

## You Feel at Ease: Reconstituting the Fall

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There is no start or end, only the process of a fall, diving infinitely towards a ground being stripped of its foundation. The worldly body gradually blends into oceans, deserts, volcanos, the sky, and the wilderness. The body separates from the self in unceasing motion, as eyesight begins to unravel, the ears fade into silence, and the skin touches the planets, its membrane expanding steadily yet explosively, feeling the rough, intricate, fierce, and steady energy of physical matter. The self is constantly lost in the fall as you strive to pick up the fading pieces.

On the night before the fall, a triangular prism enters the view, surrounded by a black void in the background and its center. A soundscape of ocean waves fades out as the prism burns into ashes, and an ocean landscape emerges from the darkness.<sup>1</sup> You feel the eternal rhythm of planetary fluctuations against your ears, overwhelmed by a sea of big data. All the while, you realize the impermanence of your life, temporal like the flashes of the column of fire, consigned to dust. The gravity of physical and mental anxieties—self-discipline, working, studying, earnings, deadlines, pandemics, character descriptions, world wars, personal development, emotional ties, and wisdoms—are trifles before the vastness of the sea. Therefore, you have found peace, being a droplet that becomes one with the sea. However, a foghorn interrupts the sea's rhythms, and an odd feeling takes hold within your body.

In the pre-dawn hours of the fall, the beach stretches towards the black desert of the volcanic crater.<sup>2</sup> You see throngs of people leaping into the crater, conjoining with the Earth. Scorching flames envelop the falling bodies as corpses are turned into ash. As the smoke slowly billows, it circulates in the air to fall upon the black desert at your feet. You tread upon the ashes of the various souls, feet clasped in the grips of their remains, falling into the quicksand, unable to break free as the desert ingests your body.

You fall into despair, envious of the quick demise of those leaping in. Before the desert sands rush into the mouth and nostrils, before consciousness wavers, you catch a glimpse of a beast covered in black VHS cassettes rising from the desert.<sup>3</sup> From its mouth emanate devastating nuclear radiation in

an all-powerful display of light and energy, eradicating all memories, the past, traditions, and histories. If Walter Benjamin's Angel of History was blown back by the winds of progress, eager to take hold of the ruins of history, then the beast's light of progress catastrophically dissolves them all.<sup>4</sup> Before giving up the ghost, you find that not only do you want to preserve yourself, but also the commingled histories—the corners people have neglected and the things which have been oppressed.

You know that this body of flesh and blood is fated to end, to die and be swept away, like the inevitable assimilation of the black sands. But we can always through the “medium” preserve “a second corporeal body”—files, archives, and histories kept in art. Time trickles away like the sands, gnawing away at our finite bodies, but the medium can recall and rework time, resurrecting spirits through ritual and magic. As a spirit of the dead, you come back to life with the representation and replaying of the medium, leaping forth from the screen, evoking, cursing, possessing, and taking over the body and mind of the audience.<sup>5</sup>

The various media of today's data torrents overwhelm human worlds like viruses, aided by the platforms. Humans are thoroughly computed, analyzed, and controlled, uploaded at faster speeds and embedded in the dataset. The data becomes removed from historical contexts to form digital currents, engulfing the masses. Specters that are useless and in conflict with the system are filtered out, paving the way for rampant computational, statistical, and feedback-based “frictionless media”. Human sexuality, corporeality, and minds are constantly analyzed, dissected, and recruited to bolster platform data, to the point where landscapes, planets, and Earth's surfaces are subject to the forces of frictionless data. You'd think that data is purely a model of human form or natural landscapes, but it reconfigures the natural scenery. 300 million years from now, with the sun gone and organic bodies of human beings long extinct, would frictionless data carry on our lives and keep on calculating the landscapes? <sup>6</sup>

Faced with the total dominance of data media, you feel an urge to escape, to return to the rawness of nature, using the infinite powers of the wilderness, inner spirit, spontaneity, pre-reflection, and meditation to counter the alienation of data calculations and to fight against the alienating effects of civilization by exiling the self from society and extra-sensory connections with nature. However, you find there is no “nature” to return to, only a semblance of nature that has been mediatized, and what looks like a desert has been filled with eroded corpses, not at all the nature you knew. The black

desert that engulfs you, like toner, like cat litter, can bury poop as well as people, along with all kinds of obsolete media. You strive to break loose from the mediatization of the black desert and return to nature but realize that you are being haunted by all kinds of dead spirits.

