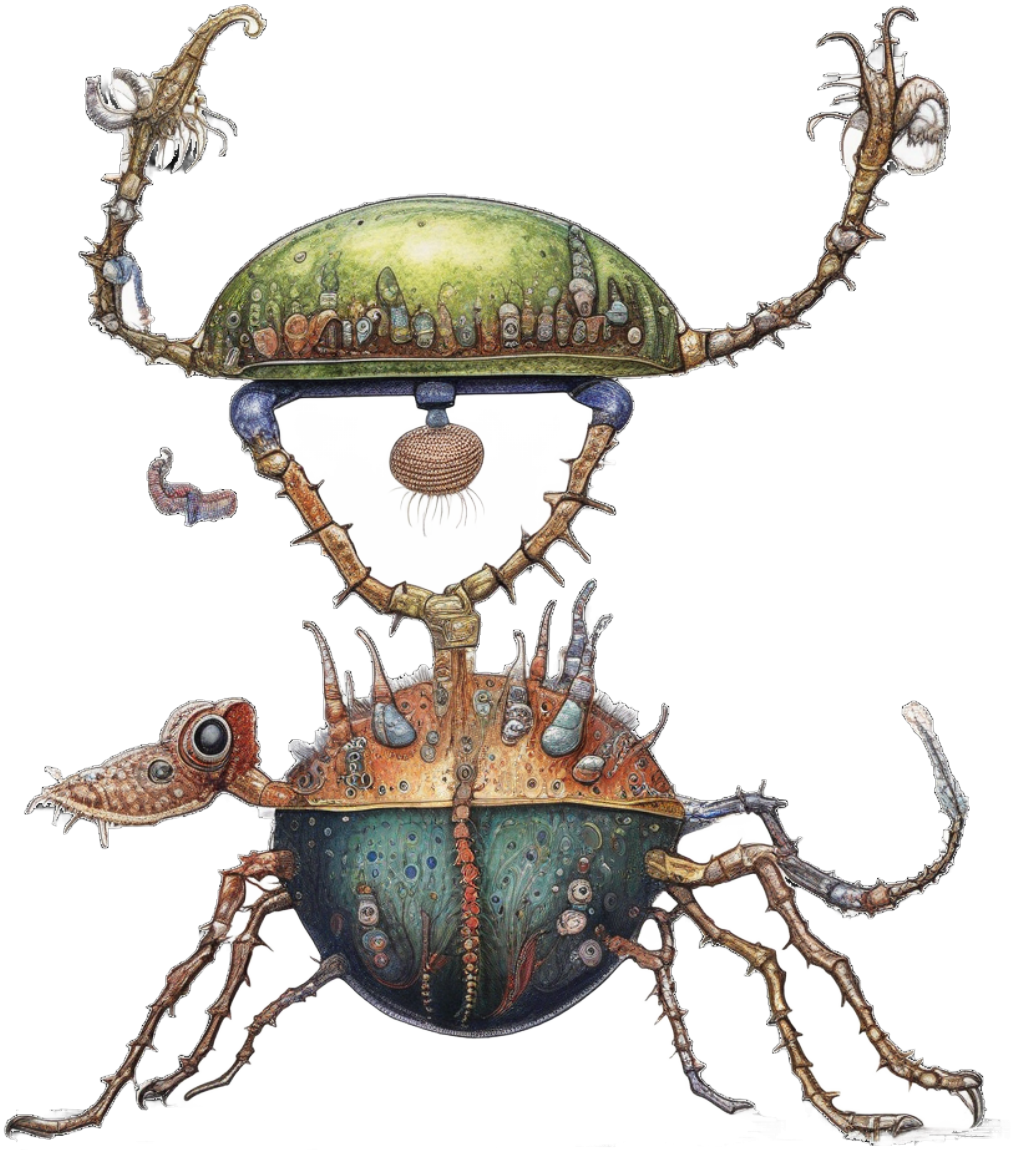


Figure 9: Author, *Bootlegged Neurotics*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

In relation to the latter, the ontological fallout – 'hair-raising and monstrous shapes' – of such encounters, has of late been an over-exploited anthropological fad that found inspiration in Viveiros de Castro's (1998; 2014) work on perspectival dynamics in Amazonian hunting societies. The issue of whether Viveiros de Castro's 'ontological perspectivism' was a convenient byway for middle-class subjects, caught up in competitive academic environments, to explore issues of predation, is a subject for another paper. However, the core of Viveiros de Castro's ethnographic observations offers a guide for pulling apart how the dynamics of predation motivates inter-subjective positioning. For my purposes here, this involves first recalling James Lovelock's (2020) claim that in the novel paradigm brought about by Covid19, the accepted order (that holds 'us' as the omnivore predator at the top) has undergone a complete inversion, and now 'We are the food'. Secondly, it needs to be recalled that several authoritative sources have traced the virus's genetic

parentage to at least two undomesticated animals thought to have been brought into close proximity in Chinese wet-markets.

