

# Plants

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# Contents

1	Nature Eruption	5
2	Plinth'd Nature	11
3	Nature in the 80s	17
4	Cornered Nature No. 1	23
5	Cornered Nature No. 2	29
6	Nature Addendum	33





# Chapter 1

## Nature Eruption

It is only in the quiet of panels, when horror vacui is quietly receded from, that movement can begin to come from nature. A thing that should not shudder begins to exhibit the first tremors of life. There is a sensation of bubbling beneath the feet, a fibrous crunching, something like the tiny sounds at the bottom of the lungs on a deep breath. There is a kind of panting. Surely an eruption is coming.

In a regimented frame, there is an attempt to cast authority through the appearance of order. This is a setting without exclamation. This is not a place where anything slides luxuriously from upright to reclining, but a



Figure 1.1: Nature Eruption

desperate calmness sites itself in the air, an hyperactive stillness. It is not possible to situate this frame (to give it a context or some kind of Gestalt backdrop), instead an observer must attempt to impose herself as a figure for the things she sees to stand a chance of approaching corporeality. This impetus is well-anticipated in the viewer; a sturdy pastiche of their figure is “pre” placed in the scene, already there, waiting to be called into play by this acknowledgement.

There is no pointed coquettishness or promise, instead there is an air of hastily conceived-of urgency, like a dull ambient panic or pale anxiety. The subtly implied threat of grey and misty Lacanian reality is veiled with an extreme economy of gesture. As lightly as is possible to contain something is how things are contained here. It is impressive, then, that this containment is able to be so utterly complete.

This should surely be the conception of a very sublime perspective, to solve an issue outside of flesh and to have solved it with so light a touch. It is difficult to see the weight (or power) that maintains the rigidity holding things up. This “weight” is hidden by design, stacked

above head-height, stuffed inside walls, mirrored away or disguised in large-scale optical illusion.

There is a physical tension around us, it feels like being inside a cat's cradle. This is not a situation that begs exploration. We explore anyway.

Free movement in this space makes the space itself feel tenuous. It is as if the whole charade could wink out of existence if a certain or particular floor tile were stepped on. *The three of us tread carefully.* We emulate the stasis through which we find ourselves moving.

Right now, nothing suggests relief will come, the unbroken hush hums lulling perpetuity, and likewise waves of silence ripple and echo from a cavernous *above*. The light doesn't obviously come from anywhere, it seems to be somehow within the beams and panes and floors and walls. The defining edges of things look drawn on, the definition between things that forms what we can have as recognisable objects is only made here as an amicable gesture or polite courtesy. Moreover, it is certainly something that we should be grateful for.

But some good change is on its way, the very source of levity itself will soon spring and be upon us in a shock

of lush green. With one glance, the mind delves into the jungles of the mind, the immediate possibility of an inhabitation entirely different in character bustles in and brusquely presents itself. We exclaim “*This is the opposite!*” as creepers and ferns erupt from below head height, announcing the end of mundane sterility. Beginning at the waist, spilling voluptuously down to almost touch the floor and sprouting upwards to touch just below the neckline, fronds elegantly bowing to the tip.

We find a formality here that appears naturally, without method or intent, sensual and striking. Flowing arcs effortlessly mixed with staccato points. Misplaced ribbing and frantic groupings of tiny fluted spouts. And here too the pure violence and natural struggle that constitute life.



# Chapter 2

## Plinth'd Nature

From a pedestal such as this one there is nothing further to be strived for but full commune with the heavens. A small exemplar is chosen. Quickly, lightweight channelling infrastructure is put in place, the thing is given an “open top”. Its delicate spread of antennae are placed out of arm’s reach, the culturally requisite lucky charms are added, disguised as decoration.

The base has wholly settled with the ground it sits on, happy to be so possessed. This earthly protuberance that is relatively immovable plays host to a spindly collection placed at the point where the thing gets as far as it goes. From the simple guarantee of some weight





Figure 2.1: Plinth'd Nature



something more contingent could feel out (with imaginary hands) the safety to allow itself to emerge.

Simply put, this is technology manifest. A solid “black box” made of arcane witchcraft lending stability to something otherwise intangible. Fragile human emotion cradled gently by a larger process and so cradled allowed the space and time to flourish generously to the delight of millions. There is almost a glow about the thing, almost the sparkles of magic falling from its appendages. It is how we know all is right with the world, we are in good company, we must be cared for.

In this composition the perfect balance is struck in a sweep of asymmetry. An image sails ahead unhanded and without guidance, forging a path of light and leaving a spreading wake of shadows behind it. Standing in front of this arrangement, this image of duality, the observer is thrown into a terrible and relentless motion of their own. The coloured forms of the world shutter past at pace, a cooling jet of histories and or of new ideas splashes on the brow and spills away in dual rivers that meet between the shoulder blades. This is motion without destination, as with *ilyn*x and vertigo.

