Cinq minutes:
Intimations of imminent virtuality

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She’s beginning to suspect
Eldon Tyrell

In Matter and Memory Henri Bergson’s discussion of the manifold of duration and memory sets the scene, we might say the mise en scène, of contemporary discussions of the virtual. Bergson describes the identity of memory as a residue of the past, “a cloak of recollections” and at the same time “a core of immediate perception” (Bergson, 1988, 31). In his study of Bergson Gilles Deleuze describes this manifold texture of memory as a “virtual coexistence” and concludes that one of the most profound aspects of Bergsonism is the extrapolation of the theory of memory as a theory of the virtual. Speculative fiction, an unrecognized branch of philosophy also concerned with virtuality, offers insights to the metaphysical and ontological nuances of the affective implications of memory as virtuality:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the darkness at Tan Hauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.
(Fancher and Peoples, 1981)

This Zen-like quiescence towards the end of Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner (1982) comes after a fraught and violent battle between hunter and hunted. As Roy Baty slowly dies in Rick Deckard's presence, the tone is forgiving and confessional. His hunter becomes a kind of confidante and Roy speaks to him of what is most precious in his life, what he knows he is about to lose forever—his memories. Douglas Kellner, Flo Leibowitz and Michael Ryan have argued that

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1 The virtual, Donald Theall reminds us, “dwells in duration… and is embedded in the reality, but not the actuality, of the senses and synaesthesia” (Theall, 2002, 149-150).
this scene is a key moment of transcendence in the film for both Roy and Deckard (Kellner, Leibowitz & Ryan, 1984, 7). As the vanquished stands over his beaten opponent, he is transformed by his feelings of pity and compassion and sits with Deckard as an equal, a mortal at the end of his life. But Roy doesn’t spare Deckard’s life as an act of atonement for the violence he has unleashed during his time on Earth. Rather, it is out of empathy, of acute sensitivity to the precariousness and the preciousness of life. Unlike Roy, Rick Deckard can, for the time being at least, continue to see things.

There’s no getting away from it...
For Marcel Proust the portal to the virtual was the happenstance of involuntary memory, elusive, impromptu and always unexpected. A Madeleine dipped into an infusion of tea, the noise of a spoon against a plate, a hedge of hawthorn near Balbec, uneven cobbles in the courtyard of the Guermantes Hotel. Samuel Beckett, writing on the interplay of voluntary and involuntary memory in Proust, characterizes the productive nature of memory in terms of the pharmakon, an untranslatable, undecidable word first encountered in Plato: “Memory—a clinical laboratory stocked with poison and remedy, stimulant and sedative”. Memory is not either/or, imaginary/real but both. It is productive excess, an extrusion of the binary algorithm. Perhaps this is another way of describing Kant’s transcendental imagination, where the mind is a virtual space of intellection: “The representation of space cannot, therefore, be empirically obtained from the relations of outer appearance”. Bergson, after Kant, identifies recollection as virtual, a multiform process that explains how the past, as memories, stays with us in whatever given present: “Little by little (recollection) comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual it passes into the actual”. For Deleuze, after Bergson, the leap into the virtual is a movement from recollection to perception. This is the most important lesson of post-convergence. Augmented reality, prosthetic audio-visuality, cross media dissemination and diffusion are merely devices to do what we’ve always

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done, which is to modulate between the imperceptible and our sensoria. This is the role of memory work, memory as work, as creative potential for something in excess of itself: to modulate experience into data and back again in another form.

For Baty, memory has the indelible mark of being, of inner life, a material, indisputable trace inscribed upon the psyche like an act of writing. This sense of memory as inscription has a deep resonance within the philosophical tradition that incorporates the history of writing along the way, from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, Giordano Bruno's hermeticism, Peter Ramus and Henri Bergson, William James, Norbert Wiener's cybernetic program and Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* inter alia. The dominant motif in the writings on the “art of memory” is of memory as a kind of wax tablet on which impressions, sensations and thoughts are inscribed, as if with a stylus. As described by Cicero with respect to the story of Simonides of Ceos, to whom he attributes the invention of the art of memory, “images will

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5 http://www.acva.net.au/blog/detail/seven_theses_on_the_concept_of_post-convergence.

6 The story of Simonides’ capacity for remembering is at once a parable of the virtual as well as the first instance of what art critic Ralph Rugoff describes as “the forensic aesthetic”. Simonides’ ability to recall in memory the image of where a group of diners were sitting before a catastrophic accident presents a holographic projection or virtual image that helps solve an investigation into multiple deaths. Frances Yates sets the scene: “At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host… A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside and wanted to see him. He rose from the banquet and went out but could find no one. During his absence the roof of the banqueting hall fell in, crushing Scopas and all the guests to death beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identify them. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which were their dead” (Yates, 1966, 17).

Cicero, in his *De oratore*, reveals how Simonides was capable of this prodigious feat of recall: “He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty [of memory] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves…” (quoted in Yates, 1966, 17).

From Rugoff we can extrapolate that Simonides was providing information for identikit likenesses as well as making sense of a disaster-zone investigation. He did this by treating the banquet room scene on his return as possessing a “strong sense of aftermath” (Rugoff, 1997, 62). Cicero’s emphasis on the idea of place and emplacement is echoed in Rugoff’s enframing of the forensic scene “as a place where something happened” (62). Simonides’ art of memory is the unconscious of forensic science’s speculative assessment of the remnants of an event, information that elicits a situation which now remains “invisible to the eye” (62). Simonides’ inner vision constructs a virtual artefact from which actual information (who was sitting where when they died) that solves a practical requirement for bodies to be identified, retrieved and buried.
denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax-tablet and the letters written on it” (Yates, 1966, 17). The art of memory involved rhetorical and systematic means of retaining information internally, without the need for external prosthetics such as inscription on wax tablets or palimpsests. As Frances Yates reveals though, Quintilian, writing in the first century A.D, identifies memory as a gift of nature rather than an art (37), echoing Socrates’ alignment of memory with the soul in his famous complaint against writing in the *Phaedrus*. For Quintilian memory was part of human nature rather than culture. It was not a system to be mastered through study, as in the *ars memoria*, but an inner quality of being. It is this absolute, taken for granted assurance in memory as grounded in actual experience of nature and not artifice that Dick’s replicants believe in as proof of their identity. At crucial moments in the novel, though, they are troubled by the metaphysical perplexity that they, as well their memories, are products of technology.

