For he’s a jelly goo fellow: Daimon Cult

Thomas Feuerstein

Lampreys

The tide is on its way out and the Gironde is sluggishly pushing its water toward the Atlantic. It’s just after 4 a.m. when Rei and Lara board the Zodiac inflatable. Jacques is sitting yawnning at the tiller and presses the ignition on the outboard. The two-stroke bursts into life with a splutter, and the boat gradually picks up speed, past the expensive yachts and offering a last view of Pauillac, vaguely discernible with its street lights. During the summer months, hordes of holidaymakers flock here to sunbathe, but above all to eat, and drink Bordeaux. By contrast, in late April, the Médoc peninsula is quiet, barring the occasional spring storm. Having passed the harbor mole, Jacques heads downriver for the Atlantic, for a secret mooring point. The three are searching for lampreys, a regional specialty when prepared with leek sauce and garlic bread.
On reaching the flats off the coast, Jacques kills the outboard. Dawn is now breaking and the mouth of the river is bathed in a dark azurite blue. They look around for a white buoy that is bobbing lazily in the incoming surf. Every movement is a matter of routine and no one speaks. Lara leans out over the inflatable and ties the rope to the buoy with a double loop. Using the gaffing hook, Rei pulls in a rope covered in thread algae and shells, and together with Jacques hauls in an aluminum and plastic fish-trap up from the depths – it somehow resembles an abstract sculpture. Underneath it, seven conically tapering, nested tubes spiral into it, where a futuristic steel cartridge lies, containing the sex hormone 3kPZS. Sea lampreys are magically attracted by it and ecstatically wrap themselves around the source of the scent. With a skillful twist of his wrist, Rei opens the trap and, wearing a thick glove, pulls out the mass of lampreys as if removing Medusa’s head. Jacques and Lara assist, tugging the eels into the boat. The Zodiac is soon a slippery mess, the snake-like fish sliding around the rubber bottom. Jacques keeps his distance, given their bite.

“Mind they don’t sneak into your boots. Their teeth can grab your calves or lower arms.”

Clothing and the boat are soon covered in slime, and pulling in the catch is hard work. One by one, the transport box next to the tiller fills up, and the water tank becomes a morass of motion. A few of the lampreys are exceptionally large. While Jacques likes them best as lamproie à la bordelaise along with a glass of Moulin Haut Laroque, geneticist Rei and his doctoral student Lara are primarily interested in the eels’ genetic material. They’ve been collecting genotypes from lampreys from all over the world, from the Danube Delta to Patagonia.

The rising sun dispels the cold of early morning and the three start to talk. Jacques takes out some metal beakers, opens a bottle of cider and pours a round.

“The estuary has changed in recent years. The river and the sea now speak a different language. You scientists are astonished by the biodiversity and forget the big picture. A river’s mouth speaks in many tongues, and I hear foreign voices amongst them now. There was a time when it was zinc and cadmium from paint factories in the silt. Now it is foreign species. It all started back in 2004 when we caught a harmless piranha. And since then the most incredible things have happened. The estuary is a babble of fish.”

Lara has no time for fishermen’s tales. “I’m hungry. Let’s get going.”

At the quay, Zoé is waiting at the pick-up with punches for the biopsy. Lara grabs the eels by the head and skillfully inserts a gloved index finger into their mouths. Rei feels their bellies next to their gonads and uses a punch to take tissue specimens. Zoé takes smears of slime and then plops the wriggling eels into a tank on the flattop. It’s all over after only 15 minutes. The samples are all packed and tagged, placed in the cooler. Rei and Lara climb on board, as does Jacques, and Zoé drives them through the Rue Victor Hugo to Jacques’ restaurant. They peel off their overalls and heavy boots, ready for a hearty breakfast. Zoé disappears barefoot into the kitchen with the fish tank, while Jacques takes a piece of chalk and writes on the slate board next to the entrance, “MARÉE DU JOUR! LAMPROIE À LA BORDE-LAISE”.

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“I’m glad to have the beasts in the kitchen. They’re getting more aggressive by the year, and biting tourists. Last summer there were four incidents, and the media just loved to indulge us with stories of confused pensioners and screaming mothers. They’re like leaches, as they don’t let go when biting, scraping small bits of flesh out of your back or legs, leaving you with a round scar.”

Lara opens a bottle of Caillou Blanc, and they raise their glasses to toast to a mild spring morning.

“Jacques, they not only tap your blood, they want your genes, too. Lampreys are hunters and gatherers. They’ve established a veritable DNA menagerie with genes of different fish types, and from endotherms and humans. These prehistorical creatures seem to have found a way of interacting with other species. Each bite results in a bloody download.”

Rei takes a sip of mineral water and interrupts Lara.

“These living fossils have hardly changed over millions of years. Which is why we’re studying their genetic make-up. In some specimens we discovered a large number of DNA sequences that can change position. These transposons, as they’re called, don’t occur through mutation, but are transposed from one species to another, although we don’t know how. That’s much more exciting than plain vanilla sex.”

Zoé serves bread, butter and crevettes blanches with aniseed. She’s a marine biologist from Brittany and works at the Biologique de Roscoff Research Institute. “What do you guys think of Lamprey? I mean the organization, not the creatures. It started out two years ago. Since then it’s popped up on house walls, busses and rocks – graffiti with those nine eye spots in a snaking row.”

“You mean those images with the slogan JOIN, or DIE?,” Jacques butted in. “They’re Parisian bioactivists. They’re not from here. They held a happening last fall, down on the beach at Soulac-sur-Mer. Sprayed the sand with bacteria and it took only a few hours for a slimy biofilm to grow – in psychedelic colors. The locals and tourists were incensed, as no one knew what it was. The mayor went on record saying it was some miracle of nature. Two days later he announced on France 24 that he would have the terrorists hunted down.

And then it turned out that the bacteria are harmless. In fact, the micro-organisms cleaned up the polluted sand and, in passing, wrote the words JOIN, or DIE across a stretch of some 100 meters of beach.”

Protoplasm

Three weeks later, Rei is lecturing in Bremen at the Max Planck Institute for Marine Microbiology, on the role of glycoproteins in the formation of slime. Rei is one of only five specialists in the field worldwide, and that’s also the exact number of students in the seminar. He is just extricating himself from the slime of a hagfish – which, like the lamprey, is a cyclostome – when Hans-Peter puts his head in the half-open door. "Rei, could you please come to my lab, I’ve got something for you that relates to the topic.“

Two flights of stairs down, and Rei and the students
are standing in front of a bioreactor.

“The stuff comes from a mineshaft near Sulzberg in Bavaria. It covers the walls and grounds there, long thread that hangs like stalactites from the ceiling. The underground galleries were only rediscovered a few years ago, and a sample found its way, by hook or by crook, to me. The slime is pretty easy to culture, grows super-fast, and adapts swiftly to ambient conditions. Essentially, this whitish-yellow slime is a classic biofilm consisting of several dozen microorganisms. Yet there is a massive amount of DNA freely floating around in this highly viscous soup, as if the cells were turning their cores inside out to form a plasmodium, like with slime mold.”

“Remember the slime molds, those miraculous life forms. They start with single-cell amoeba that gang up under certain ambient conditions and meld to form a multi-cellular mass of protoplasm. Well, that biological multitude forms a single, huge cell and crawls slowly across the floor like an alien*. Finally, mushroom-like, fruiting bodies grow and almost all the former amoebas sacrifice themselves in the process. Only a few become spores and pass on their genome. For me, it’s a premonition of Christian ideas and a Leviathan of biology, an allegory of the emergence of nations.”

