

Label 1

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How Many

Many. In answer to: *what is this?* The first thing to say is simply: many. Imagine: water. What is this? We might be tempted to define it as soft and supportive – after all we float in it. Well imagine falling into it from two hundred feet. It is as hard as concrete. Now imagine you are as small as a bacterium. This is to be so small that water is no longer a liquid but a series of molecules that bounce you around. It seems then that every time we ask, “what is this?” we are asking both “what is going on?” and “what is possible to be done from this material perspective?” What is around you is not a relativism but a genuine multiplicity. These books, journals and magazines are not representations, collections of facts, or subjective opinions but rather ways of experimenting with the real. Here in this library bacteria are experimentally finding ways of moving from absolutes or relativisms to an experimental perspectivism.

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Label 2

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Stand. Walk. Run. Sit. Breathe. Exchange.

Touch. Talk. Hold.

This is all very basic.

This is all very complex.

An exercise:

Pick up an object. Find its place of origin. One stratum. Feel its weight. Another stratum. Scratch the surface. Another stratum. Sniff the object. Ask the price. More strata. But this assemblage is not closed. Pick up another object and do the same. Follow asking which materials make up the object with another series of questions of where and how the object came to be. One stratum after another folding into, onto and through another. Walk around the store with this object and solicit help in investigating this thing. Another conversation ensues. Imagine what someone else would do with this thing. Imagine leaving it for someone or something else to use, eat, inhabit, exchange. These things are not complete. And they cannot be foretold.

A second exercise:

90 plus percent of all life is bacterial. It is everywhere and in everything. It is the defining feature of life on this planet. Where does this fit into the stratum?

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Label 3

Location:

Gallery of the American West. Beside Slot in Corner (left from main entrance)

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Cornered

A corner. A position of relative uniqueness. In the space of two walls, the corner is unique. In a room with four corners, an inflected corner is unique. How far this uniqueness extends beyond the relative confines is certainly a matter of qualities. At what point do we exhaust the qualities by which to define something unique. Or is this even the right question. Do we accept the biological myopia of the genomic description life. If qualities are allow to co-mingle fluidly on an experimental level, then what sort of world do we have.

Proposition: A bacterial world.

Identity is not a function of composition, but is primarily a sort of speed. Bacteria swap their genomic content at various levels of intensity on a constant basis. Each organism is therefore a definite uniqueness, but one that does not rest, rather engages its environment as a streaming set of possible experimental transferences. I give you my genes, and my neighbor gives me some. All pass through all.

Let us reconcile the fact that our body, traditionally understood as our keep of identity, is in fact 70 percent bacterial in function and origination. Our body is already an perplexity of experimentation.

Proposal: Let us develop an ontology that is consistent.

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Label 4

Location:

American Landscape/portraiture

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Overcome

Forget for a moment your grammatical misgivings. Understand the terms “effect” and “affect”. Breathe closely on another. Allow the breath to be shared. What effects will this have. And what affect will the other adopt.

Now understand that we are engaged in this process at every sensation. The color red. An azure field. A two-dimensional smile that cannot be forgotten. A smell of urgency. The fleeting sounds of mumbling utterances fashioned for a moment into a lover’s poetry. The overwhelming realization of a collective existence. If these can sustain, we no longer can speak about effect. A universe of causality has no purchase on such becomings. We are moved- so we can speak about where we are moving and what we carry with us.

Such is the world of affect. It is irreducible.

Where impressions stick, there is no time to rest. We speak of compulsion, discovery and immanence. Only later and reluctantly do we describe such transformations as becomings.

And what is such a world without language? Without grammars that stall, interrupt and question such affect. Can we call this too the bacterial. From such a perspective there is no outside, other than the one that is in the process of becoming affect.

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LABEL 5:

Location:
Native Art of the Americas

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Clandestines

Take close look at the Native peoples in the photographs around the room. To what are the representations native, to which land and to which time do these photographs belong?

How do they classify, and on which classifications do they rely for our understanding, our empathy, our attention?

Further questions persist. On what basis do classifications rest? Are we to simply blame Aristotle, Linneaus, Watson and Crick? For the biological, we rely on species as a unit of order. For peoples, there is the land. But species are subject to time and land produces movements. For bacteria, there is only time and movement. There are only individuals- and even those over time resemble a cloud rather than a continuity. Classification falls apart under the shear weight of distinction. As compensation, we categorize only those bacteria that purportedly matter.

Only the pathological.

A bacteria that is not harmful is not important, we say. Classification, even at its most benign, is not just the first step in producing an ontologically distinct subject- it is what persists. To get out from under the ethics of the pathological, for example, we must confront the entire project of classification, calling into question its perspicuity and its agency. To liberate the bacteria is perhaps to usher in, or rush in to an ethics of immanence.

