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## Producing the Cut The Poetics of Earth-Bound Theology *Oliver Morris Jones*

Commercial aviation has long since lost the glamour of its heavenly carriage. This seems, to me, a loss of something more than legroom or in-flight service. The window seat, however, remains the greatest luxury of modern air travel, and one of the most profound settings in which to consider the conditions of our earthliness. As the plane pierces through the thick shield of cloud, the pillows of vapour beating against the cabin windows, the upward path of the aircraft traces some kind of righteous ascendance. From the chaos of the landscape to the serenity of the bulbous expanse of the white and crisp, lucid blue heavens, I feel supremely aware of my passing through the pearly gates of the divine, into a space that once housed the deities of civilisations past. For now, height is no matter of the holy.

*“Whatever lives beneath the moon must be marked by failure and dissolution, for this domain is ruled by the linear, finite and exhaustible movements that, in the eye of antiquity, could never lead to any good. Each individual consciousness bears the failures of earlier tremors of separation. This banishment from perfection left every sublunary object with cracks, scars and irregularities.”* (Peter Sloterdijk, *Globes*, trans. Wieland Hoban (London & New York: MIT Press, 2014) 768.)

The God’s of modern theism are as grounded as we; They are an atmospheric condition of our being-in the post-industrial age, since they are all that is matter and all that is immaterial. They inhabit and encroach on our space, and exist up to the periphery of our knowledge. Steve Jobs is one of them. I fear Elon Musk may be also. Let’s choose not to discuss the POTUS. These are our global Gods of capital, of politics, of entertainment. The unsolved mysteries of the universe are not so much evidence for the divine inspirators as they are problems of contemporary science. Within the bounds of human consciousness, our Godly presence resides. The sky from which They were evicted is a manicured, perfect site of rationality—where temperature, pressure, and constituent gasses determine the conditions of the land. The earthly lap of the globe is the Joycian ‘chaosmos’ of contemporary devotion. From the heavenly domes of Their former home, there was little to break the fall of the creators. Upon impact with the imperfect surface of the globe beneath, They fractured and shattered, pieces ejected, launched, danced and rolled across oceans and continents. From this explosive descent, the order of the theological system was reshuffled and undermined.

The verticality of the theologian’s world was exchanged for an open and nondescript field. As Magellan, El Cano and Columbus stretched the imperial hand of resources, capital and power ever wider the nature of the religious project was carried further afield, stretched thinner and weakened by its

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geographical totality. And in much the same vein as Nikita Khrushchev's comments regarding Yuri Gagarin's orbit of the earth—that he had been to space and seen no God—the compulsion to advance into space, to extend man's reach, would require the requisitioning and termination of the celestial heavens, and the subordination of the divine to the needs of society.

Such is the loss of the firmament. The pale horizon beyond the aluminium casing of my cross-continental shuttle is littered, not with the friendly celestial beings, but with functional machines and operative persons. The sky is now the site of commerce. It is a soup of tellurian signals and relays, of gravitational fields and Internet connections, of financial transfers and commodity trades. The flow of people between airports is a simulation of the flow of capital between cities. The sites of religiosity have been irrevocably saturated with the machinery of globalism. How might we reconcile the atmospheric conditioning of our technological-economic umbrella against the state of earthliness, a state of being that isolates humanity from a divine project? How can artistic devotion reproduce the chaoid state of religious faith, enabling transubstantiations of material into transcendent ideology?

*"In a violently poetic text, Lawrence describes what produces poetry: people are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision."*

(Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), 203.)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the poetic methodology is the ability to incise the shade of psychic order, to frame the subject in a sudden chaos. The production of poetry, therefore, is a performance of violence. It is an upheaval and disruption, tearing the fabric of such artificial structures that, presumably to Lawrence, shield us from the harsh reality of the infinite and monstrous heavens. Cocooned in individual firmaments, the postmodern, neoliberal-capitalist subject is under the influence of their respective shelters designed to produce a substitute dome that is closer to the subjective experience, narrowing and tightening the spatial hold of ideological thought. The poetic gesture is the poesis of experience informed by ontological chaos, therefore, subjecting socio-political barriers to the storm of philosophy. We experience this daily – from the experiential battle between URL and IRL, the fabric of our production/consumption is mediated by a thin film of organisational strategies that play out between online and offline. Or more poignantly: between sheltered order and enlightened chaos.

