

Alien intimacy or radiant peel

Astrid Lorange, after Clare Milledge and for *Skara Thyng: Travelling Stock Reserves*
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The centre of science fiction is the alien – the alien as future other, or future self; the alien as quantum of difference in a world both strange and familiar. In the figure of the alien is a portrait of desire, extended in a hopeful paranoia towards what is imagined as inevitable. This complicated and ambivalent feeling is above all an expression of the incomprehensible scale of experience, the sense that what is alien will turn out to be, having always been, ourselves and our relations, otherwise obscure to our knowing.

Science fiction, a deeply Freudian genre, reminds us not that aliens are merely versions of ourselves – such a trick is too easy – but that we are alien to ourselves in ways that are profoundly, manifoldly more interesting than the faculty of imagination can offer. This is why science fiction trombones between two radically different scales – the microcosmic and the macrocosmic – because alienness is both the constituent parts *and* the total system of existence.

The close-up is also an alien. Scopophilic, measureless, it is an image turned into a stranger. A single-image epic, the close-up contains a theory of entirety, showing through detail that literally anything can be used as a model for the world: the tight curl of a fern frond is the mathematical sublime of architecture, the plant's structure and the building's edge mirror images of each other.

One passage of earth can be a close-up; the narrow slice of pasture, for example, along which stock is occasionally moved or rested, can become a close-up shot in an otherwise edgeless pastoral. The travelling stock reserve contains in its detail a total system for exceptional life – the eco-specificity of a niche history, alien to itself; a trough or ribbonish plateau, ripe for the erotics of bacteria.

Milledge is an alien, or her work is engaged with how enfoldings of alien relations converge in and as the art work (a peculiar genre of object that emerges from a deeply communal, one could say communistic, effort into a singularity). In Milledge's practice, the singular art work is rerouted back into a communistic scene, emphatic about its having come into being in a spectacular capture of a history to which everything else belongs. The art work, therefore is an alien in an affinitive kinship with other aliens – an alien intimate.

On the underside of toughened glass, in the inverse image of the scratching surface, in the one-note epic of the close-up, in the overlap of plant and building, in the cell or fibre palette of the bio-pigment, in the conversation between forms in space, in the consideration of material as it pings in every direction (loose and ecstatic as greasy vectors), and with the spirit and attention of what is most critical in the alien labour of art making, Milledge's paintings trill like a radiant peel of land, linking as in a long breath different conditions for the continuation of thinking and of living.

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