

# A new style of life

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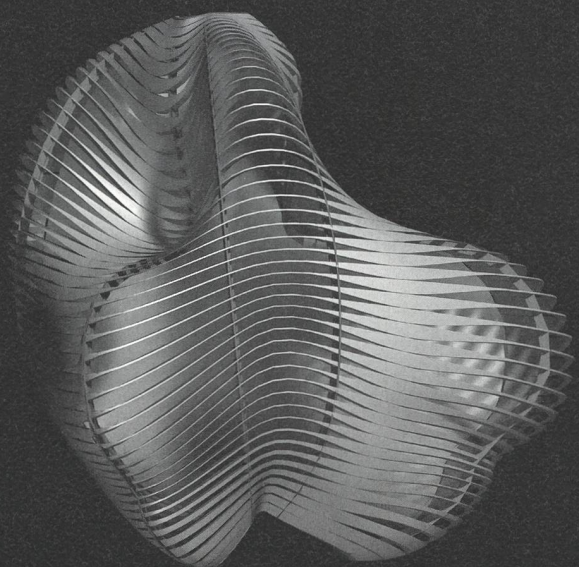
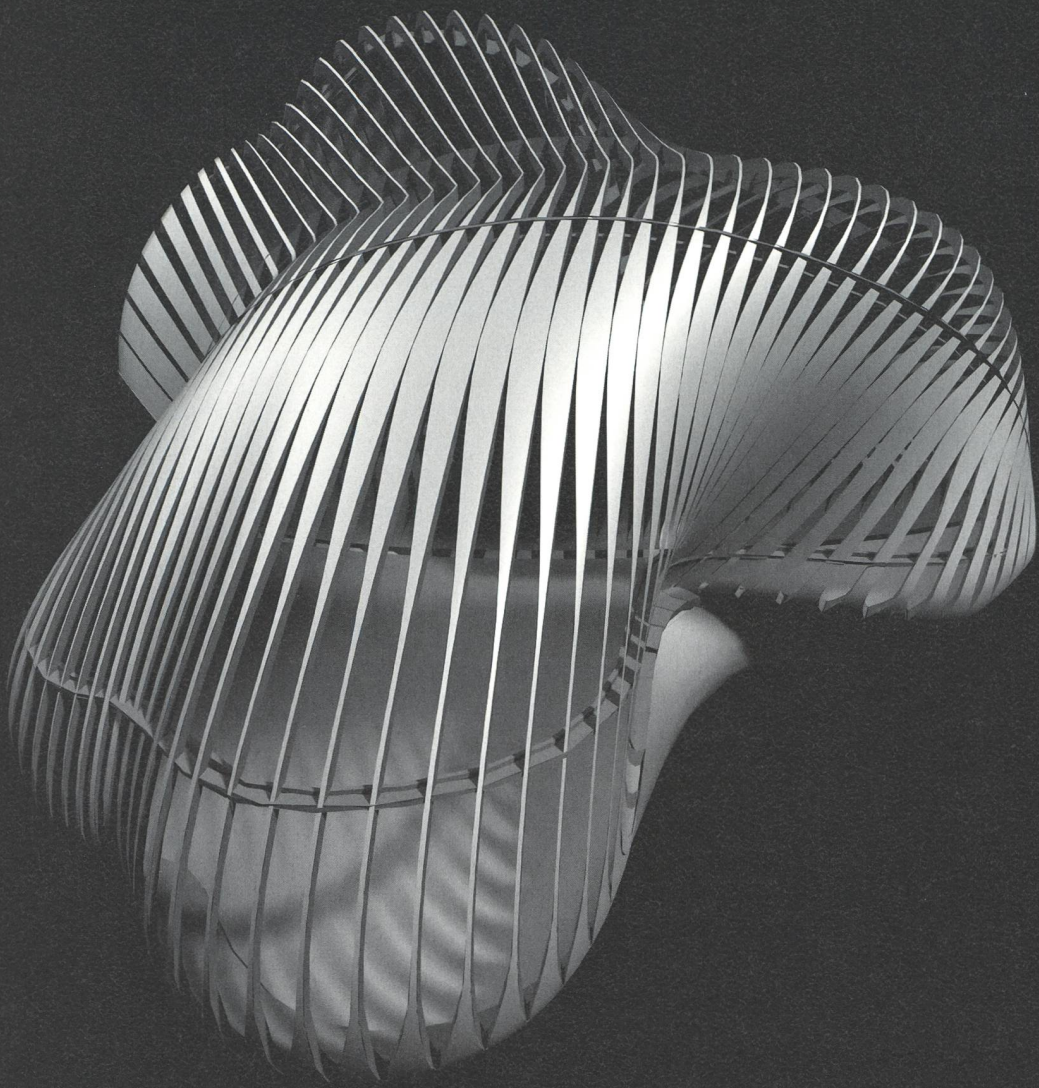
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## A New Style of Life

