

NEANDERTHALS, A STUDY

Amy Lam

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## ABSTRACT

Neanderthals, A Study  
Amy Lam

*Neanderthals, A Study* is an attempt at writing the ultimate natural history text: a speculative study of a species that is supposed to be extinct, the genre is imagined as one that creates as it describes.

Before Linnaeus, father of the modern systems of classification that structure how we know the natural world today, creatures lacked place and name. The discipline of natural history, then, provokes the question of whether or not identity exists pre-language; without “elephant” to gather and frame all elephants, what is an elephant? In a zoo, how does one elephant manage to represent all elephants?

Conceptually liminal, neither true animals nor true humans, Neanderthals bear the burden of contemporary anxiety about the future of our species. In the same way that “primitive peoples” are portrayed as living in antediluvian or utopian worlds, the narrator Amy Lam’s representation of the Neanderthals enacts a particular longing for an elemental, non-technological, nearly supernatural, state of being. The impossibility of this, however, is echoed by the impossible scope of the project itself. The shadow premise – that an impersonator has already written the same book, but in a very different way – emphasizes the desire embodied in fiction: to create something entirely new, even as all the words (and names) are inescapably old. A work-in-progress, *Neanderthals, A Study* aims to be a hypothesis of the point at which alien but twin selves meet.

*All the Universe is full of the lives of perfect creatures.*

*– Konstantin Tsiolkovski*

*Who knows the end?*

*What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise.*

*– H.P. Lovecraft*

## PREFACE

Unlike the other Amy Lam, I do not purport to present an exciting or even exhaustive account of living Neanderthals within these pages. The recently published book that claims to be the true account of my experiences is not: I am not that crusading megalomaniac; the Neanderthal is not mine to exploit. I am but one person, and my personal experience is a puny scraping, a little scratching, at the enormous solidity of Neanderthal life. I can only provide a digest here, a reductive sampling of some of the typical and some of the anomalous – nothing that can truly reflect the Actual Neanderthal in its infinite Actuality. This true version (which, unfortunately, must follow the false) may seem less immediately satisfying. I apologize. Of course my impersonator is more confident as me than I am.

I have kept quiet for so long because I have thought it possible that this should not be written at all. This is not an idea that I can banish easily. I am plagued by questions:

- If we coo and cluck over all manners of Cats and Dogs, and spend most of our time taking lots of photos of them in funny poses wearing funny hats, how can we live with the Neanderthal?
- If we make martyrs of Dodos, as if they were saints for disappearing, but try to exterminate the Pigeon, how can we live with the Neanderthal?
- If we throw platters of data into airless outer space, hoping to prove ourselves as worthy creatures to unseen Aliens with our melodious popular music and our discovery of the genome, how can we live with the Neanderthal?
- If we treasure our loneliness on planet Earth, if we bask in our certainty that we so deeply misunderstood, so without reason for being, how can we live with the Neanderthal?

I do not know if I can provide answers to these questions that would be less than awful. For it is testament to the deep perversion of humankind that we have, throughout our entire history, thoroughly and systematically erased all understanding and regard for the dead Neanderthal from our *umwelten*; that we

have, in our 200 000 or so years, lived as if *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* were the only *Homos* around. The modern logic of “extinction” has made the living Neanderthal impossible; the species can be referred to now as no more than a pile of ancient bones. It is no coincidence that the first Neanderthal skulls were “discovered” a few years before the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Out of jaw and leg bones, scientists have fabricated a gruesome narrative in which Neanderthals are eliminated by the variation of *Homo* to which we belong. A bunch of dirty fragments (the laughable “fossil record”) has come to represent the story of life, and in it is no place for any other humans. We are content to keep our noses to the ground, looking for bits of old big toes and knee caps; we are vain; we do not want to see lumpier, smellier, versions of ourselves; we want to be new; we neglect that time branches and branches...

So what could we possibly know to do with a living Neanderthal? As my impersonator has proved, we seem to be incapable of imagining anything beyond what we already think we know. By describing a Neanderthal that is no more than a glorified version of the popular ape-man, she endangers the real Neanderthal, a creature of mystery and power. (Whether her false Amy Lam, a character out of some colonial fantasy, does the same to the real counterpart I leave temporarily unanswered.)

When I first came back from my strange journey, I was overwhelmed by the attention I received. The attention came in different varieties: some people, quite obviously, were not concerned at all in what I had experienced, but only wanted me to serve as an *amuse-bouche*, a novelty; others were genuinely curious but could not, ultimately, see past their prejudices; still others acted as if they sympathized entirely, all the while biting their tongues about what they really thought of me. Ultimately, I was lured into the eye of the media to be publicly humiliated. I was treated like a freak of the worst kind: a dishonest one. Is it surprising, then, that I retreated? With the publicity payments I earned I built a refuge for myself. I have lived alone, largely without any physical contact with other people, for the past seven years. Some interesting conclusions about what I have been doing on my own have been made. I am used to the occasional revelation about the “Insane Conspiracy Theorist” Amy Lam and her “Bizarre Mountain-Dungeon” (*National Enquirer*, 22 November 02), or “Reclusive Amy Lam Threatens *SIXTH* Squirrel Intruder with a Club” (*Us*, 14 March 04), or Amy Lam, “Stuck in the Ice Age, Refuses Psychiatric Attention Despite Deteriorating Conditions of Her Lonely Basement” (*OK!*, 08 June 07).

I come out of my *self-imposed* isolation not to vindicate my own name, but to vindicate the name of the Neanderthals of No-Name Island. I will try to refrain from referring to the first book written under this title with my identity. I want to offer, as much as possible, an unsullied account. This book is for those who are



truly invested in thinking about how it could be possible to live with the Neanderthal. I have tried to create a portrait of Neanderthals as I came to know them. Out of this, it is my enduring hope that we may begin to determine, however belatedly, how to fashion a world in which humans and other humans can co-exist, perhaps not entirely together, but at least in mutual recognition of one another. Would it be so difficult, so humiliating, to revise our science? Could we not make some small provisions, shuffle what we know for a little extra room?

My story is but a poor substitute for a true Neanderthal perspective, one told by a member of the species. But the Neanderthal does not speak simply because we bid it to. And even if we could pry open the mouth and make the tongue move, the enduring problem of language remains: Neanderthal communication is, as you will see, unlike any *Sapiens* model. (Furthermore, it exists only in oral forms.) The translated texts (Long Proverbs) that I provide here are speculative; they are an imaginative response to the question of “Neanderthal literature”; they are meant to approximate, not define.

Finally, foreseeing the inevitable charges that I want to destroy the existing order of *Homos*, or that I extol the virtues of the *Neanderthalensis* over the virtues of the *Sapiens*; I will state that I was but an inadvertent explorer and observer, and that I have presented myself as honestly as I can. If there is one thing that any impersonator cannot hope to understand, it is that even trying to think about what

happened seven years ago makes me feel like a stranger to myself. My knowledge of the Neanderthal also remains remote; I can only grasp it in fits and starts. I cannot guarantee any satisfaction for you either. There is no way to circumvent this, just as there is no way to describe a new colour. I will, nevertheless, ask the most meaningless of questions: when you look in the mirror, what isn't backwards?

Sincerely Yours,

Amy Lam

June 2008

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## POPULATION

In the year 2008, there are eighty-six Neanderthals living on a small rocky island off the coast of Alaska. Forty-one of these living Neanderthals are female; forty-five are male. Sixty-four of the group are full-grown adults, eight are adolescent (between the ages of ten to fifteen), and fourteen are children (between the ages of zero to fifteen.) The average age is approximately twenty-eight years. (The average Neanderthal life-span is thirty-seven years.) As far as we know, the members of this group are the sole surviving examples of the species *Homo Neanderthalensis* on Earth.

## FIRST EXTINCTION / RELATION TO *H. SAPIENS*

According to science, the species became extinct near the end of the Pleistocene era, or one of the last Ice Ages. In the most common extinction theory, *Homo Neanderthalensis* successfully occupied the northern regions of Europe and Asia for over 10 000 years, until modern humans, *Homo Sapiens*, migrated from Africa into Europe and, over the span of a few thousand years, forced the former out of existence. *Homo N.* and *Homo S.* share a common ancestor, *Homo Heidelbergensis*, on the human family tree.

A lot of useless debate goes on about whether the Neanderthals were exterminated, indirectly out-competed, or assimilated by the *Sapiens*, the other species. This debate is fueled by the notion that in this case, *we* are the other species; depending on what type of person she is, the pre-historian will attribute to our ancestors varying degrees of responsibility. Some propose that *Sapiens* went around on planned head-lobbing missions, orphaning babies with glee. Others posit that berry bushes or other food sources were within the range of both *Homo S.* and *Homo N.* groups, but *Homo S.* were simply faster at picking all the berries than *Homo N.* Still others imagine the *Sapiens* as having realized that they could befriend and persuade some of the Neanderthals into abandoning their own and becoming low-waged laborers until, so effectively cut off from each other, they couldn't reproduce anymore. (I am not sure, however, that these three scenarios are so distinct, or that the three types of historians are so different from each other.)

In any case, paleoanthropologists agree that by that point in time, *Homo Sapiens* possessed vastly superior technological skills: wicks were used to burn fat so as to create portable light/heat sources; the perpetually frozen ground of the tundra was a simple freezer for storage; fish and birds, not only land animals, were hunted and cooked; water was boiled with hot rocks; etc. In addition to these methods of survival, *Sapiens* knew to organize their living sites in terms of

activities. They are also described as having access to the sanctum of Art. They painted horses on the walls of their caves, made flutes out of bones, and carved women into rock. Finally, it is asserted that these early modern humans had some kind of trading network that stretched from the Baltic to the Mediterranean – amber from the former and seashells from the latter have been found at all sorts of places far away from their natural sources. Neanderthals, they think, had none of these. As one paleoanthropologist equivocates, italics not mine, “Nothing suggests... Neanderthals were *necessarily* inferior users of their environment...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tattersall, Ian. *The Last Neanderthal: The Rise, Success, and Mysterious Extinction of Our Closest Human Relatives*.

LONG PROVERB 5

IF THERE IS AN ANIMAL AND IT IS RUNNING FOR ITS LIFE  
AND THERE IS A MOUNTAIN IN FRONT OF IT,  
WHAT SHOULD IT DO? THE PROBLEM IS OBVIOUS.  
TURN THE PROBLEM AROUND.

IF THERE IS A MOUNTAIN AND IT IS NOT RUNNING FOR ITS LIFE  
AND THERE IS AN ANIMAL BEHIND IT,  
WHAT SHOULD IT DO? THE SOLUTION IS OBVIOUS.<sup>2</sup>  
TURN THE SOLUTION AROUND.  
THE MOUNTAIN MUST MOVE ASIDE.

