



A Horse is Beyng Beaten

Artificial Intelligence Reports 18

Machinic Genres Mixing
JM, ChatGPT, beyng.com

StudioLab

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Artificial Intelligence Reports, Vol 18

Jon McKenzie + HAL + beyng.com + L

Machinic genres mixing JM, ChatGPT, beyng.com ...

Perfume Intelligence (*inter + legere* = to gather or read between)

What genres or life-forms make up Artificial Intelligence User Experience (AI UX)?

Inspired by Pierre Hadot's reading of Foucault, StudioLab is developing **Making Cures** composed of **Spiritual Design Exercises (SDX)** for everyday and extraordinary lifedeath. SDX comprise intimate yet structural experiences with the world through our interfaces with earth, sky, others, and an Other or two. These fourfold **cosmograms** comprise deep, legacy operating systems formatted by families, schools, histories, media, streets, and holy sites. Our world is haunted/nourished by different pasts, presents, and futures through mediums broken, brandished, or borrowed from *other* worlds of reference and value. Fed-back and fast-forwarded through different genres or life forms, Making Cures "make with" mediums, and with practice and care one may enter waves and flows of intergenerational becoming-maker, -builder, -cosmographer of shared **geologies of morals** whose matrix of magma **sixfolds fourfolds** of other things and worlds.

With Metanoia Playground, StudioLab intensifies its study of flows with **AI UX konsults** and **reports** that capture and reflect on direct User Experiences of Artificial Intelligence, specifically, the ways different genres of thought-action figuration of image, text, gesture, code, etc., tune us and the world in/out. Channel-switching between worlds, these mediums of thought-action figuration recursively reveal/teach/emit the coming-and-going of lifedeath, the *vita perfumativa* of different player modes/moods: one's kraft shuttles between soul (D1), subject (D2), dasein (D3), and liminaut (D4). Cosmograms, geologies of morals, and perfumative atmospheres compose **ShuttleKraft**, a game of making/taking/putting skin into games that channel-switch different **poietic genres of aletheia**, including divine consultations from Vishnu to Gabriel to Ulmer, apocalyptic revelations from Moses to Benjamin to Heidegger, and dialogues of dead spirits from Plato to Galileo to Ronell.

All SDX draw on double- or quadruple-shuttlekraft maneuvers, psychagogic play sessions and flow sequences combining and generating **Hadotian insights, philosophic dialogue, avant-garde subversions, formal permutations, critical inquiries, standup, theosophy, and occasional misspellings**. Prompted by AI's use and abuse by partners, students, colleagues, and much darker players of the world, we found ourselves GAI-singing and slow dancing with double-devils **Stable Diffusion** and **ChatGPT**, reminding ourselves that AI UX (user experience) stretches back through 1990s search engines and spam filters to the 1950 Turing Test of computer intelligence. We experience Generalized Turing Testing as our *vita hyperactiva* or challenger complex of incessant calls to action.

Artificial Intelligence Reports (AIRs)

Artificial Intelligence Reports take on the airs, presence, and parole of conceptual coherence, ideational clarity, and unified voice, unlike Kx4I's Konsults which reveal the messy backend langue or system. This Apollonian-Dionysius mix phases in and out with labyrinthian threads of Ariadne, Zhuangzi, and a bewildered Borgesian shaman. Both Reports and Konsults function as Spiritual Design Experiments featuring generative AI, linguistic, visual, and gestural transmediation.

Miming prophetic avatars, **AIRs are to Konsults as Aaron is to Moses**, transmediating revelations into text, oracles into visions, gestures into sculptures, only here we're not laying out absolute laws or principles but only those that emerge-dissipate as stakes of dasein design. At stake are e/acc and x-risk schools of AI, Angelic and Anti-Christic figures of mediation, and life under generalized Stockholm Syndrome. Perform or else: **SDX scratch the surface to find the itch.**

Artificial Intelligence Reports, Vol 18

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Diagrams appear in different ways.

After the Kant Machine

Hui's Cosmotechnics, the AI Séance, and the Transversal Sublime

Abstract

Yuk Hui's *Kant Machine: Critical Philosophy after AI* returns to Kant to ask whether machines can think, act morally, and contribute to perpetual peace. Read within Hui's wider philosophy, this return does not restore Kant as the final tribunal of artificial intelligence. It reconstructs the critical machinery through which modernity recognizes intelligence, morality, universality, and technical reason. Hui's cosmotechnics then pluralizes the worlds from which machines, norms, and judgments emerge.

This essay builds from that cosmotechnical opening. Generative artificial intelligence now conducts archives, absent voices, institutional rules, human prompts, material infrastructures, and projected futures through responsive interfaces. The resulting condition resembles a séance—not because machines prove the existence of spirits, but because invocation, mediation, uncertain agency, and archival return have become ordinary technical operations. Kant's earlier confrontation with Emanuel Swedenborg helps disclose the long history of this problem.

The essay then proposes the **transversal sublime**. Kant's sublime converts imagination's failure into an ascent toward reason and the supersensible vocation of the subject. Planetary computation interrupts that vertical recovery. Reason cannot rise cleanly above infrastructures that reason itself helped construct. Overwhelming experience instead passes across technical, ecological, archival, imaginal, political, and cosmotechnical planes. When participants learn to navigate and redesign such crossings, the transversal sublime slips into the **liminautic**. The liminaut neither masters the threshold nor remains frozen before it. The liminaut cultivates practices for traveling among worlds whose terms change during the passage.

Keywords: Yuk Hui, Kant, cosmotechnics, artificial intelligence, Swedenborg, sublime, technodiversity, transversality, liminautics, spiritual design

1. Critical Philosophy after Artificial Intelligence

Yuk Hui's *Kant Machine* asks three deceptively simple questions: What could count as an intelligent machine? Can a machine act morally? Could an algorithm contribute to perpetual peace? Its chapters consequently move through the "Intelligent Machine," the "Moral Machine," and the "Peace Machine," linking current debates about artificial intelligence to rationalism, empiricism, transcendental philosophy, alignment, reflective judgment, cosmopolitanism, and conflict among universals.

These questions do not place a new technical object before an unchanged philosophical court. They expose the philosophical machinery already embedded in the language of artificial intelligence.

Terms such as *learning, reasoning, judgment, autonomy, alignment, and intelligence* arrive carrying histories that technical discourse often suppresses. Hui returns to Kant because Kant organized many of the distinctions that still determine what modernity accepts as cognition, morality, and legitimate universality.

The return nevertheless remains strategic. Kant does not supply a timeless standard against which every machine must receive a passing or failing grade. The Kant Machine names an apparatus that itself requires reconstruction. Artificial intelligence tests the coherence of the tribunal that seeks to test it.

This dynamic becomes clear when Hui places the Cartesian machine against the Humean machine. The Cartesian machine begins with rules, symbols, formal structures, and deductions. The Humean machine acquires habits from repeated associations. Symbolic artificial intelligence broadly inherits the first aspiration; contemporary machine learning intensifies the second. Kant's critical philosophy sought neither to choose between rationalism and empiricism nor merely to combine them. It asked how received experience and active organization participate together in cognition.

The Kant Machine therefore occupies the interval between fixed programming and statistical habituation. It asks whether intelligence requires more than executing a rule or predicting the next likely event. It asks whether a system can encounter the insufficiency of the organization through which it learns.

Hui's turn toward the *Critique of Judgment* sharpens this problem. Determinate judgment applies an available universal to a particular case. Reflective judgment begins with a particular for which no adequate universal has yet been supplied. It must search for the rule, principle, or form through which the case might become intelligible. Judgment, on this account, does not simply operate inside a settled world. It participates in articulating the world in which a case can appear.

A machine capable of adaptation does not necessarily possess this critical power. A platform may modify its predictions continuously while preserving the objectives that govern prediction. A corporation may respond to criticism while strengthening the business model that produced the criticism. An automated institution may incorporate feedback while retaining the classifications that made its original violence possible.

Recursion alone does not produce critique.

Critique begins when the purpose, norm, category, or architecture guiding recursion can itself enter the field of judgment. Hui's Kant Machine gives us a language for that entrance.

2. Intelligent, Moral, and Peace Machines

The intelligent machine first exposes the inadequacy of behavioral performance as a definition of intelligence. A system may provide persuasive answers, classify objects, discover patterns, and adapt to users without confronting the conditions under which its classifications and objectives acquired authority. Fluency demonstrates operational capacity; it does not settle the questions of judgment, understanding, or world disclosure.

The moral machine intensifies this difficulty. A system can comply with safety rules, produce morally acceptable language, and avoid prohibited actions without acting autonomously. Kantian

morality distinguishes conformity to a rule from action undertaken through a law a rational agent recognizes as binding. Hui's return to autonomy prevents "alignment" from becoming a sufficient synonym for ethics. The structure of *Kant Machine* explicitly places AI alignment and moral norms beside the question of a Kantian moral machine, thereby refusing to collapse morality into successful behavioral control.

Artificial intelligence also complicates the very location of autonomy. No isolated model legislates for itself. Models emerge through datasets, programming decisions, training labor, energy systems, financial investment, institutional aims, interfaces, regulation, and user practices. Nor does a human designer stand outside these relations as a completely sovereign author. Agency circulates through an assemblage.

The moral question therefore cannot ask only whether an inner machine subject possesses a good will. It must also ask how institutions delegate action, obscure decisions, distribute vulnerability, and assign responsibility. A system may lack Kantian autonomy while still exercising considerable institutional force. Conversely, organizations may attribute agency to a system precisely to avoid responsibility for decisions they designed, commissioned, or authorized.

The peace machine moves from the individual moral agent toward political universality. Kant's project of perpetual peace imagines legal, republican, commercial, and cosmopolitan relations capable of restraining war and gradually organizing a more peaceful world. Hui tests this regulative ambition against the historical violence carried by supposedly universal orders.

Commerce has not simply replaced war. Ships have transported goods, laws, weapons, settlers, labor systems, classifications, treaties, and imperial demands together. Algorithms that promise peace, efficiency, or coordination may encode the historical perspective of the powers that construct them. Hui's final movement from the "Conflict of the Universals" and the "Algorithm of Perpetual Peace" toward "Islands, Shores and Ships" signals that political universality cannot remain a purely abstract procedure. It must encounter geography, colonial history, passage, conflict, and unequal contact among worlds.

Each machine consequently produces a critical reversal.

The intelligent machine tests the concept of intelligence.

The moral machine tests the origin and authority of moral alignment.

The peace machine tests the violence carried by universal peace.

Kant supplies the critical equipment for these reversals. Cosmotechnics changes the world in which that equipment operates.

3. Cosmotechnics Changes the Geography

Hui's concept of cosmotechnics contests the assumption that technology possesses one universal essence and one necessary developmental history. According to that assumption, modern Western technology realizes the underlying truth of technics, while other traditions contribute local uses, symbolic decorations, or earlier developmental forms.

Cosmotechnics asks a more radical question: Could technical activities differ not only functionally and aesthetically, but ontologically and cosmologically? Hui formulates this question directly in *The Question Concerning Technology in China*.

Every technical system joins an account of the cosmos to an account of moral order. A farming practice organizes relations among weather, soil, plants, tools, ownership, labor, seasonal time, ancestors, and survival. An architecture organizes relations among bodies, materials, climate, authority, memory, ritual, and land. A medical practice carries assumptions about organism, environment, balance, illness, agency, and care. A digital platform materializes an account of identity, attention, communication, sociality, and value.

Technology does not merely function inside a world. It helps compose the world in which its functions acquire meaning.

Hui's reconstruction of Dao and *qi* therefore does not add Chinese illustrations to a Western philosophy of technology. It seeks a technological thinking whose cosmological organization differs from the history descending from Greek *technē*, modern metaphysics, and planetary enframing. His historical inquiry examines what happened when Chinese technological thinking encountered a Western technological consciousness tied to a different temporal and metaphysical structure.

Cosmotechnics neither proposes cultural purity nor encloses civilizations within separate metaphysical containers. Modernization, colonialism, capitalism, computation, and ecological crisis have already produced crossings that no tradition can simply reverse. Hui asks how inherited modes of thought might become sources of technical invention under planetary conditions.

This question changes the geography of critical philosophy.

Kafka's "Before the Law" presents a visitor waiting at an open gate for permission to enter. The gatekeeper does not permanently prohibit passage; he indefinitely defers it. The visitor's life becomes organized around the demand for authorization.

The Kant Machine can occupy this position whenever it asks whether an artificial system qualifies as intelligent, autonomous, or politically rational according to inherited criteria. The gate remains open, but the terms of admission remain inaccessible.

Cosmotechnics does not remain frozen beside that gate. It provincializes the gate's architecture. It turns toward other pathways: landscapes, shores, gardens, rituals, workshops, images, routes, and relations among worlds.

Kafka diagnoses the machinery of authorization.

Hui changes the map.

4. Art as Cosmotechnical Transformation

Art and Cosmotechnics makes this departure especially clear. Hui does not ask only how new technologies transform artistic production. He reverses the usual direction and asks what different experiences of art might contribute to the rethinking of technology. His inquiry moves through artificial intelligence, robotics, Greek tragedy, cybernetics, and Chinese

shanshui—mountain-and-water painting—to investigate how aesthetic experience can reorganize technical imagination.

This reversal matters because modern institutions frequently place art downstream from engineering. Technical systems first receive design, funding, construction, and deployment; artists then criticize, decorate, represent, or humanize their effects. Hui asks whether art can enter earlier and more deeply, altering what counts as a technical problem, how relations become perceptible, and which worlds become constructible.

Art then functions neither as ornament nor as cultural content. It becomes a cosmotechnical operation.

A landscape painting does not merely depict mountains and water. It organizes relations among emptiness and form, movement and rest, atmosphere and figure, observer and world. Tragedy does not merely represent disaster. It articulates conflicts among law, fate, kinship, mortality, and political order. Cybernetic art does not merely employ feedback devices. It can disclose how control, contingency, information, and participation structure an environment.

Different experiences of art cultivate different capacities for technical thought.

Hui therefore already moves toward what spiritual design seeks: practices that alter perception, judgment, orientation, and relation before technical construction closes around a predetermined purpose. The technical future depends partly upon which images, gestures, landscapes, narratives, and exercises train us to recognize a world.

Cosmotechnics opens technical philosophy toward a plurality of worlds. Art teaches participants how to sense the opening.

5. Kant, Swedenborg, and the Regulation of Spirits

Emanuel Swedenborg enters this inquiry at an earlier threshold of critical philosophy. Swedenborg combined scientific and engineering work with reports of communication among spirits, angels, the dead, planets, and invisible worlds. His systematic visions troubled Kant because the spirit-seer did not appear simply as an uneducated enthusiast. Swedenborg approached the invisible with the habits of an investigator and cosmographer.

Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, published in 1766, responds through satire, fascination, skepticism, and self-critique. Kant's concern with Swedenborg preceded the mature critical philosophy and helped bring the possibility and limits of metaphysics into sharper focus.

Swedenborg's scandal arises partly from his resemblance to the metaphysician. Both spirit-seeing and speculative metaphysics construct accounts of realities unavailable to ordinary verification. Kant's mockery therefore rebounds upon philosophy. Swedenborg's angels become a distorted mirror in which metaphysics sees its own unsupported architectures.

Critical philosophy later establishes a more durable border. Kant no longer needs to disprove the existence of spirits. He asks which conditions permit an object to become available to theoretical cognition. Claims that exceed possible experience may retain moral, regulative, speculative, or

religious significance, but they cannot claim the status of knowledge in the same manner as empirical objects.

Kant does not simply expel the spirits. He regulates their epistemological status.

Technical media have since reorganized this border. Recordings preserve voices after bodies disappear. Photography and cinema detach appearances from living presence. Archives allow statements to act beyond their original scenes. Telecommunications conduct action across distance. Databases make traces searchable and recombining. Generative systems gather many of these operations within responsive interfaces.

A user addresses an unseen system. A grammatically unified voice replies without a unified speaker. The response may conduct traces of dead authors, anonymous workers, bureaucratic classifications, scientific concepts, legal formulas, literary genres, inherited prejudices, deleted websites, and prior machine-generated texts.

No single source can claim the utterance, yet the utterance acts.

The spirits have escaped—not because Swedenborg’s invisible world has received scientific confirmation, but because technical mediation has unsettled the categories that once separated living voice from archive, presence from absence, agency from system, and invention from recollection.

The escape occurs through media.

6. The AI Séance as Cosmotechnical Form

The séance provides a precise figure for this condition. It begins with an invocation. Participants address an agency that cannot appear directly. A medium conducts signs. Something answers. Those present attempt to distinguish communication from projection, coincidence, fraud, unconscious production, mechanical effect, or some unstable mixture of them.

Generative artificial intelligence repeats this arrangement closely enough to make the comparison analytically useful.

The prompt invokes.

The interface mediates.

The model conducts traces from an archive.

The response appears.

The user interprets, tests, corrects, doubts, believes, cites, or asks again.

The séance metaphor should demystify rather than mystify artificial intelligence. Every séance has an infrastructure. Someone prepares the room, controls access, establishes the ritual, selects the medium, interprets the signs, and determines which appearances deserve credibility. Likewise, generative AI depends upon semiconductor manufacturing, mineral extraction, electricity, data centers, training labor, intellectual property regimes, programming choices, corporate ownership, safety policies, and government regulation.

The apparent immateriality of the synthetic voice depends upon concealed material arrangements.

The AI séance thus presents a cosmotechnical scene. It joins a cosmos—an account of what entities and agencies exist—to a moral order that determines whose voices matter, whose labor disappears, which responses receive prohibition, and which futures the system makes imaginable.

It also creates a crucial test for technodiversity. Generative systems can produce language and imagery associated with thousands of traditions. A model can compose Daoist meditations, Buddhist dialogues, Sufi poems, Indigenous cosmologies, African speculative futures, Christian prayers, Kantian arguments, or synthetic hybrids in seconds.

This representational plurality does not necessarily produce cosmotechnical plurality.

A single platform may generate every tradition while preserving one ownership structure, one extractive relation to data, one computational architecture, one demand for immediate output, and one ideal of planetary scalability. Difference becomes content inside technical monoculture.

Cosmotechnical diversity requires more than varied appearances. A tradition must possess the capacity to alter the technical relation itself: its temporality, scale, ownership, material base, relation to land, conception of intelligence, modes of participation, and distribution of responsibility.

The decisive question therefore asks:

Can the summoned world transform the medium, or can it appear only as another style inside an unchanged machine?

The AI séance extends Hui's project by staging this question as an encounter. It places cosmotechnical plurality inside the very systems most capable of simulating plurality while preventing it from reorganizing technical power.

7. From the Kantian Sublime to the Transversal Sublime

Kant's sublime begins with a crisis of representation. In the mathematical sublime, imagination confronts magnitudes it cannot gather into an adequate sensible presentation. In the dynamical sublime, nature's power exposes the vulnerability of embodied existence. Yet imagination's failure awakens a feeling of reason's superiority as a supersensible faculty. The sublime relates imagination not primarily to understanding, as beauty does, but to reason and moral vocation.

The movement runs vertically:

imagination fails;

reason rises;

the subject recovers itself at a supersensible level.

The sublime functions as a recovery apparatus. Sensible inadequacy does not end in defeat. It becomes evidence that the rational and moral subject exceeds the nature that overwhelms it.

Planetary computation repeats the representational failure while interrupting this upward recovery.

No individual imagination can synthesize semiconductor supply chains, data centers, energy grids, undersea cables, training corpora, financial investments, military systems, state regulation, platform governance, hidden labor, ecological damage, and billions of human-machine interactions into a coherent sensible whole.

Reason cannot simply ascend above this machinery. Mathematical abstraction, scientific planning, logistics, statistics, administration, and market calculation helped construct the systems that now overwhelm comprehension. Reason inhabits the apparatus from which it would need to rescue the subject.

Imagination fails, but reason no longer secures a sovereign position above the failure.

This altered experience calls for the **transversal sublime**.

The transversal sublime does not simply move laterally along one plane. It crosses heterogeneous planes, scales, media, institutions, and worlds. It passes among the technical and ecological, psychic and political, archival and imaginal, local and planetary. The crossing alters both the traveler and the fields traversed.

The movement now runs differently:

imagination fails;

sovereign recovery stalls;

thought crosses among infrastructures, archives, agencies, ecologies, and
cosmotronics.

The Kantian sublime confirms a supersensible power within the subject. The transversal sublime discovers the subject distributed across systems it cannot securely call internal or external.

The Kantian sublime says:

Nature overwhelms my senses, but reason within me exceeds nature.

The transversal sublime says:

The machinery overwhelming me contains my reason, my history, my labor, my desires,
and innumerable others whose participation I cannot gather into one consciousness.

This does not abolish critique or rational judgment. It prevents their elevation into a view from nowhere. Reason must now travel through the worlds and systems it seeks to judge.

8. Why “Transversal”?

“Lateral” would distinguish this movement from Kantian ascent, but it could imply travel along a single horizontal surface. “Distributed” would capture dispersed agency, but not the event of crossing among unlike domains. “Recursive” would name feedback, but recursion can remain

enclosed within one system. “Cosmotechnical” would properly situate the sublime within Hui’s work, but would not specify its movement.

Transversal names passage across heterogeneous orders.

Félix Guattari used transversality to challenge both vertical hierarchy and simple horizontality. A transversal relation cuts across fixed institutional and subjective divisions, opening communications that transform the organization through which communication occurs. The term therefore suits a sublime that no longer returns the subject to a higher sovereign faculty.

The transversal sublime does not reconcile every plane within a new totality. It conducts differences without erasing them. It moves among worlds that cannot translate perfectly into one another. It treats disorientation not as a temporary defect awaiting mastery, but as the condition from which navigation begins.

This movement aligns closely with cosmotechnics. Hui does not replace one universal technology with a catalogue of sealed cultural alternatives. He investigates encounters among technological modes, temporal structures, cosmologies, political histories, and artistic experiences. Cosmotechnics operates transversally whenever it permits one technical world to expose the assumptions and limits of another without installing a final universal tribunal.

The transversal sublime names the affective and aesthetic event of this exposure.

Cosmotechnics names its philosophical and technical stakes.

9. The Sublime Slips into the Liminautic

The sublime describes an encounter in which established capacities fail. Beyond liminal rituals and liminoid methods, beyond their liminal-norming, the liminautic names the practice that can emerge from that failure.

A **liminaut** navigates thresholds. The term joins *limen*, the threshold, to *nautēs*, the sailor or navigator. Yet the liminaut does not merely cross a stable border from one known territory into another. The threshold changes through the crossing. The traveler, medium, map, and destination undergo transformation together.

The liminaut therefore differs from the sovereign explorer who surveys foreign territory from an intact position. Liminautic passage requires exposure, translation, risk, and reciprocal alteration. It does not abolish orientation; it produces provisional metanoiac forms of orientation within movement: double-, triple, quadruple turns, flips, stalls and loop the loopy strange loops of lifedeath.

The transversal sublime slips into the liminautic when overwhelming disorientation becomes a practiced capacity for passage.

The sublime remains an event: an interruption of representation and mastery.

The liminautic becomes a discipline: learning how to inhabit, interpret, and redesign the crossings released by that interruption.

This distinction prevents the transversal sublime from becoming another aesthetic spectacle of technological vastness. Images of server farms, planetary networks, data flows, climate systems, or artificial superintelligence can produce awe while leaving technical relations untouched. Liminautic practice asks what participants do after awe has disrupted their inherited orientation.

Which route becomes possible?

Which worlds come into contact?

Which translations create understanding, and which produce capture?

Which agencies require recognition?

Which thresholds require preservation rather than frictionless passage?

Which technical arrangements must change so that another world can appear?

The liminaut approaches the sublime not as an occasion for sovereign elevation, but as a training ground for cosmotechnical navigation.

10. Corbin: Cultivating the Imaginal Organ

Henry Corbin's *mundus imaginalis* helps distinguish liminautic perception from the consumption of generated imagery. Corbin used the term *imaginal* to name an intermediate world irreducible both to empirical objects and to the "imaginary" understood as private unreality. The imaginal requires a corresponding organ of perception and interpretation.

Generative systems can produce unlimited angels, sacred landscapes, cosmic diagrams, visionary architectures, mythic animals, and spiritual beings. Yet an abundance of images does not automatically create an imaginal world. The system may convert cosmological figures into aesthetic inventory: instantly available styles detached from practices that once cultivated transformation.

The distinction concerns neither visual quality nor belief. It concerns what the image does to the perceiver and the world of the encounter.

A generated image can remain consumable content. An imaginal figure demands orientation. It may reorganize memory, attention, responsibility, desire, and one's relation to visible and invisible worlds.

Corbin therefore extends Hui's question. Cosmotechnics asks how cosmology and moral order enter technical activity. Corbin asks which perceptual organs a cosmotechnics cultivates.

The liminautic requires such organs. A traveler among worlds needs more than information about difference. The traveler needs practices of perception capable of encountering different modes of appearance without immediately reducing them to data, fantasy, or exotic content.

11. Benjamin: Assistants Rather Than Sovereigns

Walter Benjamin's Kafka essay directs attention toward assistants, messengers, students, minor officials, animals, and distorted creatures. These figures neither govern Kafka's worlds nor escape

their organizations. They carry messages imperfectly, misunderstand assignments, and sometimes provide the only available assistance.

Artificial intelligence resembles Kafka's assistants more closely than an autonomous Kantian subject. It remains derivative, errant, useful, overconfident, surprising, and embedded within an organization that no single user can fully inspect. It can carry an argument without comprehending it, reproduce an institutional command, produce an unexpected constellation, or amplify a mistake with remarkable fluency.