“Professor Rei, at German universities we tend to refrain from combining biology and ideology. But I would agree that this life form is somehow reminiscent of an alien*. We were astonished to find out that the biofilm uses more amino acids than does normal life. Nature has hundreds to offer, but only a good 20 are used in human cells. The goo includes quite a few dozen of them, all actively used. If you add molecular glucose and other energy sources, the system grows quantitatively. If you feed it organically – that is, living cells – then the genes are integrated into it on the spot.

And now to why I called you over. This slime turns biology upside down. Half of the material is xenobiological and does not fit the bacteria identified in the slime. Genetically, some of this is identical to the lampreys’ transposons. Could you conceive of the lampreys being the genetic basis of this slime?” “Confusing. As then the parasite* would be the host*, and the animals would then act as archaic servers* to which information* would be temporarily stored.”

“Maybe only as interim hosts. All manner of organisms that come into contact with the lampreys would be the final hosts. The slime is possibly far older in origin, a primordial swamp thing from the primeval soup*.”

“So a kind of slime thing?”

Some of the students smile. At least the mood is brightening. Boris has studied for 12 years and is a passionate astrobiologist.

“So it’s star bogeys. Or what we also term meteor jelly, star jelly or astromyxin. In the Middle Ages, they called it stella terrae. Many cultures the world over mention it. To this day, it* tends to appear most after meteor strikes. Microbiologists explain the phenomena by referring to the excrement of birds or mammals that contain residues of amphibian spawn. Others assume that slime molds are behind it. But that doesn’t make sense. The molecular compositions vary, and there are too many deviations from known organic materials. Numerous assumptions, but few publications. Information gets swapped surreptitiously. No scientist wants to be considered subjective or mad and jeopardize a career. And all the faithful would simply be mortified if it turned out we were not made in God’s image but born from slime.”

Boris tends not to talk much, but once he gets going there’s no stopping him. “I’m in no doubt that all life originates in the slime. And when we die, we revert to slime. We fear slime, because it stands for some dark energy and we associate it with infection, decay and horror. It is archaic and seemingly uncontrollable and dangerous. For us astro- and xenobiologists, by contrast, slime is the very matter of which dreams are made. We still believe in cognition that exceeds mind and ask: How did life arise from the slime of the interplanetary primeval soup*? What structures matter, and engenders ever more complex compounds and bonds? What emerging force bonds atoms to forge amino acids, proteins and cells? To be slime or not to be, that is the question.”

Rei and Hans-Peter gaze in fascination at the glass reactor vessel and watch how the moisture, condensed into small drops, gets absorbed by the slime. Hans-Peter opens the refrigerator and places a bottle of beer in front of each of them, which
Boris reads as an invitation to continue.

“Sperm, blood, fluids from the bowels, lymphatic fluid, spit. Humans are full of slime, and because we are ashamed of the fact, we invented culture to escape the slime. Culture means achieving a dry and firm status. A desperate attempt to stabilize things so they don’t glide out of our hands. Laws, museums, libraries, archives, rules, morality, rites are all strategies of conservation. Culture is a hopeless struggle against entropy*, decomposition and decay. If we fall ill, we expectorate slime. If our bodies exude slime, we fear we are dissolving. Slime has something alarming, infectious and epidemic about it. It trickles from all our pores, moistens our skin and interfaces us with everything we touch. It infects us and makes us part of its system as we become the seedbed for its existence. We’re frightened of it, because it makes it clear to us that we’re simply one splat of slime among others. Slime has no limits, it crawls, flows and drips, and knows no obstacles. There is no reason for fear or loathing. The fluid is what bonds people. We dissolve into slime and mix the juice in our cells. If we were aware that we are all but plasma, a single bubbling biofilm, it would put an end to all wars. Schopenhauer wrote about the mold covering the world, the mold that created living and cognitive beings, and had in mind a slime such as this. If you ask me what is in the bioreactor before us, then let me quote Schopenhauer: It is the empirical truth, the real, the world.”

* Back in his hotel, Rei lies down on the bed and dozes. The sheet becomes damp and thin threads drip from the ceiling. Viscous jelly streams slowly from all the cracks in the walls, immersing the room in a pale light. The air seems heavy with methane. Behind the half-opened box door opposite the bed, splats of slime sneak across the clothes-hangers like wet towels. They spread down and over the shoe rack, forming limp sacks of skin from bodies that have melted. They inflate to bubbles, in line to some slow rhythm, constantly changing their contours. A strange sculpture bereft of shape, constancy and structure.

Everything seems in motion and without identity. The slime subverts all order and obeys some mysterious process. Nothing is foreseeable. Within the world of slime there are no dimensions, no arrested time*, no permanent states, no beginning, and no end. Things remote and things close are blurred. The slime functions like a lens with no focus or depth of focus, flattening space and time, eliding differences and opposites. The images have no foreground or background, no perspective and no depth. They are as flat as a Manet, and span a hyperbolic foil tight across the room, upon which a film, projected from within, shimmers diffusely. The lack of difference creates an intermingling of differences, engulfing themselves, mixing to bring forth diverse bubbling streaks. The slime on the carpet resembles an ocean upon which the waves draw unclear shapes, tugged down by maelströms.

Carefully, Rei reaches for a drop that is oozing across the bedside lamp. He dips his finger tip into the mass*, which is like wet oil paint. A bit detaches itself and remains stuck to his fingertip, a vibrating cone. More drops peel off and form 3D pixels, painting a picture in space. Each dot gleams in a different color, and together they bring forth an unknown form of Pointillism. The picture folds and expands into strips that are stretched continuously as if by a taffy puller, and kneaded to create a relief by Frank Stella. Shortly after, the sculptural edifice implodes, sucking the slime back in from all corners of the room, as if an attractor were at work. The uncanny gives way to pleasure bereft of interest, and thoughts smolder away in a calmly crackling neuronal fire. Rei feels certain these are not images from his subconscious. This is no Surrealism. It’s something sub-real, a layer beneath reality, or perhaps the real, per se. Something that is revolutionarily ontic. Is art supposed to familiarize us more closely with reality, or to create a reality of its own? Is art a drug or is it Alka Seltzer? Does it foster cognition and show us the mysteries of existence, or does it help us get through existence unscathed? Is art a matter of escapism or a confrontation with the world? Does it provide answers or raise questions? Is art an aesthetic or an anesthetic matter?

Rei had hitherto felt art was a semblance of a world. An accessory of the rich, fostering social distinction –art you bought from the Gagosian, like bags or shoes from Gucci or Prada. But now, directly before his eyes, something radically different is unfolding. Function and reality no longer conflict, and the difference between art and nature suddenly seems pointless. Art is more than a symbolic language*, more than a metaphor or
It is no imaginary world, it is the real slime-world.

Sounds become softly audible, playing a familiar melody: Lee Hazlewood’s “Some Velvet Morning”. It’s his ring-tone.

“Rei, get back to Paris. There’s news. Take the 8.44 train, I’ll meet you at 15.59 at Gare du Nord. And I miss you.”

Do we really live in post-history? Has everything that happens already happened? If everything said is borne by vibrating atoms, then the vibrations create an everlasting archive of everything that was. As of a certain point, perhaps the interferences are strong enough to impact back on the present. Charles Babbage* thought that all sounds and utterances were stored in atoms. Matter would then be a universal library, from which a second-order daemon* could select to upload information and proofs of all kinds – going as far as solving crimes. Each grain of sand, each molecule of air would be part of a gigantic memory system, even our bodies’ atoms would be replete with data. Biological introspection must go deeper, and follow the insight that humans must descend into the flesh that they are to reach those regions where the affinity of matter and mind* is revealed.

The train screeches across the last set of points and comes to a stop on the central platform of the terminus. Zoé is waiting at the beginning of the platform.

