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Pink Data: Tiamaterialism and the Female Gnosis of Desire

Tessa Laird

Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* has been described variously as apocalypse theology, aberrant demonology, a living cauldron and a philosophic grimoire.¹ Yet in falling under the spell of Negarestani's crypto-archaeological tract, it's easy to forget its preface: a semi-autobiographical narrative penned by the American artist Kristen Alvanson. She calls it 'Incognitum hactenus', which Negarestani later translates as 'Anonymous-until-Now', or, a 'mode of time connecting abyssal time scales to our chronological time', in which 'anything can happen for some weird reason; yet also, without any reason, nothing at all can happen'.²

Nothing really does happen in Alvanson's preface, except that she further mongrelizes *Cyclonopedia's* already deeply questionable pedigree by creating a quasi-fictional status for herself and Negarestani, as characters alongside other fictional inventions, including the living manuscript of *Cyclonopedia* itself.

Reading 'Incognitum hactenus' against Alvanson's art practice shines a beam of pink light on a desire I will code *female*, one which begs penetration, not by the fallible phallus, but by an influx of *data*. Parallels can be traced in the very different, but equally data-hungry art practices of two other women, Camille Henrot (France) and Jess Johnson (Australia). The most profound example of pink penetration, however, comes in the form of science fiction: Philip K. Dick's 1981 cult classic *VALIS*. Dick's novelistic worm holes perform a sci-fi invagination which unwillingly enacts the Tiamaterialism propounded in *Cyclonopedia*, a return of the repressed 'nested-vaginas' of the archaic-chaotic mother goddess, Tiamat.

Alvanson begins her narrative with the story of a woman flying into Istanbul, and taking up residence in a hotel where she awaits a rendezvous with an entity

1. I've been thinking of it as a kind of ()hole Earth Catalog (with an 'evaporative W'), a dystopian psychedelia, the bad trip to end all bad trips...

2. Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, Melbourne, re.press, 2010, p. 49.

indicated in the text by a Persian initial unpronounceable in English. Whether he is an avatar of Negarestani, and she of Alvanson, remains unclear. The rendezvous never occurs. Instead, 'Alvanson' finds a box of notes written in black pen and pink highlighter under her bed. Ostensibly by Dr. Hamid Parsani (another Negarestani avatar), these end up forming the basis of the *Cyclonopedia* text.

The pestilent palimpsest of the Parsani-Negarestani notes aren't all that Alvanson finds inside the dusty box—there is also a pink mother of pearl bracelet which fits her perfectly, and a card for a computer repair shop, with directions to retrieve a laptop there. Hot on the trail of intrigue, Alvanson visits the shop but declines to pay for the dodgy laptop, instead surreptitiously stealing the CD from its drive. We never get to hear what, if anything, is on this CD, because Alvanson's narrative jumps from the computer shop to a liquor store, and then states, rather obliquely, 'If I can't pass through these plot holes, then it is the best to leave my own holes'.³

Alvanson's *holes*, it turns out, are pink. She perforates Negarestani's petroleum-black scrawls with vivid pink highlights, (and, incidentally, a highlighter is a textual tool which is also known as a *magic marker*). The colour pink, for Alvanson, operates as a marker of magic, or of (willfully embodied) desire, or is that the same thing anyway? As if virally infected by the dodgy CD, Alvanson vomits this hallucinogenic pink paragraph:

Pink magnolias, NYPL, NYBG, cherry blossoms in DC more pink... a fleshed out nipple, a bleeding heart, little girls' pink velvet ribbons, pink spaces, pink sweater set, Christos' [sic] pink, pink blush, or the lack of need for blush cotton candy Pink poodles or pink cats pink cover of Laches the most perfect shade of pink lipstick pink cd holders pink pearl necklace pink pearl earrings pink camisole pink highlighter pink Christmas lights and pink flowers—peonies, tulips, Christmas Cactus in bloom in my room, pinkish lilac, pink hydrangea, pink rose of sharons, rare pink poppies, carpet roses, spinning in pink flowers... begonia, spider flowers, cosmos, sweet peas, toadflax, moonwort, petunias, phlox!, butterfly flower, sun moss, wax pink lilies, caprifoliaceae, pink wisteria, malvaceae, oyster plant in pink, floxglove [sic], caryophyllaceae, heather, theaceae, magnolias, chinese crab apple flash by my eyes, Pink torrent.⁴