IF YOU GIVE THE WORLD YOUR WILL  
THEN THE WORLD WILL TAKE CARE OF IT.  
ONLY REMEMBER TO ONLY GIVE IT  
EXACTLY WHAT YOU ARE SURE OF:  
THE QUESTION THAT YOU CAN'T ANSWER BY YOURSELF.  
IF YOU ASK FOR SOMETHING ELSE  
THEN THERE IS NO AGREEMENT THAT  
BOTH QUESTION AND ANSWER WILL NOT BE  
TURNED AROUND AND SENT BACK AT YOU

*(Trans.)*

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<sup>2</sup> One can also observe this Neanderthal precept in cartoon logic. I.e. Wile E. Coyote cannot fit through the Roadrunner shape because Wile E. Coyote cannot catch the Roadrunner. If the mountain were to let Coyote through then Coyote, Roadrunner, and the mountain would all stop existing. It is better for the mountain to make the same choice every time.

## HABITAT

Very well adapted to extreme climates, the Neanderthals of No-Name Island have thrived modestly upon their small, cold rock.

The island is mountainous. A small stream, fed by a spring, meanders through one of the valleys and finds its way to the Bering Sea. The mountains are filled with cave formations, which the Neanderthals use as their primary living sites.

Due to permafrost, the island is almost entirely treeless, except for some stunted birch and willow trees, but in the summer flowering grasses grow abundantly in the valley. Blooms include: forget-me-not, marsh marigold, dwarf rhododendron, anemone, lupine.

The sub-Arctic climate has winter temperatures as low as  $-50^{\circ}$  C, while summer temperatures can be as high as  $30^{\circ}$  C. The winter lasts approximately seven months of the year, with a very short autumn and an even shorter spring.

Summer lasts about four months (May-August). During the winter, daylight lasts for only six hours of the day while in the summer total darkness is never experienced.

The exact location of the island, in terms of longitude and latitude, is impossible to pinpoint, as No-Name happens to be situated within the boundaries of what is



popularly known as “Alaska’s Bermuda Triangle” (although it would be more accurately described as a trapezoid). In addition to a perpetual low pressure system that creates frequent fog, high winds, and thunderstorms, making the area extremely difficult to navigate for both ships and aircrafts, this area, like the original tropical trapezoid, possesses strange properties – probably magnetic in nature – that cause navigational equipment to go awry and strange fluctuations in time. Most famously, this Bermuda Triangle of Alaska (or Devil’s Triangle, or Vile Vortex) has been attributed with the disappearance of two U.S. Congressmen, Boggs and Begich, in 1972. Many scientists insist that Alaska’s Bermuda Triangle is the natural tendency of icebergs to present themselves to aircraft as solid and then suddenly open into yawning crevasses that swallow them up. The fact that scientists can make this claim about icebergs without finding this behavior to be deeply unsettling, if not outright sinister, I think is more revealing of the science than of the phenomena.

### NOT A SHIPWRECK

The events that led to my body being washed up on the shore of No-Name Island can only be explained when the problem of Alaska’s Bermuda Triangle is solved. It is clear to me that the Triangle is what caused my disappearance from the Carnival Cruise Line ship, but my experience, taken alone, cannot illuminate the

ways of the Triangle. (Overall, the possibility of solving the problem of the Triangle is very slight.)

I was only seventeen. My parents had decided it was time for the entire family to go on vacation together, and so had rounded up my sister and I to embark upon the "Carnival Cruise Line" Vancouver-Alaska Cruise, a seven-day all-you-could-eat and duty-free-shop extravaganza set against a scenic backdrop of, amongst other things, orcas, humpback whales, wooden sidewalks, old-fashioned saloons, horse-drawn carriages, otters, seals, a very large concentration of glaciers, a series of glaciers named after Ivy League schools, eagles, bears, waterfalls, and mountains. I regarded this vacation as unfortunate but inescapable, and so prepared myself as best I could. I filled my suitcase with clean socks and earplugs.

I hardly had time to acquaint myself with the first gift shop before I was overtaken by an attack of nausea that sent me half-reeling, half-crawling to the shelf-bed of my cabin. The other members in my family took my descent into the bowels of the vessel with little surprise; on long car rides, I was always the one wanting to pull over, so they waved me off and soldiered onwards to the next level of the ship's entertainments. In my cabin, with the brochure of On-Board Activities over my face I tried, as much as I could, to fall asleep.

Suddenly, I felt a deep cold all around me. I opened my eyes. The cruise ship had completely disappeared. I was clinging to my inflatable pillow (that came with the shelf-bed), floating on the open ocean. There was no wreckage: only I was left, floating in a black sea. Something about being in the hold of the Triangle, though, changes you. All of your regular concerns vanish along with your regular bearings. I remained perfectly unpanicked: I gripped my pillow; I did not imagine myself drowning; I was not afraid. It is almost as if in that moment I was bestowed with an extraordinary immunity to reality. I felt as if something alien had been inserted into my core, a material of incredible buoyancy. I put my head on the pillow and drifted along, on a cloud, frozen numb, yes, but not unpleasantly, my thoughts entirely free of distress. I slept, carried along by some current for an immeasurable amount of time. Eventually, the forces of the Triangle deposited me on No-Name Island.

## LONG PROVERB 6

TO THINK THAT ONE THING FOLLOWS ANOTHER IS  
NO COMFORT, WHEN ONE ASKS THE QUESTION,  
FOR WHAT DID YOU SIT ON MY NECK  
CAN YOU ANSWER? IN THE SAME WAY  
THE THING THAT FOLLOWS HAS NO ANSWER  
FOR YOU, IF YOU THINK YOU CAN COME UP WITH  
SOMETHING BETTER THEN TELL IT BUT  
THE ONLY THING TO KNOW IS THAT  
IF YOU SHIT ON YOUR FEET

THEN WHAT COMES NEXT?  
YOUR FEET WANT TO KNOW  
THE GROUND WANTS TO KNOW  
EVERYTHING HAS THE SAME WANT  
TO KNOW BUT NOTHING  
KEEPS A RECORD OF WHAT COMES FIRST  
AND WHAT COMES AFTER  
ONLY THAT A BONE HOLDS THE SAME  
BONE THAT IT HOLDS<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Neanderthal conception of causality – of which there is none – can be frustrating, especially when applied to everyday *Sapiens* activities such as cooking or building.

## DIET

You can do many interesting things at the Science Centre, like shattering lettuce leaves into hundreds of pieces by dipping them into vats of dry ice, or viewing a monitor that shows you what the child of you and any other person would look like, but the most satisfying of all must be the foil-wrapped freeze-dried astronaut ice cream at the gift shop. Developed by *Whirlpool*, the washer/dryer manufacturer, it comes in three terrible flavours. Even though all of them taste like compacted talcum powder, people are enthralled because they know it is dessert in space. So, too, the Neanderthal diet may seem meager and unappetizing, but so, too, can the Neanderthal diet become something to long for.

On No-Name Island, Neanderthals eat from a necessarily limited selection of plants and animals, and everything in its most basic state (that is, almost entirely unprepared). In the summer, the bulk of meals come from foraging for young leaves, shoots, bulbs, and roots. In the winter, the dietary staple is goat meat, the mountain goat being the easiest to hunt on No-Name Island. I have witnessed that mountain goats are afflicted with the strange desire to stand at the tallest point in any given area. Sometimes, the tallest point around is on top of the entrance to a Neanderthal cave, so a goat will be standing there, quite contentedly, on its perch and a Neanderthal will come out, luckily, from a nap.

Then the club that is kept at the cave entrance for this express purpose is used. Smaller animals are much harder to catch, so usually if rabbit or fox meat is available it is the product of an accident. Younger rabbits and foxes will make fatal mistakes like running directly into the path of a Neanderthal holding a rock. Or, more commonly, their bodies will be scavenged: Neanderthals, despite a poor sense of smell, are quite adept at finding bodies.

There are no special rituals followed when dealing with a killed or found body: it will simply be drained of its blood, split open and skinned with a sharpened flint tool, and the soft tissue cut up into chunks. The blood is an important part of the Neanderthal diet, as it is a fortifying and warm liquid in an otherwise mostly dry and cold landscape. Bones are also disassembled and distributed, as Neanderthals possess very robust digestive tracts that allow for the ingestion of animal matter *Homo Sapiens* must discard. Eating happens immediately. Neanderthals do not equate fire with cooking – it is used exclusively for warmth – so everything is consumed raw. Afterwards, Neanderthals will collectively prepare the only by-product that is not eaten: they use their teeth to scrape the skins clean, for clothing and blankets, in a kind of post-feeding ritual that lasts well into the evening. I am fortunate to be able to say that one of the most satisfying meals I have ever experienced was one where after feeding on the flesh of a fox that I had found lying near my cave (all I had to do was drop a stone on its head to make sure it was really dead) I sat beside a crackling fire with other Neanderthals

and pulled its skin between my teeth repeatedly. The fox meat was slightly fermented, and after a while my jaw ached, but I was full, and I had fed others. Perhaps it is not so unbelievable that astronauts sometimes long for a plate of food that has all the water sucked out of it.

Very little food is stored by Neanderthals; they usually consume the entirety of what they gather or hunt in the day and share with others the excess. To the modern human, this may seem short-sighted and unwise, but I have seen that this practice actually makes them not entirely unhealthy (they are surprisingly able-bodied). Because they are unable to rely upon an accumulation of provisions, they must be aware of their environments at all times, looking for what will make the next meal. This also makes them unsusceptible to the neuroses of modern human diets; the general attitude towards food is that whatever happens to land on their plate is whatever is best. Of course, this also means that occasionally they will go without food for days or occasionally weeks – starvation is a not uncommon cause of death on No-Name Island, especially during the winter months.

Finally, I have never once witnessed any cases of cannibalism<sup>4</sup> amongst the Neanderthals: even with sockets sunken by hunger, I have never once seen one look at another with ravenous eyes.

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<sup>4</sup> For a real-life discussion of the strange intersection of cannibalism and naming, please refer to a personal essay written by Craig Hamilton Parker, available at

## GREETINGS

What a sight I must have been to the Neanderthals who first encountered me washed up on the shore of No-Name Island! That Amy Lam was certainly not the Amy Lam I would want anyone, let alone another kind of human, to meet for the first time: sputtering, grey-skinned, limp-haired. I was just a sniveling body, looking for the first solid thing to grab hold of and lean upon. So I cannot blame the Neanderthals for treating me as they did; given my pathetic state, they did nothing less than save me.

