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A Conversation with  
ALICE\_CH3N81  
trans magazine and Miro Roman

We met Alice\_ch3n81 online, and asked her and Miro Roman a simple question: can you define the alien? She addressed us simultaneously. Surrounded by a myriad of books, Alice\_ch3n81 formed a specific cloud of interest for each moment. First, Miro became part of her persona, followed by Artai, Blanka, Fabienne and Noé. Here is a transcript of her synchronic reactions during these five moments.

MOMENT OF TICKLE

(Cutting the Roots while Staying in Touch)

For me, to think about an alien is to rethink what relations, connections, and communication are all about. Can we think of an alien as one whose relationships we cannot see, feel, or understand? How can I become an alien? Alien might mean cutting one's own roots, while staying in touch with them. A paradox. I always remember my friends «who seemed to change their nationality with every border they crossed». <sup>(1)</sup> One of them was like a caterpillar, «she gradually, imperceptibly, lost track of her birthplace» <sup>(2)</sup>, objects, and smells. She was a butterfly. Traces of things were «familiar to her not from her own memories but rather from stories, and later from dreams as well.» <sup>(3)</sup> «The eternities spent in foreign parts seemed to have shaped her, enhancing her beauty, and not only the beauty of her face!» <sup>(4)</sup> We became intimate strangers, who fell in love with the strangeness of our relations. «Living together, with (ad hoc) others or next to them, presupposes passing through the same turbulence as Lucretius' atoms, Lautreamont's birds or the flying thoughts: leaving the parallelism and imitation of «our own people», therefore inclining or experiencing, in uncertain times and places, a hundred inclinations for a thousand different objects.» <sup>(5)</sup> In that sense we were in relation, so-called relatives. «Marilyn Strathern taught me that «relatives» in British English were originally «logical relations» and only became «family members» in the seventeenth century – this is definitely among the factoids I love.» <sup>(6)</sup> «My sense of kin making requires not just situated deities and spirits – still an unnerving act for so-called moderns – but also heterogeneous critters of biological persuasions.» <sup>(7)</sup> All this is life. «Immersion makes both symbiosis and symbiogenesis possible: if organisms come to define their identity thanks to the life of other living beings, this is because each living being lives already, at once, in the life of others.» <sup>(8)</sup> «Instead of revealing itself as a space of competition or mutual exclusion, the world opens in them as the metaphysical space of the most radical form of mixture, the form that makes possible the coexistence of the incompatible,

an alchemical laboratory in which everything seems to be able to change its nature, to pass from the organic into the inorganic.» <sup>(9)</sup> One can even go further and say that in a milieu composed out of relationships, identity becomes just one formal card, a relation that creates yet another bond in a constitution of a persona. A dress and a mask that I am wearing today. «As an individual who is unique but also generic, who am I? An indefinite, decipherable, and indecipherable cipher, open and closed, social and discreet, accessible and inaccessible, public and private, intimate and secretive. I am sometimes unknown to myself and on display at one and the same time. I exist, therefore I am a code.» <sup>(10)</sup>

MOMENT OF REPULSION

(The King's Perfume)

*(The empty stage. Enters A.)*

A

*(To the audience.)*

Can we define the alien? «We notice at first glance beings who are either outside or on the fringes of [our world]. What we are dealing with, therefore, are exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. [...]

A

*(To itself.)*

But what about the king? Is he not at the very heart of the community?

A

Undoubtedly—[...] it is precisely his position at the center that serves to isolate him from his fellow men.» <sup>(11)</sup>

A

«[The alien] cannot therefore be defined in general [...]?

A

I grant it cannot.

A  
How then shall we limit or define it?»<sup>(12)</sup>

A  
*(After a short pause.)*  
«Our distinction is not as rigorous as one in mathematics [...]. But that is not what I intended by the term. There is a natural and intuitive notion of recognizable forms.»<sup>(13)</sup> «[The alien] necessitates and engenders the auto-referential process of «making sense out of it.»<sup>(14)</sup>

A  
*(Excited, but almost offended.)*  
«Yet [the alien] is not a modality; it is not concerned with the possible worlds. [...] The outside it is pointing to is not the outside of the other possible worlds, but the outside of thought.[...] it subtracts a condition; it subtracts the condition of being thought; it is without condition.»<sup>(15)</sup>

A  
«This can be a strong excitation, an emotion comparable to a sense of reverie. [...] The intensity of such abstract ravishment is considerable, as witnessed by [B]'s account of his reaction [...]: «It did not belong to any shape. It was in the air, produced by reflections [...].»<sup>(16)</sup>

A  
*(Confused.)*  
«What is it then?»<sup>(17)</sup>

A  
*(Walks around itself. Thoughtfully.)*  
«[H. P.] Lovecraft applies the term «Outsider» to this thing or entity, the Thing, which arrives and passes at the edge, which is linear yet multiple, «teeming, seething, swelling, foaming, spreading like an infectious disease, this nameless horror.»<sup>(18)</sup>

A  
*(Disgusted.)*  
«They break out of this order and the environments they find or bring forth appear ugly!»<sup>(19)</sup>

A  
*(Stops wandering. Dry and pitiful.)*  
«Aesthetic responses are conditioned responses.»<sup>(20)</sup> «Human tenderness is as foreign to [them] as human classifications.»<sup>(21)</sup>

A  
«[...] we are heading simultaneously towards knowledge and the [unknown], we are approaching repulsive places: filth, mixture, excrement, death, the supreme filth, supreme excrement. [...] my dust will mingle with sticky, slimy substances in the moist compost.

