

ECCE ÖTZI

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Dramatis Personae

“Fred Flintstone” – *as the prehistoric man*

“The Other” – *as an unacknowledged externality*

“Zoe” – *as the power of Other life*

“The Kardashian family” – *as the goddesses of consumption*

“Undisclosed inhabitant of the Man Cave” – *as a victim of
“extinction”*

“The imperative of the market in capitalist economy” – *as the actual
nonhuman*

“The wax figure of Anne Frank” – *as the most tragic spectacle*

“The wax figure of Justin Bieber” – *as a realer version than the real
Bieber*

“A plastinated body at BodyWorld” – *as a nameless Other*

“The corpse of Lenin” – *as a mortal body*

“The spirit of Leninism” – *as an immortal voice*

“Ötzi the Ice Mummy” – *as my boyfriend*

and “His brother” – *as the prettier twin*

The Finest Cave in the District

In *The Evolution Man (Or, How I Ate My Father)*, English economist and writer Roy Lewis describes the quintessential prehistoric family, fresh from the discovery of fire and galvanized to evolve into a more cultured and civilized species of hominid and leave the primitive Pleistocene. Father Edward invents innovation after innovation in a steady locomotion of progress, while Uncle Vanya hits town every now and then, expressing his concern and disagreement with Edward's disobedience and deviation from nature.

The antagonistic voice of Vanya is annoying, but eventually unimportant. The main antagonist turns out to be father Edward himself, not because he forces his sons into exogamy, burns down their entire living territory with his reckless use of fire or turns out to be a prehistoric dictator. He is the villain because he “*proposes to divulge this formula for fire-making to every Tom, Dick and Harry in Africa*”.¹ Ultimately, he is murdered because he refuses to license the use of fire, ruining the opportunity for a total monopoly for his family.

Edward's archaic family is not an implausible depiction of the prehistoric family.² With many aunts and uncles who seemed to raise their many children collectively, this primeval cave-family was surely more legitimate than whatever pops when you google “prehistoric cartoon,” which is to say, a Western nuclear family, featuring a cavewoman with a necklace of teeth rockin' a 1950s updo, a caveman grumpily holding a club, and the emblematic cave baby. Not to mention, all the figures are white.³

¹ Roy Lewis, *The Evolution Man (Or, How I Ate My Father)* (New York: Vintage, 1960).

² Prehistoric being pre-written history. Script started to emerge around the fourth millennium BC in the Fertile Crescent and other places during the Neolithic revolution, so we're talking about pre-Neolithic hunter gatherers that sometimes (but very often not) lived in caves.

³ Meanwhile, the origin of the human species lies in West-Africa.



The US-American animated sitcom *The Flintstones*⁴ is probably the most infamous example of this archetypal prehistoric family. The immense popularity of *The Flintstones* rested heavily on its juxtaposition of modern everyday concerns with a Stone Age setting. In between the lines of these inflated depictions of white US-American suburban life, the capitalistic, misogynistic and racist dogmas of mid-twentieth-century US-American society slowly began to adhere to the image of the prehistoric cave. (Now including a domesticated sabre-tooth tiger and classic letterbox.)

Many modern neoliberalist credos and philosophies fit perfectly in such prehistoric narratives: the nuclear family, misogyny, growth, expansion and progress. These fictions of the cave are just a prehistoric rendition of the same Western capitalist story. This is dangerous territory. The hegemonic neoliberalist dogma will commodify prehistory as a tool with which to reinforce the already all too dominant belief that our current version of capitalist humanism is inevitable. That, instead of there being multiple ways for society and humans to evolve, this is what we are destined to be.

It is actually much truer to life to think of prehistory as a representation of everything that is not part of our anthropocentric

⁴ A US-American sitcom produced by Hanna-Barbera Productions that aired originally in the US from 1960 until 1966.

way of modern living. Hunter gatherers were codependent with the symbiotic environment and were often animistic groups of people living in solidarity with their immediate surroundings. The worlds of these Palaeolithic people were perforated, which made them able to acknowledge the perforated worlds of the entities around them. Not being the dominant life form, they had to acknowledge the world of the big cats to avoid being eaten, and to understand the worlds of the shrooms so they would not be poisoned. Man shared his position at the center of the world, which was not a center at all, but the entire world.

