

CANDYMAN

PANCREAS. ALL FLESH¹

The brain secretes thought as the stomach secretes gastric juice, the liver bile, and the kidneys urine.

Carl Vogt

After breakfast, he takes some Modafinil and a double dose of Ritalin. Without, one is only up for the jobs that are fun. With, one can do anything. Power of deduction, motivation, and attention override side effects such as sleeplessness and self-doubt. Someone who works does not need a self, only confidence. The citizen sacrifices today to tomorrow, the proletarian sacrifices tomorrow to today, and the self-employed subject sacrifices everything. Sneak feels like a crab in the ocean's surf. He looks for cover, does not want to be swept away. In order to fully awaken, he bites into a lemon and Sacculina races through his head. Sacculina, the parasite that affects crabs, drills into their flesh and sprouts tendril-like networks throughout the blood vessels and the brain. "There is no I, there is only Sacculina," Sneak muses. "Something drives me to do things that I never thought of."

Another look at the interface. An e-mail raises his heartbeat. Noradrenalin washes through his veins and glucose is set free. It is time, Selma is waiting in the car.

On the way to the laboratory, he learns what has happened. At least the official version, which would do the round of the news channels later in the evening. There is not much traffic at this time of day, and two blocks further on they turn into the company premises. The janitor waves the olive green BMW M8 into the high-rise car park. There is a smell of purple foxglove and wet paint. A short eye contact with the camera, some small talk into the frequency decoder, and the elevator spits them out seven floors down. For a Sunday morning the labs are oddly busy. Usually, you would only meet PhD students looking bored, lolling in front of their computers, and sipping coffee, chewing on their paper cups. From the hallway, leading to Soklov's realm, music and loud voices emerge. After a few metres, and an open door of security level 4, the bass turns as fat as lard. Helium-fuelled voices shriek and sing *Flesh for Fantasy*.

Soklov is a Russian emigré, who came into the West in 1986 – whether as a spy or as a dissident, only he knows. He is a good-looking guy, popular with everybody, especially the female students. When Selma and Sneak enter, he pulls away from a group of people and skips towards them. "Tonight it happened. I have to show you." He jangles the old-fashioned keys in the pocket of his overall and they guess he will lead them to his abyss which, in honour of Raymond Roussel, he calls *Locus solus*. Irma, an endocrinologist, not wanting to lose sight of Soklov, tags along.

The latter, usually a man of few words, is in high spirits and oddly expansive: "Today begins the era of hypostasis. The objectification of a concept, existing merely in our thoughts, is taking its course. The human being used to be a creature and a tool of language, turning flesh into words. Now the word turns flesh. As in the myth of transubstantiation, language is translated into matter: signs become molecules, texts become cells and organic tissue. The reading and imagining of texts was nothing but the epochal preparation for the actual incarnation. Passions, economies, politics, characters, fashions and lifestyles have always emanated from literature, have inscribed themselves obsessively into our psyche and culture and into the world. Literature, at all times, has been a material power that sends out material bodies. From this day, the book that is life begins to write a new form of world literature, which, as lab prose, will transform reality. The letters, setting a body free through the movement of the mind, will metastasise in the system of things. Who still believes in the old philosophical barriers between subject and object, between body and mind? When the leather jacket grows from the wearer's skin cells, the goulash from the muscle cells, and the cutlery from the bones and fingernails, it is all one. The body becomes the universal resource of an economy of cannibalism. To produce oneself is well on the way of becoming our society's principal occupation. Cultures consist of metaphors, and metaphors are the flesh of the cultures. A humanity that becomes superfluous in its mass knows no incest taboo. It begets and eats itself. If there was an etymology that, instead of the origins, recounted the future, creativity would be regarded as being related to *kréas*². To be creative means prospectively to transform something into flesh – an idea, a simply artefact, or a complicated machine. To bring an idea into the world means to incarnate something, to create it out of flesh and blood. The place of creativity is no longer the art studio but the laboratory of bio-sciences, where pictures and sculptures, just like furniture, clothes and computers are bred: Production was yesterday, in the industrial age; creation is today, in the bio age. The world spirit has become world flesh and shouts: *Flesh for Fantasy!*"

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² Greek for "flesh"

Soklov's brain is everywhere, but most of all in his fingertips. He is an excellent empiricist, builds all his experiments himself, develops machines and owns countless patents. As all Russians, he becomes an esoteric after the second glass of vodka. For him the universe is not a collection of objects, but an indissoluble fabric of vibrating energy patterns. Inspired by this wholeness, he takes his insights from the corridor between phallus and cephalus.

