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**One always forgets, namely that language, this language
which is the instrument of speech, is something material?'**

In 1994 Sunnyvale, California, a group of hyper-libertarian, techno-utopian, anti-government bodybuilders and nerds sat together in a hot tub at the world's first 'Extropaganza'. Extro 1, as it would be known in those waters, called together believers in 'extropy' (the opposite of entropy). In the pursuit of unending growth, the heightening of all methods of consumption, and a quest for the immortality of the human / market / thought-processing form, Extropians sought a discourse of spending not dissimilar from the description of 'nature' misattributed to Goethe that inspired Freud in his early construction of psychoanalysis:

**She tarries, so that one calls out for her; she hurries, so that
one never tires of her.**

**She has neither language nor speech; but she creates
tongues and hearts, through which she feels and speaks.**

Attached to the side of the Extropaganza jacuzzi, a warning read: 'Please note, some clothing will be required ... so as not to shock the neighbours with the sight of our transhuman physiques!' To applause, the software engineer and 'hot blooded capitalist' Mistress Romana arrived dressed as 'The State'. Wearing a specially made leather miniskirt and chain harness and carrying a riding crop in one hand and a leash in the other, 'The State', we are told, had the dog-like figure of her companion, Geoff Dale—'The Taxpayer'—crawling about the dirt in 'mock subjugation'.

Words order themselves around the feeling of pure growth, says the Extropian. A doctrine can itself be extravagant, as if speaking it were spending it. Its members take on new names. The Silicon Valley attorney Tom Bell called himself Tom Morrow. Max T. O'Conner called himself Max More. The Olympian-cum-philosopher F.M.

Esfandiary called himself FM-2030.

MIT's AI advisor Marvin Minsky declared Max More the heir to Carl Sagan. More would go on to become the chief executive of Alcor, 'the world's leader in cryonics' (a 'life preserving' company specialising in the cryogenic freezing of human heads). In 1994's hot tub, a member announced: 'immortality is mathematical, not mystical!'

The Club of Life, 'fantastic superabundance', neurocomputers, a memetic approach to selling cryonics, 'Order Without Orders', and of course Bataille's call towards the lavish expenditure of energy—it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically—united Extropia's doctrine: the seeking out of a financial *moreness* to what it means to be human. Their motto, 'Boundless Expansion, Self-Transformation, Dynamic Optimism, Intelligent Technology, and Spontaneous Order', was very literally yelled as this group of tech CEOs, lawyers, coders and charismatic charlatans clasped their hands together and raised them to the sky. Now was the age for the dynamic optimism of technology, they said. As a very real response to a growing awareness of the environmental consequences of unchained consumption, Extropianism was an antidote to an older philosophical (and cosmic) pessimism that had been building in the sciences and the arts.

In 1893 the palaeontologist Louis Dollo announced his 'law of irreversibility':

An organism never returns exactly to a former state, even if it finds itself placed in conditions of existence identical to those in which it has previously lived.

In 1920, untethering the cyclical time of the Greeks, Rainer Maria Rilke (as translated by Hannah Arendt) wrote:

Here even the mountains only seem to rest under the light of the stars; they are slowly, secretly devoured by time; nothing

is forever, immortality has fled the world to find an uncertain abode in the darkness of the human heart that still has the capacity to remember and to say: forever.

And in 1970, the French biochemist (and thinker of chance) Jacques Monod condemned a belief in 'the eternal recurrence [of the] human species':

The ancient covenant is in pieces; man knows at last that he is alone in the universe's unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance. His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor is his duty. The kingdom above or the darkness below: it is for him to choose.

As species extinction, entropy and omnicide became the dominant scientific diagnoses of the future, Extropians hoped, as it were, to turn back the clock—to emphasise something deeply emancipatory in taking control of the responsibility proffered by thoughts of finitude. The cosmos, expanding in all directions, was to be directed. Finitude was to be renounced. As Corey Pein notes, the journal M. More and T. Morrow started, *Extropy*, 'promoted seafaring secessionism long before Peter Thiel's Seasteading Institute ... It extolled the subversive potential of digital currencies before Bitcoin ... it denounced, with eerie glee, environmentalist, "statists," and "deathist" cryonics critics who threatened the transhuman future'—and arguably, for the sake of this essay, the bizarre influence of *Extropy* predated the immortalist desire for an endless and always increasing *material* to language.

