

FUTURE COUNTRYSIDE

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HYPNAGOGIC (SC) ROLL

Thinking about the countryside begins for me with the memory of falling asleep in the car as a child. The countryside was a place where I woke up, with the dark fields rising up around me as I fell asleep, and woke back up. That is my most primordial memory of the countryside. The state of hypnagogia is the state between waking and dreaming that we experience very often. It's a time of heightened suggestibility, illogic and fluid association of ideas.

The phenomena where concepts are turned immediately into images, is what the psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer called 'auto-symbolism.' While that might sound very mystical and wild it's actually something that we experience regularly. Auto-symbolism is also the zone in which one has what is scientifically called the 'Tetris Effect.' If you have ever spent the day in the ocean and then, while falling asleep, felt that motion coming back over and over – that is the Tetris Effect. The idea of 'Hypnagogic Scroll' is connected to the digital and also maybe to the landscape. We look at these infinite pages and infinite feeds – between light and dark, between wakefulness and secrecy. The landscape also rolls on in a similar way.

The countryside is a sort of theater of the mind – it's what we see when we read and it's what we are imagining behind our eyes.

I think the countryside is imaginary. It is a literary space. The countryside is not exactly the rural and is definitely not everything that isn't urban – I would argue that the desert is not the countryside nor the jungle or rainforest. Many rural environments to me lack the coherence that make the term 'countryside' an accurate des-

cription. The countryside is a dream of coherence – it is a false coherence, projected on a very real landscape. Thinning out is crucial to understanding the countryside, it becomes a metaphor of light and dark – the countryside is where the lights thin out. So thinning – can also be a dimming.

THE FORE-TELLERS

In 2009, the science fiction writer Bruce Sterling coined the term 'Dark Euphoria' to describe the coming decade – the decade that we have more or less just lived through. 'Dark Euphoria is what the twenty-teens feel like. Things are just falling apart, you can't believe the possibilities, it's like anything is possible, but you never realized you're going to have to dread it so much. It's like a leap into the

unknown. You're falling towards earth at nine hundred kilometers an hour and then you realize there is no earth there. That's a dark euphoria feeling.'

Today, I am looking at how that darkness may be updated. K-HOLE – my art and trend forecasting collective, which I worked with for five years in New York – was once asked to define 'the future' by a magazine. This is the type of thing that is often asked of trend forecasters. 'Where is the future? Where is it going to happen?' Of course we knew this was a trick question: so much of being a trend forecaster or strategist for brands is being able to answer trick questions on the spot. We said, 'the future is in the fog.' Of course that was a vagueness that was intended to point out an ambivalent relation to our own discipline.

We wanted to know the future and wanted to be able to project it with certainty, but of course, as we did it we knew that it was almost

always completely false – it was more a dream of an emergent reality. I like to think about what the great filmmaker, writer, tarot reader and mystic Alejandro Jodorowsky says about the tarot and about reading tarot cards as a way of predicting the future: 'you must not talk about the future. The future is a con. The tarot is a language that talks about the present. If you use it to see the future you become a conman. You are just a charlatan... Nothing is a matter of probability. If you set your spirit to something that phenomenon will happen. When you are determined, when you deeply enter that dimension that I call the dance of reality, the world dances around you and gives you what you seek.'

In Ursula Le Guin's novel, 'The Left Hand of Darkness,' the protagonist has this line about 'one of those admirable professional prophecies applicable to any outcome.' The Left Hand of Darkness features an emissary from a league of planets to a new planet called Winter, where it is very cold and snowy, to convince them to

join his group of planets. To find out more he has to leave the city and go into the countryside to encounter a group of 'foretellers' who are capable of finding the answer to almost any question. So he is on this ultra cold planet and is going up a super steep, almost Himalayan style, mountain through snow drifts where it is 40 degrees in the sun and -5 degrees in the shade. He then finds himself in the countryside where the coherence of the city breaks down in a chapter called, 'The Domestication of Hunch.' He arrives and the people are practicing a discipline of presence, an untrance, a form of self-loss. The protagonist is thinking, 'Legends of prediction are common throughout the whole Household of Man, gods speak, spirits speak, computer speak. Oracular ambiguity or statistical probability provide loopholes, and discrepancies are expunged by Faith.'



He continues into the forest, where he meets the 'foretellers.' At the center is the weaver – the one that keeps tension and responses of the group 'running in a self augmenting pattern until a strain breaks and one reaches through to the answer.'

Reading the future from the countryside is something quite different than giving an official, considered, forecast of what might happen. In the foreteller's words:

Don't you see why we perfected and practiced foretelling? No – To exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question.

When I was 21 or 22, I came across a text called the 'Gonzo Futurist Manifesto.' I was extremely excited because it featured another literary character near to my heart, Cayce Pollard from William Gibson's 2003 novel 'Pattern Recognition,' who is a cool hunter and trend forecaster in her own right. Her incredible powers of understanding and reading corporate logos are connected directly to a crippling anxiety. If she ever sees the Michelin man or certain other corporate logos she almost has to be hospitali-

zed. There is a deep, deep fear of corporate logos that also power her enormous abilities to read into the future of business. The literary theorist Lauren Berlant, quoted in the 'Gonzo Futurist Manifesto,' calls her an empress of the amygdala. The amygdala is the part of the brain that processes fear. So the trend forecaster is someone that goes out into the wilderness and processes information through fear.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE NAUSEOUS

The future will reach us as a form of nausea. Maybe not a physical kind – it has to do with this manufactured normalcy deforming and becoming an affect. It will reach us as a feeling, a sensation, as something we experience in the dark, not necessarily something that we see and not necessarily something that we read. Perhaps inside a building with no windows, perhaps inside a building that's bigger than some towns or villages. As we approach – or already experience the collapse of consensus reality – the dark future is not necessarily a euphoric or exuberant one as Bruce Sterling mentioned – just as the countryside is not necessarily a safe or happy place. It is a place of danger, lack of visibility, loneliness, it is a place where women have been put to work, but where the dimness of the lights show us that we should embrace a future that is based on unknowing and reversal. We should take on the repose of the hangman in tarot who is upside down as the future comes toward him.

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