According to the Amerindian example of perspectivism given by Viveiros de Castro, the phenomenology of a sudden and unexpected animal encounter (or indeed an attack by an enemy), is premised on the shifting categorical imperatives that take place as an alien presence emerges into the foreground of consciousness and perception. Transient, unstable figures emerge in a shuddering instant before perception settles on more recognisable shapes that allow relative ontological positions to be established. Therefore in the initial instance calling on all emergency resources, the reflexive body and perceptual apparatus autonomously and instinctually swing into action. Still in the process of becoming fully visualised images, fragments shiver through the skin and gather around in indistinct waveforms, creases and wrinkles. Simultaneously, the sudden convergence of intense 'heads or tails', predator or prey, stimuli sparks the need for an instantaneous reckoning. In the Amazonian example given by Viveiros de Castro, once predatory supremacy is settled, the prey surrenders or turns to flee and becomes dispirited 'meat'; the predator advances to make the kill, gorges on the flesh but also collects animic trophies.

No doubt, the variety of ethnographic circumstances where differing forms of perspectivism have been identified has also served to buttress different theoretical ends. For example: Rane Willerslev (2004: 630) early on argued that physical imitation and forms of empathy (mimesis) play a significant role in hunting skills of Siberian Yukaghirs, in which context they 'attempt to assume the point of view of the animal, while in some profound sense remaining the same. [...] it grants the hunter a "double perspective" whereby he can assume the animal's point of view but still remain a human hunter who chases and kills the prey'. Charles Stépanoff (2009: 288), noting what appears as a central contradiction in the ongoing debates during this period, states: 'strangely, the non-human perspective according to which humans are prey appears to be quite accessible to humans and, so to speak, not point-of-view dependant [sic]. This paradox is not a subsidiary one; it is intrinsic to perspectivism: the enunciation of the content of different perspectives, which is necessary to any formulation of perspectivist conceptions, by itself demonstrates that perspectives can be taken up without bodily change'.

Stépanoff, noting the degree to which many seem to misunderstand or misinterpret Viveiros de Castro (1998: 476–77), goes to some length in clarifying: 'Viveiros de Castro notices that Amazonian self-ethnonyms, usually translated as "humans", are pragmatically used as pronouns rather than nouns. These names are not a designation of humankind as a species; their signification is rather "we, people/us". Thus the animic attribution of this self-designation to animals is not anthropocentrism, but the recognition of their position as subjects [...]' (Stépanoff (2009: 291)'. Later, Stépanoff (2009: 294) adds that: '[...] the originality of perspectivist anthropology is the introduction of a phenomenological approach in a structuralist anthropology [...]. This focus on perception is not philosophically neutral. While any perception can be reduced to the perceiving subject and thus internalised ("I perceive nothing but my perceptions"), interaction implies a difference between a self and an Otherness' .

Finally, and significant to the spatial arguments found embedded in Agamben's theoretical armature, Stépanoff (2009: 302) uses a definition of the body of a being by its position in an interaction. This position-dependency he sources from collections of Siberian mythology and is further elaborated upon by way of an ethnographic source, a native Siberian Lot-Fack, when he makes a clarification in the following manner: 'While animal is a man in his domain, man appears as an animal, outside of "his home"' (Stépanoff 2009:

293). Perspectival changes appear in either case to be nothing other than consequences of a primordial positional movement and moreover 'this positional definition of kinds of body requires in any case a common referential space' (Stépanoff 2009: 302) which infers that 'in the forest' the hunter is estranged and counts as an animal amongst others and consequently admits to the possibility of becoming prey.

Situated in the grey area between hunting and ritual, the anthropological work on perspectivism is generally exemplified in hunting cultures guided by acute animistic concerns where embodied or disembodied *anima*, 'souls' or other spiritual entities are factored into everyday concerns that typically include nourishment, health, reproduction and protection from one's enemies. The analogy with the realm of 'bare life' – *zoé* – shows how Agamben's framework is partly contingent upon these anthropological themes. However, Agamben's insistence on using legal jurisprudence entails recognising only the infractions that fall within its endowment, including the entitlements of personhood or citizenship that are regulated from within the civic sphere, i.e. *bios*. At the same time, in Agamben's framing, when jurisdictional powers are utilised to remove protections and then proceed to 'capture' a life, this does however imply some sort of predatory intent.