Those attendees and readers of the journal of the Extropaganza form a direct line to Large Language Modelling. In a blank prompt bar the spores of expenditure flourish alongside the brilliance of *spontaneous order*. The ideology of a gapless plentiful universe,

lying in wait for capitalist extraction, bleeds into the ideology of gapless words. Words to be lavishly and catastrophically counted. In Large Language Modelling I see alive and well the seeking out of the efficiency of a lossless compression of meaning against finitude. But I also notice a contradictory philosophy of the endlessly repetitive, of the infinite generation of content—of the problem of surplus in a superabundant future; the problem of seeking stability in an ethos and practice of endless increase.

There's a word Descartes used—'interminate'—which qualifies this feeling of 'no end'. It predates an alienation Lacan picks up. Descartes refuses to label his world 'infinite'. He reserves that denomination for God. Instead, his thought world is without boundaries. In Alexandre Koyré's description:

[Descartes'] universe is not infinite (*infinitum*) but 'interminate' (*interminatum*), which means not only that it is boundless and is not terminated by an outside shell, but also that it is not 'terminated' in its constituents, that is, that it utterly lacks precision and strict determination. It never reaches the 'limit' ; it is, in the full sense of the word, *indetermined*. It cannot, therefore, be the object of total and precise knowledge, but only that of a partial and conjectural one.

'Interminate' then is an expansive 'without end'. Its secondary meaning is a menacing and threatening feeling. The threat of losing an end. The inability to have anything but a partial and imprecise knowledge of the world (and its openness) is expressed by this baleful word. It is a word attentive to the tension (and luring cast) between the unconscious (and coded) labour of finitude and the very sense of no-limit.

The possible interminate 'materiality' of language and the 'quantification' of communication is the concern here. Lacan reminds us that language gained measurability after the invention of Bell's

telephone. Language after this moment became culturally inseparable from its energy. A quantity of 'information' now travelled along wires. In his perhaps less-compelling musings on 'telepathy', Freud also wondered if the telephone pointed to a future where we had access to the physicality of formerly unvoiced speech: 'And only think if one could get hold of this physical equivalent of the psychical act!' When communication became principled by its medium, Alexander Graham Bell famously misheard the spirits of the dead in the static of his own copper wires. Lacan reads a different death in this energised sound: the death drive.

Many technologies to record and repeat language were developed during Freud's life. Beyond Freud's fascination with an archaic children's pad, there came the phonograph, the radio, and in the 1890s (before wires could sustain the sound of a human voice) Samuel Morse experimented with transmitting language via energised code. Much has been made of Freud's homeostatic analogy between the anatomic body and the pleasure principle. Lacan instead reads a history of technology through this homeostat.

Asking why Étienne Bonnot de Condillac could not theorise the give-and-take of pleasure in his treatise on the mind, Lacan makes a historicising claim:

Condillac wasn't deluded. Why, it must be asked, doesn't he give an explicit formulation to the pleasure principle? ... He didn't have a formula for it because he came before the steam engine. The era of the steam engine, its industrial exploitation, and administrative projects and balance-sheets, were needed, for us to ask the question—what does a machine yield?

Prior to the steam engine more came out of the mind than was put in. But after the steam engine, an energetic vision of the mechanical body called into equivalence the restlessness of a clock. There came the sense of an interminance to homeostasis. A compulsion to be

‘in-knowledge’ of equalness, without end. As Freud grappled with the ‘beyond’ of his pleasure principle he asked ‘what, in terms of energy, is the psyche?’

The fantasy of this question is important today. The Large Modelling machine forces theorists of the inner life to adapt the economy and energies of pleasure to the reconfigured terms of an externalised self-fulfilling imagination. In analysing the relationship between someone who types into a prompt bar and the quality of the machine’s generated result, the central tensions of this act respond to the externalised terms of repetition and homeostasis progressed by Large Language Models. The material quality of this coded language (because we search for it) is of importance. Matter in these models repeats itself. If it goes it can be found again. The material can be resuscitated. If the cut is recorded it can be healed again. If anything new is added to this modelled place its addition to the symbolic order produces its own material past. The quantification of speech spurred into action by the telephone reaches its culmination in generative AI: all words receive a value, an energy judgment, which turns language into image, and image into a laboured new discourse tasked with fighting the slow arrow of entropy.