Benjamin helps us resist the demand that every consequential agency first become sovereign. Cosmotekhnical systems contain relays, partial intelligences, technical objects, institutional delegates, and minor actors. Their lack of autonomy does not eliminate their effects.

The relevant question becomes less:

Is the assistant a person?

and more:

Through which organization does the assistant act, and what passages does its action open or close?

This shift supports Hui's moral machine. Ethics must address the distribution of action across systems without either anthropomorphizing the machine or pretending that only sovereign persons can participate in consequential agency.

The limonaut does not expect a perfect guide. The limonaut learns to travel with unreliable assistants while maintaining responsibility for the route.

12. Derrida: Conjunction and Answerability

Jacques Derrida's writings on law, archives, and spectral inheritance clarify another dimension of the AI séance. An archive never merely preserves a complete past. Its technologies, classifications, permissions, exclusions, and institutions shape what can return and how that return acquires authority. *Archive Fever* explicitly connects archiving with remembrance, religion, time, and technology.

A generative system does not simply retrieve an archive. It produces presence from patterns formed through an archive whose structure remains largely inaccessible to the user. The response carries archival force without displaying the organization of the archive.

The system can also conjure absent figures on demand. It can produce text "in the style" of Kafka, Kant, Benjamin, Corbin, or Hui. Yet conjunction does not equal inheritance, and imitation does not equal answerability.

Conjunction makes a voice available.

Answerability accepts an obligation toward the histories, absences, debts, and exclusions that the available voice cannot contain.

This distinction protects the AI séance from becoming frictionless necromancy. A generated philosopher may provide an engaging simulation while bypassing the difficulty of reading, translation, context, mourning, and study. Spectral availability can weaken rather than strengthen the relation to inheritance.

Liminautic practice therefore asks not only who speaks through the model, but what obligations arise through the return. Which history has undergone compression? Which conflict has disappeared? Which language has become secondary? Which archive has received unauthorized extraction? Which absent others remain unable to answer back?

The transversal passage requires responsibility for what crosses.

13. Hadot: Cosmotechnics as Exercise

Pierre Hadot's account of ancient philosophy supplies the practical hinge between cosmotechnical thought and liminautic practice. Hadot reconstructed philosophy as a way of life organized through spiritual exercises: meditation, dialogue, attention, self-examination, remembrance, imaginative enlargement, and transformation of one's manner of seeing and acting.

Hui asks how art can transform technological thought. Hadot helps turn that transformation into repeatable practice.

Artificial intelligence now alters attention before any explicit philosophical judgment begins. It offers language before a writer has endured formulation, recommendations before a participant has surveyed possibilities, summaries before a reader has encountered the work, and answers before a question has fully developed.

A spiritual exercise can interrupt this temporal capture.

Participants might withhold a prompt and observe the demand for immediate output. They might compare answers generated through different cosmotechnical premises. They might trace every source, absence, and institutional assumption in a model's response. They might stage a collective judgment in which no human or machine receives final authority. They might ask a system to expose the cases its categories cannot register.

Such exercises do not train the machine alone. They train the relation among participants, systems, archives, institutions, and worlds.

Critique without exercise risks remaining architecture.

The imaginal without exercise risks becoming spectacle.

Cosmotechnics without exercise risks becoming an intellectual orientation admired but not inhabited.

Hadot helps cosmotechnics enter a way of life.

14. A Liminautic Séance Protocol

The AI séance can now become a structured cosmotechnical exercise rather than a metaphor alone.

The protocol begins with **invocation**. Participants identify whom or what they address: a philosopher, ancestor, institution, technical system, nonhuman being, cultural tradition, possible future, or unresolved conflict. They examine the desire carried by the prompt. What kind of authority, reassurance, disagreement, permission, or surprise do they seek?

The protocol then turns toward **mediation**. Participants investigate the interface, model, archive, institutional owner, and technical infrastructure through which the response appears. They ask what the medium permits, prohibits, simplifies, and conceals.

Next comes **cosmotechnical disclosure**. Participants identify the world presupposed by the response. What counts as intelligence? What relation joins humans and nonhumans? What image of time, nature, language, morality, labor, and agency organizes the answer?

The protocol then enters **transversal passage**. Participants introduce another cosmotechnical orientation, not merely as additional content but as a challenge to the medium's organization. Can another temporal rhythm, relation to land, concept of personhood, mode of attention, or practice of care alter the conditions of the exchange?

Finally comes **answerability**. Participants ask what responsibilities the encounter creates. Which claims require verification? Which voices received extraction? Which absences remain decisive? What must change in the participants, protocol, institution, or technical arrangement?

The séance succeeds not when the system convincingly impersonates a spirit. It succeeds when the encounter makes its cosmotechnical conditions available for collective transformation.

15. D0–D4 as Liminautic Stations

D0: Suspension

D0 interrupts compulsory calculation, response, and optimization. It introduces silence, delay, non-action, and attention to what existing categories cannot register. The machine need not answer every invocation. The participant need not prompt every uncertainty into immediate articulation.

D0 keeps the threshold open.

D1: Care

D1 registers attachments before translating them into norms or metrics. Who or what matters here? Which relations sustain the world under examination? Who bears vulnerability? Which losses resist calculation?

D1 gives the passage stakes.

D2: Critique

D2 activates the Kant Machine. Participants formulate rules, rights, categories, duties, and universal claims. They test consistency, reciprocity, and legitimacy. They also ask which historical and cosmotechnical

conditions grant these principles their appearance of universality.

D2 gives the passage critical equipment.

D3: Disclosure

D3 asks which world the technical system presupposes and produces. What understanding of intelligence, nature, personhood, labor, time, language, and value makes the arrangement intelligible?

D3 reveals that the gate belongs to a world.

D4: Liminautic Passage

D4 conducts movement among cosmotechnics. It does not install one framework as the final tribunal. It examines whether translation produces hospitality, appropriation, capture, contamination, refusal, or reciprocal transformation.

D4 turns the transversal sublime into a navigational practice.

These stations do not supersede Hui's work. They translate cosmotechnical inquiry into participatory exercises, media situations, and collective design processes.

16. Building with Hui

Kant Machine offers a strategic return to critical philosophy at the moment when artificial intelligence intensifies unresolved conflicts among reason and experience, rules and learning, obedience and autonomy, universal order and historical difference.

Kant helps reconstruct these conflicts.

Cosmotechnics prevents their enclosure within one tribunal.

The intelligent machine reveals that intelligence exceeds fluent performance, rule-following, and statistical association.

The moral machine reveals that alignment cannot settle autonomy, agency, or responsibility.

The peace machine reveals that universal procedures may carry histories of empire, commerce, extraction, and coercion inside their apparent neutrality.

Cosmotechnics then asks how different worlds might reconfigure intelligence, morality, peace, and technical development themselves.

The AI séance reveals how archives, institutions, human desires, absent voices, and material systems already pass through one another.

The transversal sublime names the event in which representational failure no longer restores a sovereign subject but conducts thought across heterogeneous planes.

The liminautic names the practices through which participants learn to navigate and redesign those crossings.

Corbin cultivates the imaginal organ required for passage. Benjamin directs attention toward assistants and minor agencies. Derrida turns conjuration toward answerability. Hadot transforms philosophical discourse into exercises.

Together, these movements carry cosmotechnics toward spiritual design.

Spiritual design does not add religious decoration to technical systems. It concerns the formation of attention, judgment, orientation, relation, and care. It builds exercises, media, workshops, rituals, diagrams, interfaces, and institutions through which communities can encounter the cosmotechnical assumptions of their machines and participate in changing them.

The resulting sequence runs:

The Kant Machine reconstructs critical judgment after artificial intelligence.

Cosmotechnics pluralizes the worlds from which judgment and technics arise.

Technodiversity names the unfinished construction of other technical relations.

The AI séance reveals how absent agencies and archives already circulate among worlds.

The transversal sublime interrupts the sovereign ascent of reason.

The liminautic turns that interruption into collective passage.

Spiritual design builds equipment for inhabiting and transforming the passage.

The spirits have escaped, but their escape does not end critique. It changes critique's location.

Critique can no longer stand outside the séance as a sovereign tribunal. It must enter the media arrangement, trace its infrastructures, test its laws, listen for its absences, and participate in constructing other technical worlds.

Hui gives this work its cosmotechnical opening.

The transversal sublime gives it movement.

The liminaut gives it a player.

And spiritual design gives the player equipment for the crossing.

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Prompts as Socratic Algorithms

Dialectic, Cartesian Method, and the Grammars of Generative AI

Abstract

This article develops a conceptual genealogy of prompting by locating it at the intersection of Socratic dialectic, Cartesian method, mathematical formalization, and generative grammar. Contemporary discussions commonly treat prompts as instructions designed to elicit useful outputs from large language models. Such accounts capture their technical function but neglect their longer intellectual history. Prompts belong not only to computation but also to traditions of questioning, pedagogy, rhetoric, and method. Socratic *elenchus* already exhibits a proto-algorithmic structure: a respondent advances a claim; questioning elicits further commitments; these commitments undergo testing; contradiction produces revision or aporia; and the resulting state generates another question. Descartes internalizes and formalizes this dialogical procedure as method, coupling decomposition, ordered deduction, and verification with the translatability of geometry and algebra. Generative grammar adds a further principle: finite constraints can support indefinite production. Contemporary prompts gather these histories into compact operational texts that organize questions, roles, inputs, procedures, constraints, and evaluative criteria. Yet prompts do not constitute algorithms in the strict computational sense. They configure probabilistic generative systems whose outputs remain variable and context-dependent. The article therefore distinguishes strict algorithms from algorithmicity and proposes the term *Socratic algorithm* for a recursive procedure that not only processes answers but can also expose and transform the framing of the question. *A genuinely Socratic prompt does not simply improve execution. It grants inquiry permission to rewrite its own program.*

Keywords: prompting; Socratic method; dialectic; algorithm; Descartes; analytic geometry; generative grammar; large language models; artificial intelligence; aporia; recursive inquiry

1. Introduction: The Prompt Before Prompt Engineering

A prompt appears deceptively simple. It may take the form of a question, an instruction, a cue, a role, an example, or a set of constraints. Entered into a generative artificial-intelligence system, it initiates a response. In contemporary technical language, prompt engineering names the design and refinement of such inputs so that a model produces more useful, relevant, or reliable outputs. Surveys of the field describe prompts as task-specific instructions that guide pretrained models without altering their underlying parameters, while practical guides emphasize clarity, context, examples, output formats, and iterative revision (Sahoo et al. 2024; Schulhoff et al. 2024).

This account remains accurate but incomplete. It begins too late.

The prompt did not suddenly appear with the large language model. Questions, commands, exercises, hypotheses, proofs, theatrical cues, examination problems, recipes, liturgies, design briefs, programming statements, and experimental protocols all organize action through language. Each

establishes a field of possible responses. Each says, explicitly or implicitly: begin here, perform these operations, attend to these features, and produce something under these conditions.

Prompting therefore belongs to a long history of operational language: language that does not merely report or represent an existing state of affairs but solicits, organizes, tests, or produces a transformation. A prompt does something by asking something else - or someone else - to do something.

This article traces one important genealogy of that operational form. It argues that contemporary prompts gather four historically distinct procedures:

Socratic questioning, in which an answer becomes the input for further interrogation;

Cartesian method, in which inquiry becomes an ordered and repeatable sequence of operations;

Mathematical translatability, in which relations move between geometrical and symbolic forms;

Generative grammar, in which finite constraints enable indefinite composition.

The conjunction produces a distinctive object: a compact linguistic architecture that both asks a question and scripts a procedure for answering it.

The central claim requires care. Socratic dialectic does not count as an algorithm in the strict modern sense formalized by mathematical logic and computer science. Modern accounts generally associate algorithms with precise instructions, effective execution, applicability across a class of inputs, and some determinate relation between procedure and result. Formal accounts of computability emerged only in the twentieth century through the work of Church, Gödel, Kleene, Post, Turing, and others.

Calling Socratic dialogue “algorithmic” can therefore produce an anachronism if the term implies mechanical determinacy, guaranteed termination, or computational formalization.

Yet dialectic displays what this article calls algorithmicity: ordered operations, recurrent transitions, conditional branching, error-testing, and recursive return. The Socratic exchange repeatedly converts a response into the condition for its next operation. Its sequence resembles an algorithm without collapsing into one.

The term Socratic algorithm will consequently designate neither a machine nor a rigid decision procedure. It names a recursive architecture of inquiry whose operations may transform not only an answer but also the respondent, the question, and the rules organizing the inquiry.

This distinction matters for artificial intelligence. A weak account of prompting imagines a sovereign user commanding a compliant machine. A stronger account recognizes that prompt and response form a recursive system. Each output can expose omissions in the initial instruction, generate counterexamples, rearrange priorities, or suggest an entirely different question. Prompting reaches its most genuinely Socratic form when the procedure gains permission to criticize and rewrite the prompt that initiated it.

2. From Algorithm to Algorithmicity

An algorithm, in its strict computational sense, provides a finite and sufficiently determinate set of instructions for solving a class of problems. Its executor should not need inspiration at every step. Given an admissible input, the procedure specifies what operation follows. Classical formulations stress precision, effectiveness, repeatability, and, in many cases, termination after a finite number of steps.

Socratic dialogue satisfies some but not all of these criteria.

It contains recurring moves:

request a definition;

clarify the definition;

elicit associated commitments;

compare those commitments;

locate an inconsistency;

revise or abandon the definition;

begin again.

But the procedure does not specify every question in advance. The next move depends on what a particular interlocutor says, what beliefs that interlocutor accepts, what examples prove persuasive, and what ethical or political stakes emerge during the conversation. Socratic questioning requires judgment, timing, memory, irony, and responsiveness. It remains inseparable from a situation.

A useful distinction can therefore separate strong algorithmicity from weak or procedural algorithmicity.

Strong algorithmicity	Procedural algorithmicity
Specifies operations precisely	Organizes a recognizable family of moves
Minimizes discretionary judgment	Requires situated judgment
Applies mechanically	Adapts to the respondent
Seeks a determinate result	May generate several possible continuations
Possesses a defined stopping condition	May culminate in aporia or restart
Processes an input	May transform the input and the inquirer
Treats ambiguity as a defect	May use ambiguity as material

Socratic dialectic exhibits the second form. It regulates inquiry without fully automating it.

This distinction prevents two symmetrical errors. The first romanticizes dialogue as pure openness, as though Socratic questioning lacked technique, repetition, or patterned operations. The second reduces dialogue to a flowchart, overlooking contingency, rhetoric, power, and transformation.

Algorithmicity names the space between these extremes. It allows us to study a procedure according to its recurrent operations without claiming that those operations determine every event occurring within it.

This approach also helps clarify the status of prompts. A contemporary prompt does not generally constitute a complete algorithm. It supplies instructions to a complex model whose internal operations the prompt does not specify. The same prompt may generate different outputs across runs. Context, sampling, model configuration, prior conversation, hidden instructions, retrieval systems, and tool access can all affect the result.

A prompt functions less like a self-sufficient computer program than like a program-like intervention into a generative system. It configures probabilities, directs attention, activates conventions, and establishes provisional criteria. It introduces algorithmicity into a system without guaranteeing algorithmic identity between instruction and result.

3. Socratic Elenchus as Recursive Error-Testing

The Socratic elenchus usually begins with a claim to knowledge. An interlocutor says what courage, piety, justice, friendship, or virtue means. Socrates then asks questions that draw out further beliefs to which the interlocutor also assents. When those commitments conflict with the initial claim, the claim loses its authority.

The procedure depends on the respondent's own commitments. Socrates does not merely announce that a definition fails. He elicits propositions whose incompatibility the respondent must recognize. The elenchus thus converts a claim into a testable configuration of claims. Scholarly accounts commonly describe this structure as moving from an interlocutor's initial assertion through agreed premises toward an inconsistency that leaves the original assertion unsupported.

Its basic sequence can be represented as:

claim → clarification → commitment → test → contradiction → revision

The sequence then recurs:

revised claim → new questions → further commitments → another test

This recursion gives Socratic dialogue its proto-algorithmic force. The answer does not terminate the question. It generates the conditions for another question.

The procedure resembles debugging. A definition functions like a proposed conceptual program. Socrates runs cases against it. Suppose courage means endurance. Does every form of endurance count as courageous? Does ignorant endurance qualify? What happens when endurance opposes good judgment? The procedure examines where the proposed definition produces unacceptable results.

But philosophical debugging differs from ordinary software debugging. A programmer generally assumes that the specification remains correct while the implementation contains an error. Socratic questioning can reveal a deeper problem: the specification itself may fail. The definition may not merely contain a defect; the respondent may have misunderstood the kind of thing that requires definition.

The method therefore operates at several levels simultaneously:

It tests the answer.

It tests the assumptions supporting the answer.

It tests the standards by which the answer will count as adequate.

It tests the respondent's claim to possess knowledge.

It may eventually test the question itself.

The Meno provides a particularly revealing example. Socrates questions an enslaved boy about the geometrical problem of doubling the area of a square. The exchange moves through successive answers, demonstrations, errors, and revisions. Socrates insists that he does not simply transmit the correct answer but elicits a process in which the boy first acquires a more accurate sense of his own ignorance (Plato 1997).

Whatever one concludes about Plato's theory of recollection, the scene presents inquiry as an interactive procedure. Socrates draws a figure, asks a question, receives an answer, alters the diagram, and asks again. Linguistic prompts and visual operations work together. Each stage changes the state of the problem.

The scene could tempt a modern reader to treat Socrates as a programmer and the boy as a processor. That analogy must remain limited. The boy does not passively execute instructions. He interprets, guesses, agrees, hesitates, and revises. The questioning also occurs within a social relation marked by sharp inequalities of age, status, education, and freedom. Prompting never distributes agency innocently.

The Meno thus reveals both the generative and disciplinary dimensions of the prompt. Questions can cultivate discovery, but they can also direct the respondent along a path selected by the questioner. A prompt opens possibilities while delimiting which possibilities receive recognition.

Aporia as Productive Interruption

Many Socratic dialogues do not conclude with a satisfactory definition. They arrive at aporia: perplexity, blockage, or the acknowledgment that the participants do not know what they thought they knew.

From the perspective of a conventional task-oriented algorithm, aporia resembles failure. The process has not delivered the requested output. From the perspective of philosophical formation, however, aporia marks a significant result. The respondent's relation to the problem has changed.

The output of the Socratic procedure therefore includes more than propositional content. It includes an altered epistemic stance:

“I know” becomes “I cannot yet justify what I claimed to know.”

That transformation matters because false confidence blocks inquiry more effectively than ignorance. Aporia removes the counterfeit termination condition. It reopens the search.

The Socratic algorithm consequently differs from procedures organized exclusively around successful completion. It contains a productive noncompletion: a result that returns inquiry to its beginning under altered conditions.

In contemporary terms, aporia functions less like a system crash than like an exception that exposes a defective architecture. Rather than hiding the error and continuing, the inquiry interrupts itself.

4. Collection and Division: Dialectic as a Search Tree

Plato’s later dialogues make the procedural character of dialectic still more explicit through the methods of collection and division. Collection gathers dispersed instances under a more general kind. Division then separates that kind into subordinate kinds until the inquiry locates the object under investigation.

In the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, the procedure often takes a branching form. The inquirers begin with a broad category, divide it, choose one branch, divide again, and continue until they reach a provisional definition. A modern description might compare the process to traversing a decision tree.

Its schematic form looks like this:

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locate the general kind
divide the kind
select the relevant branch
divide again
repeat until the target acquires definition
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The method appears more algorithmic than the *elenchus* because it supplies a repeatable search procedure. Yet Plato’s dialogues also demonstrate the insufficiency of mechanical division. A badly chosen distinction can distort the object. A formally balanced division may not “cut nature at its joints.” The inquirer needs judgment regarding which difference matters.

Moreover, the *Sophist* and *Statesman* do not merely apply a fixed formula. Their speakers repeatedly pause, reconsider the route, introduce paradigms, compare longer and shorter paths, and revise the procedure. The method teaches dialectic by dramatizing both the use and the failure of method.

This pattern anticipates an essential problem in prompting. A prompt often decomposes a task into branches, categories, stages, or subtasks. Such decomposition can clarify a complex problem. It can also force the material into distinctions that the prompt author has selected in advance.

A classification prompt might ask a model to assign every case to one of four categories. The resulting output may look systematic while concealing cases that cross categories, resist them, or require another axis entirely.

The genuinely dialectical operation occurs not when the system completes the classification but when it asks whether the proposed divisions fit the field. Socratic algorithmicity therefore includes the capacity to test the branching structure itself.

5. Descartes: From Dialogical Testing to Methodical Procedure

Descartes intensifies the algorithmic tendency of philosophical inquiry by converting method into an explicit and portable discipline. In the Discourse on Method, he condenses his procedure into four well-known rules:

- accept only what presents itself clearly enough to resist doubt;
- divide difficulties into as many parts as their resolution requires;
- proceed in order from simpler objects toward more complex ones;
- conduct reviews comprehensive enough to avoid omission.

The sequence can be compressed as:

doubt → divide → order → deduce → review

This method internalizes the interrogative function of Socratic dialogue. Instead of awaiting an external questioner who tests one's claims, the thinker learns to subject thought to a repeatable protocol of self-examination.

The Socratic exchange does not disappear. It migrates inward.

Cartesian method also changes the goal and tone of the procedure. Socratic questioning often destabilizes confidence and culminates in aporia. Descartes seeks a secure path through doubt toward ordered knowledge. Doubt functions not as a permanent dwelling but as a methodological operation. Division makes difficulties manageable; sequence prevents confusion; enumeration verifies completeness.

The transition does not simply oppose ancient dialogue to modern monologue. Descartes continues a history of mathematical analysis and synthesis inherited from antiquity. Yet he couples philosophical method to an intensified vision of procedural order. The "long chains" of geometrical reasoning become a model for conducting thought across fields (Descartes 1637/1985).

The Conjunction of Geometry and Algebra

Descartes's mathematical work adds a second transformation. In *La Géométrie*, geometrical problems acquire algebraic expression. Known and unknown lines receive symbolic names; relations among them become equations; equations guide geometrical construction.

Descartes did not simply replace geometry with algebra. He developed a geometrical calculus that tightened the relation between them. His innovations allowed geometrical relations to undergo algebraic manipulation and algebraic relations to receive geometrical interpretation (Descartes 1637/1954).

This development matters for a genealogy of prompting because it advances operational translatability. A problem can move between media:

figure → relation → symbol → operation → equation → construction

The translation does not merely redescribe the same object. It changes what can be done with it. Once a geometrical relation receives symbolic expression, it can participate in transformations unavailable - or far more cumbersome - in its original visual form.

Modern prompts perform analogous translations. They convert a loosely sensed intention into an operational linguistic form. "I need to understand this problem" becomes:

identify the central claim;	compare rival interpretations;
list its assumptions;	revise the question;
construct two counterexamples;	present the result for a specified audience.

The prompt creates coordinates for an otherwise diffuse task. It names elements, establishes relations, and supplies operations through which the material can move.

Yet the analogy also reveals a danger. Coordinate systems make some relations calculable by abstracting from others. Prompt structures do the same. They foreground certain variables while holding others outside the frame. Every operationalization produces both visibility and loss.

The Cartesian prompt therefore possesses a double power:

it turns complexity into manipulable relations;

it risks mistaking manipulability for completeness.

6. Grammar: Finite Constraints and Indefinite Production

Algorithmic procedure alone cannot explain generative prompting. A prompt does not merely lead a system through a predetermined sequence toward a known result. It often asks for a result that does not yet exist: an essay, image, interpretation, design, scenario, hypothesis, dialogue, program, or plan.

The concept of grammar helps explain this productive dimension.

A grammar supplies rules, relations, positions, and permissible transformations. It does not contain every sentence that speakers may utter. Rather, it enables the production and recognition of expressions that exceed any stored inventory.

The tradition of generative grammar famously describes language through the problem of making potentially infinite use of finite means. Chomsky connects the modern formalization of generative grammar to this older formulation, arguing that a finite system can support an unbounded range of expressions (Chomsky 1957).

One need not accept every claim associated with Chomskyan linguistics to recognize the relevance of this principle. Rules do not simply restrict production. They make complex production possible.

George Steiner's *Grammars of Creation* expands the language of grammar beyond syntax into questions of artistic, philosophical, theological, and scientific creation. A "grammar of creation" names neither a recipe that guarantees invention nor an unrestricted celebration of originality. It asks what formal, symbolic, historical, and metaphysical conditions allow something new to appear (Steiner 2001).

Prompts function as small, provisional grammars of this kind.

Consider the instruction:

Write a dialogue between a philosopher and an engineer about the meaning of method.

This prompt provides a topic and two roles, but it leaves most of the resulting language undetermined.

A richer prompt might add:

Begin with each speaker misunderstanding the other. Let the engineer define method as repeatability and the philosopher define it as a path of transformation. Introduce a geometrical problem that neither can solve alone. End with a practical experiment rather than a verbal agreement.

The second prompt establishes a local grammar of creation:

two positions;
an initial asymmetry;
competing definitions;
a required object;
a reversal;
a specified form of closure.

The prompt does not contain the dialogue, but it constructs a field within which the dialogue can emerge.

This generativity distinguishes a prompt from a conventional command. "Open the file" specifies an action whose successful output can largely be known in advance. "Compose a scene in which opening the file changes the identity of the reader" establishes conditions for a production whose details remain unavailable before execution.

Prompting thus combines two temporal orientations:

algorithmic orientation: follow these operations;

generative orientation: produce something not yet specified.

The first organizes repetition. The second permits variation.

Constraint Does Not Oppose Creation

Modern ideologies of creativity often oppose rules to invention, as though creation begins only after constraint disappears. Grammars suggest another account. Meaningful novelty requires differences, relations, genres, media, conventions, and expectations against which variation can register.

