

The Highlights - Outer Spaces: Part I



John McCracken, *Liftoff*, 2009. stainless steel, 144 x 16 x 18"

DÍA FELIX:

Jesus did not suffer from anxiety. He made his way serenely down the airplane's center aisle wearing a pleasant, peaceful smile. It was a completely full flight, a redeye, and the general feeling among the passengers was one of tension and barely contained conflict. I heard one

woman say, "fucking assholes." Welcome aboard. I was looking around to see if the "fucking assholes" lady was the same harried, fried blonde who I had been half-heartedly stalking in the San Diego airport, when I saw Jesus walking towards me. He was truly radiant. His skin was luminous and clear. His clean white robe was beautifully fitted to his lean body, he carried a simple, brown satchel over one shoulder, one tender hand held it close to his body. He was the kind of person who made you want to go on a juice fast.

Like a cartoon person, I closed my eyes hard and popped them back open, to see if he was still there, if I hadn't just "seen something." I hadn't. He was. I wanted him to sit next to me. He did. He was in the aisle seat, and I was in the center. The center is the worst seat for a claustrophobe like myself, but I had had no choice, as my flight to New York had been booked at the last moment and aisle seats were all that remained. Anyway, Jesus! When Jesus sat down, a perfect fragrance puffed up around him, subtle yet intoxicating, a garden of precious, small flowers, the smell of clean itself, and also something rich, moist, and woodsy.

Jesus tucked his satchel under the seat in front of him, and folded his hands. They were so beautiful. Large, long fingers with fingernails clean and symmetrical. His eyes were closed, so I could stare at his face. He appeared to have no facial hair, though the hair on his head was a thick, glossy tumble of sweet, black curls, and his eyelashes were thick. His nose was strong and big. His lips were smallish, but still full and almost girlish, offset from his olive skin by their plum color, he almost could have been wearing lipstick. Wait, WAS he wearing lipstick? I was trying to discern this when his eyes popped open. "Yes?" he asked.

"I'm claustrophobic," I said, weirdly. Then, "are you Jesus?"

"Of course I am," he said. Then, "do you want something to make you feel better?"

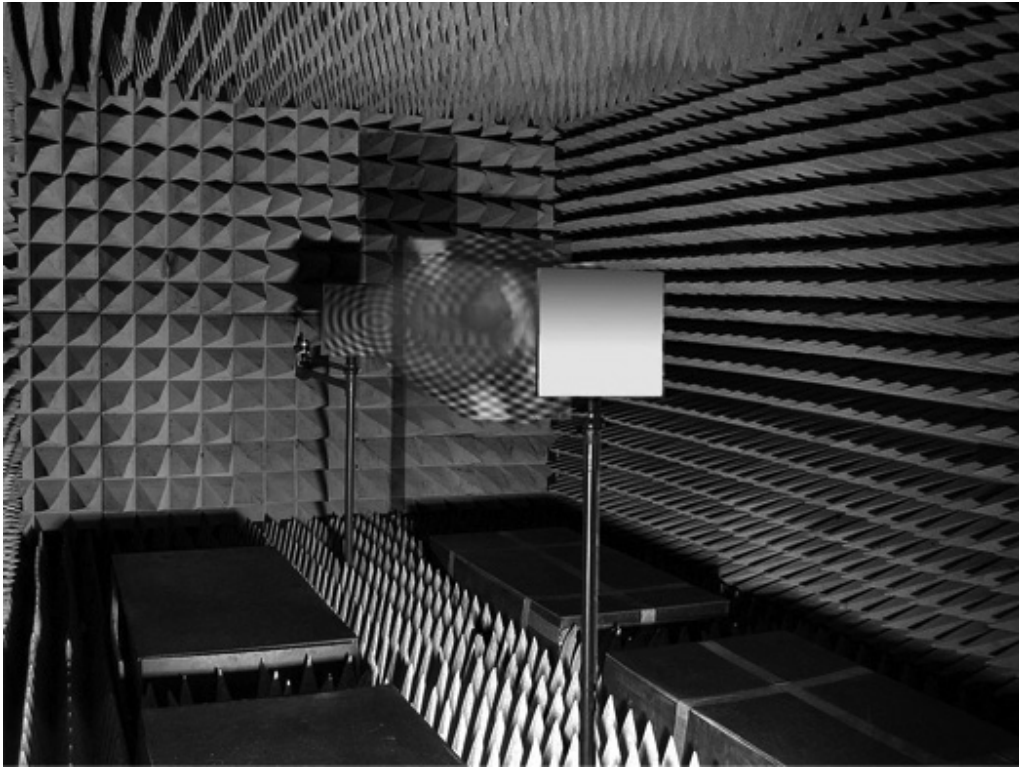
"Yes please," I replied.

"Close your eyes," he said. His voice was like melted butter. I closed my eyes. I felt his hand on my throat. His thick thumb on my bottom lip, opening my mouth. Something entered me. He placed a tablet on my tongue.

