

The Anticlockwork Mouse

Ravelling Human Identity in Analogies of the Mouse

James Duffy



Cover Image by Stefan Thelan

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Abstract

The mouse has been used prevalently within both cultural and biological contexts as an analogy or a substitute to humans. The following text is an experimental essay. It is an accompaniment to a wider scope of research and an artistic enquiry entitled: *am I man or am I mouse?* In this research, this question becomes an ontological binary whereby identity construction is interrogated through an analogous framework. This essay, entitled *The Anticlockwork Mouse*, concocts a mouse through appropriating and combining existing analogous mice. The ambition of an action such as this is to use analogy to excavate social constructs and institutions. What influence do they have on identity building and the manifestations of self in the world? How do they form and where do they originate? By revealing time and space to be socially constructed, and foundational to the production of western hegemonies, this text attempts to expose distorted borders between biology and culture. Situating itself in these borders, the interest of this text is the in-between, the liminal; in the confusions between what is socially constructed and what is supposedly objective, true, natural or real. Can we construct identity beyond socio-historical perspectives? If so, what other affinities may exist or be produced between living entities, and how are these perspectives prevented in our cultures? The mouse as a reflection of self, tentatively initiates a new imaginary, where these questions can be engaged with. An imaginary that may facilitate the construction of identities that have different reliances on social constructs. One that could account for alternative temporal and spatial relations between living entities. The essay employs ravelling as a methodology. Over three parts, through a text that shifts in style and format, the mouse and I become ravelled. The lines between us become fused, as do the borders between biology and culture, nature and nurture, the unreal and real. This is not to obfuscate, but rather, ultimately to locate alternative perspectives of identity construction and how we perceive of our presence in the world. This essay also cautiously begins to piece together three existing essays concerned with time, space and being by Karen Barad, Michel Foucault and Victor Turner. This is to inform my wider enquiry question, *am I man or am I mouse?* and to foundationalise further developments in my art practice.

Note to Reader: This essay uses fonts, colours and formats outside the remit of the exam. This is not to convolute, but to conceptually reinforce the essay through aesthetic choices. These choices are to be read as integral to the words used and so, the essay must be read in colour. Additionally, there are notes for clarification and elaboration. For reasons of continuity, these can be found at the end.

I

BEGINNING

**“There was a man who became so intrigued with watching salamanders,
that he ended up as a salamander watching the man he was”**

Julio Cortazar¹

Mice

have infested the pages of novels, the verses of poetry and visual cultures since humans were capable of producing such things. These abundant manifestations, that can be found in all facets of popular culture(s)ⁱ, have not only been representations of mice. They have also acted as an analogy or a substitute, performing as either representative or antithetical of humans. Mice have been used analogously within the sciences also. Here, the human body is often replaced to enable further understandings of disease, medicine and biology, whilst eliminating the risk to, otherwise, human subjects. This medical model has been pushed further, permeating into commercial industries for the development of cosmetics, and governmental bodies to advance weapons and defence.

Mice litter my research too. My practice searches cultural histories for strategies to disrupt identity building and perspectives on selfhood. This is specifically in relation to social constructs and institutions when they influence human behaviours and perceptions of reality. From sources concerned with (but not limited to) gender, male masculinity, evolutionary theory and liminality, mice consistently poke through. They were also prevalent in the popular culture of my childhood. On morning cartoons, in nursery rhymes and the books I read at school. Mice enigmatically ran through my consciousness as offspring, clone and anthropomorph. Is this what they call the *Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon*?ⁱⁱ An emergence of what is already there that becomes more significant through noticing it? A phenomenon both of reality and the human need to construct patterns in their reality. This trope of the analogous mouse, however, has not gone unrecognised, and certain chronographies have been collated before. Most notably in Lorna Owen’s ongoing blog *Mouse Interrupted*² and accompanying book *Mouse Muse: The Mouse in Art*³, both of which look at the history and manifestations of mice in a cultural sphere. There has also been a significant amount of literature written on mice from a scientific perspective that both stratify, such as Lee M. Silver’s *Mouse Genetics*⁴, as well as interrogate the ethics of using mice in laboratories, like Bernard Baertschi’s essay, *Ethical Considerations in Mouse Experiments*⁵.

¹ Alan Fletcher, *The Art Of Looking Sideways*, 6th edn, Phaidon, London, 2005, p.252.

² Lorna Owen, *Mouse Muse*, 1st edn, Monacelli Press, New York, 2014.

³ Lorna Owen, *Mouse Interrupted* [web blog], 2019, <<https://mouseinterrupted.wordpress.com>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

⁴ Lee M. Silver, *Mouse Genetics*, 1st edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

⁵ Bernard Baertschi, *Ethical Considerations in Mouse Experiments* [ebook], Institute for Biomedical Ethics, University of Geneva, Geneva, 2011 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229986473_Ethical_Considerations_in_Mouse_Experiments> (accessed 19 April 2020).

Unavoidable in their frequency, man and mice analogies have become integral to my practice, most markedly in the enquiry question that drives it: am I man or am I mouse? (aimoaim?) This artistic enquiry – through the employment of mice as reflection, shadow and antithesis – excavates social constructs and institutions, attempting to interrogate identity beyond only socio-historical perspectives. In other words, a perception of identity produced and viewed within the context of the society or culture it finds itself in, whilst also being a product of their histories. The enquiry thinks through what foundationalises these perspectives, and attempts to rupture human precepts. That is, the core, the primordial, the point before, the moment preceding, the foundations from which identity is constructed both individually and collectively. One could take the position, as I do in my practice (and here in this text), that time, space and matter are such precepts; that they are socially constructed in their embodiment by humans. Arguably, this is where individual and collective perspectives on identity begin, where our cultural values derive, and conditions that produce and perpetuate hegemonies originate. It is also where our patterning and habit-forming behaviours initiate. Through analogy, the enquiry questions what constants human identities can concretely rely on to define itself and its presence in the world. Essentially, what do we mean when we say man and mouse? How can we be sure that either is not the other, or is not at all? This text, although an accompaniment to my artistic enquiry and the research that informs it, does not set out to directly answer this enquiry question: am I man or am I mouse? Neither is the interest of this paper an attempt to replicate or add to the existing texts concerned with mice, historicisation and ethics. It is more than can be asked of such a limited text. With it, we lose the opportunity for comprehensivity, of producing comparative research that analyses prevalence's over different cultures. This essay is not about the mouse I don't know I don't know but rather the mouse I know I don't knowⁱⁱⁱ. It is about *the* mouse that has invaded my practice, the mouse I cannot avoid, yet cannot quite grasp.

