PHILOSOPHY/ANIMALS AND SOCIETY

"A classic, available in English at last, this collaboration between Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec is a pioneering exploration of uncharted territory in the realm of animal cognition, philosophy, and art. At once inquisitive and whimsical, this uncategorizable book brings together some of the best work of two cutting-edge thinkers who were not only geographic but also intellectual neighbors." — Eduardo Kac

"Vampyroteuthis Infernalis is a unique work that is at once literary and philosophical, poetic and scientific, and it nicely combines the imaginative fancy of the best fiction with elements of science fiction and surrealism. Flusser’s work is a hybrid creature, a marvelous and monstrous text that mirrors the fantastical creature it describes. The Vampyroteuthis holds a wonderfully strange and unhuman mirror up to the human and in so doing opens the way for a strange and novel kind of philosophy of life." — Eugene Thacker, author of After Life.

HOW FAR APART ARE HUMANS FROM ANIMALS—even the "vampire squid from hell"? Playing the scientist/philosopher/provocateur, Vilém Flusser uses this question as a springboard to dive into a literal and a philosophical ocean. "The abyss that separates us from the vampire squid is incomparably smaller than that which separates us from extraterrestrial life, as imagined in science fiction and sought by astrobiologists." Flusser notes at the outset of his expedition. Part scientific treatise, part spoof, part philosophical discourse, part fable, Vampyroteuthis Infernalis offers a unique posthumanist philosophical understanding of phenomenology.

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VAMPYROTEUTHIS INFERNALIS

A Treatise, with a Report by the Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste

VILÉM FLUSSER

and

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VAMPYROTEUTHIC CULTURE

Its Thinking

The more we learn about thought processes, the more mysterious they become. How are we able to control, as though from the outside, our inner thoughts? How and where do our brain and central nervous system process data? It seems absurd to locate this function exclusively inside the brain itself, as though a computer programmer can be found inside a computer. Yet it seems just as absurd to locate this function elsewhere, for instance in the Cartesian pineal gland. To do so would be to renew the vain search for the “seat of the soul.” Several mental processes—perception, symbolic understanding, imagination, learning, reading and writing, remembering and forgetting, for example—are fairly well understood by neurophysiologists. Their centers have been identified within the brain, and many other thought processes are, without a doubt, just as analyzable. But it is precisely thanks to such scientific advances that our ability to access these processes from the outside—to step outside of ourselves, so to speak—has become all the more uncanny. That is to say, the traditional concepts of “Geist” and “soul” have become more and more aberrant. This aberrance is in no way diminished if, for “soul,” we substitute “reflection” (Nachdenken). There can be no doubt that the vampyroteuthis reflects.
Its sensory organs transmit bits of information to its brain that are no less complex than those transmitted to ours. Its brain must, therefore, process this data with methods that are accordingly complex. It could not survive, any less than we could, without having control over these processes. If we—momentarily leaving aside the soul—were to replace the term “reflection” with “philosophizing,” then we would have to concede that, no less than we could, the vampyroteuthis could not survive without philosophy. We should thus be able to compare vampyroteuthic with human philosophy (and with the sciences that have derived from it).

There is nothing, however, that could possibly be called “human philosophy.” There are only different methods of reflection, and the sum total of these methods is far too paltry to be called philosophy. Luckily enough, this problem can be circumvented. In the West, where the present fable is being written, “philosophy” has a fairly clear meaning: it is a mode of reflection that was devised, not too long ago, by a handful of Greeks. This is, of course, an embarrassing reality. The vampyroteuthis would roll with laughter upon learning that the methodological reflection of “Homo sa-piens sapiens,” a millennia-old species, had been developed only in a few European villages, and so late at that. Nevertheless, we have no other option than to compare vampyro-oteuthic philosophy with this rather undeveloped method of human reflection.

Reflection is the process by which reason (nous) penetrates behind appearances (phanomena) in order to be able to think about them. Reflection is thus preliminary to thinking. The role of reason in this process is that of a scalpel: it dissects phenomena into discernible rations. This rationalizing allows us to look through phenomena, to look through the gaps between them: this is “theory.” And it also allows us to manipulate these rations: this is “praxis.” Finally, rationalization serves to circumcribe future thoughts and manipulations by providing fixed standards that can be applied to what is thought and manipulated. To reflect as a human, in the end, is to wield a knife, and the stone knives of the Paleolithic era—the earliest human instruments—indicate when it was that we began to reflect.

We trace our fingers along the dissected rations of phenomena in order to comprehend and define their contours. With a theoretical gaze, we then disassociate these defined contours from the dissected phenomenon, at which point we are holding an empty husk. We call this empty husk a “concept,” and we use it to collect other rations of phenomena that have not yet been fully defined. We use concepts as models. In doing so, we create a mêlée between dissected appearances and empty concepts—between phenomena and models. The unfortunate outcome of this conflict is that we can no longer discern any phenomena for which we have not already established a model. Since we can no longer apprehend model-less phenomena, we therefore brandish the scalpel of reason simply to tailor phenomena to our models. Human reflection, in other words, is the act of constricting the feedback loop between models and phenomena.