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This wall your gaze asunder: outsides within

In one of the volumes of the *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses* that appeared in Paris during the first half of the eighteenth century, Father Fontecchio of the Society of Jesus planned a study of the superstitions and misinformation of the common people of Canton; in the preliminary outline he noted that the Fish was a shifting and shining creature that nobody had ever caught but that many had said that they had glimpsed in the depths of mirrors. Father Fontecchio died in 1736 and the work began by his pen remained unfinished; some 150 years later Herbert Allen Giles took up the interrupted task. According to Giles, belief in the Fish is part of a larger myth that goes back to the legendary time of the Yellow Emperor.

In those days the world of mirrors and the world of men were not, as they are now, cut off from each other. They were besides, quite different; neither beings nor colors nor shapes were the same. Both kingdoms, the specular and the human, lived in harmony; you could come and go through the mirrors. One night the mirror people invaded the earth. Their power was great, but at the end of bloody warfare the magic arts of the Yellow Emperor prevailed. He repulsed the invaders, imprisoned them in their mirrors, and forced on them the task of repeating, as though in a kind of dream, all the actions of men. He stripped them of their power and of their forms and reduced them to mere slavish reflections. Nonetheless, a day will come when the magic spell will be shaken off.

The first to awaken will be the Fish. Deep in the mirror we will perceive a very faint line and the color of this line will be like no other color. Later on, other shapes will begin to stir. Little by little they will differ from us; little by little they will not imitate us. They will break through the barrier of glass or metal and this time will not be defeated. Side by side with these mirror creatures, the creatures of the water will join battle.

In Yunnan they do not speak of the Fish but of the Tiger of the Mirror. Others believe that in advance of the invasion we will hear from the depths of mirrors the clatter of weapons.

Excerpted from *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis Borges

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Label 7

Location:

Nauman Area, behind green room

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Blind-Sight

There is a ½ second lag between the moment light hits our eyes and the moment we can say that we are aware of what we see. In other words there is a slight delay that is always present between the world as we receive it and the world as we perceive it. It is as if the world is dubbed, but there is more. If we examine the space of the ½ second in terms of information which is a considerable period of time, it is not as straight forward as all this. The world is analog and therefore continues to stream information such that the ½ second does not provide us solace to make sense of the world, rather it provides time for more information to stream in and recursively affect the manner in which we process information just received. Taking this into account, perception is neither mechanical nor simply psychological, it is as Brian Massumi calls it, a smudge.

Let us add to this the dimension of perception that never could operate outside of socio-cultural contexts. Experiments with blindsightedness demonstrate that we ascribe meaning without actually being aware of our perception of things, such that we can read the world from a point of view that is neither apriori nor aposteriori. We engage directly with the world unable to shed our socio-cultural assumptions.

To put these things together then begs the question of what worlds we are perceiving without being aware of them and of what worlds we already understand without perceiving them.

The world awaits impatiently.

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Label 8

Location:
Eiteljorg Suite of African Art
(Re metal, metallurgy – location not specific)

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Metallurgy

“Not everything is metal, but metal is everywhere. Metal is the conductor of all matter.”

Let us take for a moment a world animated beyond the divisive categories of the scientific and the philosophic. We are not interested in a revival of animism, totemism, or a reverence for deep ecological vitalism- our interest lies at the surface. What is not clear is which surface. Our skin, the ocean’s surface, a thermal’s surface, an emotional surface, a technological surface, or all of these at once though matter.

Metallurgy works these surfaces. Iron and its handling move transversally across geographic, social and technological surfaces to transform ontological relationships. The smith is not simply a functionary, but a high priest of matter. The smith does not master the metal- they enter a relationship. How can we not say that the matter is animated.

“What metal and metallurgy bring to light is a life proper to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognizable, dissociated by the hylomorphic model.”

Delueze and Guattari

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LABEL 9:

Location:
Eiteljorg Suite of African Art
(on wall opposite/behind the songe power figure)

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Factish

How to enter the *superstitious*. Within the word is both a witnessing and an overtaking. Nature stand besides us, we witness and overtakes us as we engage it. Fabrications, artifice, likewise overtake us as we make it, and then stand beside us as we witness. Thus the birth of dual autonomies, where nature and artifice both have an agency and a cosmos.

It is not sufficient to speak of the natural world or the artificial world, because each world is already ahead of us. They have already exceeded their factualities.

We enter the *factish*.

