



We fall

Alberto Corsín Jiménez

To cite this article: Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2017) We fall, *History and Anthropology*, 28:3, 293-296, DOI: [10.1080/02757206.2017.1289933](https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2017.1289933)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2017.1289933>



Published online: 01 Mar 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 125



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



We fall

Alberto Corsín Jiménez

In the middle

1. Plants have no centre. They ‘root’ themselves in a proliferating middleness. ‘It is this middle place’, writes Michael Marder in his philosophy of vegetal life, ‘that holds the promise of growth and proliferation, dispersed from the moment of its germination’. ‘The ethics of plants’, he adds, ‘will perennially return to this middle place literally *suspended* between heavens and earth’ (Marder 2013, 65, 66, emphasis added and removed).
2. What happens to aeroponic plants, then? Where are they suspended from? Where is their middle place, their ethics?

We float

1. We can only fall and float in desert islands.
2. Only in desert islands can one aspire for ‘the survival of a sacred place in a world that is slow to re-begin’ (Deleuze 2004, 14).
3. When in 1966 Jean Baudrillard joined Jean Aubert, Jean-Paul Jungmann and Antoine Stinco, amongst others, to form the guerrilla urban ensemble, Utopie, their vision for a new beginning for the world was clear: a world unhinged, free-floating, aspirational, elevated by the winds and dreams of inflatable and pneumatic architectures. They drew, designed and built worlds in suspension (Dessauce 1999).
4. By 1970, however, the inflatable moment was over. By 1970 the sense of techno-immersive consciousness and liberation spawned by cybernetic psychedelia and pneumatic architecture, the openings of a ‘democratic surround’, as Fred Turner has called it, had caught up with its own legacy and network of military-industrial aspirations (Turner 2013). A world in suspension no more.
5. The insular suspension of hope thus entangled in the very modern trap – techno-infra-structural, eco-relational, epistemic – of its self-description.
6. We can only float in desert islands. Yet ‘islands are *prototypes* of the world in the world’ (Sloterdijk 2004, 311).¹

In love

1. Space stations, Peter Sloterdijk has written, are the onto-paroxysms of the Modern project. They bubble-up Modernity in that most cosy, most accomplished, most

breath-taking of our techno-atmospheric insulations (Sloterdijk 2004, 338f). Spaceship islands to our spaceship Earth (Fuller 1969).

2. The onto-trap of the space station: modern, insular, extra-terrestrial, extra-hominidae. Humans do not inhabit space stations; space stations inhabit us. We get stationed, re-functioned, re-anthropologised. There are no humans in space. There are no plants in space either. We are all life-supported systems in space. We are 'companion experiments' (Battaglia, this volume). We are life-supported companion experiments in Earth, too.
3. How do companion experiments fall in love? How to fall in love under conditions of extreme vigilance and surveillance, of technological monitoring and metrological tracking, of bio-political self-assessments and astroanthropological self-reporting? We fall. We just fall. We get trapped and fall.
4. The onto-trap of the earth system: relational and entangled, co-dependent and co-evolving, recursively emergent (Strathern 1991; Harries-Jones 1995; Barad 2007). The onto-trap of love.
5. 'Loving goes by haps; Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps' (Shakespeare 2003, Act 3, Scene I, 105–106).
6. And in love, in the middle, in between, in the interim and the impasse, we keep falling, we remain trapped.
7. The visitor and the exhibition, the yam and the laboratory, the astronaut and the zucchini, the city and the country – face to face, interfaced, and intraphased – as subjects and objects, nature and culture, capitalists and the disenfranchised, the ontic and the epistemic. In between, in the middle, inside out, we re-describe (another hyphen, another interface, another trap) (Corsín Jiménez 2015; Lebner 2016).
8. Some traps imprison, some release and liberate. Cupid gets to you with a trap, and then you fall, and then you float. You inhabit '*suspense stor[ies]* of escape of both persons and plants from programmatic scripts' (Battaglia, this volume, emphasis added). You are entrapped: life-supported and life-suspended (aeronomically, perhaps; or perhaps pneumatically, or cybernetically).