A BitTorrent is a file-sharing protocol enabling the exchange of large amounts of data over the Internet. Alvanson's interlude in the seedy computer shop seems to have opened a channel for the inflow of information via the colour pink. This is strangely reminiscent of Dick's *VALIS*, which tells the pseudo-autobiographical story of the author's own theophany, or 'in-breaking of God'⁵ via a *beam of pink data*. In *VALIS*, it's Dick's alter-ego, the improbably named Horse-lover Fat, who has 'beam after beam of information-rich coloured light' fired at his brain, 'blinding him and fucking him up and dazing and dazzling him, but

3. Kristen Alvanson, 'Incongnitum hactenus', *ibid*, p. xviii.

4. *Ibid*.

5. Philip K. Dick, *VALIS*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1991, p. 39. '...a theophany is an in-breaking of God, an in-breaking which amounts to an invasion of our world...'

imparting to him knowledge beyond the telling'.⁶

As with Alvanson's preface, *VALIS* turns the autobiographical into a series of nested fictions. Dick personally experienced theophany (or a schizoid turn, depending on your perspective) after painful dental surgery. Apparently, Dick was listening to that pinkest of songs, *Strawberry Fields Forever* when he was blinded by the pink light, and the words in the song were rearranged to tell him that his son had a birth defect which would kill him if it wasn't operated upon immediately. Dick commented that the pink colour operated like binary code, and talked with a female AI voice.⁷

So, while we're thinking about binaries and codes, such as female versus male, and pink versus blue, let's not forget that this particular assignation of colour to gender is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon (post World War I) and indeed, during the great war, pink was recommended for boys as the baby version of warlike, masculine red.

By contrast, pink has become, in recent years, a crypto-capitalist cult for female children, in a way which is terrifying, sickening, and deeply fascinating. Alvanson's pink torrent of language betrays a desire for the more *grown up* aspects of pink culture, with her 'pink sweater set', 'Pink poodles', 'Pink lipstick', and a litany of pink flowers.

That Alvanson's brush with the infected CD leads to a supra-digital influx of pink-tinted *information* is made obvious at the start of her rosy rant, which namechecks NYPL, the New York Public Library: second largest library in the world, exceeded only by the Library of Congress in Washington DC. Alvanson notes 'cherry blossoms in DC more pink', as though 'more pink' equates to *more data*. Indeed, Dick claims of *his* pink beam, that 'it fired whole libraries at him in nanoseconds'.⁸ Another of Alvanson's acronyms is NYBG, the New York Botanical Garden, where a different kind of data is stored. Michael Pollan writes that '...the flowering garden is a place you immediately sense is thick with information, thick as a metropolis, in fact'.⁹

Alvanson's floral list includes Caryophyllaceae, more commonly known as the pink or carnation family, but *Dianthus* is the genus within that family that contains the 300 or so species we recognise as 'pinks'. *Dianthus* is from the Greek words *dios* (god) and *anthos* (flower)—so the common pink is the flower of God, and Alvanson's enthusiasm for the colour is like the original Greek 'Enthousiasmos'—the God's 'inbreaking' into you as Dick puts it. This piercing is pertinent, since pinks are not named for their colour, but for their serrated edges, which look like they have been 'pinked', that is, in the Old English, 'pierced' or 'stabbed', as with dressmakers' pinking shears, which cut cloth in a zigzag, or

6. Ibid, p. 71.

7. Robert Crumb, 'The Religious Experience of Philip K. Dick', *Weirdo* #17, 1986.

8. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 71. Note also that Camille Henrot held an exhibition which asked, 'Est-il possible d'être révolutionnaire et d'aimer les fleurs?' (Is It Possible to Be a Revolutionary and Like Flowers?) (2012). This exhibition consisted of floral arrangements that interpreted books from Henrot's personal library. As Claire Moulene asks in her review of the exhibition, 'aren't all libraries revolutionary?' *Artforum*, 2013, Vol. 51, Issue 5, p. 219.

9. Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World*, Random House, New York, 2001, p. 73.

meander (a motif I will return to later). Across Europe most languages name the colour pink with a variation of the word rose, but English stands out for naming this seemingly gentle colour ‘to pierce’, a prick that Dick was no doubt aware of when he made it the colour of theophanic penetration.¹⁰

When Horselover Fat tries to recall the exact colour of the blinding beam, he studies a chart of the visible spectrum. But the colour is absent, because it lies ‘off the end’ of the Fraunhofer Lines, ‘past B in the direction of A’. In 2011, popular science had a field day with the idea that ‘pink light can’t exist’ because it is made of a combination of red and violet, which are at opposite ends of the spectrum, and that if you rolled up the spectrum there would be a gap in which radio waves, microwaves, infrared, ultraviolet, x-rays, gamma rays exist. ‘Since we can’t see any of those wavelengths, we replace all of that hidden grandeur with pink’.¹¹ Perhaps this is why David Andrew Sitek of the indie rock band TV on the Radio opined that ‘All music since the beginning of time has been an attempt to aurally convey the colour pink’.¹²

Indeed, the synaesthetic properties of pink seem boundless. Thomas, an ancient Roman Christian inhabiting Fat’s brain, achieves life-in-death because he ‘engrams’ himself—stores his memory traces—on the *ichthys*, or Christian fish symbol, and eats ‘some strange pink food’.¹³ Perhaps Dick is referring to the Eucharist, the body of Christ, since flesh, regardless of skin colour, is searing pink, and a pink beam of data represents Logos, or the ‘word made flesh’?¹⁴

At the nexus of sign and sensation, or data and desire, Alvanson’s real life art practice involves a project called *DESIRE for Sale*, in which she sells her intangible desires in units, and 1 unit equals 100 consecutive desires, as well as 100 photographic representations of said desires.¹⁵ Each unit is sold on a CD, and for

10. ‘Penetration’ is a term I use deliberately, since Dick refers to living information as a ‘plasmate’ which ‘uses the human brain as a *female* host in which to replicate itself into its active form’. (Dick, p. 61, my emphasis). This has a strange resonance with the ‘facehugger’ alien which Barbara Creed refers to as ‘orally raping’ Kane in Ridley Scott’s film *Alien*, (1979), in order to ‘impregnate’ the male crew member who essentially ‘births’ a baby alien in what is one of cinema’s most climactic and memorable moments. Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, 2012, p. 28. Jess Johnson’s Gnostic sci-fi drawings are populated by tentacle- and vulva-faced aliens which inspire a kind of genital panic in the viewer.

11. Youtube’s MinutePhysics, ‘There is no pink light,’ October 16, 2011. *Scientific American* takes this illogic to task (Michael Moyer, ‘Stop this Absurd War on the Colour Pink’, March 5, 2012). But while the colour may be a ‘pigment of the imagination’ (another waggish phrase doing the pop science rounds) its irreality makes perfect sense in terms of Dick’s theophany. See Robert McRuer, ‘Pink’ *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2013. McRuer fleshes out a queer pink, something this essay tacitly acknowledges but does not attempt to speak for.

12. Thanks to Kristen Alvanson in personal communication for this quote.

13. Dick, p. 111.

14. ‘Because everyone knows, regardless of meaningless exterior coloration, it’s all pink inside’. Mike Kelley on his use of pink crystals in the exhibition *Deodorized Central Mass with Satellites*, 1999. He goes on to connect human flesh to the earth’s glowing underbelly: ‘Crack any dull geode, and inside is its fiery heart: the crystalline core of beauty and wonder’. Quoted by Karl Schawelka, ‘Showing Pink—Biological Aspects of the Colour Pink’ in *Pink, The Exposed Colour in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern, 2006, p. 70.

