

An Invitation to Dwell in Darkness

Matt Barlow

“It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.”

Herman Melville (2008 [1851], 49), *Moby Dick*; or *The Whale*

Dark matter looms. Intimate and monstrous. Near and far, but *present*. Some things tend to loom in relation to their verticality: a volcano, a beehive, a skyscraper, an avalanche, a shark, the tide, the moon, the sun. That is to say that these things loom seemingly through their ability to suspend gravity. Other things loom through their absence, which also suggests their presence: global warming, the state, the economy, radiation, terrorism, malaria, colonialism, a deadline. Timothy Morton calls these things hyperobjects, things at once visceral and abject, and yet somehow absentⁱ. The power of that which looms then, lies in its ability to transgress. It seems that in this quantum age of entanglementsⁱⁱ and plurality that there is a task set forth in adjusting to ambivalence, to find the in between, the mezzanine. However, if our cosmological understandings of life have been replaced with an immunologicalⁱⁱⁱ understanding of health, what wondrous surprises await those brave enough to drink from the bowl whose contents cannot be seen^{iv}?

Many ‘modern’ understandings of the world rest upon the law of non-contradiction, which broadly suggests that things must exist as singular entities: this is an apple *or* a molecule, rather than an apple *and* a molecule. However, it seems that in this new geological epoch called the *Anthropocene*^v, contradictions, or paradoxes, are everywhere, and that in fact they might have always been intrinsic to the flourishing of life. Light may be light only in so far as there is darkness for it to emerge from. One is “always already turning that way”^{vi}. *One: all that we can see* confronts this intersection by bringing contrast to matter. Contrast does not preference light or dark, but rather renders both complementary. It also negotiates the relationship between the two. It does not create a dualism, or a dialectic, but rather brings the qualities of differences in sharper focus. Things actually become more vital, and more vibrant, while in contrast. This can even be seen in gravitational force, as opposites attract. We have the moon to thank for this.

Spheres have the greatest surface to volume ratio, and are evident throughout the cosmos. From atoms, to wombs, to viruses, to Earth and the sun, spheres are *the* base geometrical unit throughout our conceived universe. Dome shaped dwellings are semi-spherical objects resting upon a spherical Earth. In indigenous cultures, domes were the preferred form of dwelling. From the Americas to Oceania, there seems a unified appreciation of domes across indigenous societies for the practical benefits to dwelling. In the Americas, Wigwams were used. Generally speaking, they had two distinct structural features: their semi-spherical shape and the east facing doorway, open to the morning light of the rising sun^{vii}. Light was simply welcomed and praised in the waking hours, just as it is in *white white (summer and winter solstice)*. Further, no one is excluded while inside a wigwam – everyone faces one another. This begs the question: what do corners represent? Gaston Bachelard^{viii} sees corners as places of reverie, places where the residual matter of modern life clusters in darkness to sequester and become potent. Where, in silence, and with a relative lack of mobility, one is left to ponder, wait, and investigate the depths of intimate immensity. Literally confronted. *Hora Somni: for Vera Rubin* nurtures this space and its genealogy; spherical, perpendicular, and dark.

Steady Illiterate Movement speaks to that which looms, the potency of contrast, and the relationships that form out of spherical and perpendicular geometries of existence. It is a body of work that draws from the infinite nature of the imagination, while inspired by the metabolic and atmospheric patterns that animate this thing we call life. The works encourage an engagement with that which is uncanny – which is not to say that these works are uncanny in and of themselves, but rather, produce an uncanny affect. They present themselves simultaneously as familiar and strange, lodging themselves in the far reaches of your memory bringing fourth associations once dormant. I invite you to dwell here, in darkness, clothed in light^{ix}.

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ⁱ Morton, T (2013) *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

ⁱⁱ Barad, K (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sloterdijk, P (2011) *Bubbles: Spheres Volume 1 – Microsphereology*, MIT Press, Cambridge.

^{iv} Tanizaki, J (1933 [1977]) *In Praise of Shadows*, Leete’s Island Books, Connecticut.

^v Kawa, N (2016) *Amazonia in the Anthropocene: People, Soils, Plants, Forests*, University of Texas Press, Austin.

^{vi} Wills, D (2008, 2) *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

^{vii} Kimmerer, RW (2014) *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis.

^{viii} Bachelard, G (2014 [1958]), *The Poetics of Space*, Penguin Books, New York.

^{ix} Ashley, R (1977) ‘The Backyard’, from *Private Parts [LP]*, Lovely Music Ltd., US.