The vampyroteuthis, on the other hand, has no knife, no need for human reason. Its chromatophores emit cones of light that delineate the darkness into rations before they are conceived. Its reason is therefore preconceptual. It perceives things rationally in order to comprehend them; its tentacles follow these cones of light only to comprehend what this light-reason has already rationalized. Since its tentacles are equipped with sexual organs, the concepts that it abstracts from these illuminated cones of reason—“pure reason,” as we would say—are sexually laden: There are male and female concepts. When the male rationally illuminates a female to grasp (comprehend) its abdomen, and when the female responds by rationally illuminating the male to grasp (comprehend) its penis, what occurs is the masculine comprehension of feminine concepts and the feminine comprehension of masculine concepts. Masculine and feminine concepts, that is, are synthesized during copulation, and these synthesized concepts can then be used as models for phenomena—phenomena as
simple as the stones on the seabed. It follows that human reason, which slices and dissects, corresponds in the vampyroteuthis to coitus and orgasm, which comprehend. Its concepts are generated by orgasms, and its philosophy is synonymous with copulation.

Human coitus has no clear place or function in reflection, and this is because it remains undetermined whether our coitus is a public or private act. Vampyroteuthic coitus, on the contrary, is the ultimate political event. It corresponds to something like the academy or to the agora of Greek cities. It is the ultimate political event not only because it is responsible for the regeneration of society but also because everything it conceives in the world is impregnated—given life—by means of copulation. Its every ontology is an analysis of sex, an effort to differentiate between male and female being. The rules of its reflection are sexual rules. The logic of sex governs the syntax of its language (the colorations and illuminations of its skin). If, while philosophizing, the vampyroteuthis is able to abstract these sexual rules from phenomena—if it manages to practice pure science—then it will behold the structure of pure sex. This theoretical insight causes it to climax.

Its very first philosophical inquiry is concerned with sex, and all others come later. The aim of this initial inquiry approximates that of what we might call psychoanalysis, and it is with this philosophical foundation that it goes on to analyze everything else, even things repressed and unsexual. In the end, and after much intellectual labor, it is compelled to plunge into those deep regions of thought where we practice analytic geometry. That is, the history of vampyroteuthic philosophy resembles ours, only in reverse. Its most archaic achievement is something like that of Freud, its most advanced like that of Pythagoras.

The vampyroteuthis is indeed a historical being, but we will have to reformulate the term “history” before it can be properly applied to it. For us, history designates the process that allows us to record acquired information, and it has two distinguishable phases: “prehistory,” during which information is simply recorded, and “history in the strict sense,” during which the recording of information is deliberate and intended. As far as the vampyroteuthis is concerned, this is an inadequate formulation, and we should therefore allow it a brief opportunity to criticize the human conception of history:

Homo sapiens sapiens is a mammal that, having uplifted its body carriage from the ground, has freely dangling forelimbs. As is the case with all mammals, its eyes refract rays of the sun, and the data that it acquires in this way are transmitted from the brain to the hands. Its hands, in turn, transmit this information to its environment by handling it. Thus the human is a sort of feedback loop through which data, gathered from out of the world, can re-enter into the world. But since the human organism (especially its brain) is complex, information is distorted during this feedback process. It is processed by the brain, which coordinates it reflexively and transmits it in a reconfigured form to the hand, by which it is retransmitted onto the world. In this sense, the data that humans cast back into the world represent new information. This new information is likewise perceived by the eyes, processed by the brain, and returned to the world in a restructured form. It is through this process that the human transforms both its environment and itself. In short: human history.

To understand this history further, it is necessary to know that the existential focus of mammals is the stomach. The human, no exception, is motivated to transform the world and itself by its stomach. Human history has economic infrastructures that are phenomenologically clear to see: The objects of the world that are altered by human hands are meant, in the broadest sense, to serve digestion. These same objects have hardly any sexual dimension. In fact, human sexual behavior has scarcely changed over the course of its history. It has remained practically animalistic and ahistorical.

This anomaly, this suppression of the sexual apparatus by the digestive, cannot be adequately explained by biology
alone. It cannot be explained, for instance, as an evolutionary trend in the development of chordate intestines. On the contrary, this anomaly has mainly historical roots. The human male is somewhat larger than the female. Since the beginning of history, it seems as though the male has oppressed the female and has lived, ever since, in fear of female rebellion. Thus have humans managed to lose the entire dimension of female thought and activity. We vampyroteuthes are left with a rather pathological impression of human history, one that can be understood in terms of the repression of sexuality for fear of the female. Human history is a history of affection.

Humans are surrounded by a mixture of gases called “air.” Most inhabitants of the air possess an organ that can cause this gas to resonate. Among humans, these resonances are codified and used, like our chromatophoric emissions, to transmit intraspecific information. Human memory is consequently designed to store information that is transmitted in this way. Compared to ours, however, its memory seems rudimentary, for the human is continuously reaching out for mnemonic crutches. It channels the majority of what it wants to communicate onto inanimate objects, which exist in large number on the relatively infertile continents, and these newly “(in)formed” objects are meant to serve as mnemonic aids.

A peculiar consequence of this blunder is that human history, in contrast to a genuine history such as ours, can be ascertained objectively—is can be established on the basis of these “(in)formed” objects. Not only we vampyroteuthes but even a visitor from Mars could reconstruct human history from these entities. Since it is soaked up by objective matter, human history is not properly intersubjective. It is an utter failure.

From the foregoing cultural critique we are able to reconstruct certain aspects of the vampyroteuthic conception of history. At the heart of this history lies a process of storing intersubjectively communicated information, and therefore the central question concerns the intersubjective media by which information is transmitted. These media are glands: vampyroteuthic history is a glandular history, a history of secretions.

In this respect, the most important of its glands are the chromatophores, the original function of which was of a sexual nature: its colorations were meant to attract a sexual partner. It is known, however, that these displays of color give outward expression to the inner thoughts of the organism—that chromatic secretions serve to articulate its volatile immanence. These displays are coordinated to the extent that every chromatophore is singly controlled by the brain, and the individual glandular contractions can be synchronized. Their chromatic language is intraspecific. What remains unknown is whether the code has changed throughout history.