15. This project embodies the ‘the practice of photography as the technic-erotic perpetuation of love-at-first-sight’. Kristen Alvanson, Nicola Masciandaro and Scott Wilson, ‘Desire Gloss: A Specimen’, *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary* 3, 2010, p117. For Alvanson, the camera is literally a desir-

US\$525, the unit price at the time of writing, the viewer can be infected with Alvanson's desires in the same way she herself was infected by the CD from the Turkish computer store. A preview of some very pink desires includes Persian pastries with pomegranate seeds, a blurry Sophia Loren in a pink towel-turban caught on an old colour TV, marble tiles depicting a rose paradise garden, a dresser with pink candles and a pink highlighter pen...

In *Pink—The Exposed Colour in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Barbara Nemitz suggests that pink addresses our *senses* more than other colours, because it can be closely related to certain skin tones, eliciting the sense of touch, as well as a sense of taste associated with sweetness and fruitiness, and the sense of smell, as in the fragrance of blossoms,¹⁶ all of which are evoked in Alvanson's photographic desires. In the same book, Karl Schawelka's essay "Showing Pink" points out that shocking colour's appearance in primates' lips, genitals, and nipples, and that the blood-engorged posteriors of baboons, chimpanzees, and bonobos signal willingness to mate.¹⁷ He links pink language with human sexual mores, such as the expression 'showing pink' which refers to nude female models exposing their genitals. In Japan, the sex industry is known as the 'Pink Industry' while across Europe, the rose has long been a euphemism for the vagina, with rather charming terms such as 'Rose Lane' and 'Rose Corner' denoting places of prostitution.¹⁸

The relation of genitalia or euphemistically *private* parts with the colour pink is nothing new; to the ancient Romans, the term *sub rosa*, meant 'under the seal of confidentiality'.¹⁹ In *VALIS*, Ancient Rome is superimposed over Southern California in the early 1970s, and Horselover Fat shares his already paranoid psychic space with Thomas, the persecuted Christian who secretly ate pink food to time-travel posthumously via a beam of pink data.

Dick problematises my attempt to claim pink as an especially feminine gnosis, although the female archetype looms heavily over his text. Fat is engaged in writing a cosmological exegesis, known as the *Tractates: Cryptica Scriptura*, which explains that there are two realms, the upper 'hyperuniverse I or Yang' which is 'sentient and volitional', while the lower yin realm is 'mechanical, driven by blind, efficient cause, deterministic and without intelligence since it emanates

ing-machine, while Roland Barthes' 'punctum' or 'little prick', the detail of a photograph which 'pierces the viewer' which he discusses in *Camera Lucida*,¹⁹⁸⁰, might have some relevance here especially considering the etymology of pink.

16. Barbara Nemitz, *Pink—The Exposed Colour*, p. 27.

17. Karl Schawelka, "Showing Pink—Biological Aspects of the Colour Pink," *ibid.*, p. 44.

18. *Ibid.* Zona Rosa, on the other hand, is one of Mexico City's *zonas de tolerancia*, home to the city's gay population, and a major gay tourist destination, see McRuer, 'Pink'.

19. Schawelka, p. 45. Pink heralds a liminal space, a *marker* of transition, as with the *magic* hours of dawn and dusk. Pink represents the threshold of a new order, the change from yang to yin and vice versa, and thresholds the world over are visioned as vulvas—portals to new dimensions, from the Maori *pare* (door lintels) in which female ancestors display their vaginas, to the infamous, grinning Sheela na gig of Celtic lore. This idea of being 'under the vagina' brings to mind the moment in Nicholas Roeg's film *Insignificance* (1985), when 'Marilyn Monroe' performs her famous subway-grating skirt-lift, and one of the men below the grating looking up says, 'I Saw the Face of God'. Compare this to the story of the Devil taking flight when a woman showed him her vulva. (Freud in his essay 'Medusa's Head', quoted by Creed, p. 2.) This leaves no doubt that *VALIS* a.k.a. the living beam of pink light, emanates from the Goddesshead.

from a dead source'. Fat believes that we are unknowingly trapped in the lower realm, concluding that 'The Empire never ended',²⁰ which is the gloomy signature phrase of *VALIS*.

