I take my title from Yorgos Loizos’ essay in this issue of Design Ecologies. Loizos describes the aesthetic framework by using a bizarre list of entities, a listing technique we must now associate with object-oriented ontology: ‘I will present a series of design strategies that generate a spatial complexity informed by the rural environment of a seaside pier, a theatre of the bizarre – a freak show, a chemical photographic process and a cyborg, a storefront in an urban environment’ (2011). His essay outlines the way in which human encounters with everyday objects can be uncanny. What does this have to do with ecology? Everything. The more we know about life forms, the more we know about the biosphere, the more uncanny they become. Science does not demystify things at all, but rather returns our expectations to us warped and strangely recontextualized. The age of ecological awareness is an age of uncanniness, not a love and lighty place of total authenticity. In this respect it is more postmodern than postmodernism, if we take that ‘post’ to mean ‘genuinely beyond the modern’.
I date this modern from the time of the Romantic period, which happily is the first historical reference point in Loizos’ essay. Loizos rightly references E. T. A. Hoffman’s *The Sandman* ([1816] 1982), the story that provoked Freud into thinking the uncanny. At the very moment at which lines of thinking developed that culminated in George Bush’s and Pope John Paul’s ‘culture of [bare] life’, life itself began to slip like sand out of the firm grip of biological essentialism. For a start, what distinguishes a life form from non-life? Not very much. Life forms are made of non-life. For another thing, doesn’t life consist in a frantic effort to get rid of the stain of itself, all the way down to the DNA level – and indeed beyond, since RNA and other replicators predate DNA? What is called *life* just is the expression of unstable molecules that contain some kind of inner disequilibrium. In their attempt to cancel themselves out, to solve their inner paradox, they ironically produce more of themselves. The frantic repetition of life is what Freud calls *death drive*, for this very reason. The effort to kill the zombie reproduces the zombie. Freud examines the manifestations of the death drive down to the scale of a single celled organism in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. But surely we can go at least as far as DNA, which itself is an uncanny kluge of viral code insertions, viroids, DNA code from thousands of other species mixed together, ‘junk’ and so on. And why stop there? DNA requires ribosomes and ribosomes require DNA, so there is a vicious circle. To break it, there must have been an RNA world in which DNA had not yet developed. In RNA world, RNA molecules attached to some other replicator, perhaps a silicate crystal of some kind. So now we have uncanny repetition at the level of non-life, just like the puppet Olympia.

If this is the case, perhaps we ought not to stop even there. If it is the case already that RNA, a nonsentient molecule (nonsentient at least in the standard definition of sentience), exhibits some kind of ‘drive’ beyond ‘life’ do away with itself, then surely other nonsentient beings might be the same. Surely there is a reason why replicating molecules can exist in the first place? And if, to solve its inner paradox, RNA hitched a ride on a silicate that was also a replicator, why confine our search for the death drive to organic molecules? Why can a molecule such as a self-replicating silicate crystal arise in the first place? It seems likely that such replicators are themselves expressions of an inherent instability in objects in general. Indeed, this instability might not be confined to the ‘building blocks’ out of which things are made, but might affect ‘macro-scale’ entities such as the badgers and bottle nosed dolphins made out of DNA’s attempt to cancel itself out. And what about other things such as ‘a freak show, a chemical photographic process and a cyborg, a storefront in an urban environment’? Why not?

What is the nature of the inner paradox of DNA? It is an irreducible contradiction. Viruses and even smaller viroids provide good examples of how genetic codes are self-contradictory. A virus is a bundle of DNA or RNA wrapped in protein shell; a viroid is an even simpler strand of RNA, just a few hundred ‘letters’ long. When a virus enters a host cell, its DNA or RNA instructs the genes in the host to reproduce itself. A virus is basically what logic calls a Henkin sentence: ‘There is a version of me in your system’. This sentence provokes the genetic system to find the ‘version’. But the Henkin sentence
Figure 1: Potato Tuber Spindle Viroid (Secondary Structure).
contains a secret code that says something like ‘This code is false’. So that when the host genome tries
to locate the version of the viral genome, it gets caught in a loop and starts to produce more of the
virus. A virus, in other words, is indistinguishable from a computer virus.