A second type of gland secretes a gelatinous compound, the release of which renders the entire body virtually transparent. Physiologically, the function of this gland is to release bodily pressure; it enables the vampyroteuthis to ascend to shallower quarters of the sea. It should be noted that lesser octopods employ this gland to conceal themselves from enemies. In the case of the vampyroteuthis, however, it enables the sender of chromatic information to become invisible to its receiver. In that they conceal the messenger, the messages are abstract. We would say that this gland facilitates lying.

A third type of gland, located in the mouth, secretes a paralyzing poison. The original function of this secretion, which paralyzes but does not kill, was of course to assist in the capture of prey. For the vampyroteuthis, however, it serves the additional function of arresting the form of incoming information, making it intelligible. This gland is an epistemological organ; it converts mental impressions into processed bits of data that can be communicated later on.

Yet another gland used to convey history is the diverticulum, the cavity that discharges sepia into the surrounding area. According to popular opinion, octopuses deploy this floating cloud of ink, which they shape into their own image, simply to mislead
their enemies, but there is more to the story. Closer observation of the vampyroteuthis’s relatives has revealed that the act of sculpting the sepia cloud has nothing to do with their enemies and that, beyond self-portraits, they fabricate countless other forms that are indecipherable to us. We have to assume, then, that the vampyroteuthis broadcasts information in sepia clouds. For two reasons, however, its manipulation of this cloudy material is incomparable to our own production of cultural artifacts. The first is simply the ephemerality of the sepia cloud. Its edges dissipate too quickly for it to serve as a (relatively) permanent store of information. The second reason is that the information communicated with these clouds is exclusively intended to mislead its receiver. These nebulous manipulations are meant to deceive. We would say that this gland, too, facilitates lying.

So far so good. Our appraisal of vampyroteuthic history and culture has begun to take shape. Like us, it gathers information. This it does by emitting a cone of light into the world, by extracting units of information out of this light with its tentacles, and by paralyzing these units into data. Having arrived in the central nervous system, information is processed, compared to that which is already stored there, and then sent in an intraspecific code—by means of glands—to other vampyroteuthes, which in turn store it in their memories. Thus there emerges an ongoing dialogue between vampyroteuthes, the nature of which ensures that the sum of available information will only and ever increase. That is vampyroteuthic history.

It must be kept in mind, however, that all of this has the character of a conspiracy. The spirit of their dialogue is perfidious, for the transmitted data is meant to deceive: they are lies. As a species, the vampyroteuthis deludes all other species, and every group of vampyroteuthes deludes every other group; the individual deceives all others in the group, and every vampyroteuthis deceives all others. The vampyroteuthic code is a peculiar type of cryptography that is not meant to be decrypted, or rather, its decryption yields further deceptive encryptions. The underlying purpose of all vampyroteuthic communication is to deceive the other in order to devour it. Its is a culture of deceit, pretense, and falsehood. Broadly speaking, one could even call it a culture of art.

This cultural critique of the vampyroteuthis raises a Darwinian question: What is the evolutionary function of its culture? Well, the deception of all other species promotes the survival of the species vampyroteuthis, the deception (seduction) of sexual partners promotes reproduction, and the deception of all other vampyroteuthes promotes the survival of the individual. It would not be outlandish to claim that this is the most sophisticated strategy that evolution has ever devised. But how can this Darwinian, sociobiological explanation of vampyroteuthic culture be reconciled with its orgasmic, orphic, and artistic character? A Schopenhauerian answer comes to mind: vampyroteuthic culture is a display of light and color, an exhibition, which works to mask the demonic predator’s will to power. During our examination of this culture, we too were entranced (swindled) by its beauty: it is a seductive culture of colors, lights, forms, and caresses that leads—on all levels of Dasein—to orgasm. And yet it disguises the will to death. (Does not our own culture, albeit with different methods, go out of its way to disguise death?)

The vampyroteuthis is a mythomaniacal deceiver. For it, the opposite of truth is not falsehood but dishonesty. Whereas we philosophize in order to proceed from falsehood to truth, it philosophizes in order to lie ever more completely. As it seems, these two philosophical conventions are worlds apart.

**Its Social Life**

The following considerations are based on the presupposition that what we call "evolution" is, essentially, the tendency of life toward socialization. Life is made up of cells. They are the building blocks, the "atoms," of life. From a prebiological perspective, of course, cells are complex structures in
themselves, but they are regarded as the fundamental elements of biology proper. It is possible, in fact, to understand life on earth as nothing more than the shuffling of individual, isolated cells—like the tiles of a mosaic in progress—in such a way that the cells divide and multiply without dying in the process. For an idea of this teeming and immortal mosaic of life, simply consider the current population of protozoa, the single-celled life-forms that still constitute the great majority of biomass on earth.

The tendency to live together arose at a very early stage in the development of life. Oddly enough, this tendency can also be regarded as a tendency toward death. This is because an organization of cells, a cellular community, cannot divide itself—as an individual cell can—without losing its embodied information. When an organization of cells divides, its information decomposes, and the decomposition of information is precisely what is meant by “death.” Surely there are numerous causal explanations—biochemical, for instance—for this death drive in life, but these are of little concern to this fable. The goal here is rather to relocate the discourse concerned with the tendency of life toward socialization. To be precise, the aim is to transplant this discourse from the optimistic perspective of “progressive” thinking into the more sobering perspective of the post-Auschwitz, thermonuclear era.