Predictably, the sick and evil cosmogonic twin ruling the yin realm is female, and must be killed by the healthy twin, whose gender is never stated, but is presumably male.²¹ Within the *VALIS* narrative, two of Dick's female friends die, and his coping mechanism involves creating his alter-ego, Fat, who pens the exegesis in an attempt to explain cosmic disunity. The *Tractates* states that within measured time, the yin twin remains alive, but in eternity, she has been killed—of necessity—by the healthy twin 'who is our champion'. As with *Cyclo-nopedia*, chronological time and abyssal time are engaged in coitus, the result being that in *VALIS*, the universe is grieving over the tragic death of a woman... without knowing why.²²

Primordial femicide is a pan-cultural motif dramatically epitomised by the story of Tiamat, who in Mesopotamian religion was both chaos monster and primordial goddess of the Ocean. In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of creation, she gives birth to the first generation of deities, one of whom is Marduk, god of storms. In a matricide symbolic of the overturning of archaic goddess worship and matriarchal societies, Marduk dismembers the archaic mother and institutes order in the Cosmos, creating man to be 'servant and labourer of the gods'.²³

Hakim Bey's cult classic *TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone)*, brings the Babylonian myth into the present, in which 'Chaos has been overthrown by younger gods, moralists, phalocrats, banker-priests, fit lords for serfs'.²⁴ Bey calls for nothing less than a 'clandestine spiritual jihad' to be waged under the banner of Tiamat, who he calls 'the anarchist black dragon'. Opposing Dick's doleful chant 'The Empire Never Ended', Bey proclaims that 'Chaos never died'.²⁵

In her study of the monstrous feminine in horror cinema, Barbara Creed uses Kristeva's theory of abjection to connect the archaic mother with chaos. Kristeva terms the abject as that which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules', that which 'disturbs identity, system, order',²⁶ and Creed uses ab-

20. Dick, *VALIS*, pp. 47-48.

21. Fat invokes Dogontology to explain the Nommos or divine twins, one of whom rebelled and had to be slain. But for the Dogon of West Africa, the Nommos are fish-like and hermaphroditic, while Dick feels the need to ascribe a specifically female gender to the 'defective' twin. Incidentally, Camille Henrot dabbles in Dogontology, which is attested to in the title of her exhibition *The Pale Fox* (2014), taken from Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen's 1945 study of the same name, which charts the cosmology of the Dogon.

22. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 238.

23. Thorkild Jacobsen. 'The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1968), p. 105. Within the *VALIS* narrative, other creation stories featuring sick female twins are alluded to, including that of the Dogon, as well as the Japanese myth of Izanagi and Izanami, in which the 'female twin dies giving birth to fire; then she descends under the ground. The male twin goes after her to restore her but finds her decomposing and giving birth to monsters'. Dick, *VALIS*, pp. 61-62.

24. Hakim Bey, *TAZ*, Autonomedia, New York, 1991, p. 18.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Julia Kristeva, in Creed, p. 8.

jection theory to understand movies like *Alien*, in which ‘The archaic mother is the parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and of end’.²⁷

Bey embraces the anarchist black dragon, while in *Cyclonopedia*, the fictional archaeologist Dr. Hamid Parsani posits a Tiamaterialism, in which it is archaeology’s goal to turn the Earth itself into an artefact, and to vision the Earth as ‘the coiling body of Tiamat, the Sumero-Babylonian Mother-Dragon’.²⁸ This *Tellurian insurgency* is Earth’s ‘uprising against its own passive planetdom. Once freed from its solar slavery, the earth can rise against the onanistic self-indulgence of the Sun and its solar capitalism’,²⁹ for the *Empire of the Sun* has given rise to ‘terrestrial orders, politics and modes of living based on its hegemonic stardom’.³⁰