We see the expected, more human-scaled, more understandable artifacts of an industrial construction; the visual clues that the thing as a whole did not simply spring into existence, but rather came into being as the result of repeated, tangential activity. The evidence appears as the side-effect of a serious process, not as a direct mark. It arrives due to the necessity of silencing the pleas for care and attendance from smaller details, and instead lending favour to the needs of the larger work taking place.

We have an acute angle into another world, a tranche of matter is used as bait for something much larger, something which looking from here is already vested with some largesse and power. A brief and delicious salad snack to goad the creeping and splintered advances of a richly different existence across to this relatively poor one.

The structure here, this thing, should at any moment leap into brief, hideous, frenetic action as the chanceless, raw power of the universe carves a bolt across eons, through timeless permanence and permanence, just to be in touch with an object that will be there *one time only*. This thing is a “one shot” fabrication designed to take a

massive but fleeting single input.

There is nothing to see here close up, *so we stand back*. Not one amongst us wants to have his eyebrows singed by the power of the infinite.



# Chapter 3

## Nature in the 80s

We don't remember what happened to us, just beginning to chase a new thought as finance and oil exploded around us (in our midst). For a period nothing aged, everything was "as it was" and so it always would be. Our shared past, the colloquial history of apes and animals was forgotten and cast aside in exchange for this moment of shining clarity cast in shiny plastic.

At that time our human "out-of-placeness" became something commodifiable, the hideous beast lurking within was invited (by advertising executives with wide open arms and rather wild grins) to present itself publicly in lavish media form, fully out in the world. In this gesture



Figure 3.1: Nature in the 80s

the animal in man became a caricature of itself, greeting and hollering. It was left outside, pathetically soliciting for encouragement and accepting any given.

Even money as we knew it ceased to have proper meaning, instead finance became a kind of *de facto* government. We would never again have the same need to fish or farm or struggle (as we once did), there would be pure opportunity for every man to possess the things he desired; living, as he was, in a bizarre new democracy of home furnishings and rubberised kitchen utensils.

All things people could own became in some sense red, white and blue without anyone intending them to be. Where before wealth had distinct and well-defined characteristics, now a new formal aesthetic began to develop, eschewing decoration and detail for ergonomics and utilitarian elegance. The judgements that for years could be made by studying the appearance of things suddenly ceased to hold water. It became possible for validity to be built up and broken down more quickly and by a greater proportion of the populous. So called civil society changed size over night.

The pure scale upon which society operated was parabol-

ically altered; the shape of things sagged.

To those with humanity's brightening prospects in mind, humanity's prospects were considerably brightened. Social mobility looked promising and desirable, the swelling of classed people was good fun, technology was just great and all these things empowered people. However, it is often forgotten in politics that pure power will not dilute, it only switches polarity at a greater rate. So as winds changed, the peaceful lacuna formed by something like time delay or lag time was rapidly and harshly emptied. Its inhabitants found themselves strewn broadly across a bleak, unforgiving landscape.

They found nothing like home, their quiet was replaced by the hum of fridges and the low thundering of traffic. The peace they found in image was exposed as mere impoverished understanding; hypnosis by the flickering of a television screen, without proper appreciation for the real messages transmitted there.

Some stayed mobile, some just stayed. Maudlin denizens of a place that had had its promise turned to ash. Now surrounded by bars and grids but still living, seeming to the outside world all but motionless, making the quiet



statement “*you don’t have me like that*” by grimly singing low the songs of the old country.

Indeed, some music could pass and stayed with them, but was only permitted to pass when accompanied by proper documentation and even then only through appropriate channels.

The world became too big and too empty and too flat, but these ex-regal figures remained raised. They stood as weak beacons to their counterparts, thinly sounding out a kind of stiff moisture against the overprescent smell of ozone. In a scene of collapsing dust and the dry stains of ventilation they were the small, shabby originals impossibly returning to their overblown simulacra.

We had no choice but to see them welcomed “in”, there was too much sharing of evolutionary roots; formal structure, growth patterns, etc. But, despite the commonality, the two existed differently in time. One was nourished by its passing and the other was slowly beaten back by it. The individual relationships each shared with time essentially hid one from other the by way of an unsailable chasm of scale.



# Chapter 4

## Cornered Nature

### No. 1

Like most all defensive pretended misunderstanding, a body acting as if it doesn't have any regard for its proper form is to be viewed as tragicomic for sure, but more could be seen as possessing a strange heroism; it is engaged in an odd battle against elegance.