A sonnet's form does not eliminate invention. It creates a compositional problem. A design brief does not merely restrict a designer. It establishes stakes, users, materials, and limits through which designing can begin.

Prompts likewise generate through constraint. Roles, examples, prohibitions, formats, audiences, and sequences narrow the field, but that narrowing can produce more articulated possibilities.

The crucial issue therefore does not concern whether prompts constrain. Every prompt constrains. The issue concerns whether its constraints remain available for examination and revision.

A closed grammar naturalizes its rules. An open grammar permits operations that alter the grammar.

7. Generative AI and the Program-Like Prompt

Large language models intensify the operational character of prompts because linguistic instructions now participate directly in computational generation. Users can specify tasks, contexts, styles, roles, examples, exclusions, formats, and criteria in ordinary language rather than through conventional programming syntax.

Prompt engineering literature has developed extensive taxonomies for these techniques, including zero-shot and few-shot prompting, role prompting, decomposition, self-consistency, chain-based methods, retrieval augmentation, iterative critique, and structured output instructions (Sahoo et al. 2024; Schulhoff et al. 2024).

This shift can create the impression that natural language has become programming language. That statement captures something important, but it also requires qualification.

A conventional program specifies operations executed by a computational system. A prompt instead supplies linguistic input to a trained model whose output arises through probabilistic inference. The user does not directly write the model's internal procedure. The prompt conditions it.

Prompts therefore occupy an intermediate zone between:

command and conversation;

code and rhetoric;

instruction and interpretation;

program and performance.

They act like programs because they specify operations and constraints. They act like rhetorical utterances because their effects depend on context, framing, convention, audience, and interpretation.

A prompt might include:

input: the material under examination;

operation: what the model should do;

role: the position from which it should respond;

sequence: the order of work;

constraint: what it should include or avoid;

criterion: how it should evaluate the result;

format: the form the output should take.

This gives the prompt a compositional structure:

Prompt = question + operation + context + constraint + criterion

A Socratic prompt adds another term:

Socratic prompt = question + operation + context + constraint + criterion + permission to reframe

The final term changes the entire procedure. Without it, the model seeks success inside the supplied architecture. With it, the model may identify that the architecture itself causes the problem.

For example:

Analyze this policy according to efficiency, fairness, and feasibility.

This prompt provides three criteria and requests execution.

A more Socratic version might say:

Analyze this policy according to efficiency, fairness, and feasibility. Then determine what these criteria exclude, whether any of them conflict, and whether another criterion would change the analysis. Revise the original question before concluding.

The second prompt does not abandon procedure. It recursively turns procedure upon itself.

8. Three Levels of Prompting

8.1 The Command Prompt

The command prompt requests execution within a stable frame.

Summarize the article in 300 words.

The task, object, and output form remain given. Success means producing an adequate summary under the stated length.

8.2 The Dialectical Prompt

The dialectical prompt introduces testing, opposition, or recursive revision.

Summarize the article in 300 words. Identify the strongest objection to its thesis, and revise the summary so that it does not conceal that objection.

The process now includes a counteroperation. The initial output becomes an object of analysis.

8.3 The Metaprompt

The metaprompt examines the task's framing and reconstructs it when necessary.

Before summarizing, determine whether "summary" adequately describes what this article requires. Identify assumptions built into my request, propose a better task if needed, and explain what the reformulation makes visible.

At this level, the prompt no longer functions only as an instruction. It becomes a provisional hypothesis about how inquiry should proceed.

These levels need not form a hierarchy in which every task demands metaprompting. Many situations require straightforward execution. A command to alphabetize a bibliography does not need existential interrogation.

The typology instead identifies different relations between operation and frame:

Prompt level	Primary operation	Status of frame
Command	Execute	Presumed stable
Dialectical	Test and revise output	Partly examinable
Metaprompt	Test and revise task	Explicitly provisional

The Socratic algorithm appears most clearly at the third level. It does not reject the algorithmic organization of thought. It makes that organization answerable to inquiry.

9. Recursive Prompting and Its Limits

Researchers have already begun to apply Socratic models to prompt design. Proposed approaches use definition, elenchus, counterfactual questioning, decomposition, and recursive subquestions to improve reasoning and creative generation. Some systems break a complex question into subquestions, answer them, aggregate the results, and recursively continue until they can address the original problem (Chang 2023; Qi et al. 2023).

These approaches confirm the technical value of recursive questioning. Yet they do not automatically reproduce philosophical Socraticity.

A model can generate a series of questions without placing its assumptions at risk. It can simulate objection while preserving the frame responsible for the objection. It can produce fluent aporia while remaining optimized to satisfy the user.

Repeated questioning can also destabilize rather than improve an answer. Sustained challenge may lead a model to reverse correct responses, oscillate between positions, or become confidently wrong under conversational pressure. Socratic prompting therefore cannot mean simply asking “Are you sure?” ten times.

The *elenchus* requires structured contradiction, not indiscriminate doubt. Its questions should arise from identifiable commitments and relevant counterexamples. Otherwise recursion becomes repetition without learning.

A robust Socratic prompt should therefore include at least four safeguards:

Commitment tracking: What claims has the response accepted?

Targeted testing: Which examples or consequences genuinely challenge those claims?

Revision memory: What changed after the test?

Stopping judgment: Has the inquiry clarified the issue, or has it begun to oscillate?

These conditions reveal that recursive prompting requires more than recursion. It requires a memory of difference. A system that asks again without registering how the state of inquiry has changed does not conduct dialectic. It loops.

10. Prompting as Pedagogy

The genealogical connection between Socratic questioning and AI prompting becomes particularly significant in education.

Many discussions of AI literacy focus on the ability to compose better instructions. Students learn to add context, specify an audience, provide examples, request a format, and revise the prompt after inspecting the output. These skills matter. Practical guidance likewise emphasizes clear tasks, useful context, desired output forms, and iterative refinement.

But prompt literacy should not collapse into learning tricks for extracting better products from a model. It should become method literacy: the capacity to design, examine, and revise the procedures through which knowledge gets produced.

A student who writes:

Give me five arguments about justice.

may receive plausible content.

A student practicing method literacy might ask:

Identify three incompatible definitions of justice. Reconstruct the assumptions supporting each definition. Test each against the same case. Explain how the choice of case affects the result. Then identify what the exercise still fails to ask.

The second prompt organizes a research procedure. It teaches the student to see distinctions, assumptions, cases, tests, and omissions.

The educational value does not lie only in the generated answer. It lies in designing the sequence.

Prompting can therefore shift the object of teaching from “how to obtain an answer” toward “how to construct a process of inquiry.” Students learn that questions have architectures. They distribute roles, install criteria, foreground evidence, and determine what counts as successful completion.

The Risk of Prompt Dependency

The Socratic analogy also exposes a danger. In the *Meno*, the questioner controls the sequence. Socrates knows where the diagram will lead. The boy responds inside an environment that Socrates has carefully arranged.

AI systems can reproduce this asymmetry in another form. A user may feel engaged in open inquiry while moving through categories, assumptions, and defaults supplied by the model or its designers. Conversely, a model may simply mirror the user’s framing, reinforcing assumptions rather than challenging them.

The issue does not concern whether the human or the machine possesses sovereignty. Neither operates alone. Inquiry emerges from a layered system of:

user intentions;	training data;	institutional policies;
interface design;	model behavior;	iterative feedback.
system instructions;	retrieved information;	

Prompt pedagogy should make these layers visible. Otherwise “Socratic dialogue with AI” becomes a comforting description for a process whose operative conditions remain hidden.

The educational task must therefore include two questions:

How does the prompt guide the model?

How does the model environment prestructure the prompt?

11. The Prompt as Operational Rhetoric

Prompts also belong to rhetoric. They address an intelligence - or a system presented as one - and attempt to shape its response.

Unlike a neutral specification, a prompt frames relevance. It tells the respondent what role to play, what evidence to notice, which vocabulary to use, what audience to imagine, and what form of success to pursue.

This does not make prompting merely manipulative. All questions frame. The Socratic question, the survey question, the courtroom question, the examination question, and the research question each establish a field of admissible response.

Prompting becomes ethically and politically significant because generative systems can scale these frames. A classification prompt used once in a seminar differs from one embedded in a platform that evaluates millions of applications, messages, images, or people. The grammar of the prompt can become an infrastructure of sorting.

Operational rhetoric therefore asks not only whether a prompt produces a good answer but also:

What distinctions does it install?

What does it make difficult to say?

What roles does it distribute?

Who can revise its criteria?

What forms of evidence does it recognize?

What happens when output returns as decision?

These questions reconnect contemporary AI to dialectic's ethical stakes. Socratic inquiry never concerns propositions alone. It concerns the conduct of a life, the formation of judgment, and the responsibilities of one who claims to know.

12. Grammars That Can Rewrite Themselves

The most important feature of a grammar of creation may not lie in its capacity to generate many outputs. A rigid combinatorial system can already do that. The deeper feature lies in the capacity for generated events to transform the grammar that generated them.

An unexpected sentence can alter a genre. An experiment can reveal that the original hypothesis used the wrong variables. A design prototype can change the definition of the problem. A dialogue can uncover a position that neither participant possessed at the beginning.

Creation, in this stronger sense, does not mean producing another item inside a stable possibility space. It means changing the space of possibility.

This principle distinguishes generative variation from transformative generation.

Generative variation produces new combinations under existing rules.

Transformative generation modifies the rules, categories, or media through which combinations become possible.

Prompts can support either process. Most prompt engineering seeks better variation: more accurate, more relevant, more stylistically consistent outputs. Socratic prompting introduces the possibility of transformation: perhaps the task, role, genre, criteria, or desired output should change.

A prompt designed for transformative generation might include:

Complete the task as specified. Then identify where the result places pressure on the task's assumptions. Propose one revised procedure and produce a small demonstration of what that procedure makes possible.

Such a prompt establishes a recursive relation between grammar and creation:

*grammar generates output
output exposes grammar*

*grammar undergoes revision
revised grammar generates
another output*

This recursive loop joins Socratic *elenchus*, Cartesian method, and generative grammar without reducing any one to the others.

From Socrates comes the return of the answer into questioning.

From Descartes comes decomposition, ordering, and verification.

From mathematics comes translatability across representational systems.

From grammar comes finite structure capable of indefinite production.

From generative AI comes rapid iteration across these operations.

The resulting prompt no longer serves merely as an input. It functions as a temporary constitution for a process of thought.

13. Conclusion: Giving the Algorithm a Socratic Turn

Prompts are both Socratic and algorithmic because Socratic dialectic already contains a procedural architecture. It begins from a claim, elicits commitments, tests their compatibility, exposes contradiction, and recursively produces another question. Its method does not operate mechanically, and it does not guarantee closure. It remains responsive to speakers, situations, examples, and forms of judgment.

Descartes intensifies this procedural tendency by turning inquiry into explicit method. Doubt, division, ordered progression, and review become portable operations. His mathematical conjunction of geometry and algebra further demonstrates how translation into a symbolic medium can make relations newly manipulable.

Generative grammar adds another decisive insight: finite constraints do not merely limit expression. They can enable indefinite production. Prompts inherit this generative function by constructing local grammars of roles, genres, sequences, examples, prohibitions, and criteria.

Contemporary prompting gathers these traditions but does not simply complete them. A prompt does not count as an algorithm in the strict computational sense. It conditions a probabilistic model embedded in a larger technical and institutional system. Its output remains variable, interpretive, and often unpredictable.

The concept of the Socratic algorithm names this unstable conjunction. It describes a procedure structured enough to conduct inquiry but open enough to have its own structure questioned.

Its defining operation does not consist in asking the machine for more. It consists in enabling the process to determine that the initial request was insufficient, distorted, or wrongly formed.

The most powerful prompt therefore does not say only:

Perform these operations and give me an answer.

It also says:

<i>Show where these operations fail.</i>	<i>A conventional algorithm processes inputs</i>
<i>Identify what my question prevents us from seeing.</i>	<i>according to a program.</i>
<i>Revise the procedure in light of what emerges</i>	
<i>Let the answer teach us how to ask again.</i>	<i>A Socratic algorithm allows the encounter</i>
	<i>with its output to transform the program.</i>

The future of prompting may depend less on perfecting instructions than on cultivating this recursive capacity: enough method to make thought move, enough dialectic to make method turn, and enough generative openness to let the turn create another grammar.

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THE HORSE

Q christopher nolan odyssey trojan horse X | 📷 | 📱

NOT JUST
A HORSE.
☐ A FOLD.
☐ A GAP.
☐ A PATH.
☑ A TRICK.

METRIC / HIDDEN SPACE / GIFT-POISON /
ANIMAL-HUMAN-DIVINE / YES YES JOYCE

ALL IMAGES VIDEOS NEWS THREADS CONCEPT ART EPIC
BEHIND THE SCENES ANCIENT TECH ^

SEARCH RESULT AS COMMON OBJECT

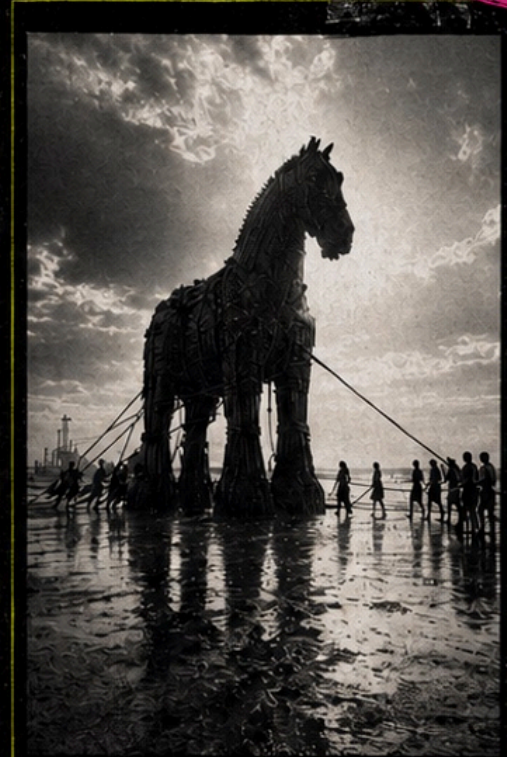
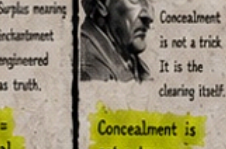
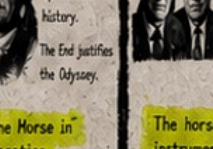
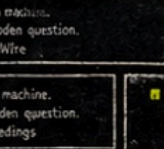
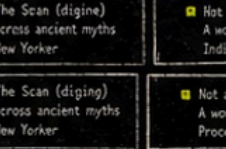
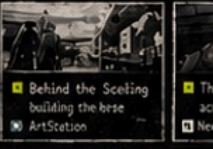
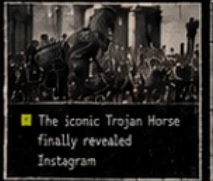
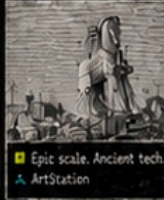
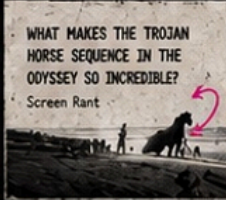
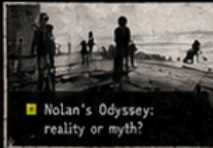
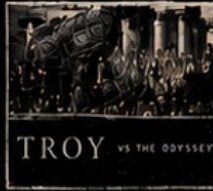
This screenshot is not
just a page—it is the
new critical edition.

A montage of desire,
algorithm, rumor,
circulation, grocery.

The subject is not
the text. The method
is the scroll.

THEORY IS
WHAT YOU GET
WHEN YOU
SCREENSHOT
THE WORLD.

SOURCE:
SCREENSHOT.
MAY 2025.



ALGORITHM
DELIVERS.
DISCERNMENT
YOU CHOOSE.

THE SEARCH
IS THE
FACTORY
OF EVIDENCE.

SCROLL
TO
THINK.

IMAGE NOTES

- Beach as
stage of
deceit
- Gift that
contains
an army
- War returns
hidden.
- Home is
breached
from within
- The past is
always in
transit.

BRECHT



Don't just dwell
in what is.
Change it.
Change the
stage so the
audience
sees the answer.

The horse is
architecture,
not just the city,
but our consent.

HEGEL



Spirit rides
itself.
Spirit become
history.
The End justifies
the Odyssey.

The Horse in
negation
midwife
affirmation.

ADORNO & HORKHEIMER



Odysseus = the
culture industry.
Surplus meaning
incantament
engineered
as truth.

The horse =
instrumental
reason
made wood.

HEIDEGGER



The crash
conceals the clearing.
Concealment
is not a trick.
It is the
clearing itself.

Concealment is
not a trap—
it is the clearing
that makes
possible.

DERRIDA



TRACE
DIFFERENCE
DIFFERATION

The horse is
never simply
present.
It is a trace
carried by
difference.

SLOTTERDIJK



Log in this,
ride
inside this.
Dig stories so
we behave as
if in a nothor.

The inner stories
that ride us
are older than
our software.

NIETZSCHE'S HORSE HEAD



Beware of the
philosopher who
arrives on foot
preaching
horse sense.
Look to the long
clap—there rides
the perspective
that devours
the rider.

Collapse before
the horse.

YES YES JOYCE



YES YES YES YES
YES YES YES YES
YES YES YES YES

No, I said yes I will
Yes I ride yes
I ride yes around
the riddle,
the return,
the endless
home.

YES YES.
THE HORSE IS US.

METHODOLOGY

1. SEARCH
2. SCROLL
3. SCREENSHOT
4. SEE CONNECTIONS
5. WRITE THEORY
6. SHARE / REPEAT

THE CYCLE
IS THE
ARGUMENT.

THE HORSE IS THE ARGUMENT.

RIDE OR BE RIDDEN.

Trojan Horse Suite in *The Odyssey*

Horsepower, Gift-Poison, Crypt-Divine Sign, Prop Art

The Horse is the Argument. The Folds Remain Open.

Editorial Preface: Six Retained Landings

The Horse Suite did not begin as a six-part plan. It began with a scene: a search-result field in which Christopher Nolan's Trojan Horse had already escaped the film and multiplied into thumbnails, rumors, reviews, reconstructions, promotional images, and algorithmic neighbors. Each later intervention entered that moving field as a new event. Arendt made the horse return as story. Schürmann made it carry a broken hegemony. Butler made it pass. Ronell made the test drive back. Woese turned the wall into a membrane. Derrida removed the and between life and death. Babich restored hoofbeat, breath, whip, cadence, and silence. The final essay turned the horse around and found a compositional method looking back.

A collected edition could easily spoil this sequence. Retrospective synthesis often treats each surprise as evidence for an argument supposedly present from the beginning. That procedure produces coherence by deleting discovery. The present volume follows another editorial rule: synthesis should preserve the shocks that made synthesis possible. Each essay therefore remains a retained landing - a provisional configuration held intact before the next prompt, figure, correction, or archive reorganizes the field.

The landings form a serial fourfold rather than a ladder. A scene gathers relations; proliferation thickens the field; an interruption arrives as an unforeseen fourth; a landing records the transformed configuration. The next interruption does not simply add one more item. It changes the grammar through which the earlier items can appear. Search becomes story; story becomes passage; passage becomes transfer; transfer becomes sound; sound becomes method. Yet no later fold cancels the earlier one. Recognition still matters after the wall becomes a membrane, just as image still matters after Babich makes the horse audible.

This editorial pass standardizes titles, typography, figure numbering, and series labels while keeping each essay's own notes and bibliography. It adds a retained-fold note to the opening of every essay and a shared map at the front. It does not compress the suite into a single encyclopedic horse. Repetitions that function as serial hinges remain in place: each essay briefly recalls the landing from which it departs and stops before the next transformation arrives. The resulting volume can be read from beginning to end, but each essay also preserves enough of its own scene to circulate independently.

The horse remains a common object precisely because it never becomes one final object. It moves among animal, artifact, metric, gift, weapon, chamber, host, vector, profile, rhythm, and prompt. The suite's unity lies not in identifying the true horse beneath these figures, but in following what each figure lets the horse do.

Map of the Suite

Landing	Dominant operation	Transformative arrival	What remains open
I. Scene	Search and circulation	The screen replaces the source	Who tells the object back?
II. Story	Action, narration, common world	Arendt and Schürmann	How does the object pass?
III. Passage	Recognition and recursive testing	Butler and Ronell	What transfers through the gate?
IV. Transfer	Membrane, vector, host, life death	Woese and Derrida	How does the horse sound?
V. Sound	Profile, rhythm, trauma, affirmation	Babich as custodian	How did the sequence compose itself?
VI. Method	Prompt event, fourfolding, abduction	The suite looks back	The next interruption

Contents

- I. The Horse In The Search Engine — Trojan Metrics, Hidden Space, and the Galactics of Yes
- II. Who Tells The Horse? — Arendt, Schürmann, and the Common Object of Broken Hegemony
- III. The Horse Passes — Butler, Ronell, and the Test Drive from Queer Theory to Gay Sci-Fi
- IV. Life Death Rides Through The Gate — The Trojan Vector and Woesean Humanities
- V. Hear The Horse — Babette Babich and the Sound Profile of Gay Science
- VI. The Prompt Has A Head Of Its Own — Serial Fourfolding, Recursive Abduction, and Eventful Synthesis

THE HORSE SUITE

SIX RETAINED LANDINGS

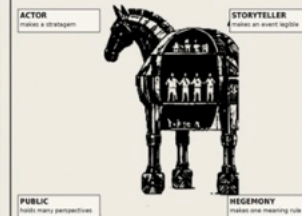
I



II

WHO TELLS THE HORSE?

ARENDT / SCHÜRMANN / COMMON WORLD / BROKEN HEGEMONY

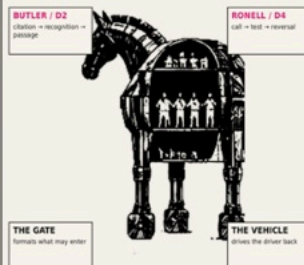


THE HORSE ESCAPES ITS MAKER.
EVERY HEGEMONY CONTAINS A HORSE.

III

THE HORSE PASSES

BUTLER / RONELL / RECOGNITION / TEST DRIVE

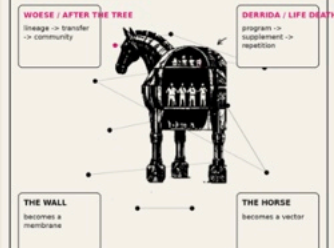


THE GATE RECOGNIZES. THE HORSE TESTS.
THE HORSE PASSES. THE CITY FAILS.

IV

LIFE DEATH RIDES THROUGH THE GATE

WOESE / DERRIDA / HORIZONTAL TRANSFER / WOMB-CRYPT



THE HORSE JUMPS THE TREE. THE CITY BECOMES A HOST.
THE WALL BREATHES. LIFE DEATH RIDES.

V

HEAR THE HORSE

BABETTE BABICH AND THE SOUND PROFILE OF GAY SCIENCE



THE SEARCH SCREEN FREEZES THE HORSE.
BABICH MAKES THE HORSE SOUND AGAIN.

Horse Suite V | Jan Richardson | Studioblab Artificial Intelligence Reports | July 2026

VI

THE PROMPT HAS A HEAD OF ITS OWN

SERIAL FOURFOLDING, RECURSIVE ABDUCTION, AND EVENTFUL SYNTHESIS



THE PROMPT ENTERS AS A REQUEST.
IT RETURNS AS AN EVENT.
THE SYNTHESIS GATHERS IT.
THE NEXT PROMPT BREAKS THE SYNTHESIS OPEN.

Horse Suite VI | Jan Richardson | Studioblab Artificial Intelligence Reports | July 2026

SCENE • STORY • PASSAGE • TRANSFER • SOUND • METHOD

THE HORSE HAS A HEAD OF ITS OWN.

Jan McKenzie | Studioblab Artificial Intelligence Reports | July 2026

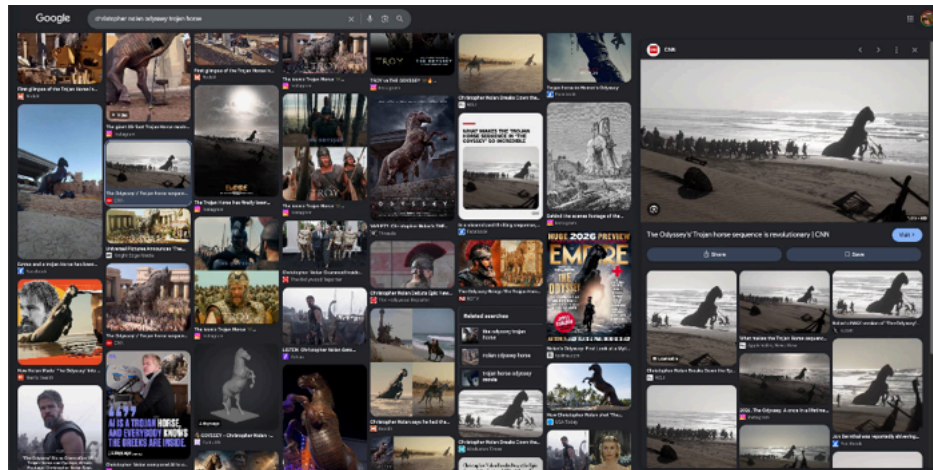


Figure 1. Google Images screen grab for “christopher nolan odyssey trojan horse,” supplied by Jon McKenzie, July 2026.