The *ars memoria* were designed specifically for the purpose of what Dick’s replicants fear most: the ability to artificially systematize and order information as memory, creating a virtual psyche that is unequivocally accepted as real. This “*inner chronology*” of time was for Beckett a “double-headed monster of damnation and salvation” (Beckett, 1976, 11); salvation because the suspicion of an elusive past may be an illusion, damnation at the realisation that it is not. But the arts of memory were also practices for prodigious feats of recall, or

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7 The affect of such virtual realities was certainly accepted as an epistemological given within the classical arts of memory, as Yates persuasively demonstrates. With the anonymous author of the first century BC textbook *Ad Herennium* in mind, she describes how memory work arouses emotional affects as well as responds to them (Yates, 1966, 26). One contemporary author who was alive to this reality affect (as distinct from effect) is Thomas Harris. Amongst his most famous creation’s other culinary and psychopathic pastimes, Hannibal Lecter is an adept of the *ars memoria*. Lecter’s memory palace is modelled on the Norman Chapel in Palermo. When he is not in search of information he spends time in it to admire the beauty of its construction. But it is also a place of retreat from physical pain. Tortured by one of his Sardinian captors with a cattle prod, he intuitively retreats to his memory palace, adjusting the shades on its windows to relieve the “terrible glare” of the electric discharge, soothing his agonized face “against the cool marble flank of Venus” (Harris, 1999, 471). While virtually anaesthetized to real pain, he is thus able to insult his tormentors in an act of robust defiance: “I’m not taking the chocolate, Mason” (471).
hypermnesia, as Jacques Derrida has described it (Derrida, 1984, 147). It is in the fictions of the Argentinian Tiresias, Jorge Luis Borges, that we witness a fascination with memory as information overload, but also more perniciously, as false consciousness or hyperreal recollection. Borges’ character Ireneo Funès manifests the capacity to remember everything after a fall from a horse. Prior to that transformative event he described his life as “blind, deaf, addlebrained, absent-minded”. After it, while physically paralysed, his “perception and his memory were infallible” (Borges, 1964, 63):

In fact, Funès remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He decided to reduce each of his past days to some seventy thousand memories, which would then be defined by means of ciphers. He was dissuaded from this by two considerations: his awareness that the task was interminable, his awareness that it was useless. He thought that by the hour of his death he would not even have finished classifying all the memories of his childhood (65).

Funès’ relentless remembering is at once a savant-like virtue as well as a penance. Mastering the systematic techniques of the *ars memoria*, Funès’ life becomes an obsessive audit of the minutiae of immediate experience against the ledger of the past. Anticipating Dick’s androids and their obsession with memory by nearly three decades, Borges’ “Funès the Memorious” reveals the folly of a life devoted to remembering, as well as its eventual impasse as a retreat from immediate experience. Funès’ death, of “congestion of the lungs” (66), gestures to the suffocation of breath, but also suggests the exhaustion of the psyche by a vertigo of excess and the burden of over-remembering (“In the teeming world of Funès, there were only details almost immediate in their presence” [66]).

Funès’ exhaustion is precipitated by his unwitting capacity to remember absolutely everything. But what if this savant-like hypermnesia remembered “an illusory past”? This is the ontological predicament that Borges postulates in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”. In this fiction it is revealed that a secret society of benevolent conspirators (among them George Berkeley and Herbert Ashe) creates the compelling illusion of the complete history of an unknown world.
The narrator's tone graduates from incredulity to acquiescence at the prospect of conceiving and fabricating an illusory planet, Tlön, as more and more evidence of its reality competes with then replaces the familiar history of Earth (“already the teaching of its harmonious history [filled with moving episodes] has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood”) (Borges, 1964, 17). Far from being alarmed at such a preposterous scenario in which a “scattered dynasty of solitary men has changed the face of the world” (18), the narrator asks how, in the face of the horrors of war, of Fascism and anti-Semitism, could humanity not yield, not “submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet?” (17). This rhetorical invocation and avowal of a false consciousness is also an uncanny inversion of Plato’s simile of the cave as well as the anticipation of Jean Baudrillard’s hyperreality and the simulacrum of a map that covers the territory— that is, a complicit undertaking fulfilled with the acquiescence of its inhabitants:

The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world. Enchanted by its rigor, humanity forgets over and over again that it is a rigor of chess masters, not of angels... already a fictitious past occupies in our memories the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty—not even that it is false (18).

William Gibson, the techno-sage who introduced the word cyberspace to a world equally eager to embrace the otherworldly in the name of networked connectivity, has recently observed that “now, I understand the word meme, to the extent that I understand it at all, in terms of Tlön’s viral message, its initial vector a few mysteriously extra pages in an otherwise seemingly ordinary volume of a less than stellar encyclopedia”. Indeed, Gibson goes as far to suggest of his experience of reading “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” as an adolescent that had “the concept of software been available to me, I imagine I would have felt as though I were installing something that exponentially increased what one would call bandwidth, though bandwidth of what, exactly, I remain unable to say” (Gibson, 2007, x).

Had it been available...
Perhaps Gibson was unwittingly postulating the virtual here in this intimation. The bandwidth of which he speaks may be an incunabulum of virtuality as excess, overload, superfluity. But more precisely the virtual as the actualisation of potential, as in Aristotle’s “entelechy” from his De Anima. In Ulysses James Joyce has Stephen Dedalus reflect on “the first entelechy” in terms of perception, describing the process whereby sensation becomes perceptible as form (Joyce, 1992, 564). The second entelechy is the more formal process of techne, whereby art transforms “formless spiritual essences” (236). This intersection of the first and second entelechy is described by Stephen as a “structural rhythm” (564). In the idiom contemporary networked telepresence we may describe it as an interface. Perhaps Gibson’s inability to draw a conclusion, to proffer a name (“bandwidth of what”) is an intuition of this rhythm, as well as the suggestion of a hovering and elusive aphorism, one perhaps that even now in his sixty-third year is yet to come; a polemical non sequitur among many in the ranks of the virtual... “Contemporary art will be virtual, or it will not be”.