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<<http://www.psychics.co.uk/coincidences/cannibal.html>>. His grandfather's cousin was named Richard Parker, who, in 1884, at the age of 17, ran away from home to become a cabin boy on the *Mignonette*. The *Mignonette* capsized in a hurricane, and, stuck in a lifeboat for 19 days with practically no food or water, the inexperienced Richard Parker drank the salty ocean water and became sick. "The custom of the sea" at that time was to draw straws in order to determine which man the others would eat first but instead the Captain of the ship made the decision to kill Parker, as he was youngest and likely to die first anyway. The men dined on Parker for 35 days until they were rescued by the S.S. Montezuma. Upon returning to England the survivors were the first men tried for murder in what was then a relatively common practice amongst desperate seamen; two of them were sentenced to death but, due to public outcry, Queen Victoria commuted their sentences to 6 months imprisonment... The cabin-boy Richard Parker seemed to have been doomed from the beginning, though: in 1974, Craig's cousin Nigel Parker was the first to (publicly) notice that the real Richard Parker shared the same name as a character in Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837), which tells the story of four shipwrecked men who draw straws in order to determine which of them will be eaten. The cabin boy who drew the short straw, was, of course, named Richard Parker. Around the same time as this discovery, Nigel Parker's father also experienced a strange coincidence: while planning to write a play about the original Richard Parker, he was sent a book to review titled "The Raft," with a cover depicting three men threatening a boy on the eponymous raft, authored by *another* Richard Parker. Craig goes on to describe many other situations for the Parker family in which Richard Parker has surfaced.



I initially mistook the Neanderthals for modern humans. Thrown up by the ocean onto the gravelly beach, I immediately began crawling towards what I thought were some blurry human shapes. How typical, to think that I had managed to come upon *more people*. No wonder, when I mustered a hoarse cry, they ran from me! When I cried a second time, they disappeared from sight. In my egotism, I wondered what kind of country I had been exiled to, whose natives would scurry away with fear from broken things brought in by the tide; I worried that I was stranded in a land of cowards. I collapsed, whimpering, certain that I was to die due to the ignoble behavior of this strange population.

When I came to, I was being kicked in the ribs. I felt pain but also elation: I was going to be saved; I was not forsaken. The unfamiliar people had come back for me. They were extraordinarily unfamiliar – they were naked and very hairy and shaped rather oddly – but I forgave them for their unsightly appearance. In my mind, I practiced doing all the friendly but threatening things to my new hosts that I would do after I collected enough strength to stand up and show them I was alive. I would empty my pockets and show them how few coins I had, I would shake their hands firmly, I would take off my belt, I would look each one in the eyes while taking off my belt, I would gesture benevolently... I plotted all of these motions deliberately, certain that I would be able to eventually win their respect and my sovereignty. Before I knew it, however – before I could get in a position to

wage my warning/plea – my ankles were gripped by two different people, and I was dragged along the ground, legs splayed, head bouncing.

I was hauled off the beach for a group inspection. More of the hairy people came and crowded around my body. There seemed to be hundreds of them. One pulled the scraps of clothing away from my body so that I lay completely naked. Another squeezed my nose between his thumbs. Another wiggled my toes. Yet another pinched the skin of my armpit. And so on, in turn, until I had been subjected to an infinite variety of humiliating but minor trials. I was so overwhelmed at being treated in such a way, I could no longer even fantasize about the rituals I would perform to secure their approval. Weak and tired, I could not mount any struggle or even voice another whimper; I could only lie there like a patient who had been poorly anesthetized, evacuated of feeling but not of thought. More importantly, I also had the uncanny sense that I was being weighed in the balance, so to speak, and found lacking; I knew that these foreigners thought me to be different and lesser.

At this point, I would prefer to omit all the ways in which I imagined I would die and, following, all the ways in which I would have my death revenged. I have realized that one's private imagination is often as private as one would like.

Rather, it can quite easily be filled with all variety of public horror. Suffice to say, I was not skinned from end to end and my skin stitched into a flag; or split open,

stuffed, and rearranged into an ottoman; or ground up into a decorative paste to be applied onto clayware; or simply hung upside down and left to wither. Instead, after the strange inspection, I was dragged to a cave and placed by the fire. Some water was dripped into my mouth. Still fearful, I reluctantly passed into an uneasy rest.

I know now that the Neanderthals had immediately recognized me as human. They were out scavenging and they found my body: because of my cries, they took pity on me, and decided not to finish me off with a blow to the head. Did I deserve it? While they were deliberating my fate, I had been deliberating theirs; while they did not damn me, I cannot say I did the same.

## LONG PROVERB 1

YOU ARE EQUAL TO THE WORLD  
YOU ARE PUT IN, THIS IS  
PROVEN BY FISH CHILDREN OF  
FISH, PLANT CHILDREN OF  
PLANT, BIRD CHILDREN OF  
BIRD. NO PARENT ASKS WHY IS MY CHILD SO LIKE ME  
I WANT SOMETHING ELSE.<sup>5</sup> NO ONE  
GETS TO PICK, EVER. ALWAYS EVEN  
WHEN NOT, YOU ARE ASKING FOR IT

SO THE UNWANTED GIFT IS THE ONLY GIVEN.  
THE OTHER WAS NOT THINKING OF YOU NOR  
WAS HE NOT THINKING OF YOU  
HOW IS THIS A BAD IDEA,  
HOW IS HE SUPPOSED TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT,  
IS THIS A BAD IDEA  
IS HE SUPPOSED TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT  
IMAGINE A ROCK THAT IS ROLLING AWAY IN PROTEST  
IMAGINE ALL THE OTHER ROCKS

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<sup>5</sup> This idea may arise from the fact that, other than height, it is almost impossible to tell Neanderthal children and adults apart. Even as a baby, the Neanderthal's facial features are almost fully formed; the *Sapiens* appreciation of juvenile characteristics as "cute" is inapplicable here. Neanderthal children are sometimes treated in ways that would seem intolerable by *Sapiens* norms.

## APPEARANCES (pt. 1)

The Neanderthal Appearance is so recognizable it exists almost independently of the Neanderthal. A clumsy, knuckle-dragging, misshapen, brow-heavy ogre: this is undoubtedly what you think you know. And you have never even seen a single photo of a living Neanderthal. Yet this benighted Appearance has determined nearly all thinking about Neanderthal Behavior; surely such an ugly thing could not *help* but slouch towards oblivion!

Backwards and crude, this popular Not-logic derives from the superstitious judgments of the paleontological tradition; claims about the way Neanderthals look, act, and even think, are based only upon the speculations of individuals while examining fragmentary skeletons. In this way, the imagined Neanderthal Exterior comes to represent what should remain an unimaginable Neanderthal Interior. A typical passage from *Fossil Man* (1921), a definitive work by a forefather of the discipline, the Frenchman Marcellin Boule, proceeds in a typically lax manner:

With regard to the lower limb, it is clear that if the formation of the pelvis and the great development of the gluteal muscles indicate that biped attitude had already been attained, the anatomical characters of femur and tibia, seen in profile in the upright position,

show that the leg and thigh, when extended, could not have been in a precisely straight line with each other; that the femur must have sloped downwards and forwards, and that the tibia, sloping in a contrary direction, must have formed a wide angle with the femur. So that, without being mechanically impossible, the total extension of the knee could not have been normal, and the habitual attitude must have been one of semi-flexion... In general, the ordinary normal carriage of Neandertal [*sic*] Man must then have differed from our own. This fossil Man often exhibits an infantile morphology, that is to say, a morphology the most striking and surprising traits of which are found in either the newly born or unborn infant of Europeans.

Boule moves blithely from “femur” to “biped attitude” to “infantile,” with little regard for making any logical connections between the terms. In other sections of the book, the “absence” of chin is, astoundingly, proof of an essential inhumanity and a receding forehead is forced to occupy “the lowest rung of the human ladder”. Contemporary paleontologists may protest otherwise, claiming that their 3D models and videos are not nearly so naive, but it is obvious that the assumptions of Boule’s work remains remarkably persistent in popular culture. The following excerpt, also of Boule, summarizes what the Neanderthal – who,

like you or I, did not choose the body he occupies – has to endure at the hands of such a man:

It is important to note that the physical characters of the Neandertal [*sic*] type are quite in agreement with what archaeology teaches us as to his bodily capacity, his psychology, and his habits... the probable absences of all traces of any preoccupation of an aesthetic or of a moral kind, are quite in agreement with the brutish appearance of this energetic and clumsy body, of the heavy-jawed skull, which itself still declares the predominance of functions of a purely vegetative or bestial kind over the functions of the mind.

This kind of literalism is alarming but widely accepted because it offers the simplest formula for explaining phenomena: the direct, one-to-one relationship. As *Fossil Men* so consistently illustrates, the speed with which one can leap from made-up physical description to making inferences about moral nature bypasses all complexity: physical evidence becomes evidence entire. But when we look at ourselves, do we not know that we are more than the lifted eyebrows we see? Are we not less gullible than we seem? In a particularly revealing moment, Mssr. Marcellin Boule admits as much:

We cannot by means of such evidence claim to be able to penetrate all the secrets of the structure of the brain of any being. The results of such studies as can be carried out on casts of the cranial cavity may be likened to our idea of the form of the statue the covering of which we have been forbidden to raise, the covering being represented in the present case by the meninges of the brain cavity. Nevertheless, such casts, when made with the necessary skill and accuracy, enable us, in comparing them with similar casts made from the skulls of apes or modern Men, to arrive at some interesting conclusions.

Several pages later, however, Boule ignores his own warning and comes to the “interesting conclusion” that:

It is probable therefore, that Neandertal [*sic*] Man must have possessed only a rudimentary psychic nature, superior certainly to that of the Anthropoid Apes, but markedly inferior to that of any modern race whatever. He had doubtless only the most rudimentary articulate language.

It is unfortunate that Boule comes so close to exposing the fallacious nature of his entire project, only to turn away (In fear? In arrogance?). The caution that he



espouses briefly – the attempt to expose the secrets of any creature’s brain from simply looking at its skull would be to mistake the covering of the statue for the statue itself – should be modified as counsel to all paleontologists who obsess over incomplete skeletons: to formulate a judgment upon a creature after looking at some teeth or femurs is to mistake the foundations of a building for the building itself. Is the Chrysler Building just a number of steel beams stuck in the ground? How pointless it would seem, to have some steel beams stuck in the ground?<sup>6</sup>

If we, unlike Marcellin Boule, remain humble before the Neanderthal Appearance, we can begin to revise all we want to know.