The interest of this paper is in ravelling. Alain de Benoist highlights at the beginning of his own essay, *On Identity*, that “identity is intrinsically a problematic concept. Rather than an answer or a statement, it is primarily a question.”⁶ I, like the mouse, do not exist in isolative parameters. We are both of our histories, present and futures, of biologies and cultures that align and collide, that are obscured and exposed. And so, this text lingers in the question, rather than answers it. Am I man or am I mouse? It interrogates the validity of it by inhabiting the liminality, the uncertainty of its components. It attempts to destabilise the conditions that produce the seemingly societal necessity for unequivocality; that my identity is exclusively human or mouse. De Benoist also states, that “human beings have no specific essence outside of their socio-historical existence and so the biological criteria of belonging (to a race, to a species) only have a relative value”⁷ Is there anything in the being of these two entities – the man and mouse, the human and non-human, the self and the other – that is not a product of social constructs or institutions? Can an interrogation of the socio-historical identity reveal potential instabilities within the power dynamics of western hegemonies? In Donna Haraway's

⁶Alain de Benoist, 'On Identity', *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, vol. 128, 2004, p.9.

⁷ de Benoist, 2004, p.54.

1985 essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, she articulates the traditions of “Western” science and politics^{iv} as “the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other.”⁸ For the purposes of this essay, these traditions will serve as defining components to the idea of western hegemonies. Although this term cannot be fully explored, western hegemonies will be used in reference to an ideology of norms, customs and traditions originating or connecting to Europe, that have had a heritage of influencing and subjugating other non-western cultures into its own. In this text, Haraway’s traditions, and western hegemonies, are products of an initiating dogma. This is that time and space are perceived as physical realities rather than social constructs; as biological, natural and objectively constant rather than a cultural phenomenon that is subject to interpretation, change and volatility. How inherent is this in humans? How are individual and collective identities shaped by this? How does it affect perceptions of their presence in the world? Moreover, by positioning or repositioning them as social institutions, this essay questions what a destabilisation of time and space might incur, what potentials there are in revealing their instabilities. De Benoist, however, potentially constrains this with his statement, and Haraway with hers. They suggest that it may be impossible to think through identity outside of the cultural parameters that are established. And so, this text focuses on whether a means may be found within them, what Karen Barad might call “a dynamism that entails its own undoings from within”⁹. Can these western traditions of science and politics be dismantled from within, and an alternative to an exclusively socio-historical perspective on identity be produced?

Through piecing together analogous mice from both science and popular culture, an alternative mouse will appear, a *mouse-in-between*. A symbol used to enable Barad’s dynamism, to rethink and reorganise identity construction. Rather than rejecting Haraway’s traditions, this essay becomes an experiment in mimicry. The mouse and I are to be characters in symbiosis entering from and as products of western culture(s). Somewhere between dialogue partner, familiar spirit and tour guide, the mouse becomes, not only the analogy from which to destabilise social constructs, but a way to imagine new relations to them. It is what Victor Turner calls “*les symbole sauvage*”. A *wild symbol*. “They gain and lose meanings”¹⁰ as they travel in and out of human consciousness, through time and space. Haraway states that writing is “pre-eminently the technologies of cyborgs”¹¹ and now as we think alternatively to being clockwork, this is the method to use too. This text is, therefore, an experimental and polymorphic collection of writings that interlink, constantly referencing its

⁸ Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, *Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, Routledge, Abingdon, 1991, p.150.

<http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Art%20and%20Philosophy%20in%20SL%20and%20Other%20Virtual%20Worlds/Texts/cyborg_manifesto.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2020).

⁹ Karen Barad, ‘Troubling Time/s and Ecologies Of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, And Facing The Incalculable’, *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 2017, p.62, <https://www.academia.edu/39974994/Troubling_Time_s_and_Ecologies_of_Nothingness_Re_turning_Re_membering_and_Facing_the_Incalculable> (accessed 15 November 2020).

¹⁰ Victor Turner, ‘Liminal To Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual: An Essay In Comparative Symbology’, *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, vol. 60, 1974, p.55, <<https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

¹¹ Haraway, 1991, p.172.

own history as well as that of the mouse. It is the method by which to concoct, to give form to the formless. To reveal identity by enravelling. Reflective, what was once clockwork and in its place, a bio-cultural hybridisation. Both human and non-human, real and unreal, of the world and apart from it, this creature will, by no means, be new. It is an entanglement of what already exists, a man mouse imbroglio, an anti-clockwork mouse.

II

MIDDLE

I have only held a mouse once in my life.

I was ten and my friend had just got one as a pet. He asked if I wanted to hold it. I did not, but I said I did, either to feign courage or out of politeness. My friend put his hand into the cage and drew a fist around a tiny creature. It was white with red eyes and had a tail the same colour as my friend's hand. The mouse was still and stricken by his fingers. He told me to hold out my own hands and he placed the mouse in them. The tail now discoloured. I don't know if it was the mouse or I who jumped higher, but it ended up across the room, no longer in our control. It was noticeably disorientated, rattling back and forth on the carpet, its eyes flitting between two doors. Then, the mouse escaped somewhere into the house. It took us hours to find and catch it and, when we did, my friend again used his hands to swaddle the mouse and return it to its cage.