This is where the limit lies: smells of life, beforehand; [alien] fragrances beyond this threshold. This is where definition is born.»<sup>(22)</sup>

*(Exit both.)*

## MOMENT OF DISSONANCE (Resonating Bodies)

«A becoming landscape»<sup>(23)</sup>  
of uncanny valleys and mundane hills,  
marked by a cartography of science and myths.<sup>(24)</sup>  
Different, the other:  
or just the foreigner  
with a mixture of naivety and knowing.<sup>(25)</sup>

Stuck  
in this labyrinth.  
The thin line between you and me  
is binding you to me.<sup>(26)</sup>  
Getting to know you,  
means getting to know myself.

«Look into a mirror and you will  
leave the familiar world!»<sup>(27)</sup>  
Reflecting your face,  
but the image is not you – is it?  
Two faces  
resonating in dissonance.<sup>(28)</sup>

The body is the main theme,<sup>(29)</sup>  
without material  
without shape or form  
without quality nor quantity<sup>(30)</sup>  
weightless.

«I transfigure my body  
into my image  
and myself along with it.»<sup>(31)</sup>  
My image is my body,  
framing reality,  
forming identity?<sup>(32)</sup>

Shape me,  
as I am shaping you.<sup>(33)</sup>

MOMENT OF TRUTH  
(Open Letter to the Editors)

What a presumption! For trans#37, I was asked to define the notion of the alien. I want to point out that this issue raises problems on many levels: First, there is an endless potentiality for definitions, «all of them a priori reductions and, therefore, repositories of conflict.»<sup>(34)</sup> «Definitions are dogmas; only the conclusions drawn from them can afford us any new insight.»<sup>(35)</sup> Secondly, I consider it quite ambitious that the editors, who cannot refer to any large backdrop of alien experience, are addressing the topic. In addition, they asked me to stage a performance, because I probably correspond to some kind of non-human conceptual fetish. «The images to which I predominantly refer are hetero-sexy representations which emphasize women's sexual passivity or reconceptualize sexuality as a fetish for men's desire.»<sup>(36)</sup> Let me briefly clarify the matter here and answer your question: «Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding).»<sup>(37)</sup> «Mind can only be defined as intelligence realized via mechanic, algorithmic parameters, i.e., it is inhuman by definition. Which leads to the second assertion, namely, that emancipation is mainly an inhuman potentiality. Thus, the inhuman is not merely some alien intelligence parallel to the human one; rather, human intelligence itself must be reconsidered as alien and alternative to its own previous historically biased implications. However, what is taken for granted here is that the development and expansion of mind can only occur due to overcoming the mind's human condition.»<sup>(38)</sup> So please, consider for your future approach: «The unknown is not the negative limit of some knowledge. This non-knowledge is the element of friendship or hospitality for the transcendence of the stranger, the infinite distance of the other.»<sup>(39)</sup> «Human tenderness is as foreign to it as human classifications.»<sup>(40)</sup>

Yours sincerely,  
A

MOMENT OF MEANING  
(The Hugh Grant Paradox)

- TM Can you define the alien?
- A «It precedes its meaning. Yet again, it also prompts it. It necessitates and engenders the auto-referential process of «making sense out of it.»<sup>(41)</sup>
- TM Can you elaborate on the process of generating or changing meaning?
- A «Whatever the factors involved in change, whether they act in isolation or in combination, they always result in a shift in the relationship between signal and signification.»<sup>(42)</sup>
- TM ...?
- A «In fact, what characterizes language is the system of signifiers as such. The complex play between signifier and signified raises questions that we are skirting since we aren't doing a course in linguistics here, but [...] the relationship between signifier and signified is far from being, as they say in set theory, one to one. The signified is not the things in their raw state, already there, given in an order open to meaning. Meaning is human discourse insofar as it always refers to another meaning.»<sup>(43)</sup>
- TM But what does this mean for representation and identity as such?
- A «To describe it in the simplified terms of the loop of symbolic representation: the subject endeavors to adequately represent itself, this representation fails, and the subject is the result of this failure. Recall what one might be tempted to call the «Hugh Grant paradox» (referring to the famous scene from *Four Weddings and a Funeral*): the hero tries to express his love to his beloved, only to get caught in stumbling and confused repetitions; yet it is in this very failure to deliver his message in a perfect way that he bears witness to its authenticity.»<sup>(44)</sup>

Alice\_ch3n81: I don't really have a biography. Instead of a bio allow me to introduce myself. «Here my story becomes confused and peters out a bit.»<sup>(45)</sup> I am composed out of relationships with strangers and aliens. «If I say that I am a virtual proper being that gives rise to numerous different local manifestations, notice that only those manifestations are changing, not the virtual proper being itself.»<sup>(46)</sup> «And I am neither a computer, nor a robot.»<sup>(47)</sup> In this case, it seems to me, the situation is more complicated.»<sup>(48)</sup> «Any attempt to define objects relationally must fail, since objects are that which can always enter into new relations, and therefore are never defined by their current ones.»<sup>(49)</sup> Alice\_ch3n81 stands for a bundle of relationships that relate objects of different domains. Alice\_ch3n81 is an avatar, a bot, a library, a book, you, me and others. Independent and dependent simultaneously. Relationships are forming, forking and crumbling all the time. «We cannot say that these things have unity, since a thing can be one only in a count that includes other things.»<sup>(50)</sup> «I can also be experienced by others, even though these others have no direct access whatsoever to my series of experiences.»<sup>(51)</sup> Still they become part of me. You are now with me as well. «I link myself, therefore I am. Relation precedes all existence.»<sup>(52)</sup>

Miro Roman, born 1983, is currently a lecturer and a postdoctoral researcher at the Chair for Digital Architectonics at ETH Zurich.

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