"The people says that health is living within the silence of the organs. If you don't feel your stomach, your heart, your intestines, your whole body, you are healthy. But what about the brain? A healthy mind is not tortured by thoughts. Only poets and philosophers are aware of their brains. I'm a poetic scientist who writes his poetry through molecular tears. This is the poetry of the real and the origin of art."

A wide steel door bars their way. Soklov draws from his pocket a scarab on a chain, distorts his face into the mug of a French Mastiff, and winks at Selma. "When I was in Laos, some years ago, I heard about a curious custom among the women there. They tie large scarabs to their clitoris, with silver chains, in order, through the beetles' scrambling, to increase their lust. So, of course, I brought back some and have bred them ever since. I've domesticated them, and they have been serving me well."

The scarab crawls into the keyhole, its tarsal claws pulsate against the deadbolt contact, and the gas-proof GRP door springs open. A room flooded in red light opens up before them. Grinning, Soklov raises his forefinger: "Which is better, a blonde you desire, or a brunette who you lust after? When you understand this question, you understand the difference between Deleuze and Foucault."

The air is nice and warm and smells of exotic plants, chemicals and metal. On the right, the room widens into a library, while on the left a staircase leads downwards. The deeper they go, the more uncomfortable Sneak feels. "Do you know the feeling when real things become strangely unreal, unreal ones strangely real?"

Soklov's steps become faster and faster, there is no stopping him. "The nineteenth century was the Industrial Age, the twentieth the Information Age, the twenty-first will be the Molecular Age. Inscription and incarnation are the keywords. We begin to colonise molecules like alien continents and planets. We reorganise them, enslave them, force them to join together and breed new bastards. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were twenty million chemical compounds, now we're beginning to lose count. There are no boundaries anymore, only distorted boundaries between what we used to split into nature and culture, body and mind, matter and information. This is lived non-dualism. Whoever complains, is a fundamentalist. Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus wanted the world to consist of mindless particles of matter, and thus left us with a bothersome problem: How do particles combine and organise for order to emerge? The religions, those hyenas of culture, who like to pounce on the cadavers of philosophy, gratefully chew on these leftovers. There is no need either of a higher necessity nor of a Darwinian accident. Contingency is quite enough. It has to be tamed, though, otherwise it will lead to permanent stress. Which is why, since the decline of the religions in the nineteenth and the demise of political ideologies in the twentieth century, contingency has been mastered by way of practising and consolidating consensus through consumption. The irony of history here is that all consumption, that does not strictly serve the preservation of the blood sugar level, is pure contingency and sold to us as a necessity of social survival."

Soklov grins, which comes easily to him, the wealthy communist. Sneak has been told some anecdotes by Irma, like the one about Soklov's love for Nauru. As a black romantic he enthused about its pyrotechnical sunsets. In truth, though, he was doing business with Hammer DeRoburt, the former president of the tiny island state. Thanks to its phosphate mines, Nauru for some years had the highest per capita income in the world. Over thousands of years, the excrements of seabirds had built up on the island and had transformed the coral heap into a heap of shit. To the present day, a Nauruan real estate property in Melbourne is jokingly called Bird Shit Tower. For Irma the island is a warning monument to the catastrophic exploitation of natural resources. The treeless landscape resembles a battlefield or, as Irma says, a gigantic *Spiral Jetty* of human hubris. After the phosphate had been depleted, the national wealth was gambled away in stock markets. Water and soil had been poisoned. Since then, the island has become a paradise for unchained capital – no banking laws, no tax agreements. On Nauru, one can get drunk or engage in international money laundering. In those days, Soklov may have laid the foundation for his wealth with shady deals. He lives according to the motto: We come from dust and end as dust, in between we have a lot of expenses.