Writer and philosopher Timothy Morton describes the moment when we started to ignore nonhuman gazes and cement the holes of our world shut as the Severing.⁵ He talks about a point of detachment, when humans isolated themselves from every other nonhuman being on the planet. Humans forgot, or started to refuse, that the nonhuman species around also had a world of experiences, thoughts and access modes to the world. This tendency to exclude non-humans is well-represented in modern Western philosophy and has to do with a “dominant Hegelian⁶ strand within these thought domains. A strong correlationism⁷ [...] clipping the wings of their ideological sense of omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence.”⁸

⁵ **“What the Severing names is the trauma that some humans persist in re-enacting on and among themselves (and obviously on and among other lifeforms.) The Severing is a foundational, traumatic fissure between [...] reality (the human correlated world) and the real (ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman parts of the biosphere).” Timothy Morton, Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People (London: Verso, 2017).**

⁶ German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831).

⁷ This correlationism means that nonhuman objects aren’t “realized” until they are sensed, experienced by a correlator. The correlatee requires a correlator to make it real. The only entity capable of being this transcendental subject that can magically establish the world around them as real, is the human. This is inherently deeply anthropocentric, since all nonhumans are ruled out to be mere externalities. Capitalism relies fully on the appropriation of these externalities.

⁸ Morton, Humankind.

A *zoe*⁹-centered way of connecting human to nonhuman life allows the gap in understanding between us and other beings to exist, and releases the exclusive human copyright on whoever gets to experience the world.¹⁰ This means “dropping the idea that (human) thought is the top access mode and holding that brushing against, licking or irradiating are also access modes as valid (or as invalid) as thinking.”¹¹

Another representation of prehistoric people and a better speculation on prehistoric life could perhaps be guided by looking at the uncontacted, pseudo-archaic¹² people existent on earth, those least influenced by modernity. Though, instead of opening our worlds and minds to them, to learn about their position in the symbiotic whole, we have often subjected them to racism, illness, genocide, oppression, one-sided anthropological research and spectacle.

These “primitive” tribes much more resembled the nonhuman ‘Other’ to the extent that hegemonic “civilized” Man has historically considered them inhumane. However, they have not been Other enough to not be considered a threat to the humanity of “cultured” humans. So, instead of returning the gazes of these modern primitive people, whose ways of living probably come closest to any recreation of our speculative human origins, we have thrown them into the gorge

⁹ ζωή (*zoe*) female, is according to wiktionary a synonym for βίος (*bios*) male. Nevertheless, they embody two different kinds of life. *Zoe* is a non-human yet generative life-force which means “a living” or even “property.” *Bios* is used to describe human life, often with a positive connotation; the good life of a Human.

¹⁰ Meaning; who gets to be a Kantian transcendental subject accessing the world from a first being’s point of view.

¹¹ Morton, *Humankind*.

¹² There are still (contacted and uncontacted) prehistoric and even pre-Neolithic hunter-gatherer tribes in the world, which would at the very least be pseudo-archaic. Authentic archaism is unfeasible, since in order to be as they are, “they must have lived, endured, and, therefore, changed”. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

of pathologized abjection or the *Uncanny Valley*.¹³ If “we” cannot even consider “them” as human, how could we possibly envision our prehistoric ancestors being like them? Just another mere externality. We would rather watch a rerun of *The Flintstones*, a narrative easier to swallow for the detached Western human.



In this tweet, Trump openly celebrates the death of Abu Baker al-Baghdadi, a person whose acts were incomprehensible and (paradoxically enough¹⁴) inhumane to Western society (precisely because they endanger Western society). The dog, harmlessly and clearly nonhuman, is praised as the hero. An illustration of the Uncanny Valley model.

¹³ In robotics design, the term *Uncanny Valley* is used to describe the way in which the closer a robot comes to resembling a human, the less humans can identify with it, until a certain point of closer resemblance when the familiarity increases again. Timothy Morton uses this abyss of not-like-us-but-also-not-unlike-us-enough beings to illustrate the separation between a healthy (hegemonic) human being and a dog or the statuette of Venus of Willendorf (clear nonhuman). Because the distinction between what counts as human and what is excluded can never be a thin, unyielding line, a grey area emerges that Morton describes as “a mass grave, containing thousands of abjected beings.” This entire model is a farce that reinforces segregation.

