

Postscript 62:
Patois e Pasticcio

DAVID KHANG
on INVERNOMUTO

The drug hit him like an express train, a white-hot column of light mounting his spine from the region of his prostate, illuminating the sutures of his skull with x-rays of short-circuited sexual energy. His teeth sang in their individual sockets like tuning forks, each one pitch-perfect and clear as ethanol. His bones, beneath the hazy envelope of flesh, were chromed and polished, the joints lubricated with a film of silicone. Sandstorms raged across the scoured floor of his skull, generating waves of high thin static that broke behind his eyes, spheres of purest crystal, expanding...."¹

William Gibson's 1984 sci-fi novel *Neuromancer* is an immersive experience mediated by a string—or perhaps more appropriately a *matrix*—of words that tell a dystopic tale set in a speculative future. In Gibson's cyberspace, first-time readers are challenged to make sense of the elaborate, disorienting places and events. *Neuromancer* and *Wintermute*, eventually revealed, are names given to a pair of artificial intelligence entities that play central roles in the narrative. To get to this plateau of understanding, however, readers must attentively follow the labyrinthine narrative sequence, and imagine a speculative future from tangential present-day references (Mercedes, Yakuza, sararimen). Furthermore, to keep pace with the dizzying scene changes, we are left to rely on our own personally accumulated databank of images and ideas—which, as Gibson may agree, are fallible and volatile constructs. At best we manage to partially follow the SF narrative; it is by design beyond full comprehension. This dystopic tale is already and not yet.

Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, affecting change in the world outside. *Neuromancer* was personality. *Neuromancer* was immortality.²

Invernomuto (literally 'winter-mute' in Italian) is a hive mind composed of collective

decision makers Simone Bertuzzi and Simone Trabucchi. When they decided to name themselves after one of the AI featured in Gibson's novel, it was a conscious recognition of, if not parallel, overlapping creative processes at play. Without "a set format," yet with strategic intuition, Invernomuto works with a mediated vocabulary that emphasizes "the collapse and subsequent mixture of different languages."³ The resultant entry point and interface to their Negus project is a multi-sensory patois and pasticcio—drawn from a broad band of time and space, yet hyper-texted together with geopolitical site-specificity—of Vernasca, Abyssinia, Ruatoria.⁴

He had no idea where they were. Everything was familiar, but he couldn't be sure he'd seen any particular stretch before. A curving hallway lined with wooden showcases displayed collections he was certain he'd never seen; the skulls of large birds, coins, masks of beaten silver. The service cart's six tires were silent on the layered carpets. There was only the whine of the electric motor and an occasional faint burst of Zion dub....⁵

A faint dub emanates from the open door of Artspeak, and turns into a punctuated and raspy reggae vocal upon entering the gallery. As I quietly peruse, the door behind me slowly swings

open—on its own, and more than once—as if the objects, site-responsively situated in the space, perhaps talismanic, have invoked the spirit of Lee "Scratch" Perry, king of dub, king of Jah Love, Lion of Zion....

Writing about (around, against, across) Invernomuto is akin to navigating Neuromantic cyberspace. There is no shortage of quasi-familiar signifiers of seemingly disparate origin: a glossy, animated hand of Mickey Mouse protruding from a wall (a gesture of greeting, or of demand?), ghostly and transparent images depicting Ruatorian (northeastern New Zealand) Maori-Rastafarians mounted on the gallery's front windows (the images become more visible from *inside* the gallery, rather amusingly against the backdrop of Salty Tongue and Blarney Stone across Carrall Street), a forlorn Mercedes-Benz hubcap trisecting a corner of the room, a trilogy of books written about the aforementioned Maori (who are described as a "terrorist sect" by the author Angus Gillies), a hanging banner made of reflective fabric with laser-cutout text (is the text materially hollow or strategically immaterial?), and finally at the far end of the space, a projected video of Lee "Scratch" Perry—the entire installation tied together with an arcing rainbow of rotating spotlight that begins at Mickey's gloved hand with an orange glow, then

reflecting pink and mauve on the hubcap and the banner (and the resulting wall of mauve text just behind it), before shutting off as it reaches the projection screen. Deliberate and purposefully cryptic, more than ambient, yet indeterminately narrative—a narrative interjected with tangents and departures through a thoughtful cluster of mediated images, materials and historical references.

While the formal language of the installation tells a directional narrative, Invernomuto gently nudges, quietly demands from the audience an investigative effort, beyond the predictability of a singular narrative, or glib and easy flatness of surface; one realizes that there are bits and parts untold and unseen, like the missing digit on Mickey's gloved hand-paw that we (perhaps lazily?) dismiss as convention. Then once we jack into the narrative, how do we, given an incomplete map, locate Chiba City, Sprawl, Villa Straylight, Vernasca to Abyssinia? How do we navigate this terra incognita, while keeping up with the language and the law of the land?

