

## Artifact of the Anti-verbal Era

**Author:** Iulia Teodorescu

### **Works of fiction that inspired the work:**

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World* (1932); Borges, Jorge Luis, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"  
from *Ficciones*, (1940)

### **Academic papers that inspired the work:**

Nagel, Thomas, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat' (1979)

## Foreword

The following document records a turning point in human history, spanning from the anti-linguistic riots of the 2120s to the establishment of Touch-talk as a global language. Having pieced together the following diary, anthropologists present 'Artifact of the Anti-verbal Era', a dialogue across the ages. Please follow the footnotes for further elucidation and note that the entire manuscript has been translated into Touch-talk for your convenience.

10th January, 2183

Till swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit,  
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,  
And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow.<sup>1</sup>

My dearest grandchildren. This is your inheritance.

Forgive the quote; ironically, it perfectly expresses my anti-verbal sentiments. Because I cannot see you, have never met you, I know you must have questions. I want to leave you a record of why these things have come to pass so that you can hold me with you in trying times and understand why I have done what I have.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*.

You should know by the time you read this that the untethering has begun. Significations that have taken centuries to perfect are beginning to detach from the objects they anchored. It started with deconstructing the gender binary.

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What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

~~You~~ cannot say, or guess, for ~~you~~ know only

A heap of broken images<sup>2</sup>

This is X.<sup>3</sup>      can't remember      last time      held      pen.<sup>4</sup>  
shaking.      words have been singed and these are      ashes.      found  
some blank pages into which      can pour      anguish.      can barely read  
ancient scrawlings that come before .<sup>5</sup>

There's      echo throbbing in      chest that can't be appeased by rhythm or Touch-  
talk. Something keeps drawing      back here, to these absurd scratchings on

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<sup>2</sup> The general consensus among academics is that this quote originates from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, an ancient piece of literature predating the year 2000. The writer appears to have torn a page from this work and relocated it, as they have done with several other works.

<sup>3</sup> This later entry appears to date from approximately 2300. The simple act of self-naming combined with the accumulation of scraps from ancient literature would have considered tantamount to blasphemy.

<sup>4</sup> In the years preceding this entry, singular pronouns were deemed so inflammatory that they were excised from any remaining relics altogether.

<sup>5</sup> Though both texts have been modernised for readers' convenience, in the original, verbal language had so far evolved that the later author would have found it nearly impossible to decode the original entries.

flimsy piece of fabric behind what was our wallpaper.<sup>6</sup> Before tore  
down with sharpened fury for association with written word. Before  
tore our union due to association with written word.  
part of has died. feel compulsion to populate these blank  
pages with shadow.

~

You'd be surprised to hear that I have not always thought the way I do now. When I was young, I was caught up in the harmony of letters and words. I feasted on novels and poems and history just as you most likely do now, convinced that humanity's greatest fruits sprung forth in verbal form. That was before I realised that language can be entrapping. Language can be a constraint, it can hold within its seams cultural assumptions that cannot be unpicked. Before you dismiss me, let me explain.

I was one of the forerunners of that first rebellion. I created a ripple in the anti-verbal tide. We birthed a counter-current of fire and abstraction. You know it as a radical organisation composed of enemies of the state, but hear me when I tell you that it is a movement towards liberation.<sup>7</sup> Your parents have done all they can to remove you from me, but I need you to understand what has caused this rift.

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<sup>6</sup> The manuscript was found hidden in a wall.

<sup>7</sup> This period was privy to a bitter war between the state and the anti-linguistic rebels, the aftermath of which divided generations. So impassioned were people in their allegiances that even members of the same family betrayed one another. For more on how the revolution threatened legislation and the nuclear family, see Angela Harrod's, *The War of No Words* (2560).

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Some time ago heard voice outside, not drumming but voice as they once  
were. bled this onto streets- remember?

"Ah, Porphyro!" said ~~she~~, "but even now  
~~Thy~~ voice was a sweet tremble in ~~mine~~ ear,  
Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;  
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:  
How chang'd ~~thou~~ art! how pallid, chill, and drear!  
Give me that voice again, ~~my~~ Porphyro!"<sup>8</sup>

There was hush; break in rhythm. Maybe that was what first broke  
our rhythm. Speech was not then banned, as recall. Most people- including -  
felt was vulgar, shameful. The remnants of fallen history. But feel this. Those  
rhythms syncopate with cadences of our fingers and pulses.<sup>9</sup>

In writing, hope to delimit feelings, divide, examine, and master  
them. There was always something so satisfying, so cathartic about capturing and wielding  
thought and striking down forever. remember from student  
days, before believing words were tool of oppression, way we

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<sup>8</sup> Our facsimile illustrates that the quote seems to have been ripped from an earlier (now defunct) poem called *The Eve of St. Agnes* by John Keats, and superimposed onto the diary pages. Note that the singulars have been erased.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Touch-talk, see *The Linguistics of Touch*, ed. by J. D. Mellin (October, 2542).

luxuriated in letters. Real gluttons we were. Before wallpaper stopped being  
ours, and became alone.

~

3rd February, 2183

It pains me to know I can never hold you to me and give you these words in person. But at least hear me here, in these flawed markings.