The palate is filled with dried-out and delicate sensations, and as the running sand invades your body, you cannot distinguish the boundaries of your inner and outer bodies. You start to fall into the abyss, your consciousness fading away, feeling the violent dizziness and unease while reveling in the ecstasy of death, a bona fide immersive experience, eventually coming around to a place of communion with the dead. Why must there be a dichotomy of “media alienation” and “return to nature”? Instead, why not create an alternative form of “eccentric media”? Nature has been corrupted and infiltrated with all forms of media, and massive quantities of electronic junk are littered across the Earth’s surface. Obsolete media, such as corpses, are deposited in the soil. But media never truly dies. They will eventually be dug up by future alien visitors to be dismantled, deconstructed, reassembled, and sewn together from various body parts like Frankensteins, framing and composing scenes from the United States, Mexico, Japan, and Taiwan. Through conjuring rites with mysterious triangular and circular symbols, they become reanimated with foreign souls.

Dead media can be reanimated and reenacted not as a human puppet figure, but as a strangely contorted body covered in scars. Perhaps that VHS cassette beast emitting destructive rays have also been assembled in this way? How shall we construct eccentric spirits of the stars, rather than modern beasts of destruction? Or perhaps we should strive to assemble an eccentric medium between future alien visitors and ancient forebears, rather than frictionless media for the extant human race?

Spirits infiltrate us but also roam the lands. They are not only found within historical archives but also throughout prehistorical and historic times, before the dawn of humans and after their demise. The modern prosperity humans are proud of achieving is but a barren wilderness to the spirits.<sup>7</sup> Wherever the spirits go, they only see decay, death, decadence, and destruction, as in T. S. Eliot's apocalyptic image of the world.<sup>8</sup> The white noise of death lurks in the background, ticking away behind the bustle of human civilization.

Human beings attempt to create grand civilizations, fabricating all manners of architectures, art, and histories to immortalize themselves in defiance of nature, but nature inevitably devours and destroys

these contradictory and “incorruptible” creations. We are fated to become ghosts, leaving behind only traces of our planetary paths. In light of the futility, why not just give in? Why not head down the path of our own destruction? Why bother exhausting planetary resources to devise all kinds of media? In spite of the futility, you are not content to achieve personal nirvana but believe you must create “eccentric media” to account for the telltale but consequential alternative time, to counter the frictionless media of data, and to fight the beasts of modernity as you are drawn into a future of annihilation.

“Beep... bopp... zzz, bleep...”

Suddenly, you hear an eerie crackle of a short circuit. The flowing sands retreat, the beast unravels, and the surroundings are laced with stray currents, buzzing wildly. These electric currents do not serve the purposes of human contraptions and data flow but dance with a mind of their own. The black sands which had devoured human bodies gradually turn into light tan deserts, and corpses in the black desert revert to a state of life before they had leapt into the volcano, and the entire desert is restored to a beachfront. You stare at the burning triangular prism, feeling at ease.

## NOTES

1. The image of the burning triangular prism and sea waves hark back to WANG Hsiang-Lin’s *invisibility* (2020).
2. The volcano and black desert invoke TING Chaong-Wen’s *Infected Dreams* (2023) series. TING initiates a conversation with the black deserts of Mount Mihara, an active volcano, and the scene of numerous suicides in Japan.
3. *Infected Dreams* (2023) features a large-scale VHS cassette tape scaffolding installation, along with sound and stage lighting that creates the menacing presence of a beastly monster at the exhibition. The monster is a reference to Godzilla, which dwells in Mount Mihara as depicted in the exhibited media.
4. Walter Benjamin. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, translated into the Chinese by ZHUANG Zhong-Li, p220. Taipei. Business Weekly Publications, a division of Cité Publishing Ltd. (2019).

5. Besides references to Godzilla at Mount Mihara, *Infected Dreams*, also talks about the legend of Sadako in *the Ring*. In the original novel *Ringu*, the mother of Sadako, Shizuko Yamamura, commits suicide by jumping into the volcanic crater. Sadako inherits her mother's supernatural powers and is reincarnated through the VHS tape.
6. Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in *Thought Without a Body?* (1994) mentions the future of destruction following the sun's explosion in which humans no longer have physical bodies. "Whatever is left of the solar explosion, there is no human being, no Earth, no sentient or sentimental people left to witness, because it will be destroyed along with the consciousness of the Blue Planet."  
Jean-François Lyotard's *L'Inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*.
7. WANG Hsiang-Lin's *Missing Deadline* (2014) series of photographic works also depict the barren atmosphere of the ruins of civilization.
8. T.S. Eliot. (1964). *The Waste Land* (1922). Grolier Club.