

ATLANTA



An illustrated Journal of science and magick.

Preview

Alternative Thought, Learning and Action

A Periodic-Periodical
of Science and Magik

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ATLA

A Re-Imagination of Meaning for Our Collective Good

The ATLA Community and its “periodic-periodical” were born from a collective, deep dissatisfaction with the way the world is, how it came to be, and in many regards, where it is likely going. Our agenda, therefore, is to facilitate the much needed task of improving individual and collective understanding of ourselves and our world, and then more importantly, how the parts we find inadequate might be reimagined and improved. In this sense, our ambition is that the pages of this journal will stimulate some of the Alternative Thought, Learning and Action to which our collective identity aspires.

While we have a focus on creativity, we insist that we must begin with knowledge. It’s often said that “knowledge is power”, and where power is defined as the ability to get something or someone, to do something that it or they would not otherwise have done¹, this seems essentially correct. Whether you know an effective way to plaster a wall or facilitate a human community to achieve a necessary collective goal, knowing how our world works, and how to engage in these patterns to get the result you want, will be essential. It is from knowledge of the existing that the best creativity arises—just as, if you wrongly believe the story of Newton’s apple, the observation and knowledge of motion, as well as the Galilean Law of Acceleration, supported a creative leap.²

Knowledge does not just create power, however: it is enveloped by it³. Such power is everywhere. Some of these realities are seemingly impossible to miss: the control of information by totalitarian governments

used to subjugate large populations to oligarchical control (Russia under Putin⁴). Other cases are often both less obvious and more uncomfortable to consider—so let’s consider now very briefly the democratically elected UK Government’s claims, under Boris Johnson, that they were following “the science” to save lives during a global pandemic, despite then allowing tens of thousands of young people to break isolation rules to preserve the financial status quo of Higher Education. Elsewhere again, the reins of power over knowledge are more discrete, defused, embedded in institutions and therefore, terrifyingly, often intractable to the blunt instruments of human control. Funding structures focus the investigations of science, and media platforms have unstated agendas⁵. Social elites in democratic societies maintain positions by sticking to the script, having an answer for every question but often very little, and increasingly nothing of sufficient depth or complexity to say⁶. As George Orwell warned us against the emergence of “newspeak”, in which vocabulary becomes narrowed to reduce the scope of free thought⁷, Adam Curtis outlines a process of “hyper-normalisation”: where our “economies with the truth” become “untruths” and “alternative facts”, and even those creating and repeating reductionist sound bites and outright lies lose critical awareness of the relationship between the stories they tell, and the realities they seek to represent⁸.

At the core then, those starting the endeavour of this journal are dissatisfied with what is accepted and promoted as *meaningful knowledge*, the proscriptions concerning how this is to be produced,

presented, assimilated and engaged with. At the foundation we return to the Aristotelian concern that social organisation is shaped by a combination of both “truth” and “rhetoric”⁹; the former we’d define as the most representative story that can be told about the given, and the latter being the endeavour to use the best means of available persuasion. While a combination of truth and rhetoric could and can be hugely valuable for collective benefit, one without the other was, and is, problematic—perhaps most where we come to accept “style over substance”.

We, the like-minded, also bemoan the separation of the arts and sciences, through which the processes that create knowledge began to actively veil an underlying and inescapable reality: that science is deeply entangled in imagination and human emotion; that the arts are fundamentally premised on observation and predisposed to the creation and reflection of “theorisation” (or the ability to predict what will happen in unexperienced situations, such as landing a spacecraft on the moon for the first time, based on observations of those we have witnessed, i.e the mathematical analysis of gravity on earth)¹⁰. We are also concerned that to be acceptable in a physical public space, such as in a journal or periodical, knowledge needs an immediately known application. We disagree that stories built on a deeply personal logic, with no seeming relevance to anyone else – a publisher’s understanding of market demand – should be denied structured and constructive engagement from others, and therefore confined to self-authorship. Moreover, since we are living breathing, thinking but also

feeling human beings, we wanted to invest in the collective creation and physically published dissemination of pieces that scream from the bottom of their hearts “fuck the status quo and its sad unwitting agents, insisting on civilised language and appropriate tone”. We also reject that the most relevant and insightful knowledge necessarily comes in the form of words, and as such we will demonstrate that a published pamphlet can contain videos and music. We don’t do topics or themes or disciplines because all these confine and control; instead, we aspire to facilitate communication, creation, reimagining and remaking. In summary, after a lot of thinking about what exists and possible alternatives, we offer this journal as a space to challenge the often uncritically and widely accepted status quo, along with the structures that support it.