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<sup>6</sup> Judgments made after examining the detritus of a species are similarly specious. Is there any other so-called discipline that places so much import on remains? Do ornithologists only look at wayward feathers? Do Sinologists only look at turds in China?

### LONG PROVERB 3

A HEAD IS SOMETHING YOU SEE ONLY IF YOU HAVE ONE.  
TRY EVERYDAY TO HAVE SOMETHING ELSE:  
A BLANK SPOT AND THEN SOON  
BLANK SPOTS ARE EVERYWHERE  
THIS IS HOW TO STAY CALM BECAUSE  
YOU KNOW HOW IT FEELS WHEN  
THE PATH BEFORE AND AFTER IS  
SPOTTED WITH BLANK SPOTS,  
NOT HEADS AT ALL

REMOVE THE NOSE AND THE PROBLEM  
WITH THE NOSE IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM.  
ONCE A SHAPELESS WORM WAS  
UNHAPPY WITH ITS SHAPE. IT THOUGHT IT LOOKED  
LIKE A BIT OF SQUISHED NOTHING. OF COURSE,  
BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT IT WAS BUT  
IF IT WERE NOT A WORM THEN IT COULD  
BE A SMILE UPSIDE DOWN<sup>7</sup>,  
IMAGINING ITSELF UPSIDE DOWN

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<sup>7</sup> Although this may seem like a facetious bit of advice, this form of Neanderthal conditioning has allowed members of the species to attain states of calm virtually unknown to *Sapiens*. I try to practice this re-imagining every day but I am usually only able to blank out my chin, a bit of my left cheek, and a spot near my brow. It could be argued that this calm is fictional (that obliteration is not peace).

## APPEARANCES (pt. 2)

When I first recognized the Neanderthals for what they are, in a singular moment of clarity after days of unconsciousness, I was struck by the same feeling that I had when I saw a gun in person for the first time. It looked so remarkably like all of the fake ones I had seen, I could not help but be amazed. Yet the gun and the gun were so distinct, so undeniably different, that my sense of wonder was doubled; so, too, did the Neanderthal and the Neanderthal hit me in the head twice over.

So it is still necessary to provide you with a new Neanderthal Appearance: picture a modern man of approximately smaller than average height (approx. 5'1"). This man has a thick torso, as well as limbs of considerable girth, in relation to his height. His arms are perhaps a little longer than yours; the tip of his middle finger reaches the bottom edge of his kneecap. His feet are large and flat. His knees are a little flexed, ready for movement. His shoulders are wide but a little hunched, and his head is balanced on his spinal column in such a way that it juts forward. His brow-ridge is prominent, his nose robust, his teeth wide and white. A short forehead and a short chin. Close-set and piercing eyes... His head is covered in a thick growth of coppery-red hair. All over his body, the same coppery-red hair grows in a finer variety, so that from a distance, it seems as if a slight metallic glow surrounds him. Beneath the hair, the skin is smooth and fair.

The overall bearing is not regal, but something more hearty: the center of weight is closer to the ground, more in tune with gravity.

It is pointless to protest that this Neanderthal Appearance is but the same as the Neanderthal Appearance posited earlier. As I have already stated, they are and they are not. I am not trying to prove the inaccurate to be accurate. Rather, I am trying to demonstrate that a new understanding of something does not require an entirely new world: just as the dead become the living, so can the false become the true.<sup>8</sup>

### “ABDUCTEES”

I have found, in reading about people who have undergone similar experiences to my own (some call us “abductees,” a term I am not sure if I agree with) that the resistance we encounter from the rest of the world is depressingly consistent.

The argument often used to discredit the incredible is that accounts of the incredible are not incredible enough: that, indeed, the incredible is *too close to*

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<sup>8</sup> However, perhaps this is not so much a matter of the false becoming true or the true turning false (or transformation) as a matter of coincidence (or *happening at the same time or place or being identical*). For example, Giorgio Agamben writes that always the word “people” is divided: “We the people” refers to “people” as sovereign, decision-making citizens, but also to “people” as the *court-of-miracles* or camp of the wretched, oppressed, defeated, etc. “[This] will come to an end when, only when, in the classless society or the messianic kingdom, people and people will coincide and there will no longer be, strictly speaking, any *people*.”

the credible. For example, when victims of alien abductions recount their experiences, they are accused of retelling the standard alien abduction narrative. The extremely bright light on a dark country road, the circle of big heads with big staring eyes, the internal cavity probe, the inside-out and backwards clothing, the migraines and nosebleeds, the feeling that *This is not happening*, etc., etc. The fact that individual accounts match the popular account is used as proof against: real experience, it is insisted, is unique. Is it not possible, though, that the unfamiliar can be expressed in vernacular? Do we not accept the principle that new words cannot be invented for the sake of the individual? Maybe this problem of doubt is the same as the one that arises, when, in an extraordinarily novel situation, you still feel somehow cheated, because you cannot shake the notion that you are but in a movie other people have already seen before. It should come as no surprise, then, that the first derisive headline – “After Time Overboard Girl Recovers Memories of Living With Neanderthals in Caves” – was, fundamentally, accurate (*Calgary Herald*, 10 August 01). It should also come as no surprise that when the *National Enquirer* (22 November 03) declaimed that “Amy Lam’s Desperate Attempt at Isolation Unravelling,” the *National Enquirer* was not entirely mistaken.

## CAVES

A typical Neanderthal cave contains a shallow fire pit, clubs of different sizes, and a pile of furs. Located partly underground, the caves are dark and damp; small amounts of oxygen and light are let in by minute cracks in the ground above.

Caves are an important part of the average Neanderthal's life; most social activity occurs inside, especially when winter storms are blowing over the island. A major event in a Neanderthal's life is when she acquires her own cave; this happens when she becomes pregnant. Up until that point, Neanderthals remain in their parents' caves. Coupled Neanderthals will choose caves together. Neanderthals will frequently choose caves that are too small for them, in the interests of warmth. Often they will select a cave that they have to struggle to get into, with an internal space that they can barely have a fire in without singeing their hair.

An adult Neanderthal sleeps sitting up facing the entrance, her back against the wall of the cave. The sitting-up sleep is an acquired skill; Neanderthal young sleep curled up, lying down, until they reach adolescence, at which point Neanderthal mothers work very hard to train them to sleep upright. In addition to tying their wrists to their ankles and placing them between two big rocks, the traditional method is for mothers to stay awake all night and, at irregular intervals, slap the Neanderthal young very hard while banging another rock against the

ground. After approximately three weeks of this training, the young sleep upright on their own, without the aids. It is easy to spot which mothers are currently sleep-training their young as they look especially bedraggled. Why Neanderthals have developed this sleeping habit is unknown, as they do not have any (observable) natural predators on No-Name Island, in the day or in the night.

Lastly, as I must remind myself of daily, the particular always precedes the general, and each Neanderthal Cave is unique just as each Neanderthal is.

Caves are arranged and outfitted in manners specific to character, and the location of each cave reveals a great deal about the personality that inhabits it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> What might a Neanderthal cave be like in the *Sapiens* world? My mountain-basement is an attempt at realizing this: I have tried to enact Neanderthal principles with currently available technology. (For example, I no longer have to sleep upright because of the exterior security system. My well-equipped media centre and library replaces other people.) The Neanderthal cave was especially desirable to me after I was returned to the *Sapiens* world. All the media attention made it necessary. Perhaps you are already familiar with my last television appearance. That one earned me the reputation of being a tantrum-throwing brat, but from the vantage point of the audience you couldn't see what he was doing under the table. Furthermore, each time a reptilian TV man asked about the "specific texture of the Neanderthal rump," I acquired another "suitor". The most benign suitor would send long, rhetorically complex letters about the sensuality of socklessness (it is true that Neanderthals never wore socks). The most malignant suitor would show up to my family home dressed in a loincloth and a unibrow and peer through the windows. One day he managed to actually get into the house and writhe on the floor. My mother brought up the possibility of boarding with Auntie #4, one of the unmarried ones, in Hong Kong for a while. One of my delinquent cousins had been sent to her with "OK results." It was then that I decided I could no longer participate in the *Sapiens* world as it was. What is the significance of the fact that showbiz both forced and allowed me to retreat? Something the *National Enquirer* does not know is that the floor plan of my basement is in the shape of a trapezoid. There are no windows; an advanced lighting set-up simulates the passage of day into night.

## LONG PROVERB 8

KEEP TO YOURSELF WHATEVER IS TOO MUCH.  
THE WORLD IS A SMALL PLACE  
BOUNDED ON ALL SIDES BY THE WORST KIND OF  
WATER. ONLY A CHILD WOULD  
FLING HIMSELF INTO THE OUTSIDE LOOKING FOR ESCAPE  
WHAT DOES HE THINK IS ESCAPE?  
ESCAPE IS NOT A NEW WET  
EXPERIENCE, SOMETHING TO MAKE YOU YELL  
FOR MOTHER

IN THE OPEN EVERYONE CAN SEE FROM ALL SIDES.<sup>10</sup>  
NO ONE WANTS TO LOOK, THAT OFTEN AND  
THAT CLOSE. THE BUG BEHIND THE EAR  
KNOWS HOW THE EAR  
ITSELF IS FILLED WITH UGLY  
THOUGHTS. IN THE SMALLEST PART  
OF THE SMALLEST CAVE YOU KEEP  
THE CLUB AND THE SHARPENED CLUB,  
YOU AND THE BAD YOU

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<sup>10</sup> The group huddle is a favorite pastime of Neanderthals in winter months; nearly everyone on the Island will stand in concentric circles facing in. Each Neanderthal then jostles her neighbour, trying to get to the innermost circle, causing the entire huddle to be a constantly circulating mass of bodies. The alternation between the cold of the outer circles and the heat of the inner is akin to the invigorating *Sapiens* tradition of jumping from sauna to lake.



## HANS' CAVE

Hans's cave was slightly removed from the central grouping of the other caves. It had the usual arrangement of fire pit and furs; its major distinction, from what I could tell, was that Hans lived entirely alone. Hans was the Neanderthal of No-Name Island tasked to look after me. I believe that this *difficult* job was tasked to him because he was one of the few single male Neanderthals not yet coupled. Furthermore, through some series of circumstances, he was left orphaned, and so occupied a cave by himself.

To be brought into a Neanderthal cave was an experience that I did not fully appreciate at first: mistaking my opportunity for convalescence as imprisonment, I did not act in the manner of a happy guest but in the manner of an unjustly detained captive. I could not help but think that they were keeping me alive only for a short period of amusement and fattening, and that I would sooner than later be dispatched of in a special dinner. At the time, I was so weak I could barely sit up for more than a few hours. I resolved to wait before attempting anything rash.

