

# Scripting for Agency

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For the Annual Review Panel, I am submitting the first chapter of my novel-in-progress, *Anomaline*, and a video, *Self-Estrangement as Method (Part 2)*.

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# Anomaline

My amnesia stops where my encapsulation begins. Unlike most people, therefore, I can recall what is effectively my birth.

A very long time ago, on a rainy afternoon, I am sitting by a window.

When I arrive at the scene, or come to - I'm not sure which - to find myself sitting on the wooden chair by the window, it is without fuss, as though I have always been sitting here, looking out at the lazy rain. There is a lull, as if the heart of the world skips a beat - it is within this moment of carelessness I think, that I find my eyes.

When I do find them, and my mind blooms open like a universe unfurling from a single point, I look out of them with the voracity of raw life, without discretion; without much grace or subtlety. The rain is persisting noiselessly through the stonewalled cut-out of the arched window beside me, but there is nothing in my mind, no place into which to put the images I am seeing. So they flood into me and drop out of me again; countless snapshots of the falling rain wasted on my tactless staring.

I can't tell you about the damp smell of the Before that never was - and not because it's secret - I've just long grown out of being able to remember such a smell. There are no thoughts before the rainy afternoon, only foetal spasms: glitching pink lights from beyond the womb, squinting unborn eyes, submerged oceanic songs. But, sitting in the library, by the window on a rainy afternoon, I come to.

It is a comfortable room, if a bit chilly, and improbably vast for what must be a small smudge of a body sitting by the window at the far end, looking back over a shoulder. It is a place already lived in, by a History that already knows me like a strange old lady at a funeral, grabbing my cheeks and looking sadly into my youth. Uttering my name, introducing me to myself.

I hop off my chair, and wander off.

I am trailing between the tall shelves of the library, parsing the spines of the books with a finger, as if to ask: what do you know about me? But I keep being told the same lie: "There is no Before, before." I know that it is a lie because everything in the world is older than me.

Who knows how long I've been out for, or what circumstances bring me to now hold a hand to my headache as if the faint heat emanating from my palm might somehow soothe the dull pain. But if

my forehead throbs a little, I don't mind - it is a thing to be picky about, a precious complaint of weary living, which is the privilege of those who can discern. And if I am being lied to by the library, I don't mind - it is an affectionate form of deception, which is the privilege of those who are looked after by guardians.

I pass reams of books without discovering the mechanism of pulling them out. I read the vast faces of the shelves as one surface, discerning the letters horizontally across the spines in one big NTPCDKDarohlak... I amble down the aisles like tumbleweed, attracted and repelled by random whims. Occasionally, I bump into the shelves like a forlorn bowling ball and spin softly, looking blankly at the world I've entered as it appears in a rolling tape before my eyes.

The library is beginning to affect me, physically. It's sculpting me with its impressions as I pass: corridors, book spines, typeset and all. Aha! I think aloud. So that's how it is. To look around at things is a reciprocal kind of probing; it entails being touched back by all the things I see. Like the swinging 'Saloon' sign in a Wild West cartoon, I am being shot by the ricocheted bullets of my own sight into some sort of recognisable shape. And I grow accustomed to this shape right away, without question, because I am that pliable.

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Evening has descended when I retake my place by the window. I nudge the glass part open. On the threshold there is an invisible interface, where the dusk-air from outside tries to mingle with the library-air inside, dismissed from entering by the elite club of stuffy indoor air molecules. Strands of my hair levitate out of the window and tangle with the damp evening breeze, their naughty arrows tugging gently at my head, urging me forward, toward forbidden straits. But I am not easily persuaded, and remain perched by the window, loyal to the library and its protective lies.

Beyond, the rolling hills do not seem real, even under the wash of the rain from earlier on. And I have no wish to walk out into a picture. The world seems to me to be entirely held together within the library; the landscape merely a painted backdrop. But just now, with alarming quietness, I catch sight of what I can only say looks like a drifting veil in the far, far distance. The drape dips and soars like the haunting soul of a dove against the darkened hills. It has been in the picture all along, but I mistook it for a wisp of a cloud, the artistic flirtation of a meandering brush. It drifts across the sky which, after the drizzle, has turned violet and warm, emitting the breath of a yawning lion.

The veil quivers in the air like a whimpering fiddle, drawing nearer, and then much nearer; drawing wetness from my eyes. The veil swells and contracts, in a manner of lamenting; it dances as if wounded, evoking the fit threads of an exhausted ballerina's legs, limp from fatigue, one knee

threatening to knock the other and stumble like shot game. But the veil does not falter or fade from view. Instead, it continues on towards me, quite purposefully actually, until it passes over my face and hovers right above my head. Only at this range am I able to see that the veil is in fact an impossibly thin, floating skin, evasive as running water. What I do not see, and cannot possibly know, is that it is shaped exactly like me.

Without consulting me on the matter, strands of my hair float upwards and greet the airborne jellyfish-veil above my head with eager synapses. I do not suspect any need to protest. I haven't had the chance to think things through yet, to remember why I am here, or to place an uneducated bet on my future. The veil settles over me quietly.

I look down and find my hands. On their surface I can barely see the sheen of the film clinging to my skin as I turn my outstretched fingers under the moonlight. The transparent veil covers the ridges of my toes, and even the cavities in my nostrils. It fits me perfectly and covers me entirely, so finely tailored it seems to have disappeared. I am perfectly encapsulated.

When time passes and I come to regard the incident as exceptional, I recall it with solemnity, as if it marks the inheritance of a curse or a gift that - in either case - I ought to protect.

After my encapsulation, the night sky closes into itself, and it is clear that it has nothing more to share. So I slip off my chair and retreat into darkness.

When I creep through the aisles of shelves once again, their imposing flanks narrowing above me to eclipse the ceiling far above, I run my finger across the book spines once more. Nothing at all has changed. The film separating me from the world is so slender that I cannot feel it intervening. Yet, much like the imaginary borders of countries, it means a lot more than its physicality might suggest.

*This excerpt is the first chapter of my work-in-progress novel, Anomaline.*

## Self-Estrangement as Method (Part 2)



Click [here](#) to watch the video (15 min)

I'm submitting this video because I think it's opened a new avenue for me as to how I might approach art-practice-as-research. But I didn't know that at the time, so I should offer some context about this video before you watch it.

I'm part of a research group put together by the arts organisation Exposed Arts, working on the theme 'Intelligence Debiased'. We are thinking about non-human conceptions of intelligence, where my own concern has been on the intelligence of fictional characters, as well as the problematics around what we conceive as (human) intelligence in the first place. Since playing with my own personhood is an integral part of my performance practice, I decided to try out an experiment: to communicate my 'self-estrangement' performance method to the other artist-researchers in the group as a technique for 'brainstorming' or 'thinking outside the box', and then to see what thoughts they come up with by changing something small about themselves (voice, mannerisms, appearance...). To communicate the method to them, I made two videos (this is the **second** of the two) - in one of them I describe the method, and in the other, I try to demonstrate it. So in this video, I am talking about 'intelligence' by deviating from my 'own' character and using an other's temporary voice. I am still collecting documentation of other people's attempts at doing this.