In the redaction he attempts an explanation of Tôn that brings to mind Stephen’s structural rhythm whereby abstraction becomes form: “This sublime and cosmically comic fable of utterly pure information (i.e. the utterly fictive) gradually and relentlessly infiltrating and ultimately consuming the quotidian, opened something within me which has never yet closed” (Gibson, 2007, x). It is to this something that he bestows the word “meme”.

Borges, like Dick in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968), fuses the genres of fantasy and science fiction with the detective aesthetic (a genre also familiar to Gibson) to implicate the reader in the very metaphysical conundrums that affect the protagonists in the fictions. There is in Borges, after Derrida, no outside-text (nota bene: this is not the same thing as the undergraduate apocryphon, when quoting Derrida, that there is “nothing outside the text”). As he observes of the Joyce of Finnegans Wake, “Can one pardon this hypermnesia which a priori indebts you, and in advance inscribes you in the book you are reading?” (Derrida, 1984, 147). By the end of Dick’s novel we are still unsure as to Deckard’s metaphysical identity, just as he himself suspects that it is

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9 On the matter of the Borges meme and the virtual, see Darren Tofts, “‘The World will be Tlön’: Mapping the Fantastic on to the Virtual”, Postmodern Culture, 13, 2, 2003.
ambivalent, either/or, human or android. Borges writes with the unimpeachable sobriety of the essayist, sincerely documenting fact rather than overtly weaving a fiction. His long time friend and collaborator Adolfo Bioy Casares draws the narrator’s attention to the entry on Uqbar in *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia* (volume XLVI, 1902).10 This “superficial description of a nonexistent country” (7) is only to be found in one particular volume of this edition. This strange anomaly transforms the two men of letters into literary detectives (Borges was besotted with Conan Doyle and Poe) who, in trying to verify its presence elsewhere, come across an altogether different volume, entitled *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, in which, startlingly, they find “a vast methodical fragment of an unknown planet’s entire history” (7). A 19th century history of Uqbar, listed in its bibliography, was traced to Bernard Quaritch’s bookshop in Buenos Aires.11 To the narrator’s astonishment its author, Johannes Valentius Andreä, is mentioned in De Quincey’s *Writings* (Volume XIII). In a subsequent footnote the narrator sends the reader off, sleuth-like, to track down a 1921 edition of Bertrand Russell’s *Analysis of Mind* (page 159 to be precise), in which the philosopher “supposes that the planet has been created a few minutes ago, furnished with a humanity that ‘remembers’ an illusory past” (10). The body text to which this appended note refers involves a discussion of one of the doctrines of Tlön that negates time:

... it reasons that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality other than as a present hope, that the past has no reality other than as a present memory (10).

With its uncanny anticipation of the foreshortened, yet intense five year life-span of the Nexus-6 generation android, how can one not speculate, uncomfortably, that Philip Kindred Dick, like the shadowy character of Herbert Ashe, was an invention of the conspirators of Tlön. Rather than being born in Chicago in 1928, as the orthodox histories suggest, it is indeed an atrocious reality to suggest that

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10 Holding the mirror of fiction up to fiction, Borges’ narrator informs us at the start of the story, *en passant*, of his dinner conversation with Bioy Casares, the topic of which was “a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers—very few readers—to perceive an atrocious or banal reality” (Borges, 1964, 3).

11 If there is any doubt to the veracity of this establishment, please see http://bernardquaritch.com.
Dick intruded “into the world of reality” (16) in the last five minutes to a humanity that remembers his Chicago upbringing in the 1930s, his struggle with vertigo from an early age, his obsession with science fiction as a young teen, the University drop-out, the voracious reader of Joyce and Flaubert and his untimely death at the age of 53. His biography is as compelling in its verisimilitude as the inventory of the “kipple” (his neologism for the material, miscellaneous stuff of everyday life) of Orbis Tertius, with its architecture and its playing cards, with the dread of its mythologies and the murmur of its languages, with its emperors and its seas, with its minerals and its birds and its fish, with its algebra and its fire, with its theological and metaphysical controversy (7).

And like Dick’s biography all of the stuff inventoried by the conspirators of Orbis Tertius is “articulated, coherent, with no visible doctrinal intent or tone of parody” (7).12 If this sounds preposterously irreal, metafictional or the product of an over literary imagination, it should be remembered that for many years it was rumoured that Dick was the real author of Venus on the Half-Shell (1975), a pulp science fiction novel attributed to Kilgore Trout, the fictitious writer invented by Kurt Vonnegut Jr (the same must also be said for the purportedly fictional Ern Malley in the 1940s and more distantly Chatterton’s Thomas Rowley and the hero of James Macpherson’s poem Fingal, an ancient epic poem in six books).13

In Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? androids are implanted with false memories that remember “an illusory past” and, therefore, an illusory identity. This is dramatically portrayed in Blade Runner in the characters of Leon and Rachael who carry photographs purporting to represent their childhood;

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12 Lawrence Sutin’s biography of Philip K. Dick does little to dispel this outrageous conceit of Dick as a cipher of Borges’ imagination. The book’s subtitle, “A Life of Philip K. Dick” is overtly provisional, indefinite, potential. Its title, Divine Invasions, is no less suggestive of the virtual, with its assertive intervention of the avatar, the earthly manifestation of the otherworldly in the material embodiment of flesh.