The capture that Agamben describes however also entails the permission for any agent to thereafter terminate or 'dispatch' the residual form – *homo sacer* – that, having been reduced to the condition of bare life – *zoé* – is merely alive. This action is not considered murder, and as it does not constitute a legal offence, it incurs no penalty. Rather, as no particular form of property is identifiable in terms of rights, such an action is viewed to be as incidental as would be the death of a wild animal whose life and properties are of no concern to the law. *A priori* stripped of all any protection and value, bodies reduced to bare life can be argued to be the equivalent of desacralised, inedible 'meat' (Agamben 1998: 83).

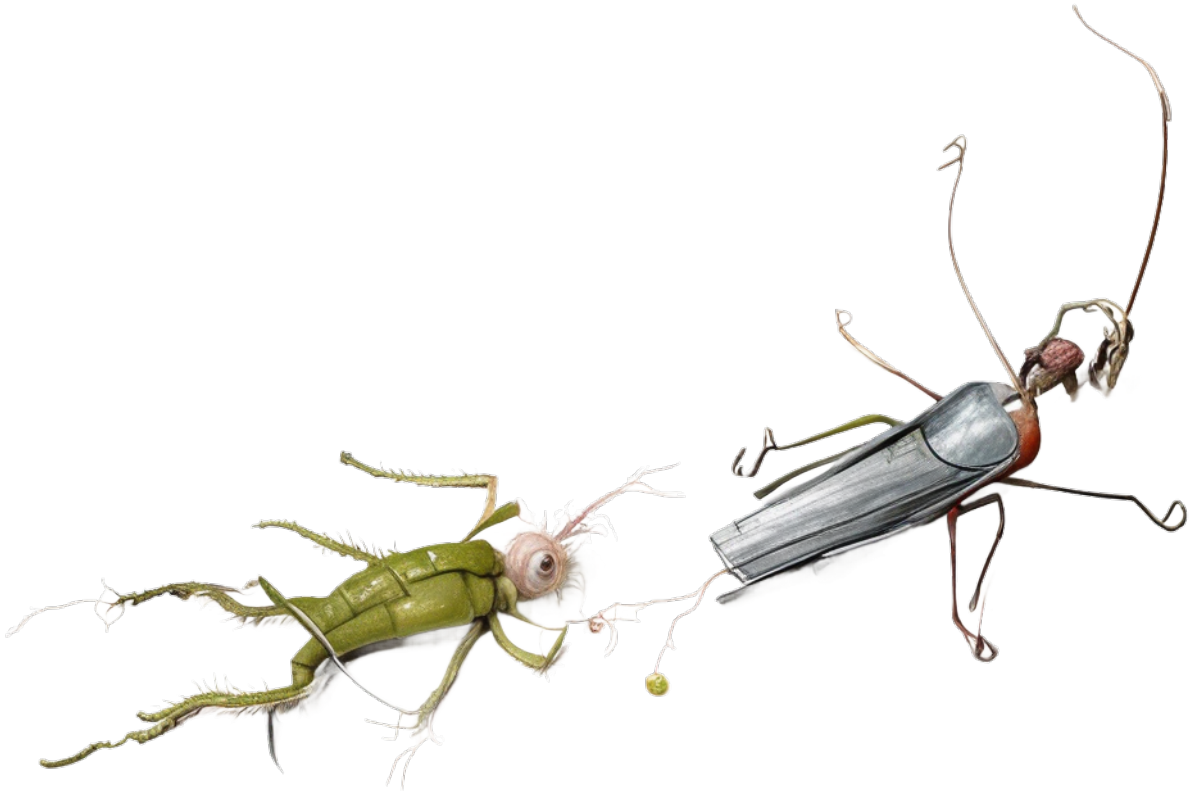


Figure 10: Author, *Dimestore on 5th*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

The issue of law, however customary, with regards to the treatment of 'meat' is a subject that cannot be more central to the concerns of classical anthropology. Lévi-Strauss (1966; 1969), for example, made the strict norms found in every culture for the treatment of meat a sufficient basis for the societal segregation of human societies into 'us' – the humans on the one hand and 'them' – the animals and the brutes on the other. He observed that the ethical and aesthetic norms that govern the butchering and handling of meat also govern the fundamental prohibitions against cannibalism and its social equivalent, incest. Foundational 'laws' concerning the viability of marriage partners regarding degrees of consanguinity (neither 'too close' or 'too far') and those regulating food hygiene in the culinary arts are therefore understood as structurally homologous. Their cultural impact is moreover often so great that they will come to govern all other forms of exchange and appropriation. Meticulous care and ritualistic respect consequently suffuse every element of human conduct in these regards. [12]

In the Chinese example above, starvation and reports of cannibalism were deemed partly responsible for reopening Chinese wet-markets in the midst of the Maoist revolution. Also discussed above is Agamben's invocation of Antigone – distraught for not being able to undertake the rituals of burying her dead. Laws whose origins lie in socially respected customs often reflect overriding existential concerns about maintaining social cohesion, but ultimately bear on how honouring these foundational prohibitions is essential to preserving a sense of humanity. Needless to say, these existential concerns arise against a backdrop of 'animal nature' or the horror entailed in the 'monstrous' and encompass the care for the body in death – whether it be in the prohibition of cannibalism, sanctioning of butchery practices or avoiding desecration by performing timely funerary rituals.