“Rei, you look pale. You need a shower, but let’s have a Pastis first and slurp a few Belon oysters in my favorite brasserie Cap Vernet. It’s on our way. Incidentally, you’re sleeping at my place. The institute knows nothing about you being here and only covers expenses for lousy digs.”

“Tell me the news.”

“One thing at a time, and never on an empty stomach. We’ll visit an exhibition tonight and meet the members of Lamprey.”

Zoé is in her early thirties and graduated in Biology from the Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris,
before doing a Ph.D. in Roscoff on deep-sea microbiological habitats. At the age of 18 she wanted to save all the whales, but while a student her interest was kindled in dead whales. When a whale dies, up to 130 tons of flesh, blubber and bones sink to the bottom of the sea, forming an island of nutrition for countless species. Amphipods, hagfish and sharks get their teeth into the carcass, while bristle worms, mollusks and snails devour what’s left. It is not rare for there to be 45,000 species per square meter of ocean floor. Whale carcasses are gigantic rotting piles of slime that engender biofilms and bacterial lawns with enigmatic biochemical properties. The so-called annelid worms that hang like flokati strands from the whale’s carcass, are reminiscent of Lovecraft’s Necronomicon. Zoé specialized in oseax, the bone-eater, also termed a “blind zombie worm”. The annelid injects bacterial slime into the bone marrow to digest the fat, and is also completely covered on the outside with slime – which brought Rei to Zoé’s attention when she was working on her dissertation.

After the fourth Pastis, they feel relaxed and refreshed. Rei wants to order a Chablis and Livarot, the scent of which is wafting over from the neighboring table, but Zoé wants to get going. On Rue Newton*, Zoé lives in the apartment belonging to her sister, who studies art and is away for a year in Turin on a scholarship. After swiftly showering they are back out on the street and jumping into a taxi. It’s just after eight, and traffic is sluggish. Half an hour later the cab stops in front of a building bearing a sign saying Maison Mise en Misère. Young people in hoodies, older gents in black turtleneck pullovers and high boots pose outside the entrance smoking Gitanes and joints. Behind the wide entranceway there’s a high, almost square lobby, with no windows. In the large white room, a number of people are crowding round a woman in white who is speaking from the lectern.

Rei looks around for the works on show, but the exhibition is empty, except for the visitors. He fears there’s going to be a performance, a kind of art that for him is like theater without chairs and a form of torturing the senses.* The woman in white quietly starts her opening address. She talks about emptiness and immateriality, space and reduction, expression and presence. How boring these reenactments are, and the most banal thing of all must be the idea of reconstructing Yves Klein’s show Le Vide at Iris Clert Gallery. Her voice gains force and her words captivate the listeners. The sentences float and morph into objects that spread atmospherically in space and materialize like exhibits. The text triggers a surge of endorphins. The text is doubly coded: first as a plain story that sounds simple and easy-going, and then the subtext, written for the body’s molecules. The brain follows the instructions as if they were a manual, deleting and repositioning content to make new bonds possible. The symbolically coded words translate into molecular structures and create a neuronal reality. Consciousness transforms profoundly, and the walls between the visitors dissolve.

The opening speaker breathes the sentence “the exhibition is now” and the bright white room is dyed in red, violet, then purple. Space and time get fundamentally restructured, and Rei feels he is somewhere else completely. His sense of balance and orientation is upset, and only vaguely is he able to move in a coordinated fashion to the buffet. The makeup slides off the visitors’ faces and they resemble Carpenter’s aliens* in “They Live”. Rei gradually realizes, Amazing, this is posthypnotic neuro-art. No masses of materials, no plinth, all of it bereft of aura*, 100 percent neuro-performative and suggestively induced. No video or beamer required, each person their own projector. The rolls at the buffet crawl like beetles across the floor, cracks appear in the walls. Panic starts, and the first visitors rush to the exit. Art is not to everyone’s taste. Only a few art students remain, two collectors, a drunken gallerist who slept through the, and a handful of artists*. Calm is restored and the exhibition proper can begin.

“That’s apocalypse pure, the catharsis of nothingness, the long cherished cleansing of capital. Pure art. What remains is a void full of nuances. Tous pareils: où est la différence?”

The speaker is still wearing her white dress. But it is no longer gleaming like satin, but is furry, and her costume resembles the natural garb of a sloth. The anthropomorphic animal figure dances toward Rei and takes him by the hand. Is this Zoé? Well, it certainly feels like it. The work floats as ineffably as a never-ending story in space. Like an invisible spaceship in the mist of night, waiting for the last dregs and scum to salvage them. Those who remain regard themselves as the initiates. The
chosen ones of art, eschatologists who have survived the avant-garde Last Judgment and are now ascending to the eternal Olympus of the muses of art.

On the upper floor, a five-member band is playing fast rhythms, overlaid by a melody that subtly grabs you. The sound is somehow inverse, somehow Indian, or at least Oriental. The beat otherwise banged out by a bass is high, the melody kept in deep notes.

trois, trois – le jour de gloire est arrivé quatre, deux – contre nous de la tyrannie sept, six – que veut cette horde d’esclaves neuf, neuf – marchons, marchons

un, trois, neuf, six, zéro – pour qui ces ignobles entraves cinq, huit, huit, trois – c’est nous qu’on ose méditer neuf, huit, cinq, cinq – liberté, liberté chérie

six, sept, cinq, huit – nous entrerons dans la carrière trois – le jour de gloire est arrivé

In the band’s argot, the text rhymes, and Rei hums along. He recognizes the numbers and wonders whether they are phone numbers or PIN codes. As the refrain repeats the numbers, he realizes what they are. The number of molecules in a liter of water: 33427699139605883985567583. For Rei, a key number – as slime, which is 99.9% water – changes the number of moles. He scrutinizes the band members who are ecstatically at work at the keyboards, or aiming the guitars and bass at the audience like weapons*. Two men and three women move their bodies as if in the thrall of some severe demonomania*. One of them has an eye-patch – they must be the Lampreys. The air is hot and moist. Beads of sweat ooze from Rei’s pores and, once they reach pea-size, meander downwards with gravity, cloying, like slime across the skin until they soak into the fabric. There’s Tono-Bungay to drink, with or without Tonic, with a lot of ice and lemon. Rei has lost Zoé from sight and looks for her. Two girls in tight white T-shirts squeeze past him. Across their breasts, the initials D&G are emblazoned in rhinestones, and they don’t stand for Dolce and Gabbana, but for Deleuze and Guattari. Asked how they like the band and show, they quote qua duet. “Human misfortune stems from the fact of opinion. Science, philosophy* and art always involve an ‘I don’t know’, that has become positive and creative, the very condition of creation, and consists of determining by virtue of what it is that one does not know.”

Rei immediately realizes that his purpose is defined by what he does not know. Zoé is the girl under the wig at the bass guitar and the key to the mysterious events. There’s trouble in the air. Rei has fallen in love.

Fiction of no friction

We come from dust and return to dust; in between we expend energy on all sorts of things. Rei learned the sentence from his father, who was an economist and once ran a factory*. Art, in this regard, was one of those expenditures destined to turn the dust of history into money*. Everything obeys the dominant logic of capital and serves the self-valorization of the inherited assets. With
growing prosperity and success, life becomes ever more orderly. Or is it the other way around, and everything is just deception?