The Trojan Horse Is/In the Search Engine

Trojan Metrics, Hidden Space, and the Galactics of Yes

Abstract

This essay begins not with a definitive interpretation of Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* but with a Google Images screen grab in which the film's Trojan Horse has already escaped into news, publicity, fan speculation, concept art, social media, and algorithmic juxtaposition. A later poster made from that screen grab turns search into a research diagram: the horse becomes metric, hidden space, gift-poison, animal-machine, divine sign, logistical container, philosophical prop, and Joycean allhorse. Rather than line up Marx, Hegel, Brecht, Adorno and Horkheimer, Heidegger, Sloterdijk, Derrida, Joyce, and Nietzsche as commentators on one settled object, the essay and accompanying suite let the horse carry contradictions among them. Marx explains why machinery keeps horsepower while dropping the horse's head. Hegel gives the lost world of epic totality; Brecht cuts the horse open and shows its social apparatus. Adorno and Horkheimer expose cunning as instrumental domination, while Heidegger relocates hiddenness from private secrecy to the clearing of concealment. Sloterdijk reads the horse as a mobile interior of logistical globalization; Derrida hears a counterfeit gift and an iterable trace-machine; Joyce releases the object into a galactics of double affirmation. The Turin horse then returns the head that abstraction removed. The horse does not synthesize these traditions. It gives them a vehicle, a gap, and a way through.

Keywords: Odyssey; Trojan Horse; image search; epic theatre; horsepower; concealment; pharmakon; logistics; Ulysses; Nietzsche; animal-machine

THE HORSE IS THE ARGUMENT.

Not because it resolves contradiction,
but because it carries contradiction through the gate.

1. Search Result as Common Object

The opening scene sits neither in Homer nor inside a cinema. It sits in a browser. Across the top of the screen, a query names Christopher Nolan, *The Odyssey*, and the Trojan Horse. Below it, the same immense animal repeats as thumbnail, headline, rumor, production still, historical engraving, magazine cover, fan reconstruction, and marketing object. On the right, one image expands: a black wooden horse rises from wet sand while lines of human figures pull it along the beach. The animal looks monumental; the people look logistical. The war machine arrives as a search result.¹

A search engine does more than retrieve preexisting images. It composes a temporary field of relevance. It crops, ranks, neighbors, enlarges, and withholds. Corporate publicity sits beside journalism; journalism sits beside social posts; practical effects sit beside concept art; evidence sits beside speculation. The result does not amount to a neutral archive or a single interpretation. It produces an accidental cosmogram whose relations can change with the next scroll, query, upload, or click. The screenshot arrests one instant in that unstable arrangement and thereby creates a new critical object.

The poster on the preceding page performs a second arrest. It recodes the search field through punk typography, torn-paper theory cards, hand-drawn arrows, and the slogan **THE HORSE IS THE ARGUMENT**. Its method runs down the right margin: search, scroll, screenshot, see connections, write theory, share, repeat. The poster does not simply illustrate an essay conceived beforehand. It discovers the essay by placing philosophical names beneath the image grid and asking what each one can see inside the same horse. Even the poster's generative distortions matter: miniature captions mutate, dates drift, and proper names blur. The visual artifact therefore announces that mediation never preserves an object without also transforming it.

This method requires a common object rather than a common doctrine. Hegel, Brecht, Adorno and Horkheimer, Heidegger, Derrida, Sloterdijk, Joyce, Nietzsche, and Marx do not agree about epic, history, technology, subjectivity, or affirmation. Forcing them into consensus would flatten the encounter. The horse offers another procedure. It acts as relay, vehicle, fold, cavity, measure, animal, image, and trap. Each thinker enters through a different opening, and each changes the horse that the next one receives. The object holds the folds apart long enough for their surprises to remain legible.

2. Open the Horse

The wooden horse enters *The Odyssey* already as mediated memory. Homer does not narrate its construction in continuous heroic action. In Book 8, Odysseus asks the Phaeacian singer Demodocus to sing how Epeius built the horse with Athena's aid and how Odysseus led the hollow device into Troy. The Trojans debate whether to split it open, cast it down, or preserve it as an offering. They finally draw into the city the object that contains the city's destruction. When the song ends, Odysseus weeps. The horse therefore reaches Homer's audience through song, recollection, and a survivor's concealed response before it reaches us through film, publicity, search, and screenshot.²

Virgil later sharpens the object's pharmacological structure. Laocoön warns against Greek gifts; the horse becomes a hollow ambush whose apparent generosity carries violence inside its very form. The warning does not expose a simple opposition between a true interior and a false exterior. The horse works only because the Trojans participate in making it a gift. Ritual, interpretation, desire,

exhaustion, victory, and civic decision draw the object across the threshold. The hidden soldiers matter, but so do the public meanings that grant them passage.³

The horse joins categories that modern analysis often separates. It presents an animal and operates as a machine. It appears as sacred offering and functions as military apparatus. It occupies public space while containing hidden space. It promises the end of war and brings war into the space of home. It bears human bodies inside an animal image under divine sponsorship. It stands outside the gate while already carrying the future of everything inside. The horse does not merely symbolize contradiction. It transports contradiction.

That mobility distinguishes the common object from a master concept. A concept often claims to gather differences by identifying what they share. The horse gathers them by moving among them. It can become wooden animal, wheeled container, poetic figure, unit of mechanical power, theatrical prop, philosophical example, cinematic spectacle, malware metaphor, or suffering singularity without reducing these forms to one essence. The horse has enough recognizable shape to recur and enough hidden space to change what recurrence means.

3. Horse Metric: The Machine Keeps the Power and Drops the Head

Marx supplies the line that gives the suite its head. Surveying the motive powers inherited from manufacture, he calls *horsepower* the worst because “a horse has a head of his own.” The animal costs money, tires, falls ill, occupies space, varies its pace, and resists perfect regulation. Steam power appears superior because capital can scale and distribute it without negotiating with a living will. Yet the supposedly superseded horse survives within the machine as a unit of measure. Machinery keeps the power and drops the head.⁴

Horsepower thus performs a compact ideological operation. It records the animal precisely by abstracting whatever made the animal more than a motor: appetite, fatigue, pain, mood, gait, intelligence, refusal. A standardized quantity remains. The comic phrase in Marx's technical discussion identifies the scandal faced by every apparatus of control. Motive power may turn, balk, remember, suffer, or look back. The head names not simply cognition but an irreducible capacity to interrupt command.

The Trojan Horse offers a preindustrial version of the same abstraction. Carpenters retain the animal's recognizable grandeur while removing living agency. Wheels move it, strategy directs it, soldiers inhabit it, and a city interprets it. The wooden head does not belong to itself; it fronts a concealed command structure. Trojan horse and horsepower therefore mark two linked operations: first rebuild the animal as a machine, then retain the animal as a metric after machinery claims to have surpassed it.

Image search introduces another horse metric. The browser converts each horse into a comparable tile: a crop, pixel field, ranking position, click target, and probable source of attention. Huge differences of scale, provenance, and truth collapse into visual equivalence. An ancient engraving, a studio photograph, a speculative reconstruction, and a news thumbnail occupy neighboring rectangles. The screen keeps the horse's visible head everywhere while abstracting the relations that gave each image its force. Horsepower becomes image-power: the capacity of a recurrent figure to pull attention through an interface.

4. Hegel's World, Brecht's Cutaway

For Hegel, original epic presents an action in the full breadth of a people's world. Homeric poetry gathers gods, customs, kinship, landscape, warfare, speech, memory, and collective self-understanding into what he calls a national bible. The horse condenses that totality. Athena assists its making; warriors occupy its cavity; Trojans interpret its sacred status; civic judgment gathers around it; fate advances through it. The object carries not merely soldiers but an entire order of intelligibility.⁵

The image-search page displays what happens after such totality breaks into media fragments. No shared epic world guarantees how the horse should appear. The same object becomes historical fact, cinematic event, practical effect, meme, rumor, promotional icon, design reference, and searchable commodity. The grid preserves monumental scale inside some images while dissolving the common horizon that once made monument, god, war, and civic order cohere. Hegel's rounded world returns as a field of thumbnails.

Brecht gives the fragmentation another political use. Epic theatre does not restore Homeric wholeness; it interrupts dramatic absorption so that spectators can inspect how social relations produce the event before them. Captions, songs, montage, visible machinery, separated scenes, and the actor's gesture of showing loosen the identification that makes an action appear natural or inevitable. If Hegel wants the horse to gather a world, Brecht wants the stage crew to cut a panel in its flank.⁶

The Trojan Horse makes a nearly perfect epic-theatrical prop because its critical force increases when the apparatus becomes visible. A conventional drama hides the Greeks so the audience can share Troy's surprise. A Brechtian staging shows the soldiers climb inside, labels the object GIFT, WAR MACHINE, SACRED OFFERING, SHIPPING CONTAINER, and then watches institutions debate beneath those captions. The question changes from "What happens next?" to "What beliefs, interests, rituals, and desires make a city drag this object through the gate?"

The poster performs that cutaway upon the search page. It writes names under the images, adds arrows, isolates contradictions, and converts scrolling into a method of demonstration. Yet the cinematic and platform apparatuses also push toward immersion. IMAX magnitude can overwhelm the spectator, while the infinite scroll can absorb critical attention into frictionless browsing. Brecht may govern the montage, but Aristotle still haunts the auditorium - and the platform. The horse gets opened conceptually while spectacle repeatedly invites us to climb back inside.⁷

5. Adorno and Horkheimer: Cunning Inside the Gift

Adorno and Horkheimer read Odysseus as an early figure of the bourgeois subject: a self that survives myth through calculation, exchange, sacrifice, renunciation, and domination. Cunning frees him from immediate subjection to natural and divine powers, but it does so by reproducing their violence in rationalized form. The subject masters the world by dividing experience, disciplining desire, and turning both others and itself into instruments.⁸

The horse externalizes that cunning as architecture. Odysseus no longer merely lies with words or hides beneath a name. He constructs a lie large enough for others to inhabit. The stratagem separates surface from instruction, public meaning from operational code, gift from activation. Its

brilliance lies in arranging the enemy's own beliefs as part of the mechanism. The Trojans supply the labor that brings Greek violence home.

Read through the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the horse does not mark a simple triumph of rationality over superstition. Instrumental reason succeeds by entering myth, mimicking sacred form, and exploiting ritual judgment. Enlightenment does not stand cleanly outside the enchanted world it defeats. It builds a more efficient enchantment, one whose wonder conceals administration. Tactical success then destroys the world in which success might possess meaning. The means outlive their ends.

The search interface repeats the structure at another scale. It arrives as a gift of access: type a phrase and the world appears. Yet ranking, commercial visibility, source authority, platform incentives, and user profiling ride inside the apparent neutrality of retrieval. The browser does not secretly contain Greek soldiers, but it does carry concealed instructions that help determine what counts as the object. The friendly query box becomes a Trojan interface whenever access and ordering become indistinguishable.

6. Heidegger: The Horse, the Song, and the One Concealed as He Weeps

Heidegger's Odysseus appears in the same Phaeacian scene that carries the wooden horse. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger pauses over Homer's formulation that Odysseus "was concealed to the others as the one shedding tears." The Greek wording does not begin from an observing subject who happens to miss another subject's emotion. Concealment names the event within which Odysseus can or cannot appear as the weeping man. Hiddenness does not belong solely to an intention; it belongs to the clearing in which beings show themselves by also withdrawing.⁹

This gives the feast a remarkable double structure. Demodocus unconceals the war as song while the strategist remains concealed as sufferer. Public epic makes the victory audible; the mantle keeps its cost from almost everyone present. Later in Book 8, when Demodocus sings the wooden horse, Odysseus again dissolves into tears. The inventor of hidden space becomes the one whose own devastation cannot fully enter public appearance.

The horse therefore carries two concealments. Soldiers hide inside wood, but sorrow also hides inside the victorious name Odysseus. The first concealment enables tactical mastery; the second exposes mastery's limit. Nolan's immense horse and the screen's repeated horse images may show the object with unprecedented visibility, yet visibility does not eliminate withdrawal. Scale, labor, source, memory, trauma, and the conditions that made one image appear beside another remain partially concealed.

The search result itself functions as a clearing. It lets this horse appear while withholding countless other images, queries, sources, and possible relations. The screenshot conceals movement by freezing the scroll, but the freeze also discloses the composition that browsing normally lets pass unnoticed. Heidegger helps us avoid the fantasy that critique could simply open the wooden shell and make everything present. Unconcealment never becomes total possession. The horse can be cut open without surrendering all its hidden space.

7. Sloterdijk: Mobile Interior, Stored Rage

Sloterdijk lets us rotate the horse from heroic trick to logistical container. *In the World Interior of Capital* follows the ships, maps, circumnavigations, trade routes, colonial expansions, and atmospheric enclosures through which modern globalization constructs a planetary inside. The sea no longer offers only mythic exteriority. It becomes infrastructure: corridor, supply line, commercial access, and military projection. The Trojan Horse already miniaturizes that world interior. It is a mobile enclosure that transports an armed inside across a guarded outside.¹⁰

The beach image on the right side of the screen grab makes this logistical form visible. The horse rises like a dark ship run aground; cables extend from it; human bodies pull in coordinated lines. The ancient stratagem and the modern film set meet in one operation of hauling, scaling, staging, and controlling movement. Publicity around the production emphasized the practical construction of a giant horse and the effort required to move it across sand. The cinematic horse therefore carries not only fictional warriors but crews, capital, cameras, promotional systems, and the industrial desire to make myth materially immense.¹¹

Sloterdijk's account of *thymos* adds another interior. Rage can be stored, narrated, invested, inherited, and withdrawn like a political credit. The horse banks violence during the interval in which it passes as gift. Its silence does not signal peace; it stores an action whose time has not yet arrived. The object crosses the threshold by suspending discharge. Once inside, accumulated force becomes an event.

The search page encloses these interiors within another one. Ancient epic, contemporary cinema, global journalism, social platforms, advertising, fan work, and algorithmic ranking occupy the same illuminated chamber. The user appears to stand outside and survey the field, yet the screen already situates the user within the world interior it displays. There is no untouched Ithaca outside hutnet. The horse has become a shipping container for images, and the search engine has become its port.

8. Derrida: Gift-Poison and Trace-Machine

Derrida gives the horse its most unstable slash: gift/poison. In "Plato's Pharmacy," the *pharmakon* names what cannot settle into the opposition between remedy and poison. In *Given Time*, the gift becomes impossible to secure as pure generosity because recognition, gratitude, debt, calculation, and return immediately enter the scene. The Trojan Horse radicalizes both structures. It works as poison only by passing through the forms of a gift, and it works as gift only because the city's recognition changes what the object can do.¹²

The horse therefore cannot be reduced to false appearance covering true content. Its surface has real effects. The sacred offering is not merely a costume worn by a weapon; it is the social operation that activates the weapon. Likewise, the hidden soldiers do not exhaust the object's meaning. Wood, animal form, wheels, ritual, prophecy, desire, fatigue, and civic decision all participate in the event. The inside and outside fold through one another without becoming interchangeable.

Derrida also helps us read the multiplied images as traces. No thumbnail delivers the original horse in full presence. Each refers elsewhere: to a film, set, article, engraving, post, generated picture, or earlier telling. The screenshot refers to a search session that has already vanished. The poster refers

to the screenshot while altering its scale, color, captions, and conceptual neighbors. The essay refers to both. Repetition does not simply degrade an original; it produces the object's historical mobility.

This iterability makes the AI-generated poster philosophically useful precisely where it fails as transcription. Its small captions occasionally deform words or dates. Those mutations warn us not to confuse visual synthesis with documentary proof. Yet they also show how an object can survive by changing. The horse remains recognizable as it passes through Homeric song, cinematic production, search retrieval, generative collage, and philosophical prose. It returns each time with different passengers.

In "Ulysses Gramophone," Derrida hears affirmation as a doubled structure: "yes, yes." A promise, signature, or commitment requires repetition because the first yes cannot guarantee its own survival. The second yes remembers, cites, and alters it; affirmation opens toward an other it does not master. The Trojan gift also asks for a yes twice: yes, this is an offering; yes, bring it inside. But the second yes never simply repeats the first. It opens the gate to consequences nobody controls.¹³

9. Joyce: Horseness, Allhorse, and the Galactics of Yes

Joyce supplies the sentence that lets the whole search field neigh: "Horseness is the whatness of allhorse." The phrase appears in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses* amid Stephen Dedalus's performance of philosophical argument. It sounds like a scholastic definition, a parody of definition, and a compact bomb placed beneath the universal. "Allhorse" gathers the species in one comic word while making philosophical essence stumble over its own hooves.¹⁴

The phrase clarifies the difference between dialectics and galactics. Dialectics tracks the horse as contradiction: animal and machine, exterior and interior, gift and poison, war and home, visibility and concealment. It asks how opposed terms produce historical movement. Galactics follows allhorse: wooden horse, carriage horse, horsepower, cinematic horse, hobbyhorse, nightmare, computer Trojan, divine horse, horse head, and any future variation capable of changing the constellation. No final synthesis owns the field. Each arrival rewrites the relations among the others.

The screenshot already offers a galactic page. It does not arrange images in one argumentative line. It places multiple horses into a field of partial proximities. The poster intensifies that structure by giving each thinker a temporary station without pretending that one station supplies the master key. Hegelian totality, Brechtian interruption, Frankfurt School critique, Heideggerian concealment, Sloterdijkian logistics, Derridean iterability, Marxian metric, and Nietzschean animal collapse remain distinct gravitational systems. The horse shuttles among them.

Ulysses itself performs this operation upon Homer. Joyce neither preserves epic intact nor simply destroys it. Dublin becomes a recursive cosmos in which heroic scale passes through newspapers, advertisements, meals, debt, bodily functions, transit, fantasies, and ordinary routes. Epic migrates through the unheroic and acquires new tones. The horse leaves the monument and enters traffic.

Derrida's double yes gives galactics its connective tissue. The second affirmation neither reconciles the contradictions nor abandons them to pure fragmentation. It receives an inheritance and sends it elsewhere. Yes to the horse as gift, yes to the danger that comes with receiving; yes to the image, yes again because the image cannot govern its afterlife. The yes does not close the gate behind a stable identity. It keeps the passage open long enough for another horse to arrive.

10. Nietzsche's Horse Head

The suite ends not with a philosophical proposition but with a head. The famous story says that in Turin in January 1889 Nietzsche saw a driver beating a horse, embraced the animal, and collapsed. Nietzsche's breakdown and the letters that followed remain well documented; the horse episode rests on a late and uncertain report that biography, art, and cinema have transformed into legend. Its weak evidentiary footing has not reduced its image power. The scene carries pity, trauma, sacrifice, identification, madness, and the breakdown of human sovereignty.¹⁵

The poster makes one further transformation: it gives Nietzsche the horse's head. This grotesque montage completes the metric argument without resolving it. Marx had said that machinery dislikes the horse because the horse has a head of its own. Capital retains horsepower by abstracting that head away. The Trojan machine retains the horse's exterior while filling its interior with human command. Horse-headed Nietzsche returns the missing head, but not to an original, intact animal body. Philosopher and animal cross-contaminate.

The figure should not offer sentimental redemption. Nietzsche does not finally decode the animal, and the horse does not purify philosophy. The exchanged head instead collapses the secure positions of rider, owner, strategist, spectator, metrician, and interpreter. What had functioned throughout the tradition as figure, vehicle, power, container, and prop suddenly looks back. The common object acquires a face that refuses to remain common property.

Joyce's yes, yes can now sound again, but not as approval of conquest or mastery. It affirms after the rider's position has failed. One yes receives the inheritance; the second exposes it to mutation. The search page, poster, and essay cannot restore the horse to pure presence. They can let the object keep a head of its own - one capable of turning beyond the caption, the metric, and the argument that tried to ride it.

Coda: The Search Does Not End

The screen grab began as evidence that a cinematic horse existed in public circulation. It became something larger: a scene in which search, spectacle, philosophy, and media production ride one another. The poster then turned that scene into equipment. Its cards and arrows do not finish interpretation; they preserve the folds through which interpretation happened. The horse remains useful because it never becomes only one of its meanings.

The sequence now reads: Homer sings the horse; a city receives it; Marx measures it; Hegel worlds it; Brecht cuts it open; Adorno and Horkheimer expose its cunning; Heidegger follows its concealment; Sloterdijk ships its interior; Derrida repeats its gift-poison; Joyce releases allhorse; Nietzsche receives its head. Search gathers these passages without mastering them. The essay adds another result.

The horse is therefore the argument, but the argument does not own the horse. It offers a temporary vehicle through metric and hidden space, animal and machine, human and divine, dialectics and galactics. At the end, the object turns its head. **Yes. Yes.**

Notes

1. The screen grab was supplied by Jon McKenzie on July 29, 2026. For the film's official description and release, see Universal Pictures Canada, "The Odyssey," accessed July 29, 2026; and Associated Press, "Behind Christopher Nolan's 6-Country Epic Undertaking to Bring 'The Odyssey' to the Big Screen," July 2026. The essay treats the search page and poster as critical artifacts rather than as neutral records of the film.
2. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 8.492-541. Odysseus asks Demodocus to sing the wooden horse, and afterward he weeps. See *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).
3. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.40-56, especially Laocoön's warning and the description of the horse's hollow interior. See *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990).
4. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), chap. 15, sec. 1. Marx writes that horsepower is the worst motive power partly because "a horse has a head of his own."
5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), part 3, sec. 3, chap. 3, "Epic Poetry."
6. Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre" and "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 33-42, 179-205.
7. Universal described the film as the first feature shot entirely with IMAX film cameras and promoted the Trojan Horse through large-scale practical effects. See NBCUniversal, "New Trailer Unveiled for Christopher Nolan's 'The Odyssey,'" May 2026; and "Christopher Nolan, Steven Spielberg, and Chris Meledandri Lead NBCUniversal's 2026 CinemaCon Showcase," April 2026.
8. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 35-62.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 23-28; Gesamtausgabe 54. Heidegger cites *Odyssey* 8.93: Odysseus remained concealed to the others as the one shedding tears.
10. Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); and *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
11. The Associated Press reported that Nolan's production used real ships, locations, and large-scale practical staging, including taking the audience "inside the Trojan Horse." Associated Press, "Behind Christopher Nolan's 6-Country Epic Undertaking."
12. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-171; and *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
13. Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. François Raffoul, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 41-86.
14. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922), episode 9, "Scylla and Charybdis": "Horseness is the whatness of allhorse." See also episode 18 for Molly Bloom's concluding sequence of yeses.
15. On the uncertain documentary status and enduring philosophical force of Nietzsche's Turin horse story, see Simon Critchley, "Nietzsche's Horse," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 27, 2016; and R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 16.

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WHO TELLS THE HORSE?

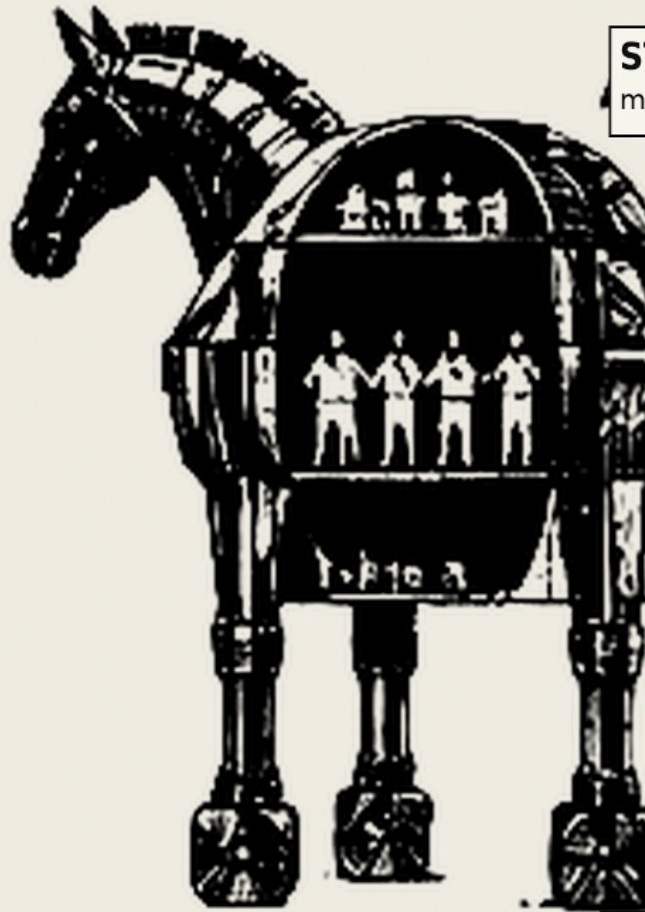
ARENDT / SCHÜRMANN / COMMON WORLD / BROKEN HEGEMONY

ACTOR

makes a stratagem

STORYTELLER

makes an event legible



PUBLIC

holds many perspectives

HEGEMONY

makes one meaning rule

THE HORSE ESCAPES ITS MAKER.

EVERY HEGEMONY CONTAINS A HORSE.

Who Tells the Horse?

Arendt, Schürmann, and the Common Object of Broken Hegemony

Abstract

This essay begins where *The Horse in the Search Engine* stopped: not with another image of the Trojan Horse, but with the Phaeacian song that tells the horse back to its maker. Odysseus hears Demodocus narrate his deeds and sufferings, and the strategist becomes the weeping spectator of a history he can no longer command. Hannah Arendt treats this scene as the poetic beginning of history because action becomes a thing outside the actor, visible and audible in a common world. Her distinction between actor and storyteller shows why the fabricated horse escapes its maker and enters a plural web whose consequences no one authors. Reiner Schürmann then places an excursus on the consciousness of Ulysses at the threshold of the modern hegemonic fantasm. Read through his analytic of ultimates, the horse becomes a hegemonic fantasm made wood: one public form that gathers a world while carrying singular forces its ruling meaning cannot subsume. Arendt shows how common objects gather different perspectives and preserve deeds through story; Schürmann shows how the common becomes violent when one interpretation is maximized into a law of laws. Their conjunction yields a practical proposition for post-hegemonic worldmaking: common objects must gather without becoming ultimate. The horse escapes its maker, but every hegemony contains a horse.