At 4:15am it breathed in. It awoke to the faint burning of a flickering blue inner light in its gullet and a general feeling of indigestion. As if had eaten a bad meal the night before, it rested fitfully with the persistent feeling that an agitated animal was living in its gut. Its inner atmosphere had the sour smell and taste of bile. It had been churning more than usual and now it was awake before daylight. The irritation of a muffled grinding sound from within itself continued whirring until it was inevitable that the day would be beginning in the dark. At least the acidic blue light pattern was off and a dim incandescent yellow feeling replaced the harsh cathode rays. Its surface began glowing as electrical impulses crisscrossed its skin, and the whirring continued. Its broad girth concealed warm pockets of air and this was most easily heated with minimal energy available on this particular morning. Warm water began coursing through the capillary tubes below its surface washing the acrid color below its skin's surface away as its body walls began to radiate heat. A rush of cold water followed by hotter and hotter blasts ran down its septum clearing its sinuses. Steam and humidity filled its lungs as internal liquids reaching a rolling boil. The woody smell of brewing coffee began wafted from its pores as its skin began breathing out the previous rough night's stench. Its iridescent skin shone reflective yet dull as the morning's coating of dew formed on its metallic curves. It would be several hours before the sun rose and penetrated its scaly protective skin for the first few hours of the day. Until then, squeaking with the sounds of an awakening digestion system, it would twitch and hum in its earthen nest, warming and activating from the inside out.

Meanwhile, within its gut: He lay dreaming that his skin was delaminating in linear waves traveling up and down his legs. He awoke to find that his slacks were delaminating in linear waves synchronized with the test pattern on his television screen. The initial sensation of gentle massage across his thighs was transforming into the gumming bites of miniature toothless fish. It was shortly after 4:00 a.m. and he had passed out on the couch with the television on. He had not peeled off his pants. The time consuming process of removing, cleaning, feeding and putting to bed animate contact lenses, clothing, hearing aids, wigs, shoes and other bio-prosthetics could sometimes take more than a half an hour. The slacks and jacket that had been tossed on the floor were this season's tropical weight miracle fabric. The term „miracle fabric“ originated with the use of plastic fibers in clothing such as nylon and rayon and now, along with the slang term „*growthing*,“ described any farm raised article of clothing; in this case a two piece tropical weight leisure suit genetically engineered from the archived cells of an extinct Brazilian rain forest frog. The jacket had been put away wet and was now mated to the alligator shoes they landed upon and it was not clear if they could be decoupled. The worst damage to his jacket was not the scalar imprint resulting from its intrication with his shoes but the pat-







tern disruption caused by the exposure to the television. His newest and most extravagant clothing purchase could only be worn from dusk until dawn without suffering the same fate as its amphibious genetic parents; sensitive iridescent skin damaged by increasing ultraviolet rays. Even more damaging to these fragile reptilian skins than solar radiation is the repetitive mechanical impact of cathode ray displays. After four hours in front of the television, milky stripes were already visible below the slick surface of his slacks, a gridded record of the simple temporal rhythm of scanning technology. Contrasting the gridded space of this record was the biologically engineered rhythm of growth distributed fluidly across the slacks adapting to the tailoring and seaming of the garment. The price of his new boutique amphibious image would be a trip to the pet store around the corner that operated a genetic cleaners specializing in the regenerative growth of miracle fabrics. His failed green thumb when it came to taking care of his clothing suggested that he was better suited to either nerdy tree toad suits or kitsch color shift chameleon shirts.