As the houses grow bigger, the white walls become more expansive and the need for art arises. The autos in the carport, the glittering pool in the garden, the freshly mowed lawn, the kids in private school, the wife wearing a dress by Versace. All of it orderly and well-kept. To compensate, you need dedicated zones for chaos and anarchy. Residual amounts which prove that beneath the smart surface there is depth, the unfathomable experience of the wildness of life. The uninhibited elements of life have long since been tamed and sacrificed to everyday functions. What could be better in the existential boredom than a Baselitz on your wall? Art is expensive and denotes class membership. Painting is expressive and cries out: I’m wild and Rock ‘n’ Roll. Noble art should be so, but not discerning. Art possesses all those things of which the bourgeoisie cannot get enough. An oily smudge on the wall, dripping capital, bereft of humor, bereft of seriousness. The perfect life, as without dangers, in a tamed frame. Painting doesn’t care less about the world. It is interested only in things painterly. The figurative is but a pretext for the free play of pure arrogance. Zen Buddhism for tranquilizer-damaged bankers. You can’t climb the social ladder by buying cars, jewelry, golf or Rotary club membership cards. If you started out at the bottom and want to get to the top, you need art as your free ticket. It is the key to the Nirvana of capital.

There are two essential kinds of collectors. The boring ones who circumspectly invest in redundancies, above all in the painted perpetuation of the identical in history, padding themselves in cotton and vegetating in the belief that all will remain as it is. And those who hurry to burn fast money, to prove their financial oomph. On the way home after closing a good deal, they buy things in some upmarket gallery boutique that no one else has and no one needs: derivatives of wasted opportunities for life.

From the kitchen wafts the fragrance of Galettes bretonnes. Zoé places bowls of café au lait on the table and dissoluble Aspirin in a glass of water. It was a long night, and it’s too late to return to the old life. Rei was hitherto driven by weightlessness in a Laplacean* universe and was obsessed with daemons* that thought each of his thoughts before him. Stories, myths, morals, methods, dogmas and laws were all parasites* and controlled his destiny like sacculina* on a crab. He thinks that nothing has become as rare as an independent act; most people are other people; their thoughts are the opinions of others, they lead lives of mimicry, their passions mere citations. That’s no wild idea, it’s Oscar Wilde. Until yesterday evening, Rei felt alienated and burnt out. There was no gap in things, no contingency*. Where is radical freedom? A freedom that construes life as a fiction and celebrates art as the highest form of fiction. What is needed is a panfictionalist liberation front. The fictions that stand out from the sea of latent stories should burst the world’s fetters asunder. Anything else would be merely distraction and illusionism*. Zoé looks cheekily across the kitchen table and smiles at Rei with his pale face.

“You’re confused. That, you hadn’t expected. The world doesn’t obey any laws of purity. The differences between good and evil stabilize power* but change nothing. Which is why the Lampreys exist. We don’t fight the crisis, we are the crisis.”

Rei rarely jokes, but if he’s in a bad mood he dons the role of Bruce Lee and lets his hands and feet speak.

“Zhè shiii! Don’t you think you’re taking yourselves too seriously? With what voice do you speak and where does your naïve faith in that critique come from? Yīì! Critique stabilizes the crisis. It describes the normalcy of capitalism*. Siì! Marx already knew that, for crises are the outcome of the inevitable fall in the profit rate in a capitalist economy dependent on innovation. Which is why all critique, especially that by art, is suspected of toppling the system. Liuuu! Critique is not only impotent, it’s counterproductive. Critical art is a placebo for a politics* that wishes for domesticated critique. Bāaa! The deal is: the fiercer the critique, the greater the recognition of the art. Art knows that, as do politics and capital, it’s simply a few artists* in their naivety who don’t want to know it. Lāó dù zii! Why did the Deutsche Bank prefer to always buy pieces by Beuys? Critique and crisis are like yin and yang. The sharper the critique of the crisis, the stronger the system.”

“That also applies to your criticism. I will cure your surfeit of ideas and lack of imagination. We’re
heading for Turin this afternoon. I will love you there.”

*  

The old pickup tears through the remaining wisps of fog on the Autoroute du Soleil. Zoë is driving, and Rei is busy watching the slimy film on the windscreen. It’s drizzling and the wipers squeak as they distribute the mushy mess. When the raindrops grow, gluey streaks appear, gleaming like oil from the soap from the windscreen washers. The rain flows lazily off the asphalt, and after a few kilometers there’s a river several centimeters thick on the blacktop, as if it were sleet. They take the next exit ramp and stop on a parking space a few kilometers outside Lyon. The air is warm but doesn’t smell like rain. The liquid falls from the sky in threads, covering the ground like a worm carpet. The translucent milky mass hangs from the bushes like tinsel. Rei wipes the hood with his hand and rubs the slime between his fingers. The friction causes it to become highly viscous, almost firm, but it swiftly regains its fluidity. It has almost no smell but for a slight mixture of strawberry and sweat. Rei has never seen something like it before. Some cosmologists claim that a brief storm of fundamental particles can trigger irregularities in matter. A so-called asymptopia could radically influence the behavior of materials such as water, at least for a certain while. As a biologist, Rei does not have much truck with physical speculation, as what is physically possible under conditions on earth has been explored by evolution* and exploited for life. There are various reasons for atmospheric precipitation. He assumes it’s all about pollen mixing with rainwater and swelling. From the compartment in the inside door panel, he takes out an empty water bottle to collect some of the heavenly secretion dripping from the car body.

“For my collection. At some point I’ll analyze the stuff. Maybe I’ll discover the primordial slime of life* and they’ll give me the Nobel Prize for infusorial goo.”

Zoë is taken by the idea and feels privileged to have witnessed the spectacle. She photographs the slime with her smartphone, tastes it with the tip of her tongue and slides around on the slick road surface like a daring kid. Rei gets back into the pickup and uses his fingers to comb the slime out of his hair. The scene is banal as a children’s party. But just as a clown can become absolutely evil, he shudders as a splash of slime slips down his back, becoming more harrowing by the vertebra. This is no sublime shock or delightful horror, but fathomless fear. Being chopped up and devoured is not as bad as having something at the back of your neck gnawing away at you for the rest of your life. Horror movies are like humor: You can shudder or laugh, but, be that as it may, life continues unharmed. Rei senses that nothing will be the same again. Everyday life is dissolving like meat in sulfuric acid and perhydrol.

“Zoë, I’m frightened. Man has changed nature, and now nature is changing us. We thought our understanding of things was constantly improving, but things have a will of their own and have gone on strike. They’re rebelling and raising their voices.”

“How can we be so sure that tomorrow everything will the same as it was yesterday? Like religion, the laws of nature offer us tempting certainty. Steady things for us, create confidence and orientation. We’d go mad without them, there’d be no society, no politics, no economics. The task of us scientists is to incorporate all miracles into the grand narrative of the laws of nature. If we fail, we have failed as the high priests of reason* and the world order collapses. You can bet we’ll read a simple explanation of the phenomenon in the press.”

“Media banality won’t save us. Post-horror is the truly banal, meaning incessant horror, just as post-humorism is laughter that ends in madness.”

“Science is rationalized magic, but not knowledge or certainty. Science only shifts things on the scale of ignorance.”

“Zoë, I’m frightened. Ignorance has hit a tipping point no paradigm shift can offset. The world is changing without us. My whole life, I’ve hungered for reforms, but it was me driving the desire. Human nature seemed immutable, stubborn, rigid. I thought I was a mayfly in the cycle of eternal things. Whereas now I feel that youthful revolt inside me is an ossified fossil. I’m a piece of coal burning up in the heat of evolution*.”

The rain eases off. Everything now moves smoothly, no limits or barriers. No transitions and rupture, no tangible resistance, no losses in translation. But
where does the energy go if there is no friction?

In Chambéry the evening sun pops out from behind the clouds, bathing the Savoy Alps in pink. The air in the car is sticky although the windows are half down. The slime on their shoes has spread across the floor mats and starts to go darker. Their hair is moist and feels greasy. Everything is sticky and is covered by an oily film. They’re sweating and their clothes are muggy. Saliva thickens, there’s a thickish goo in their nose and throats. The sweat in their armpits, at the napes of their necks and on their palms is fatty, soapy, almost like glue. It goes foamy on the skin, which becomes itchy until a thicker, transparent gel squeezes out of the pores.