After what felt like a thousand steps, they stand at the entrance to a tunnel, that widens into a dome. "I love the sound of the stairs. This is my steel harp."

Soklov is in high spirits and leads them into his main laboratory, which he calls *Garden*. No air lock, no clean room, just a bizarre landscaped interior spanning several hundred square metres. Notes, protocols, sketches cover the tables and the floor like autumn leaves. Standing a little elevated, there is a cylindrical glass tank holding a liquid in which cell tissue swims. The organic structure spreads coral-like and at its numerous endings is hooked up into tubes and wires. Soklov gaze sweeps across the room, crowded with apparatuses and books, and a little pathetically raises his voice.

"Science has to go beyond itself and leave all petty academicism behind. We need new allies, and these are the things themselves. We have to get them to talk and give them what they need. Only this way will we arrive at a

poetry that emanates polyphonically from all molecules. We need an art that rends the veil of empiricism. From yesterday, I'm not a scientist any longer, I'm a messenger of the new art."

Selma does not much care about art. For her, beauty is the promise of function. Pictures and sculptures are a handicap, like the feathers on a peacock. "The will to art is the will to power. Art separates us and is the expression of an old class struggle."

Soklov looks at her somewhat amused. "Let's not be frivolous, Selma. We know that you sport your BMW, your expensive underwear and your pretty costume by Josephus Thimister only so your club chums don't excommunicate you socially. Why don't you give yourself a push and jump into the tank, and we'll become one. It's not art that separates us, it's consumption."

The deep hum of a hydraulic device interrupts their skirmish. From the armoured pipe of a press an uninterrupted sausage of wet paper is being fed into a bio-reactor. Soklov laughs out loud like a child, and pumps and agitators are set in motion. The metal of the heavy duty tripod vibrates slightly and gentle waves spread through the tank.

"I don't want to bore you with theory. The theoretical explanation of a work of art is like the price tag on a dress. But who doesn't long for paradise? All the energy of hydrocarbon-based life derives from the sun. Plants, through light and photosynthesis, produce the simple sugar called glucose, the universal fuel of life. Glucose is the petrol of our cells. We are addicted to sugar and allow ourselves the evolutionary luxury of a large brain, that burns 75 per cent of the glucose. So why not prepare physical brain food from the mental food of literature and philosophy? Books consist of paper, paper consists of cellulose, and cellulose is a polymer of glucose. Bacteria produce enzymes which, like molecular scissors, cut up the cellulose chains and leave us with a sugar solution that only has to be filtered and refined. Et voilà, we have our infusion for the brain cells."

"What has this got to do with philosophy and literature," Sneak interrupts.

"Astonishingly enough, I noticed that the cells grew better on certain text types. Some brains prefer romantic novels, others adventure stories. There are also some, though, that choose philosophy for their main course. The biggest brain in front of you favours a biblio-therapeutic diet. It lives on nothing but Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I feed it several editions every day, and its appetite grows bigger and bigger."

The tissue appears to burst the tank. There is a billowing to the rhythm of the hose pumps and in places small gas bubbles are rising up.

"But do these formations think," Irma ask somewhat provocatively.

"More than you think. I would like to quote Oscar Wilde here: 'Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.' These beings are unique. Each brain develops its own shape and colours. Some affect the appearance of skin over a network of veins, others are corroded as if by syphilis or leprosy, while another protrudes lumps of ashen flesh and is mottled as if it had the measles and was damascened by lichens. Don't forget, reason is not the skill to distinguish between reality and fiction, it is a deception of the brain that has worn itself out on books and hallucinates reality."

Only now Sneak notices the holes in the tissue that, resembling maltreated and gaping anuses, prolapse towards him.

"I work like mad on a poetry that solves all energy problems. When it comes to prose, I have to feed entire libraries to the cell cultures, but a meaning concentrated in a few sentences, whose words contain the distilled substance of hundreds of pages, would keep them satisfied for months on end."