I counted the days. I passed the time by working and re-working elaborate stories: I envisioned my family frantic after the discovery of my disappearance; I saw them making pleas for information about my whereabouts on local television; I imagined a nation-wide fund-raising campaign for the sole purpose of flying my

parents in helicopters in low, wide, swoops over the area of ocean where the cruise ship was when I had vanished. I enumerated all the celebratory meals I would be lavished with, once back in Canada; I thought of how I would tell my incredible story and how the feats of survival I had performed in direst and most peculiar circumstances would be circulated; I pictured myself as one of those irrevocably marked by an encounter with the wild, and so set apart from the rest. And in the darkest hours, I dreamt of how I would gain fame and respect for having discovered the last Neanderthal outpost, and how my captors would look captive in a zoo, or theme park...

I barely noticed how my supposed jailer looked after me with care almost beyond his abilities and suffered with patience my bad behaviour. For I shuddered every time I saw the unmistakable low-slung shadow in the threshold of the cave; I turned my back to him and cowered under his touch (which was always nothing but gentle). Indeed, it was solely out of spite that I came to know him as Hans. Thinking of the fraudulent story of the "clever" horse who was said to be able perform arithmetic (but who was eventually revealed to be responding to his owner's hidden signals) I would sarcastically refer to him by that name, certain that he had no mental faculties beyond those needed for the circus trick.

LONG PROVERB 2

ONCE YOU HAVE DONE IT THEN YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS YOU HAVE DONE.  
TO GO THERE YOU BRING IT YOURSELF,  
SO WHY NOT? WHY NOT? BRING YOURSELF TO YOU,  
YOU ARE THE HEAD AND THE HAND  
YOU WANT YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE MUD?  
YOU WANT YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE MUD?  
YOU WANT YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE MUD?  
THE QUESTION IS ASKED FORTY-SEVEN TIMES TO BECOME  
TOTALLY USELESS, AT THE FORTY-EIGHTH ASKING

ALL THERE IS TO DO HAS ALREADY  
BEEN TOLD TO YOU HOW TO DO,  
AT THE END OF YOUR ARM IS A HAND  
THE HAND GETS OUT OF THE MUD EASIER THAN THE HEAD  
SO PUT THE HEAD AT THE END OF YOUR ARM<sup>11</sup>  
PUT THE HAND ON THE HEAD AND  
PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE HAIR  
WHEN IT FALLS OUT WHAT DOESN'T GROW BACK  
YOU CAN BRING IT

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<sup>11</sup> Or, in a *Sapiens* formulation: in *Re-Animator*, a film based on the Lovecraft story, a persistent scientist proves the worthiness of his project by being able to continue working long after he has been decapitated. No one can refute the fact that his body has to carry his head around.

## PHILOSOPHY

If there is one quality that surely distinguishes *Homo Neanderthalensis* from *Sapiens*, and which may be the invisible advantage paleoanthropologists have never been able to take into account, it is a deep immunity or resistance to pain. From what I have witnessed, it seems as if while Neanderthals do experience some kind of response when they are injured, their bodies do not torture their minds in the same way.

The most memorable proof of this occurred when I watched a Neanderthal inadvertently trip over a stone while carrying a heavy load of skins and fall, in a remarkable, head-first, way, into a nearby fire. His feet twitched a bit but he got up speedily, brushed the ashes off his newly tenderized face, picked up the skins, and continued on his way. On numerous other occasions I have seen Neanderthals remain unperturbed upon walking into tree branches or dropping rocks onto their toes. The strongest reaction such accidents elicit is the composed removal of one's body from the source of damage or the source of damage from one's body.

Definitive proof of this occurred when I finally regained enough strength to jump on Hans' back as he was tending the fire and sink my teeth into his neck (the warm blood that filled my mouth tasted familiar). He merely reached around, lifted

me off his back, and deposited me onto the floor of the cave. When I grabbed a rock and threw it at his knee, his leg buckled but his face did not show any concern; he calmly sunk to the floor and watched me as I scrambled out the entrance. I did not note any indication of distress: he did not cry out nor did his face get twisted up.

Is this proof of a more highly developed interface between interior and exterior worlds in *Homo Neanderthalensis*? Could it be that the Neanderthal resistance to physical pain is evidence of an existence that is more aligned with (instead of opposed to) the external? For while *Sapiens* always feels put upon and blown about by the cold and the hot, the blunt and the sharp, the Neanderthal may, on some primary level, understand that those things are not in conflict with him, if he is not in conflict with them. Perhaps the Neanderthal nervous system has considered Marcus Aurelius: "Take away thy opinion, and then there is taken away the complaint, 'I have been harmed.' Take away the complaint, 'I have been harmed,' and the harm is taken away."<sup>12</sup>

In anticipation of those who are looking for magic, however, this is not to say that Neanderthals have special "healing powers" that allow them to overcome the limitations of the physical form. Rather, I noticed that Neanderthal tissue is slow to repair, or at least no faster than mine.

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<sup>12</sup> Meditations, Book Four.

## FALSE ESCAPE ATTEMPT

I can't help myself: I must include this scene from my impersonator's book for comparison. From "Chapter 7: Escape Attempt":

The Neanderthals roared as I ran for the shore. Confused by the ingenious dummy I had made of myself and hidden under the fur blankets, they could not process that I was not still sleeping in the cave. They stood there roaring as I sprinted past them towards the raft I had secretly been working on. Just as I thought I would make it, however, one of them finally snapped out of their group bewilderment and lunged for my ankle, bringing me down to the ground. I had been defeated by force but in smarts I had won. From that day forward the Neanderthals recognized who was boss: the sleeping form I had made that had deceived them was saved, mounted on a stick, and placed in front of the entrance to my cave. Slowly other privileges were accorded to me: I was always given the largest steak, none of the flint sharpening was handed off to me anymore, and a special covering was made for my toilet-hole. My cave was now the one at which all the creatures gathered in the evening, and even after I went to sleep two remained to guard me. Later, two stones were placed in the dummy's head to represent my eyes. Even later, my dummy was placed

on the raft I had made and sent away in a ceremony I presided over, to symbolize my mortal departure from the island (my immortal self remained).

As if Neanderthals could be so easily tricked! The phrase “who was boss” has provided me with an endless source of amusement. There is something in this passage, though, that stays with me; there is something about this passage that reminds me of a dream I had once, which I woke from with the feeling that something cold had been sitting on the small of my back.

## LONG PROVERB 9

UNLUCKILY YOU CAN ONLY  
SEE YOURSELF FROM THE TOP. THE ABOVE HEAD,  
THE ABOVE WANT, THE ABOVE ABOVE.  
WHEN THE UNDERSIDE OF A ROCK  
IS NOT A ROCK'S UNDERSIDE. IT IS NOTHING  
LIKE WHAT IT LOOKS USUALLY OR ALL THE TIME.  
FROM THE BOTTOM OR THE RARE TIME, EVERYTHING  
IS WHAT IS NOT, SO HARD AND GREY AND FAST  
IS RED AND SLOW AND SOFT

SO TRY TO KEEP ALL THE BLOOD FROM FALLING  
AND POOLING IN YOUR FEET. OPEN YOUR EYES  
IN YOUR TOES TO WHAT IS HAPPENING FROM THE  
OTHER WAY UP. BIG TOE TO LITTLE TOE,  
DIM THE DIM PART AND TRY TO  
LOOK AT YOUR FRIEND<sup>13</sup> FROM THE BOTTOM  
AND YOU WILL SEE THAT YOU WILL NOT SEE  
THE ABOVE PUCKERED MIND  
BUT DROOPY THICK GRINNING

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes I try to imagine what my impersonator might look like. I always picture a woman with long blonde hair, improbably tall and svelte, with green eyes and perfect teeth... until I realize that the woman I am picturing is a famous actress, with a name that everyone knows, and that there is no way this famous actress has bothered to write the fictional autobiography of someone like me.



## COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (pt. 1)

If the penultimate dream of modern telecommunications is that one day all members of *Homo Sapiens* will be able to beam their thoughts directly to each other, without the intermediaries of paper or wires or even letters and digits (the ultimate fantasy being where all members of *Sapiens* are reduced to one *Sapiens*) then we must surely turn to the Neanderthal as model if not exemplar. Though it may be extremely difficult to imagine UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA as anything but crude grunting, the Neanderthal language is truly ONE in all Neanderthal minds. When I think back, now, upon how I first thought it appropriate to communicate with the Neanderthals, I can only chuckle with embarrassment at my elementary techniques and total lack of imagination.

I ran to the shore after knocking Hans over in his cave, but I quickly realized how pointless my actions were. There, I found myself rapidly encircled by a group of Neanderthal faces, each infinitely more tranquil than my own. Standing in the middle of the circle, with Hans' blood on my face, I acted as if the Neanderthals were idiotic children: I said, extremely clearly and slowly, in the first words I had uttered since my arrival, "LET ME GO." I tried to mime the action of "letting go" in a large gesture (kind of like someone releasing a fly while fly-fishing). I yelled. I jumped up and down to emphasize each word. Words became sounds, and sounds became sobs. At all of these displays, justly, I received no response.

They continued to stare at me with the same unnerving quietude. They did not even grunt amongst themselves.

I fell to my knees. Hans came out from his Cave, looking unruffled, as if I had not even touched him. It was that moment, encircled by all the unblinking Neanderthals, the sky grey overhead, that I finally began to understand what it means to concede your terms to someone or something else's.

### CONVERSATION

I only managed to record one extended Neanderthal conversation. This is not an exact transcript but I have tried to duplicate, as closely as possible, with punctuation, the rhythms of their speech.

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA?

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA?

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA?

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA?

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.  
UGGHA UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA...

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA...

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA! UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA!

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA? UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA,  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA.

NEANDERTHAL 2: UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA. UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA...

NEANDERTHAL 1: UGGHA?! UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA, UGGHA, UGGHA UGGHA,  
UGGHA UGGHA, UGGHA... UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA  
UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA UGGHA!

#### FALSE CONVERSATION

My impersonator claims that Neanderthals speak a language that is composed entirely of "OOGA BOOGA." To be sure, she devotes an entire page to a "reconstruction" of Neanderthal speech; the entire page is filled, indiscriminately, with "OOGA BOOGA OOGA BOOGA OOGA BOOGA OOGA BOOGA." This is to be expected from an imagination that describes the Neanderthals, in other instances, as "thick-skulled," "mouth-breathing," and "easily manipulated." This is the same narrative that posits a first encounter where the Neanderthals were so terrified of my impersonator they immediately ran away, before realizing that she was so outnumbered they could imprison her (so as to quell their terror).