It was the only time I have been close enough to actually feel a mouse. There have been other times when I have got quite close. One elusive brown mouse who used to steal food in the night from my kitchen. Dead ones brought in by the cat and frozen ones fed by that same friend of mine to his new pet snake. There have been times also when, stumbling home at night, a small shadow seemed to scurry across my foot or not far in front and, when I looked, whatever it was, was no longer there. Unless searched out, the mouse will evade but they are never far away. We know because it leaves its evidence. Half chewed books or food, small dry excretions in the corners of unkempt rooms. The mouse is a master of not being seen but an amateur at not being noticed.

In Disney's *Dumbo*, the 1941 animated movie about an elephant with unusually big ears who learns to fly, there was to be a song entitled, *Are you a man or a mouse?*¹² It borrows its title from a common proverbial expression of middle English origin. Deleted during production, the song was to appear after *Dumbo* had been exploited as the humiliating finale to the clown act. As the clowns celebrate with a party, *Dumbo*'s sidekick, Timothy attempts to enliven the elephant.

*“When the going's getting rough
And old man trouble's getting tough
Stand right up and call his bluff
Are you a man or a mouse?”¹³*

Dumbo, like most animated films with animals as their central characters, are analogous stories.

Anthropomorphised, the viewer interprets these characters as capable of having both human and non-human characteristics. The subversion in this song is that Timothy is a mouse and so, the answer to its refrain isn't as obvious as it seems. What does Timothy perceive itself to be? What does it consider those values, it tries to instil in *Dumbo*, as typically representative of, the man or the mouse?

Man, according to the philosopher Charles Taylor, is “an animal that interprets itself”¹⁴ The human species, in other words, has the exclusive capability to situate themselves in the world through *their* perception of it. This

¹² ‘*Dumbo Deleted Song - Are You A Man Or A Mouse*’, [online video], Disney, 1941, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDZMK5urylc>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

¹³ Disney, 1941.

¹⁴ de Benoist, 2004, p.44.

is something not lost on Timothy. Developing Taylor's thesis, Alain de Benoist articulates that human life "is not content with the description of objects; it tries to give them meaning."¹⁵ Humans, therefore, are configured both from objectivity (itself and the world *is*) and through subjectivity (the perception of what itself and the world *is*).

De Benoist continues to define that man "belongs to the world, which constitutes *him* and to the world which *he* constitutes"¹⁶ It may be true that identity is formed through interpretation, but only partly. De Benoist's seemingly eutieric^v reading of identity, as a mutual transfer of interpretation from human to world and world to human, fails to convey the extent of the dichotomy of power that underlies this transaction. That is, the dichotomy between belonging and possessing. Timothy may biologically *be* a mouse, it may declare itself as so, but he is in a man's world. He wears the clothing of men, speaks the language of men and, even when encouraging a weeping Dumbo to "stand right up"¹⁷, this is a strategy of man, not of his own. After all, as that expression infers, men *stand right up*, mice do not. By now, it is important to realise, that the terms man, men, him and his, although acting as abbreviations to the term humans, are part of the heritage that Donna Haraway, in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, articulates as a male-dominant tradition of "Western" science and politics, or more specifically "male-dominant capitalism"¹⁸. They are semantically significant in the analysis of western culture(s) as being masculine enterprises. This cannot be ignored and, in this essay, become a means to differentiate between humans as a species, and the human that exists within this heritage of masculine-driven western hegemonies. The latter will now be referred to in italics as such, *man*. In Dumbo, Timothy has found a sense of belonging by becoming possessed. It has interpreted *itself* into conforming to that which constitutes *him*. This is not for the benefit of him, as an individual, but for the culture he finds himself within. This is because identity doesn't solely "narrate itself using a continual process of self-definition"¹⁹ as de Benoist says, but configures itself from a response to continual interactions with culture(s) that narrate it.

"Well, are you?" I imagine that escaping mouse demanding to know.

"Am I what?" I question.

Whilst identity may form through interpretive dynamics between individual and world, interpretation is not a characteristic, but a power that *men* have over themselves, as well as their environment and the other. Like all powers, it can be given and taken away. It can be commandeered, as well as corrupted, benefitting those with it and disadvantaging those without it. With the power to interpret comes the power to misinterpret; to manipulate meaning, and to miscast or recast objectivity and subjectivity. Alan Renaut defines that "no liberal

¹⁵ de Benoist 2004, pp.43-44.

¹⁶ de Benoist, 2004, p.44.

¹⁷ Disney, 1941.

¹⁸ Haraway, 1991, p.150.

¹⁹ de Benoist, 2004, p.44.

concept identifies man's humanity with the goals he has chosen, but with the ability to choose them"²⁰ The more liberal a culture is, the more agency an individual has for mis/interpretation. The less liberal, the more that culture can mis/interpret the individual. This is the contradictory nature of human identity. It fluctuates between belonging and possession, dependent upon the control such cultures are willing to relinquish. Its innateness in humans has made interpretation inherent within the heritage of western traditions. *Man* becomes, as mouse becomes, appropriated "as a resource for the production of culture"²¹. No longer is interpretation used only to perceive the world, but to stratify, mine and own it. *Man*, therefore, does not find identity through a sense of belonging. Rather, it is claimed through a sense of possession; *man* does not belong to the world, but the world belongs to him, along with everything in it. To belong is to possess and, in western hegemonies, "what one possesses can only be possessed at the expense of all others."²²

What is it and if it isn't, why isn't it?