VII. ANIMALS AS IMAGES IN THE ECOLOGICAL SENSE

I now turn to the idea of treating animals as images in an ecological sense and the question of how these images participate in shaping a perceptual landscape: first, it should be reinforced how the Covid19 pandemic provided for a unique set of circumstances underscored by the legal injunctions that forced entire human populations into prolonged periods of domestic confinement. Over time, this was followed by myriad gradual territorial 're-alignments' through which many wild and peri-urban animals discovered that they were able to venture more freely from their habitual niches.

By reinforcing these observations, the argument returns to and extends the theme broached earlier of a predatory animal 'breaking cover' in an ambush. However, I also want to pry into evolutionary aspects of seeing – or not, as the case may be – animal skins against the visual and textural qualities of their habitual environments. I then compare how hybrid animal imagery is understood to have developed functional roles in the long transition from hunting societies to those based on animal domestication and more permanent agricultural settlements.

The 'ecological sense' that I want to convey therefore anticipates wild animals of all types carving out territories along the paths of least resistance and avoiding whenever possible the dangers of direct confrontation. Therefore, when, in an ecological framework, an animal is understood as the embodiment of a place, this is temporally inflected by the manner in which a species lays itself out in a territory through habitual patterns of extension. By stretching itself out in scent and sound as well as sight, around a

supporting ecological matrix, a territorial animal creates a bodily preserve that incorporates and overlaps with that of a multitude of other species. Over a span of evolutionary time, moreover, ecological territories can be observed to gradually settle on animals 'skins' as selective pressures favour visual patterns that mimic key features of the environment. The species with a well-developed ecological niche therefore finds itself emplaced and adapted to a natural environment where its physical appearance becomes advantageously disguised. Needless to say, this operates along the lines of each species' particular perceptual abilities. In this respect, the sighting of an 'animal' that suddenly emerges from this ecological texture can be regarded as a salient perceptual break from the protective cover that their 'extended skins' habitually afford them.

While it may initially appear incongruous to now address a set of much more traditional iconographic concerns, I believe that the discussion set out above paves a way for exploring the theme of hybrid animal imagery within a shared embodied and ecological paradigm.

Agamben (1998:104) briefly touches on Germanic and Anglo-Saxon wild-man figures found on the portals of medieval European cathedrals. Archaeological and art-historical sources offer a plethora of similar anthropomorphic and interspecies hybrids: chimeras, Pegasuses, sphinxes, dragons, griffins, Garudas, minotaurs, Cerberuses, Medusas, herms, Lamashtu and Lamassu figures are all generally associated with boundaries, portals and gateways of some sort. Their placement is often understood as having a functional purpose of being 'apotropaic' and having dissuasive, delaying or warning effects. As protective figures, such images often achieve these effects by having monstrous qualities; '*moneo*' literally meaning to warn (Lykke 1996:136).

In European cultural heritage and art-history, the monstrous realm or teratology is indebted to medieval-era sensationalism around the causes of human deformation, including bestiality, daemonic intercourse and unfortunate astrology (Braidotti 1996; Didi-Huberman and Lillis 2018; Stewart 2002). The most vivid examples of daemons are perhaps the succubus and incubus, whose viral imagery obsessed with insemination and embryology has long haunted western erotic nightmares (Stewart 2002: 286–295). [13]



Figure 11: Author, *Botanical Sketch c.1797 II* , generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

For archaeologists who research the iconography of apotropaic images, it is notable that this a phenomenon which becomes widespread during the Near-East and Mediterranean Bronze Age. It is therefore often identified as a factor that arises in the context of formative urban settlements and life-ways. Scholarly interest in animal-hybrid images is often embedded in this context and reflects on how they perform as a visual technology whose formal traits lend them a 'counter-intuitive poignancy' and attention-grabbing

qualities (Gell 1998; Boyer 2000; Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004).

Iconographically, this is a domain that is by-and-large characterised by a fixation on the animal world with a large allowance made for experimentation and metamorphosis. Whether 'eclectic bestiaries', 'hybrid collectives' or a 'formalised repertoire of stylistic parts' (Wengrow 2013), these images are based on the severing and reattachment of body parts. Their figurative plasticity, often suggesting supernatural themes, appears alongside a functional coherence concerned with modularity and standardisation: heads are held high, feet are on the ground, wings are on shoulders where they would theoretically work (ibid.: 28). They therefore present along the lines of re-combinatory milieus that are not too hard to decipher.

