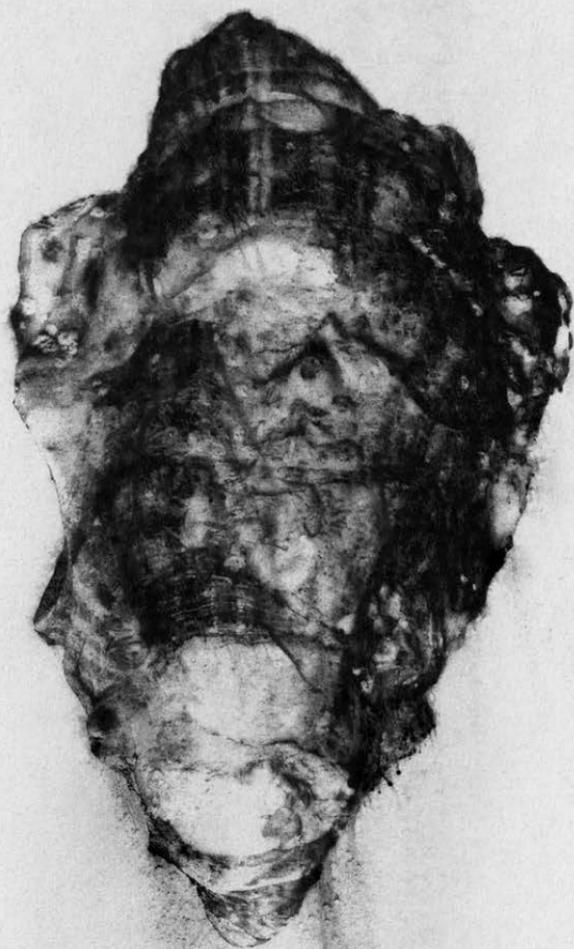


The Oyster

OR, RADIAL SUPPLENESS



Dejan Lukić and Nik Kosieradzki

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Fig. 2



II. Baroque Fulcrum

Cosmic indeterminacy vs. contextual contingency. Which wins? ↓

The image of the shell thus reveals nothing short of an architectural edifice, a futuristic cathedral, or an ahistorical baroque expression, both familiar and unfamiliar in its curvature (Fig. 2). Except the former emerged in the seas of the Cambrian period 500 million years ago, while the latter occurred in 1600s Catholic Europe. The former relies on the geometry infused from deep cosmological time; the latter on the intricacies of Austrian or Italian mathematical calculations where a shift of one millimeter would make the whole interior falter.

We call it ahistorical because the problem of the inside and the outside far exceeds architectural or artistic time periods. On the other hand, one also has to see specifically baroque problems exceeding their own contexts and times, and seeping into other historical and geologic periods, albeit in a different configuration.

This exceeding of the inside/outside problem also occurs on the level of feelings:

Perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's

what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces & no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either.³

He is a bivalve that is a fulcrum, and then pure surfaces without thickness, then pure vibration, or an instrumental surface that reacts to vibrations, a tympanum that can be seen as a mantle ("as thin as foil"). But we should not really say "he," for there is no character left here, no human or animal, only the experience of an inside and an outside, and a non-belonging to either side. No character left here, only a filter.

The oyster does not resolve the problem of the inside and the outside either; rather, it exasperates it by making it visible. Through its baroque-ness, the architecture of the façade protects the formless fulcrum. The outward coarseness is simply a series of complex folds generating the façade of the shell. But just as each façade is different, every oyster differs from the next. The notion of difference is essential here:

Obstacle becoming a prop; a hinge that makes action possible
(e.g. a joint in a bird's wing, a lever for a boat's oar). ↓

Difference is the alpha and omega of the universe; everything begins with difference, with the elements whose innate diversity (which various reasons make probable) can in my view be the only justification of their multiplicity; everything ends with difference, where, in the higher phenomena of thought and history, it finally breaks free of the narrow circles in which it had bound itself, namely the atomic vortex and the vital vortex, and transforming the very obstacle it faced into a fulcrum, surpasses and transfigures itself.⁴

This passage can itself be seen as a thought-oyster: an insular wall with enormous richness at its core. It tells us that difference is like an oyster: a filtering machine that turns the obstacle (the narrow circles of mechanized sameness) into a central support of its own transformation. Difference always overcomes itself. This is its law of spontaneity, both a rule & improvisation. Written 200 years earlier than the above passage, article 9 of Leibniz's "Monadology" proposes an identical idea:

17th century thought,
forever co-present, eternal. ↓

Each monad, indeed, must be different from every other. For there are never in nature two beings which are exactly alike, and in which it is not possible to find a difference either internal or based on an intrinsic principle.⁵

So it is with each oyster we take into our hand. It is born out of endless differentiation of itself.

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It took considerable time and energy and affirmation for this little molluskular text to be born. First, in 2013, Nik Kosieradzki provided the kernel that connected the marine creature to the baroque. This was for the “Ethnographic Image” class at Reed College. I augmented it by providing layers, one upon another, from the most limber to the most firm. Craig Epplin helped with initial editorial formatting. Later, I pried it open again and discarded much debris. Then I let it mature and grow in darkness. Finally, Emile Plateau, the curator-chef of Contra Mundum Press, provided a perfect environment, with expansive and smooth sheets, nourished by typographer Alessandro Segalini and visual artist Federico Gori, like the three layers of the Sea (of the surface, of depth, and of the seafloor sediments). Each of these is present, with its own temperature, in the text. This work of calcareous thought and supple geometry could not come to life, in this form, anywhere else. Now it lives only for the feast, for the self-expenditure, which is yet to come.

—DL



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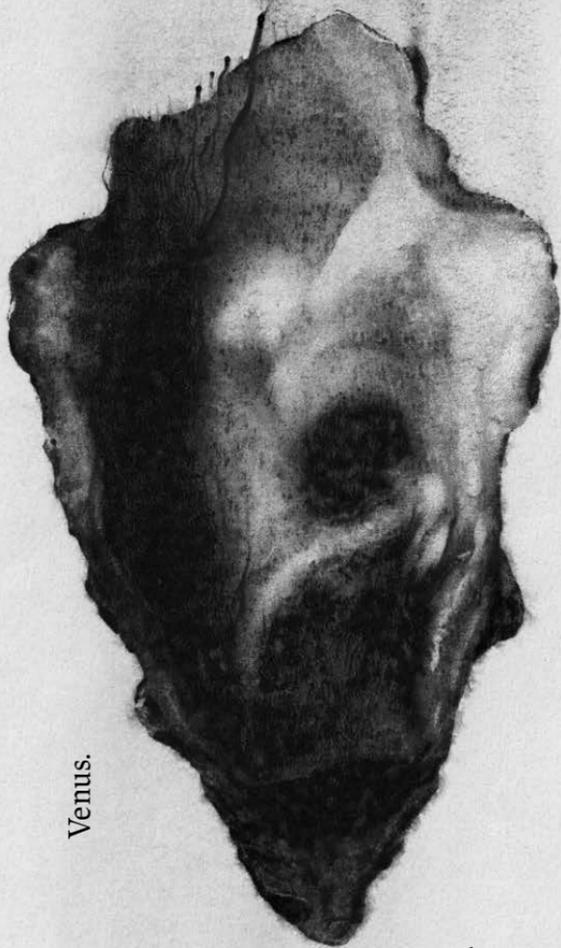
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