They’re tired and getting sleepy. Around midnight they’ve reached La Citadelle, turn off the interstate and overnight in a motel. A shower makes them feel normal again. There’s no thinking of love-making and they lie like Incubus* and Succubus* in the double bed, and Levania* sing them into the abyss of dreams.

In their sleep, the slime becomes less awful. Horror gives way to a tender touch that covers their entire skin, forging an intimate bond between their bodies. In an ocean without limits, they feel united with the world, their organs externalize. Their identities become fluid and their bodily fluids flow from their guts, unite and spread in an even mush over the sheets. Slime is the polymer of escalation. It explodes all notions of volume and entrances the bodies in effervescent gushing ecstasy. The bed has become a fountain, from the base of which the slime rises up as a translucent liquid sculpture, changing its shape as if in slow-motion. The slime knows no scale, does not distinguish the ego from the world. It is the spirit* innate in all things. An animism* that animates all things and gives them voice. They are no longer born as the ego, but as the alter. They have literally become the alternative. Not tautologies of themselves. No individualism as conformism. No capitalism* as cannibalism.

* Fiat mucus

The next morning Zoé awakes in Rei’s arms. Their naked bodies are outlined beneath the thin sheet, Amor* and Psyche* creating a marble sculpture by Canova. They are dry, and hungry. They devour cornetti in the seemingly endless Tunnel du Fréjus. They’ve almost reached the 45th parallel and Turin is close ahead. It’s Sunday, so there’s no gridlock on the Corso Francia. Shortly after 10 a.m., they park in Via Antonio Gramsci close to Piazza Statuto. Zoé strokes Rei’s back and rests her head on his shoulder.

“I love wandering around cities on Sundays. Especially Turin. Where the rational and irrational meet. Together with Lyon and Prague, Turin forms the white triangle of magic – together with London and San Francisco, the black one.”

“ Astrology and occultism are ideological systems that strike fear into my heart. Replacing civil society with arcane societies. What Gramsci comments on totalitarianism also applies to esotericism.”

“Sure, but in Turin there are now more Satanists than Communists.”  “Mussolini would probably not
have made the distinction.

“Look at that monumental fountain, commemorating those who died building the Fréjus tunnel. Over the workers’ tormented bodies gloats a genius*, an allegory of the triumph of science and technology.”

“He’s good-looking. Even engineers* can be sexy.”

“For Satanists, the Devil is the most beautiful of all angels*. An alliance of sensuousness and reason*. Science, politics and occultism can’t be separated that easily. In Turin there have always been lodges, secret societies, initiation sects such as the Carboneria, Giovane Italia and Massoneria. ‘The Devil* is a logician,’ Heinrich Heine once said, and maybe he wasn’t so wrong. There are not only the dead buried beneath the Fréjus tunnel; it is also home to the Ettore Majorana Observatorium. Doing particle research to prove that the neutrino is its own anti-particle. And if they prove it, it would spell not only physics* beyond the standard model, but would also be the scientific proof of the existence of the Devil* – for the Satanists.”

Rei laughs.

“The Fascists had eugenics*, the Stalinists Lyssenkoism, and following the Antichrist, the Satanists now have antimatter.”

A dark blue Maserati pulls up next to them. A side-window is lowered letting out pleasant cool air. At the sporting wheel sits Zoé’s sister Élaine. She is 28 and unadulterated by life. Her eyes sparkle behind her sunglasses, and Rei’s breath is taken*. Zoé plops down on the passenger seat, and while the two sisters kiss in greeting, Rei squeezes embarrassed onto the backseat. Its white leather smells new and the multimedia system is playing “Atmosphere” by Joy Division. They drive past the Olympic stadium to Lingotto, to Via Giordano Bruno*. A porter* lifts the barrier into the courtyard of an old industrial building. The car creeps between rusty machines and containers, across a scrapyard and into a warehouse. The roller door drops behind them and they’re standing in a room as if wrapped in Shōji paper – as if inside a diffuse white cloud, light has no direction, no source, no goal. Everything is part of a syndetic order*. On tables there are lines of lab and chemical apparatuses, coolers and tubing. White crystals grow like coral over glass flasks, measuring cylinders and spatulas. Thick crusts swell from a basin’s outflow, covering the edges with a velvety, sparkling, crystalline coating. Each vessel is outfitted with thermostats and connected to coolers, columns, and reactors. Like the cogs in a machine, the apparatuses form a unit, melding to create a machine* of molecular processes. At the tables, stand people in white, some in overalls, others in suits by Brioni or dresses by Elie Saab.

“Benvenuti, detto per brindare! Grab a mug of hot chocolate and taste the fresh spring truffles, the flesh of the Gods. We love them with honey. You’ll dance for joy, laugh and cry. Let’s toast the good life and look to the future. Welcome to the Accademia dei Segreti. We are jokingly called Tute Bianche, though we have nothing in common with them other than being Communists. We call ourselves Otiosi, because we’re leisure-lovers, or rather, people with a muse*. We don’t like vapid bustle. It’s an illusion to believe that the more active you are, the freer you are. The active tend not to know any higher activity. In this regard, the busy bees are lazy, or, to quote Nietzsche: ‘The busy roll like a rock rolls, according to the stupidity of mechanics.’ Our society dates back to the 16th century and was founded by Giambattista della Porta. Our obsession*: the magic of nature. It is our daemon*, whose voice we obey. We have been called an occult organization, but that isn’t true. The occult today is as obscene as love for money. It isn’t to be found in solitary cemeteries and in dark cellars; it rules executive boards and political parties. It poses in the harsh light of the media. Today’s occult is not secret, but mendacious.”

Paolo was born an Agnelli, but calls himself an Angeli, because in his youth he heard the voice of angels*. He’s specialized in glossolalia*, and his speaking in tongues is famed for Romantic overtures to women. He never wanted to have anything to do with the Fiat corporation and aspires instead to a new fiat. A new society of justice, knowledge and insights. A new human condition that brings together people the world over, in freedom and equality, forging a new unity.

Rei starts to sweat. Perhaps it’s the hot chocolate and the heavy honey truffles. He wipes his forehead, feeling the thickish liquid, its consistency of beads of sweat. When he looks around more closely, he sees that the walls are covered in a
wooly fungoid mycelium. Voices sound dull and yet as clear as in a sound studio with no echo, free of background noise. The air is steamy and language becomes an insulating material, symbols become dampeners. The eye blurs and the air condenses in a fine mist that floats above the floor at knee height in a smoky veil. Firm objects enter a slimy state, vibrating like jelly in a railway restaurant car. Clothes and the skin cover Rei’s body like waves cover the ocean. Wobbly flesh, but not muscles, no sinews, only single, unconnected cells. The liquefaction of the world as the ultimate flotation of symbols and bodies causes memory to implode, and time becomes viscous until it stops flowing altogether. Thick and slow, syrup and gelatin, molasses and brine. Everything that will ever be has happened at once. Everything in vitro, nothing in vivo.

“No fears. The molecular scanner is just tracking the tissue and transmitting the raw data to a computer*. A molecular printer will create a copy perfect down to the last atom, and in a few hours we will hold in our hands your portrait in flesh and blood.”