The statement ‘This code is false’ is a version of what logic calls the Liar. All Cretans are liars, says
a Cretan. Is he telling the truth? If he is, then he is a liar, so he is not telling the truth. Is he lying? If
so, then he must not be a liar – in which case he is lying. Both versions of the sentence ‘This sentence
is true’ are true simultaneously, producing what is known as a dialectica: a double-truthed statement.

Aristotle first states the law of non-contradiction (LNC) that asserts that dialecticae are not legal. No
one since Aristotle has ever proved why – the ban on dialecticae remains an assertion only. For over
two millennia logic has tried to rid itself of these viral parasites. But just like the struggle between
humans and the cold virus (rhinovirus), the parasites adapt to its hosts newfound resistance. So a
logician can follow Alfred Tarski’s lead and imagine a rigid ‘metalanguage’ that will tell me what
counts as true and false, and which excludes the pesky viral dialecticae from logic. Since on this view
‘This sentence is false’ is not a real sentence, there is no need to worry about it. But now the dialectica
virus can adapt, making a stronger version of itself: ‘This sentence is not true’. It uses the very criteria
of truth that the logician sets up to exclude it. So the logician decides that ‘This sentence is not true’ is
neither true nor false. But the dialectica can increase its power: ‘This sentence is false or neither true
nor false’. So like an exasperated child in a playground fight, our logician ups the ante by declaring all
such sentences neither false, nor true nor false, nor some fourth thing as yet unspecified. That should
do the trick. But no: ‘This sentence is false or neither true nor false or the fourth thing’. And so on.

Why? I believe that logical dialecticae are like radio signals from a distant star. What is the distant
star? Simply the real world, from which philosophy has shrunk since the age of Kant. Part of the
disaster of modernity is the confinement of thinking to smaller and smaller areas of ground marked
‘human meaning’, while what is known as ‘science and technology’ get on with the serious business
of mindlessly searching for more and more all encompassing ways of enfaming the world in the vice
like grip of pure functionality (Heidegger 1982). One of the things that modernity damaged, along
with the biosphere, was thinking. A blind adherence to the LNC is part of what caused the damage.

The now distant star of real objects is a place of contradictions. Objects are liars. Consider the simple
fact of fragility. There are ontological reasons why an object is fragile, not simply to do with the power
of other objects, but with an inner weakness inherent to all objects that allows them to be broken and
unwound. Douglas Hofstadter provides a revealing analogy for what viruses do. For every record player
there is a record called I Cannot Be Played on this Record Player. When you put the record on this record
player, it emits amplified sounds that correspond to the resonant frequencies of the record player itself.
The sounds blow up the record player. Hofstadter shows that no matter how carefully one designs the
record player – even incorporating self-defense mechanisms and surveillance technologies – there will
always be a record that can get around the defenses and destroy the record player.
Figure 2: Resonant Frequency.

- $\omega_n$: Natural Frequency
- $\omega$: Input Frequency
- Disastrous resonance when $\delta = 0$ for $\omega_n/\omega = 1$

**Maximum Curve:**

- $\delta = 0.15\omega_n$
- $\delta = 0.2\omega_n$
- $\delta = 0.3\omega_n$
- $\delta = 0.4\omega_n$

**Envelope:**

- $1/[1 - (\omega_n/\omega)^2]]^{1/2}$
- $\delta = 0$
Hofstadter uses this analogy to explain a version of the Liar found in number theory. Kurt Gödel demonstrated that for every coherent theory, there is always one theorem that the theory cannot prove: ‘This statement cannot be proved in this system’. What Gödel means is quite astonishing: it is that coherent systems that are true are necessarily incomplete, not that they lack a certain degree of truth. To be coherent, a theory has to be inconsistent. Alan Turing formalized Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem as a solution to Hilbert’s Halting Problem (Entscheidungsproblem). To do this, Turing created imaginary machines that were the progenitors of computers: Turing Machines that read a feed of tape. Turing’s version of Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem is that a Turing Machine cannot predict when every single programme will stop or whether it is in an infinite loop.

Turing’s envisioning of ‘hard’ machines that exemplified the Incompleteness Theorem loop us back to thinking about the record player and the record called I Cannot Be Played on This Record Player. We could indeed apply Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem to physical objects. What does this mean? It means that objects are ontologically fragile. Ontologically here means that an essential facet of their very being is inconsistent. It is not simply that objects happen one unfortunate day to explode or die. It means that objects have this death, this ending, inscribed within their hearts in order to exist at all. Fragility is a default condition of objects. From this we can hypothesize that when an object is destroyed, what happens is that its inner fragility gets the better of its coherence. Think of a large thin-stemmed wine glass. An opera singer sings a note that resonates with the glass and the glass explodes into fragments. Somehow the note engages with the inner fragility of the glass like a virus sending DNA into a loop.