13 The book’s actual author, if we can have any confidence of his provenance in the light of the current discussion, is Philip José Farmer. The Dell Books publication of the title in 1975 came out ten years after the book had been mentioned as a literary work of the fictitious Trout in Vonnegut’s God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. The arcane association of Dick with Trout was tantalizingly reinforced recently when, upon dipping into Vonnegut’s Breakfast of Champions, I noticed that one of the excerpted blurbs on the dust jacket was attributed to one Kay Dick.
intimate and reassuring images of a loving family life, longevity and a verifiably real past (“I don’t know if it’s me or Tyrell’s niece”, Rachael says of a photograph of her childhood). The intimation that Dick is some kind of amanuens of Borges, despite the fact that history remembers him as an actual living writer, is even more enticing when comparing “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” with Dick’s 1966 short story, “We can remember it for you wholesale”. This story can in fact be read as an allegory of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, an uncanny remix that demonstrates the cabbalistic process of fabulatory world-building and its substitution of reality that remains aloof and invisible in Borges’ text. The lugubriously self-proclaimed “miserable little salaried” clerk Douglas Quail seeks out the services of “Rekal, Incorporated” to enable him to fulfil his life-long dream of having been to Mars. The prohibitive cost and inconvenience of actually going to Mars make the prospect of the illusion of having been to Mars an attractive alternative:

Was this the answer? After all, an illusion, no matter how convincing, remained nothing more than an illusion. At least objectively. But subjectively – quite the opposite entirely.

And anyhow he had an appointment (Dick, 1969, 148).

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14 The oblique vector that links Dick, Trout and Borges is more plausible if we consider that all three writers were fascinated by the invention of alternative or parallel worlds and, importantly, the use of fables and allegory as the portal to different planes of reality (Trout, for instance, disguised his theories of mental health “as science fiction” [Vonnegut, 1974, 15]). Intertextuality is a prominent trope in all three writers’ work, so it is not surprising to find Trout, in 1973, describing mirrors as “leaks”, “holes between two universes” (19); a re-inscription, no doubt, of the opening of lines of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, which speak of the role played by a mirror in the discovery of Uqbar. If my forecasts are not in error, we can soon expect a critical analysis postulating that there is no qualitative difference between a 3D overlay on a geophysical location in an augmented-reality browser and a Lonely Planet guide (http://www.acva.net.au/blog/detail/seven_theses_on_the_concept_of_post-convergence).

15 Quail’s appointment is “Within the next five minutes” (Dick, 1969, 148). On the matter of the number five, I have noted previously that Dick’s androids live for five years. There is an anomaly here that warrants further research. In both the original 1968 edition of Dick’s novel and in the Fancher and Peoples script for Scott’s film, four years is specified as the lifetime of an android. However in a 1987 essay on Blade Runner Peter Fitting discusses “fail-safe”, the mechanism that is built into androids, as “a four-year lifespan” that prevents them from attempting to find ways to become more human-like and prolong their life (Fitting in Mullen et al., 1992, 135). In an extended footnote to his point, he qualifies this by noting that “fail-safe” is a “by-product of their manufacture rather than … an intentional limitation, and as such, it plays no part in the androids’ motivation in the novel. There is some confusion in the film on this subject, for although Tyrell tells Roy that he cannot reverse the process, Rachael has been built with “no termination date”” (143). In a violent encounter in Blade Runner before he is shot dead by Rachael, Leon asks Deckard “How old am I?” More alarmingly, in a rare 1969 Éditions du Cerf French translation of the novel in my possession (acquired from El Arte de la Memoria bookshop in Barcelona), the androids’ life-span is described as “cinq minutes”. Given the impeccable reputation of the dealer I see no reason to treat this as an aberrant, bowdlerized edition.
Apart from the technological intervention of an “extra-factual memory implant” of a trip to Mars, Quail will have corroborative evidence of his experience in the form of “proof artifacts” such as ticket stubs, postcards, photographs, half an ancient silver fifty cent piece, match folders from various Martian bars and a steel spoon engraved “PROPERTY OF DOME-MARS NATIONAL KIBBUZIM”. These ephemera individually “made no intrinsic sense” but “woven into the warp and woof of Quail’s imaginary trip, would coincide with his memory” (151). The entire Rekal, Incorporated process (a technology, no less, of writing) instils in his psyche the authentic sensation of first-hand experience, of “have been and have done” (Dick, 1969, 149)— memory, and indeed the virtual, in other words, as simply a locution of tense.

Have been and have done...

An intimation of Roland Barthes’ noeme for photography, “that has been”. The virtual has become the most recent subject of the epochal aphorism, which collectively garnered as a numerical list may form a manifesto of sorts for contemporary art. Some of its key pronouncements invoke the cyber age (Gibson: The street finds its own uses for things, Benedikt: We are turned into nomads who are always in touch), the technological sublime (Burroughs: Storm the reality studio. And retake the universe, ACVA: All that is solid melts into data16), the hyperreal (Borges: The world will be Tlön, Eco: The sign aims to be the thing), the subject (Zizek: I am a replicant, Haraway: in short, we are cyborgs). Contemporary art, then, is always already virtual.

As with Dick’s androids and Borges’ entire population on Earth, Quail’s absolute remembrance of a fake journey to Mars presumes a complete amnesia:

‘You’ll know you went, all right’... ‘You won’t remember us, won’t remember me or ever having been here. It’ll be a real trip in your mind; we guarantee that. A full two weeks of recall; every last piddling detail’ (149).

16 http://www.acva.net.au/blog/detail/seven_theses_on_the_concept_of_post-convergence.
Rekal, Incorporated offers Quail an experience that (anticipating Umberto Eco’s *Travels in Hyperreality*) is “more real than the real thing”, a relentless remembering in which, unlike human memory, “nothing is forgotten” (149)—nothing, of course, except that it never actually happened. The price of doubt, according to Rekal, Incorporated is a money back guarantee. But as the story develops doubt becomes the oppressive and overwhelming force, as the Rekal technicians uncover during the implant process a series of pre-existing memories of a trip to Mars that correspond to the fake scenario Quail is actually paying for (which may, or may not, be real) of an undercover Interplan agent.