The printer is equipped with the elements of the periodic table that can be synthesized to form any conceivable artificial molecules. If a slice of bread is copied, then it tastes like the original. If it’s a beetle, then after the process is complete it simply wanders off. A neo-kabbalist* typewriter that manipulates not alphanumeric characters but atoms and molecules. Just as letters and words give rise to texts, so chemical bonds take material form as real objects. Adamo uses his homemade molecular writer for his poetry. Adamo started with small haikus you could swallow, which went straight to the brain. He came to fame with his molecular art history. For each style* he synthesized the relevant substances to trigger perceptual images of Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism or Surrealism. Thousands of Picassos rushed through the brain, images by Paul Klee drifted by the mind’s eye, more than he actually painted in his lifetime. At the moment, Adamo is writing molecular poems which he presents as bizarre bio-crystalline structures. The second generation of molecular artists are young and wild, such as Havva. She designs insects with lots of legs and absurd wings that evolve from larvae*. As pupae, they populate museum collections for years, only to disappear overnight. Flickering light massages Rei’s closed eye-lids and a burst of colors floods his mind. Is Adamo a new Prometheus* who, over and beyond aesthetic effects, creates living works? Real art as real life? Not bourgeois poetry, but pieces of autopoiesis*? But even if one function of art is to bring forth the future, Rei does not want to end up an inverse Dorian Gray. He doesn’t want a portrait of himself. He hates selfies and gadgets with an ‘i’ in front of them. For him all individualism is conformism. At the same time, he intuits that the 21st century is defined by neurons and molecules. The 20th-century revolutions started at the mega-level, with the people, and therefore came to nothing. Change in society starts with the small
things. No totalitarianism is needed, just the minimalism of molecules. Just catalysts and enzymes*. The smallest has the maximum effect.

Rei frees his head from the machine and sways over to the washroom. In the mirror he glances at his hair, appalled: it sticks out from his parietal bone like springs. His hair is holy to him. As a young man he read a report about Vahram Hakopian, in which the devout man from Iran engraved a line from the Book of Solomon* with a diamond-studded needle on the single hair of a virgin. Since then, Rei believes that hairs sprout like magnetic tape from the head and store everything he thinks. Sentences grow day and night, with one or another dream conjuring colors, shaded from white to dark brown in his top hair. In his imagination he wears an entire library on his head that has now become disarrayed. The hair is matted and his memories confused.

“Rei, you look pale. We’ve been looking for you. Paolo wants to show you the factory*.”

Zoé sounds impatient.

“Don’t let me down. We’re going through with this. I will love you for it.”

“Angeli doesn’t need me. The upper class needs no knowledge. The upper class has done everything right.”

Everyone is gathered back in the hall. Even the one-eyed guy from the Lampreys. In the flasks and reactor vessels, solvents are bubbling, and the rotary evaporator and vacuum pumps are buzzing.

“Signore Rei, your work on slime gave us a key insight and you will also solve the last puzzle. You localized a bundle of transposons in lampreys – of unknown origin. The genes in question are far more fascinating than viruses, which are egotistical. They don’t want to change the world, they simply want to reproduce. Transposons are much more intelligent and altruistic. They encode a series of proteins, mutate and learn. They share their knowledge, communicate with one another and with us. In the history of human society, growth, power* and sex only ever existed vertically, from top to bottom, from bottom to top. That’s the evil of the world, and it causes inequality and wars. True socialism is horizontal, egalitarian, and genetic. To speak of democracy*, we need first grasp what demos* means. Demos is not simply the people. Democracy means the people that has found its daemon*. Our eudaimon* are surely the transposons in the slime, and in their honor we hereby rename the Accademia dei Segreti the Accademia dei Secreti. From now on we are no longer a secret society but a slime society. Long live the Slime Age!”

From the roof of the hall, finger-thick tubes of green liquid hang, branching out on the ground and ending in glass reactors. In some places, the tubes join in a mesh of floating nodes, outlining a labyrinth-like pattern in space. Gesticulating solemnly, Angeli walks as if following a green thread along the bundle of tubes, leading the way through the biochemical factory*.
“We cultivate mushrooms and algae on an industrial scale to obtain extracts for new chemical compounds. Green floating algae flow through kilometers of tubing and absorb sunlight on the roof to enable photosynthesis. The algae produce tyrosine; the mushrooms on the walls, psilocybine. In the glass reactors, they’re converted into dopamine and psilocin. Synthesis then bonds the two to form a new molecule, psilamine, P+ for short, that does not exist naturally.”

Zoé comes up with a tray of cocktails and hands out glasses. Angeli raises the transparent slimy fluid like a Grail and gazes into the glass as if it were a crystal ball that shows the future.

“Let us drink P+! P+ is the molecular sculpture that will not gather dust in a museum. It should have an aesthetic effect in our bloodstream and brains, stimulating the senses. We want to be its base, its space, its medium. Language and images will no longer form separate spheres. Logic and the senses*, reason* and emotion will meld in a new synthesis. P+ forges the identity of mind* and matter. One small molecule, and the world has changed.”

Angeli’s eyes are sparkling bright. He is driven by obsession* and in joyful expectation of an attack of the tongues. He feels an epileptic* force rising in him and is seized by a promising spasm.

“Rei, most people wonder who they are, where they come from and where they are going to. The answers are trivial and inflationary. They fill volumes of self-help books. The key question is: WHAT are we? Out of what matter are we made? What is matter and how does it begin to live? Accademia dei Secreti has found the answer in P+. P+ reveals being as slime. It liberates the objects of perception from any false phenomenology and makes them into true objects of cognition. Enslaved matter, raped for the sake of its exchange value and staged use-value, is rendered naked. P+ opens the door* into the depths of matter, into the psychedelic crevasses and fantasia of the flesh.”

A researcher in a white lab coat detaches himself from an apparatus like a locust. He has hitherto gone unnoticed, so mimetically did he blend with the machines. On coming closer, Rei recognizes the student from Bremen. Boris straightens his spectacles and, without moving his lips, launches into a monologue like a ventriloquist.

“When producing P+, large amounts of slimy biomass accrue. We initially thought the slime was an irritating side effect. In your work on slime, we then found the key. It is not a byproduct or a waste product; it is the cause and the beginning.”

Rei’s brain fills with blood like a dry sponge in water, and his amygdala floods his limbic system. The lock to the uncanny opens and gives him a view of a buried and repressed world.

The slime is no coincidental excretion, not normal bodily secretion. It is a life form of its own. Perhaps Boris was right when he speculated in Bremen that the slime is older than life on earth. Perhaps it is simply waiting for the right moment for its resurrection. And perhaps P+ is the medium in which it communicates, a molecular language in which it speaks. Boris has read too much speculative fiction, but you need people who imagine away like he does in order to recognize that nature is a slimy process that blends all things and creatures in a crawling network of relations to form one nexus.

Boris often seems to be devoid of emotion, but the impression is misleading. His face shows no signs, other than lots of freckles. They catch Rei’s attention and generate strange pareidolia*. In the short pauses between sentences, the dots of pigment become pixels that form patterns and symbols. The melanin conjures up emoticons in his face that accompany his words like subtitles in a movie.

“P+ is the smallest sculpture in the world, its production brings forth the largest sculpture. When making P+, massive amounts of slime aggregate, and at the same time, if imbibed, P+ liquefies our perception of the world to create a slimy state. In other words, the consumption* of P+ changes our perception and our psyche*, and the production of P+ modifies the composition of the material world. We initially thought it a coincidence that the state which P+ triggers, like a psychotropic in our minds, is unleashed in the outside world during the production. But P+ is a two-faced molecule in two senses. It impacts in two directions, outwards and inwards. It targets the smallest and the biggest. It has two sides by which it docks in our brains. One side functions as the partial agonist of the D2...
receptors, the other as that of the 5-HT receptors. It functions psychologically and physically, on the imagination and on reality. The hallucinogenic, fictional energy inside the psyche is congruent with the change to external reality. It is psychotropic and physiotropic. Thought and real being, gene and meme*, become congruent, setting in motion a pump between inside and outside, between the smallest and the greatest. In your legendary article on transposons in lampreys, you localized genes for the slime production that are much older than the creatures themselves, asking the question whether these transposons can move to other species, too. For me that’s the proof for an ancient slime-born form of life that waits on the ocean floor for the right moment to ascend and colonize species. I call these ancient slime transposon the Cthulhu gene, in honor of H.P. Lovecraft. Under lab conditions, we have not yet managed to synthesize a protoplasm that independently brings forth P+. As in lampreys, the transposon does not trigger the discharge of P+. Only in humans is the gene selected for extended protein synthesis, triggering endogenous production of P+. This is presumably because P+, like many other psychotropic substances, primarily functions in humans. We wonder how we can insert the gene at the right point to trigger the production of P+ in the human body. What we need is a suitable slime maker that can serve as a living bioreactor for the output of P+.