What is the inner fragility of an object? Simply that for an object to exist, it must be inconsistent. On this view, objects are not those things that are identical to themselves, but those things that are non-identical and hence fragile. Objecthood is not some boring lumpish existence, but a weird, uncanny half-life, like an isotope that emits charged particles, slowly decaying into non-existence. Death, non-existence is consistency, not life, not existence. In this I suggest that thinking now make a 180˚ swerve from the LNC and from the empty theories that prop it up with their brittle logics, susceptible to viruses. What thinking needs, what humans need, what the ecological emergency needs, is not more brittleness, not more flood barriers against reality. What is required is, I argue – and this will sound very counterintuitive until I make it a little more clear – is a new age of weakness, lameness and hypocrisy. At almost every level of human production, imagination, rest, thinking, being, what is required is the weak, the lame and the hypocritical. The current ecological emergency demands this! Why?

Human action has been reduced to hypocrisy by the existence of gigantic entities – the hyperobjects – that we realize surround us, such as biosphere, climate, global warming, evolution. These are beings that humans cannot see in one go. We only see slices of what are gigantic objects executing themselves in various kinds of high dimensional phase space. Inside these gigantic whales, some of which were brought into being by humans ourselves, no perfect, ‘right’ philosophical, ethical, political or
psychological stance is possible. This is for the very reason that we are inside them. As Kierkegaard wrote, ‘Against God we are always in the wrong’: we are now able to revise this to ‘Against the hyperobject we are always in the wrong’. Do nothing about global warming? Wrong. Solar panels? Huge energy to make them. Nuclear? Just consider Fukushima and Chernobyl. Drive a Prius? It will not solve the fundamental problem. Refuse to drive a Prius? Worse. And so on. We have been reduced to hypocrisy: a fundamental gap between our aspirations and our actions.

Non-humans have done this to us. Non-humans are responsible for the next big upgrade of human intelligence, the one that results from the beginning of what geology now calls the Anthropocene, a geological period like the Holocene or Pleistocene, but one for which humans are directly responsible. In 1945 a thin layer of radioactive materials was deposited around Earth as the result of nuclear testing at Trinity, New Mexico and bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This marked the beginning of the Anthropocene with an uncanny accuracy: the lightning flash of human history meshing with the vast roar of geological history. In this moment, as Benedict Singleton argues here, we confront a trickster reality, precisely because we know more about it. Our apprehension of the world is upgraded as non-human beings arise to swallow us whole. This is an age of asymmetry, unlike any historical moment humans have yet encountered.

We are radically inside hyperobjects. Even if we move to Mars, we are doing so with reference to global warming, as Kim Stanley Robinson’s novels make clear (Robinson 1993, 1994, 1997). Humans are now living the truth articulated by post-structuralism, the truth that Jacques Lacan announced in his typically lapidary way: ‘There is no metalanguage’ (1977: 311). No position outside the world is possible from which to see it perfectly. Cynicism is dead. Cynicism has been unmasked as hypocritical hypocrisy: the cynic believes that if she or he vomits nastily enough, it will change someone's mind. The cynic hopes. Thus the cynic is a hypocrite: she thinks that she is free of illusion, and in the very thinking of this, she is deluded. Notice, moreover, that to have no metalanguage is also to live the truth of the Liar: no metalanguage is capable of coping with the inevitable dialetheias of logic. Non-humans have kicked away LNC, since we appeared so reluctant to do so. Indeed, our love of non-contradiction is, as I suggested above, partially responsible for the last 200 years of industry, capitalism and technology, since positivism and technical domination of Earth depend upon getting down to atomic facts that can be manipulated as easily as possible. The ecological emergency is a deadlock in thinking, logic and ontology as well as a deadlock of industry and technology and capitalism. While the deadlock persisted, Earth was redesigned by humans. The name of this deadlock is modernity. Humans are now witnessing the end of modernity, the birth of a truly postmodern era. In this era, designed things start to speak back, like Frankenstein’s creature, to their makers. Nonhumans are leading the mass evacuation of modernity.