The earliest communities of cells, those of the mesozoa and parazoa, are colonies in which the individual cells have retained their individuality. As organizations, they are thus reminiscent of human society: each member lives for itself in collaboration with others. From this stage, evolution then leaped to that of metazoan, a truly startling transition. At this stage, cells forsake their individuality and live only as a function of society: they become specialized functionaries. What is more, a hierarchy of functions emerges that resembles human bureaucracies. The lowest level of this hierarchy is represented by cell tissue, the next by organs, and the highest by organisms. Individual cells work in the service of tissues, which work in the service of the organs, which in turn serve organisms (by which I mean something like the human body, not a totalitarian state). Certain cells, however, have managed to evade this process of specialization and have thus retained their individuality, namely, gametes. Ova and spermatozoa behave like protozoa; being immortal, they hold organisms in contempt.

Yet we have not fully appreciated the evolutionary transition into metazoic life, for organisms—complex organizations of cellular hierarchies—come to acquire an individuality of their own, an “indivisibility” (as etymology implies). Such is the perverse outcome of cellular socialization. An organism is not a society of cells but rather an individual; it is like an individual cell, only on a higher level. It should come as no surprise, then, that the same tendency toward socialization and death that manifests itself in individual cells is observable in organisms as well. Individual organisms of the same type are inclined to live together, and it is this inclination that leads to the formation of such groups as herds, packs, and human society. Though on a higher level, such groups are analogous to the loose societies of mesozoa and parazoa: they are porous and poorly established organizations.

In the case of insects, however, and especially Hymenoptera, evolution leaped from its metazoic stage to an even higher level of socialization. Supersocieties developed (ant hills and beehives), in which individual organisms acquired specialized functions and sacrificed their organic individuality to perform them (as queens, drones, workers, and so on). Such a novel process of socialization warrants critical attention, if for no other reason than it might provide a model for the future of human interaction.

Though often highly cerebralized organisms, insects suffer from a major design flaw, namely, their exoskeleton. This has to be shed from time to time as insects grow, leaving them periodically vulnerable. Moreover, if they were comparable in size to us, insects would be crushed to death by their own weight. As individual organisms, insects are thus condemned to be very small. The purpose of the superorganism is to overcome this design
flaw. Superorganisms have a tessellated brain, the capacity of which rivals our own. It is for this reason that ants, for instance, are capable of challenging our putative dominion over the continents. That matter aside, what is essential about a society of ants is the following: It is an individual, albeit on a higher level than that of an individual organism. The functions of the individual ants are not social but biological. The queen ant does not behave toward a worker ant as a general does toward a common soldier, no—their relationship is rather like that between a stomach and a liver. The society of an ant hill operates according to biological rather than political rules. If myrmecological politics can be said to exist, it would come into play only between one ant hill and another, never between individual ants.

To speak of politics is to speak of freedom. As part of a superorganism, ants have sacrificed their freedom; as part of an organism, cells have done the same. A consequence of this sacrifice is the creation of a new freedom, namely, that of the superorganism and the organism. This new freedom is created because the preceding and sacrificed freedom was biologized. Put another way, freedom exists where biological rules (regulations) have not fully encroached upon life. Freedom is a provisional stage in the tendency of evolution toward socialization and death. Those who explain human life as a function of biology—this would include economic explanations, since the economy is a digestive function—are “progressive”: They are wallowing in the evolutionary tendency toward socialization and death and are thereby contributing to the abolishment of freedom. Those who champion freedom, on the other hand, are “reactionary”: they are attempting to resist the biological tendency toward socialization and death in order to conserve space for a fleeting, provisional condition.

Unlike ants and bees, vampyroteuthes and humans are individual organisms that live in poorly organized societies. They are, as organisms, free individuals, but their freedom is threatened by their societies, which are becoming ever better organized and thus ever more conscious of biological regulations. They are in danger of becoming, sooner or later, like ants or bees. Like humans, that is, the vampyroteuthis is also confronted with the problem of freedom in the form of an antibiological struggle, but at the bottom of the sea this conflict manifests itself in an entirely different way. Let us then make an effort to extract the political engagements of the vampyroteuthis from the darkness of its abyss.

We know the following facts about the social life of the vampyroteuthis: the female lays its eggs in clusters; both the male and the female protect the eggs; the hatched young arrange themselves into groups according to these clusters; the vampyroteuthis is inclined toward suicide and cannibalism; it communicates in intraspecific codes. For now we will have to be content with these few details.

The central social phenomenon is the clustered configuration of the oviposited eggs, just as the central social phenomenon of humans, by way of analogy, is the structure of the family. Each egg cluster contains a group of “twins” (simultaneously hatched individuals) that are interrelated according to a genetically predetermined hierarchy. Human siblings are also hierarchized—a fact that explains the great discrepancy between our conceptions of fraternity and equality—but our fraternal hierarchies are, for the most part, culturally determined. The hierarchical structures in African tribes, for instance, can differ from those in China or the West. If we were to advocate, that is, for equality and against fraternity (or vice versa), we would be agitating for or against historical contingencies. If the vampyroteuthis, on the contrary, should take the side of equality over fraternity, it would be agitating against its own biological condition.

For the vampyroteuthis, fraternity is synonymous with society; vampyroteuthes live in clusters of twins. If, in the name of equality, the vampyroteuthis were to settle against fraternity, this settlement would not only be antibiological but also antisocial. If we are to understand political activity as the attempt to change the structure of society, then vampyroteuthic “politics” would represent the attempt to abolish, outright, its iniquitous
social structure. In other words, its "politics" is synonymous with
anarchy. Because the hierarchy of the ovular clusters is biologi-
cally determined, there can be no other social structure, and thus
the political ideal of the vampyroteuthis is anarchic, fraternal
strife. Of course, fraternity has lost some of its shine for us, too, at
least since Freud shared his thoughts about brotherly hatred—
or, perhaps, ever since there have been Big Brothers. To some
degree, at least, we can relate to the vampyroteuthic struggle.