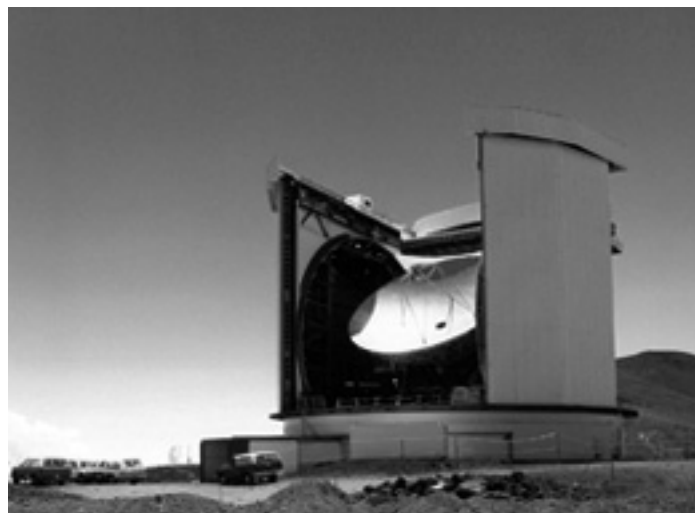
"Let it dissolve," he said. "It'll work faster."

Reader, he put his hand on my thigh.

I felt that I was turning into a down pillow. I remember the captain saying something through the crackling PA. I remember thinking my neck may not hold my head. Then I went out.



Inside the RF Anechoic Chamber, Antennas Research Group, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece



The James Clerk Maxwell Telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii, image found on the Science and Technology Facilities Council website



Centaurus A, NASA photograph

KAMAU AMU PATTON:

Research Proposal: 4-D Holographic Solar Void Field Image. The proposed project is to gather dynamic, near universe, radio frequencies (RF) from a geosynchronous satellite, relay the signal to a ground-based radio telescope, and transmit to opposing, wave-guided microwave antennae housed in a RF anechoic chamber. This data will act as a reference field. A second RF wave stream will be collected directly from our nearest star, the sun. The wave streams in opposition will create a dynamic interference pattern. This pattern, imaged with spectral and phase data, constitutes a 4-D holographic solar image within the RF void field.

Pod Blotz/Suzy Poling, *Natural Powers*, 2011. YouTube video, 6:29:

DESIRÉE HOLMAN:

Let's suppose you were interested and able to study technology and culture in a Martian species. What would you want to know?

SHERRY TURKLE:

What do the Martians want technology for? Do they want to think with it? Feel with it? Do they want it to enhance their aesthetic possibilities? Do they want it for war? Do they use it to die with dignity? Do they use it to prolong life? Do they use it to kill each other with greater efficiency? Are they close to their technology? Or do they keep it at arm's length? Do they have fantasies, as we on earth have become so prone to, of merging with technology towards the goal of self-transformation? Those are my questions.

Message to Kronos as read by Marc Okrand, YouTube video, 1:07:

Desirée Holman: nuqDaq 'oHtaH Qu'noS?
Marc Okrand: yuQvam wISamnIS.
Holman: chay'?
Okrand: Hov leng QeD qeSwI' wIyu'ta'.
Qapla'! DaH Qu'noS Quv wISov.

Translation: *Where is Kronos? We had to locate this planet. How? We interrogated the Star Trek science advisor. Success! Now we know Kronos' coordinates.*

DESIRÉE HOLMAN:

Let's suppose you were interested and able to study language and cognition in a Martian species. What would you want to know?

LERA BORODITSKY:

Being able to study the Martian mind would be a huge score, and not just because Martian cognition might be exotic or fantastical. As it happens, some of the biggest questions about human intelligence hinge on the Martians. In philosophy and linguistics texts, Martians are

avid anthropologists, frequently dropping into earth to make observations about human behavior. (And really, who could blame them? We're awesome!) Often the Martians are uber-rational and their keen observations unequivocally support the terrestrial theorist's position. On other occasions, they play the easily bamboozled naïf, a foil to the terrestrial scientist's incisive theories.



Space is the Place, 1972, film, directed by John Coney and written by Sun Ra and Joshua Smith, 82 min.

The question closest to my heart is how Martians might experience human languages. In his seminal proposal of a Universal Grammar (the idea that all human languages are really the same underneath), Noam Chomsky appeals to extraterrestrial intelligence. A Martian scientist comes to observe all the world's languages and, owing to her rational nature, agrees with Chomsky. "The Martian scientist might reasonably conclude that there is a single human language, with differences only at the margins," Chomsky writes. (1) Of course, if you have ever tried to study another language using your meager terrestrial mind, you may be skeptical. What about all the obviously observable differences, you might ask? "A rational Martian scientist would probably find the variation rather superficial, concluding that there is one human language with minor variants," Chomsky suggests. (2)

Over the last couple of decades, work from my lab and others has shown that at least in the workings of human minds, languages differ from one another in fundamental ways and not

just on the surface. Terrestrial speakers of different languages think differently, and learning new languages can change the way they think. As for Martian minds, however, these remain open empirical questions. So, bring on the Martians, I say! Time to pose the Universal Grammar hypothesis to the universe.

Abyss of Fathomless Light, States of Suspended Agency, 2012, 12 min:



Desirée Holman, Untitled Drawing, 2012, graphite on paper, 40 x 26 in

DESIRÉE HOLMAN:

I'm looking for Raëlian believers. Know anyone?

JULIE LEQUIN:

There are a lot in Quebec...

DESIRÉE HOLMAN:

Do you know any?

JULIE LEQUIN:

Well, I went to school with Brigitte Boisselier's daughter. This girl had the first baby clone the year after we got our BFA. Crazy stuff. I'm not in touch with her unfortunately. She was a pretty interesting person...

NOTES

1. Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.
2. Chomsky, *New Horizons*, 118.