There is good and evil in every revolution. At first, I was swept up in the flow of idealism. I was enraptured by the idea of systemic change but was not fully aware of its implications. I began to understand the ways in which language had broken me and so many people around me. The way it twined around the fundamental pillars of society and instead of strengthening them, as I had believed, it created cracks, pulled us apart from the crevices it clung to. I knew how language can be weaponised, how susceptible it is to being overwritten with vicious intentions. But I had to see it for myself to believe it. I saw language being wielded as a bomb, shattering all in its wake.<sup>10</sup>

That was why I dedicated my days and nights to generating non-verbal linguistic research. I want you to take my harvest; I want you to be nourished by a language free from deceit, from oppression, from intolerance, from rigidity. There will be losses and there have been losses. That

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<sup>10</sup> It is unclear which event the writer is referring to here, but there was a wealth of devastations during this time period in which police brutality was rife, and it is possible this is what the writer is alluding to.

is the fact of the matter, there's no escaping it. With the extinction of singular pronouns there may be a movement away from individualism. The entire structure of society will change. And I cannot say what your future holds. But I have every intention that you will live in a world in which one cannot render hatred and fear material. And if all must fall silent for that to happen, so be it.

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Let us recall the way we used to debate. I held that that to uphold language as a thing of beauty is to oppress. I remember the words – when we feast on words, we feast on opposition, on divides. How much further have we come since we rejected the poisons of gender, of age, of family relationships? How volatile and pressurised the old pronouns have been. Bombs. Why trap a person within a word, I said.

With more progressive forms of communication, we are more in touch (literally) with our fellow creatures and environment. Touch-talking further erodes the barriers that language sought to enforce. How daft humans were, thinking we could go beyond. Faustian beings.

Till swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit,  
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,  
And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow.<sup>11</sup>

want to say apologise. Each cut of pen is another laceration. Do  
remember when was distant for days, avoided touch? wasn't ill.  
had found this- relic of past. And that's when  
began to be unfaithful.

don't know if will ever see or be able to dredge up  
ability to decipher these letters. not entirely sure want to. But at  
least here, in some form, carved truth in durable form. oxymoron,  
would say, recording and truth-telling. But here is- truth.

Words can be beautiful. They can be lucid. More direct than touch even if wielded correctly. Of  
course, know felt they were too dangerous, atomic as their past has  
been.

When we first met under jasmine, pulses thrumming, it was not rhythm that  
surfaced in . was words:

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<sup>11</sup> Here, the same passage from *Doctor Faustus* is repeated across generations in an extraordinary moment of lucidity.



But ~~thy~~ eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair ~~thou~~ ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag ~~thou~~ wander'st in ~~his~~ shade,  
When in eternal lines to time ~~thou~~ grow'st,  
So long as ~~men~~ can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to ~~thee~~.<sup>12</sup>

Do            feel it?            is for            that            shore these fragments, in  
                 memory, in these pages.    is            why            enclosed            in here for  
days on end beyond            touch.

When            put            affairs in order, cataloguing all objects according to weight,  
shape, size, temperature, smell, that is exactly what words do.<sup>13</sup> They file and label and  
enclose objects, so effectively that they can be immediately found again with  
least effort. Centuries of human revelry, love, knowledge, discovery, religion, custom, can be  
untangled from            symphony of figures.

~

I want you to have a better future than I had. It's time you realised the atrocities committed with  
language as ammunition. In my will, I have left a few volumes that I hope you will suffer to read.  
They speak of the advent of post-truth, of warmongering, of political manipulation and schisms.

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<sup>12</sup> William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18.

<sup>13</sup> The reader will of course be aware of the irony that Touch-talk too later evolved categorical and, as many argue, oppressive modes of communication.

Hatred, war, ethnic cleansing, genocide, all have been conceived of and disseminated through verbal languages.

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worry about state of things now. Our people, wandering, vacant, whimsical as they commune with nature. No sound but of birds filling air with primitive screechings. We are beyond that. We are denying our capabilities as species. What could tree or bat or mountain have to say? Their poetry is inferior to ours, their history less glorious.<sup>14</sup>

When last picked up \* from school, again stared at state of affairs.<sup>15</sup> Rooms bereft of divisions, stairs, stages, platforms, pictures with no frames. Children permitted to learn whatever they like in any way they like. deafening orgy of rhythm as each shared touch in this godless manner. Child as both teacher and learner, world at their fingertips. No hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

What is that sound high in the air

Murmur of maternal lamentation<sup>17</sup>

stood in doorway of educational park, toes itching within tightly-laced shoes. Nobody wears shoes anymore. Too confining, supposedly. As

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<sup>14</sup> Here, the writer seems to echo anthropologists Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan, key proponents of the theory of 'Unilineal evolution', a 19th-century social theory which proposed that Western culture was the height of evolution. Evidently, they have not read Franz Boas's counterargument, 'The Methods of Ethnology' (1920).

<sup>15</sup> In this period, naming one's children was frowned upon, and this small symbol is a gesture of resistance.

<sup>16</sup> This word appears to have been vandalised in subsequent years.

<sup>17</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

stood watching, pulse strained to leap from chest, from  
confines of buttoned shirt. writings, lovingly enclosed in their rightful  
places in compact suitcase, seemed to shift and grow light, bursting from  
seams, longing to break forth into seething air.

Knowledge forbidden?

Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord

Envy them that? Can it be a sin to know?

Can it be death?<sup>18</sup>

These fragments I have shored against ~~my~~ ruins<sup>19</sup>

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In a few decades we may speak through touch, rhythm, temperature, smell. For the time being, I address this to you, my dearest offspring, verbally, though I know we shall soon find a means to translate these reflections into a purer form.

You will laugh to remember how you wished to ask me, wide-eyed, what happens to Shakespeare and Chaucer and Woolf and Brontë? What happens to history, to legacy, to research, to progress? And you will remember my reply. Our past has been nothing but linguistic hoarding. Even the most innocuous word is poisoned. Be brave. To move forward, we must leave all behind.

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<sup>18</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>19</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

## **Afterword**

This is all that remains of the manuscript, since the remaining pages were likely destroyed in the ritual burnings of the 2350s. It is the sole extant document which testifies to a set of events that changed the path of history, before verbal and tactile languages began to exist in harmony.