Characteristically, such images are also strategically placed; thus they appear within an established architectural, or urban, style and are in general found in the vicinity of doors, gateways or other thresholds. Viewed in relation to territorial functions, it can be surmised that these images force subjects into making a 'reckoning' in order to resolve the dilemma about how to best judge their predatory (or territorial) intentions.

Wengrow (2013) sets out an argument about how animal hybrid images may also have played a functional role in extending trade networks during the Bronze Age. In the example that he examines, miniature cylindrical seals with engraved negatives mechanically reproduce their image by impressing it onto a soft material: clay, beeswax or resinous gum – materials which were also used as sealants for ancient containers – a practice that has ample analogues in the ways in which products are still being marketed on any supermarket shelf today.



Figure 12: Author, *last Summer*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hybrids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Courtesy of the author.

The circumstances of competitive trade throughout the Bronze-Age Eastern Mediterranean required effective techniques for preserving the new forms of condensed value derived from the products of agriculture, metallurgy and high-value cattle stock. Thus, rapidly urbanising societies developing records, linear histories, genealogies and habit-forming material cultures, became increasingly aware of a dangerous potential for plagues, pathogens and contaminants. They therefore had to simultaneously develop effective methods of control to protect their products and keep these dangers in check. [14] Images or signs with apotropaic resonances can therefore be understood as an elemental part of sealing technology, albeit with a dual orientation: on the one hand, preventing contamination by oxidation or bacteria and thus guaranteeing the stability of a commercial product (e.g. vegetable oils, cosmetics, wine, opium, garum), and on the other hand, as 'brands' protecting against competition and inflationary market practices such as diluting and

substitution.

Wengrow's (2013: 50) question 'why did composite figures fail so spectacularly to "catch on" across the many millennia of innovation in visual culture that precede the onset of urban life?', however, suggests a certain reluctance on his part towards making use of wide-spanning analogies to cross over the apparent gaps 'in the archaeological record'. [15] It also might reflect how particular cognitive theories, such as those outlined above, struggle to provide a sufficient basis for understanding how such images could manifest in various different modalities over the *longue durée*. Considering this problem, Ucko (in Willis 1994: 17) suggests that societies which had once placed great emphasis on their relationship with certain animals might continue to express this indirectly in a later phase:

> What is at least as challenging is the realisation that for however long a particular society may have been involved with animal husbandry (or, presumably, farming), it may still be preoccupied in a major way with expressing its relationship(s) to fauna (and, presumably, flora) through ritual, dance, art, or special dietary preferences or avoidances, etc.

This comment points towards the power that certain animals exercise over societies regardless of the technological époque, indicating that animal images appear to maintain a degree of cultural transcendency.

SOME NOTES BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION

The Covid19 pandemic seriously challenged a relatively stable urban order and its corollary – globalised, networked society. Pandaemonium may have been the result, but was it? In this regard the prolonged lockdowns, frozen trade, domestic confinement and psychological individuation marked a retreat from public spaces and community life. Provoked by the community transmission of the virus in areas of high-density urbanism, long-term periods of confinement, reminiscent of the measures taken during the European plagues, were perhaps inevitable. However, the speed and scale of their implementation demonstrated the extraordinary powers modern democratic states hold over populations to keep them 'merely alive' by forcing entire populations into extended periods of 'suspended animation' or 'biological homeostasis'. State-led mobilisations had a devastating impact on how ordinary people could conduct their daily lives and also showed how, in the face of a life-threatening viral agent, democratic institutions tended to act much more like authoritarian regimes. In Northern Italy in particular, the stage was set for the shocks that spread to the rest of Europe and beyond.

While the origins of the virus remain an area of shady speculation, as witnessed by the enduring Wuhan lab-leak theory (BBC 2023), the idea that Covid19 had zoonotic origins quickly started to take hold in the public imagination. Aided by media reporting on the subject, a highly mobile and recombinant inter-species virus was understood as running rampant though the globalised structures of trade, commerce and tourism. This coincided with wild or peri-urban animals gradually emerging from the shadows and transiting though, then occupying, places that had by-and-large been in the human domain. At a time when the ordinary patterns of urban life had been turned 'on their head', therefore, a novel iconography of animals 'out of place' – on roads and streets, in city centres, on beaches and in parks – almost simultaneously started circulating across the globe. These images – digital representations of animal life – that appeared on

screened devices were then themselves recombined and republished, often with a tangible sense of enthusiasm about the 'return of nature' throughout the popular and social media-scape.