I suggested a while back that logical dialetheias such as ‘This sentence is false’ are radio signals from a distant star, and that this distant star just is the very earth beneath our feet, a popsicle melting in our fingers, the steering wheel of a Mazda and mint growing haphazardly in the cracks between

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Figure 3: Trinity Test at 0.016 Seconds.
broken paving stones. Or as Yorgos Loizos puts it, ‘the rural environment of a seaside pier, a theatre of the bizarre – a freak show, a chemical photographic process and a cyborg, a storefront in an urban environment’. These entities, which I shall call objects for short, are inconsistent because they exhibit a profound rift between essence and appearance.

This is not your grandma’s rift between essence and appearance. Back in her day, essences were rather boring cupcakes without flavour, while appearances were like little sugar sprinkles on top in various pretty colours: substance and accidence. By contrast, I assert that ‘substance’ (whatever that is) and ‘accidence’ (whatever that is) are both manifestations of what I call appearance. That is, substanti-

ality is a performance-for another being such as a human. It is a particular way in which I grasp this sprig of mint, this heavy power-steering column, this soil beneath my toes. The same goes for things that old ontology thought of as accidental: colour, shape and so on. Such things are appearances-for. A flower appears a certain way for a bee who can see in ultraviolet. The same flower appears a certain way for me, who wants to decorate my front garden with a patch of yellow just there.

The bee fails to capture the whole flower when she uses the ultraviolet lines as a landing strip. I fail to capture the whole flower when I plant it in this bank. No use of the flower, no appropriation, no act of intention or aesthetic appreciation, will ever capture the flower as flower. This is for the perfectly simple reason that a use of a flower is not a flower; an aesthetic appreciation of a flower is not a flower; and so on. Using this notion, we can massively expand the idea of design to include non-human beings. A human designs a chair, but dust uses the chair in another way when it gently falls on it. Strictly the dust redesigns the chair, in a way that humans might not care to appreciate – but it still happens. A photograph of the chair performs another act of appropriation altogether. A restless cat also enjoys the chair in her own unique way. My greasy fingers redesign the chair, coating them with their sheen. Human design takes places within a gigantic universe of non-human design. Every single object is a designed thing, in this sense, not the work of some divine designer, but simply the appropriation-for by some entity. Design just is ecology: design ecologies.

Moreover, this design universe is possible precisely because it is like a vast ocean of sensuality floating on top of – ontologically on top of, not spatially – real objects, which are always withdrawn from access. The flower can not be appropriated completely by anything, including itself. The petals are not the flower. The shape of the flower is not the flower. The molecules in the flower are not the flower. The flower’s genome is not the flower. And so on. Thus there is a profound, ontological rift between essence – withdrawal – and appearance – appropriation-for. The flower is a non-flower, at the same time. (What is the difference between a duck? One of its legs is both the same.)

We inhabit an outrageously full universe of strange and dark designs. Even our own designs get away from us: that is what they do, by definition. The very term design is beautifully succinct in this regard, since it allows us to think causality as a kind of aesthetics: I have designs on you; I design – I draw, I write, I plan; and so on. For causality just is aesthetics. This is made elegantly clear in Benedict
Figure 4: Rudbeckia Flower, Viewed in Ultraviolet Light.
Singleton’s essay here on design as *craft* and *being crafty* (Greek, *mētis*), or in Claudia Westermann’s appropriation in this journal of Michel de Certeau’s concept of *strategies*. Mathew Emmett writes vividly about an abandoned underground bunker from World War II in this issue: ‘The bunker triggers a state of hypersensitivity, releasing the body to feel the depth of space physically, enabling the gap between experience and reality to be explored’. All objects strategize: they are capable of machinations, craft, design. Because of what Emmett calls ‘the gap between presence and reality’, this world is intrinsically shifty and disturbingly inconsistent: ‘What constitutes pretense is that, in the end, you don’t know whether it’s pretense or not’ (Lacan 1981: 48). The very existence of withdrawn objects guarantees the play of illusion in which what is called *aesthetics* and what is called *causality* float.