¹⁴ If we consider the use of unmanned drones in this mission.

Psalm is Playing Minecraft in his Room

But when talking about a representation of modern neoliberalist credos, some of the Western notions projected into the cave (looking at the Flintstones family for example) are prominently outdated. The cave, as a leitmotif for sexist hierarchies within the nuclear family, transforms in parallel with changes in beliefs. True to our fragmented, hyper-reproduced and highly accelerated culture, depictions of contemporary cultural dogma are more often not projected into prehistory itself but into other cultural representations of a simulated neoliberalist cave (becoming a fourth order simulacrum in the process).¹⁵

Halloween 2019. Kim K. dressed her family as the Flintstones: herself as secondary character Betty Rubble, her oldest son and daughter as Fred and Wilma Flintstone, her youngest son and daughter as Bamm-Bamm Rubble and Pebbles Flintstone. Interestingly, Barney Rubble was absent, and Kanye W. (pater familias) was hidden as the Flintstone's pet dinosaur Dino.



¹⁵ First order being a faithful copy of the original; second, a perversion of reality; third masks an absence of a reality; and fourth is a pure simulacrum. Here the sign has no relationship to any reality whatsoever. See: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981).

The paradigm of the twenty-first-century family is one where the ambitious parents have accomplished themselves professionally before or even despite their offspring. The Kardashian family is the perfect example of this. Kylie Jenner, for instance, has a net worth estimated at 1 billion US dollars and is the world's youngest billionaire (as of March 2019).¹⁶ They have become the neo-liberal goddesses of consumption and they have named their children accordingly: Saint, Reign, Psalm, True, etc. They are dominant members and hyperreal embodiments of the current ideal of the nuclear family, of the changing (but still not equal) hierarchy between men and women, and the ultimate Dream (also a Kardashian's child's name) of many aspiring young humans.

Another real, though even grimmer depiction of the current inhabitant(s) of the fictional prehistoric cave, is the modern living situation of the "Universal Man"—still central in our highly individualized modern society. While problems of institutionalized marginalization of externalized minorities and the commodification and suffering of so many animal lives are still being reinforced, the hegemony of the "white, urbanized, a standard language speaking, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and full citizen of a recognized polity"¹⁷ male is unbothered, and continues to live in the cave. But in true twenty-first-century individualistic idiosyncrasy,

¹⁶ Natalie Robehmet, "At 21, Kylie Jenner Becomes The Youngest Self-Made Billionaire Ever," *Forbes*, March 5, 2019, forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmet/2019/03/05/at-21-kylie-jenner-becomes-the-youngest-self-made-billionaire-ever.

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

woman and child completely disappear from the scene, leaving him the sole inhabitant of the Man Cave.¹⁸

The jobs he is supposed to occupy are vanishing into thin air, taken over by immigrants and algorithms. The girls don't respect him, the leftists call him racist and the only thing left for him to do is, in a state of existential, egocentric *ennui*,¹⁹ turn to fully automated consumption, lonely and alone.

From this segregated position of privilege, his embittered mind is too preoccupied with hoarding bulks of canned food, collecting an offline, analogue collection of hentai porn and purchasing improvised weapons from the hardware store in preparation for the imminent apocalypse to worry about the nonhuman entities for whom “the tsunami of extinction has been a daily reality”.²⁰ Contrary to the caveman, for whom quite recently extinction came politely knocking on the door of his Man Cave, for the externalized, oppressed and appropriated other, “the Anthropocene is just a pathetic replay of what they know all too well.”²¹

¹⁸ “A man cave or manspace, and less commonly a manland or mantuary is a male retreat or sanctuary in a home, such as a specially equipped garage, spare bedroom, media room, den, or basement [...] where men are supposed to be able to do as they please, without fear of upsetting any female sensibility about house decor or design. “Man cave,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_cave.

¹⁹ An important term in the work of the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867).

²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, “Necropolitics and Ways of Dying” (lecture, Sonic Acts Festival, Amsterdam, February 22, 2019).

