

Dreaming as Document

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[https://www.are.na/jonathan-fraser/
dreaming-a-document](https://www.are.na/jonathan-fraser/dreaming-a-document)

This is not a dream.

I was in a matatu¹ heading out of Nairobi to Ngong'. The seat in front of me had a cover made of some sort of synthetic leather from which the sun had bleached out most of the richness, leaving only patchy hints of pink in varying shades. Synthetic once-bright pink leather, blue edge-stitching, and the texture of human skin followed the curves and folds. Curved triangles tessellated across the surface of the seat cover and the fading pink brought it closer to human scale. Perhaps in a few more years under the sun, the pink will even out, and it won't just look like a person but inhale and exhale as well, even bristle at unfamiliar touch. Sweat.

1. Matatus are a form of privately owned public transportation—ranging from fourteen-seater vans to buses—that form the basis for most peoples' transport in the East African region.

Heading to Ngong' is a long trip and I had to take another two matatus in order to get there. The last one had been a bus and the next was a van. A Nissan with a Jesus sticker on the windshield. This Jesus was white and stared off into the middle distance in place of a rear view mirror. Above him was a half torn sticker of a cartoon race car. It didn't take long for the van to fill up with passengers, but in the time we waited a very old man stood outside smoking. Perhaps he wasn't very old at all, only hunched over and gaunt. Each breath was labored and pulled his taught body up at the shoulders in a gasp, as though he was surprised at each new moment. He stood there inhaling, shaking, exhaling smoke, inhaling again from that cheap and flaccid cigarette. A Sportsman² that no doubt had been deformed from traveling in his pocket.

After the third matatu, I walked the rest of the way home. A familiar route that at some point was punctuated by the smell of a dead something in a ditch. A very tired donkey pulled a cart. The seemingly fossilized remains of stray dog shit appeared every so often, imploring me to watch my step.

And eventually, I was home and tired for it.

Why couldn't this be a dream? Because I wasn't asleep? That is unconvincing. While it was occurring, this long way home felt no different than a dream I had had of meeting a friend for a meal. The room was vibrating with conversation and it was hot enough to sweat.

2. Sportsman is a popular cigarette brand from British American Tobacco Kenya (BAT Kenya), a part of the British American Tobacco Group (BAT Group), which has been in operation since 1907.

In the moment, dreams are ultimately as mundane as most of waking life. It is only in memory, only in recounting it, that the in-between matter boils off. The arrival to the restaurant, the walking back home.

Then the experience reduces further—into fleeting moments that clarify into significant points in time. Points of time that we gather together into a story.

So a dream could be another story we tell of an experience we had in a different place. I think it's worth interrogating how that experience intervenes in our lives at all. What follows are illustrations that attempt to extend and manipulate that experience of the world through the lens of the “extra-human:” the machine and the angel.

The machine here is a free online AI Image Alt Text Generator that generates alt text³ based on image prompts. A tool alludes to the hands that made it, and so I wonder what this tool can reveal about how we see the world around us and the stories we tell about it.

Let us then sit with the work of a prominent Croatian sculptor, Ivan Meštrović. Living between 1883-1962, the horrors of war⁴ turned the focus of his later work to more religious subject matter, such as a marble sculpture of the Angel Gabriel captured in a fleeting moment of arrival to earth. If our experience of the world is an embodied one, then what might inform the dreaming, the aftermath really, of a brief encounter with the world when an angel has a physical body for the first time.

3. Image alt text is a descriptive attribute used to provide a textual description of an image on a web page.

4. The Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913) and World War I (1914–1918).

Is the image in the room with us right now?

Who's telling the story?

Photo by Giuseppe on May 15, 2024. May be a meme of one or more people and text that says, 'Cameron 18 minutes ago i having bad day'.

To whom?

Photo by Katsu Yuasa on April 30, 2024. May be an image of man, newspaper, crossword puzzle and text.

1. A person walking in fog with hands raised, appearing disoriented.
2. Individual walking through dense fog, arms raised in confusion.
3. Figure navigating through thick fog, hands raised in uncertainty.
4. Person strolling in misty fog, hands up in a gesture of bewilderment.
5. Human silhouette in fog, hands raised in a gesture of disorientation.

Source

Connect →

About what?

May be an image of money,
poster, and text



1. A person using a computer to connect to a data source.
2. A laptop with cables connected to a server for data transfer.
3. A person plugging in cables to connect to a data source.
4. A close-up of a hand connecting cables to a data source.

Insubstantiation



An annunciation, “Hail Mary...”.

Wait.

The distracted Angel is listening out for something. Aware now of his voice. Its pitch and how it rolls over the tongue. The vibration carries into his chest, deep enough to reach his arms.

Perhaps his first time on earth and now he is breathing. Just how much air can his lungs take? And how long can he hold his breath before the burning. The heavenly body collides sound. Flies through air. Then touches earth.

Listen further *in* for a call to prayer. It carries long over tenement housing.

Overloud upstairs neighbors. He can't help himself from looking at how bodies intertwine each other.

The Angel's eyes can carefully split the wavelengths of light one from another until only the darkness of the X-ray and infrared remains. In that darkness, the fluid medium of a small pond outlines the oval shape of a fluttering paramecium. He numbers each cilia.

What else is full of grace?

The falling angle of moonlight. The silence occupying the gaps between stray dogs barking at night. Rhythm in a diesel engine.

The Angel will dream tonight, for the first time, of his time on earth. All too brief.

The dream is residue. A dust on the fingers to say that "I was here, I touched stone."