In the introduction to his book *Mouse Genetics*, the American biologist Lee M. Silver is ensnared in the same traps too. "What is a mouse?" Silver begins, before acknowledging "those nursery rhymes sung by small children" and "the artistic renditions of mice in the form of trinkets"²³. Mice become mis/interpretations through the dichotomy of belonging and possession. It is what Haraway defines as the "reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other."²⁴ Where biology becomes obscured by culture, as *man* attempts to wield power over the mouse. Why this is only an attempt will be discussed as we continue, but first it is important to define what we mean by these terms, biology and culture, and how they are being used in this essay.

Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* identifies that "biology enables and culture forbids"²⁵ "Culture, as we will use it, is the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society, whilst biology is the physical structure and processes of organisms"²⁶. "Biology enables women to have children," Harari continues, "some cultures oblige women to realise this possibility. Biology enables men to have sex with one another – some cultures forbid them to realise this possibility."²⁷ In this text, biology, and the more general term of science, are what cannot be questioned by anything other than an evidence-based opposition. The values of biology and science are closest to objective facts that we have in the present moment. The values of culture, on the other hand, although they may also be objective facts, do not

²⁰ de Benoist, 2004, p.17.

²¹ Haraway, 1991, p.150.

²² de Benoist, 2004, p.53.

²³ Silver, 1995, p.3.

²⁴ Haraway, 1991, p.150.

²⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, 'There Is No Justice in History', *Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind*, Random House Audiobooks, 2015, Available at Audible, (Accessed 16 November 2020).

²⁶ 'CULTURE | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary', *Cambridge English Dictionary* [website], <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture> (accessed 16 November 2020).

²⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, 2015, *ibid*.

rely on an evidence-based enquiry for them to operate. **In this essay, I can make no claims to what is objectively true. Likewise, I can make no statements that do not mis/interpret the facts.**

Twelve thousand years ago, the dawn of civilisation began. Humans ceased being “tribes of nomadic hunters and gatherers”²⁸. They stopped seasonal migrations, and instead “constructed permanent shelters to store dry food, in the form of grain.”²⁹ Mice are, by nature, foragers and burrowers, and grain stores meant they no longer had to scavenge in the wild. Their propensity to consume and reproduce prolifically were accommodated, and it could live near humans, populating through their infrastructures. Silver defines this as the beginning of a “long interwoven history” This is how it has entered human culture, through unavoidable close proximity since, what Silver would define as, the beginning of culture.

Before I arrived on a later visit to that house, that mouse my friend so proudly held in his hand made another daring escape. This time it was gone, never to be captured again. Helpless, I picked up my bag, left my friend searching and went home. That night, I could hear scratching above the loft hatch in my room. The mouse had somehow made its way from my friend’s house into the fabric of mine. I had noticed it and through proceeding winters, I could hear it scuttling about up there. And in the summers, even when it couldn’t be heard, I knew it was close, perhaps under the shed or in the fields behind the house. I also knew when it stowed away with me to London and, some years later to Scotland, then Sweden. I could find its traces all around me. My Mr Jingles. Like in The Green Mile. Steamboat Willie in the book. Delacroix’s mouse-immortal dying at sixty-four. All this time and in all these places, this mouse, one and the same.

To make the mouse familiar, it is not objective fact that prevails, but subjectivity. This is what the philosopher, Freidrich Neitzche, calls the “*will to power*”³⁰. That is, that human beings have an inherent desire for domination over others, as well as their environment. This *will to power* is not only relevant to tyrannical enactments but, as in western culture, it is often more subtle too. Small deft enactments of norms, language, social constructs, traditions that all enforce social order. Slavoj Žižek speaks about the forgotten category of ‘known unknowns’ neglected from Donald Rumsfeld’s *Knowns* speech. The “disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values”³¹ Arguably, this notion of the ‘will to power’ allows a socio-historical mis/interpretation of mice, through a sequence of known unknowns relevant to human culture, rather than biology or even a mouse culture. It is important to perceive of western culture in this way. For the purposes of its own perpetuation, it operates with a set of constructs, ignoring what is not conducive to its progress.

²⁸ Lee M Silver, 1995, p.5.

²⁹ Lee M Silver, 1995, p.5

³⁰ Emrys Westacott, ‘Nietzsche’s Concept Of The Will To Power’, *ThoughtCo* [website], 2019, <<https://www.thoughtco.com/nietzsches-concept-of-the-will-to-power-2670658>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

³¹ Slavoj Žižek, ‘What Rumsfeld Doesn’t Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib’, *In These Times* [website], 2004 <<https://inthesetimes.com/article/what-rumsfeld-doesn-know-that-he-knows-about-abu-ghraib>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

Individual identities are nuanced and contradictory, but in this dichotomy of belonging and possessing, they conform to simplified versions of themselves. If we take, De Benoist's statement as true, that humans have "no essence outside of their socio-historical existence"³² we form our identity within the parameters of culture. *Man* (that is, a human within a heritage of western hegemonies) must shed themselves of complication, if he is to belong. As we have outlined, although human life is interpretive, humans do not look at it as such. Memory, for instance, becomes history because "memory inhibits identity if it carries too many contradictory elements. It risks burdening itself with too many contradictory things, far from building an identity, it will make it less transparent."³³ In western hegemonies, transparency is important. It lets others see who you are for what you are. Gaston Bachelard posits in *Intuition of the Instant*, that "being can preserve from the past only what serves its own progress, only what is able to enter into a rational system of sympathy and affection."³⁴ And who defines this rational system? Not the individual. This erases nuance, not only in an individual's identity, but to culture itself. It relentlessly streamlines itself. On the island of Madagascar, for example, some Malagasy rodents may have the appearance of other mice in the world even though they may descend from an isolated evolutionary path. This is what is called by biologists Analogous Evolution; "similarity of function and superficial resemblance of structures that have different origins"³⁵ Humans categorise them as mice even when they are not. Similarly, Adrienne Rich, in her essay, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* says "lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality"³⁶ Human identity conforms to cultural taxonomies, shedding complication. As Bachelard quips, "Nothing endures unless it has reason to endure"³⁷ And it only has reason to endure if it doesn't destabilise social order.