Are Dick’s Empire, Bey’s Chaos and Negarestani’s Tellurian Insurgency all the same dark force, seen via different spectacles, rose-tinted or otherwise? Dick the crypto-Christian exults Apollo and fears Dionysus, and sees the female principle as sowing disorder in the universe. And yet, her death fills the universe with remorse, so that ‘All the information processed by the Brain—experienced by us as the arranging and rearranging of physical objects—is an attempt at this preservation of her; stones and rocks and sticks and amoebae are traces of her’.³¹ The propensity to find meaning in stones and rocks and physical objects, mimics the archaeological impetus, which has literally dug up thousands of prehistoric goddess figurines, but also, in the process of ex-humation, what Negarestani would call *ungrounding* has created a fissured earth, in which narratives of stability and solidity are increasingly less convincing.

Camille Henrot’s *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013, is a thirteen minute video which attempts to be a history of everything, yet is anything but a stable narrative. Accompanied by a spoken-word hiphop track fusing a range of global creation myths, images of museum collections and anthropological texts jostle with the data storm that is the Internet—pictures of cats proliferate amongst softcore porn scenarios. Of relevance to Alvanson’s pink torrent of public libraries, the bulk of Henrot’s imagery comes from her residency at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, the world’s largest museum and research complex. Henrot’s fable of endless beginnings is Tiamaterialist: an ungrounding in which the earth becomes an artefact made of artefacts, in endless fractal recursion.³²

27. Creed, p. 17.

28. Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 50.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 42. Perhaps, then, it is not so much that “The Sun is a whore,” as Daniel Paul Schreber once put it (quoted in Ben Woodard, *On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy*, p. 88), but that the sun makes a whore of earth. Indeed, it is worth noting the similarities (and differences) between Dick’s beam of pink data and Schreber’s sexual assault via sunbeams. I think also of the relationship between the sun and the earth in terms of Barbara Kruger’s classic feminist work, *Untitled: Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*, 1981.

31. Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 37.

32. Both artists appear to suffer from Walter Benjamin’s ‘cataloguing psychosis’, or Jacques Derrida’s ‘Archive Fever’. I’m thinking of positing the term ‘Data Slut’ for this kind of work, as long as it is read as a prideful reappropriation of shaming language. In fact, Henrot’s latest project includes drawings of rap star Nicki Minaj, as a repudiation of the slut-shaming responses to Minaj’s videos. Minaj is a par-

Henrot's manipulation of images has been called 'Dionysian dismembering',³³ but what ties together the imagery of *Grosse Fatigue* are what another critic referred to as its 'black hole of browsers', which are 'progressively nested within one another in an infinite regress'.³⁴ I can't help but be reminded of 'the nested-vaginas of Tiamat's swirling body, engorging their curls, opening their curves and experiencing the contorting movement of each concave and convex wall'.³⁵ Indeed, '...everything related to the Middle East emerges, moves, diffuses, escalates and engenders itself through and out of the holey *Hezar'to* (A Thousand Insides; the Persian word for labyrinth)'.³⁶

The recurring motif of a pair of highly manicured female hands codes the encyclopaedic *Grosse Fatigue* as feminine. Obsessively lacquered nails gently caress pieces of fruit, eggs, stuffed birds and books, creating an intimate snapshot of female lust for information via a highly eroticised interface of the gaze and touch.

In *Grosse Fatigue*, manicured nails are micro-chips of vast databases encoded in the resins and adhesive polymers that fix colour (that most data-rich of substances) to the tips of the fingers. Fingernails, when painted, take on inhuman associations—they become the talons of birds, the scales of serpents, or even, in Henrot's case, hint at an alien culture encountering our own. Long or coloured fingernails are the stuff of goddesses and female chaos monsters. 'Red in tooth and claw', while referring to the violence of the natural world, can also be applied to the red nails of seductresses, prefiguring *vagina dentata*.³⁷

Like Alvanson's photographed desires, Henrot's subjective catalogue makes no attempt to be exhaustive, rather, as the title suggests, it is the exhausting auto-erotic summary of the universe from the perspective of a procreatrix: she whose desires are generative. In one key sequence, the female hands are thrust into a pair of panties, provoking a torrent of browser windows to open, one upon the other, in an orgasmic infinity of *mille plateaux*. Nested vaginas, indeed!