Dixie Flatline, Hosaka, Ono-Sendai, Screaming Fist, Sense/Net, shuriken, simstim, Turings, zaibatsus / Abyssinia, Duppy, Haile Selassie, Invernomuto, Negus, Ngati, Ruatoria, Topolino, Vernasca

"On our left," said the Mercedes, as it steered through a maze of rainy streets, "is Kapali Carsi, the grand bazaar." The Mercedes swung smoothly around a corner. "The spice bazaar, sometimes called the Egyptian bazaar," the car said, "was erected on the site of an earlier bazaar erected by Sultan Hatice in 1660. This is the city's central market for spices, software, perfumes, drugs...." "Drugs," Case said, watching the car's wipers cross and re-cross the bulletproof Lexan.⁶

Invernomuto's Mercedes-Benz hubcap (circa 1970), object found motionless and seemingly abandoned, in part invokes Duchamp, and in part evokes the empty, drizzly streets of Istanbul that Case's futuristic Mercedes self-navigates through.⁷ Neuromancer is a tale in which corporate presence has superseded that of governments, city/states, and conurbations. And while not-yet omnipotent, corporate omnipresence signified by the hub can be felt like a faint background dub, whether it is Mercedes in Abyssinia/Vernasca, Disney in Anaheim/Orlando/Tokyo/Paris, Tessier-Ashpool in Gibson's Berne/Rio/Villa Straylight.

Corporations are not found objects, but their logos can be (found or stolen). Corporations are built entities—sometimes built over millennia,

gliding smoothly through past, present, and future, and in between truth and speculation. The historically situated truths that corporations leave behind as by-product of doing business-as-usual are often just below the surface of investigation (Degesch, the makers of Zyklon B used in gas chambers at Auschwitz, for example, now operating as Detia-Degesch). These histories, like oceanic heavy metals that sediment to the bottom, patiently wait to be stirred into murky, often toxic recognition. For the most part, however, logos remain relatively unblemished in the market place (if not in quasi-public spaces as sponsors of sports stadiums, theatres, and arts festivals). We swim with the prevailing currents, along with the flotsam and jetsam of logos, ideas, and objects that bob around us, floating signifiers seemingly timeless and site-less—until those like Invernomuto do the work of connecting the dots, without prescription, and with suggestive implications.

Neuromancer does have the rudiments of a traditional novel: a protagonist and a plot. Henry Case is a computer hacker rescued from death by a shadowy organization that needs his skills to break into the computer systems of another organization... The novel's plot turns, like much dystopian SF, on the deep-laid schemes of an almost but not quite omnipotent agency....

But the novel is not much interested in character and plot. Instead it is dedicated to creating the feeling of a transformed reality, (a zeitgeist) where a new vocabulary is required to describe how perception itself has been changed....⁸

I have never been much interested in descriptive or didactic writings on art exhibitions. They often feel perfunctory, untransformed—both for the writer and the reader. In response to the Negus project, I write with conscious intention to investigate, and to communicate the feeling, the zeitgeist of Invernomuto's work. I want to interrogate the research and histories imbedded within their work, to carefully listen to the multiple tracks that have been “collapsed and remixed” to form their version of dub, while acknowledging that I need not, cannot fully comprehend the fulsomeness of the narrative.

We monitor many frequencies. We listen always. Came a voice, out of the babel of tongues, speaking to us. It played us a mighty dub. “Call ‘em Wintermute”, said the other, making it two words.⁹

Call ‘em Invernomuto, in a word.

NOTES

1 William Gibson, Neuromancer (Ace Books, New York, NY, 1984), p.154.

2 Gibson, p.269.

3 Invernomuto, home page, 2015, www.invernomuto.info.

4 This postscript is written as a response not only to Invernomuto's exhibition at Artspeak, but also to the exhibition essay by Kim Nguyen, who manages to deftly and densely pack in the gamut of references made by Invernomuto in their work. My aim here is to provide a complimentary text with an alternate, experimental, and comparative approach to the work, rather than attempting to provide a totalizing summary of the exhibition.

5 Gibson, p.231.

6 Gibson, p.91.

7 The futuristic car of course is already here—or at least in California, where drivers can be driving along a freeway and encounter a Google driverless vehicle. Mercedes and Volvo are working on their own driverless vehicles, which are projected to be on the road by 2020.

8 John Mullan, "On William Gibson's Neuromancer—Guardian Book club," The Guardian, November 7, 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/07/neuromancer-william-gibson-review-cyberpunk-classic-30-years-on>.

9 Gibson, p.110.

DAVID KHANG is a visual, performance, and biological artist, whose practice investigates embodied languages as vehicles of poetic and political relations. He holds a BSc and DDS from the University of Toronto (1991), BFA from Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design (2000), and MFA from UC Irvine (2004). He concurrently completed UCI's Critical Theory Emphasis, for which he studied with Jacques Derrida, David Joselit, and Etienne Balibar. Khang has exhibited and performed in Tokyo, New York City, Los Angeles, Toronto, Vancouver, and Santiago (Chile). Khang is a 2006 recipient of the Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance Art Award (Brooklyn, NY), and 2010 artist-in-residence at the SymbioticA Centre for Excellence in Biological Arts (Perth, AUS). Khang divides his time between his art practice, part-time dentistry, and part-time teaching at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver.