



U-jazdowski
exhibition script

Ursula Mayer

What Will Survive of Us



The Complex

By Rachel Hill

It was easier to find the portal than expected.

The council sent me to this place, this place which shouldn't exist. This place that challenges all we thought we knew about the cosmos.

It was when the new planetary-spanning device became operational, that reality flipped itself, pulling me here. The device was a completely new design. Due to some very complicated interaction with Terra's magnetic fields, the device promised to bring not only new ways of seeing, but also of *feeling*, astronomical phenomena. That was the plan anyway.

So expectation was high, with everyone yearning to know what the churning of a distant star or the froth of an ancient nebular would feel like, once translated into safe levels for the human body to sense. Then the device went live. That's when we found the flare: older than our universe and clearly artificial. That's when people started to change.

As my ship approached the iridescent planet, I thought it was a joke. Spiralling down to the surface, the details of the alien complex became clearer. It wasn't so much that here, in the unfathomable depths of the cosmos, was incontrovertible proof of extraterrestrial intelligence. What I couldn't believe was that the flare's incredible emission of energy could have come from such a small structure. Leaving the ship to hover at a safe distance, I approached the complex. Its strange surfaces, with their delicately carved sigils, came into focus. I already felt that I had found the place. But it was when I saw those sigils that I knew I was at the flare's source.

A child would recognise them of course. They are part of every alphabet in every language, now. They are the very same sigils that had inexplicably filtered into the calculations of every computational infrastructure and algorithm on Terra. They are the sigils that arrived with the discovery of the flare. Although they are known across our small world, becoming a new planetary language of sorts, we still do not know what those sigils mean, what they portend.

Here at the flare's source, I still don't know if I've been given a gift or a punishment.

I guess I'm going to find out...

Hesitating outside, I feel the building wrapped in waiting, anticipation. Stepping inside, I immediately sense the stillness of the place shift. Moving deeper, I feel my body disrupting the complex's state of arrest. In response, I feel an unseen, gathering presence accompanying my steps, becoming stronger. And yet, the place seems empty. Well almost.

Ahead of me a figure arises, breaking the smooth monotony of the place. Are they a guardian? Some kind of idol for a forgotten divine? A fabled Sky Dweller?

They float, borne aloft in the contemplation of an electronic breeze. They crackle and flicker, in attunement with the fire they hold: a captured sun, a spark. A fire which holds them. Turning, they gently speak.

"Welcome"

If someone had told me that I would be the first to speak to a new lifeform, alien but somehow familiar, I would have asked them what the punchline was. And here it is. In

this pivotal moment of contact, I had, it seems, forgotten how to speak. The entity waited, expectantly.

“Welcome”

Haltingly, I croaked, “Thanks?” Wow, a poetic exchange for the ages. Let’s try that again. “I thank you. And what is this place? When is that place?”

A fraction of movement, for a fraction of a second: a smile seemed to quirk their face.

“You are at the place where things begin, where they end, where they endure. The deathless heart.”

Okay...I should have known this wasn’t going to be easy. Maybe another approach.

“I came because of the flare”

“You are here because of the flare.

But what is it you seek?”

Damn. I had been so busy seeking that, I hadn’t really thought about the whys of it.

“I seek to know what this place is, what it wants.”

“Then you will have to go further, go deeper.”

Yep, this time they are definitely amused by my faltering ways. But that’s an invitation all the

same and I’m going to accept. I nod in gratitude, stepping towards the next chamber.

But before I make it there the walls break into sudden illumination, lit with sigils dancing in jumping frequencies. At first these glyphs and sigils strike me only for their unknowability. Chasing me, I nonetheless chase these signals, refusing to give up. They gradually change. In jagged and spiky translation, letters I know start to appear, coalescing into words.

The solitary animal.

I suppose that’s a pretty accurate description for my current status. Have I just been addressed? Are the walls speaking to me now?

The solitary animal. Gatherer.

Well, it would be rude to ignore them. Tentatively I try, “Hello? Who are you?”

Imperishable upholder sensory receptor.

I look back at the first entity, hoping for a clue, but they have folded back into themselves, an unbroken contemplation.

I reason this conscious arrangement of light must be part of the building, and so must know about the flare.

“What is the flare?”

A split second later words stream past,
almost too fast:

*Uncompressed condition electrical
charges cosmic in its extent.*

Yes that sounds about right.

“So is the flare a form of communication
technology?”

*Uncompressed condition electrical charges
cosmic in its extent.*

I guess that’s all I’m going to get for now...
but let’s push my luck a little further:

“And what is this unseen presence that seems
to be following me?”

*Uncompressed condition electrical charges
cosmic in its extent.*

I ponder this.

“And what is this place?”

*Become a cause of imperishable knowledge un-
bounded organs macrocosmic consciousness
become visible.*

The words start to lose their coherence,
repeating and remixing, its answers increas-
ingly decouple from my questions, losing
resonance. That’s my signal to move on.



Fire

The Fire of Knowledge Burns All Karma to Ashes

LED screen, 3168 × 2016 mm
Walls sprayed with ashes

The Fire of Knowledge Burns All Karma to Ashes is an HD video loop depicting a digital, idling avatar of a real-life figure. Updating Haraway’s cyborg for the 21st century the FIRE avatar of transwoman Valentijn de Hingh is an icon for the posthuman.

Birth of a Sentient Cosmic Mouth Conflux Fields Bind Eternity Astral Supreme

LED text panel, 5760 × 288 mm

Science-fiction poem generated by an algorithm which uses the translated meanings of the Sanskrit words Fire, Earth, Water, Air, Akasha. Inspired by research that Sanskrit is a language free from culture context and most suitable for binary code artificial intelligence.



Earth

Eternal Vomit Ground of Reality

LED screen 3168 × 2016 mm
Room painted with clay

Eternal Vomit Ground of Reality is an HD video loop depicting a digital, idling avatar of a real-life figure. Updating Haraway's cyborg for the 21st century the EARTH avatar of transwoman Valentijn de Hingh is an icon for the posthuman.

In the next chamber, an entity, like the first but different, waits for me. I address them with forced enthusiasm, an attempt to disguise my fear.

“Hello” I beam. The entity merely watches me from their peaceful perch. Too cheerful?
I try a more sober

“Who are you?”

They are buoyant, a citizen of microgravity, silent and watching.

I try a new approach.

‘What do I need to know?’

“The chamber on your right. There you will come to know.”

“Thank you.”

Turning to the right, I hold my breath.

As I enter the next chamber I hear a whispering rhythm of liquid, echoing as it falls into burnt vessels. Casting around I see the glimmer of pipes as they silver the air. But the harmonious babbles of the place quickly start to stutter. My entry must have catalysed a break in the circuit, prompting a new kind of speech.

Contemplating, I stare at...the entity? Structure? The entity-structure hybrid? Watching its endless pump, it's hard to say for sure.

My sense of alarm increases as its circulations seem to recalibrate, moving from the momentary chaos into a new pattern.

Swept in the waving flows of the chamber, a swaying voice coils out from all around me.

“What are you that survives in our complex? Why do you disrupt our gliding processions?”

“I seek to know this place.”

“Then you must flow to the end”

“Then I will flow with you. But what is it that accompanies me, the presence that continues to dawn here?”

“The one that burns, that flows, the source, that which we conjure. It is Zoe. You will



Water

Lotus Eyed Nectar

Water Installation: metal basin, pipes, pit fire ceramics, polyester cast, double membrane pump, clay covered walls.

A system of metal pipes connecting to a double diaphragm industrial pump and organic elements combining a machine living system releasing the smell of the earth. A circulatory system much like that of a biological heart.



Air

Magnet Hole Deathless Heart

HD video, loop 3 min
Metal pipes structure

A floor projected image of an animal heart using Laser Ablation Tomography technology. Exploring the scientific research into the connections of the heart's and Earth's electromagnetic fields. The projection is circled by a structure of metal pipes, which release air from a pumping system.

know her. You must flow to the end. Follow me, continue.”

Following the tune of pipes, the swish of their breathing, we flow through. Accompanying me is my unseen companion Zoe, her guarding presence building. I move into the next chamber feeling the release of the mechanical entity's breath. A new beat takes over.

Here in this domain of air I see the electric syncopations of a shivering heart. But the beat begins to modulate. Like with the chamber of pipes, here again my presence has prompted a new pattern to emerge. I realise that I have not only reawoken this place, but my existence here has prompted changes to its form. I'm a new expression of life to be calculated and incorporated within its matrix of functions, within its contemplations.

Another beat, a stronger vibration beckons me as I am drawn into the next chamber. Immediately I feel this is the place where everything joins in a single refrain.

I close my eyes and I see them. All before me, all the entities I have encountered here. They come together in the crucible of this place, the final chamber. I realise now, at the end or at this new beginning, that my entry here not only broke the balance of the complex, but set about another cycle, bringing renewal alongside disruption: poison, remedy.

Now I know what the flare was, what this place is. It's a generator, a factory of sorts, with my presence initiating a new iteration of its endless process.

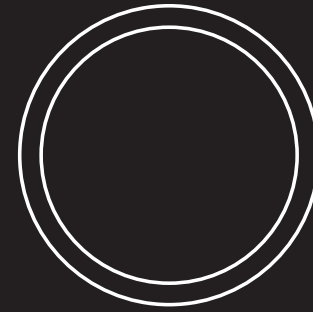
I feel a surge gather, promising to release its primordial life force into a new universe. Zoe.

What would it be like to move into that new layer of reality?

I look back, I look forward.

As a new flare is released .

It was easier to find the portal than expected.



Akasha

Soundless Death

6 channel surround sound, curtains

Commissioned six channel surround sound by composer Na'ama Zisser. Akasha can be translated from Sanskrit as the word 'sound'. According to quantum physics, Akasha is the so-called zero point energy field and includes everything that exists, transporting, accumulating and storing our entire experience.

U–jazdowski

25/09/2020—17/01/2021

exhibition

Ursula Mayer

What Will Survive of Us

Distant sci-fi scenarios have now become our reality. We live in the future in which humans are no longer the measure of all things, but just an element of the universe. The exhibition resembles a living organism, a temple, or the set design of a sci-fi film. It is a space that engages all the senses, the walls are painted with clay and ash. In this scenario we are no longer autonomous, finite identities, but rather we are *becoming* through our relationships with non-human beings and machines. Technology and biology define the shape of a new realm governed by an algorithm generated with the use of Sanskrit.

Ursula Mayer refers to post-humanist ontology, including Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, philosophy of science, Eastern cosmology, and sci-fi writers Octavia E. Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin.

Her work has been shown at the 16th Istanbul Biennale, Istanbul; the Hayward Gallery, Southbank, London; Mediacity Seoul, South Korea; The Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia; the Whitechapel Gallery, London; the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and Malmö; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the Kunsthalle Basel; and 11 Performa, New York. Mayer is the 2014 recipient of the Jarman Award and the 2007 winner of the Otto Mauer Prize.

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