In comparing its political activity to ours, we recognize at
once that the tension underlying its efforts is far more taut and
volatile than that which drives our own. It is true that all of our
political activity is likewise directed against our biological condi-
tion, against biologically predetermined inequalities. The differ-
ence is that our biologically predetermined inequalities also have
a large and overlying cultural component. Our political struggles
are thus against this cultural superstructure, which we strive to
rebuild. Moreover, we are able to imagine cultural structures
("Utopias") in which even our biological constraints are done
away with. The vampyroteuthis cannot fathom Utopias, for the
structure of its society is not a cultural product (it is not a "fac-
tum") but rather a biological given (a "datum"). When it engages
in politics, it does so against its own "nature"—it commits a vi-o-
lent act against itself. In the end, however, is not all human po-
itical activity contra nature? Are not those who defend nature—
those who defend such natural "realities" as race, the dominion
of mankind, even ecological balance—somehow betrayers of the
human Geist?

For us, political activity is a question of freedom that poses it-
self dialectically: as the self-assertion of an individual within so-
ciety, on the one hand, and as the individual acknowledgement
of other humans, on the other. Over time we have tried, with
negligible success, to overcome this inherent contradiction. For
the vampyroteuthis there is no dialect of political freedom. It
is biologically necessitated to recognize the hierarchical rank of
its brother, and it can only become free if it disposes of this ne-
cessity. For it, then, freedom is cannibalism—the right to devour
its kin. Although the vampyroteuthic and the liberal conceptions
of freedom have unmistakable similarities, their origins differ.
The vampyroteuthis derives from animals that would develop
into ants, and so the inclination to form an ant-like society is in-
grained in its "collective unconscious." Much more than we do,
it feels threatened by the anthill—that is, by absolute socializa-
tion—and its political activity is, therefore, far more antisocialist
than ours. Hardly a Utopia, its liberalism is rather the denial of
its biological condition.

It could even be said that its cannibalistic antisocialism re-
resents a "hate movement," whereas our hymenopteric social-
ism represents a "love movement." Its political liberation comes
in the form of brotherly hatred, ours as a sacrifice of individ-
ual freedom to our beloved brother—an anthropomorphizing
error on its part, a myrmecomorphizing error on ours. So much of
vampyroteuthic behavior (its copulation, monogamous fidelity,
brood care) reveals it to be a lovable and loving being. An exam-
ination of our society, however, reveals hardly any evidence of
human lovability. If anything, the following is true: For the vam-
pyroteuthis, it is precisely love, the recognition of others, and or-
gasm that constitute the natural state of its Dasein. The natural
state of human Dasein, on the contrary, is defined by univer-
sal hatred, by the universal struggle for survival—one against
all. By overcoming its animality, therefore, the vampyroteuthis
learns to hate; by overcoming ours, we learn to love. This over-
coming can be called "spirit" ("Geist"), and it expresses itself in
the vampyroteuthis as hatred and in us as love. In Judeo-Christ-
tian terms, vampyroteuthic behavior might be said to approxi-
mate "sins against the spirit" (Sünde wider den Geist).

The foregoing discussion, in a word, has been about "hell," about
Geist and freedom as sins. In this regard we should not forget
that the vampyroteuthis stands on its head: its hell is our heaven,
its heaven our hell. For us, its murderous and suicidal anarchy
would be an infernal society, and yet, to it, such anarchy re-
represents an inaccessible heaven of freedom. Loving and socialist
collaboration and cohabitation represent, to us, an inaccessible and heavenly Utopia, a messianic state of being, to it nothing more than a hellish anthill. Is there not a third possibility, a middle road, a tertius gaudens? Can an “absolute good” and an “absolute evil” really be said to exist?

There is indeed a third possibility, however unappealing it may be: there is, namely, a Geist that is both human and vampyroteuthic, and it is not difficult to find. For there is something of the vampyroteuthis in each of us, otherwise we would not be able to recognize aspects of its heaven and hell. And there is something of the human Geist in each vampyroteuthis. For us, too, hell is the company of others (l'infer, ce sont les autres); and for us, too, freedom is the opportunity—ever at hand—to commit suicide. The vampyroteuthis is the reverse side of our own Geist, and if we could encounter both sides simultaneously, the question of heaven and hell, of good and evil, would be no more. In fact, it is likely that no questions would remain at all, for this encounter would mark the end of Geist. That is the risk we take when we face the vampyroteuthis eye to eye. What we would behold would be our own reflection, above all the reflection of our grotesque political folly.

Its Art

Both vampyroteuthes and humans acquire information in order to disseminate it to others, and this practice is not unique to us. In several other of the so-called higher species—mammals and birds, for instance—certain behavioral models, such as hunting and flying, are passed along from a mother to her young. However, the case of humans and vampyroteuthes is somewhat different. Unlike other animals, both of us endeavor to preserve information in our respective memories, to saturate these memories with more and more new information, and to impart them—thus enriched—to others. In the case of humans and vampyroteuthes, that is, the transmission of information is a cumulative process. In other words, humans and vampyroteuthes are historical animals, animals that have overcome their animality.

It is a biological function to pass along genetic information, from one generation to the next, by way of gametes. During this process, the transmitted genetic constitution coincidentally mutates (on account of transmission errors), and such mutations lead to the formation of new genetic information. It is a super-biological function, however, to transmit acquired information by means of conventional codes, to mutate this information intentionally—over and over again—and even to mutate the codes themselves. This is superbiological because, in addition to genetic evolution, there is now an overlying process of historical evolution, one that is not governed by chance but rather by intention (an admittedly nebulous term).