Where the world flows smoothly, our hero jerks about. When surrounded by ironed, filed receipts, our hero screws his own into crumpled balls and pockets them. He refuses to see doorways, bumps into their jambs, trips on their



Figure 4.1: Cornered Nature No. 1

stops and swings on their hinges. At fancy restaurants he rudely smacks his lips and tells dirty jokes on you, shouts at the staff, unkindly blows his nose on the napkins. On public transport he pushes and snarls, speaks too loudly, never moves aside. He leaps over the homeless in the street, does not respect the traffic. He curses babies and children at any opportunity, leers at young mothers, spits and snorts and smokes. He holds up queues and suddenly stops on crowded pavements. He ignores email and will not answer the phone.

He is fighting powerfully, but the conditions necessary for his victory are truly outlandish. How can one win a battle against the insurmountable by attacking it with precisely the thing it was made to stand contrary to? Surely impossible, with how the odds are stacked.

But there is a dream of the outside, or at least of somewhere to go. It may take the throwing out of the baby with the bathwater; throwing everything else away with the pain to get there, but there are no other options. Earlier in the game something else could have happened (maybe something funny), but that time is now past. A rock and an iron resolve holds each one exactly where she

is, in a life looking perfectly well like publicity material for something she might buy to help with it.

No ticker-tape is promised, no piñata will be delivered. There is no officious individual to hold the door or someone waiting for the opportunity to tell you where to go. Only perhaps an Eastern plane of virgin space, a pine, buried ceramics.

This is not a ham-fisted attempt to escape the condescension of Plato's cave, it's nowhere near that complicated. We are just moving from something we know lots about and *know* we don't like, to something that for a reason (that for some reason Douglas Adams could never fathom) we know almost exactly nothing about.

The strange thing is that all the things we *do* know about where we are trying to get to are not any of them things we don't like the sound of.

The perceived oddness of our hero can melt away. He is doing the only thing it is conceivable to do in his situation; he sees the reality of where he is so placed, but he will not admit to the unreality of what he is trying to do.

What he does not see is that through the lens of con-

vention he has far exceeded his goals; he is already “from there”. His motion is so alien that he is looked at not as an individual standing in childish and pointless rebellion, but as a telltale sign of serious and dreadful things to come, as though the building will fall and slump to the ground as its foundations are revealed to have been made from green jelly.





# Chapter 5

## Cornered Nature

### No. 2

Part of the magic of pre-made objects lies in their smugness; they appear to have come from nowhere and seem to have always been there, they are rather proud within themselves.

Seeing something that is so obviously prefab forces us to interrogate everything else in the scene in order to find out what arrived on stage before what. Whatever the case, surely what we are is *the late ones!* Thanks to our very British and probably Victorian/Germanic propen-



Figure 5.1: Cornered Nature No. 2

sity for imposing grand narrative onto relative banality, it is precisely this accusatorial question of chronology that bounds eagerly to the forefront of our considerations.

We need to be able to point to the thing that naïvely fetched up amongst its neighbours without the language to articulate exactly what its fetching up could mean for either party. And conversely which thing arrived not strictly of its own accord, fitting perfectly in, “designed” for some particular task or set of purposes. Then we must ask how deeply considered this design was.

Designing prefabricated objects is something like a game of chess. We must try to see how many moves ahead the designer was thinking, how long would we have to wait until their intention is revealed by the purpose of the designed thing being fulfilled?

With the off-kilter tone leaking from the initial question, we find ourselves essentially (despite being presented with a clipped, polite arrangement), considering which of the things out of those before us is the “most” prefabricated. The dumb things are set in a kind of competitive juxtaposition. They cannot profess their innocence or admit their guilts (or, indeed, claim anything), they have

no exclamation to offer and so we are left to cast our judgement using the visual alone.

And shamefully, we find ourselves quickly organising, making an organisation, assuming things are *being done*. Because of the meaningful purpose (purposeful meaning) imbued in every shape and pattern (but for one), we can easily see what is *being done* (and to whom).

We have been a little bit silly in fostering this burning need to discover which is more of the innocent party. All things are somewhat complicit in their appearance. That is, they collude in producing the total image, but no individual object or compositional element is to blame entirely for how a situation appears.

# Chapter 6

## Nature

### Addendum

A good fake is a statement that abruptly diverts you from its stated subject. It shortcuts the long-winded formalities by using an unexpected (more “lowly”, or completely other) formality. The thing presented is wonderfully done; boasting smooth motion and perfect counterbalance, here constructed entirely from sticks of bamboo, elastic bands and string; it is such a brilliant idea that no one would actually think to do it.

It has its comedy too, like our hero from Chapter 4,





Figure 6.1: Nature Addendum

but the comedy here is expressed with childlike mannerism. The portents our fake speaks of could be strikingly ominous, but the language used to speak them simply lacks the gravitas afforded by context to the original and so their messages are lost to babble (Bakhtin), as the violent shop floor threats of bosses to workers.





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