²¹ Braidotti, “Necropolitics.”

Mona Lisa Looks Ugly from the Side

*Celebrities, statesmen, history's elite
They're dripping in the hallways, they're starting to secrete
They're pouring out the pores, they're shrinking on the spot
Someone take a photograph, get 'em while they're hot* ²²

The dissolving of the exemption of Man (“the Universal (hu)Man”²³) could be described as the opening act of the posthuman predicament. Michel Foucault has written in *The Order of Things* that a category of thought emerges at the moment of its disappearance. Nietzsche famously declared the death of God²⁴ during the time that Christianity was entering a state of crisis. Foucault speaks about the death of Man,²⁵ the crisis of humanity, and I echo Rosi Braidotti in saying that his crisis has become terminal.

Braidotti elaborates on the demise of the *anthropos*. She argues that the modern capitalist model has aimed to control all that lives, having become bio-political.²⁶ Previously exempt humans are now in the same spheres of exploitation as non-anthropomorphic, animal or nonhuman others. The exodus of the categorical distinction distinguishing Human from the externalized Other produces a negative category: the human as endangered species. A human that dreads extinction, guards personal data, separates waste (which gets

²² Snippet from “Meltdown at Madame Tussauds” (1984) by the US-American Christian alternative rock singer Steve Taylor.

²³ “Universal? Human? Not neutral. Loaded with power differential. There in fact terms that almost police the access to what counts as humanity, and counting as human is an incredible entitlement. Not everybody does, or we do so differentially, in materially embedded embodied perspectives. We are not human in the same degree, not in the same way, and a lot of us humans are far more mortal than others.” Braidotti, “Necropolitics.”

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁶ “[Because] it exploits the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells.” Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

thrown in the same garbage truck afterwards) and lives in a shared “negative sort of cosmopolitan interconnection is therefore established through a pan-human bond of vulnerability.”²⁷

That leaves us with only one real inhuman hyper-object,²⁸ a post-anthropocentric²⁹ and opportunistic global economy, that haphazardly unifies all species under the imperative of the market and under insatiable consumption, repeats familiar patterns of oppression and threatens the *sustainability*³⁰ of our planet as a whole.³¹ What remains front and center on planet earth is neither the human, nor the consumer, but the act of consumption, the notion of progress and me buying these Reebok sneakers at 40% off in a pre-Black Friday deal.

An interesting example of the insatiable consumption of the human (human depictions, that is) by the human (human consumer, that is) is Madame Tussauds.³² When looking at the line-up of (in)famous wax delegates in the museum, one cannot ignore the immense discrepancies between the people represented. For some, their biggest controversy arose from them licking a donut and claiming that they

²⁷ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

²⁸ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

²⁹ Which is very different than non-anthropocentric, since there is still a reflective screen of correlationism that makes the world isolated, exclusive and detaches us from an interconnected symbiotic real.

³⁰ Even sustainability is inherently a post-anthropocentric idea. “What is being sustained, of course, is the neoliberal, capitalist world-economic structure. And this isn’t great news for humans, coral, kiwi birds or lichen.” Morton, *Humankind*.

³¹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

³² Owned by Merlin Entertainment, the business that brought you your favorites: Legoland, the Dungeons and Sea Life.

“hate America”;³³ for others, it was the genocide of roughly 11 million people.³⁴

The spectacular and insatiable consumption of these bodies does not differentiate between good or bad. The flux of sensation corresponds only with the familiarity of the person depicted, which changes from person to person, but usually is good news for Ariana Grande. Conrad’s terrifying dictum: “Exterminate the brutes!”³⁵ becomes “Consume these nonhuman representations!” (With selfies and spectacle.) The tourists pillage the entire premise of the building as a locust of grasshoppers, swarming around the wax bodies in a way that the ancient Egyptians would describe as an omen for the inevitable apocalypse,³⁶ Baudrillard as a pure simulacrum, severed from any reality whatsoever, and people visiting the Las Vegas strip as: “very annoying.”³⁷

Looking at my footage of a day at Madame Tussauds Amsterdam, I was confronted with the objectification of the wax figure of Anne Frank, which unsettled me to the core. Though it would be easy to penalize the obvious perpetrators present at the scene, they only act within a preconstructed capitalist format of the dehumanization of the

³³ On July 4, 2015, pop star Ariana Grande created a scandal when she was caught on video licking several donuts in a store and saying loudly: “I hate Americans. I hate America.” “It is not clear at this time if the affected donuts were disposed of or sold to another patron,” a police statement said. Ariana, after posting an apology video, was later forgiven by her fans as #WeForgiveYouAriana trended on twitter.

