

Z

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While access to it is limited, there is some evidence nowadays of a world shadow that consists of incessantly produced eventual data. This world shadow is not flat. It has near-countless dimensions, but always fewer than the world that it shadows; it's more flat than the world as a matter of course.

The word 'projection' hints at this phenomenon. The word itself is overproductive, with more meanings than it can handle, and meanings that seem to meet from opposing directions: you can say that projection is the operation of throwing light to cast a shadow, but, strangely, also that projection is the operation of flattening the darkness out into this or that shadow.

This latter projection is an operation that makes an illusion useful, an effect created through a sensory deception between a thing and its apprehension. It's an attempt at mitigating dimensional overflow. This is only becoming ever more relevant. Nowadays, everywhere you look, perhaps on account of the world shadow, dimensions are overflowing. The possibilities are endless when it comes to deception in apprehension. Luckily, the list of things to apprehend or be deceived by is not endless. Here's one way to put it: you can only buy what's out there to buy.¹

From 1996 to 2011, one such buyable thing was the Freedom Furniture Zed home office desk. Let's set a periodisation of this recent past as Z-time. 1996 to 2011: fifteen years, flat-laid, and, as Tim, into whose work here I'm trying to project, described in an email, 'a span almost perfectly aligned to the generation Z birth years'. Imagining Z-time is to create an anamorphic relation to the time it encapsulates in a period. Periodisation is an act of selection, distortion, and unequal distribution that tries to do justice to the details considered useful to remember—at least at the moment of remembering. This act also involves the deselection and disordering of other details, much as the logic of social generations creates fuzzy, aged-based rifts within otherwise possible communities.² (Tim told me about the anthropologist Tim Ingold identifying an unsustainable condition where in order to go to work building a future for humans to come, Generation Now always feels they must first raze the "future" that had been built for them.) This razing of futures can take forms other than

straight destruction: inattention, occlusion, and circumscription, among others. Anamorphic means 'shaping again'; it's the imposition of shaping on a thing with a shape already.

In other words, a projection of this kind fits something in a space otherwise too small to support it, but it does so by an act of hobbling. And yet it's not a unidirectional relationship between hobbler and hobbled, not a one-way projection between caster and shadow. The world shadow, for instance, now re-pronounces the world but also seems to redirect it, driving the world towards this or that shadow form, the way the shape of a bunny might drive the shadowing hands of a child. The world shadow attempts in its hobbled way to anticipate the future of the world. Strangely, again, this process of anticipation is also known as creating a projection.

Tim's works might be such an attempt—on a small scale, and in a more ameliorative way—by pulling Z-time back into relation with a present that otherwise prefers to forget, or which is at least now mystified by it.

What is nowadays mystified by (or in) the Zed? For one: there's the continued material attendance of the desks themselves, in various hobbled conditions and places, long after the drawing to an end of Zed time in 2011. They are still strong things, but neglected. Perhaps Zed time corresponds (by extension of production drives) to the span in which these particular desks could be considered beautiful. Here we find yet another sense of projection: its psychological sense. This projection is the operation of imagining that another someone has some certain quality of yours—like a self-loathing metonym, longing for an alternate host.

This projection involves not throwing, not flattening, but borrowing space elsewhere. This borrowing might be for evasive or empathic purposes; either way, it involves a kind of promise. Marketing conceptualises itself as a form of strategic projection, glomming and redirecting the unthinkable or childish desires into purchase events by promising to extinguish or satisfy them. But why allow marketing to conceptualise itself? Listen to Julio Cortazar instead, in his *Preamble to the Instructions on How to Wind a Watch*, a prose poem about friends presenting you with a watch on your birthday. It ends

They aren't giving you a watch, you are the gift, they're giving you yourself for the watch's birthday.³

Let's port this inverse manoeuvre and say it's the Zed desk doing the projecting, and not, as the marketers would have it, you who bought it. The desk projects that its buyers have its qualities: heaviness, sharpness, temperedness. Whether you like it or not, the desk throws its qualities into you, with all its stashed inequities and its manipulative energies. For the time that its projection is true, the desk is satisfied, which makes the desk beautiful. Wittgenstein theorised about the coherence of beauty as the 'click' of things falling into place—your no-tools-required relationship to the sensuous world—despite also theorising against any mechanical understanding of aesthetics. I first read about this idea in my high school library some twenty years ago, the early days of Z-time, in a book by John Cage. He wrote about Wittgenstein: "then he said that people should put a clicker in their pocket so that when something doesn't appear to be beautiful to them, they can just take it out and click it."⁴ This all clicked with me then. Now I'm mystified and half-mortified by the idea; I'm half-mortified by the naive and half-accidental truth of all the clicking. To counter it, I think of what half-satisfaction Tim must have felt when his salvaged Zed desk legs, with extra joints he had freshly milled, fell into their beautiful new arrangements.