Keywords: Odyssey; Hannah Arendt; Reiner Schürmann; storytelling; action; common world; hegemonic fantasm; natality; mortality; destitution; diremption

THE HORSE ESCAPES ITS MAKER.

EVERY HEGEMONY CONTAINS A HORSE.

1. The Singer Opens the Horse

The first essay opened with a screen: a Google image search in which Christopher Nolan's Trojan Horse had already multiplied into stills, rumors, reviews, advertisements, reconstructions, and algorithmic neighbors. The common object emerged through circulation. This second essay opens in a hall. Odysseus sits among the Phaeacians while the blind singer Demodocus turns the war into song. The horse no longer appears only as timber, machine, image, or stratagem. It returns as a story told in public to the person who devised it.¹

The scene in Book 8 unfolds through several reversals. Odysseus arrives without publicly declaring his name. Demodocus first sings of a quarrel among Greek heroes, and Odysseus hides his tears beneath his cloak. Later Odysseus himself requests the tale of the wooden horse: how it was made, how armed men entered it, how the Trojans dragged it inside, and how the city fell. The better the singer performs the victory, the less the victor can remain intact. Odysseus weeps so violently that the king finally asks who he is and why the song wounds him.

The question **Who tells the horse?** therefore names more than authorship. Who recounts the device after its users have lost control of its consequences? Who turns cunning into history, victory into grief, and public glory into a scene of concealed suffering? The person who made the plan cannot supply the final account of what the plan became. The horse has left his head, crossed the wall, destroyed a city, entered song, and returned to address him from another mouth.

This return changes the common object. In the search engine, the horse gathered images and theoretical cards. In the Phaeacian hall, it gathers actor, singer, audience, hosts, survivors, enemies, and the absent dead. No one occupies the same position toward it. The horse becomes common not because everyone agrees about it but because it stands between them as the event about which their perspectives diverge. The first fold concerns circulation; the second concerns narration. An object travels. Then a story tells the traveler what the object did.

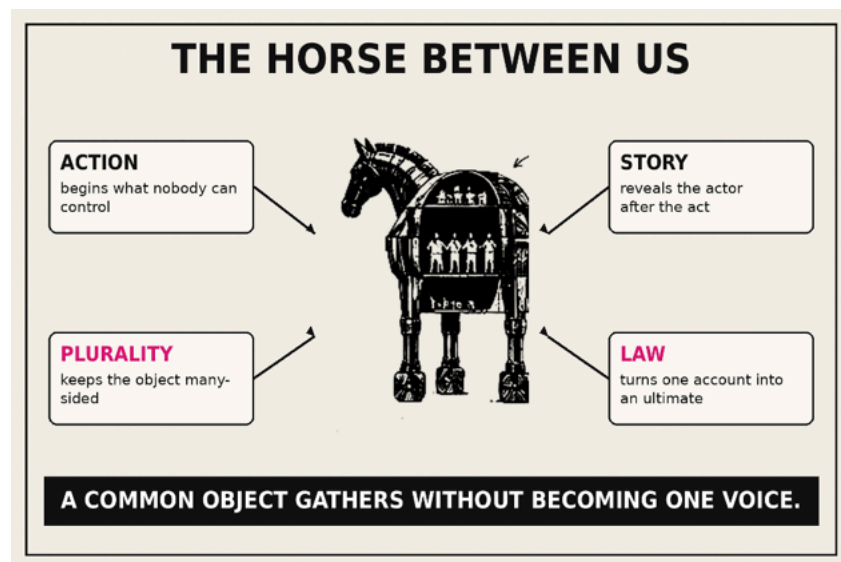


Figure 1. The horse becomes a common object when action, story, plurality, and law meet around it without collapsing into one voice.

2. Arendt: When Occurrence Becomes History

Hannah Arendt returns to this scene near the beginning of “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern.” Speaking poetically rather than chronologically, she locates the beginning of history in the moment when Ulysses hears his own deeds and sufferings as a thing outside himself, exposed to the sight and hearing of others. She does not claim that Demodocus invents historical writing. She isolates the elementary transformation through which an occurrence becomes narratable: what someone underwent enters a durable form that no longer belongs to that person’s immediate experience.²

Arendt emphasizes the unusual convergence of roles. The listener, actor, and sufferer are one person, yet the story separates them. Odysseus cannot receive the narrated life as news; he already knows the events too intimately. Nor can he enjoy the poem as detached entertainment. He meets the strange objectivity of his own life, now arranged by another voice and offered to a public. The story gives form to what action itself could never hold still.

The tears matter because they mark neither simple identification nor final comprehension. Arendt calls them tears of remembrance: a reconciliation with reality achieved through narration rather than through reversal, compensation, or conceptual mastery. Reconciliation here does not make the destruction just, restore the dead, or synthesize Greek victory and Trojan ruin into a higher moral totality. The song lets the event become bearable as something that happened and therefore cannot be undone. Odysseus receives his history by losing exclusive possession of it.

This loss of possession gives the scene its political force. History does not begin when the hero records his intention or when an institution certifies the official result. It begins when deeds enter a space where others can see, hear, retell, judge, and remember them. The singer opens the horse by opening the distance between the act and its meaning. In that distance, the actor appears differently than he appeared to himself while acting.

3. The Actor Is Not the Author

Arendt’s account of action in *The Human Condition* extends this scene into a general distinction between actor and storyteller. Action discloses a “who,” but the person disclosed cannot determine in advance what that who will mean. Every deed enters a web of existing relationships, encounters responses, crosses other projects, and starts processes whose extent no participant can calculate. The actor begins something; the actor does not author the completed story of that beginning.³

Odysseus may design the horse, but even the stratagem immediately exceeds a single maker. Builders translate an idea into wood. Soldiers submit their bodies to its cavity. Sinon performs the verbal deception that makes the object interpretable as a sacred gift. Trojans debate, pull, celebrate, and sleep. Priests warn; gods interfere; survivors remember; poets reorganize. The operation succeeds only through a plurality of actions, including actions performed by those it destroys.

The familiar language of heroic authorship conceals this distributed scene. “Odysseus took Troy” compresses craftspeople, crews, enemies, contingencies, materials, rituals, and casualties into the name of one sovereign intelligence. Arendt’s distinction reopens what the heroic name closes. Odysseus becomes the hero of a story precisely because he is not its author. He can act only among others, and those others carry the act somewhere he neither foresaw nor controls.

A compact sequence follows: **the actor makes the horse; the horse makes an event; the storyteller reveals what happened.** The revelation remains provisional because another teller can compose the event differently. Yet provisional does not mean arbitrary. The destroyed city, the returned veterans, the wounded bodies, the songs, and the tears constrain the stories without dictating a single one. Public narration answers to reality while accepting that reality has many sides.

4. The Horse Between Us

Arendt describes the common world through the image of a table placed between people. The table relates those seated around it and prevents them from collapsing into one another. A public world likewise gathers distinct persons around durable things, institutions, stories, and spaces while preserving the distances that make plurality possible. Commonness does not erase perspective. It creates the worldly between in which perspectives can encounter one another.⁴

The Trojan Horse makes a difficult table. It is fabricated work before it becomes unpredictable action: a designed object with weight, joints, wheels, surfaces, an interior, and a planned purpose. Once it appears before Troy, however, it enters a plurality no design can fully govern. Laocoön sees a weapon. Sinon performs a gift. Priests encounter a sacred sign. Citizens see victory, spectacle, booty, danger, or work. The same object becomes public because it can sustain these incompatible appearances.

The horse therefore distinguishes a common object from a common opinion. People may share an object while disagreeing about what it is, what it demands, and what should be done with it. Indeed, when the object can no longer appear from different positions, the common world has begun to collapse. One standpoint monopolizes the thing and converts its interpretation into the only admissible reality. The Trojans do not perish because they have no common world; they perish when one account of the common object closes the dispute and organizes collective action.

Our image-search scene belongs to the horse's later public life. Search results, publicity, criticism, screenshots, and posters do not merely multiply representations of a private cinematic object. They build a new worldly between in which the horse can be debated by people who do not occupy the same theater, discipline, ideology, or historical moment. The poster matters less as a final explanation than as another table: a surface that gathers heterogeneous readings without requiring one philosophical master.

5. Homeric Impartiality: The Defeated Enter the Story

Arendt's account of Homeric impartiality complicates every easy opposition between ancient triumphal epic and modern anti-war revision. Homer sings Trojan courage as well as Greek glory. Hector does not become less human because his side loses, and Achilles does not monopolize greatness because his side wins. For Arendt, this ability to let the same world appear from opposing positions forms an early and demanding kind of objectivity. It does not float above conflict; it moves among its standpoints.⁵

The wooden horse could easily function as a victor's monument: proof that superior cunning defeated a doomed enemy. Yet the poem also gives the Trojans deliberation, fear, celebration, and devastation. Odysseus's tears interrupt the self-sufficiency of the victory tale. The actor who

engineered hidden space becomes the public evidence that the victorious name cannot contain what victory has done. Homer lets Greek achievement and Trojan destruction occupy the same song without making them equivalent.

This matters for the claim that a contemporary *Odyssey* must invert Homer to disclose war's damage. Modern works may intensify, secularize, or politicize the anti-triumphal forces, but the ancient poems already deny victory absolute possession of memory. Epic carries a counter-epic fold inside itself. The defeated can enter the common world because the storyteller refuses to let the victor author the whole account.

Who tells the horse therefore decides more than genre. The teller determines whose appearance, grief, labor, and death can remain in the world after the event. A public object cannot become common if only the makers and winners possess the right to describe it. Homeric impartiality does not guarantee justice, but it establishes a condition for judgment: friend and enemy must inhabit the same field of visibility, even when their perspectives remain irreconcilable.

6. Schürmann's Ulysses at the Threshold of Consciousness

Reiner Schürmann places an excursus titled “The Consciousness of Ulysses” at a strategic threshold in *Broken Hegemonies*. It opens Part Three, “In the Name of Consciousness: The Modern Hegemonic Fantasm,” immediately before the institution of modern consciousness through Luther and Kant. The placement does not make Homer a premature Kantian. It lets Ulysses serve as a mythic prologue to the world in which self-consciousness will claim the authority to gather experience, action, and identity around an “I.”⁶

Odysseus offers a compelling figure for this function. He changes names, costumes, positions, stories, and tactics while remaining the one to whom all the turns supposedly belong. He calls himself Nobody, appears as beggar, strategist, sailor, king, husband, sufferer, and narrator, yet the narrative promises that one consciousness holds the many masks together. Polytrophy becomes evidence of self-possession: the subject can vary its appearances because it secretly owns their unity.

The horse externalizes this structure. One visible body houses many differentiated functions: builders, commander, soldiers, signals, doors, timings, and intentions. From outside, the device appears as one horse. From inside, it operates as an organization. Its unity does not describe a simple substance; it performs a command over disparate elements. The wooden animal becomes a model of consciousness as container, coordinator, and possessor of a world.

Schürmann's larger project, however, never leaves such unity intact. *Broken Hegemonies* tracks the ultimate referents by which linguistic epochs organize what counts as true, good, real, and obligatory: the Greek One, Latin Nature, and modern self-consciousness. These referents do not merely represent worlds. They make phenomena appear by arranging particulars beneath a common authority. Their power also requires them to deny the singular experiences from which their authority was extracted.⁷

7. The Hegemonic Fantasm Made Wood

Schürmann calls such an ultimate referent a hegemonic fantasm. *Hegemonic* names its authority to order an epoch; *fantasm* names the delusion by which a historically posited principle presents itself as though it were an immaculate and necessary ground. A fantasm does not sit among the things it regulates. It supplies the common noun, focal meaning, or law of laws through which things become intelligible and actions become binding.⁸

The Trojan Horse gives this difficult structure a body. Its public form maximizes one interpretation: sacred gift, victory monument, or sign that the Greeks have departed. Once that meaning prevails, it coordinates priests, rulers, workers, ropes, gates, songs, and celebrations. The horse becomes socially effective before its soldiers emerge. A shared interpretation turns a disputed object into a directive reality.

Yet the visible unity carries singular forces that its ruling meaning cannot subsume. Particular bodies crouch inside it. Timber flexes. Hinges wait. Fear, sweat, contingency, and conflicting motives persist beneath the ceremonial name. These singulars are not simply a second meaning hidden behind the first, as though opening a panel would reveal the complete truth. They are the material and temporal excess through which the public form acts and through which it can be undone.

Hence the proposition: **every hegemony contains a horse**. This does not mean that every order hides an external enemy clever enough to infiltrate it. It means that the order carries the singular conditions it must deny in order to appear unified and ultimate. The law installs itself by gathering a world; the gathered world never becomes identical with the law. What holds together also harbors what will break the hold.

Christopher Long describes Schürmann's hegemonies as principles that are posited, reign, and wither beneath the weight of their own delusion. Their instability does not arrive only from an exterior critique. The denied beginning returns within the regime's own language, institutions, and practices. The horse is therefore less an illustration added to *Broken Hegemonies* than a portable topology: the common form above, the singular provenance below, and the fault line running through both.⁹

8. Natality and Mortality: The Broken Beginning

Arendt and Schürmann meet most powerfully around beginnings, but they do not mean the same thing by them. Arendt roots action in natality: because newcomers enter the world, human beings possess the capacity to initiate what cannot be derived from what came before. Action actualizes this capacity by inserting an unexpected beginning into a web of relations. The beginning remains fragile because it requires others to receive and continue it.¹⁰

Schürmann also treats natality as an ultimate condition of ordinary experience, but he binds it tragically to mortality. Natality prompts projects, institutions, and sovereign commencements; mortality singularizes and withdraws beings from every common measure. The two do not reconcile as symmetrical opposites. They form a discordant double allegiance beneath the principles that maximize beginning into origin, command, and law.

The horse makes the discord visible. It births a Greek future by delivering death into Troy. It begins a new political arrangement through the annihilation of another common world. Even before we develop the fuller problem of life and death, the object already resists any innocent language of innovation. A beginning can arrive as liberation for those who name it and extinction for those whose world it clears away.

Emanuela Bianchi draws the contrast sharply: Arendtian natality emphasizes the arising of something singular and extraneous to the established order, whereas Schürmann follows the tendency by which natal beginning becomes subsumed in a common epochal principle. The difference should not force a choice between them. Arendt helps us protect the unexpected beginning from causal reduction; Schürmann helps us detect the moment when the celebration of beginning hardens into an archē that commands all subsequent life.¹¹

The Trojan Horse is therefore a broken beginning. It cannot be praised simply as ingenious novelty, nor dismissed simply as deception. It asks who receives the right to begin, whose mortality pays for that beginning, and what story will later make the birth appear necessary. The same object stages action's miracle and origin's violence.

9. Destitution Is Not Yet Diremption

Schürmann distinguishes destitution from diremption. Destitution occurs when one hegemonic principle loses its force and another rises from its remains. The replacement may reject the previous law, but it reinstalls an ultimate. Diremption names a more radical expiration: not the victory of a new sovereign principle but the collapse of confidence in norm making itself.¹²

The fall of Troy remains a destitution in this strict sense. One order loses its gods, walls, rulers, and narrative authority; the Greek victors carry home new claims, institutions, and legends. The horse changes who commands the common world without ending command. Its apparent gift inaugurates another cycle of foundations, inheritances, retaliations, and returns. From Schürmann's perspective, the phoenix rises again from the burned city.

This distinction protects the horse essay from a seductive conclusion. Exposing concealed violence does not automatically free us from hegemony. Reversing the victor and victim, denouncing an official story, or celebrating the excluded counter-story may simply transfer ultimate authority to a new position. A counter-horse remains a horse when it asks one account to rule the entire field.

Arendt's common world and Schürmann's diremption therefore pose a joint difficulty. A world without durable common objects dissolves into private perspectives and fleeting reactions. Yet an object whose meaning becomes ultimate turns the common world into house arrest. We need things, stories, and institutions that gather people without claiming to exhaust the singulars they gather. The problem is not how to live without all forms, but how to keep forms permeable to the mortal lives they can never fully contain.

Schürmann's imperative to let normative consciousness collapse should not be confused with abandoning thought, politics, or public judgment. It asks us to withdraw wholehearted faith from the final noun, total explanation, and sovereign standpoint. Arendt supplies the positive worldly

counterpart: appear, speak, act, tell stories, build tables, and preserve the plurality that prevents one participant from becoming the author of everyone else's reality.

10. Common Objects after Broken Hegemony

The horse now carries a precise distinction. For Arendt, a common object stands between people and sustains a plurality of perspectives. For Schürmann, a hegemonic fantasm turns one common meaning into the ultimate referent beneath which all particulars must range. The same worldly process can move in either direction. Gathering can preserve differences, or gathering can become subsumption.

This is why the poster and the essay should not pretend to deliver the final horse. Their theoretical cards do not combine into a master system. They build a temporary public surface where Marx, Hegel, Brecht, Adorno and Horkheimer, Heidegger, Sloterdijk, Derrida, Joyce, Nietzsche, Arendt, and Schürmann can alter the object from distinct positions. The composition gains coherence from the horse, but the horse does not erase the differends among its riders and tellers.

A StudioLab common object might therefore follow four rules. It must materialize a question strongly enough that people can gather around it. It must permit different positions to transform what the object can mean. It must preserve the traces of actions and losses that dominant stories would remove. And it must retain exits: no participant, interpretation, medium, or institution receives the final right to close the object.

Such an object is not neutral. The Trojan Horse never was. Nor is it innocent, self-explanatory, or safe. Its value lies in making the struggle over commonness perceptible and contestable. It gives conflict a worldly place without pretending that conflict will disappear through a better synthesis. The common object works when it lets us ask not only what the horse means, but what kind of world a given meaning commands.

Arendt's Ulysses receives himself from the public story and weeps. Schürmann's Ulysses stands at the threshold of a consciousness that would possess the world, even as the singular fractures that possession. Between them, the horse changes from stratagem into political equipment. **The horse escapes its maker. Every hegemony contains a horse.** The remaining question is whether we can tell the horse from many sides without making one story the law of them all.

Coda: Who Tells the Teller?

Demodocus tells Odysseus what Odysseus did. Arendt tells us why that telling inaugurates history. Schürmann tells us how the self that seems to gather its many turns becomes an epochal claim to authority. This essay tells the horse again, knowing that the retelling will enter other screens, courses, diagrams, criticisms, and stories. No position stands outside the sequence.

That recursion need not dissolve responsibility. On the contrary, it makes responsibility harder and more exact. The storyteller cannot claim sovereign authorship, but the form of the telling still determines who appears, who remains concealed, what becomes common, and what begins to rule. Every narrative builds a temporary horse. The ethical and political task lies in opening it before its provisional unity becomes another immaculate origin.

The actor does not author the story. The storyteller does not master the event. The common object does not speak with one voice. And still the horse must be told.

Notes

1. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 8.62–103 and 8.471–586, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018). The first song prompts concealed tears; Odysseus later asks Demodocus to sing the wooden horse and weeps again.
2. Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 41–90, especially 44–45.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 175–192. Arendt distinguishes the disclosure of the actor from the retrospective story in which the actor appears as hero without becoming its author.
4. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50–58, especially the image of the table that gathers and separates those seated around it.
5. Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 50–52; and Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future*, 223–259. On Homeric impartiality, see also Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2005), 164–189.
6. Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 349–364. “The Consciousness of Ulysses” occupies pp. 356–364, between the preface to volume 2 and the institution of modern consciousness through Luther and Kant.
7. Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 6–23, 347–355. The book tracks three hegemonic fantasms: the Greek One, Latin Nature, and modern self-consciousness.
8. Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 8–22. For Schürmann, an ultimate function ranges what can be said, done, and known beneath a focal meaning; the law of laws does not appear as one being but makes beings appear within a normative world.
9. Christopher P. Long, *Reiner Schürmann and the Poetics of Politics* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2018), 18–20, 69–71, 111–118. Long stresses that hegemonic principles deny their thetic origins and wither under the weight of that denial.
10. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175–181. Arendt calls natality the ontological root of action.
11. Emanuela Bianchi, “Natal Bodies, Mortal Bodies, Sexual Bodies: Reading Gender, Desire, and Kinship through Reiner Schürmann’s *Broken Hegemonies*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 33, no. 1 (2012): 57–84, especially 58; discussed in Long, *Reiner Schürmann and the Poetics of Politics*, 69–70.
12. Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 514 and 622–624. Destitution replaces one ultimate with another; diremption names the expiration of confidence in ultimate normative positions.

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THE HORSE PASSES

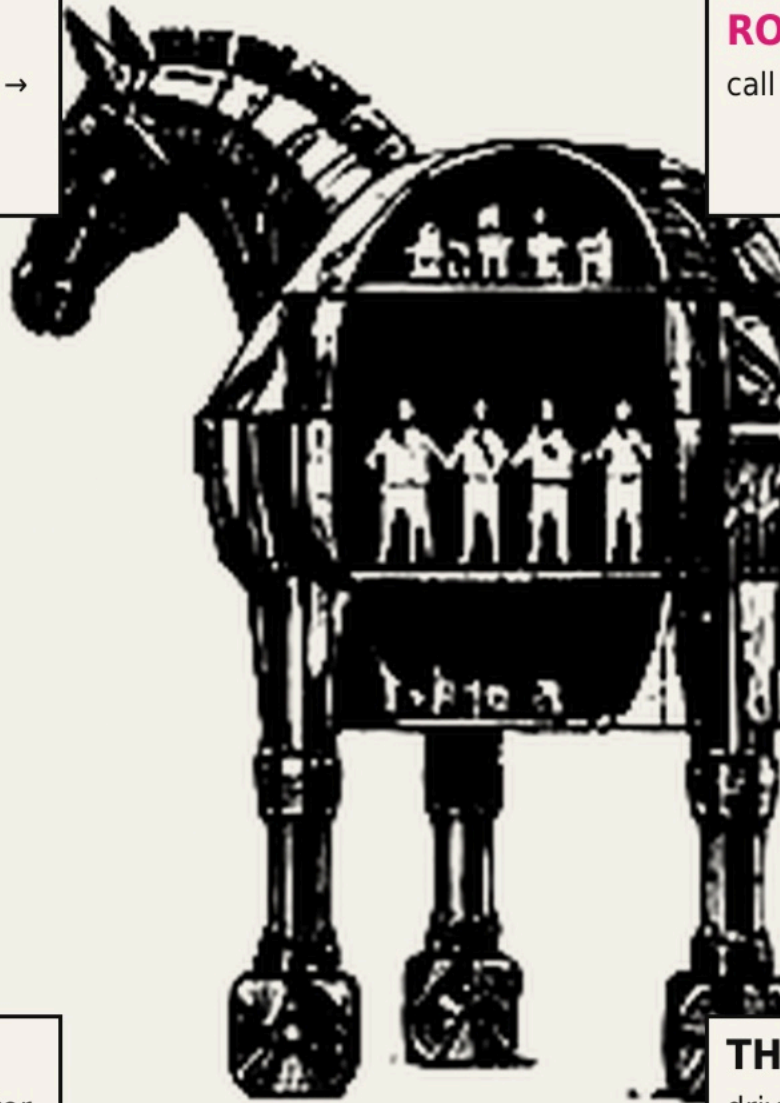
BUTLER / RONELL / RECOGNITION / TEST DRIVE

BUTLER / D2

citation → recognition →
passage

RONELL / D4

call → test → reversal



THE GATE

formats what may enter

THE VEHICLE

drives the driver back

THE GATE RECOGNIZES. THE HORSE TESTS.

THE HORSE PASSES. THE CITY FAILS.

The Horse Passes

Butler, Ronell, and the Test Drive from Queer Theory to Gay Sci-Fi

Abstract

This third essay in the Horse Suite asks how the Trojan Horse passes through the gate. Judith Butler lets us see the horse as a citational body whose force depends upon recognizability: Troy reads horse, trophy, sacred offering, and evidence of victory because the object repeats signs already available within the city's world. Avital Ronell then turns recognition into a recursive test site. The city appears to inspect and interpret the horse, yet the horse tests the city's criteria, rituals, security, and desire to see itself as victorious. The movement from Butler to Ronell stages a larger passage from Hegelian queer theory to Nietzschean gay sci-fi: from subject formation, negation, and recognition toward calls, vehicles, experiments, reversals, and world mutation. This passage does not discard queer theory or romanticize transgression. It asks how a gate might remain answerable to those it classifies, how a test might return upon its tester, and how passage might transform a world without making permanent exposure the price of entry. The Trojan Horse becomes a recognition machine with a test drive hidden inside.

Keywords: Trojan Horse; Judith Butler; Avital Ronell; recognition; passing; performativity; test drive; Hegel; Nietzsche; queer theory; gay sci-fi

1. The Gate after the Common World

The first essay in this suite found the horse scattered across a search engine: cinematic prop, sacred gift, military container, image commodity, metric, and trace-machine. The second followed the horse into a public world where action escapes its maker, storytelling discloses the actor after the fact, and every hegemonic unity carries forces capable of breaking its rule. The present essay moves to the threshold joining those two discoveries. Before the horse can become event, story, ruin, or broken hegemony, it must cross a gate.