The price of doubt for Dick’s androids won’t be assuaged by a refund. As Peter Fitting has suggested androids are “preoccupied with overcoming their non-humanity”, collecting and treasuring family photographs that provide memories and therefore evidence of “an individual human past” (Fitting, 1992, 135). These “precious photos”, as Roy described them in *Blade Runner*, are surreptitious attempts to fool themselves, assembled proof to assuage their suspicion or even knowledge that they in fact are remembering a fake past. At this moment of troubled awareness of rupture, of things not being what they seem, the replicant achieves an unwanted enlightenment, like the cave-dweller in Plato’s simile of the cave, who is confronted with the illusory nature of their world of shadows. Deckard’s dread, a dread which dare not speak its name, is no different from that which oppresses the replicants he seeks to terminate (Deckard’s speculation on the true nature of his identity is much closer to the surface of the narrative in Dick’s novel than in Scott’s filmic adaptation). This schism between being and self-knowledge forecasts the metaphysical angst of the posthuman condition; the fear of an unseen deity (Eldon Tyrell, “the demiurgi of Orbis Tertius”, Kilgore Trout) in whose image we are made, a fear which bespeaks the loss of individual identity, of unique subjectivity, of unfettered agency and, ultimately, our humanity.

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Morphology, longevity, incept dates. It’s all very well when replicants or human beings ponder such questions. But what does it mean when an artificial intelligence or intelligent agent asks such questions of itself to do with its own nature? When, as Manuel De Landa menacingly puts it, they extend beyond mere “advisory” to “executive” capabilities (De Landa, 1991, 1). For me this reflexivity, a metaphysical reflexivity beyond mere consciousness of self, suggests a state of technological smartness that has not yet been realized within the various disciplines and practices associated with what Mitchell Whitelaw has called “metacreation”; that is, the genesis by computational means of “artificial systems that mimic or manifest the properties of living systems” (Whitelaw, 2004, 2). These emerging paradigms that have exceeded the binary algorithm, such as artificial life, artificial intelligence, fuzzy logic and complexity theory, are being explored artistically as well as in the discourses of science and philosophy. Within the discourses of cyberculture and robotics, too, there is a shared concern with the philosophical distinction between the simulation of agency and its realization, to use Maturana and Varella’s term (Maturana and Varella, 1980), or its emergence, to use Chris Langton’s (Langton, 1989). In the age of the hyperreal and the simulacrum the copy has indeed broken free from its moorings in the real, creating an agency at the level of the double, the phantom, the remix as well as ersatz memory. This concern with knowing whether or not memories are artificial or have a basis in lived experience is becoming more urgent. In the speculative fictions of Dick and Borges the emphasis is on the beautiful fake, the sublime architecture of the hyperreal and the knowledge that someone is aware of and can appreciate the art of the deceit. With the increasing sophistication of technological smartness the question may be inverted: how can we disprove that something is not artificially intelligent, nor capable of remembering actual lived experience? And what happens when we forget that it is artifice, or no longer care? The disclosure of this recursive folding and refolding of ontological disquiet is, of course, the point of the empathic Voight-Kampff test used by Deckard to expose replicants, the exposure of any illusion that they are human and that their memories are real. This is the case with Rachael Rosen of whom he asks in Scott’s film, “How can it not know what it is?” The question of Dasein, of being in the world, relies upon self-consciousness of
one's sense of being, not one's suspicion of being; a certitude captured in the formula of the Cogito. Some of Dick’s replicants, like Rachael or Polovok, are as self-assured in their knowledge of their humanity as you and I. So where does that leave us?

The shadow of Dick’s Voight-Kampff test haunts the contemporary imagination. How can we disprove, Yale philosopher Nick Bostrom rhetorically asks, that we are all, most likely, mere simulations in some vast future computer system? (Bostrom, 2001, 8). The allegory of this thought-experiment was writ large in the Wachowski Brothers’ Matrix trilogy (1999/2003), where Guy Debord’s spectacle, Jean Baudrillard’s simulation and Marx’s false consciousness combine to totally blind human perception to even the slightest intimation of the reality of their condition. As Joshua Clover observed in his wonderful book on The Matrix (2004), a veritable genre of what he called “edge of the construct” films emerged in the 1990s and coincided with global networked telepresence and an overall perception of the ability of digital technology to modify our sense of immediate experience. Films such as The Truman Show (1998), Dark City (1998) and The Thirteenth Floor (1999) all contain revelatory, albeit alarming moments of insight in which the main character (like Plato’s philosopher) “has come to suspect, or realize, that what he had thought was reality is in fact a simulation of incredible power and subtlety” (Clover, 2004, 6). As with previous eruptions of millenarian dread, the metaphysical tumult of the times tends to be concentrated within a very short period. By the time the new century dawned, virtuality as concept, art practice, mediated social network and new standard in audio-visual acuity had arrived. We are still waiting for the Y2K singularity.

Has come to suspect...

Virtual environments are not abstract innovations in relation to books or film or radio or television. They are not distractions from reality. They are reality.17 This is why conventional art cannot comprehend or commodify the powers of virtual environments. Gibson may have intuited the relations between the virtual, the art of memory and information in his early reading of Borges. By the time of his

mature fiction he had mastered its language and the transcendent force of its alchemy, its code: “Program a map to display frequency of data exchange, every thousand megabytes a single pixel on a very large screen. Manhattan and Atlanta burn solid white. Then they start to pulse, the rate of traffic threatening to overload your simulation. Your map is about to go nova. Cool it down. Up your scale. Each pixel a million megabytes. At a hundred million megabytes per second, you begin to make out certain blocks in midtown Manhattan, outlines of hundred-year-old industrial parks ringing the old core of Atlanta” (Gibson, 1993, 57). Having written this he would have been struck with the uncanny sensation of having met an old friend as if for the first time. The extract from Neuromancer resonates with “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” as an allegory of exactitude in science.