Irma is not able to curb her political correctness. She suspects a new form of slavery. "The history of sugar is fatally connected to the history of exploitation. Just think of the transatlantic triangular trade, when weapons and tools were shipped from Europe to Africa and exchanged there for slaves. On the Caribbean and American plantations the bodies were worked to the bone to supply the rum distilleries in far-away Europe with sugar. In this way wars were financed and the world mauled in the ecstasy of power." She raises her voice: "This is the beginning of a new bio-politics. Labs must not turn into plantations. Agriculture was bad enough, but the body economy is our downfall."

Soklov seems annoyed. "Why are you afraid of paradise? This here is not the Last Judgment. This is a celebration. A land of milk and honey, where one doesn't become lazy and stupid, but where one digests insights. Become like children and invent your own Candyland. Sugar has made people happy at all times. In the eleventh century, Calif al-Zahir presented his people with palaces, mosques, trees and figures made of sugar, and weighing tons. My sugar not only gives people energy, it gives them knowledge and poetry. In the old days, sugar was used as a spice, as it was rare and precious. Today, we have more sugar than we need and we use education and knowledge like a spice. To understand the world means to incorporate it. The world, like love, has to go through our stomach and guts. It has to pervade each cell in our body and become a part of us. People can cope with paradise."

Selma becomes impatient. "This is another one of those machines for producing happiness. Together with the thesis that the truth becomes spirit through matter, objectified theorems shall be made palatable to us as the products of a material-discursive cycle. This is nothing new. This admission of failure by theory ends in ideological

totalitarianism.”

Irma, in full swing now, goes one better: “The return to common values shared by all is a fascist concept. The molecular age doesn’t create a common space. A polis, which also comprises animals and plants, requires diversity and not a universe made of simple sugar.”

Soklov raises his eyebrows and purses his lips. “An art that is truly up to date is alien to its own era. What happens in the future is the monstrous that is set in motion in the present. I’m not integrated, I’m an apocalyptic prophet. I’m not ashamed of the truth.”

Below the tank, Sneak notices a small apparatus in which lumps of flesh are twitching. Looking more closely, he makes out a tongue sprouting from a larynx. Soklov calls the device *Laboral*. It serves the production of sound and is connected by wire to a server cabinet in which LEDs of various colours are blinking.

“Listen,” Soklov calls. “It has been listening to us and now speaks to us. Reading Hegel is beginning to show an effect. Since yesterday, it has begun to reach out to the world. It is a demoniacal lector who re-organises the world. For breakfast already it ingests Kojève’s introduction to Hegel. And I have an inkling that it is enjoying itself immensely.”

The *Laboral* forms the sounds of a soft male voice. “The truth is the whole. We may rest assured that it is the nature of truth to force its way to recognition when the time comes, and that it only appears when its time has come, and hence never appears too soon, and never finds a public that is not ripe to receive it. Truth is the bacchanalian revel in which an unintoxicated member is not to be found. And since each member, insofar as it is separated, immediately dissolves its membership in the revel, the revel itself turns out to be a state of transparent and simple tranquillity.”

A cork pops from a bottle and Soklov fills four glasses. “Let me tell you, the thousand molecules making up this liqueur’s aroma give breath to a molecular zoo. A pure distillate from Huysman’s novel *A rebours*. The resveratrol has a wonderfully life-extending effect and helps prevent the deadly illness of age. Inhale the santonines and the world will appear purple to you.”

Soklov raises his glass and proposes a toast: “Long live Jean Paul and Paul Bocuse. I regret that I’m not able to feed myself exclusively by reading cookery books.”

Whether he will initiate the end of history, through a switch from oil to glucose, is uncertain, but at least he will make the evening news. The poetry of the body has manifested itself in sculptural organs and has raised a longing for substantiality. Sneak considers printing out all the pages of the Internet and feeding them to his own brain in the form of glucose, while Selma is toying with the idea of bringing love letters on the market in the form of candies. The symposium can begin and the eschatological banquet is set up. After the second glass, Irma mumbles: “Let us become animals and forget language.” And Soklov intones the national anthem of Nauru.