If we consider, for a moment, the prevalence – and success – of "dating apps," we can observe the metanoic shift from ordered firmament to transcendent chaos. From the formality and algorithmic architecture of digital applications, the process of "soul searching" takes on a poetic, chaotic character.

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The anarchy of love, in this instance, is the tear in the fabric of the constructed atmosphere of the online space – perhaps why people have a hard time believing that love could be borne of digital media, reconciling the contradistinction of their psychic states. Love is the *de facto* chaotic state.

*“Who then devised the torment? Love.*

*Love is the unfamiliar Name*

*Behind the hands that wove*

*The intolerable shirt of flame*

*Which human power cannot remove.*

*We only live, only suspire*

*Consumed by either fire or fire.”*

(T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding” in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1944) 42.)

To Eliot, the bind of our torment is a catch-22 – between the woven fire and chaotic love. The threat that is posed to material order by metaphysical chaos is of fatal seriousness. The poetics of Hamish Pearch’s series of “barn” works render this irreconcilable dialogue between [architectural] order and [existential] collapse with clinical dispassion. In the sculptures, the integrity and detail of the built form reconstructs the images and sites of production. The barn, the warehouse, the factory floor; the arcane, ominous walls of Marx’s battleground are, to a post-Fordist society, the relics of industry and outdated models of economics. Once the generative site of capital, the engine room of early industrial society, the buildings are the edifices of process; processes of labour and processes of economics. These bare buildings are, however, not devoid of historical and political intonations. It is hard not to look at the “barn” or “warehouse” and conjure images of factory farming, of abattoirs, of Stalinist gulags and Nazi concentration camps. This dichotomy is precisely what makes Pearch’s barn series so arresting; the interplay between the economic, political rationality of industrial production, and the abhorrent, irrational chaos of the “death camp,” a site of termination.

If we view the industrial unit with such psychic embrocation—saturated with stark vicissitudes—how can we begin to read Pearch’s practice, and this series of works in particular, in a contemporary context? What is the incision in the global, artificial dome that the poetics of the barn works specifically make? The conveyor belt and the endless corridors of gargantuan space echo the tunnels of life through which we walk. The passage of time and our accumulation of life aboard the ceaseless track bound for our end; life is a production line, through which we are constructed, our application is defined and our cumulative process cut short by the limited capacity of the cycle. Pearch’s barns chronicle the contained field of contemporary life, one large enough to house storage for a lifetime. The transitional sites of the wall-based pieces define the moment of passage from one reality to the next—as if passing through the gates of hell, or the door of the incinerator. But they also describe an emergence, something akin to a

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birth. Taken together, the image produced is suspended between life and death, between production and termination. To hark back to Eliot: 'In my beginning is my end [...] In my end is my beginning.'

Thus, the conditions of our earthliness and the problem of ascendance unfold. The total flight time of my temporary passage through the vacated heavens is not enough to remove Eliot's 'shirt of flame.' We remain bound to the earth and the disseminated God's of society. I finish where I start. In both Pearch and Eliot we find this tautological manoeuvre played out through an existential poetics, bringing into fierce clarity the psychic passage through which we move from time past to time future. The fearful question of both artists returns to the qualitative nature of time, and its inevitable regression. Without the heavenly domes to project our existence indefinitely into the cosmic mantles of our glorious death, we are instead plagued by our fear of the mortality we are cursed with. Our worship of self, the idolatry of individuals, the solipsistic nature of society; to rend these constructions, introducing the chaotic state of our fatality, is the troubled light of these poetic gestures. In Pearch's barns I am reminded of the value in observing my surroundings. Not only its physical nature, but also its psychic rendering and its emotional surface; am I aware of the architecture of my existence? Am I cogent of its affect upon me? Am I passive in time's passing, or am I choosing to reflect upon its motion and my place in line? The popularity of such terms as "the rat race" and "the daily grind," convince me of the caged nature of life, and the microforms of worship that must be channeled in order to recompense for the trauma incurred. But it highlights the value of the poetic incision into such realities, to rip the fabric of our cloak and be restored by that refining fire.