³⁴ As in the case of Adolf Hitler.

³⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Everyman, 1993) as quoted in: Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

³⁶ Exodus 10:12-15: “And the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that locusts swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail.”

³⁷ In late July 2019, a locust of grasshoppers descended on Las Vegas and swarmed around (among other things) the 30-storey pyramid that is the Luxor Hotel and Casino. The Sky Beam, a column of light from the top of the pyramid, was a magnet for the grasshoppers.

namesakes of these represented figures, and essentially even of the dehumanization of themselves in their roles as oblivious consumers.

There is no moral distinction suggested between a hyperreal Justin Bieber (the real, living counterpart of Justin Bieber looking less like his truer-to-life wax twin) and an orphaned Anne Frank (her living counterpart being erased in the most inhumane way possible, her material counterpart lying in a mass grave around Auschwitz.) Yes, Anne is sitting at her little desk in a separate room that seems a bit more solemn and considerate than the Marilyn Monroe–Shrek–ET combustion of a couple rooms before, but when the nonhuman humans are taking pictures of and with her, they are thinking about the assembly of Marvel heroes yet to come, and consume her all the same.

*Down in the dungeon, the Chamber of Horrors
Look at all the criminals soften to the cores
They're mixing with the head of state floating down the lane
Good, bad, there they go down the same drain*

To Respect the Posthuman (read; dead) Body or not to Respect the Posthuman (read; dead) Body

Interestingly enough, less than 300 meters from Justin and Anne, you find the plastinated bodies of humans, animals and others in BodyWorld, made anonymous to protect their privacy. All the human plastinates are (allegedly³⁸) from people who donated their bodies for plastination. One can assume that the plastination of the animal bodies was not voluntary.

In opposition to the wax figures at Madame Tussauds, whose bodies only display a certain cultural aftermath, severed from a physical original³⁹ and frozen in time, the representational identities of the plastinated bodies at BodyWorld remain undisclosed, leaving only muscles, tendons and bones exposed. Before we become sentimental (which I will), asking ourselves whether 'tis nobler to have your physical corpse plastinated, your personal life rescued from inevitable commodification, or to have your postmortal coil released to lie, roam, evaporate wherever and your namesake stuck in capitalist distortion, we must also realize that this schism inherently is an incredibly anthropocentric privilege. The animals, equally plastinated, don't have the luxury to ponder on these human conundrums.

Looking for a paradigmatic representative to find a more coherent answer, I dove deep into the gorge that is the Uncanny Valley, eventually finding myself in Bolzano, Italy.

In September 1991, a corpse was found by two German hikers in the Italian Ötztaler Alps. Only his head and shoulders were looming from

³⁸ In January 2004, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported that the founder of BodyWorld, Dr. Gunther von Hagens, had acquired corpses of executed prisoners in China; von Hagens countered that he did not know the origin of the bodies, and returned seven disputed cadavers to China.

³⁹ They are sometimes not even derived from an original, but, as with the wax figure of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* for example, from another reproduction.

the frozen mass, his face down, his brown skin stretched thinly over his skull, ribs and spinal cord.⁴⁰ Carbon dating showed the body to be 5300 years old.