The central problem of historical evolution is that of memory. Animals perpetuate transmitted information in gametes. The latter are practically eternal memories: they will persevere as long as there is life on earth. To transmit their acquired information, however, humans make use of artificial memories such as books, buildings, and images. Because these are far less permanent than eggs or sperm, humans are therefore always in pursuit of more durable memories: aere perennius (more everlasting than bronze). They are aware that, after all of their artificial memories—all of their cultural artifacts—will have faded into oblivion, their genetic information, preserved in gametes and perhaps mutated by chance, will still remain. The biological is more permanent than the superbiological, and this truth is difficult for humans to accept. It is difficult because it is not as animals, but as superanimals, that humans want to achieve “immortality.” Memory, the central problem of historical evolution, is also the central problem of art, which is essentially a method of fabricating artificial memories.

From the perspective of the vampyroteuthis, all of this has the look of a laughable error. How foolish can humans be to entrust their acquired information to lifeless objects such as paper...
or stone? It is well known, after all, that these objects are subject to the second law of thermodynamics, that they will decay and necessarily be forgotten. In the vampyroteuthic abyss, where all is strewn with sedimentation and bathed in fluidity, the unreliable impermanence of lifeless objects is far more obvious than it is on the relatively dead surfaces of the continents, where sun-bleached bones can endure for millennia. And yet the laughable error that is human art should not simply be laughed at—assuming the vampyroteuthis is capable of laughter—but scrutinized as well.

When we attempt to express a novel experience or thought—when we aspire to render the unspoken speakable and the unheard audible—we do so as functions of artificial memory, as functions of lifeless objects. That is, our experiences and thoughts assimilate with lifeless objects to form inextricable units. We experience and think, for example, as functions of marble, film strips, or the letters of written language. It is not the case that we first experience or think something and, subsequently, scour the vicinity for an object with which to record it. Rather, it is already as sculptors, filmmakers, authors—as artists—that we begin to experience and think. Material, lifeless objects (stones, bones, letters, numbers, musical notes) shape all of human experience and thought.

All objects are stubborn; being inert, they resist our attempts to “(in)form” them. Yet every object is stubborn in its own particular way: Stones shatter when chiseled; cotton slackens when stretched; written language deforms thoughts with the stringency of its rules. To (in)form objects and transform them into memories, art engages in a constant struggle against the resistance of the objects themselves. During this struggle, humans have experienced and come to know the essence of certain objects (stones, cotton, language, for instance). Of course, this very experience provides us with even more new sets of information that, in their turn, come to be recorded in other artificial memories. Thus an ever-expanding feedback loop has developed, and continues to develop, between objects and humans—in other words, “art history.”

The stubborn resistance of objects is aggravating to humans. It is as though humans are called from above to (in)form a specific object. There are humans whose calling it is to (in)form stones, others whose calling it is to (in)form language, and those who have missed their calling seem to be leading a false existence, a false Dasein. For the feedback loop—the relationship—between a specific object and a specific human is finely tuned and, over the course of its development, this relationship changes both the object and the human. To repeat, humans live as functions of their objects. Because of this fact, we tend to forget the purpose of art, which is to transform objects into memories from which other humans can extract information. Forgetting that they are engaged in the transmission of acquired information to other humans, artists allow the objects themselves to preoccupy and absorb all of their attention. It is typical of humans to allow objects to absorb their existential interests. The result of this is a work ethic that threatens (sic!) to turn objects not into communicative media but into the opposite, namely, barriers that restrict human communication. The creation of communicative barriers is, in the end, the laughable error upon which all of human art is based. Thanks to the perspective of the vampyroteuthis, it has finally come to our attention.

By observing the vampyroteuthis we are able to recognize an art of a different sort, one that is not burdened by the resistance of objects—by our error—but is rather intersubjective and immaterial. Its art does not involve the production of artificial memories (artwork) but rather the immediate inculcation of data into the brains of those that perceive it. In short, the difference between our art and that of the vampyroteuthis is this: whereas we have to struggle against the stubbornness of our materials, it has to struggle against the stubbornness of its fellow vampyroteuthes. Just as our artists carve marble, vampyroteuthic artists carve the brains of their audience. Their art is not objective but
intersubjective; it is not in artifacts but in the memories of others that it hopes to become immortal.

The production and dissemination of vampyroteuthic art—its epidermal painting, for instance—can be described as follows: It experiences something new and attempts to store this novelty in its memory, that is, to allot space for it among the other information stored in its brain. It then realizes that this novelty is incongruous with its mnemonic structure, that it somehow does not fit. The vampyroteuthis is thus forced to reorganize its memory in order to accommodate it, and so its memory, shocked by this new information, begins to process it (what we humans call "creative activity"). This creative shock permeates its entire body, overwhelming it, and the chromatophores on the surface of its skin begin to contract and emit colored secretions. At this moment it experiences an artistic orgasm, during which its colorful ejaculations are encrypted into vampyroteuthic code. This exhibition captures the attention of its mate, whetting the latter's curiosity about the articulated novelty. Thus the mate is lured into copulation, which becomes a sort of conversation. During the course of this conversation, the novelty is inculcated into the partner's memory in order to be stored in its brain. Exactly how it spreads from there to other vampyroteuthes—how it manages to infiltrate the common vampyroteuthic conversation—cannot be accounted for here. In any case, that is precisely what happens: the newly acquired information is now a part of the vampyroteuthic conversation, and as long as vampyroteuthes exist, it will exist along with them.