The edge of the construct genre concentrated a metaphysical rupture that has bedevilled the historical imagination, the apocalyptic moment when we can no longer reliably count on the seemliness of things as a reflection of the reality of things. This fear of “the finale of seem”, to quote the poet Wallace Stevens, is not unique to the age of digital simulation. It can be traced back to Platonic idealism via the phenomenology of Hegel, Kant and Merleau-Ponty. William S. Burroughs was fascinated with the idea, famously asking how at any given moment can we prove that we are not asleep, dreaming that we are awake? One of the darker passages in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* also plunge Alice into very murky metaphysical waters indeed. With Tweedledee and Tweedledum she observes the Red King sleeping:

‘He’s dreaming now’, said Tweedledee: ‘and what do you think he’s dreaming about?’ Alice said ‘Nobody can guess that’. ‘Why, about you!’ Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. ‘And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you’d be?’ ‘Where I am now, of course’, said Alice. ‘Not you!’ Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. ‘You’d be nowhere. Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream!’ ‘If that there King was to wake’, added Tweedledum, ‘you’d go out—bang!—just like a candle!’

(Carroll, 1976, 238).
In his *Indeterminacy* lectures (originally published in 1959), John Cage re-tells the parable by the 4th century BC Chinese philosopher Kwang-Tse about a man who went to sleep and dreamt he was a butterfly. Upon waking he asked himself, “Am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?” (Cage, 1992).

“Striking likenesses have led us down the garden path to unreasonable facsimiles”, Hillel Schwartz suggests, with the consequence that discernment becomes problematic in “a world of copies and re-enactments difficult to think ourselves through or feel our way around” (Schwartz, 1996, 378). In *Culture of the Copy* he describes the experience of wonder recorded by one observer in 1794, John Randolph, on having seen two political automata, Mr. Aristocrat and Citizen Democrat: “An Automaton is an artificial person, who by means of machinery, performs many actions similar to those of a rational being. It differs from a puppet inasmuch as it performs its tricks, not by the assistance of external force, but by powers contained within itself” (137). Automata were designed to simulate the illusion of life and exploited the technologies of the respective ages of steam and mechanics to achieve the conceit. Implicit in this faith in fakes, in the knowing that it is an automaton, is the titillating possibility that it may *not* be fake. And if not fake, then disturbingly life-like. The unease engendered in animation was cannily rendered in Chinese artist Shen Shaomin’s *G5 Summit* installation at the 2010 Biennale of Sydney. Amid *realistically fake* corpses of Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, Ho Chi Minh entombed in transparent sarcophagi, Fidel Castro lies on his deathbed. Observing his effigy becomes a kind of vigil, a death watch that we get is part of the conceit. It is only when we realise that he is breathing that things get really creepy. The power of credulity and international border control reassures you that it is not actually, nor could possibly be Castro. And we even remind ourselves that some concealed pneumatic process or other infernal machine is responsible for this uncanny intimation of psyche. But even knowing this the power of the simulacrum is hard to resist. We sense the virtual in its pure sense, the *as if* real, understood exactly for what it is in terms of Duns Scotus’ thirteenth century etymology. Even knowing this, I still kept my distance, as others did too.
Compelling artifice, from historical automata to the hyperreal sculptures of Ron Mueck and Duane Hanson, produces the uncanny sensation of Schwartz’s “striking likenesses” and “unreasonable facsimiles”. While the art world may have embraced the collectible nature of such likenesses and facsimiles, the most curious contemporary example of their psychopathology is the cult of Elvis impersonation.\textsuperscript{18} And like contemporary CGI cinema and virtual effects, each innovation and refinement pushes the threshold of credulity as well as the demand for even more presence, greater verisimilitude. This heightening of expectation for the complete trompe l’oeil is a profoundly cybernetic principle, in that the challenge of the illusion of life is akin to the Second Law of

\textsuperscript{18} The phenomenon of Elvis impersonation runs parallel to the busy calendar of the King’s “posthumous career” of post-mortem sightings, both of which are detailed in Gilbert Rodman’s comprehensive Elvis After Elvis (1996). Staged death conspiracy narratives are not especially relevant to the notion of the virtual, though the belief in post-1977 appearances of Elvis is a particularly acute instance of a certain kind of affect to do with mourning (“A phosphorescent shape appeared before me. It was vague and wavering, like heat shimmers over hot Memphis blacktop, but there was no mistaking the cocky stance, the white jumpsuit, or the slow resonant voice that spoke my name” [Jan Strnad, in Marcus, 1999, 136]). Mourning is the work of the libido clinging to what it has lost, to that which is absent and of which it cannot let go (Freud, 1990, 289), which explains why Dead Elvis appearances have continued from August 16th 1977 to the present day.

Impersonation is a fetish of mourning, whereby the ego knows that the object of affection is a substitute. Rodman suggests that Elvis impersonators are driven by the “will to imitate”, to conjure the affect of the King’s look and sound (6). With respect to the resonance of mourning and the virtual, imitation retains Baudrillard’s distinction between the sign and its referent, whereby the impersonator attempts to craft the countenance of someone he/she is not. The phenomenon of Dead-Elvis-Walking suggests the passage from representation to simulation, from mourning to identification. The revenant Elvis takes on a virtual life since there is no binary against which it is being reconciled for, in an uncanny way, it is Elvis. This is an economy of the “double” at work (after Otto Rank), though with important differences in the human agent/avatar relation are reciprocally played out and resolved. \textit{Pace} Jason Rowe from Crosby, Texas, a young man stricken with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and confined to a wheelchair, whose Second Life avatar Rurouni Kenshin rides “an Imperial speeder bike, fight(s) monsters, or just hang(s) out with friends at a bar” (Cooper, 2007, n.p.).

In his masterful discussion of doppelgängers, Hillel Schwartz persuasively differentiates between impersonation and imposture, the former being “the concerted assumption of another’s public identity”, the latter “the convulsive assumption of invented lives” (Schwartz, 1996, 72); one a form of image management, the other method acting–“Ever fearful of detection or defensive of reputation, impersonators labor against the odds of archives, eyewitnesses, and competing claimants” (72). The impostor, however, is “there” in the absence of its other. This absent presence is the grammé principle of writing and the “apparent” reality of the virtual avatar (Tofts, 1999, 29).