This social order is enforced by, what are known as, social constructs. They are conventions that are invented and maintained by a society and they influence behaviours in individuals and collectives. Gender roles, for instance, would be defined as a social construct. They are not inherent in the world but are a part of cultures. Social constructs are more generalised than social institutions which are complex and integrated systems which enforce social order. They are often demarcated into five primary institutions: family, religion, state, education and economics. An example of a social institution would be state laws that solidify gender roles. Protests, football team supporters, coups d'états as well as, lynchings, apartheid or beliefs in conspiracy theories are products of looking to maintain a social order or overthrow it. Within this, there are those looking to gain power and those looking to maintain theirs. The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, calls for a radical end to police systems and institutional racism that has seen those entrusted with power assault, shoot

³² de Benoist, 2004, p.54.

³³ de Benoist, 2004, p.49.

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard, Jean Lescure and Eileen Rizo-Patron, *Intuition Of The Instant*, 1st edn, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2013, p.54.

³⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Analogy | Evolution', *Britannica* [website], 2011, <<https://www.britannica.com/science/analogy-evolution>> (accessed 16 November 2020).

³⁶ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality And Lesbian Existence', *Blood, Bread And Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*, 1st edn, Virago, Reading, 1994, p.52.

³⁷ Gaston Bachelard, Jean Lescure and Eileen Rizo-Patron, 2013, p.54.

and lean on the necks of those without power.^{vi} Here, the social institution is the state, which maintains social order by employing the police. They define and possess the right to what social order is and isn't, and "all order is beset with a totalitarian temptation"³⁸ Again, as in the case of the Malagasy mice, to maintain, it is necessary that it appears objective, unequivocal. An approach of *with us* or *against us*. These social constructs maintain social order and perpetuate culture(s), but where do they originate from and why do they appear so difficult to dismantle? In the next chapter, we will mis/interpret time and space as social constructs and foundations to culture's ability to appear unequivocally ordered.

Hickory Dickory Dock the mouse ran up the...

"Physicists have long believed that a fundamental, encompassing theory of matter, space, and time must be attainable"³⁹ I have, in my own practice, attempted to conceive of this, viewing each one as connected, interacting and entangled with the others. Within western society, time, as well as space and matter, have the potential to be unified as they operate as rational systems. This is to say, they are constant, stable and reliable and work together for the production of empiricism.

According to Alan Watts, 'time is a social institution and not a physical reality'⁴⁰. To follow our recent definition, then, we too, must consider time to be a social institution, as it is an integrated mechanism that enforces social order. Instead of a physical reality, time, like space, produces the facade of a physical reality. Victor Turner "considers order to be the principal function of time"⁴¹. It has a past, present and future. It is what Walter Benjamin, describes as "homogenous empty time", "where a moment replaces the one before it. This is the time of capitalism, colonialism, and militarism."⁴² Homogenous empty time enforces the belief in a beginning, or what was earlier referred to as a dawn; a dawn of civilisation where we were lesser developed than we are in the present. It is Bachelard's idea of "progress"⁴³ as it is Haraway's "traditions of progress" It produces, in continuum, a past of history, a present of tradition and the potentiality of the future. There are other means to perceive time that is not sequential. Nevertheless, homogenous empty time has dominated through time.

Likewise, space could also be considered a social institution. There is a common agreement in the ruler, yet space can be measured in centimetres, yards, fathoms. Even in pineapples or hands and countless other units of measurement. Space is an integrated system that produces social order. When metrication began in the UK in the mid-twentieth century (that is, the process of transitioning from an imperial system to a metric system of measurement), that which was to be measured was not new. It was an adaptation to the social institution to

³⁸ Matthijs van Boxsel, *The Encyclopedia Of Stupidity*, 1st edn, Reaktion, London, 2003, p.59.

³⁹ National Research Council, 'How Are Matter, Space, And Time Unified?', *Connecting Quarks with the Cosmos: Eleven Science Questions for the New Century*, 1st edn, National Academy Press, Washington D.C, 2003, p.44.

⁴⁰ Alan Watts, 'Alan Watts - Time (As A Social Institution)', Gábor Hényel [online video], 2011, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZNB3iYw9fc>> (accessed 15 November 2020).

⁴¹ Turner, 1974, p.4.

⁴² Barad, 2017, p.60.

⁴³ Gaston Bachelard, Jean Lescure and Eileen Rizo-Patron, 2013, p.54.

improve social order. What's more, borderlines between countries are not drawn by rivers and oceans. They are drawn out through rivalries, wars and agreements. Land is invaded and occupied to instigate new social orders and traditions that fit the marauders. Histories are not only overwritten, they are also rewritten. Spaces are allocated for monuments to tradition, with stone, bricks and bronze, because, as Hannah Arendt writes "if the past is transmitted as tradition, it has authority. If authority has historic credibility, it becomes tradition"⁴⁴. Bodies are implicated by this tradition and if they do not fulfil a conforming role, then another space outside of society is allocated.

Time and space are social institutions whilst *being*, as we have discussed, is socially institutionalised. Matter is that which occupies space, and humans like all living organisms, occupy space. Similarly, we as human beings of matter, inhabit a time. As Foucault, writing in 1967, says "civilization has become atheistic"⁴⁵. With secularism, time and space become finite to the individual. They have a beginning and an end. The "cult of the dead"⁴⁶ Foucault calls it; where cemeteries were once the space from which you could pass into another world. "Bodies lost their last traces of individuality"⁴⁷ and mourners came to celebrate this transition. Cemeteries were phasal, of passing through, a *heterotopia*^{vii}. Now they are a place of finitism. A place to dump the dead and let them fester into nothingness, whilst the living pretend they have destroyed matter. But as we know, matter cannot be destroyed.