Super Abundance, Spontaneous Order, Order Without Orderers—in reading the production of the fantasy of the interminate through the extropy of Large Language Modelling, the questions ‘why more content?’, ‘why no limits?’ are posed against the energy of pleasure and the supposed materiality of language. In the artificial possibility of readable text produced from the complex counting of all prior catalogued words, prompt bars and their mechanisms expose new ways to read Freud’s dialectical terms: excitation and stability; pleasure and reality; the compulsion to repeat the present or the compulsion towards a restitutive beginning.

These terms find new consequence in today’s AI abundance of word-combination. Clearly words are decreasing as

they increase. Surplus is misrecognised as repose. The great proliferation of modelled content marks the beginning of the endless generation of not quite what we want. Content only marginally good enough, acceptable enough to warrant consumption, but imperfect enough to keep us wanting more. The lure of such generation must surely be found at once in the promise of endlessly up-ticking growth—endless surplus—but also in the flatline such an oxymoron proposes. The number goes up but its increase approaches zero. Is this or is this not the Extropaganza?

- 1 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: the Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–55*, WW Norton, 1997, p. 82..^{^1}
- 2 See Friedrich A Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800 / 1900*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 25. The quote was incorrectly attributed to Goethe, but was in fact from Georg Christoph Tobler’s essay ‘Die Natur’, 1783, which was written as a result of the author’s many long conversations with Goethe..^{^1}
- 3 Description courtesy of attendee Ed Regis, ‘Meet the Extropians’, *Wired*, 1 October 1994, <https://www.wired.com/1994/10/extropians/>..^{^1}
- 4 Corey Pein, ‘Everybody Freeze!: The Extropians Want Your Body’, *The Baffler*, no. 30, 2016, p. 90..^{^1}
- 5 The statement was attributed to Mike Perry. Regis, ‘Meet the Extropians’..^{^1}
- 6 The Club of Life was founded in 1982 as a response to The Club of Rome. See Lyndon H. La Rouché, Jr, *There are No Limits to Growth*, New York: The New Benjamin Franklin House Publishing Company, 1983..^{^1}
- 7 H. Keith Henson and Arel Lucas, ‘A Memetic Approach to Selling Cryonics’, *Extro* 7..^{^1}
- 8 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley, Zone Books, 1988, p. 21..^{^1}
- 9 The ‘Extropian Handshake’ is described in Regis, ‘Meet the Extropians’..^{^1}
- 10 See Eugene Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2015..^{^1}
- 11 S.J. Gould, ‘Dollo on Dollo’s Law: Irreversibility and the Status of Evolutionary Laws’, *Journal of the History of Biology*, no. 2, 1970, pp. 189–212..^{^1}
- 12 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Aus dem Nachlass des Grafen C.W.*, quoted and translated by Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, The Viking Press, 1961, p. 44..^{^1}
- 13 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, trans. A. Wainhouse, London, Collins, 1971, p. 167. Quoted by Thomas Moynihan in *X-Risk: How Humanity Discovered Its Own Extinction*, Mass., MIT Press, 2021, p. 125..^{^1}
- 14 Pein, ‘Everybody Freeze!’, p. 90..^{^1}
- 15 See HennyGe Wichers, ‘TESCREAL’, *Generative AI*, 12 May 2023, <https://>

generativeai.pub/tescreal-b271de909133; and Max More's substack, 'Extropic Thoughts', accessed 8 October 2023, https://maxmore.substack.com/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=web&utm_content=comment_metadata.¹

16 See Seminar-IX: alienation cannot be theorised before Descartes. And Seminar-XI: 'the Freudian field was possible only a certain time after the emergence of the Cartesian subject', p. 47..¹

17 Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, p. 8..¹

18 Lacan, Seminar II, p. 82..¹

19 Freud, 'Dreams and Occultism', SE:22, p. 55..¹

20 Lacan, Seminar II, p. 61..¹

21 *Ibid.*, p. 75..¹