This *Kahlkopfige Mumie, eisige Wunschvater, Alpenpharao, Unsterbliche, ausgeaperte Leiche, älteste Europaer* or *homo tyrolensis*⁴¹ was named Ötzi. His body was exhaustively studied, analyzed and catalogued. Sequence analysis of his genome revealed much about the life of a Chalcolithic⁴² human, and through unraveling the mystery of the Tyrolean Iceman, many pioneering technologies were developed. He had lyme disease. He was lactose intolerant. His last meal included dried ibex-meat.⁴³ For a hot minute he was thought to be the first *bottom*⁴⁴ ever when they found semen around his rectum (but this turned out to be an April Fool's joke).⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Brenda Fowler, *Iceman: Uncovering the Life and Times of a Prehistoric Man Found in an Alpine Glacier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴¹ In the Museum of Archeology Bolzano (Italy) there was an installation of transparent vertical plexiglass bands printed with words that hung from the ceiling. No sign explained whether it was made by an artist or was the ambitious project of a diligent intern. The words cast shadows on the white walls, sometimes flipping into an illegible mirrored version, sometimes reversing the words to make them clear. The words clumped together in a grey-ish cloud of prejudice and subjectivity that, if I understood the objective of the artist/intern, would develop an objective reflection of the perception of Ötzi.

⁴² This corresponds with the Copper Age, which is late-Neolithic. Ötzi is not old enough to be considered a pre-Neolithic human (i.e. before the agrarian revolution), but he is a prehistoric human.

⁴³ Mark Jobling, "The Iceman Cometh," The National Center for Biotechnology Information, April 16, 2012, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3418206/#B4>.

⁴⁴ Gay slang for a person receiving anal sex.

⁴⁵ David Reddish, "Mummified 'gay' man does not actually have semen in his rectum," Queerty, January 19, 2019, <https://www.queerty.com/mummified-gay-man-not-actually-semen-rectum-20190119>.

The story of Ötzi, with the mapping of his tattoos,⁴⁶ the speculations of possible murder and many other hypothesized reconstructions, was potentially a narrative compelling enough to retire the Flintstonian myths. As a *physical* representative for the prehistoric human he spoke to us, all the while incapable of speaking any human language.⁴⁷ His words didn't come from his hardened mouth or his frozen vocal tract. His access mode into the world was via enduring, decomposing or not decomposing. The lines on his body, in his intestinal tract and in his DNA communicated with us.

The animate corpse of Ötzi (animate through his posthumous, posthuman, language), is worthy of comparison with the differently dynamic corpse of Lenin, displayed at the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square in Moscow. Like Ötzi, the body of Lenin lacks a rigidity known to corpses; for Lenin, this is due to the procedure by which his corpse is *cultivated*. Cultivated, since the preservation of Lenin's corpse has always been about freezing his physical appearance, instead of his biological flesh.⁴⁸

Even more than that, the body of Lenin has been preserved in a manner securing his *dynamic* form. To this day, the joints of his body remain incredibly flexible and other invisible⁴⁹ body parts have been treated with utmost attention, as though they still expect him to open his eyes, pluck the fake eyelashes⁵⁰ from his empty eye sockets and

⁴⁶ Brad Pitt has an Ötzi tattoo. (Ötzi doesn't have a Brad Pitt tattoo.)

⁴⁷ Thinking, translating this thinking into verbal communication, vomiting that out of your eating-hole hoping the person in front of you will be able to hear, translating this back into thinking and ultimately understanding. (Which Ötzi can't do because he is dead.)

⁴⁸ Alexei Yurchak, "Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty," *Representations* 129, no. 1 (winter 2015): 116–157.

⁴⁹ Invisible to the visitors of the Lenin Mausoleum.

⁵⁰ "We had a very good histologist. He was buying artificial eyelashes, which were sold in regular [cosmetic] shops. And he managed to slide them under [the eyelids], so that there were at least some kind of eyelashes. Without eyelashes, it did not look good." Yurchak, "Bodies of Lenin."

arise from his mausoleum (even almost 30 years after the fall of the Soviet Union).

For his body to resemble a newly deceased Lenin, a lot of sacrifices had to be made. Yuri Lopukhin, a veteran scientist of the laboratory responsible for cultivating the body, described it as a *living sculpture*.⁵¹ “*After years of reembalming, resculpting, and substituting, this body today contains so many artificial materials and has changed so much from its original biological composition that in some sense it is closer to a wholly constructed representation of Lenin’s dead body than to the original, once living man.*”⁵²

The *living sculpture*, almost completely extraneous to Lenin’s authentic biology, is the closest thing the former Soviet state had to a holy relic. However, even though the voice of Lenin has echoed loud and clear in the Soviet Union for many years after his death, his sacred body had never been the source of wisdom for the ideology. The semi-real skin of his artificial corpse only served as a symbolic mouthpiece, perpetually embodying the foundational *Leninist* truth (often even unconnected to Lenin’s actual views) despite all internal crises of party organization and turns in its policy. The constant remodeling of his body has always taken place in parallel with the constant manipulation of his voice.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the immortal body of *Leninism* was detached from the pseudo-mortal corpse of Lenin. Since then, people remain unsure about the future of the body.⁵³

⁵¹ Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin.”