In *VALIS*, lacquered nails are mentioned in relation to Fat's suicidal friend Gloria. At the beach, Fat notices that Gloria 'had pink-painted toenails and that they were perfectly pedicured. To himself he thought, she died as she lived'.³⁸

agon of pink love; all three of her studio albums to date have "pink" in their title. Eerily, in relation to *VALIS*, the second album is called *Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded* (2012).

33. Federico Nicolao, *Domus*, 4 June 2013, http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2013/06/4/camille_henrot_grossefatigue.html

34. Pamela M. Lee, 'The Whole Earth is Heavy', *Artforum*, September 2013, Vol. 52, Issue 1, p. 306.

35. Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 51.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 43. A Thousand Insides can surely be related to A Thousand Plateaux, especially since 'Everywhere a hole moves, a surface is invented', *ibid.*, p. 50. It was Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, which first alerted me to the shared etymology of labia and labyrinth, as well as the term 'invagination'.

37. Maori legend has two vivid examples of these female archetypes: Mahukia, the goddess of fire, who Maui tricked into giving humankind the knowledge of fire by asking for her fingernails, one by one, and Hine-nui-te-po, goddess of death, who Maui tried to vanquish by entering her vagina in the form of a lizard as she slept. She was awoken, however, and her vagina snapped shut, 'beheading' Maui in his phallic, lizard form. Lisa Reihana has made a series of photographic images of Maori forebears including *Mahuika* 2001 who is modelled by the artist's aunt, and is a superb example of the primordial goddess figure.

38. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 13.

This sentiment presages the idea that measured time and eternity coexist, the former in which Gloria is alive, and the latter where she is always already dead. The pink-painted toenails allow Fat to see this because they engram the all-knowing beam of pink data.

Eventually, the living intelligence that is *VALIS* finds human form in a little girl—Saint Sophia, the divine feminine avatar of wisdom.³⁹ Fat's exegesis states that 'St. Sophia is going to be born again; she was not acceptable before'.⁴⁰ However, the little girl, who represents Godhead and the Logos, is accidentally killed by a laser beam, becoming the third female death in the narrative, (or fourth, if you count the evil cosmogonic twin).⁴¹

Exposure to the ichthys awakens Thomas within Dick's body and allows for the *inbreaking* of God to occur. But there are many symbols far older than ichthys, symbols associated with goddess cults which archaeologist Marjia Gimbutas catalogues in her encyclopaedic text *The Language of the Goddess*. The meander or zigzag was more than merely decorative, in paleolithic art it symbolised fertility and was closely associated with water goddesses and snake goddesses, who were eventually killed by their cosmic offspring but recycled as female chaos monsters such as the Greek whirlpools Kharybdis and Scylla, or, indeed, Tiamat, whose name was the Akkadian word for sea.⁴²

Fat writes that the beam of pink light is 'exactly what you get as a phosphene after-image when a flashbulb has gone off in your face'.⁴³ Indeed, multiple studies have shown that paleolithic art bears the telltale signs of phosphene activity—flashes of light seen under the influence of drugs or sensory deprivation. These meanders indicate entry into a sacred psychic space in which pattern operates, not as vapid wallpaper, but as living data.

In *VALIS*, Fat calls living information 'Zebra' because 'Normally it remained camouflaged'.⁴⁴ Fat meets an archetypal mad scientist, who tells him that he (Fat) has been given 'a set-ground discriminating unscramble'. Most humans can't distinguish set from ground. But once *VALIS* has fired the unscrambler at you, you see set as colour and ground as black and white, in order to understand 'The false work that's blended with the real world'.⁴⁵

39. Indeed, in Alvanson's *Incognitum hactenus* she is given instructions by 'he with a Persian initial' to visit the Hagia Sophia, completed in 537 AD and for a thousand years the largest Christian Church in the world, named for the manifestation of wisdom in female form.

40. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 229. It isn't made clear why she wasn't *acceptable*, but the inference is that it was because she was female, and therefore *imperfect* or rather, *unwhole* and therefore *unwholesome* (in Freudian/Lacanian/ Kristevan terms) lacking a phallus.

41. Dick just doesn't seem to have any luck with the ladies, indeed, underpinning all of this is the real-life fact that his wife Tess leaves him after one too many discussions about Thomas the Ancient Roman who is inhabiting his body.

42. Jacobsen, 'The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat'. Creed quotes Roger Dadoun in *The Monstrous Feminine*, whose writing on horror film denotes 'a mother-thing situated beyond good and evil, beyond all organised forms and all events. This is a totalising and *oceanic* mother, a 'shadowy and deep unity,' evoking in the subject the anxiety of fusion and of dissolution.' Creed, p. 20, (emphasis mine). Alvanson's pink mother-of-pearl bracelet might be read, then, as the oceanic vagina of Tiamat, that mother-of-all plot holes.

43. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 20.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

The sacred meander, phosphenes, games of camouflage with set and ground, are integral to the holographic, hierophantic imagery of New Zealand born, Melbourne-based artist Jess Johnson. Her earlier works (c2010) played on the transmogification of ancient Egyptian cat worship into Internet kitty porn, and delighted in drawing beleaguered, bearded, Dick-like men. Johnson's more recent work has become increasingly arcane, a mesh of grids, brickwork, towers, pillars, and textual proclamations, patrolled by aliens with demonic, bat-like faces with super-sensory noses and ears. As with Zebra, in Johnsons' highly patterned, data-rich work, it is difficult to discern set from ground.⁴⁶ In her parallel worlds information is 'engrammed' on symbols which, if viewed under the right conditions (perhaps, as with Dick's ichthys, a mixture of pain medication and psychosis), are capable of unleashing a data storm.

Fat's *Tractates* quotes Hermes Trismegistos' fundamental: 'That which is above is that which is below'. Fat interprets this as meaning that the universe is a hologram, and that the great Hermetic sage simply lacked the term.⁴⁷ Put another way, inverted by Parsani/ Negarestani, 'the (h)ole complex carves ultra-active surfaces from solidus when it digs holes... Everywhere a hole moves, a surface is invented'.⁴⁸ The practices of Alvanson, Henrot and Johnson are just such ultra-active surfaces.

In conclusion, Alvanson's preface is Tiamaterialism in action, an acknowledgement of the archaic feminine as first principle, before the arcane convolutions of petropolitics can begin: she essentially births the monster of *Cyclonopedia* from a 'box' under the bed. But while Alvanson vomits pink data with delight, Dick's penetration via pink data embodies in him that which he fears most—a feminine consciousness allied with the inexplicable urges of the yin realm and the inevitable return of the repressed, murdered ur-mother.⁴⁹ Hakim Bey on the other hand, has learned to lie back and think of chaos, like a good anarchist, while Negarestani complicates Bey's spiritual jihad, visioning the coiling tail of the black dragon Tiamat as ever more black and baroque. Artists Alvanson, Henrot and Johnson variously demonstrate that data itself is the locus of desire, that pattern and surface encode meaning, and that we are all, all-ways and all-ready, data sluts and encylopediaphiles.

46. Tessa Laird, 'The Devil is in the Detail: Pattern and Power in Jess Johnson's Gnostic Architectures', commissioned for *Matters* (NZ), Issue 6, 2015, and reprinted in *Bloodfin and Whipworm*, NGV, 2015, provides an even more convoluted appraisal of the relationships between Johnson's practice and *VALIS*.

47. Dick, *VALIS*, p. 230.

48. Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 50.

49. That Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* emanates from the yin realm is implied by this reviewer's caution, that 'Henrot's video is no paean to a transcendent collective unconscious. On the contrary, *Grosse Fatigue* shatters any image of a fully integrated system of knowledge or totality'. Pamela M. Lee, 'The Whole Earth is Heavy', *Artforum* September 2013, Vol. 52, Issue 1, p. 306. The (W)hole Earth, though, is infinitely perforated, and weighs less than the feather of Maat.