The creative process of vampyroteuthic art consists, as we have seen, of two phases. The first involves the processing of data by the artist itself: that which has remained unspoken or unheard is now articulated as ejaculations during orgasm. The second phase involves the seduction of a sexual partner: an artistic expression brings the latter to climax, enabling the newly articulated information to be stored in its memory. Artistic creation is therefore both an outward expression by an artist and an inward impression upon the seduced. It is an act of raping another vampyroteuthis in an effort to become immortal in the body of the victim. Its art is a mode of rape and hatred—of deception, fiction, and lies; it is a delusive affectation, that is to say, it is "beauty." It is all of this, oddly enough, in the spirit of orgasm.

In the depiction of vampyroteuthic art presented above, we are able to recognize—it cannot be denied—elements of our own. Nothing about this creative and orgasmic deceit is alien to us. Not only is it not alien to us, but we have even begun to vampyroteuthize our art. We have begun, in other words, to stand defiant against the fundamental error of our art, to overcome our dependence on material objects, to renounce artifacts for an immaterial and intersubjective art form. Having lost faith in material objects as artificial memories, we have begun to fashion new types of artificial memory that enable intersubjective and immaterial communication. These new communicative media may not be bioluminescent organs, but they are similarly electromagnetic. A vampyroteuthic revolution is underway.

As a model, vampyroteuthic art can perhaps help us to make sense of our current cultural revolution. The history of human art can be divided into three periods of uneven length: the first is the period before the Industrial Revolution, the second coincided with the duration of industrial society, and the third period—initiated by the information revolution (the second industrial revolution)—is advancing into an unforeseeable future. During the first period, the production of art (techne, ars) was the practice of impressing information upon objects (stone, leather, iron, language), and thus builders, coppers, blacksmiths, and authors were considered artists. The modern distinction between art and craft did not exist. With the advent of steel instruments (parts, tools) and machinery during the industrial age, artists were no longer needed to (in)form stone, leather, and iron. Objects such as these were now (in)formed mechanically. Builders, coppers, and blacksmiths were thus rendered superfluous, and the act of (in)forming the objects of their respective trades was no longer considered to be art. Designers and engineers supplanted
craftsmen—pre-industrial artists—as the true creators of information. Of course, the pre-industrial (nonmechanical) manner of (in)forming objects did not disappear entirely. Archaic relics continued to be produced. Labeled works of "art" by bourgeois-industrial society, they were removed from everyday life to be ensconced in museums and other glorified ghettos.

Before the Industrial Revolution, an informed object did not readily betray the precise source of its information—its potentiality. This potential information originated, rather vaguely, in an artist's "head," where it remained hidden until it was impressed upon one object or another. With the invention of steel instruments and machines, however, the potentiality of information became visible and tangible: we know precisely what information they are made to produce. Modern industrial technology did not entail—as did premodern art—the impression of information upon objects by artists; rather, it entailed the processing of potential information by engineers, who designed tools and machines, and then the impression of this information upon objects by these very tools and machines. Industrial technology, in other words, removed humans a step away from the objects that they had once (in)formed directly. As a consequence, human existential interest shifted away from (in)formed objects, which were becoming ever more inexpensive to produce, toward the processing of potential information, which was becoming ever more expensive. By making this shift away from objects, humans became more vampyroteuthic, and the Information Age began to dawn.

Another shift has since taken place. Potential information is no longer embodied in the form of steel instruments. It is now the case that such information is, first of all, symbolically and immaterially processed with the help of artificial intelligences—computers. It is then programmed into automated machines, the purpose of which is to produce steel parts. These steel parts are assembled into other automated machines which, in turn, (in)form objects. Human Dasein has thus been altered. Humans no longer realize their creative potential by struggling against the resistance of stubborn objects, for this struggle has been delegated to machines. Human labor has become superfluous. From now on, humans can realize their creative potential only by processing new and immaterial information, that is, by participating in the activity that has come to be called "software processing." In this context, there can be no doubt that "soft" alludes to mollusks ("soft animals").

The vampyroteuthis is a mollusk of such complexity that it managed to appropriate, by developing a skull, an evolutionary strategy of vertebrates. We are vertebrates of such complexity that we managed to appropriate, by developing an immaterial art, an evolutionary strategy of mollusks. As our interest in objects began to wane, we created media that have enabled us to rape human brains, forcing them to store immaterial information. We have built chromatophores of our own—televisions, videos, and computer monitors that display synthetic images—with whose help broadcasters of information can mendaciously seduce their audiences. In time, this communicative strategy will surely come to be known as "art" (assuming that the term will not have lost its currency).

The glorification of art, artificiality, and other seductive measures should have no place in the encroaching future. To celebrate such things would be to ennoble the vampyroteuthis. And yet, as animals that have prevailed over our animality—or at least presume to have done so—we are compelled, like the vampyroteuthis, to pursue immortality in the minds of others. We are obliged, that is, to create art, and it is on account of this obligation that the vampyroteuthis wells within us. We are becoming increasingly vampyroteuthic.
REPORT BY THE INSTITUT
SCIENTIFIQUE DE RECHERCHE
PARANATURALISTE
October 12, 1987

Louis Bec
Zoosystémicien
President, Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste

To: Mr. Andreas Müller-Pohle
Dr. Volker Rapsch
Immatrix Publications

Re: Vampyroteuthis infernalis
A2/10. Ref. 1801.

Dear Sirs,

We are now in a position to share our initial findings concerning *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* g. Investigations were undertaken by a team of zoosystematicians and teuthologists from the Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste (ISRP), directed by Professor Louis Bec.