⁵² Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin.”

⁵³ “Attitudes are split between those who consider it a sacred symbol of the heroic revolutionary past, an evil emblem of a criminal regime, or a neutral monument of national history. Some argue that the body should remain in the mausoleum on Red Square, some that it should be buried elsewhere with state honors, and some that it should be publicly disgraced.” Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin.”

On visiting Ötzi in Bolzano I found that, like Lenin, whose immortal voice was allocated to his body but was actually situated in the sovereign party, Ötzi's story of endurance, the palpable picture of the prehistoric human spoken through his language of persisting, was located elsewhere too.

Ötzi was depicted on a huge touch screen table at the Museum on Archaeology, surrounded by fake technologically advanced interfaces that told the conditions of his teeth, showed extreme close ups of his tattoos and disclosed every detail known to man about his body. People young and old were probing and poking and pressing this touch screen with their greasy, unwashed fingers, which rippled out in pixels of distorted color because the fingers pressed too hard on the surface.

He was depicted on many banners, infographics, videos, reconstructions, illustrations and tiny models. But his most deceiving twin was his younger and prettier brother, made of wax, like Madame Tussauds' spectacular celebrities. He was standing tall and proud with a spear in his hand. I think his pants were Yeezy,⁵⁴ but I could be mistaken. In a spectacular hypothesis of his being, down to the side part of his thin grey hair and the primordial etching of black lines into the flesh of his bare lower back, the words of his story, derived from his frozen corpse, were materialized in a life size reconstruction.

⁵⁴ **A fashion line by Kanye West.**



“Ötzi never gives up!”

While all the details of the life of Ötzi were displaced in his duplications, the mortal body of Ötzi was confined in a cell of fake respect and silence. This simulated respect also meant not indulging in a spectacular design of the space where Ötzi has found his resting place. As a pious house of worship, the architects have abstained from too much ornament, sensational depiction or emotion. There was white, unflattering light, rationality and a clinical coldness that one would expect from a dentist’s office. But though his confinement was not tastelessly excessive, it didn’t mean there wasn’t spectacle in his display.⁵⁵

We waited in line for approximately 15 minutes, watching those in front of us gawk through a tiny window in an impenetrable metal wall. A fortress of ice-cold science and silence, in which my dearest Ötzi lay. A starry sky of LED lights, air conditioning grates and emergency sprinklers hovered over me. I couldn’t touch the glass and I couldn’t take pictures. I did both.

⁵⁵ To illustrate this; there was a rack of foldable sitting stools that visitors could take if they had walking difficulties, standing difficulties, or were just too goddamn lazy to stand while waiting in line to see Ötzi.

Ecce Ötzi

Let's say it dawned upon me there, and not months later while writing this essay, what Ötzi's corpse actually illustrates.

The mortal corpse of Ötzi is not a representative of the trials and tribulations of the prehistoric Man, he is much more the stellar subject in the story of his own resurrection. But this story, told by his enduring body in his posthuman language, has been displaced into hyperreal stunt doubles and retold to bring forth a new protagonist. In the new myth, his resurrection was not of his own doing but was done by the hand of a fictional God:⁵⁶ the wonders of advanced technology and progress.

The skin of respect and scientific objectivity is easily peeled from the same ol' capitalist scheme of consumerism and spectacle surrounding the mortal corpse (silenced like the nameless Others in Bodyworld) and the immortal story (consumed like the wax figure of Ariana Grande) of Ötzi. The physical prehistoric body becomes as much a commodity as a scientific subject, a mouthpiece for neoliberalist ideologies like those previously represented by the misogynist nuclear family of Fred Flintstone.