There is not a single pocket of breathing room in this universe. The universe of designed–designing objects is crammed to the brim, like an Expressionist painting in which leering faces press menacingly against the glass of the picture in a gallery. A freak show. Space is not a box, but a dynamic vortex that emerges from objects, as relativity theory shows us; a *khora* in the Platonic language Claudia Westermann cites here. For the same reason, time is not a container in which objects float, but is part of the continuum of space–time emitted by objects. Space–time is part of appearance, not essence. It is part of the design dimension. Space, time, causality, are aesthetic appearances that float ‘in front of’ things. Beings are isotopes that radiate ghosts of themselves. It is the unlocatable, irreducible rift between this dimension and the withdrawn essence of a thing that makes everything that exists fragile.

As soon as something exists it has started to die. To die is to be flattened into pure appearance. I become your memories, some paper crumpled in a wastebasket, a faded flower in the street, some ash, an abandoned subterranean bunker. Some viral code, a cancer maybe, tickles my inconsistency and I happily unravel myself, no longer forced to live the paradox of the Liar. My weak spot is revealed, and my inner rift collapses, evaporating into appearance only, appearance-for (you, the priest, the crematorium, the newspaper clipping, the tree planted in memoriam). My death seems to be nowhere in the objectively present world – that is, in the world of appearances-for. Indeed, some new objects have been born: a gravestone, the abandoned darkness of the bunker. Precisely – the rift is no more; the unique rift that constituted my being has collapsed, and I am just a floating aesthetic appearance, an uncanny trace, just a ghost.

Biological awareness just is hypocritical coexistence with a plenum of weak beings. All beings are not only weak, but lame, in the sense that they contain at least one tragic flaw, a wound (Greek, *hamartia*) that allows them to be shattered, blown up, resonated to death, like a wine glass when it meets its opera singer nemesis. Just before it shatters the glass has a little orgasm, rippling rhythmically – they call it the *little death*. Just before I die of a massive stroke my brain waves go into coherence, undulating in sync. Some shoegazer bands of the early 1990s designed music to make your ears bleed, music that was so beautiful that you could not refrain from listening to its siren song. Sound is an entity that spreads, seeking out its hearer, ‘tuning’ them in the terms of Kjell Yngve...
Figure 5: James Ensor, The Despair of Pierrot (1892).
Figure 6: Great Pacific Ocean Garbage Patch.
Petersen’s essay here. As Petersen argues, the aesthetic–causal space is nonlocal and nontemporal. I can hear My Bloody Valentine’s 1992 album *Loveless* oozing across the room from JBL iPod speakers in 2011. Is it not possible to imagine a work of art that could synchronize with its audience like this, producing in them a subject-quake that was as near to dying as possible? Objects are lame, they halt, like Turing’s machines — but we can never predict when all will halt — objects limp along, hamstrung by their inner inconsistency. In the movie *Plastic Bag* (2009), a designed thing, the eponymous bag, its inner monologue narrated by Werner Herzog (who else?), floats around in the ocean near, the huge vortex of spinning bags in the Pacific. It wishes that it could ask just one question of its maker: ‘If I could meet my maker, I would tell her just one thing: I wish that she had created me so that I could die’. Do all things yearn for consistency, for death? It is certainly the ecological emergency that has shown us objects that obscenely outlive their makers: a Styrofoam cup, plutonium, global warming, a plastic bag. These are the beings that, like Tithonus condemned to eternal aging, force us to see the vast, ungracefully objects in which and with which we have our being.

Standing in the place of the death drive, then, the ultimate ethical position that Lacan sketches out in his study of the still uncanny, still terrifying Sophocles play *Antigone*, is precisely being as weak as possible. Allowing oneself, in other words, to coexist with as many lame beings as one possibly can, standing in their midst, in the midst of the death drive, the insatiable quest to cancel itself out, the frenzy that makes more of itself in the very attempt to erase itself. This frenzy is said to be beyond life, by the psychoanalysts: how true, as we have seen. This universe of unique objects, riven from within between essence and appearance, all uniquely lame (uniquely wounded) is not so much an animist universe as a re-animator one, a zombie universe of undeath. I do not propose a vitalism then, so much as an undeathism. In this universe of objects condemned to undeath by their own inner inconsistency, until some magic bullet hits them and they crumble into pure appearance, we can stand like a willow tree. Antigone’s lover Haemon pleads to his father Creon to bend like a flexible tree in a violent storm: ‘Seest thou, beside the wintry torrent’s course, how the trees that yield to it save every twig, while the stiff-necked perish root and branch?’

The contemporary ecological emergency is a freak show, because life forms are a freak show, because reality is a freak show.

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