The psychopathology of Dead Elvis sightings is a persuasive instance of Freud’s exploration of “the uncanny”. In his 1919 essay of the same name, he asserts that the uncanny is especially felt “in relation to death and dead bodies” and, most significantly, “the return of the dead” (Freud, 1990, 364). Freud’s gloss of Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 definition of \textit{unheimlich} is also suggestive of the unnerving sensation of being in the presence of hyperreal sculptures, such as Shen Shaomin’s \textit{G5 Summit} and, potentially, virtual entities. When we intuit impressions or events that “arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny” we “doubt[] whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact alive” (347).
Thermodynamics and the principle of entropy: successful automata, hyperreal sculpture or artificially intelligent agents don’t achieve deceptive animation, but rather struggle incrementally to forestall the exposure of the illusion. The desire implicit in this historical obsession with artificial life is best captured in the title of a 2004 monograph on Jon McCormack’s work, Impossible Nature, as well as Horatio’s plaintive invocation to the shade of his kinsman’s dead father on the battlements of Elsinore, “Stay, illusion” (Hamlet, 1.1, 109).

Virtual art must locate and present new points of potential...

But to what end?

To force new openings into actuality

Indeed, but not for the first time— “Such was the first intrusion of this fantastic world into the world of reality” —The time of the contemporary is virtual time. A time of the highest fidelity. But not of fidelity to the real, but to the virtual, fidelity of the virtual. Only virtual art can meet the challenge of our virtual times of a renewed exactitude beyond mere representation, a new technological standard that is above, post and beyond. The virtual as simulation of the virtual. This is the vertigo of post-convergence, an endless mise en abyme of copies and copyists, a condition of post-reproductive technologies of which Borges forewarns us at the start of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”: “…mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men” (Borges, 2007, 3).

Jean Baudrillard clearly thought so too, taking time in Simulations to identify the origins of post-convergence in Ecclesiastes as well as Borges, describing the latter’s figuration as “the finest allegory of simulation” (Baudrillard, 1983, 1). That superlative allegory is the 1946 fragment “On Exactitude in Science” and in the literatures of the hyperreal, the virtual, postmodernity and fabulation it is the sine qua non of attribution. But the text’s provenance is itself a simulation, a hyperreal insinuation of authority where there is in fact none. Ever the well-read man of letters, Borges attributes the fragment’s origin to one Suarez Miranda who wrote the text in the seventeenth century: As with Herberts Ashe and Quain, Miranda is

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21 The citation is impeccable in its veracity: Suarez Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap.XLV, Lérida, 1658. If the parables for the virtual are didactic, its lessons are cautionary. While
a fictitious author. While an apparent act of literary imposture (apparent in that we would do well to remember the lessons of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”), this fallacious attribution attests to the parallels between the utterly fictive and the virtual, for it is Borges’ name, in a subtle act of self-conscious literary bodysnatching, that is indelibly associated in critical discourse with the fable of a 1:1 correspondence between the map and its territory. The other purloined body, not to mention letters, whose anxiety of influence haunts Borges’ numerous engagements with the relations between cartography and its territory, is Lewis Carroll (the authorial avatar of one Rev. Charles L. Dodgson). The “deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution” that haunts the writings of Pierre Menard, Paul Valéry and M. Edmond Teste (Borges, 1964, 44) underwrites the historical usurpation of Carroll by Borges as the artificer who wove the metaphor of the map replacing its territory. History remembers Borges as the anterior author of an influential posterior text published six years before his birth in 1899: “That’s another thing we’ve learned from your Nation”, said Mein Herr, “map-making. But we’ve carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?” “About six inches to the mile”. “Only six inches!” exclaimed Mein Herr. “We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!” “Have you used it much?” I enquired. “It has never been spread out, yet”, said Mein Herr: the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well (Carroll, 1893, 169).

We could say that it is permissible to see in this anterior text a kind of palimpsest, through which the traces—tenuous but not indecipherable—of our friend’s “previous” writing should be translucently visible.

scholars agree that this fragment is an instance of a literary hoax found elsewhere in Borges, other citations in his work are encountered in far more ambivalent contexts. CF., the bibliographic citation for Bertrand Russell in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”: “Russell (The Analysis of Mind, 1921, page159) supposes that the planet has been created a few minutes ago, furnished with a humanity that ‘remembers’ an illusory past” (Borges, 1964, 10). The planet in question is Tlön.
Hamlet also courted the illusion, and was especially alive to the rhetorical powers of deception and in particular the artifice of the perfect copy. In his strategy to betray Claudius’ guilt he will “hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature” (Hamlet, 3.2, 20-21). As ’twere is premonitory code, a cipher for the edge of the construct, the disclosure of an artifice that will have stood in for an absent reality but nonetheless, after Baudrillard, traverses the economy from true, false, real and imaginary to simulation (Baudrillard’s description of the psychopathology of simulation as a person “who produces in himself some of the symptoms” he feigns [Baudrillard, 1983, 5] is a palimpsest of Hamlet’s invocation of and faith in theatrical affect— “The play’s the thing/Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” [2.2, 593-594]). This passage reveals that the seductive power of the virtual is its capacity, with apologies to Spinoza, to “affectus” (Spinoza, 2005). The issue of Hamlet’s dumb show is the sensation of guilt experienced by Claudius, an affect of the virtual that is not lost on Hamlet (“What, frightened with false fire?” [3.2, 250])

It is truly incredible to be able to read emailed articles by Einstein on your iphone...

In the writings of Daniel Dennett (1998) and David Chalmers (1996), among others, the philosophical zombie or p-zombie is offered as a kind of alternative Turing Test for artificial intelligence, designed to explore the boundaries of behaviour as a verifiable signifier of conscious will. Murray McKeich’s p-zombie series (2006-ongoing) engages with this ontology of appearance and being. The p-zombie animations evidence multiple personalities metamorphosing through a series of phantasmagorical mutations. The central motif is certainly suggestive of

22 The economy, facility and power of such artifice was evidenced by Julian Dibbell in his introduction to Alter Ego: Avatars and their Creators: “Four years ago, I sat down at a computer, clicked a few buttons, filled out a text box or two, and in a few short minutes created something it takes the most accomplished novelists years to produce: a fictional character with a life of its own”. Perhaps with Hamlet in mind, Dibbell goes on to say that the virtual life of his character Alhinud is “as rich with possible directions and desires as any Shakespeare protagonist’s” (Dibbell, 2007, n.p.). At the time of writing I have not as yet sourced any of the available critical literature on Alhinud to substantiate Dibbell’s claim.

an individual. However the stunning fantasia of the re-constitution of matter by form suggests a tribe or colony of p-zombies.