Tim clicked with these desks, I'm guessing, or they clicked incessantly at him—maybe because they're so broken-down—maybe they couldn't stop, in a kind of clicking gasping efflorescence only perceivable at a certain frequency range. In this range, it's clear that nowadays what's projected at first as promise becomes dread, the dread of the material outliving its connotative associations — its radical moisture dried up, its manipulative projections laid flat.

What Tim recognises is that dread of a broken illusion (and some number of broken-down desks) can act as a promise anew, or as a redrawing of promises—just as Alfred Sohn-Rethel wrote of Neapolitan technology: "it is only when things are broken that they begin to work."⁵ The breakdown constitutes a new technical stage of continuous renegotiation and invention. It draws a reconciliatory line between the intent of those who made it and those who are left with it.⁶

As such, the unforeseen and unsettled assemblages of legs and desktops that constitute Tim's artworks half-fulfil Sohn-Rethel's vision:

he has destroyed the misanthropic magic of intact functions, but he then installs himself in the unmasked monster and its artless soul and enjoys this literal incorporation.⁷

— however, it's not *himself* that Tim has installed in the Zeds. I'm not sure, perhaps it's themselves; perhaps he's giving them themselves for the exhibition's birthday.

Tim reshapes these desks at the moment that their connotative projections appear otherwise spent, otherwise falling back to earth, seemingly heavy again and impractically acute. Here in his projective remaking, the rhomboid angles of their false tops pinned to the wall might make you imagine they stretch away from you, unusably, but still they are going nowhere. And so really they're still full of possibility, and can still inspire real fear. When Tim comes to deinstall the Zeds, I think he will unscrew them all from the wall, only to find each assemblage stays right there, hanging in the air for the time being.

Your home desk arrives as a projection of a desk in a near-flatpack of near-two-dimensional layers. In an act of projection, the box belies all it took to be boxed. Once it's out and up, you imagine a desk is different to a table, or at least that a desk is not just a table. You set up your desktop computer on your desktop, and you are sitting at your desk. The desk then projects itself into the screen as a desktop on the screen; you imagine the screen is not a screen but a desk. If you follow this through, if a screen is a desk, then the world must have quarter-turned down on itself from you, and you must actually be sitting somehow face-down. This makes the act of desk-work look as if you're trying to fall into sleep up on your shins and haunches, and the screen is incanting your dream. Somehow you don't notice all this; you've thrown yourself into the work; you're directed elseways. When you're finished, you slip with your intuition out of the world's quarter-turn for now by putting your computer to sleep.

- 1 —a paraphrase of sociologist Daniel Zamora Vargas via Twitter on 23 Aug, who was in turn paraphrasing sociologist Barbara Wootton, unknown book, likely *Full Employment*.
- 2 — This is all true of any other possible periodisations—say, for instance, A-time, which overlaps Z-time somewhat: the time of makeshift desks made from unhinged doors on A-frame sawhorse trestles, popular in artists' studios, and a style that Freedom co-opted into their own chrome and glass version.
- 3 Via Sarinah Masukor's piece in WSJ texts for Volume Book Fair 2015, originally from Cortazar's *Cronopios and Famas* (1962, trans. Paul Blackburn, 1999, New Directions)
- 4 From Cage interview excerpts by Wes Nisker on *Inquiring Mind* — I can't recall the high school reference, though it was likely found in *Silence*.
- 5 From Sohn-Rethel, *The Ideal of the Broken-Down: On the Neapolitan Approach to Things Technical* (1926), trans. via saladofpearls.wordpress.com.
- 6 Yet another projection: a 'vector projection' is the linear measurement between two other vectors. Shown diagrammatically, it makes the shape of a Z.
- 7 As above.