These studies would not have been possible without the groundbreaking and irreplaceable work of Professor Vilém Flusser. A number of new observations and analyses, however, were brought to light within the laboratory facilities of the ISRP.

The conclusions reached by our investigations will be sent to you shortly, for we are convinced, as you will be, of their zoological, epistemological, and aesthetic significance.

Sincerely,

Louis Bec (signed)
President, ISRP
**VAMPyroTHEONE EUKELAMPre**

The VamPyroTHEONE EUKELAMPre is bioluminescent, and its luminescent emissions are a subject of zoosonitics. The complex and unusual effects that it exerts over its biocenosis result in a sort of devoted fascination and definitive commensalism among certain organisms. Some authoritative zoosystematicians and teuthologists refer to this luminescence as a "divine light in the abyss."

**VAMPyroTHEONE EUKELAMPre**

The VamPyroTHEONE EUKELAMPre belongs to the order VamPyromorpha. It inhabits the hadopelagic zone. Submerged beneath high water pressures, it is a barophile. Its behavioral attitude is hypocrimological and characterized by a biotechnical mimeticism on many levels: morphological, physiological, metabolic, and ethological.
(text on left) The Vampyrotheone eukelempre is bioluminescent, and its luminescent emissions are a subject of zoosemiology. The complex and unusual effects that it exerts over its biocenosis result in a sort of devoted fascination and definitive commensalism among certain organisms. Some authoritative zoosystematists and teuthologists refer to this luminescence as a "divine light in the abyss."

(text on right, above) The Vampyrotheone eukelempre belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. It inhabits the hadopelagic zone. Submerged beneath high water pressures, it is a barophile. Its behavioral attitude is hypocrimological and characterized by a biotechnological mimeticism on many levels: morphological, physiological, metabolic, and ethological.
(above) The Vampyromelas enedaropalon belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. Its hypocrinological activities are eloneredic.

(below) The Vampyromelas enedaropalon projects a dark and gelatinous substance on its prey, the melasikone or translucent hyaleonikone. It sculpts and models this imprisoning substance and strikes at its prey with an organ, the ropalon, that is particularly adapted for such a function.

The Uoppeloma artagepargogone belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. It inhabits a skenobiotopical preferendum in which it lures and seduces its prey with the grace and elegance of its movement.
The Akroate hadal f. belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. It is sensitive to the slightest vibrational phenomena as it scours the depths of the sea. These vibrational phenomena are internalized by way of the small capsules that it spreads over the benthic substrate. The akroate hadal f. casts its prey (the proximity of which is signaled by aquatic turbulence) with a flagellating organ, the eispotherete. This organ, designed for sucking, takes hold of the prey by means of the mastakuses. These are later used to transport the prey to the manducatory organs.
The Lumanter phusagrion belongs to the order Vampromorpha. Concealed by a substance that it emits, the chromohydré, the Lumanter phusagrion swoops violently on its prey by means of a propulsive organ, the phonikapion. Its behavioral attitude manifests itself in the systematic destruction—not necessarily for nutritional ends—of all life forms that encroach on its biodeological space.
The Vampyroteukis upomenepisteme belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. Especially eager to consume biotekmeriones, it synthesizes dolotrophic substances. These are fixed in its memory by means of the plitunens of the mnemoteukte and transmitted to other vampyromorpha in the form of capsules, the phulliokartes, for zoosemiotic purposes.

The Vampyroptusse poikilone belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. It is morphodrophasic and possesses the ability to transform in a variety of ways, namely, by folding, bending, and retracting into itself. This diversity of appearances allows it to erase all signs of its permanence and zoological identity. Its zoosemiotic morphology remains to be studied at length.
The Vampyropeleid kampte belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. A barophile that inhabits the hadopelagic zone, it locomotes by means of the caterpillar-track reptation of its tentacles. Its pallid and ghostly appearance (highly characteristic of its catenated morphology) tetanizes its prey. Some creatures seem fascinated by its appearance to such an extent that they commit various forms of sacrificial automutilation. Having been captured by the matixtes, such prey are emptied of their innards by the stomakmudzaole and the phulakemneustones.
The Lalokame semaphoroïde belongs to the order Vampyromorpha. Like communication towers within their particular preferenda, they emit complex bioluminescent messages. Teuthozoosemioticians have attempted to decode these messages (produced in varying colorations and intensities by dermal iridescence) by radiation or by the luminescent flashes of certain organs.

The Vampyroteuthis infernalis g. and the Ormetaire tapakegennon belong to the order Vampyromorpha. Barophiles both, they inhabit the hadopelagic zone. In the act of copulation, the Ormetaire tapakegennon adopts a behavioral attitude of complete submissiveness. The provocative diversity of its sexual appeal and the particular development of its sexual organs enable it to mate with any type of vampyromorphic partner.
The biotekmeriones are organisms that serve the nutritional needs of Vampyromorpha. By means of dolotrophesis, they alter the morphology, physiology, metabolism, and behavior of certain Vampyromorpha.
VILÉM FLUSser (1920–1991) was born in Prague. He emigrated to Brazil, where he taught philosophy and wrote a daily newspaper column in São Paulo, then later moved to France. He wrote several books in Portuguese and German. *Writings* (2004), *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (2011), and *Does Writing Have a Future?* (2011) have been published in English by the University of Minnesota Press, and *The Shape of Things, Toward a Philosophy of Photography*, and *The Freedom of the Migrant* have also been translated into English.

LOUIS BEC lives in Sorgues, France. His artwork explores the connections between art and science. His search for new zoomorphic types and forms of communication between artificial and natural species led to his founding of the Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste.

VALENTINE A. PAKIS teaches German at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.