He needed a strong cup of coffee; more precisely, the ritual of measuring, grinding and brewing that it entailed. Once daily, he indulged himself with a cup of coffee brewed from Kopi Luac beans. These beans, whose name is derived from the Luac, a marsupial, lemur-like creature that eats ripened coffee cherries which have fallen to the forest floor, were shipped from New Guinea in limited quantities by a Papuan Indian tribe that controlled the international Kopi Luac coffee bean market commanding astronomical prices from Japanese and American coffee importers. The flat molars of the Luacs gently masticate the beans, stripping them of their fruit and cracking their outer shells. Once swallowed these beans are bathed in a mixture of bile and tropical fruit acid. As they pass through the primate's ribbed gastrointestinal tracts their outer husks are stripped through friction. The dung with which they are surrounded absorbs their remaining moisture imbuing them with a slightly acrid fruitiness while reducing their caffeine content. Frightening the shit out of the Luacs with simulated leopard calls, locals collect the dung as it falls to the rainforest floor, later filtering it for the hard beans. This process yields a full bodied Pacific bean that substitutes the bitter finish on the sides of one's tongue that accompanies most coffees with a unique musky nasal aftertaste associated with aged Chevre, or the fecal aroma of a barnyard. There was no mechanical substitute for organic decomposition. Because the Luac is a protected species and importing them is a difficult legal and expensive financial prospect he has been looking for surrogate digestive pathways. In an attempt to replicate the diet of the ring-tailed lemur with some other animal he realized that his girlfriend's vegetarian diet of nuts, berries and occasional soy approximated that of the lemurs very closely. Without notification or permission he began feeding his girlfriend small ripe coffee fruit in her granola. With an animistic love for technology he prepares the beans in a chrome and glass coffee distiller. Along with the affection for the technologies of steel and silicon his libido for mechanical reproduction has been redirected towards a more psychologically primitive and more technically advanced set of desires. Neither entrepreneurship nor connoisseurship explains these behaviors; only the agricultural manifest that organized his new style of life.

Unlike the rhythmic repetitive patterns of an agricultural intelligence, his thought processes were more akin to those of a parasite. His thought processes followed the paths of an influenza virus; constantly mapping lines of mutation and proliferation through the construction of elaborate networks within, through and across forms of life; inventing new forms of host through unforeseen connections; initiating physical and informational intercourse with and between everything; husbanding architecture, bacteria, chemistry, economics, electronics, insects, fish, furniture, mammals, plants, reptiles and silicon. The parasite is this year's model of yesterday's adman. He is the ecological organization man of today. This is the only possible explanation for his habit of beginning his day with a freshly brewed cup of coffee processed from the rectum of a marsupial.

Why invent a silicon ship to regulate carburetion in your car engine when a smear of rat brain is far more sophisticated? Why invent a night vision lens when an anglerfish eye has already perfected the job? The cosmetic surgery industry was the first to submit to the ecological paradigm; hair implants, liposuction, breast implants and back hair removal to name a few. Instead of inventing better machines, organic processes were being harnessed and the natural processes of auto-cannibalization were being catalyzed by a new parasitic sensibility coupled with readily available genetic technologies.

He and his generation were the first to abandon dominion over nature in favor of mutation and recombination. He is the hurtling point of a trajectory folding back on itself from an origin in the domestication of the wilderness, moving towards the industrialization of the planet, gaining momentum with unbridled liberal ecological ambition and rocketing back towards its original moment with the wholesale capitalization of organic matter's animate vitality to produce a reconfigured alien wilderness. Shifting from a fear of extinction to the ecstasy of mutation, the natural and industrial world had emerged as a circus of monstrosities born from a bastard intelligence. He was not alone. Before the marriage of industrialization and genetic bestiality the master narrative of his generation had been ecology. Instead of seeing nature as a structure organized from a God modeled on humanity, the New Age religions of ecology redefined nature as a web of intricate exchanges. God is not a rational architect of nature but a procreative virus.

Excerpt from the chapter: „A New Style of Life“ from *Embryological House*, Princeton Architectural Press, forthcoming Fall 2001.