The discussion offered above addresses how Agamben's multi-modal methodology and sometimes unorthodox ideas can be mobilised to elucidate difficult-to-categorise phenomena that become accentuated in the exceptional circumstances of a 'state of emergency'. Agamben's focus is on the internal logic and means that the bureaucratic state has to enforce various forms of control and exclusion. However, this emphasis has been challenged by those who, while acknowledging the powerful analysis he brings to bear on the subject, wonder if a model based on 'law' is best equipped to handle the subtleties of such a complex and manifold arena that continues to unfold within our own era of high-tech innovation. W. J. T. Mitchell (2005: 310) for one noted that: 'we seem to be on the verge of reducing this most ancient question [of the meaning of life] to what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has called "bare life", a matter of technical means, a calculable chemical process' and asked, 'to what extent are the widely heralded innovations in biology and computation themselves mythic projections or symptoms, rather than determining causes? And above all, who is in a position to reflect on these issues? Do we call on the artists or the philosophers, the anthropologists or art historians?' (ibid.: 311).

Mitchell's questions hinge on a claim for what he calls 'bio-cybernetic reproduction' in effect replacing Walter Benjamin's 'mechanical reproduction' as the fundamental technical determinant of our age. Thus 'If mechanical reproducibility (photography, cinema, and associated industrial processes like the assembly line) dominated the era of modernism, bio-cybernetic reproduction (high speed computing, video, digital imaging, virtual reality, the Internet, and the industrialization of genetic engineering) dominates the age that we have called post-modern' (ibid.: 318–319). Moreover, Mitchell argues that:

> Bio-cybernetic reproduction [strictly speaking] is a biological science that makes cloning and genetic engineering possible. In a more extended sense it refers to the new technical media and structures of political economy that are transforming the conditions of all living organisms on this planet. […] Norbert Wiener, who invented the subject, called cybernetics 'the active field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or animal' (OED, 1984 ed.) *Bios* on the other hand, refers to the sphere of living organisms which are to be subjected to control, but in which may in one way or another, insist on "a life of their own". Bio-cybernetics, then, refers not only to the field of control and communications but to that which eludes control and refuses to communicate. In other words, I want to question the notion that our time is adequately described as the age of information, the digital age, the age of the computer and suggest a more complex and conflicted model, one which sees all these modes of calculation and control as interlocked in a struggle with new forms of incalculability, from computer viruses to terrorism. (Mitchell 2005: 313)

The frequency with which the figure of the virus appears in Mitchell's elaborate essay [16] is remarkable and brings up how viruses are seen and understood from within a digital medium in a way that can even question their assumed biological character: Are viruses alive? Are they alive in the digital soup of the mediums we depend on? Can they be said to be anything more than mostly sub-microscopic packets of self-replicating genetic information who irrevocably alter or destroy their hosts? These questions have featured in debates about the prospects for a multi-species ethnography:

> By the late 20th century, biologists were beginning to find that viruses and other microbes transfer genes across species lines as well as higher level taxonomic categories like families or even phyla – spreading genetic material laterally among living creatures, rather than vertically down generations (Helmreich 2003). Evolutionary theorists began to rethink their mappings of interspecies relationships, challenging prevailing Darwinian orthodoxies about linear descent (Margulis and Sagan 2002; see also Hird 2009). In the words of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: 'Evolutionary schemas would no longer follow models of arborescent descent going from the least to the most differentiated, but instead a rhizome. […] We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals' (1987:11). (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 555)

It seems that the virus, whether as genetic stitcher or computer malware, can be understood to produce one of the most stable homologies for the transfers and protocols building a networked digital realm and for the breakdown of biology into genetic codes. On the basis of this, Mitchell makes three categorical claims for bio-cybernetic reproduction: 1. The copy can no longer be regarded as an inferior or decayed relic of the original. 2. The relation between artist and work, the work and its model will as a consequence be both more distant and more intimate than anything possible in the realm of mechanical reproduction. 3. Bio-cybernetic reproduction also gives rise to a new temporality, 'characterised by the erosion of the event and a deepening of the relevant past, that produces a peculiar sense of "accelerated stasis" in our sense of history' (Mitchell 2005: 319). Regarding this final point, this becomes manifest in the widespread fascination with primitive and archaic images such as those of dinosaurs that 'become alive'. From a larger perspective, Mitchell muses that 'the region of the *bios* and the cyber is a rewriting of the traditional dialectics between nature and culture, human beings and their tools, artefacts, and media – in short the "whole man-made world" […]. It is also a reenactment of the ancient struggle between the image […] and the word, the idol and the law' (ibid.: 314).