To cycle back to the concerns of Aristotle, one final point remains important: that our agenda is not tantamount to accepting “anything goes”. Meaning must be coherent within an accessible and ultimately understandable structure, and therefore intelligible to others. Just as the foundations and engineering of all buildings must be sound – irrespective of the function, form and aesthetic – the best stories must provide the most plausible and insightful account of their subject as *humanly* possible. We are delighted that contributions to this, our first edition are all fine illustrations of the principles to which we aspire. Indeed, we are proud, and as certain as we might be, that our first edition responds to the explicit mantra of one author, that: “process should take you to the very edge of what you are capable

of, which is both unnerving and painful but also beautiful and inspiring”.

We hope anyone who finds the above to resonate will enjoy these seminal contributions to what will be a long and exciting experiment.

Editorial Note

The concept of a “periodic-periodical” emerged as those who have worked to make this happen want no part in dictating the frequency and number of publications. Setting such parameters always overshadows quality decisions. The fate of this publication is therefore left to those who might wish to contribute.

See Postscript for details about joining our endeavour.

Issue 1: Alternative perspectives on thought, truth and futures

Our critique of the power structures that order and organise legitimate and acceptable truths of course reflect those of generations of people across the globe. Such a perspective finds concrete expression in Emmanuel Effiong Johnson’s piece, “The Heart’s Archive: A Poem by an African in Pursuit of Belonging”. Here we find a direct and uncomfortable question to readers: why those dreaming of peace and security for “Africa” (however this might be interpreted: the continent, a diaspora or a structural position within global society) should be marginalised as “abominable?”, when other visionary dreams – the state of Israel and its

illegal invasions of other sovereign states perhaps? – are embraced by not only wider thought but also action? Johnson testifies to the experience of being chastised and “told to be quiet”, forced into “designated spaces” that are “praised and branded to be warm” yet are so cold they induce shivers of isolation. We might believe that an appropriate action for those of us with less experience of such marginalisation is to listen (read), but a further call comes not to dismiss this “merely as an academic matter”, as is so often the case in formal education about issues of colonisation overseas and at home. In my personal interpretation at least, this reflection carries implicit the request to empathise and so to *feel* emotion in response to the account—and therefore to reconnect the “Science” and “Art” in the “Magik” (or that space of humanity someplace in between the two).

Another two pieces accepting the opportunity to reconnect the human self of the author with the meaningful stories they tell are *Escaping the Labyrinth and Haunted Landscapes*. In the former, Joel Lazarus outlines his vision for *navigating the path of transition-transformation*, in which he outlines a deeply autobiographical and personally reflective story as essential ingredients in a wider theory of improving our shared world. Joel acted, he tells us “because of the pain I felt in my heart – the pain of such obvious and extensive injustice, oppression, and violence everywhere I looked in the world”. Now try getting that published in a journal otherwise inviting theorisation of social-economic adjustment. Trust me, you won’t get in. The rest of the account

makes an active argument, the essence and presentation of which are grounded in Greek mythology, to propose the value of recombining the “sword” with the power to be gained in “clews of thread”. *Haunted Landscapes* by Gayle Letherby however, dissolves entirely a division between the self and the account and shares a deeply autobiographical narrative of life’s ups, downs and terminations. Moreover, the work speaks to the way in which emotions remain embedded in space, to create a place of deep emotive experience. For me therefore, the work provides a seminal example of publicly writing for the purposes of personal processing. Moreover, it’s a healthy antidote to the expectations of our daily lives, where death is subjugated to isolated spaces by social practices so intensely internally, chemically weaponised by our unconscious control centres—that being is often paralysed when confronted with the topics of personal hardship and deep loss.

A further piece that confronts us with the realities of life and death is Conor Heaney’s *Preliminary Notes for a Solar Pharmacology*. *O Ye Wonderful Shapes / With your Streamers of Light* is a proclamation borrowed from the American poet, William Ross Wallace’s tribute to the first known observation of a great auroral or solar flare display (1859). What follows is a study of the interaction between the sun’s electromagnetic waves and living organisms. Amid our dissatisfactions, including those of biodiversity loss and climate breakdown¹¹, we are reminded that life on earth existed before us: not only before the human species, but even prior to the great oxidation of our planet,

which shifted the atmosphere’s chemical status quo from being carbon dominated to forcing life to breathe oxygen for the very first time. We might see this as part of an inevitable positive evolution to higher forms of life, but I believe that would be arrogant and naïve. For me, the important alternative thought here is that perceived stability is thin. One day even oxygen might let us down and to understand this, imagination will be key.