⁵⁶ Much like the resurgence of Jesus Christ.



A hypothesized approximation of Ötzi's voice was presented during a congress to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his discovery in September 2016. With the length of his vocal tract and vocal cord, Italian scientists were, with a “high degree of fantasy”,⁵⁷ able to make him utter five vowels in human language. Ötzi finally broke his silence after 5400 years of incredible endurance, his long-awaited prophecy told us “A E I O U” (Supposedly in Italian.)

At the very nadir of the Uncanny Valley, Ötzi is urgently converted into a vessel for propaganda to subjugate his abjection⁵⁸. Mere externalization, the fate of other harmless nonhumans, is not enough to fully dismantle him as a “threat to humankind”. Like the corpse of Lenin, his posthumous body is neutralized through setting him up to be an agent for the humanistic ideology he threatens to deconstruct.

At this position of being *not-like-us-but-also-not-unlike-us-enough*,⁵⁹ Ötzi gets commodified for all the reasons why he is like “us” (us actually being the humanistic ideology surrounding “us”). His story even resembles the anguish of the Man Cave as a story of isolation,

⁵⁷ F. Avanzini, P. Cosi, R. Füstös and A. Sandi, “When Fantasy meets science: An attempt to recreate the voice of Ötzi the ‘Iceman’”, *Associazione Italiana Scienze della Voce* 3 (2017): 425–431.

⁵⁸ “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.” Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁵⁹ Morton, *Humankind*.

pained wandering, antagonism towards his environment and dreaded extinction. But this commodification comes only second to him being a danger to the supremacy of the human species for the reasons why he is unlike “us”. I would not be surprised if the characteristics of Ötzi’s world that are unrepresented in his familiar celebrated story, the tale of his *life*⁶⁰ rather than his death, would actually exhibit an interdependent and pan-human alternative to our anthropocentric isolation and oppose the fake inevitability of capitalist humanism.

Similar to Lenin’s body, the corpse of Ötzi will become superfluous when the immortal narrative he represents collapses. We will look at the shimmering corpse in the cooling cell, and be unable to think of any sensible reason why we keep him from decomposing. One day, when we shed our deeply imbedded skins of humanistic anthropocentrism, our capitalist ideas of never-ending progress and our insatiable urge for consumption and spectacle, maybe then we can strike an alliance with the productive and immanent force of *zoe* and let Ötzi’s language be one of posthumous⁶¹ decay. Maybe this is when we become posthuman ourselves.

The light was dim and the glass was moist with condensation. His body was brown and glimmering as if he was wet and sweaty, a humidity that spread evenly over his brown-skinned body and made me think he had just taken a swim and was now drying in the sun, for

⁶⁰ The language he spoke, the things he thought, the people he loved and how he saw the world.

⁶¹ “The posthumous is literally posthuman in that it follows human life, but how might the posthumous also exist along a continuum with the living, entailing a reconceptualization of what counts as “life”? For much of its history (and the corpse, too, has a history that intertwines with that of the living), the corpse has represented a “naturalized” conception of the body. Its fate dictated by enzymes and colonies of bacteria, the corpse marks the cessation of rationalist control over the body, the moment when the socially defined person is given over to biological forces, and the molar form of the human yields to the molecular processes of decomposition.” Erin E. Edwards, *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

he also looked dry, barren and exhausted of every single driblet of water in his fragile body, like a raisin or sundried tomato left in the Tuscan sun by a clumsy farmer who had forgotten about them, about him, causing him to sweat in the heat until he had almost evaporated and disappeared forever. But he had not been found in scorching heat but in freezing cold. The icy blanket of snow a prison for his starving body that craved oblivion. But however he tried to decompose, he was frozen in a permanent dab-position, no vultures to take his organs or maggots to eat his flesh. The actual vultures, not allowed to touch his body with their warm, bacteria-spangled hands that would eat away his skin, came much later, gawking at his cruel destiny of ice and science. His glistening body was perpetually sealed in a humidity of 98,75% and a temperature of -6,29 degrees, mortal but frozen immortal, to forever be a silent representative for the fictions of his cold-blooded captors.

I exhaled against the glass and drew a heart.