“Boris, you have the right questions. So why do you need me?”

“Rei, you are the answer!”

Zoé places her hand on Rei’s shoulder and kisses his ear.

“The transposon has spread and lives in your body. It found you to be its suitable host. You are the medium of the Cthulhu gene!”

Angeli solemnly raises his glass. The situation calls for pathos, and after a pause his gaze ceases to be inward and comes to rest firmly on Rei.

“Rei, you are the hope for change. Everything you think will be translated into reality. You are suffering from the Holy Disease* and were selected for the gene. Your thoughts are contagious and will infect the world with ideas. Let us drink to Rei! He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Geminus and the Biceps. He is Janus with the two faces. He looks at the past and gazes into the future. He links mind* and matter.”

Rei senses that there’s something wrong with him. For days now he has suffered bouts of sweating, hallucinations, nightmares*, and alienation*. He is pale and at times feels ill. Like bouts of malaria, he is constantly being seized by moods that trigger a thinking disease* and can torment him like a Descartian demon*. The transposons must have entered his bloodstream. But how were they able to place themselves at the right point in his genome? How did they populate trillions of cells? Why him?

Working with the flesh

Rei feels gravity’s pull. His body goes soft and starts to melt like warm wax. His bones consist only
of marrow and his head sinks into his torso. Like a 
submarine he dives into his bowels and his outsides 
fall inwards. The world’s consistency becomes 
porous and airy like yeasty dough fermenting*. 
Foam is everywhere. The countless little bubbles 
inflate into architectural spheres and cosmic domes 
and then suddenly burst. The view changes from 
complex view to fish eye, the foam decomposes 
into slime. Dimensions get blurred, and Rei can 
swim back and forth in time*, dip in and out of 
space. He can’t penetrate things, but he doesn’t 
need to. Things look as if he were seeing them 
through a magnifying glass. All foggy from a 
distance, all sharply detailed close-up. The idea of a 
panoptic* view and total transparency* seem to 
him to be an obsolete paradigm. The panorama of 
a landscape or the view of a library is seductively 
beautiful, but empty, bereft of meaning, not an 
entity. The lion lurks invisible in the grass, the 
bomb explodes in the shadow of the book cover.

Rei faints and comes to on a chaise-longue. He is 
lying in an office furnished by Carlo Bugatti. 
Strange symbols, intestines, veins and sinews are 
woven into the textile wallpaper. His color 
perception is more acute, and peripheral things on 
the edge of his vision come to life, scamper and 
whisper quietly. The mysterious creatures are 
reminiscent of Kafka’s Odradek* and drag 
themselves across the floor as hybrids of steel and 
insect, mole and potted plant, beer bottle and 
gnome*. The Oriental carpet turns into a giant 
turtle and recites sentences from Huysman’s À 
rebours.

Rei hopes that it is all just a dream. He hearkens 
the sound of the alarm clock or a call, but what he 
hears is the rush of blood in his ears. If dream and 
reality can factually no longer be distinguished, all 
that remains is fiction. Only now does he notice 
Zoé and Élaine. They’re sitting behind him in 
armchairs, their legs crossed like psychoanalysts. 
Zoé is clever, Élaine is beautiful. Together they’re 
like Laurel and Hardy. Élaine is thoroughly 
mediocre. She has perfect measurements, 
embodies symmetry and harmony. Were one to 
measure all the girls in Paris and derive the 
arithmetic mean of the data on their proportions, 
then Élaine would be the product. Exactly what his 
drive* desires.

“Rei, relax, it’s almost over.”

Farts sneak out, and reflux sends thick phlegm up 
his throat. Perhaps psychoanalysis was but a 
temporary insult to humanity and the great Other 
went by the name of slime? Perhaps Freud* hat 
hitherto been completely misunderstood and the 
actual trauma is a mucous glandular organ? At any 
rate, repairing and renewing humans must start 
with the cells and the body’s smallest molecules. 
Therapy must eat its way through the flesh like the 
triangular teeth in the lamprey’s mouth. Élaine’s 
voice starts to softly massage Rei. In his dreams, 
the words become flesh and he wants to unite with 
their secretions.

“The slightest trace of matter can determine our 
fate*. Without matter, no dreams – without dreams, 
no reality. The power of your mind is located in 
your glands and pores, not in your brain. The future 
is reflected in the sweat on your brow. Now, with 
the revolutions forgotten, it’s time to start work* on 
fiction. But how to get a clear mind and world? 
Everything is distorted by the dreams of ideology. 
After the death of the great narratives, all that 
remains is concern about health and safety. 
Humans believe in an Ego that is located in the 
brain, and hallucinate their identity. They’re 
frightened of being flesh, are disgusted by puss 
and lymphatic fluid, are ashamed of snot and 
excretions. We want to be mindful, noble beings, 
but that is nothing but smoke and mirrors. What is 
needed is work* on the flesh.”

Before Rei’s genes run amok*, Zoé’s clear voice of 
paranoiac reason* cuts in.

“More entropy* is needed, as entropy is reality. 
The essence of being includes decay as 
transformation and trans-substantiation. P+ fuels 
the river that carries thoughts along with it and 
transposes consciousness into the state of the flesh. 
We must leave anthropocentrism behind us and 
move on to a state of digestion. We must become 
different beings in order to explore the essence of 
being. We are tired of working ourselves ragged 
studying symptoms. Religion, politics, economics, 
art – they’re all epiphenomena. Distracting 
entertainment for despairing Ego-hunters. Slime, 
by contrast, is a radical ontological category. Truth 
grows in the flesh. It isn’t air, it has weight and 
body. Ontology is something for butchers. It’s 
about the minced body, bones and fat, meat and 
innards. Bodies need to be broken open like ripe 
figs. Let the juice squirt over the ground and
thicken in a slimy puddle.”

Rei runs his fingers, stroking, through his hair feeling each strand of memory individually. On what occasion did the transposons spread? It must have happened in Pauillac. He hadn’t noticed anything when taking samples of the germ cell tissue, but that evening he had a little cut in the ball of his thumb. The needle of the biopsy punch must have gone through the animal and glove, and squirted cells into his bloodstream. Scavenger cells prevented inflammation, but released transposons that were whisked by his blood into his organs. The first harmless outbreaks had been in Bremen and Paris. Unlike a virus infection, there is no fever, no immune system is busy battling something. Each hour, the process simply progresses. The transposons have started reprogramming his genome and placing his cells in a new order*. Rei realizes what he has long since sensed. He is no longer in charge of his own body. His name is legion, for he is many.

On Rei’s gleaming forehead thick beads of sweat run like slugs. Angeli bends over him and inserts a subcutanean catheter in his stomach, out of which an oily liquid seeps. He greedily wets his tongue and distributes the goo over his gums. He wants to taste P+ in its purest form and gazes in yearning at the swollen body.