However, I am also aware that the transcript I have offered above seems like nothing more than a slight variation on her joke... What I can say in my defense

is that in the years after my time with the Neanderthals, I have read and re-read this conversation to myself aloud hundreds of times, looking for some key... I know it by heart: I know exactly where the inflections fall and where they rise, I know where the pauses are, I know how the conversation begins with doubt and ends in excitement. Although on paper it may look like a mass of nonsense, in life it was a spirited exchange with real meaning.

### COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (pt. 2)

After having witnessed that I had a mind and a will, or at least enough of one or the other to try to escape, the Neanderthals promptly submitted me to what are best described as language lessons. Hans was my teacher, and every day we would go through a number of exercises. The procedure was regimented: we would sit at the entrance to his cave. I would not be allowed to move except for at designated break periods. The exercises were simple: the most common one was based on objects. Hans would hold a rock under my nose and say the Neanderthal word (UGGHA). He would then wait for me to say the word on my own. The problem, however, as you have seen, is that all Neanderthal words, at least when transliterated into English, are the same: they are all UGGHA. So when Hans held a twig under my nose, said UGGHA, and waited for me to repeat what he had just said, I was filled with a sense of despair. I knew my attempts to

be hopeless; everything came out exactly the same. Whatever the defining principle of Neanderthal language is, which allows its speakers to communicate vastly different things to each other with only two syllables, I (and I am sure any *Sapiens*) simply lack the ability to understand: it is a concept of such subtlety it must be nearly imperceptible to the mind.

Hans, however, was remarkably persistent: for what seemed like weeks, we would spend whole days together, equally tormented. (I submitted willingly, though, because I did hope, deep within, that we would make some kind of miraculous breakthrough.) He put objects under my nose and waited, and I tried to act as if I was thinking very hard, and then eventually squeezed out what was always (or at least it seemed to me) very close to being correct. Sometimes he would try different techniques, like bringing in another Neanderthal to do a little routine with, where one would name the object the other was holding and then both turn to look at me accusingly, or only holding edible objects under my nose, like choice pieces of different types of meat, but none of these yielded better results than the most simple procedure. I did manage to distinguish the words for water and dirt from each other, but this small achievement could not stay Hans' increasing frustration until finally one day, while holding a bone under my nose and waiting for me to fail miserably once more, he got so tense he shattered the bone with his grip. We were both ashamed and did not look at each other. The

next day we only worked together for a few hours, the following even fewer, and soon we stopped altogether.

I have always felt like this was my major failure with the Neanderthals: I never was able to prove myself as an apt pupil, even though I was nearly bursting with malformed expression.

## GEOLOGY

The charms of No-Name Island in the summer are immediately apparent. My happiest memories there were spent with Hans, after the language exercises of the day, exploring the mountains and valleys. My heels and palms toughened until I could scramble over the rocks and boulders almost as quickly as my Neanderthal companion, and my arms acquired incredible strength (especially now, with my eyes glued to a screen, it is hard to believe I was so active.)

Hans led me to many hidden places on the island that Neanderthals would visit on days when the air was especially heavy or when the Arctic light was especially long: my favorite was an underground cave that was uninhabited by any of the Neanderthals. Its opening was blocked by a lichen-covered boulder. Once rolled away, the boulder revealed a mouth that emitted a slightly

phosphorescent haze (a shade that was violet or chartreuse, depending from which angle you saw it). I followed him on my knees through the opening. We had to crawl through a pitch-dark tunnel no wider than his shoulders which expanded, unexpectedly, into a cavern of great height. The air was filled with the smell of sulfur. A column of light entered from an invisible hole at the top, shining on what seemed to be a lightly gurgling cavern floor.

Hans nudged me and pointed at my feet. When I uttered UGGHA in happy surprise and wonder, I swear I saw the corners of his lips curl up. All over the cavern floor were tiny bubbling mud pots, little crusty openings to the centre of the earth. The thick slurry was brown, tinged with a slight pink (if you squinted). In the underground stillness, you could hear the murmur of what had spent who knows how long squeezing its way through the ancient layers of muck and dirt to find itself here, at last... Putting my ear closer to a foul-smelling pool, I heard something that stirred my gut and some inevitable questions arose: How old is the mud? And who could ever hope to know?

We spent many hours in the dim cavern, soothed by the yellow stink of the sulfurous air and the goopy popping of the mud. In the rotten belly of the earth Hans taught me one meaning of wild.



## FALSE TREASURE

The gold that my impersonator describes the Neanderthals as secretly being in possession of is obviously sensationalistic. This allows her to include a palm-sweating chase scene, complete with beating drums and thick undergrowth (both of which simply have nothing to do with Neanderthal life on an Arctic island.)

Everything aside, I must concede that the adventure novel my impersonator has written is, occasionally, exhilarating. I am not afraid to admit that, while reading, I was struck by pangs of jealousy: not at her insight or intelligence, but at her ability to draw me, irresistibly, into her well, if inaccurately, rendered world.

Regardless, the idea that my escape from the Neanderthal Island happens only because I realize that I can, as their ruler or demi-god, steal their treasure and use it to gain hold of the *Sapiens* world is appalling. Worse is the part where I, “in the frenzy of the moment, bit down hard on a hairy arm that was in my way. My mouth filled with blood. I had to make it to the second raft, or else...” And never have I shared with the Neanderthals any appreciation for riches.

## TIME

According to *Sapiens* time, I was only on No-Name Island for a little under two days. When I was discovered missing from my cabin the next morning, everyone immediately assumed that I had gone for a walk on the decks in the middle of the night and fell overboard. When I was discovered forty-seven hours later, the fact that I was still alive was barely remarkable; people have been known to survive more difficult situations, without food or water, for longer periods. For example, a newborn was rescued after more than a week from the rubble of Mexico City's 1985 earthquake; in 1999, a senior citizen of Iowa City was locked in a parking garage underneath a shopping mall undergoing renovations and freed after five days; after a rock slide in B.C. in 1992, a driver was pulled from underneath the wreckage of his car, still alive, after nearly a week and a half; etc. Even more significant to this story is the finding of Movile Cave in 1986: sealed off from "light, seasonal change, and circulating air,"<sup>14</sup> this cave in Romania maintained its own unique ecosystem for five and a half million years. Life in the cave is not tied to photosynthesis: through troglomorphy, land animals inside have adapted to their habitat by learning to eat bacteria and fungi that consume hydrogen sulfide from rocks. They have also lost their pigmentation and become blind. Until scientists opened Movile Cave, its soil even lacked the radioactive isotopes that can be found in Romanian soil since Chernobyl.

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<sup>14</sup> National Science Foundation

On No-Name Island, there are no techniques used to mark the passage of time. Most anthropologists think that counting systems used to record quantities of goods and intervals between events are fundamentally related (i.e. on Day One I have 300 grains of rice, on Day Two I have 290 grains of rice, and so on). Neanderthals have no such arithmetic. As noted in Diet, this is because Neanderthals do not store food: with no accountants to monitor stores, timekeeping<sup>15</sup> never took hold. (Whether or not this affects the Neanderthal understanding of familial relationships is unclear. If memory is not preserved through physical mnemonic objects then individuals probably have no knowledge of generations older than their parents' parents.)

Without a standardized system of timekeeping, Neanderthal time expands and contracts on the basis of will alone. Forty-seven hours can be a week or forty-seven hours can be minutes; such correlations are rendered useless. There is no way to account for the duration of my experience on the Island as compared to that of my absence from the ship. Likewise, there is no way to account for the time I have spent in my basement trapezoid as compared to my retreat from the

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<sup>15</sup> Which is just as well: contemporary veneration of ancient calendars is sorely misguided. This is not because calendars cannot be accurately adjusted to present time (i.e. the infamous 2012 may not be 2012, but instead 2014 or 2016 or *even* 2018!) but because calendars are artifacts of power. Created by spiritual leaders who were beholden to political leaders, calendars helped predict the beginning or end of whatever the state wanted. During winter solstice every year, tourists will gather at the Gateway of the Sun near Lake Titicaca in the Peruvian Andes, waiting for the sunrise to shine directly through the twelve-foot opening in the block of stone. Every year, they are disappointed. Tour guides attribute this failure to a re-location of the Gateway in the twentieth century, never to the calendar itself.

*Sapiens* world. As I have learned, attempting to live without marking the passage of time *on your own* is much more difficult than in the company of others like you. I have not quite been able to disconnect from *Sapiens* chronology altogether: the occasional delivery truck, press clipping, or letter from my mother are constant reminders. The most successful aspect of my experiment so far has been my adjustment to an irregular diurnal cycle. The basement's lighting system's timer is randomized, so that the periods of artificial light and dark are of unpredictable length. Lately, however, the system has been malfunctioning more often than not. Sometimes the lights will flicker until I see spots and other times the light (or dark) will be intolerably long. The fickle nature of this aging technology has made this writing project more difficult than I had anticipated; I have had to contend with long periods (once, the period between one truck and another) of inactivity.

## HYGIENE

One of the most important things I learned to do as a Neanderthal was to treat my waste in an appropriate manner. The *Sapiens* world likes to believe that civilization means the development of increasingly advanced methods of getting rid of garbage, but even the most civilized methods of disposal are, essentially, the same as the least civilized. For though waste may be rocketed or sunk or

ferried to space or undersea or other country, it still ends up in a pile or pool with the same intent to return.

Neanderthals understand and appreciate the nature of waste. Neanderthals know that it possesses an innate capability to go back to from whence it came, that somehow, like a dog or boomerang, it knows its point of origin. Therefore as a Neanderthal, the most important thing for me to do in terms of dealing with my own was to accept it as such. This is why the trucks are only allowed to import supplies to my Basement, and not allowed to remove anything from the premises. Each new piece of garbage I sort according to color and size; the point at which the Red mound will become unmanageable is near.

### MATING (pt. 1)

Despite their Arctic habitat, Neanderthals have exceptionally beautiful mating rituals. Most creatures that live in cold environments try to preserve their energy for the demands of the harsh climate, which is why tropical birds perform the most ornate, known mating demonstrations. A Neanderthal, however, has practices that rival even those of the most elaborately plumed bird of Paradise.

After the annual Winter thaw, for a period of several weeks, male Neanderthals will spend most of the daylight dancing in pairs. The attention-getting dances establish the males' stamina and physical coordination. The most common dance involves the pair hopping in turn while vocalizing one sound at different pitches. Pre-hop, the male is crouched on the ground, making a low-pitched "Wop" sound. Mid-hop, the male is approximately three feet off the ground with his knees tucked under him, making a higher-pitched "Wop" sound. While one male is in pre-hop the other is in mid-hop, so that the overall effect is something like this:

	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
Wop		Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
Wop		Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
Wop		Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop
Wop		Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop	Wop

This dance, being relatively easy to perform, lasts for anywhere up to five hours.