Haraway's western tradition of progress, is where homogenous empty time, space or place claiming and taking, take place. Matter occupies space but social institutions determine what space those without power can occupy. **It puts you there and me here.** *Man* has rationalised time and space because it is hegemonic lifeblood; fuel for one to enact dominance over another. Humans have ordered what was, or is, disordered, manifesting a physical reality through social institutions and constructs. Making human into *man*.

The Future of No Future⁴⁸

Culture relies on this new dogma: all things come to an end. The question of our time seems to be 'where does it end?' Whereas Foucault identifies "the great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history" and his own as the age of "simultaneity"⁴⁹, we are in an epoch of endings. Seemingly disparate movements that challenge and enforce social institutions, as well as notions of objective and subjective truth, are essentially all dichotomies of one overarching thought: time ends. Barad explains "the singular sense of temporality is fixed and fixated on the event horizon of total annihilation"⁵⁰. Endings that are just around the

⁴⁴ de Benoist, 2004, p.48.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias And Heterotopias', *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, Abingdon, 1997, p.335.

<http://www.vizkult.org/propositions/alineinnature/pdfs/Foucault-OfOtherSpaces1967.pdf> (accessed 15 November 2020).

⁴⁶ Foucault, 1984, p.334.

⁴⁷ Foucault, 1984, p.334.

⁴⁸ Barad, 2017, p.3.

⁴⁹ Foucault, 1984, p.334.

⁵⁰ Barad, 2017, p.58.

corner both because they are, and we want them to be. The ultimate ending is annihilation of time, space, and matter; of everyone and everything. “A Star Wars apocalypse” as Haraway puts it “waged in the name of defence, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war”⁵¹. *What is it mouse? Are you the harbinger of doom?*

Lee M. Silver's notion of the mouse being present at *the dawn of civilisation* is a mis/interpretation of culture as having a singular lineage where the mouse is possessed. It is, however, what Victor Turner calls “*les symboles sauvages*”. Mice, as a symbol, appear “not only in traditional, ‘tribal’ cultures but also in the ‘cultural refreshment’ genres (poetry, drama, and painting) of post-industrial society, and have the character of dynamic semantic systems.”⁵² If we share Silver's faith that there was a dawn of civilisation, a beginning to culture, territorialisation and immigration, the mouse was present then as it is present in this time of “capitalism, colonialism, and militarism.”⁵³ They are both here *now* as they were *then*. As semantic systems, they gain and lose meaning as they travel in and out of human consciousness through time and space. According to Karl Hennen, in his essay, *Of Manly Mice and Mausy Men*, “one of the oldest known myths about the mouse comes from ancient Egypt” where the mouse was ‘an abomination or harbinger of misfortune to avoid even by sight.’ where the “destructive habits of the mouse brought it into disfavour, and indeed in the East it was a symbol of pestilence.”⁵⁴ *Man's* evanescent encounters with the elusive mouse endowed it with powers beyond a socio-historical context, for the fact that it actively, albeit unwittingly, sabotaged western progress.

This power should not be underestimated in a contemporary world. It remains *the wild symbol*. Domestic, in that the mouse is inextricably linked to the house, to the human world, but they remain undomesticated. An unfamiliar spirit. As this essay has already discussed, humans have no essence outside of their socio-historical existence, or in the words of Haraway there is “nothing about us that binds us”⁵⁵, then our presence in the world and the way we perceive it, only occurs on a limited level, within only cultural contexts. But these can be undermined. There is a parasitic organism, for instance, named *Toxoplasma Gondii*. This organism causes the infectious disease Toxoplasmosis, which is capable of infecting nearly all warm-blooded animals, but cats are the only known host for its reproduction. In mice and rats, it has the ability to change their behaviours. The organism wants to reach a cat to reproduce and so, it reduces fear in mice, making it easier for cats to prey on these infected rodents. For most humans, *Toxoplasma Gondii* does not have any symptoms at all. For others, there may be mild flu-like outbreaks, headaches, confusion. It can lead to further poor coordination, lung problems and even death. Evidence also suggests links to mental health issues such as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Alzheimer's and Schizophrenia. Interestingly, over half of the world's human population has Toxoplasmosis and there is no cure. There have been links made also to other disruptions of human behaviour.

⁵¹ Haraway, 1991, p.154.

⁵² Turner, 1974, p.55.

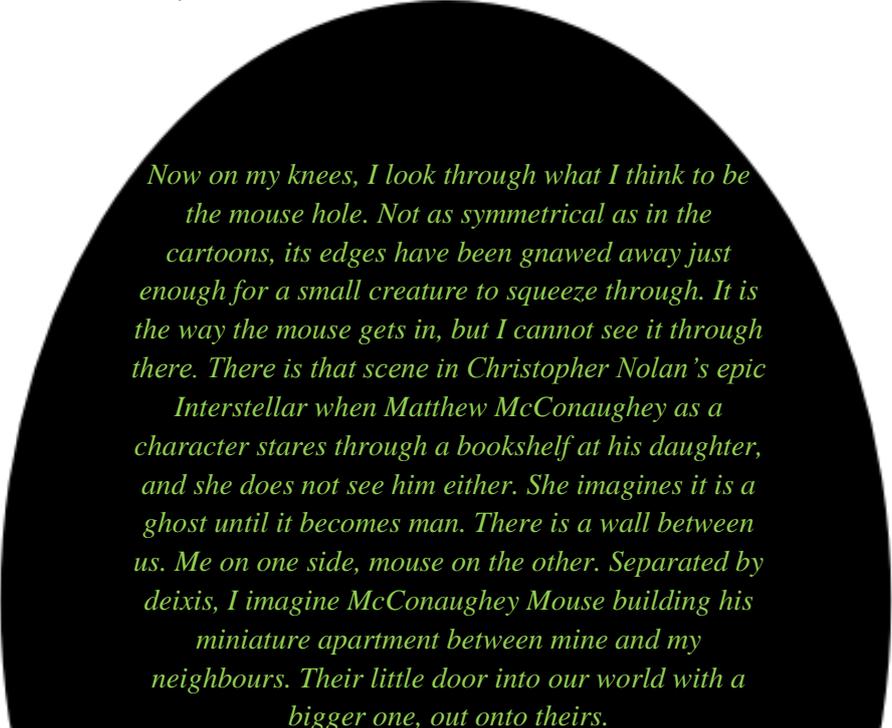
⁵³ Barad, 2017, p.60.