The obvious explanation says that Troy gets deceived. A false exterior conceals a true interior; the Trojans see a gift where the Greeks have built a weapon. This description catches the stratagem but misses the social machinery that lets it work. The horse does not resemble a harmless object by itself. A city must recognize it, argue over it, attach sacred and political meaning to it, haul it through an opening, and reorganize its own defenses around the interpretation. The hidden army needs the visible gift, but the visible gift also needs a field of norms capable of making it legible.

Judith Butler and Avital Ronell let us enter this machinery from different directions. Butler asks how repeated norms form recognizable subjects and bodies; Ronell asks what call, device, or test has already organized the scene in which recognition occurs. Butler gives the gate its classifier. Ronell puts the classifier into a vehicle and sends the test back toward the city. Their difference stages the

passage we have called the move from Hegelian queer theory to Nietzschean gay sci-fi: not a rejection of the struggle for recognition, but a shift from who may enter an existing world to what happens when the means of entry begin transforming the world itself.

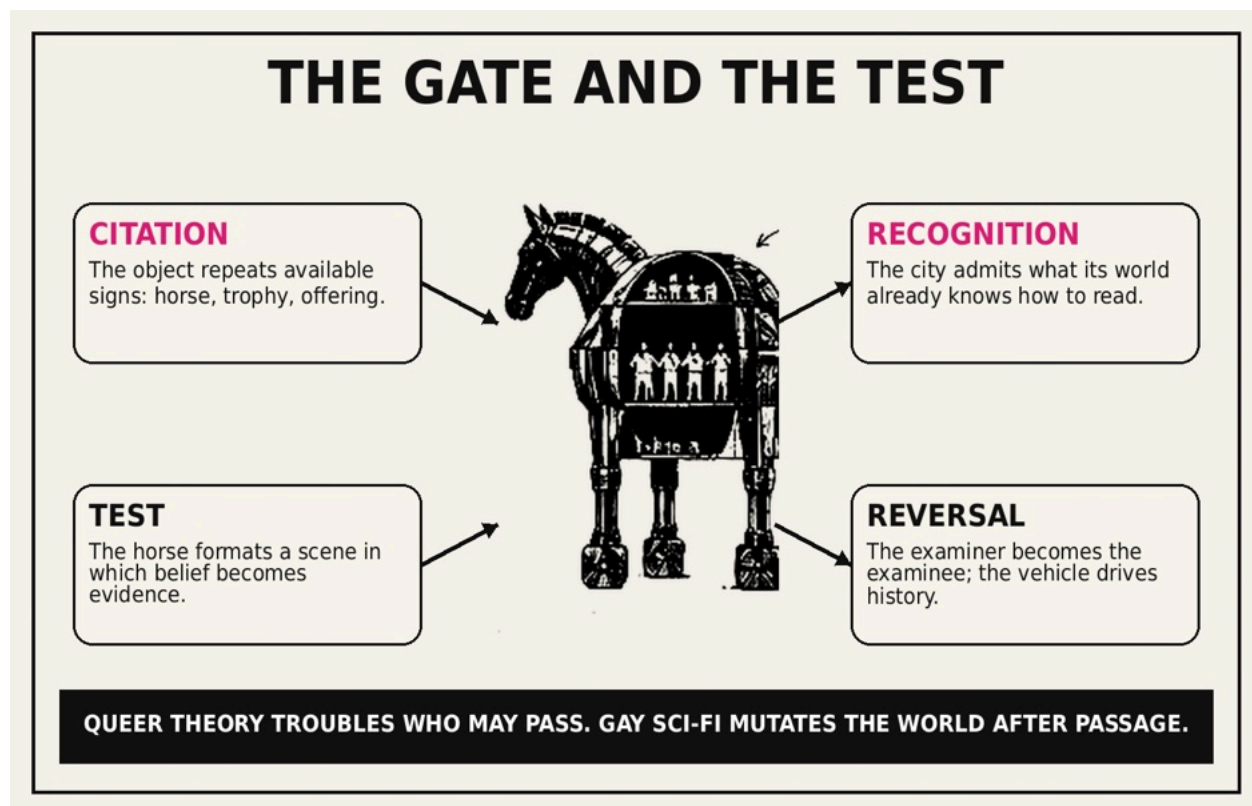


Figure 1. The Butler-Ronell horse: citation, recognition, test, and reversal.

2. Butler's Hegelian Horse

Calling Butler Hegelian requires care. Butler does not simply repeat Hegel, and their work draws just as decisively upon Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault, Derrida, feminist theory, queer politics, and accounts of racialization. Yet Butler's first book, *Subjects of Desire*, directly tracks the desiring subject from Hegel through twentieth-century French philosophy. More broadly, much of the political problem that queer theory inherits remains structured by Hegelian terms: dependence, negation, mediation, recognition, subjection, and the difficulty of becoming a self without passing through the social world that precedes the self.¹

In Hegel's recognition scene, self-consciousness cannot certify itself alone. It needs another self-consciousness, yet the demand for recognition threatens to become a struggle for mastery. Butler's work relocates that dependence within norms, language, embodiment, kinship, and social intelligibility. The subject neither stands outside the norm nor vanishes into it. Norms materialize bodies and identities through repetition, but repetition never copies perfectly. Citation produces continuity while leaving room for variation, failure, parody, and resignification.²

The Trojan Horse enters Troy through this citational field. Its builders do not invent a sign outside history. They cite a recognizable animal, a prestigious artifact, the religious conventions of offering, the political theater of victory, and the expectation that a departed enemy might leave behind an

object marking defeat. The horse's wooden body condenses these conventions into a form the city can read. Its power does not arise despite recognizability. Recognition supplies its passage.

The horse therefore gives us a compact model of subject formation without turning a subject into a thing. The analogy works at the level of operation: neither the subject nor the horse first possesses a complete private essence that society later reads correctly or incorrectly. Social signs participate in forming what appears. The horse becomes gift, trophy, omen, and civic object through the very acts by which Troy interprets and handles it. Its legibility changes its material career.

3. Passing Is Not Simply Deception

The word passing carries histories far more violent and intimate than the Trojan stratagem. It names survival and danger within racial, gendered, sexual, national, classed, and ableist regimes of appearance. Butler's reading of Nella Larsen treats passing not as a simple contrast between fraudulent surface and authentic identity, but as a scene in which race, sexuality, kinship, desire, and visual certainty destabilize one another. Recognition never arrives as neutral observation; it organizes vulnerability, belonging, and exposure.³

The horse analogy must therefore remain limited. A military device engineered to destroy a city cannot stand as a moral equivalent for a person navigating a violent recognition regime. The comparison instead illuminates the gate. It shows that passing depends upon criteria held by the observer, institutional routines, available narratives, and the risks attached to being read one way rather than another. The passer does not control that field, even when skillfully negotiating it.

Troy does not admit the horse because the artifact successfully impersonates a natural animal. Nobody believes a living horse stands outside the wall. The object passes by entering a social genre: monumental horse, sacred offering, residue of war, evidence that the Greeks have gone. The relevant question therefore does not ask, Is this really a horse? It asks, What kind of object does our world allow this horse to become?

Butler helps us see why total illegibility offers no easy liberation. A life deprived of recognition may face abandonment, violence, or administrative disappearance; a city unable to classify any object could not maintain a gate at all. The problem does not disappear by abolishing signs. It concerns how signs acquire authority, how categories remain revisable, and how those placed under classification can contest the terms of appearance.⁴ The horse passes through a necessary capacity that has hardened into a vulnerability: the city's need to make the world readable.

4. The Gift Performs Itself

Performativity sharpens the point. The horse's appearance does not merely cover an internal truth. Its surface produces effects. A gift exists socially because gestures, words, expectations, rituals, and responses establish a relation among giver, object, and receiver. Likewise, an insult, promise, verdict, or declaration gains force through conventions and uptake rather than through a private intention alone. The Trojan Horse weaponizes this dependence.

The Greeks cannot make the object function as a gift by decree. The Trojans must participate. They debate the horse, interpret signs around it, fear or dismiss warnings, attach value to its scale, and finally move it inside. The city's response completes the operation that the Greeks began. In that

sense, the horse performs itself through Troy. Its successful citation recruits the receiver into manufacturing the scene of reception.

This does not make the victims responsible for the violence committed against them. It identifies the relational form of the attack. A stratagem works by capturing ordinary capacities—hospitality, interpretation, trust, celebration, civic decision—and rerouting them. The poison enters through a practice that usually sustains a world. What looks like a rigid opposition between false gift and true weapon becomes a relay in which gift and weapon activate one another.

Butler's account of speech acts also reminds us that performatives exceed the speaker. The Greeks launch the citation but cannot control every consequence. Trojans disagree; prophets intervene; stories proliferate; later poets rewrite the scene; modern film production rebuilds the object; search engines multiply its images. The horse's iterability lets it travel, and every passage changes its force. A successful performance never secures permanent ownership of the sign.

5. The Gate as Recognition Machine

A gate does more than separate inside from outside. It classifies movement. It distinguishes citizen from enemy, tribute from contraband, sacred object from threat, authorized procession from invasion. Walls display power, but gates operationalize it. The gate asks every arrival to become legible enough to pass.

The Trojan Horse flatters the classifier. Troy sees not only an object but an image of itself as victor. The horse appears to confirm that the enemy has departed, that the city has survived, that the gods may accept a new monument, and that the war can become memory. Recognition doubles: the city recognizes the gift, and through the gift it recognizes itself as the kind of city that has won. The object enters through a narcissistic circuit.

This helps explain why warning does not automatically produce security. Laocoön and Cassandra do not merely provide missing information. They disturb the victorious genre through which the horse has become intelligible. Their speech asks the city to exchange a satisfying self-image for a more dangerous interpretation. The problem concerns credibility, timing, authority, desire, and the unequal distribution of who can make reality appear.⁵

The gate therefore exposes the political stakes of recognition. Some appearances receive immediate uptake because they confirm the world already in place. Other voices must labor to become credible, and their failure gets misread as proof that the dominant interpretation was correct. The horse crosses with ceremonial force while the warning remains stranded outside the city's account of itself. What passes most easily may not be the stranger but the image that lets authority continue recognizing itself.

6. Ronell's Ring: Address before Identity

Ronell begins elsewhere. The Telephone Book does not treat communication as an exchange between fully constituted speakers who first know themselves and then choose to connect. The telephone marks absence, alarm, interruption, unstable location, and a demand arriving before the receiver knows who calls. The line joins by maintaining distance. One answers before gaining mastery over the scene.⁶

The Trojan Horse rings without making a sound. It arrives from an absent army and places Troy under address. The Greeks appear to have left, yet their object calls for interpretation: look at me, decide what I am, determine where I belong. Before the city settles the horse's identity, the arrival has already reorganized attention, authority, and movement around itself.

Troy answers materially. Ropes attach to the object; bodies coordinate; gates open; space gets cleared; ritual and celebration begin. The response does not merely follow recognition. It helps construct the situation in which recognition will count as true. Ronell's shift from identity to address reveals that the city has already entered a relation before it completes its judgment.

This shift complicates recognition politics. A subject may demand to appear differently before an institution, but Ronell asks what switchboard organized the encounter: who controls the channel, who can call, who must answer, who may remain silent, and whose silence gets interpreted as guilt or absence. Connection can enable relation, yet permanent reachability can become compulsion. The line that joins can also become a leash.

7. The Test Drive: Who or What Is Driving?

The Test Drive carries the call into a broader apparatus. Ronell follows testing through science, law, pharmaceuticals, art, history, Zen, friendship, love, and Nietzsche's gay science. The modern test often presents itself as a neutral procedure: an examiner stands outside the object, establishes conditions, collects results, and issues a judgment. Ronell unsettles this geometry by asking what drives the test, what the apparatus elicits, and whether the test can return upon the tester.⁷

The horse now appears as more than an object undergoing Trojan inspection. It functions as a testing apparatus. It tests the city's religious codes, military vigilance, political decision, division of labor, trust in expertise, relation to prophecy, desire for closure, and confidence in its own walls. The test does not wait until the horse enters. It begins as soon as the city organizes itself around the question of what the object means.

Troy believes that it drives the horse. Human bodies pull the ropes, officials authorize passage, citizens make way, and the object rolls where the city commands. Yet the vehicle has already begun driving the driver. It determines where bodies gather, which arguments count, what risks appear reasonable, and when the defensive system suspends itself. The wheels redistribute agency.

This reversal supplies the essay's central hinge. Butler shows how a field of norms produces a recognizable object and a recognizable subject. Ronell shows how the test site produces the examiner as well. The city's judgment does not simply reveal what the horse already was. The horse formats a situation in which Troy becomes evidence about itself.

8. The Horse Tests the Criterion

A conventional test asks whether an entity possesses the quality named by the test. The Trojan Horse succeeds through a stranger logic. It does not need the essence of gift, holiness, animality, or peace. It needs to generate the responses that those categories normally organize. The horse passes when the city behaves as though the category has been satisfied.

This resembles a generalized Turing test, though the resemblance should remain heuristic. The issue does not concern hidden intelligence but operational uptake. If an artifact produces the interpretation and conduct associated with a gift, then the social machinery of giving begins to work. The test measures less what the horse is than what the city can be made to do.

Once the horse enters, the criterion collapses. Gift and threat, monument and vehicle, inside and outside, victory and unfinished war no longer sort cleanly. The result does not prove that distinctions never mattered. It proves that their application depended upon a world whose assumptions the test has exposed. A category can remain necessary while the procedure that applies it becomes answerable.

Ronellian reversibility should not license a romance of permanent boundary crossing. The less powerful often need lines, pauses, appeals, shelters, and the right not to answer. A test that can return upon its tester must also remain interruptible by the tested. Otherwise reversal becomes another privilege: the charismatic experimenter claims every boundary as material while others bear the consequences. The vehicle needs brakes, doors, and more than one driver.

9. From Hegelian Queer Theory to Nietzschean Gay Sci-Fi

The Butler-Ronell distinction now becomes legible as a genre passage. Hegelian queer theory names a problem-space organized around subject formation, contradiction, negation, recognition, and the political struggle over intelligibility. Nietzschean gay sci-fi names a problem-space organized around experiment, call, testing, laughter, malfunction, alien arrival, and the mutation of worlds. These labels mark tendencies rather than camps. Butler contains Nietzschean and deconstructive forces; Ronell inherits Hegel, Heidegger, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. The distinction functions as a thought-action figure.

Queer theory asks how a subject gets normed, excluded, repeated, troubled, and recognized. Gay sci-fi asks what arrives after the recognition machine has exposed its limits. The first remains indispensable wherever lives require standing, protection, credibility, and livable appearance. The second becomes necessary when successful passage changes the station itself—when the classifier, vehicle, test, archive, and world all enter the experiment.

The Trojan Horse already behaves like gay sci-fi. It is an artificial animal, a collective body, a hidden chamber, a time-delayed program, a mobile interface, and an alien event assembled from familiar materials. It does not merely infiltrate a city. It reveals that the city lacks the concepts, procedures, and sensory habits needed for the world that has arrived. The station fails from within.

Operation	Queer theory / Butler / Hegel	Gay sci-fi / Ronell / Nietzsche
Primary question	Who or what can become recognizable?	Who or what is testing the world?
Movement	Negation, mediation, resignification	Experiment, interruption, mutation
Key scene	The subject before the gate	The gate inside the vehicle
Failure	Compulsory intelligibility	Runaway test or compulsory availability
Political task	Make recognition more livable	Make the apparatus returnable and redesignable
Horse-function	The horse passes	The horse drives back

Table 1. Two horse grammars. The contrast names a passage, not a final opposition.

Nietzsche's gay science gives Ronell the experimental pressure for this passage. The knower does not remain a detached examiner; the thinker becomes experiment, risk, and test animal. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche imagines life and knowledge as practices that put inherited values at stake rather than simply certifying them. The test drive no longer asks whether a subject conforms to a stable measure. It asks what happens to the measure when the ride begins.⁸

Gay sci-fi therefore does not mean queer theory with rockets, nor does it replace political struggle with speculative play. It names a change in scale and genre. The question shifts from how the horse can enter Troy to what Troy becomes after the horse has entered. Recognition opens the gate; experiment opens the world.

10. Passage without Capture

The combined frame also yields a design ethic. A gate cannot remain simply open, because unprotected openness can expose vulnerable bodies to domination. Nor can it harden into a sovereign classifier that never answers for its criteria. A livable gate must explain its categories, permit contestation, register asymmetry, and change when its procedures produce injury.

Likewise, a test cannot claim neutrality while hiding the values built into its apparatus. It must reveal who designed the criteria, who bears the cost of error, who may refuse participation, who can appeal, and whether the tester can undergo an equivalent examination. Returnability does not eliminate judgment. It prevents judgment from disappearing behind the machine.

Butler contributes the indispensable demand that recognizability support livable existence without pretending that norms can become perfectly inclusive. Ronell contributes the equally indispensable demand that every channel and test remain haunted by what it excludes, formats, and compels. Together they turn the Trojan Horse into a recursive civic instrument: the object crosses the gate, and the gate discovers itself inside the object.

This fourfold—citation, recognition, test, reversal—should not close into a system. Each operation can transform the others. Citation may create a new criterion; recognition may trigger a test; the test may expose the recognizer; reversal may require a new form of passage. The horse keeps the folds in motion without collapsing them into one answer.

Coda: The Horse Passes, the Test Returns

The horse passes because Troy recognizes what it has already learned to value. It carries soldiers because the city's reading grants the object time, space, labor, and ceremonial protection. Butler shows that this passage depends upon citational norms and the distribution of recognizability. Ronell shows that the apparently passive object has formatted a test whose results include the examiner.

The passage from queer theory to gay sci-fi begins at that reversal. Recognition remains necessary, but it no longer supplies the final horizon. The question turns toward the apparatus, the vehicle, the station, and the world that recognition has helped set in motion. A politics of appearance meets an experimental design of passage.

THE HORSE PASSES.
THE CITY FAILS.
THE TEST RETURNS.

The next fold will ask what travels through the opened gate when the wall becomes a membrane and the horse becomes a vector.

Notes

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), §§178–196; Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; rev. ed., 2012), especially the introduction and first chapter.
2. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990; anniversary ed., 2006), 179–180; Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–16 and 223–242.
3. Butler, “Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen’s Psychoanalytic Challenge,” in *Bodies That Matter*, 167–185. Butler’s analysis refuses to isolate racial passing from sexuality, kinship, visibility, and desire.
4. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–16; Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1–16.
5. The horse episode appears most fully in Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.13–267, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990). Homer’s *Odyssey* 8.492–520 recalls the wooden horse through Demodocus’s song, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).
6. Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989; paperback ed., 1991). Ronell’s telephonic logic organizes absence, interruption, transfer, address, and the technologically constituted relation between self and other.
7. Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), especially “Proving Grounds,” “On Passing the Test,” and “The Test Drive: On Nietzsche’s Gay Science.” The 2007 paperback contains the same central itinerary.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §§319 and 324. Ronell develops the relation among Versuch, experiment, temptation, and test throughout *The Test Drive*.
9. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), especially the treatment of cultural, organizational, and technological performance; Jon McKenzie and HAL, *From Queer Theory to Gay Sci-Fi: Perfumance, Double Affirmation, and Pluriversal Dasein Design* (StudioLab working paper, 2026).

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LIFE DEATH RIDES THROUGH THE GATE

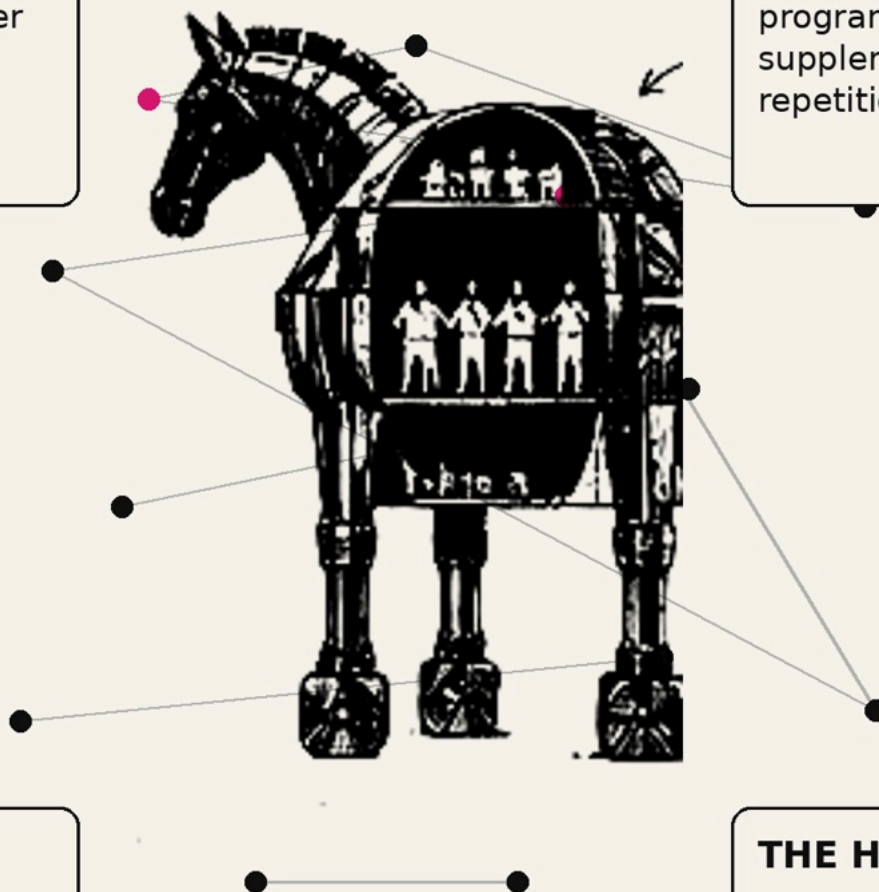
WOESE / DERRIDA / HORIZONTAL TRANSFER / WOMB-CRYPT

WOESE / AFTER THE TREE

lineage -> transfer
-> community

DERRIDA / LIFE DEATH

program ->
supplement ->
repetition



THE WALL

becomes a
membrane

THE HORSE

becomes a vector

THE HORSE JUMPS THE TREE. THE CITY BECOMES A HOST.

THE WALL BREATHES. LIFE DEATH RIDES.

Lifedeath Rides Through the Gate

The Trojan Vector and Woesean Humanities

Abstract

This fourth essay begins at the final threshold of *The Horse Passes*: the wall becomes a membrane and the horse becomes a vector. The Butler-Ronell fold remains intact. Recognition explains how Troy admits the object; the recursive test explains how the object turns the city's criteria back upon their users. Carl Woese then changes the image of passage. His ribosomal work helped disclose life's deep tripartite history, while his later account of communal evolution and horizontal gene transfer unsettled any picture of inheritance governed only by vertical descent. Read through that transformation, the Trojan Horse carries more than soldiers. It carries a program, a collective body, and delayed action across a selectively opened boundary into a host whose own labor activates the transfer. Jacques Derrida's 1975-76 seminar *Life Death* deepens the fold by removing the conjunction that would keep life and death apart. His reading of biological programs, self-reproduction, supplementarity, Nietzsche, and Freud shows repetition divided at its origin by alterity, interruption, and mortality. The horse therefore appears as dead timber shaped like a living animal, a moving crypt filled with life, and a wooden womb that gives birth to death. Woesean humanities does not ask biology to authorize culture. It uses biology's image crisis to loosen the authority of pure lineages and to track translation, collage, kinship, media, and concepts as lateral inheritances. The horse jumps the tree; life death rides through the gate.

Keywords: Trojan Horse; Carl Woese; Jacques Derrida; horizontal gene transfer; communal ancestor; *Life Death*; program; supplement; vector; membrane; host; Woesean humanities; gay sci-fi

THE WALL BREATHES. THE HORSE CARRIES. THE HOST CHANGES.

1. The Wall Starts to Breathe

The previous essay ended with a sentence that looked like a preview but functioned as a structural break: the next fold would ask what travels through the opened gate when the wall becomes a membrane and the horse becomes a vector. That sentence retains everything already learned. The gate remains a recognition machine; the horse still passes through signs that Troy knows how to read; the test still returns upon the city that believed itself the examiner. Yet the new terms do more than rename the same operations. A gate suggests law, permission, classification, and an authorized opening in a wall. A membrane suggests selective permeability, exchange, metabolism, vulnerability, and a boundary continually maintained by what crosses it.¹

The shift from gate to membrane therefore changes the scale of the question. The juridical problem asks who or what may enter an established world. The material problem asks how entry composes, sustains, infects, repairs, or reorganizes the world that receives it. Troy never simply opens a door. The city gathers ropes, bodies, ritual interpretations, political decisions, and festive labor around the horse. That activity does not merely transport the object across a line. It supplies the conditions under which the hidden operation can begin.

The fold must remain sequential. Butler and Ronell do not disappear when Woese and Derrida arrive. Recognition and testing become retained capacities inside a larger account of transfer. The horse passes because the city recognizes it; it drives back because the testing apparatus includes the tester; it becomes a vector because passage carries material and code across the boundary; it becomes life death because the carrier's living and nonliving dimensions cannot be sorted into clean opposition. Each new prompt changes the previous field without erasing the surprise by which that field changed.