For

1. 'Of love, I love, you love, I laugh, you love, I move, you move, you move, *and one more time with feeling*' (Cave 2016).
2. 'The ethical question turning in the wind of exhibitionary phytotechnology ... is how tightly the "enframement" of cultivation within this regime of value binds plants and people to cosmopolitical regimes, at the expense of "feeling into" – empathizing with – the anthropocenic futures of other living beings' (Battaglia, this volume).
3. One more time with feeling.
4. Among the Runa people of Ávila in Ecuador's Upper Amazon, the paths of 'feeling into' exfoliate in thickly textured, sometimes intricate, often unsuspected ways. Thus, for example, dogs are counselled into the ways of the human form, for 'becoming human in the right way is central to surviving as a dog in Ávila'. To such an effect, dogs are administered mixtures of 'hallucinogenic and also quite toxic' plants, known

as *tsita*, aimed at ‘reinforc[ing] a human ethos of compartment that dogs should share’ (Kohn 2013, 136).

5. However, shamans have been known to ‘steal the souls of the vision-producing aya huasca plants of their shamanic rivals with the effect that these plants become soul blind; ingesting them no longer permits privileged awareness of the actions of other souls’ (Kohn 2013, 117). Plants exfoliate feelings and feelings exfoliate plants. It remains to be seen who gets there first *one more time* with feeling.
6. One more time.
7. ‘Take the principal spell of Omarakana garden magic, which begins with the word *vatuvi*. The magician, after certain preparations and under the observance of certain rules and taboos, collects herbs and makes of them a magical mixture. Parallel with his actions and in concert with him, the members of the community make other preparations, notably the provision of fish for a gift to the magician and the spirits, and for a festive eating. The magician, after ritually and with an incantation offering some of this fish to the ancestral spirits, recites the main spell, *vatuvi*, over the magical mixture. Let me remind you of how he does this. He prepares a sort of large receptacle for his voice – a *voice-trap* we might almost call it. He lays the mixture on a mat and covers this with another mat *so that his voice may be caught and imprisoned* between them. During the recitation he holds his head close to the aperture and *carefully sees to it that no portion of the herbs shall remain unaffected by the breath of his voice*. He moves his mouth from one end of the aperture to the other, turns his head, *repeating the words over and over again, rubbing them, so to speak, into the substance*. When you watch the magician at work and note the meticulous care with which he applies this most effective and most important verbal action to the substance; when afterwards you see how carefully he encloses the charmed herbs in the ritual wrappings prepared, and in a ritual manner – then you realise how serious is ... *that the magic is in the breath and that the breath is the magic*’ (Malinowski 1965, 215–216).
8. ‘I doubt very much whether *vatuvi* is etymologically connected with the word *vatu*, “coral boulder”. But considering the richness with which even fortuitous associations enter into words of magic, *it is not impossible that the feeling of strength, depth and stability* connected with the term *vatu*, “coral boulder”, “coral reef”, are active in the magical functioning of *vatuvi*’ (Malinowski 1965, 260, emphasis added).
9. It is hard work – at times playful, often treacherous, sometimes uncontrollable and overwhelming too – to trap a feeling.

Free fall

1. Anthropological traps are good to fall in (love with). Voice-traps we might almost call them: where the magic is in the breath and the breath is in the magic.

Note

1. Although ‘prototype’ is not a term that Sloterdijk emphasizes, I italicize it here to underscore its specific investment as a techno-infrastructural, eco-relational and epistemic ‘trap’ of modernity today. On prototypes see Corsín Jiménez (2014).

References

- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cave, Nick. 2016. *Magneto*. vol. Skeleton Tree. London: Bad Seed.
- Corsín Jiménez, Alberto. 2014. "Introduction. The Prototype: More than Many and Less than One." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7 (4): 381–398. doi:10.1080/17530350.2013.858059.
- Corsín Jiménez, Alberto. 2015. "The Capacity for Re-Description." In *Detachment: Essays on the Limits of Relational Thinking*, edited by Matei Candea, Joanna Cook, Catherine Trundle, and Thomas Yarrow, 179–196. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2004. *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Dessauce, Mark, ed. 1999. *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press and The Architectural League of New York.
- Fuller, Buckminster. 1969. *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Harries-Jones, Peter. 1995. *A Recursive Vision: Ecological Understanding and Gregory Bateson*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lebner, Ashley. 2016. "La redescription de l'anthropologie selon Marilyn Strathern." Translated by Arianne Dorval. *L'Homme* 218: 117–149.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1965. *Coral Gardens and Their Magic. Volume II: The Language of Magic and Gardening*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Marder, Michael. 2013. *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. Chichester: Columbia University Press.
- Shakespeare, William. 2003. *Much Ado about Nothing, The New Cambridge Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 2004. *Sphären III: Schäume*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1991. *Partial Connections*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Turner, Fred. 2013. *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.