⁵⁴ Karl Hennen, 'Of Manly Mice And Mausy Men', *Hohonu*, vol 13, 2015

<<https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/HohonuVol132015.pdf>> (accessed 16 November 2020).

⁵⁵ Haraway, 1991, p.155.

It has also been suggested that the ancient Egyptian mouse hatred Hennen describes, may not be the only explanation for their deification of cats. When latently infected by the disease, it is possible humans are affected similarly to rodents. One theory is that humans become more susceptible to the charms of cats because *Toxoplasma Gondii* needs to find its hosts and our brains are unrecognisable from that of, say, the mouse. Humans may be behaving like infected mice already, and not even know it. They are inculcated. Mice as, humans as *les symbols sauvage*, enable connections between cultures, between times and spaces. Time, here, is no longer “caught in a posing of its breath”⁵⁶ and humans no longer need to fixate on an event horizon of total annihilation, perceived to be nothingness. They have the potential to rupture inculcation because there is only the instant. A place of shambolic dissonance where time and space are destabilised in their homogenic emptiness. This is the crack that should be nurtured; that should be sowed and filled to imagine what can grow from it. In the next chapter we will attempt to do just this, to instigate “an imaginary that could become a collective.”⁵⁷



*Now on my knees, I look through what I think to be the mouse hole. Not as symmetrical as in the cartoons, its edges have been gnawed away just enough for a small creature to squeeze through. It is the way the mouse gets in, but I cannot see it through there. There is that scene in Christopher Nolan’s epic *Interstellar* when Matthew McConaughey as a character stares through a bookshelf at his daughter, and she does not see him either. She imagines it is a ghost until it becomes man. There is a wall between us. Me on one side, mouse on the other. Separated by deixis, I imagine McConaughey Mouse building his miniature apartment between mine and my neighbours. Their little door into our world with a bigger one, out onto theirs.*

III
END

⁵⁶ Barad, 2017, p.58.

⁵⁷ Barad, 2017, p.82.

**I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!**
*To a Mouse - Robert Burns*⁵⁸

The “imagined is created” the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre says, “not on the basis of the world, but instead, insight into the real world implies a mysterious trend toward what is imagined.”⁵⁹ What is to be imagined in this text is influenced by established cultural structures, upon social constructs. This essay, for instance, relies on these functioning. It is written in modern English as a linear sequenced text with a beginning, middle and end. Disobeying those constructs that give value to this as essay, would undermine the reader's understanding of its progress; of a question that is manifested to be answered, of a conclusion that overcomes a problem. “Is it feasible”, Irma Ratiani asks, “to work out a world at the individual's level?”⁶⁰ To imagine an alternate world, one must first realise that imagination is limited. In *Dumbo*, after the elephant accidentally consumes a bucket of champagne, inanimate objects come to life in Dumbo's hallucinations. Dancing objects and psychedelic mammals may not be real, but brooms, flags and elephants very much are. Dumbo imagines something within its world but functioning outside of its norms because its environment, which is formed by these social institutions and constructs, cannot be separated from its imagination. Likewise, to write an essay such as this has proved difficult because it is difficult to think outside of my own perception of a structure that has served myself and others so well in communicating before. Ratiani concludes “it is not only feasible to work out an alternative world at the level of an individual mind but is necessary with a view to expanding mankind's self-consciousness and self-cognition.”⁶¹ The mouse is anticlockwork because it owes something to other mice and reality, but it now finds a place to operate outside of them. In an “anti-structure”. A “dissolution of normative social structure, with its role set, statuses, jural rights and so on”, the ‘anti-structure’ represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies of the normative system require it.” Turner unpacks this as deconstructivism, “not in opposition to rules but in the notion of erasure and trace.”⁶²

“An individual” Ratiani continues “who moves to the liminal phase has the potential of an individual, but finds himself in the gap between worlds, or he is a certain medium between the alternative structure of here

⁵⁸ Robert Burns, ‘To a Mouse’, *Selected Poems*, Penguin, Reading, 1996, p.109.

⁵⁹ Irma Ratiani , ‘Liminality And The Liminal Theory Of Conceptualizing Time And Space In 20th Century Eschatological Anti-Utopia’, Irma Ratiani, undated, p.3

<<http://www.irmaratiani.ge/Liminality,%20Nabokov.pdf>> (accessed 16 November 2020)

⁶⁰ Ratiani, *ibid*, pp.1-2.

⁶¹ Ratiani, *ibid*, pp.1-2.