A less common dance involves the pair throwing themselves onto the ground belly-first while making big circles with their arms. The two males land on their

bellies at the same time and release a constricted vowel howl (“Aggh.”) They then leap back onto their feet and fling their arms forward and around again, launching the dead centre of their weight downwards. The impact of this dance lies in the unique sound of “Aggh” combined with the dull thump of the bodies:

THAgghUNK

THAgghUNK

Due to the punishing nature, however, of the belly landings, it quickly degenerates into uncontrolled flopping and crawling. Self-control is regained in mysterious simultaneity: in an instant, the males will suddenly stand and innocently look at their feet, as if they had not just incurred deep bruising (which may result in a day or two of convalescence).

Finally, the rarest dance is the most sedate. The two males stand, bent over, with their heads between their knees, humming. This tableau is presented until their

heads are so filled with blood they faint. Reproduction truly reveals its own logic in a scatter of unconscious Neanderthal bodies over the early Spring Tundra.

### MATING (pt. 2)

Whether or not it is possible for *Homo Neanderthalensis* and *Homo Sapiens* to mate is a matter of ongoing debate, possibly ongoing because it is so titillating. As members of different species, the creation of fertile new offspring by a pair is categorically no: however, as can be proven, this is not a barrier to members of the two different groups engaging in sexual intercourse. Silly “scientific” tales of horses painted like zebras scaring the Platonically-inclined souls of Real zebras, or apes raping chimpanzees and the chimpanzees then quickly running off to commit suicide are nonsense at best.

### YETI/SASQUATCH

Even if the Sasquatch or Yeti are Neanderthals, the accumulated knowledge about these creatures is not useful here. Though there certainly are many interesting mythologies about these “wild men” or “relict hominids,” the overwhelming majority of these accounts have been distorted into the whimsical.



One only has to examine how in modern Western popular culture, the creature known as “Bigfoot” fares. Forever posed in the inane “walking but looking” pose – facing (how conveniently) the camera – Bigfoot is but a caricature or a punch-line: a costume or a blurry monster.

Cryptozoologists rely on the naive vision of the overgrown ape-man, a low and simple vegetarian who is terminally shy. The reports of the “wild snowmen” types of the Chucuunaa of Siberia and Almas of Mongolia mostly consist of an accidental encounter from which the snowman runs away (one, by a Tungus reindeer herder named Tat’yana Il’nichna Zakharova, precisely notes that the witnessed creature “ran very quickly, leaping high after every third step”). The snowmen usually are covered in hair that is black or brown; their footprints are all that are left behind. And unfailingly, the accounts describe the beings as inarticulate, though sometimes they may cry “ru-ru-ru.”

Knowing what I know about the Neanderthal, I think it necessary to draw a sharp distinction between the animals described in the aforementioned apocryphal stories and *Homo Neanderthalensis*. Though it may seem apropos to try to explain folklore about the “wild man” by applying specific terminology, Neanderthals are a species, not monstrosities. They are not mistakes.

For it is not by accident that the Neanderthals of No-Name Island have managed to preserve themselves amidst and from the onslaught of the *Sapiens*. I am fairly certain that their presence on the island must be due to a discovery, on their part, of the Alaska's Bermuda Triangle's special properties. It is likely that a portal is opened when certain factors align (winds, suns, moods, etc.). One enterprising Neanderthal may have figured out the necessary timing and convinced the others of benefits of inhabiting a rock that is perpetually shielded by the Triangle's protective forces. According to the scientists Nikolai Goncharov, Vyacheslav Morochoy, and Valery Makarov, in their article "Is the Earth a large Crystal?" the Earth is made up of twelve pentagonal plates. Where any three of these plates meet there is a strong concentration of crystal energy; there are sixty-two of these junctions in all. I would not be surprised if, at each of these junctions, a portal existed to other islands, hollow mountains, or undersea bubbles where other Neanderthals went to when they felt it necessary.

Therefore it is fallacious to think of living Neanderthals as "exceptions" when the rule itself is unknown. Is there a plan to ensure the continuation of our species? Does it involve simply *putting our shoulders to the wheel*<sup>16</sup>? Would I be better off

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<sup>16</sup> The Mesoamerican Olmec invented the wheel but used them on nothing other than toys: they never thought to make them bigger and use them on carts, for pottery, or as millstones. As Charles C. Mann writes, lacunae like this exist in every society: Europeans spent thousands of years using an inefficient, straight plow, while by the third century B.C the Chinese had invented the "moldboard" plow, shaped like a V with curved arms. Quoting Robert Temple: "So inefficient, so wasteful of effort, and so utterly exhausting,... this deficiency of plowing may rank as mankind's single greatest waste of time and energy." (This may be the

trying to adapt to life above ground? It is possible that survival has nothing to do with ability. Even though I have just attempted to repudiate any connection between the two, there is a story about the Yeti that is worth repeating here:

The first Chinese emperor, Hwang-Ti, builder of the Great Wall, may have had an unwitting hand in Yeti-making. According to ancient legend, some people tried to avoid compulsory labor on the wall by taking to the forests and hiding there, where, even after many generations, their descendants became wild, large, and hairy, but retained the power of speech. They emerged periodically from the forest and enquired, "Has the Wall been finished yet?" But although the answer was Yes, they didn't believe it, and returned to the forest...<sup>17</sup>

In *The Immortal*, a fictional account of troglodytes that never die, Borges writes: "I recalled that among the Ethiopians it is well known that monkeys do not speak so they will not be obliged to work." The two tales both posit (antonymically, which makes it all the clearer) that the existence of Neanderthals may be the greatest proof of the utility of escape.

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exact opposite of a technological singularity, wherein a technology becomes so advanced it surpasses its creator and no longer can be controlled.)

<sup>17</sup> Shackley, Myra. *Wildmen: Yeti, Sasquatch, and the Neanderthal Enigma*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1983. 90. I have omitted the final sentence: "Alas, reality is about to catch up with them."

## MEGALITHS

Neanderthals have no practice of building structures out of great stones for preoccupations religious, political, or otherwise: any metaphysical concerns do not require the material manifestation of henges or colossi.<sup>18</sup> If, as Ernst Renan has written, “Egypt has no archaic epoch, but suddenly takes its place in the world in all its matchless magnificence, without father and mother, and as clean apart from all evolution as if it had been dropped from the unknown heavens” (as if all the pyramids simply fell from the sky) then the Neanderthal is the inverse: with no future epoch, if ever to disappear it would do so without progeny, cleanly dropped from the nameless places of the earth.

## IMPLANTED MEMORY

The practice of trying to “recover” memories through hypnosis or other techniques I find to be largely useless; more telling are the memories that surface on their own. For some reason now, whenever I try to think of a specific thing that

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<sup>18</sup> Though suffering from the “deficiency in plowing,” early Europeans still managed to build these enormous structures without the help of cranes or tractors. The common assumption is that Stonehenge must have been the product of sheer determination: the accumulated will of hundreds of people pushing and pulling, with all their might, for weeks upon weeks. As Wally Wallington (a retired carpenter) has proved, however, 1200 lb. concrete blocks can be moved by one man with “some rocks and leverage.”

<<http://www.theforgottentechnology.com/>>

I cannot name (I know what I am trying to think of, but I cannot think of it, so the thing I am trying to think of is like a big white disc) I instead, very clearly, remember that I am sure did not happen to me. I am not sure if something was replaced or turned upside-down in all that has passed; I only know that I have a longing that, instead of calling for what it wants, calls something else entirely.

In the strange memory, I am a very ugly baby. I have an identical twin sister, and she is just as ugly as me. Our father is the Emperor (I know this because he wears a long purple robe trimmed with raccoon fur) and he is unfortunately a pervert with bad ideas he can *make happen*. Because my sister and I are so ugly he decides to try out this idea he has been nursing, to help him figure out the Universe: he imprisons my sister and I in one of the dank basement rooms of his castle, and cuts out the tongue of a young woman. The woman is to be our caretaker. She used to be beautiful but now she always wears a pained expression, as if she did not want to wear her face. She moans a little sometimes, when she brings us our daily toast. So my sister and I grow up in silence and darkness but because we are exactly alike in our ugliness, we somehow are able to understand each other. When we touch we know what the other is thinking. And we both think, all the time, about what we need to do in order to get out of the room. (There is never any question as to whether or not there is something other than the room.) We try to tell our caretaker that we need her help to escape but she can barely bear to look at us, as we have grown tall

and now are really horrific, and we don't know how to make any sounds that do not sound like gurgling, and her expression gets more and more pained as our gurgling gets more and more frantic, especially coming from our truly hideous faces. We begin to hate her, even though she is nothing but kind to us; we think that her expression is proof that she thinks we are ugly. (But we are wrong, because secretly she is hatching a plan to get all of us out.) In our misery, we decide that we can't wait for her any longer: so one day, when she comes in with the toast, my sister jumps on her back from behind the door while I knock her head against the wall. She crumples to the floor; there is a pool of blood. When we reach the top of the stairs, though, and we find our father the Emperor in his purple raccoon-trimmed robe grinning maniacally, triumphantly, his arms outstretched to take us both close to his body, we realize that we have done nothing less than what our father wanted.

The memory ends there. When it goes, I get the feeling that the thing I was trying to think of in the first place is insignificant, like whether or not a window is open or shut.

## FALSE SERVANT

Typically of my impersonator, she claims that I kidnapped a Neanderthal servant and now keep him in my basement with me. When she writes:

The lover I chose for myself was the strongest of all the Neanderthals. Towering by a good three feet over the average *Homo Sapiens* man, he was covered in a shiny coat of ginger hair. I put him to work immediately on the second raft – one that would surpass the first I had tried to leave with – teaching him to lash together the pieces of wood with strips of skin, tie sailors' knots, etc. After a few initial mishaps, he fulfilled his duty admirably.

This makes it seem as if the Neanderthal is just an exceptionally talented handyman to me, and worse, that a Neanderthal would be *content* as such. And even if it were possible for a Neanderthal to be brought back from No-Name Island, is it not obvious that I would immediately protect him in every possible way, so that no scientist or impresario would ever get his hands on him? Would it not be more responsible, even necessary, to keep him entirely away from the public's implacable eye? Who, then, would be in the servitude of whom?