Brilliantly, all our contributions have readily accepted the invitation to abandon preconceived notions of appropriate presentation. As an academic I have wasted days, if not weeks and months, amending my knowledge to conform with the ultimately arbitrary presentational expectations of publications. Even online magazines have “rules” for grammar and style. Yet, until the efficacy of the creator to communicate what they believe is their message has broken down entirely, little is lost in variation from the conventional. In this light, I see the title of “This is by no means a manifesto” and the manner of its presentation, entirely coherent with the transparent tagline that “This is my interpretation of the information that I have come across in a lifetime of musical obsession”. Where Conor Heaney has accompanied writing with original images, Ellie House takes the opportunity further in sharing an *Extract from a short film; Room 45*. This contribution tramples the conventional expectation that meaningful knowledge comes from conscious human creation. While it does include screenplay text, the story was created by Ellie’s unconscious mind. Moreover, the text

is complimented by images created by Artificial Intelligence – dedicated to “exploring new mediums of thought and expanding the imaginative powers of the human species”¹² – created by translating the visual and emotional memories of her dream into appropriate prompts. If there are places art and science recombine, this must surely be one.

This theme of creating Magik through art and science is also core to *This Is By No Means A Manifesto*. Here George Vaughan suggests that the best music emerges when people work together in a natural way – the coming together of what I understand Jools Holland to call the essential “technique” and “feel” of musical expression. Here, while the aesthetic of presentation is playful, the use of words is surgical. Consider the precise statement of advice to “Always prepare correctly”, suggestive of a specific, scientific method to create the best foundation in a given situation. Compare that with the Schrödingerian command: “Don’t force it”. Here, for me, George recognises the

futility of trying to be more instructive on this matter. Sometimes, I suppose, the most scientific processes of learning, as here, from a lifetime of musical experience, can only result in the most artistic of conclusions.

On that “musikal note”, I leave you with a conclusion attributed to one of humanity’s most celebrated scientific thinkers to reflect upon through the heart of our publication:

“The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong to the rank of devoutly religious men”¹³.

¹ Dahl, R. A. (1957) ‘The concept of power’, Behavioural Science, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 201–15. www.fbaum.unc.edu/teaching/articles/Dahl_Power_1957.pdf // ² Priestley, F. (1987). Newton and the Apple. Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Vol. 81. www.adsabs.harvard.edu/full/1987JRASC..81..185P // ³PowerCube. Foucault: power is everywhere. www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere // ⁴ Digital Forensic Research Lab (2024). Undermining Ukraine: How Russia widened its global information war in 2023. www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/undermining-ukraine-how-russia-widened-its-global-information-war-in-2023/#:~:text=Additionally%2C%20Russia%20has%20continued%20to,in%20Latin%20America%20and%20Africa // ⁵ Tibit, A. (2023) Media urged to scrutinise think tanks’ claims amid fears over secret donors. www.opendemocracy.net/en/who-funds-you-press-regulator-think-tanks-journalists-scrutinise-secret-donors-dark-money // ⁶ Allen, D. (2008). Politics, Propaganda, and the Use and Abuse of Sound-Bites. www.ias.edu/ideas/politics-propaganda-and-use-and-abuse-sound-bites // ⁷ Open Culture (2017). George Orwell Explains How “Newspeak” Works, the Official Language of His Totalitarian Dystopia in 1984. www.openculture.com/2017/01/george-orwell-explains-how-newspeak-works.html // ⁸ Curtis, A. (2016). Adam Curtis continues search for the hidden forces behind a century of chaos. www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/oct/09/adam-curtis-donald-trump-documentary-hypernormalisation // ⁹ Rapp, C. (2022). Aristotle’s Rhetoric. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric // ¹⁰ Bergland, R (2024). Magic Died When Art and Science Split. Nautilus. www.nautilus.us/magic-died-when-art-and-science-split-650412/?_sp=c6773784-f0cf-4b87-9dbc-e38941e859be.1718280108690 // ¹¹ Stockholm Resilience Centre (2024). Nine Planetary Boundaries. www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html // ¹² Midjourney (2024). www.midjourney.com/home // ¹³ Einstein. Cited by Philipp Frank. Einstein: His Life and Times (1947), ch.12, section 5. // Alastair Smith – Co-founder, ATLA.

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