⁶² Turner, 1974, p.60.

and there.”⁶³ What we attempt to imagine is this liminality. Not between worlds only in the spatial or temporal sense, but also between world values, constructs, or institutions, and meaning; between perception itself. The mouse is between here and there. A wild symbol. Here nor there, but also both. What binds us is not our socio-historical essence, although this must be accounted for in its fragility of truth. What binds us is our collective presence in the moment. What the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, calls the *instant*. That me and the mouse are here together, a part of all histories and futures, simultaneously in the present. Inhabited not by ourselves but by our metaphors and analogies, where these things collide, merge and mutate To rupture the inculcation of culture and the inherency of the dichotomy of possession and belonging, first humans need to be aware that they are inculcated. In Adrienne Rich’s justification of her own essay, which could as well be an explanation of my own, she says it is “founded on the belief that we all think from within the limits of certain solipsisms -usually linked with privilege, racial, cultural, and economic as well as sexual- which present themselves as the universal”⁶⁴ This is why thought has been replaced, in my own text, with imagining. We cannot consider mice colour blind because they do not see green, we must view its limitations as its dynamism. It is what Max Ernst would call a “transcendent dream logic”⁶⁵; voluntary provoked hallucinations of a liminal imaginary. An *Okinesis*^{viii}, an inhabited world. Kinesis is “an undirected movement of a cell, organism, or part in response to an external stimulus”⁶⁶. The okinesis is an inhabited world of movement. An imaginary that never was or wasn’t, never is or isn’t but always will be. Where our identities can be as we physically are, as we see them to be and how they are seen to be. Unified presence in the world where each of these three components (time, space and being) are enacted simultaneously. . As you are, I am also. As I am, you are also. A common nonsense in a displace.

Conclusion

Before writing this essay, I set out with the ambition to piece together the work of three writers who I saw as engaging, in some way, with liminality, but whom I hadn’t seen connected before. Karen Barad, Michel Foucault, Victor Turner had been informative in my research, and so, in finding affinities between them, I believed they could provide answers to questions concerning identity. This has been largely unexplored in my essay due, in part, to the vast undertaking this requires. Arguably, there is a reason why each of these writers engage with time, space and matter almost separately from one another. Instead their works have become a means to imagine. A beginning to understanding timespaces outside of socio-historical perceptions in order to ask why so much of what we base our identity on appears as solid, dogmatic and unquestioned. It has been an attempt to think through identity enravelling by a web of cultural influences, and how this can be destabilised. I began by quoting Alain de Benoist. Identity “rather than an answer or a statement, it is primarily a question” I

⁶³ Ratiani, *ibid*, p.1.

⁶⁴ Rich, 1994, p.72.

⁶⁵ Michael Friedrich, 'Birding With Max Ernst', *Hyperallergic* [website], 2017
<https://hyperallergic.com/419433/max-ernst-museum-of-modern-art-birds> (accessed 08 December 2020).

⁶⁶ Lakna, 'What is the Difference Between Taxis and Kinesis', *Pediaa* [website], 2019
<https://pediaa.com/what-is-the-difference-between-taxis-and-kinesis/#:~:text=Taxis%20refers%20to%20a%20motion%20or%20orientation%20of,taxis%20and%20kinesis.%20The%20direction%20of%20the%20Movement> (accessed 08 December 2020).

have tried to linger in this question, in what is in-between. This essay has attempted to formulate an entity that resides between, and ventriloquise it in to analogise how social institutions produce conditions of confusions. These in turn inculcate humans. The Anticlockwork Mouse is not exclusively biological or cultural, as I am not. We are nuanced. I have attempted to think through fundamental systems that format our identities from the beginning; that create a common sense, a collective agreement that its “the way things are”⁶⁷. What has been realised, is how difficult this is to do. Not only to think outside of culture but the foundations of it. Most of all, this text aimed to produce means by which the mouse can be used conceptually and practically within my art practice. This is something, also, I feel to be underdeveloped and requires a larger text to fully realise this ambition. This is something I will return to, but right now, the mouse is in the space between my apartment and the one above, banging away of the seventh and a half floor. “What news is there from the okinesis, fellow mortal?”

Notes

ⁱ It is important to recognise that, although we commonly use the singular ‘popular culture’, personal scopes are nuanced and, arguably, traverse cultures. They could cross, for instance, national, racial, or generational borders, amongst others. The scope of a collective’s popular culture is harder to map because of these nuances. Considering this, the plural *popular culture(s)*, will account for the individual and the collective simultaneously. Whilst the singular will denote an individual’s ‘popular culture’.

ⁱⁱ The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon or Frequency Illusion is a sensation that something you have recently become aware of appears repeatedly after learning it. It is unknown how it became named as the Baader-Meinhof. The term ‘Frequency Illusion’ was coined by Arnold M. Zwicky in his paper *Why are we so illuded?*

ⁱⁱⁱ In a now infamous statement made by Donald Rumsfeld regarding the lack of evidence linking Iraq and terrorist groups, he attempted to explain the differences between knowing and not knowing. Seemingly complicated in its phrasing, it is in fact a technique of analysis used in the sciences and government, as well as psychology in what is called the Johari Window. In this field, it is used as a way for people to understand the relationship to themselves and others.

^{iv} Throughout her text, Haraway accentuates certain words using quotation marks. This, I believe, is to ensure their previous usages within theory do not go unignored. In other words, to account for their weight, whilst challenging their established meanings. I, too, use “western” in this way.

^v Eutierria simply means “a good and positive feeling of oneness with the earth and its life forces.” Kenneth Worthy Ph.D., *Eutierria: Becoming One With Nature* (Psychology Today, 2016).

^{vi} We cannot forget here also, Freidrich Neitzche’s notion of the ‘will to power’, which suggests that racist motivations may originate in an innate pleasure found in cruelty against individuals by those that have power. This is a discussion that I will have to postpone for this essay.

^{vii} Heterotopias, a term coined by Michel Foucault, describe *other* spaces, that are capable of reflecting as well as disrupting the notion of normal society.

^{viii} I do not claim this term to be original, but I cannot source if or when it has been used in this way before.

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⁶⁷ Rich, 1994, p.72.

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