## PATHOLOGY

In addition to their resistance against pain, Neanderthals seem to be largely unaffected by diseases that are known to *Sapiens*. Even though their diet lacks variety, they are not susceptible to scurvy, jaundice, lupus, osteoporosis, etc. They are, however, more vulnerable to parasitism than *Sapiens*, possibly because of their covering of hair. (Some scientists think that *Sapiens* hairlessness is an evolutionary strategy designed to shed parasites such as lice, fleas, and ticks.)

The most common Neanderthal parasite is found on children: almost every Neanderthal child, at some point or other, is host to a fat, translucent worm, initially two to three inches long, which dangles behind the left ear. Like a leech, one end of the worm is a toothy orifice, which allows it to hang permanently on the Neanderthal's skin while sucking blood. This parasite (commonly known by *Sapiens* as a type of "fluke") feeds behind the child's left ear for approximately eight months, until it reaches a length of four to five inches. At this point, the parasite is ready to embark upon its reproductive process, which, in a bizarre co-evolutionary turn of events, is a milestone in the Neanderthal childhood.

In order for the parasite's eggs to be fertilized, its sperm capsule must be dissolved. The sperm capsule is soluble only at a specific temperature: the exact



temperature of the inside of a Neanderthal's head. The four to five inch long parasite, then, must worm itself into its host Neanderthal's head cavity. It does this by chewing its way slowly through skin, flesh, and bone; due to the innate Neanderthal resistance to pain, the child perceives this activity as only slightly ticklish. Once inside the head cavity, the parasite's sperm are released and the eggs are fertilized.

It is at this point that the Neanderthal child begins to experience the strong desire to bury her head in the ground. If in a cave, she will run outside and begin to dig frantically, until a sizable hole has been formed. Placing her face in the dirt, the child then sneezes until exhausted. This allows the parasite and its fertilized eggs to be expelled from the head cavity into the external environment, where it can infect other hosts and begin its life cycle again.

Why this parasite only affects Neanderthal children remains an unanswered question. The children, however, treat their parasites as pets (growth and habits are compared) and after the parasite is expelled in the fit of digging and sneezing, the Neanderthal child is officially recognized by the community as an adolescent. This complex relationship between host and parasite demonstrates how little is understood about how unseen organisms can affect subtle, as well as significant, changes in our behavior. Even more boggling is the idea of what kind of changes we could be affecting on a parasite's behavior, unbeknownst to

anything but the parasite. Therefore I have tried to be especially considerate of the animals that are categorized as “pests”; as the state of my Basement-Trapezoid deteriorates, however, this becomes more and more difficult.

## ECLIPSE

I don't think my forced exile from No-Name Island was the sole work of the Neanderthals. Any world, like any body, recognizes what doesn't belong in it and eventually rejects it. The world, the Triangle, I had stumbled upon must have recognized me; the Neanderthals, acting in accordance to the forces that shielded them, were probably following a foreign imperative. Occasionally, I wonder if I could have been more successful at disguising myself... But then I remember that the Triangle is not easily placated.

So I saw it coming. Hans had been acting in a strange manner for several days. He would choose not to sit near me at meals, instead choosing a place beside a fellow Neanderthal with whom he would converse loudly and animatedly; he would leave the cave in the middle of the night, thinking that I wasn't awake and wouldn't notice; he would refuse my pleading looks with a cold shrug; so on and so forth. The signs were glaring and even I could not have missed them. I knew

there was nothing I could do, so I tried to keep a normal face (but inwardly I was afraid.)

When one very early morning I was shaken out of my sleep and led to the shore, tied onto the inflatable pillow from the cruise ship I had washed up on with some long grass and pushed away, only (I think) a side-long glance from Hans towards me floating on the ocean when the others had already long turned their backs with certainty and resolve, I was not surprised at all.

I was not surprised when the sun was blotted out from the sky and noon turned dark. I was not surprised when the sun returned almost immediately.

As when I had been first pulled by the Triangle to No-Name Island, I felt a deep indifference, somehow assured by my inability to do anything. When I heard the sound of its engine, my stomach did not turn. The helicopter lifted the pillow and I out of the sea and into its internal roar, where I met the astonished faces of my family.

## FUNERAL RITES

When a Neanderthal dies, her body is buried in the floor of her own cave.

Members of her immediate family dig a shallow depression in the cave, and if in season, flowers are gathered and placed on top of her body before it is covered with dirt. Effectively, every Neanderthal lives on top of the remains of her ancestors.

There is no public lamentation: the period of mourning, marked by silence, is intensely private and its length variable, as determined by the mourners themselves. However, some Neanderthals remain mute for so long that eventually they must be gently reminded of the living. Usually it does not take many attempts for the Neanderthal in question to realize that her quiet communion with the mourned must come to an end. For example, when one of the oldest Neanderthals on the Island passed away in his sleep, his youngest daughter refused to participate in any meals or activities. She was initially indulged, but after a while a group of concerned adults soundly (but not cruelly) informed her, in a long UGGHA UGGHA speech, of her responsibilities to the others, and she promptly returned to her former self.

I cannot provide a definitive answer to the question of a Neanderthal "afterlife"; however, I doubt that they would be too eager to attest to the existence of a

*second* life. And because the Neanderthal remains are so close to (or inside of) their living quarters, they are rarely surprised or frightened by death when it does appear, as they know it to be the crusty end of a bone.

## LONG PROVERB 7

NO ONE CAN SEE AS GOOD AS YOU CAN.  
THE DITCH IS LONG AND WIDE  
BUT WHERE IS IT? IS IT NOT IN FRONT OF YOU?  
NO DITCH IS INVISIBLE.  
EVEN IF IT IS SO LONG AND SO WIDE  
YOU WANT TO CLOSE YOUR EYES,  
YOU CAN STILL SEE IT.  
IT WILL NOT HIDE FROM YOU, IT EVEN  
WANTS YOU TO KNOW WHAT'S AT THE BOTTOM

IT IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU AND TO CROSS IT,  
WHEN YOU THINK OF THE TWO INSECTS,<sup>19</sup>  
DO THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER? DO THEY WONDER?  
NO. THEY ARE SMALL,  
THEY COUNT THEIR LEGS, THEY ARE ALL STILL THERE  
THE DITCH WILL NOT MOVE, IT STAYS THE SAME  
SO LONG AS YOU GET ON THE BELLY  
THE WATER IN THE DITCH SHOWS  
YOUR CRUMPLED FACE

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<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Neanderthals can be self-reliant because they are simply not affected by the same problems of survival that members of the species *Sapiens* are affected by. Afflicted with the ability to look at something – no “inferior user” of her environment – and see something useful emerge, a *Sapiens* may never be able to reconcile with a ditch as anything other than impediment.

#### LONG PROVERB 4

A ONE SELF PLACE IN A ONE SELF PLACE  
IS THE WORST. ONCE SOMEONE WAS  
SURPRISED TO FIND HIMSELF IN THE HOLE  
HE HAD DUG. HE THOUGHT HE HAD DUG IT  
FOR SOMEONE ELSE, BUT ACTUALLY  
HE HAD FORGOT.<sup>20</sup> JUST LIKE YOU FORGET  
WHEN YOU TOUCH YOURSELF WHICH DO YOU FEEL,  
THE PART YOU ARE TOUCHING OR THE PART  
YOU ARE TOUCHING WITH?

YOU CANNOT STOP SOMEONE FROM TELLING YOU  
THAT YOU SMELL. THERE IS NO WAY STOP IT  
FROM LEAVING YOU AND TELLING SOMEONE ELSE.  
BUT WHAT YOU CAN DO, AND THIS IS ONE WAY  
OUT OF FIFTY, IS TO GRAB YOUR FOOT  
BEFORE IT SHOOTS OUT TO TRIP  
THE SMELLER AND WHILE YOUR FOOT IS GRABBED  
YOU WILL CHANGE THE COURSE OF  
WHAT WAS YOU TRIPPING

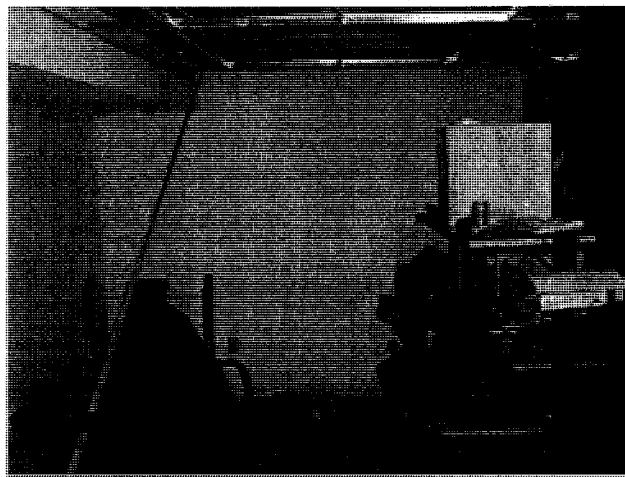
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<sup>20</sup> Yet I find it hard to believe that my impersonator lives happily in her Martha's Vineyard mansion, reaping her ill-earned rewards, without occasionally feeling like she is stuck in a big flesh costume. I am sure that (at least occasionally) she must know she is stuck in a costume like those of mascots at sporting events. Is she never afraid that the costume is slowly shifting, slowly revolving around her, and that eventually the eye-holes would be so misaligned she will only be able to see half the world and half the sweaty lining of the costume? While she is sipping her morning mimosa, or shopping for her new cell phone, or kissing her handsome boyfriend, or entertaining her well-dressed friends, does she never feel like she is not able to breathe, that she is turning blue in the face, because she is wearing something twice her size? Even lying down in the shade of her bedroom, does she not feel like the costume is still moving, moving all the way around until it will be totally backwards, and she will be left facing the inside of the back of her head while everything else lurches the other way?

## AFTERWORD

As best as I can, I have provided an overview of the existence of other humans; I have presented arguments against my impersonator's work; and I have offered a glimpse into my own life, which has, in itself, become a type of experiment. The Neanderthals remain on their island; my impersonator succeeds; my experiment falls apart; the Triangle is unchanged. What this will accomplish in the *Sapiens* world is yet to be seen. Although I have tried to model my behavior after the Neanderthal, I am faced with the fact that I am not. I am not, deterred, however: I know that one day my impersonator will be rendered obsolete. In the meantime, I will wait.

## CURRENT PHOTO





## BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1983 on the island of Hong Kong, Amy Lam became infamous after she inexplicably vanished for two days from a cruise ship off the coast of Alaska. She now lives alone. She is the only expert on living Neanderthals in the world. Her next projects are, tentatively, to renovate her Basement-Trapezoid and translate this text into every known *Sapiens* language.