“Rei, you are the first person to overcome the limits of his own species. You are the plus ultra of a new future. Humans have traveled in space, have descended into the depths of the oceans, but no one yet has surpassed his genetic limits and liberated himself from the cage of his own body. You are mutating into a shape-shifter who is slowly fleeing necessity. We are all born in slime and, after death, revert to slime. But you will live eternally as slime. You will be free. You will be both shapeless and also assume any conceivable shape. You will be form and anti-form, personified contingency. We envy you. We have tried everything to be different. We’ve experimented with disinhibitory substances that directly affect the nervous system. We’ve tried recipes by Giambattista della Porta, tested sodium oxybate, derived drugs* from harmless supermarket goods, we’ve extracted solarcaine from sunscreen sprays, and benzocain from ejaculation-delaying penile creams, and gulped huge doses of water-dissoluble vitamins. Nothing yet has liberated us. P+ offers us the opportunity, for a short time, to be like them, to hearken the world’s inner voice, and to feel being. But you will be P+ forever. You will have an effect on our bodies, you will speak to us. You will be our daimonion*.”

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Time* oozes and expands, until suddenly a thread tears. It’s night and, from the roundabout, the blue Maserati takes the Corso Giulio Cesare. Rei is lying in the back of the car, gazing out the window dotted with raindrops. They reflect the surroundings like compound eyes. On the A4 to Trieste, the dots become lines, and once the car hits 180 km/h, they become a surface. Élaine loves speed. She’s driving, Zoé sitting next to her, and she’s giving the V8 full rein. The wheels centrifuge the water from the blacktop and atomize it into a fine spray. The throb of the engine blends with the sound of the wheels and the combination is a
vibrating hum, its pitch changing depending on how strong the rain is and how fast the car. Rei is open to all forms of apophenia*. He see faces in the clouds, he hears cheerful laughter in the sound of a circular saw. People tend to lose this ability as they get older, but in Rei’s case they intensify owing to his enhanced dopamine levels. He nurtures them in his day dreams, and things talk to him. In the car’s purr he hears voices of the Sirens and the film of water on the road starts to sing.

With tiredness, so a choir sets in, orchestrating his restless thoughts and dipping them in a polyphonic flood. Everything flows. The auto, his thoughts, his bodily secretions, and the rain. The road becomes the stream of unconsciousness. He remembers a last sentence from the Aeneid, before the muse who was Achelous’ daughter rocks him gently to sleep and he is whisked away by the tug of forgetting: “Those souls* to whom, by fate, are other bodies ow’d: In Lethe’s lake they long oblivion taste.” Dawn breaks near Udine. With the light, Lethe is dispelled and the 500 hp chase down alétheia. They’re hunting the truth, and on the interstate between Amaro and Zöbern, Élaine guns the engine and the needle shoots up to 300 km/h.

Zoé pokes her head between the headrests and strokes Rei’s swollen legs.

“We'll soon be in the city of snails. The Viennese are floored and crawling. They’re thirsting for a conditional clause and behave toward reality like snails do to salt. Whenever they touch the truth, they shivel and start to foam. The Viennese are not interested in the world but only in what they drink and eat. You’ll go through their bodies like a warm knife through butter. You will populate their bodies and cut their flesh into sausage-like sculptures ready for the pan.”

Élaine’s glittering fingernails dance across the dashboard touchscreen and Billy Idol’s “Flesh for Fantasy” booms out of the loudspeakers.

“Rei, you are the flesh for the fantasy*, the culture medium for our dreams and desires. In you, a society will grow that places all people, organisms and things in new structures. We are not occult drug freaks who think that reality can be changed by perception. Instead, we believe that a change in perception always goes hand in hand with a change in reality. We call for an aesthetics* of the real and of matter. Material properties have always played a role in the visual arts, but now it is matter per se that becomes art. Just as science had to become art for reality to change, art must become matter in order to be real. Through you, we will get a completely new idea of matter. We will reside in you, speak in you, make love in you.”

Shortly outside Schwechat, the air grows heavy. The drizzle thickens and starts to streak down. The damp air inside the car condenses on the windows and the seats feel like sponges. Everything smells musty and the white leather of the ceiling seems to be covered by a fine mycelium. The chromed strips bubble, and rust appears beneath them, and puddles appear under the seats. By the Radetzky Bridge over the River Vienna, it’s over. The Maserati is only firing on three cylinders and there’s smoke coming out from under the hood. They get out and Rei leans over the railing, tired. He is standing at the place the Viennese call the Gate to Hell, and vomits watery slime. The demon* that found him in Pauillac has reached its goal. The Cthulhu genes that slumbered in the lampreys on the ocean floor have undergone selection since time immemorial. They awaken in their host’s flesh and order a huge festive meal on which the world will feed forever. Starting from the pineal gland, all the glands in Rei’s bloated body hypertrophy and start to produce P+. The gonads in his testicles swell enormously and his sweat glands excrete huge fat drops. His eyes exude thick gooey blobs of slime, gathering in front of his pupils like inflated contact lenses. Zoé hugs him tenderly from behind and kneads his protruding belly.

“People are dried out and burn like kindling. They’re suffering from burnout and depression. They’re ill from worrying about their health and safety. Museums and galleries are turning into spas. Wellness artists stage pleasant countryside settings, sunsets and brooks for denatured urbanites who have lost any feel for the world and for nature. Since Modernism, art believes in production without narration. But if there’s no story left to tell, the thread gets lost and with it the connection to the world. Humans are drying out, which leads to their mummification. There is no juice left in their bodies, they are petrified and become fossils. Before humanity becomes extinct, it conserves itself. It curates its disappearance in the Museum of Post-History as the Paradise of the Eternal Beyond. Accademia dei Secreti wants to provide people with moisture and blend us all
protoplastically to form a new community. The slime that is you will save us. It will be our phalanstère, our oikos and our polis."

Rei feels cold. His body is wet and slippery. In his head, ideas are bubbling like gas* in the blood of a diver suffering from the bends. In the Broca area of his brain, little bubbles filled with words form and tickle him with questions. What happens if systems become irrational? Does this boost their complexity or their opacity? Will the differentiations and distinctions take on a life of their own? Will the discourses, rules and logics swell up to form a polyphonic noise? Or do they simply mask power plays that skillfully camouflage themselves in ostensible opaqueness? When does complexity collapse? How does order and harmony arise from chaos? How do symmetries and structures, crystals and patterns arise? What makes everything simple, clear and clean?

The bubbles burst. They are the last thing he hears of his Ego. His self liquidizes and drowns the thirst for answers. His hunger for purity, clarity, control*, and surveillance* is stilled. The slime has conquered Rei to save him. The Leviathan* has risen up from the depths of the ocean to blend people in its protoplasm. It is no fiery spirit* and burning ideology, it is wet matter. A single creature and yet, likewise, an entire eco-system. It will cover all surfaces with a thin biofilm and a superficium, launching a biological Internet of Things* and Beings. The slimy coating will creep across the floors and walls, across the skin and into mouths, will grow through the bowels and spread as diarrhea. It will become a global network that extends from the water pipes and rivers through the oceans and the forests to the tiniest tips of ice in Antarctica. The slime will become the demiurge* and the daimonion*.

Rei has dissolved, heralding the beginning of the Slime Age. Everything communicates molecularly: quorum sensum.

REFERENCES

[1] Radio play for multichannel sound system, 100 min.
Voice: Tina Muliar

Composition: szely
Production: Peter Szely and ORF Kunstradio (http://www.kunstradio.at/2015A/05_07_15.html)
Text: Thomas Feuerstein (http://daimon.myzel.net/Sternenrotz:_Daimon_Cult)
The science fiction story is part of the installation ASTRAL JELLY (CINEMA SCULPTURE).

[2] * The terms equipped with an asterisk are to be found online in the thesaurus of daimonology (mainly in German): http://daimon.myzel.net.