Flowers, silk, jewellery, tulle and rubbish flicker into a constantly changing yet recognizable façade reminiscent of a painting by Giuseppe Arcimboldo on speed. Its (or their) animated, yet silent gestures of speech suggest the desire to communicate.

Stelarc’s Prosthetic Head is equally garrulous and talks incessantly on matters ranging from the obsolete body to Australian rules football. Prosthetic Head (2003-ongoing) is a schizoid entity that at once describes itself as an artificial agent as well as an avatar of Stelarc himself. The artist describes him as an “embodied conversational agent”, not simply a disembodied intelligence. As it becomes more fluent in conversation with those who visit it in installation settings, its responsiveness becomes more complex and autonomous.

Stelarc, Avatars Have No Organs, Prosthetic Head (2003). Courtesy the artist.
Consequently, Stelarc no longer takes “full responsibility for what his head says” (Stelarc).

What if we could read a dialogue between them on our iPhones?

p-zombie: We started discussing ideas when we first met. We considered each other from our formal vantage points.

Prosthetic Head: It was always a question of whether I was in your mind or you were in mine.

p-z: We would try to write thinking as if it were thinking in words and not reading.

PH: The idea of intelligence is an adaptation of experience. It is a way of unifying sensorial and nonsensorial information.

p-z: It is a way of knowing that, despite the seeming lack of evidence, there is a causal nature to phenomena; that there are theories which allow for changes in the world picture beyond the previous experimental base.

PH: I agree, intelligence is an adaptive mechanism. Working from a closed system, the mind induces ideas into empirical formulations. Working with an active conscious mind in an open system, the mind deduces from experiences and from metaphysical experiment.

p-z: How true. We must be metaphysicians on some levels. Mind is the organizer of the whole.24

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24 It has come to my attention that Prosthetic Head and p-zombie have sampled dialogue from Edwin Schlossberg’s *Einstein and Beckett: A Record of an Imaginary Discussion with Albert Einstein and Samuel Beckett*, New York, Links Books, 1973. I apologise for the imposture.
Troy Innocent, *New Home* (2005). Digital C Type photograph, 120cm x 120cm. Courtesy the artist.

Equally incredible, and certainly more alarming, would be direct personal address to the owner of the phone. Like the serial stalking I encountered a number of years ago by a digital entity called Neome. Purportedly a creation of Troy Innocent, Neome persisted in sending text messages to my phone inviting to meet in the city as part of an “art project”. Where, when and why I was to meet something made of pixels was more unnerving than intriguing. And this is an intrinsic quality of what could be called virtual art: its site of interaction can be very intimate and disturbing. The virtual artist Adam Ramona creates works that haunt, cajole and manipulate those who engage with them. The Moaning Columns of Longing

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25 Adam Nash, email correspondence, 18th August, 2011.
(2007) is such a work and it is perhaps the closest thing to a fatal attraction that the virtual art world has encountered.

A sculptural entity responds to your attention and declares undying loyalty and devotion. After the initial blush of besotted connection in-world (shorthand for one register of telepresence), messages of longing and despair start arriving in the user’s email account by the hour (shorthand for another). They become more desperate and pining until emotional blackmail results in the database death of the entity. Then the work of mourning begins.

Perhaps the most beguiling and perverse form of affect with respect to virtuality is the capacity for avatars to embarrass or unnerve their human agents. In 2009 Lisa Dethridge participated in the Writing Naked exhibition, which metaphorically explored the notion of the writer’s vulnerability when approaching the blank page or screen. Dethridge’s metaphorical response to this task was to have her Second Life avatar Lisa Dapto perform naked.


*She describes feeling exposed, as if she was “posing nude” herself. No longer the aloof mask or persona of 90’s virtual life, the avatar in this instance is a body*
double, a projection of self whose behaviour in-world can induce real affects in the world. As Brian Massumi has suggested, affect is “situational: eventfully ingressive to context”, but it is also serial, “trans-situational” (Massumi, 2002, 217).

Courtship, emotional blackmail, stalking and self-consciousness across thresholds of the virtual, the real and the fabulatory.

Interesting in theory, but what has become of you in the meantime?

You are tense waiting for another contact, perhaps this time by twitter.

Or even more chilling, a knock upon the door…

Such will be the third intrusion of this fantastic world into the world of reality.

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26 The more one writes on the virtual the more, it seems, we write in the shadow of Borges: “The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to”. This could be attributed to an avatar speaking of its human agent. And—“I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone)”. And so too—“I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may conceive his literature, and this literature justifies me” (Borges, 1964, 246). The short 1960 parable “Borges and I” is a compressed monograph on the relations between the self and its projected simulacra: person/writer, human/agent/avatar, avatar/human agent—“Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive him”. Brian Massumi’s Parables for the Virtual is an extended footnote to “Borges and I”; “When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels” (Massumi, 2002, 1). Massumi refers to “body-sites” (3) that are multiple: corporeal, incorporeal, abstract (5). The avatar/human agent is such a multiple, manifold body site, a “continuous body” across thresholds of affect (21). When our avatars are capable of affecting how we feel about feeling in-world, and feeling about how they feel, a slippage starts to occur that is different from our identification with fictional characters. It is an experience of “the double” invested with an agency that is “dissociated”, as Freud has it, “from the ego” (Freud, 1990, 357). This dissociation of self and avatar is most certainly a parable for the virtual. When we start to wonder, as Dethridge does, if our avatars can feel the virtual sun on their virtual skin (Dethridge, 2011), we invest them with an agency in excess of the algorithm, the app and the digital asset. Or, as one of the Borges (not sure which one) would have it, “Spinoza knew that all things long to persist in their being; the stone eternally wants to be a stone and the tiger a tiger” (246).
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