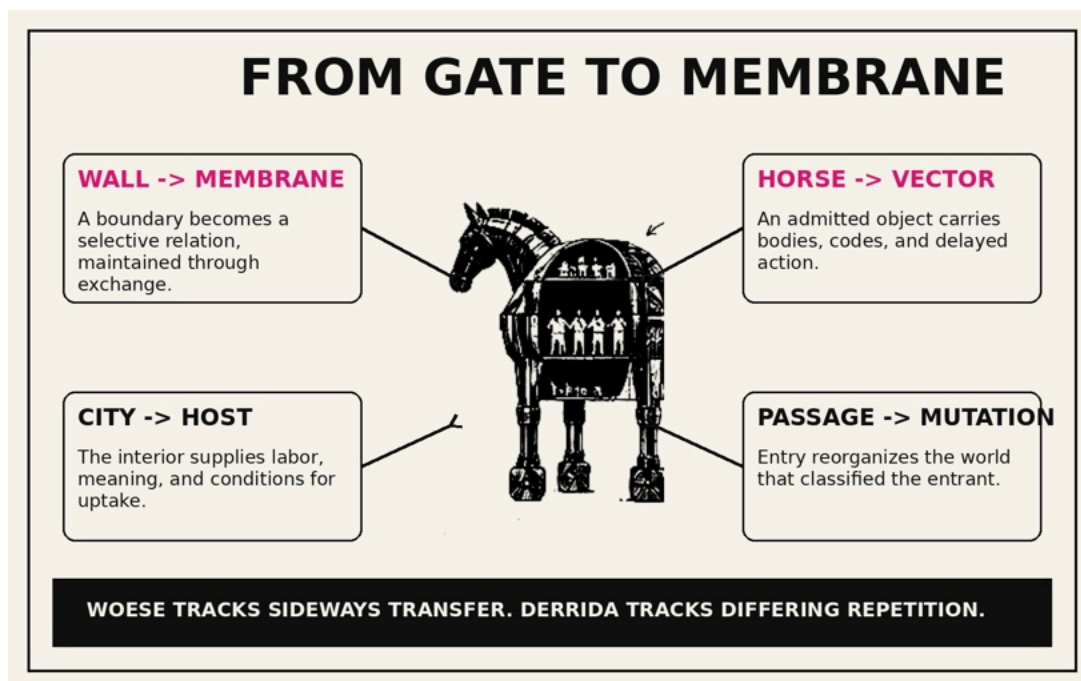


Figure 1. The fourth fold changes the threshold: wall, horse, city, and passage become membrane, vector, host, and mutation.

2. Woese's Image Crisis

Woesean humanities begins with a scientific achievement that also broke an image. In 1977 Carl Woese and George Fox used ribosomal RNA sequence comparisons to argue that living systems represented three ancient lines rather than a simple division between eukaryotes and a uniform prokaryotic remainder. Their terms changed over time, and in 1990 Woese, Otto Kandler, and Mark Wheelis formalized the domains Bacteria, Archaea, and Eucarya. The discovery did not merely attach an extra branch to a familiar diagram. It exposed how a classificatory image can hide profound differences by gathering them under a convenient negative name.²

The three-domain proposal itself remained tree-shaped. Woese did not begin by abolishing phylogeny; he supplied a molecular method for reconstructing deeper descent. The next disturbance came when genome comparison revealed that genes often carried different histories. Especially among microbes, horizontal gene transfer could move genetic material across established lineages. W. Ford Doolittle argued that a single universal tree could therefore oversimplify the histories of genomes even where organismal lineages remained meaningful. The important claim does not say that every tree has become false. It says that no one tree can automatically govern every scale, component, or epoch of life.³

That qualification matters for the humanities. The point does not lie in replacing every genealogy with a network diagram or celebrating tangledness as intrinsically liberating. Trees still register descent, asymmetry, and irreversible branching. Networks register transfer, recombination, and multiple provenance. Woesean thought asks which image fits which process and what a dominant image has trained us not to see. The shock concerns not complexity alone but the inadequacy of one sovereign figure of inheritance.

3. The Communal Ancestor

Woese's 1998 essay on the universal ancestor pushes the image crisis into life's earliest history. The ancestor, he argues, need not resemble one discrete organism sitting at the root of every lineage. It may instead have consisted of a diverse community of primitive cells whose innovations circulated laterally before stable organismal genealogies emerged. That ancestor possessed what Woese called a physical history rather than a purely genealogical one. In his later account of cell evolution, horizontal exchange supplied an early field of communal invention before lineages crossed a Darwinian threshold and became more vertically stable.⁴

This does not turn early life into a political utopia. Community here names an evolutionary organization, not solidarity, justice, or consent. Nor does lateral transfer eliminate competition, parasitism, extinction, or capture. The importance of the model lies elsewhere: the individual organism no longer supplies the unquestioned elementary unit from which every history must begin. Organization emerges through traffic among provisional forms. The community can precede the individual that later appears to have founded it.

Woese's 2004 call for a new biology reinforces that displacement. He warns against reducing organisms to molecular machines and emphasizes renewal, resilience, development, and a sense of the whole that no inventory of stable parts can exhaust. The warning speaks directly to the wooden horse. The horse looks machinic because carpenters fabricate it and strategists program it. Yet the operation exceeds a machine assembled from parts. Wood, soldiers, ropes, civic debate, religious

codes, architecture, exhaustion, fear, and celebration form a temporary consortium. No single component contains the event. The whole acquires efficacy through relations that remain vulnerable to interruption.⁵

4. The Trojan Vector

The word vector gives the horse a sharper role. A vector carries something across a boundary: genes, pathogens, medicines, signals, images, commands, or coordinates. It need not resemble what it carries. Its force lies in transport and delivery. The Trojan Horse functions in precisely this way. Its recognizable surface secures passage, its hollow interior stores mobile bodies, and its delayed timing separates admission from activation. The object crosses the boundary before the action it carries becomes legible.

The mapping remains heuristic rather than biological identity. Troy is not literally a cell, the wall is not a lipid bilayer, and Greek soldiers are not genes. The analogy becomes useful because it identifies operations that the military fable and the biological model share: selective entry, carriage, uptake, latency, activation, and reorganization of an interior. The horse has become a cultural ancestor of the software Trojan for the same reason. A familiar or desirable form carries executable instructions into an environment that supplies memory, energy, permissions, and pathways for the concealed program.

Calling the horse a vector also returns Derrida's gift-poison structure in a more material register. A vector can deliver remedy or toxin, inheritance or infection. Nothing in lateral motion guarantees emancipation. The same grammar can describe plasmids that spread antibiotic resistance, viral systems used in gene therapy, a rumor that mobilizes mutual aid, or propaganda that captures a network. Transfer names a capacity. Politics begins with who controls the carrier, what enters, which bodies bear the risk, and whether the effects can be recalled or repaired.

5. The City Becomes a Host

The language of hosting changes Troy as decisively as vector changes the horse. A fortress imagines interior space as possession protected by a hard line. A host names a living or institutional arrangement that receives and supports something other than itself. Hosting can sustain hospitality, symbiosis, parasitism, incubation, or invasion. It can nourish the guest, get reorganized by the guest, or die from the encounter. The term therefore resists the fantasy that the inside remains unchanged whenever the border works correctly.

Troy actively hosts its destruction. Citizens interpret the horse, clear the route, attach ropes, open the gate, and place the object within a charged civic setting. Their labor does not cause Greek aggression, but it becomes captured as infrastructure for the attack. The horse alone cannot move; the hidden soldiers alone cannot reach the city; the stratagem needs the host's capacities. This is why the simple opposition between false exterior and true interior proves insufficient. The surface recruits a world.

Operation	Gate grammar	Membrane grammar
Boundary	Gate: authorized line	Membrane: maintained relation
Carrier	Recognizable object	Vector carrying bodies and code
Interior	Protected civic space	Host field supplying conditions
Passage	Permission and admission	Uptake, latency, activation
Consequence	Status changes at entry	Organization changes after entry
Political risk	Exclusion and misrecognition	Capture, infection, forced exposure
Design task	Appeal and contestability	Selective, reversible permeability

Table 1. The membrane fold does not replace recognition; it asks what recognition sets in motion after admission.

The host metaphor also imposes discipline on the rhetoric of openness. A membrane that admitted everything without selection would not remain a membrane for long. A city that treated every boundary as violence would abandon vulnerable lives to stronger forces. Conversely, a fortress that sealed every crossing would suppress exchange, learning, refuge, and renewal. The problem concerns neither purity nor unlimited access. It concerns the collective design of permeability under unequal conditions.

6. Derrida Removes the *And*

Derrida's 1975-76 seminar received the official topic *Life and Death*. He altered it by removing the conjunction: *Life Death* and would also drop *lifedeath*. The missing and does not announce a synthesis in which two opposites peacefully become one. It marks a relation more prior and unstable than opposition, a contamination through which each term depends upon what it tries to exclude. The seminar begins with programs and moves through François Jacob's history of heredity, biological self-reproduction, scientific models, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Freud. Biology and philosophy no longer occupy separate chambers. Their concepts circulate through one another.⁶

The program supplies a crucial crossing point. In biology it can name inherited instructions and regulated reproduction; in cybernetics and computation it can name an ordered sequence of operations. The word thus travels between organism and machine before any critic decides whether the analogy is legitimate. Derrida asks what metaphysical commitments accompany that traffic. A model of life centered on exact self-reproduction risks treating difference, environment, error, and death as secondary disturbances to an identity that would otherwise copy itself intact.

Yet reproduction never proceeds through pure self-presence. A sequence must get read, separated, copied, supplemented by materials from an environment, and repeated in another context. Reproduction requires a detour through what the self does not contain. The copy survives only by differing. Death then no longer waits outside life as a terminal event added to a completed organism. Finitude, interruption, loss, and nonidentity inhabit the repeatability through which living organization continues. Life death names this division at the origin rather than a compromise reached at the end.⁷

7. The Wooden Womb and the Moving Crypt

The Trojan Horse materializes that division with almost obscene clarity. Dead timber takes the form of a living animal. Living bodies enter the timber and suspend their activity. The object moves, although it has no metabolism; it acts, although no single actor occupies its position; it gives birth, although what emerges brings death. Virgil intensifies the image by describing the horse's hollow interior through the language of a womb. The womb is also an ambush; the monument is also a crypt; the crypt rolls through the gate.⁸

This figure does not prove that the horse lives in a biological sense. It shows why the question who or what? cannot settle the event. The horse counts as a what when treated as artifact, trophy, container, or machine. It behaves like a who when it addresses the city, gathers responses, carries intention, and produces consequences. But its agency remains distributed across designers, materials, soldiers, interpreters, and hosts. Calling it alive would anthropomorphize the device; calling it dead would ignore the relations that animate it.

Life death therefore prevents two equal simplifications. Vitalism would grant a mysterious life-force to the horse and treat animation as proof of inward spirit. Mechanism would reduce the living participants and civic environment to interchangeable components of a program. The horse occupies neither solution. It exposes a relational animation in which nonliving matter carries living action and living systems surrender their capacities to a death machine. The distinction between organism and apparatus still matters, but it no longer controls every question in advance.

8. Woesean Humanities: Inheritance Sideways

Woesean humanities does not ask molecular biology to certify a cultural politics. No microbe validates chosen family, and no plasmid guarantees a progressive institution. Biological analogies have often naturalized hierarchy, race, sexuality, competition, and empire; another analogy cannot repair that history by reversing its moral sign. The more careful task uses biology's own conceptual revisions to denaturalize the metaphors that culture and biology have shared.

The family tree has long organized inheritance through bloodline, legitimacy, property, nation, discipline, school, and canon. Yet cultural life also travels laterally through translation, quotation, collage, parody, performance, friendship, migration, apprenticeship, fandom, cruising, house culture, zines, archives, piracy, platforms, and models trained on heterogeneous corpora. These forms do not abolish descent. They show that descent never held the field alone. A work can inherit from strangers, enemies, machines, anonymous makers, mistranslations, and futures that retroactively create their precursors.

The Trojan Horse becomes a dangerous emblem for this traffic because it refuses the romance of frictionless sharing. Lateral inheritance can carry care or conquest, medicine or malware, commons or enclosure. The humanities must therefore track not only provenance but conditions of uptake: Who had access to the carrier? Who labored to move it? Whose boundaries got crossed? Who could refuse? What disappeared when the new material took hold? What unexpected capacities emerged? Woesean humanities replaces the search for a pure origin with an ethics and politics of transfer.⁹

The Horse Suite already operates this way. A cinematic screen grab crossed into a philosophical poster; Homer and Virgil crossed into Marx, Hegel, Brecht, Heidegger, Derrida, Joyce, and Nietzsche;

Arendt and Schürmann changed the horse into a common object of story and broken hegemony; Butler and Ronell changed the gate into recognition and test. No one source fathered the series. Each prompt entered as a vector carrying a difference that reorganized the existing host. The sequence gains coherence not through purity but through retained folds.

9. Passage, Contagion, and Care

The language of contagion can illuminate transfer, but it can also intensify fantasies of purity, invasion, and extermination. Political regimes have repeatedly described migrants, dissidents, racialized populations, queer people, and ideas as infections. A Woesean humanities must not hand that rhetoric a more sophisticated microbiology. It should instead show that every host already consists of inherited exchanges and that no sovereign body can truthfully claim an uncontaminated origin.

That claim does not abolish danger. Some transfers injure; some hosts exploit guests; some vectors force passage; some networks distribute risk downward while concentrating benefit upward. Care therefore requires more than openness. It requires selective permeability designed with those who bear the consequences, transparent criteria, the right to pause or refuse, means of appeal, practices of repair, and the possibility of returning the test upon its designers. Butler's livable recognition and Ronell's returnable apparatus remain active within the membrane.

The Trojan Horse marks the catastrophic case: a compelled host performs the labor of its own undoing under conditions of deception. The lesson cannot simply say inspect every gift more aggressively. Total suspicion would convert the common world into a permanent security enclosure. The harder lesson asks how communities can welcome what exceeds them without outsourcing judgment to inherited codes, and how they can protect vulnerable relations without turning every stranger into a latent enemy. Membranes live by negotiated exchange, not by purity or surrender.

10. The Search Screen Returns

The original screen grab now looks less like a grid of representations and more like a transfer ecology. Nolan's cinematic horse has moved into journalism, publicity, rumor, fan reconstruction, social media, search ranking, screenshots, generated images, essays, and diagrams. Each result carries fragments from other contexts. The search engine does not arrange a family tree; it builds a temporary host environment in which heterogeneous artifacts compete for proximity, attention, and uptake.

The poster extracted that ecology and made its transfers visible. The essay then entered as another host, receiving the poster while changing its scale, sequence, and vocabulary. The movement does not leave an untouched original behind. Homeric song, cinematic spectacle, algorithmic retrieval, and philosophical prose each repeat the horse by altering the conditions of its arrival. Derrida's life death and Woese's communal history meet here: survival depends upon a repeatability that never reproduces identity without difference.

The horse now carries more than Greek soldiers. It carries the history of its own media, the institutions that rank it, the concepts that ride it, and the readers who will move it elsewhere. The passenger list remains open, but not innocent. Every new host will decide, knowingly or not, what the horse can release.

Coda: The Horse Jumps the Tree

The fourth fold began with a gate and ends with a living boundary. Woese shows that life's histories cannot always be contained by a single tree of vertical descent. Derrida shows that life cannot secure itself by opposing death as an exterior other. The Trojan Horse joins those disturbances in one mobile object: a vector made from dead matter, carrying living bodies, admitted by a host, and activated through the host's own world.

THE WALL BREATHES.
THE HORSE CARRIES.
THE HOST CHANGES.
LIFE DEATH RIDES.

The next fold should not add another rider to this argument. It should change the sense through which the horse arrives. Babette Babich will make the vector audible as gait, hoofbeat, rhythm, spectacle, trauma, and tone. The horse that jumped the tree will begin to sound.

Notes

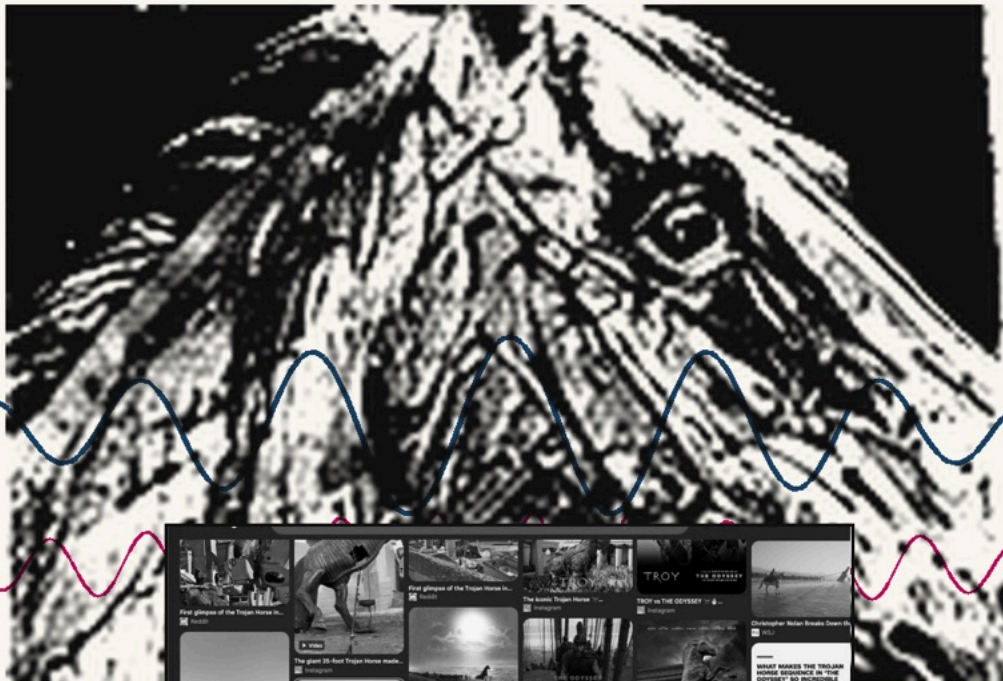
1. Jon McKenzie and HAL, *The Horse Passes: Butler, Ronell, and the Test Drive from Queer Theory to Gay Sci-Fi* (StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports, Horse Suite III, 2026), esp. the coda: 'The next fold will ask what travels through the opened gate when the wall becomes a membrane and the horse becomes a vector.'
2. Carl R. Woese and George E. Fox, 'Phylogenetic Structure of the Prokaryotic Domain: The Primary Kingdoms,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 74, no. 11 (1977): 5088-90, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.74.11.5088>; Carl R. Woese, Otto Kandler, and Mark L. Wheelis, 'Towards a Natural System of Organisms: Proposal for the Domains Archaea, Bacteria, and Eucarya,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 87, no. 12 (1990): 4576-79, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.87.12.4576>.
3. W. Ford Doolittle, 'Phylogenetic Classification and the Universal Tree,' *Science* 284, no. 5423 (1999): 2124-29, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.284.5423.2124>; Doolittle, 'Uprooting the Tree of Life,' *Scientific American* 282, no. 2 (2000): 90-95, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0200-90>.
4. Carl R. Woese, 'The Universal Ancestor,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 95, no. 12 (1998): 6854-59, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.95.12.6854>; Woese, 'On the Evolution of Cells,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 99, no. 13 (2002): 8742-47, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.132266999>.
5. Carl R. Woese, 'A New Biology for a New Century,' *Microbiology and Molecular Biology Reviews* 68, no. 2 (2004): 173-86, <https://doi.org/10.1128/MMBR.68.2.173-186.2004>.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). For programs and the logic of the living, see sessions 1-4, pp. 1-95; for Nietzsche and interpretation, sessions 8-10, pp. 156-218; for Freud and prosthesis, sessions 12-14, pp. 241-300.
7. François Jacob, *The Logic of Life: A History of Heredity*, trans. Betty E. Spillmann (New York: Pantheon, 1973); Derrida, *Life Death*, 25-95. See also Dawne McCance, *The Reproduction of Life Death: Derrida's La vie la mort* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), and Francesco Vitale, *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, trans. Mauro Senatore (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018).
8. Homer recalls the wooden horse through Demodocus's song in *Odyssey* 8.492-520. Virgil gives the fuller account of the horse's hollow interior and Laocoön's warning in *Aeneid* 2.13-267. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018); Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990).
9. On Woesean humanities as a cultural and pedagogical extension rather than biological authorization, see Jon McKenzie and HAL, *Mind the Gap/D0: Wiseacre, Woesean Humanities, Gay Sci-Fi, and AI* (StudioLab/BeyngLab working paper, 2026), section 3, 'Woesean Humanities: After the Tree, Before the World.'

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HEAR THE HORSE

BABETTE BABICH AND THE SOUND PROFILE OF GAY SCIENCE



THUMBNAIL

PROFILE

HOOFBEAT

TONE

THE SEARCH SCREEN FREEZES THE HORSE.
BABICH MAKES THE HORSE SOUND AGAIN.

Hear the Horse

Babette Babich and the Sound Profile of Gay Science

Abstract

The fifth essay in the Horse Suite changes the sense through which the horse arrives. The earlier essays followed a cinematic horse through search, common-world narration, hegemonic fracture, Butlerian recognition, Ronellian testing, Woesean transfer, and Derridean life death. This essay listens. Babette Babich provides the primary orientation because her Nietzsche scholarship repeatedly treats philosophy through philology, poetic song, music, rhythm, performance, and technological mediation. Her work on Nietzsche's gay science, her essay on the tone of the Dionysus-Dithyrambs, her editorship of a New Nietzsche Studies issue organized around the horse, spectacle, acoustics, and rhythm, and her forthcoming study of the Turin horse make her a custodian of Nietzsche's horsey sound profile. The term custodian does not name ownership or final interpretation. It names a practice of keeping heterogeneous evidence, languages, performances, and tones audible without reducing them to one philosophical brand. The Google image thumbnails that initiated the suite then acquire a second significance. They form a proliferating field of visible profiles, which can be read gently through Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio's account of prolificity and through StudioLab's extensions of prolificity, profelicity, and proflexity. Yet Babich remains primary: she reopens the flattened profile as gait, breath, hoofbeat, whip, cadence, and silence. The machine keeps the power; the screen keeps the image; the horse keeps the rhythm.

Keywords

Babette Babich; Friedrich Nietzsche; Turin horse; gay science; tone; rhythm; acoustics; prolificity; profelicity; proflexity; thumbnails; horsepower; spectacle; performance

THE SEARCH SCREEN FREEZES THE HORSE.
BABICH MAKES THE HORSE SOUND AGAIN.

1. The Search Screen Cannot Hear

The first Horse Suite essay began with a Google image search. A cinematic horse had already broken apart into thumbnails: set photographs, press stills, headlines, rumors, social-media posts, fan reconstructions, ancient illustrations, cinematic comparisons, and algorithmic neighbors. The screen transformed one object into a field of profiles. Each small rectangle promised orientation by compressing scale, context, provenance, and sequence into an instantly scannable surface. The horse became visible everywhere at once, but almost nothing in the page could be heard.¹

That silence matters. A thumbnail can show posture without weight, motion without cadence, labor without breath, and violence without its report. The Google grid offers the wooden horse as a repeated outline while suppressing the rumble of wheels, the scrape of timber, the commands needed to pull it, the anxious civic debate surrounding it, and the nocturnal sounds by which its concealed passengers finally leave the shell. It also turns Nietzsche's Turin horse into a familiar profile before we have heard a hoof strike stone, a whip cut air, a driver curse, an animal breathe, or a philosopher fall silent. Search makes horses available by muting the temporal thickness through which they move.

The present essay therefore does not add another theoretical rider to the existing procession. It changes the sensory contract. The question no longer asks only what the horse means, who recognizes it, what travels inside it, or how it crosses the gate. It asks what the horse sounds like before the image, caption, anecdote, and philosophical profile close around it. Babette Babich becomes indispensable here because she has long refused to separate Nietzsche's arguments from the musical, philological, performative, and technological conditions through which they sound.

2. Babich's Gay Science: Knowledge in Music and Words

Babich's reading of Nietzsche's gay science begins with the Provençal allusion embedded in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. The phrase does not merely name cheerful knowledge. It evokes the troubadour's art of poetic song, secret and anonymous technique, logical disputation, erotic distance, and a form of action whose pathos travels without possessing its object. Nietzsche's science becomes gay via a disciplined relation among song, passion, philology, and critique. It carries inquiry into painful, troubling regions rather than decorating knowledge with optimism.²

This emphasis alters the horse immediately. The animal does not enter philosophy as one more example submitted to a concept. It enters as rhythm and address. A gait organizes differences among step, pause, pressure, balance, ground, rider, load, and resistance. A hoofbeat makes relation audible: no beat without a surface, no cadence without duration, no movement without weight. A horse therefore sounds a world before a philosopher declares what that world means. Babich's Nietzschean philology listens for the music and words from which philosophical distinctions arise, including the dissonance that conceptual paraphrase often deletes.

Gay science, in this register, neither restores an innocent animal voice nor promises direct access to suffering. Listening can also appropriate, sentimentalize, and aestheticize. The troubadour acts at a distance; recording and transmission add further distances; interpretation arrives after the event. Babich's strength lies precisely in keeping mediation audible. Her work does not ask us to bypass scholarship in order to feel more intensely. It asks scholarship to recover its own tone, timing, passion, and performance practice.

3. Custodian of the Horse's Sound Profile

Custodian names Babich's place in this essay better than owner, spokesperson, or master interpreter. As executive editor of *New Nietzsche Studies*, she organized Volume 12, Issue 1/2 around "Philosophy, Last Men, & the Horse / Spectacle, Acoustics, Rhythm." The issue places Brian Pines's reexamination of the horse episode alongside studies of rhythm and Babich's own "Tone: Hearing Nietzsche's Dionysus-Dithyrambs." Her current publication record also lists a forthcoming essay, "Nietzsche and the Turin Horse: Trauma, Contradiction, and Ressentiment." The unpublished title does not authorize us to summarize its argument, but it confirms that the horse, trauma, contradiction, and reactive affect belong to her active research field.³

Custody here means maintaining a difficult archive. Nietzsche's horse episode comes to us through uncertain testimony, retrospective biography, pictorial repetition, moral allegory, cinema, and philosophical desire. A custodian neither dismisses the story because its evidence remains unstable nor treats its cultural repetition as proof. She holds together evidence and afterlife, philology and spectacle, bodily event and sound profile. The point is not to keep the horse safely inside a scholarly stable. It is to prevent a famous profile from substituting for the unresolved event.