Figure 13: Author, *When D'aLI met Eno*, generated with CF Spark: Flow 'Plant Animal hy-brids in the style of the Voynich Manuscript' at creativefabrica.com. Digital image, 2024. Cour-tesy of the author.

In this essay, the phenomena of human-animal negotiations, predation and monstrosity are addressed in relation to how a digitally 'viral' animal imagery spread across the globe in the wake of the 2020 pandemic. The corresponding video composites are treated as foregrounding a form of archaic hybrid animal imagery. The ecological parameters and the modes of visual perception these images provoke lead to an account of the perceptual factors in relation to themes of territory and predation. The comparative archaeological examples examined come from the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Bronze Age and provide an extensive archaeological context reaching back to the earliest periods of urbanisation, where such images appear to exercise a degree of agency and maintain functional roles in protecting and ordering urban spaces. The second comparative archaeological example from the same period examines hybrid animal images found on products in relation to sealing technologies that facilitated trade in perishable goods over the long-distance

networks that sustained these early urban societies.

The root words for 'pandemic' comes from the Greek *pan* – 'all' and *dēmos* –'people'; 'pandæmonium' however has an altogether more colourful etymological career. Coined in 1667 by John Milton in his famous epic *Paradise Lost*, 'pandæmonium' was dramatically located in the very centre of hell and was the abode of all the demons; later in the late eighteenth century it was known as a 'place of uproar and disorder' and from the mid-nineteenth century was used to signify 'wild, lawless confusion'. However 'daemon' never entirely lost its ancient Greek connotation of referring to a lesser or demi-god – resulting from the union of mortals and immortals. [17]

The subject of 'pandaemonium' is broached in various ways: one is through the figure of the 'animal' that is never entirely reconciled with the concepts of bare life, *bios*, *zoé* , nature or lawlessness. It is perhaps best described as a form of being in a permanent state of partial exile from the social sphere and as simply alien. Needless to say, the realm of animal hybrid imagery and the topic of 'animism' cannot be easily cordoned off into in self-contained categories as would be the case if they were simply defined as being traits of an 'animistic society'. Such a convenient anthropological fiction would by-and-large misunderstand how animism is often seen to provide the existential substrate for all social enterprises – much as how the notion of 'competition' animates modern conceptions of both biology and markets. Pandaemonium in the sense introduced in this essay would therefore infer the introduction of a novelty proper to the virus itself, one whose simultaneous impacts co-present across various scales and whose ecological negotiations challenge any reductive understanding of the relations between human society and the realm of animality.

ENDNOTES

The images found throughout the essay are a selection of AI generated digital images from my first foray into this highly automated form of online fabrication. While initially I had searched the web for 'copy-free' images of botanical drawings and hybrid animals from historical and archaeological sources, I soon found myself browsing scans of the Voynich Manuscript and wondering if or when AI would would aid in decrypting this enigmatic document. After being turned down or ignored in my various petitions over email, I was invited by one source to try out their AI service and generate my own images for which no rights were required for their digital publication. I was vaguely aware that my following this path would would lend a degree of internal consistency some ideas forwarded in the essay; so on the principle of avoiding the 'garbage in—garbage out' cycle of digital dreariness, I started see what kind of images I could create 'in the style of the Voynich Manuscript'.

[1] Regular news channels quickly picked up on the trend, for example: *El Pais*, *El Mundo* in Spain, *The Guardian* in the UK, *India Times*, WION in India and, ABC, MSNBC, NBC, Voice of America in the USA.

[2] '*The World*, *I&II* video series:

Curly Tales (2020). *Animals & Birds Take Over The Streets Amidst Covid19.* 8 April. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7ODSWI9CjU. Accessed 15 January 2024.

Indian Animal Rescue (2020). *With Humans in Hiding, Animal take Back the World. World Lock-down Effects on Animals*. 5 May. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7Z-ceQjsws. Accessed 15 January 2024.

ThinkBig Media (2020). *Lockdown Effect: Animals Ruling The World(Part1)*. 6 April. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37wkwG7EqG0. Accessed 15 January 2024.

[3] As China experienced a general collapse in demand for its manufactured products, this in turn triggered a much-reduced demand for oil and a worldwide 'glut' in oil markets. When the WHO declared on 11 March 2020 that the coronavirus outbreak was now a global pandemic, global crude oil markets experienced an unprecedented crash. Caught in oversupply, oil traders started to pay for their product to be removed from storage facilities forcing an inversion of oil prices, a unique event in the one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of the oil trade (Ambrose 2020; Almoguera 2020).

[4] Foucault, in *History of Sexuality Vol. I* (1978) describes bio-power and bio-politics as terms for the historical rise in state-led development of all manner of asylums, hospitals, prisons and other institutions concerned with regulating the health and hygiene of an entire national population.