The factish demands a change in the definitions of action and mastery – to make is to be overtaken by what is made – action slips ahead of us – and it too is slightly overtaken. We have never simply built anything. For the blacksmith, steel is not inert, but is part of a metallurgical movement. And for steel, the blacksmith is something to seduce. Non-human entities are not simply in our heads, nor simply out there. Both express and demand ontologies. Thought is seized and possessed by non-humans. Imagine the alternative histories that read “Newton happened to gravity” and “lynn margulis happened to microbes”.

Together this is not another chapter, it is a cosmopolitics.

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LABEL 10:

Location:

3rd floor contemporary

by elevator at the top of the escalator

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Vantage

Please read this label closely. Stand somewhere between 6 and 18 inches from the wall. Turn around slowly one full revolution.

Remark what you see. And what you sense.

You are in the one location in this museum that does not clearly define itself as an art museum. In this small alcove that is still part of the public space, there is no indication that this institution should house and explore art and its relationship to an audience.

This institution is a sort of ecosystem- often described with a very narrow set of participants- the artists, the curators, the audience, the patrons all centered on the primacy of art. If the art is no longer clearly present, even for just a moment, what kind of ecosystem now surrounds you? What would be the new collective of participants that comprise the ecosystem?

Start with the air. Oxygen, carbon dioxide, bacteria, fungi, nitrogen, hair mites, skin. Its temperature. Its humidity.

Look at the walls. The paint, the gypsum board, fasteners, base, signage. What lies behind each of these materials?

Feel the floor. Its cleanliness, the hands and feet that insure its appearance. Electricity coursing through it. What energies keep that flow continuous.

Listen. Muffled chatter of an unknown group of people. The escalators hum. Know that we are in a vertical world.

Continue developing this list.

Allow art to negotiate this new terrain.

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LABEL 11:

Location:
3rd floor contemporary
kate shepherd wall

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Contemporary

Contemporary, Contemporaneous, Simultaneous, Synchronous, Concurrent, Coincident, Concomitant

We begin with the field of the literal. It is not the word, but the evocation. The literal is what immerses you. Contemporary art. Is this Concomitant art. What is possibly a misreading begets another reading.

Concomitant refers to coincidence in time of events so clearly related that one seems attendant on the other.

What events are concomitant to art? Which field of events must we trespass to experience the moment, however distended, we call contemporary. How many solipsisms must be shattered to land in the contemporary. And what then is left of the self.

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LABEL 12:

Location:
3rd floor contemporary
outside forefront gallery

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Collaborate

Collaborate: To cooperate treasonably.

It is at issue by which edict or which agreement we are treasonous in our collaborations. And it is at issue to what extent we are always engaged in collaborations.

"In one mouth, the number of bacteria can easily exceed the number of people who live on Earth"

And it is at issue the status of treason if we humans require these collaborators to function.

What new territories must we draw to account for the abjuration of treason?

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LABEL 13:

Location:
3rd floor contemporary
off the wall gallery

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Center

Use this institution, **The Center for the Study of the Collective**, as a means to explore the outsides within. Allow the center to de-center.

The interest here moves past introspection, epistemology, or tactical subversion into a probing for sensitivities. In practice, there is no compromise, no inversions, no subterfuges- there are simply opportunities, borne out of an engaged questioning and abstracted concern for what agency are in things (human and non-human).

A search for the intensive.

For example, a security guard has a concern for security- but, when abstracted, the question of security must interrogate the territory of well-being. For example, is it secure to allow what many consider pathogenic (bacteria, fungus) into a secure environment- secure for people, for art, for capital. It is bacteria that we ourselves escort into this environment. Are we by this understanding insecure environment ourselves? Let us then wrestle with the fact that bacteria comprise 70% of human cellular makeup. They exist as symbionts that make comprise the machinery of our organism to survive. But who let them in?, we're fond of asking.
It is time we develop new questions.

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LABEL 14:

Location:

3rd floor contemporary
sandbeck room
on concrete column to the left of window

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Individuation

Standing here at this window – standing here at this division you are at the location where more birds collide into the museum than any other place. There is an optical relation between birds and Fred Sandback that crosses this barrier between inside and outside, culture and nature, art and object hood. Could we say that every individuation involves a capture? Something becomes an inside and something becomes its outside – thing and environment. Our world is composed of things in an environment. This simple fact is not given just once and for all – depending on your perspective you are either an environment or a thing. And depending on what type of thing you are the environment will appear differently. How you act in an environment and how the environment acts – changes both of you. By being here and reading these words this institution is changing. By being here and reading this you are changing. Two interacting systems – among as many as there are agents – all in a particular tenuous co-evolutionary movement.

Windows and birds, ladybugs and moisture, bacteria and stone, UV light and sensitive pigments, culture and value, indirect light and art, humidity and entropy, building noise and social quiet, air and budgets, you and us. Without certainty and between certainties.

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