[5] Proponents of Natural Law argue that this power would be an aberration as legal reason stems from qualities that are shared by humans and animals alike, such as the principles of bodily integrity and self-defence, the protection of one's kin and descendants, and of defence of one's property or territory. Animals also share the right to legal redress and to seek justice without reprisal. The overlap with the realm of *zoé* is perhaps not coincidental.

[6] Attell observes how Agamben and Negri have developed their ideas with an awareness of each other's work, and that their conceptual itineraries have often run a parallel course, noting how Antonio Negri's references to *The Coming Community* (1990) and *Insurgencies* (1992) were generally sympathetic. But with the publication of *Homo Sacer I*, Negri started to make a number of pointed critiques, indicated two incompatible accounts of bio-politics, and attacked Agamben's notion of bare life as inert, impotent and a politically useless paradigm (Attell, 2009: 35; also see Vatter 2008: 45–70 and Agamben's multiple articles in Negri's journal *Futur Antérieur* in Italian).

[7] Also see Norris 2000 and Power 2010.

[8] Domestic legislation in the USA granted extraordinary powers to the state, while in the international realm, a network of irregular or 'black' sites processed captured terror suspects, subjecting them to secretive 'extraordinary rendition' and long-term interrogations including torture at offshore facilities such as Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. A euphemistic nomenclature was employed that elided the United Nations legal requirements of the Geneva Convention on the rights of war prisoners. This included the following terms: 'war on terror', 'extra-ordinary rendition' for abduction and 'enemy combatants' for prisoners detained indefinitely and without charge. For a record of 'rendition' flights see *The Guardian*'s online interactive database available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2013/may/22/rendition-flights-cia-mapped.

[9] See, for example, Aníbal (2023), in which the author cites Candea (2010, p. 249): 'As a cultivated form of indifference, interpatience shows that "in a world of potential threats and predators, learning to ignore

another living being is a contingent and revocable achievement, one in which engagement and detachment are inextricably entwined"'.

[10] Gaius III, 90: 'Of real contracts, or contracts created by delivery of a thing, we have an example in loan for consumption, or loan whereby ownership of the thing lent is transferred. This relates to things which are estimated by weight, number, or measure, such as money, wine, oil, corn, bronze, silver, gold. We transfer ownership of our property in these on condition that the receiver shall transfer back to us at a future time, not the same things, but other things of the same nature: and this contract is called Mutuum, because thereby meum becomes tuum.' (http://legalhistorysources.com/Law508/Roman%20Law/GaiusInstitutesEnglish.htm#THIRD%20BOOK) I would like to thank Marisa Real Mesa for pointing out the principal of fungibility in Roman law.

[11] Acute stress responses stem from activation along the Sympathetic-Adreno-Medullar and Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal axis. See https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6043787.

[12] As hunting cultures form dense interrelationships between reproduction, consumption and transformation, there are powerful associations between carnivores that may turn into shamans and shamans that turn into animal carnivores in particular places or by consuming drugs or particular foods (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975). The ways of keeping these transformative potentials in balance operate through adhering to the rules of exogamy, prohibitions of incest and the avoidance of overt animality (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971).

[13] Charles Stewart concludes by making the following observation about his broad historical survey of erotic nightmares: 'The idea of a viral history is purely analogical; the incubus may be rhetorically and physically contagious, but it is not a pathogen like HIV. This study of the erotic nightmare complex does, however, supplement Sperber's (1985) "epidemiology of representations" by calling attention to the role of feelings and emotions in the spread of ideas. The diachronic transmission of the erotic nightmare depended perhaps more on the transfer of a powerful bundle of affect than on the reception of cognitive ideas. Representations of the erotic nightmare have indeed transformed as they went from individual minds to collectively available media and back again, as Sperber envisaged (1985: 75)' (Stewart 2002: 303).

[14] It can also be suggested that the origin of this particular kind of hybrid imagery is more narrowly associated with practices for controlling favourable traits in domesticated animals by constraining the natural flow of genetic mutation. The obsession with controlling mutability in animals, although not represented pictorially, could then be argued to start much earlier than the Bronze Age; perhaps even with the domestication of wolves some 40,000 years BCE.

[15] The question could be framed to challenge if such cognitive structures are really discoverable 'in the archaeological record' or whether they should rather be understood as semiotic artefacts emanating from the 'inter-artefactual realm', which therefore would require factoring in how the record is itself reconstructed, represented and exhibited (see Preziosi 2003; Caruthers 2004). The question Wengrow poses may therefore be mostly rhetorical.

[16] 'The Work of Art in the Age of Bio-cybernetic Reproduction', chapter 15 (pp. 309–335) in Mitchell (2005).

[17] Online Etymology Dictionary: https://www.etymonline.com/word/pandemonium

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