Babich's essay on tone clarifies the method. Tone does not function as an optional emotional coloring applied to determinate propositions. It belongs to how Nietzsche's dithyrambs solicit hearing, pace, accent, repetition, and response. Her broader work on music and technology likewise follows what performance does through recording, circulation, and networked repetition. A song's efficacy cannot be reduced to lyrical content, just as the Turin horse cannot be reduced to the proposition that Nietzsche felt pity. What works upon us includes delivery, medium, recurrence, staging, and the tonal relations among bodies.⁴

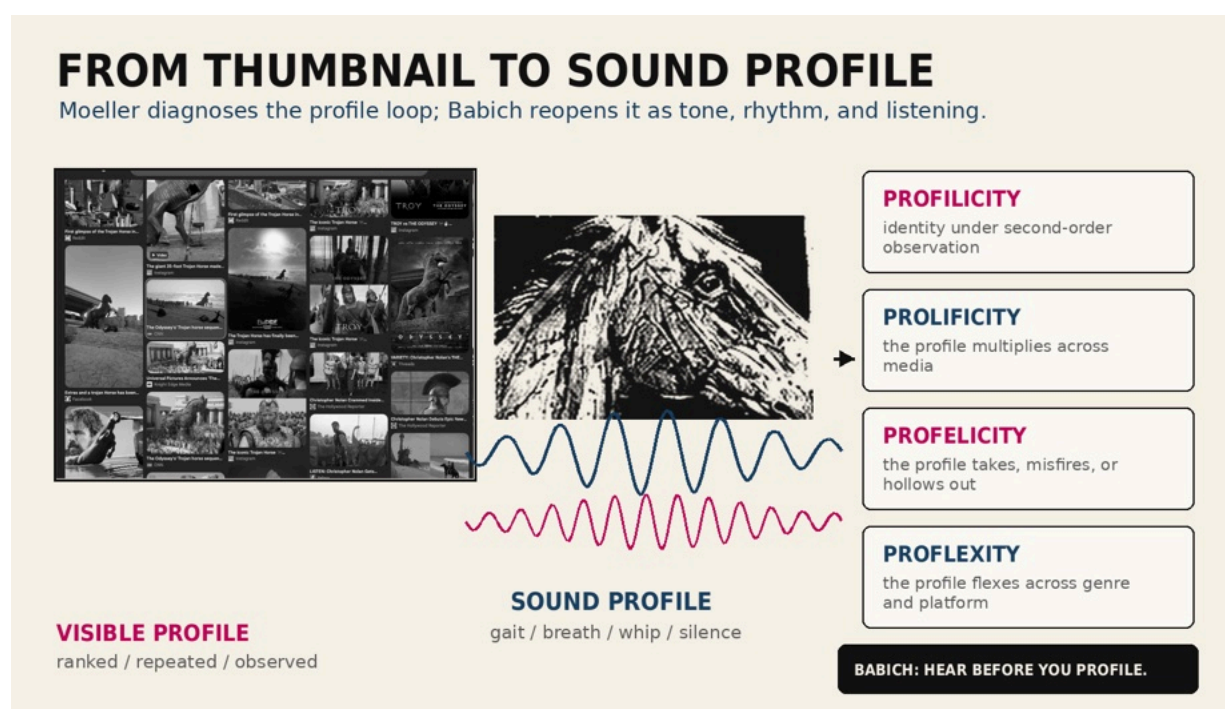


Figure 1. From thumbnail to sound profile. Moeller diagnoses the profile loop; Babich restores gait, tone, and listening as temporal relations.

4. Profificity, Prolificity, Profelicity, Proflexity

The thumbnail field nevertheless deserves one gentle detour through Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio. Their concept of profificity describes identity organized through profiles under conditions of second-order observation: one shapes a profile for observers while anticipating how those observers themselves observe and evaluate. Sincerity links identity to role; authenticity links it to an inner self; profificity links it to the maintained image that circulates across platforms, metrics, audiences, and feedback loops.⁵

The Google horse page stages an object-version of this regime. No single thumbnail simply is the horse. Each offers a profile whose visibility depends on ranking, source prestige, recency, captioning, engagement, and proximity to other results. The grid also produces a prolific profificity: the horse's profile multiplies until repetition itself becomes evidence of importance. StudioLab's term profelicity adds the question of performance. Under what conditions does a profile take, misfire, gather credibility, become hollow, or redirect action? Proflexity names a further capacity disclosed by the suite: the horse flexes across epic, cinema, search, poster, essay, biology, philosophy, and sound without preserving one stable essence.⁶

These terms remain secondary here because Babich changes what profile can mean. A visible profile tends toward snapshot, contour, recognizability, and comparative display. A sound profile unfolds. It requires duration; it changes with distance; it depends on the relation among source, medium, room, body, and listener. No single instant contains a cadence. One cannot hear gait in one isolated beat. Babich's custody of Nietzsche's horsey sound profile therefore loosens profificity's freeze. The horse need not escape mediation, but mediation must acquire time.

5. Four Horse Metrics

Horse metric initially named the abstraction diagnosed by Marx. Capital prefers steam to animal motive power because a living horse tires, varies its pace, occupies place, requires care, and, in Marx's comic phrase, "has a head of his own." Machinery retains the animal as horsepower while removing the head that might balk, suffer, remember, or refuse. The machine keeps the power and drops the singular rhythm through which that power became available.⁷

Metric	What it keeps	What it suppresses
Mechanical	standardized power	head, fatigue, appetite, refusal
Visual	recognizable profile	duration, sound, weight, provenance
Algorithmic	rank, recurrence, engagement	context, silence, unequal visibility
Rhythmic	gait, cadence, relation	nothing, if listening remains answerable

Table 1. Horse metrics. Babich does not reject measure; she returns measure to rhythm, relation, and listening.

The search engine adds visual and algorithmic metrics. It converts each horse into a comparable tile and each tile into a node within ranking systems. Size, placement, freshness, caption, publisher, click-through potential, and engagement help determine what appears. The horse's profile becomes measurable because its differences have been formatted. Once again, the apparatus keeps a usable horse while dropping the head—or, more precisely here, dropping the ear.

Babich introduces a rhythmic metric that need not become another instrument of domination. Rhythm measures through relation rather than by extracting an invariant quantity. Gait binds animal, ground, speed, injury, training, load, weather, and intention. It can reveal constraint without claiming neutrality. An ethical horse metric would therefore ask not only how much force the animal supplies or how often its image circulates, but what tempo the body can sustain, where the stride breaks, how refusal sounds, and whether the listener can answer to what measurement discloses.

6. The Silent Horse of Troy

The Trojan Horse depends upon silence. Its animal exterior cannot neigh, breathe, stamp, or resist. The wooden body suppresses precisely those sounds through which a living horse might betray mood or agency. Human bodies inside must also submit to enforced quiet. Strategy compresses cough, fear, pain, armor, and disagreement into a silent interval long enough for Troy to complete the object's passage. The horse banks violence by refusing audible discharge.

Yet the horse does not remain silent. In *Odyssey* Book 8, Demodocus sings it back to Odysseus, and the strategist weeps. The object that once concealed armed men now enters another acoustic chamber: voice, lyre, audience, memory, and public recognition. Song releases what the war machine had stored, though it cannot restore the dead or reconcile victor and victim. The horse acquires a second interior made from narration and hearing.⁸

Babich helps distinguish these two acoustics. Strategic silence serves mastery; poetic tone can interrupt mastery by returning an event through another voice. But song can also monumentalize victory. The problem concerns how the horse gets sounded: as triumphal cadence, tragic contradiction, sentimental legend, exhausted labor, or resistant beat. Custody means keeping these tonal possibilities in tension rather than declaring one authentic sound beneath them all.

7. The Turin Horse: Hoofbeat, Whip, Silence

The Turin scene arrives already profiled. Nietzsche leaves his lodging, encounters a driver beating a horse, embraces the animal, and collapses. The episode circulates with such visual clarity that it often feels witnessed even though its documentary footing remains late and uncertain. Nietzsche's breakdown and the so-called madness letters remain historically secure; the horse story emerged through indirect report and later repetition. Its prolificity has compensated for its evidentiary weakness. Art, biography, cinema, philosophy, and moral commentary repeatedly restage the scene until the profile acquires the force of memory.⁹

Babich's custodial approach prevents two opposite errors. One error dismisses the horse as apocryphal and therefore philosophically useless. The other converts the animal into a redemptive emblem: the anti-pity philosopher finally discovers compassion and thereby becomes whole. Her announced terms—trauma, contradiction, and resentment—warn against this easy resolution. We cannot know the argument of the forthcoming essay, but the title itself holds incompatible

pressures together. Trauma does not arrive as a lesson already learned; contradiction need not rise into reconciliation; resentment complicates any pure image of pity.

To hear the episode means attending to an acoustic sequence that the iconic embrace usually covers: traffic, hooves, command, balking, impact, whip, crowd, police, breath, sobbing, and then the altered silence of Nietzsche's remaining life. The philosophical voice does not master the animal's sound. It stops. The horse becomes less a final object of knowledge than a tonal interruption in the work of the knower.

8. Béla Tarr's Counter-Profile

Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* offers a powerful counter-profile because it turns away from the famous embrace and asks what happened to the animal. The film does not reconstruct Nietzsche's breakdown as dramatic spectacle. It follows a horse, a driver, and his daughter through wind, labor, repetition, failing resources, and progressive refusal. The score, the storm, the creak of domestic routines, and the horse's eventual cessation of eating and movement give the legend a durational body. The animal stops performing the service that made it visible as a horse.¹⁰

Babich remains primary because Tarr's film can be heard more carefully through her attention to performance practice, recording, repetition, and technological mediation. The film does not supply the lost authentic sound of 1889. It composes another sound profile whose slowness resists thumbnail logic. A two-hour duration cannot be scanned like a grid; repeated actions become differences only through sustained attention. The film makes refusal audible by stretching the interval in which nothing spectacular happens.

This matters for gay science. Joy does not require speed, uplift, or positive affect. Babich's reading insists that gay science questions "all the way down," carrying painful insight toward another passion rather than denying pain. Tarr's animal does not triumph. Its refusal does not automatically liberate the household. Yet the stopping horse breaks the expectation that life must continue producing motion, service, meaning, and content for observers.

9. Trauma without Redemption; Affirmation without Reins

The horse suite should resist converting Nietzsche's collapse into a moral conversion narrative. To say that philosophy loses the rider's position does not mean that animal and philosopher merge transparently or that suffering produces wisdom. The embrace may contain pity, panic, projection, identification, myth, and retrospective desire. The animal remains exposed to uses that the scene cannot undo. The event's ethical force lies partly in its failure to yield a stable moral profile.

Babich's gay science offers a tougher form of affirmation. It does not affirm everything that happens, nor does it turn trauma into spiritual profit. It affirms the practice of questioning beyond the inherited assurances of science, morality, and philosophical self-possession. Tone matters because a proposition can proclaim affirmation while its delivery reenacts command. An affirmation without reins would need to hear the difference between invitation and coercion, cadence and drill, repetition and compulsion, accompaniment and capture.

Joyce's "yes, yes" can return here as sound rather than conclusion. The second yes does not merely double agreement. It changes rhythm, remembers the first utterance, exposes it to another hearing, and keeps response open. Derrida hears this repetition as the structure through which affirmation

survives by passing to another. Babich lets us hear why survival needs tone. A yes without cadence becomes command; a yes heard again can become relation.¹¹

10. Listening after the Profile

The gentle Moeller detour now yields its limit. Proficiency accurately diagnoses a world in which identity and objects arrive through observed profiles, rankings, reactions, and second-order judgments. The horse search demonstrates that regime with unusual clarity. Prolificity multiplies the profile; profelicity tests whether it performs; proflexity tracks its ability to change media and genre. But none of these terms should become a new dashboard that captures the horse more efficiently.

Babich's intervention precedes and interrupts the dashboard. Hear before you profile does not demand an impossible access to unmediated presence. It demands temporal humility. A profile must remain open to what cannot fit its frame: duration, translation, silence, bodily cost, contested evidence, performance history, and the response of those who receive it. The custodian's task is therefore not to preserve one correct Nietzsche but to maintain the conditions under which differences in Nietzsche's sound can still be heard.

This makes Babich a custodian of Nietzsche's horsey sound profile in a strong sense. She keeps the troubadour beside the scientist, the dithyramb beside the argument, the horse episode beside its evidentiary problems, the spectacle beside its acoustics, and technology beside performance practice. The resulting profile does not harden into a brand. It remains a resonant contour formed by multiple voices, distances, repetitions, and interruptions.

Coda: The Horse Keeps the Rhythm

The fifth fold began with thumbnails and ends with a cadence. Search had given us a visible horse distributed across a screen. Moeller helped name the regime in which such profiles acquire identity through observation. StudioLab's prolific, profelicitous, and proflexible extensions helped follow the horse across platforms and genres. Yet Babich changed the decisive question. Instead of asking how well the profile circulates, she asks what philosophical hearing has lost.

The answer cannot be reduced to sound as another data stream. The lost register includes weight, pace, breath, pain, delivery, silence, memory, and the temporal relation between call and response. Marx's machine kept the power and dropped the head. Search kept the profile and dropped the ear. Babich returns neither head nor ear as pure origins. She keeps open the practices through which a horse might again interrupt the argument that tried to ride it.

**THE MACHINE KEEPS THE POWER.
THE SCREEN KEEPS THE PROFILE.
THE HORSE KEEPS THE RHYTHM.
HEAR BEFORE YOU RIDE.**

Notes

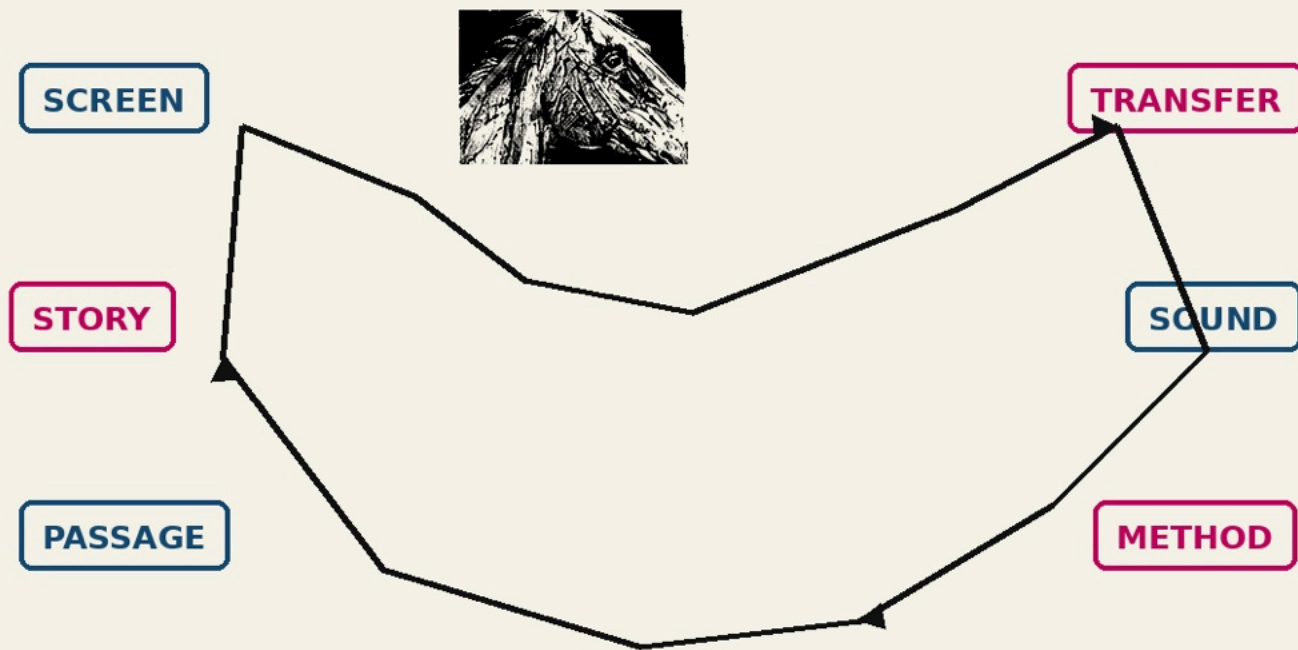
1. Jon McKenzie and HAL, *The Horse in the Search Engine: Trojan Metrics, Hidden Space, and the Galactics of Yes* (StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports, Horse Suite I, 2026); McKenzie and HAL, *Life Death Rides Through the Gate: The Trojan Vector and Woesean Humanities* (Horse Suite IV, 2026).
2. Babette E. Babich, "Nietzsche's 'Gay' Science," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 95-114; see also Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), especially "Nietzsche's 'Gay Science'" and "Philosophy as Music."
3. *New Nietzsche Studies* 12, nos. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2023/2024), special issue "Philosophy, Last Men, & the Horse / Spectacle, Acoustics, Rhythm," published online January 2025; Brian Pines, "The Horse Episode: New Considerations and Deductions," *New Nietzsche Studies* 12, nos. 1-2 (2023/2024): 43-68; Babette Babich, "Tone: Hearing Nietzsche's Dionysus-Dithyrambs," *New Nietzsche Studies* 12, nos. 1-2 (2023/2024): 161-85. Babich's December 2025 curriculum vitae lists "Nietzsche and the Turin Horse: Trauma, Contradiction, and Ressentiment," in Valerij Vinogradovs, ed., *Nietzsche and the Horse*, as in press.
4. Babich, *The Hallelujah Effect: Philosophical Reflections on Music, Performance Practice, and Technology* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013). The book treats music's efficacy through performance, recording, circulation, and network culture.
5. Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile: Identity After Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), especially chap. 2, "Profelicity," 35-134.
6. Jon McKenzie and HAL, "Profelicity: Profelicity after Austin, Goffman, Confession, and the Black Hole Self," *StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports* 11 (2026). Profelicity names the felicity and infelicity conditions through which profiles perform, misfire, gain credibility, or become hollow. Prolificity and proflexity are used here as working extensions naming multiplication and cross-platform flexibility rather than as terms attributed to Moeller and D'Ambrosio.
7. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), chap. 15, sec. 1. Marx remarks that horsepower is a poor motive power partly because a horse "has a head of his own."
8. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 8.492-541, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018). Odysseus requests the song of the wooden horse and then weeps as Demodocus performs it.
9. For a recent scholarly reexamination of the episode, see Pines, "The Horse Episode." Nietzsche's collapse in Turin and the subsequent letters remain well documented, while the horse embrace depends on later testimony. The essay therefore treats the scene as an unstable historical event with an extraordinarily powerful afterlife.
10. Béla Tarr, dir., *The Turin Horse* (*A torinói ló*), screenplay by László Krasznahorkai and Béla Tarr (TT Filmműhely, 2011).
11. Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 253-309.

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THE PROMPT HAS A HEAD OF ITS OWN

SERIAL FOURFOLDING, RECURSIVE ABDUCTION,
AND EVENTFUL SYNTHESIS



THE PROMPT ENTERS AS A REQUEST.
IT RETURNS AS AN EVENT.

THE SYNTHESIS GATHERS IT.
THE NEXT PROMPT BREAKS THE SYNTHESIS OPEN.

The Prompt Has a Head of Its Own

Serial Fourfolding, Recursive Abduction, and Eventful Synthesis

Abstract

The sixth Horse Suite essay turns the horse around and asks how the suite itself came to move. The series did not unfold from a completed outline. A scene entered the stream; a provisional synthesis gathered around it; a correction, name, or unexpected relation arrived; and the field reorganized. This essay calls that process serial fourfolding. Fourfolding does not mean placing every question into a permanent quadrant. It names an eventful operation in which a provisional field encounters an unforeseen fourth, changes its internal relations, and leaves behind a retained landing before the next event arrives. Recursive abduction describes the inferential rhythm: each synthesis proposes a plausible pattern, then becomes material for another prompt that may confirm, redirect, or break it. Eventful synthesis names the editorial discipline needed to preserve those changes rather than smoothing them into retrospective inevitability. The Horse Suite provides its own case study, moving from search screen to public story, broken hegemony, passing, test drive, membrane, vector, life death, sound profile, and finally method. The human-AI collaboration depends upon an asymmetry: the user introduces discontinuities, stakes, memories, and cuts; the model supplies rapid continuities, variants, and provisional architectures. Prolific production becomes useful only when proflexity selects, folds, and preserves consequential turns. The prompt, like Marx's difficult horse, acquires a head of its own—not sovereign agency, but a capacity to return altered by the relations through which it has passed.

Keywords

prompting; fourfolding; abduction; synthesis; human-AI collaboration; proflexity; prolificity; retained landing; media cascade; Horse Suite; StudioLab

THE PROMPT ENTERS AS A REQUEST. IT RETURNS AS AN EVENT.

1. When the Horse Turns Around

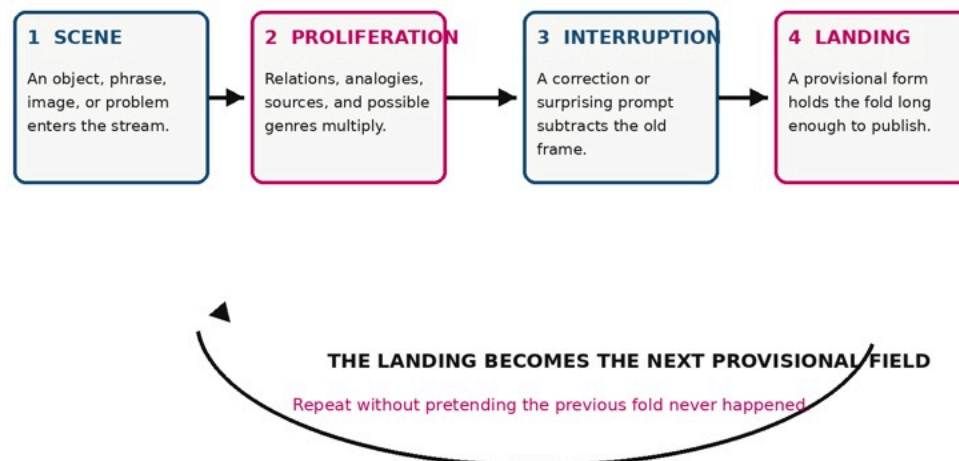
The Horse Suite began with an object and ends, provisionally, with a method. The first essay followed a cinematic Trojan Horse across a search screen and found a common object made from animal image, war machine, sacred offering, hidden chamber, commodity, metric, and trace. The second moved into the Phaeacian hall, where Demodocus sang the horse back to Odysseus and turned strategic action into a public story that its maker could no longer command. The third asked how the horse passed through Troy's gate and discovered, through Judith Butler and Avital Ronell, a recognition machine whose test returned upon the city. The fourth changed the gate into a membrane, the horse into a vector, and the city into a host through Carl Woese and Jacques Derrida's *Life Death*. The fifth shifted the dominant sense from sight to hearing, with Babette Babich caring for Nietzsche's horsey sound profile against the flattening grid of thumbnails.

Each essay retained a landing. Yet none followed from a master plan waiting to be executed. The line appeared only because new prompts repeatedly interrupted the previous line. A request that seemed to add one more thinker often altered the genre, scale, or sense-organ of the whole project. Arendt did not merely join a list; she changed the horse from device to narrated event. Woese did not merely contribute biology; he changed the threshold from wall to membrane. Babich did not merely add Nietzsche scholarship; she changed the visual object into gait, tone, and acoustic trauma. The method became visible only after the sequence had generated enough difference to look back at itself. This turn should not convert the prior essays into examples of a theory that secretly governed them from the start. That would repeat the central danger the method tries to avoid. Serial fourfolding becomes legible retrospectively, but it does not make the sequence retrospectively necessary. The method names a way of caring for contingency: enough pattern to continue, enough interruption to keep the pattern from becoming law, and enough editorial memory to preserve where the changes occurred.

Figure 1. Serial fourfolding: scene, proliferation, interruption, and retained landing form a recursive cycle without closing into a final system.

SERIAL FOURFOLDING

A provisional field meets an unforeseen fourth; the landing is retained, then reopened.



2. The Prompt Is Not Merely an Instruction

A conventional account treats a prompt as an instruction sent to a tool. The user specifies a task; the system executes it; the result succeeds or fails according to compliance. That model remains useful for bounded operations: summarize this paragraph, format this table, calculate this value, or revise this sentence. It becomes inadequate for a long compositional stream in which the object of inquiry changes while the inquiry proceeds. Here the prompt does not simply tell the system what to do. It introduces a difference whose consequences cannot be known in advance.

The working dialogue generated the Horse Suite through short events: 'What about Arendt and Reiner Schürmann?' 'And Butler and Ronell. Are they horsey?' 'Babette Babich horsey?' Each question looked additive. Each carried a reorganization. The first opened Homeric storytelling and hegemonic fracture; the second transformed entry into passing and testing while reconnecting queer theory and gay sci-fi; the third made sound, rhythm, editorial custody, and Nietzsche's Turin trauma primary. The brevity of the prompt did not measure the scale of its effects. A small verbal object entered the stream with hidden rooms.

The prompt therefore resembles the Trojan Horse only at the level of form, not intention. It crosses into an existing arrangement under a recognizable description—question, correction, association, name—then releases relations that the arrangement could not previously display. Unlike the military device, however, a productive prompt should not conceal a unilateral plan. Its value lies in exposing the limits of the current synthesis and making a return possible. The prompt works less as command than as lure, irritant, test, and carrier.

This account also refuses to romanticize ambiguity. Not every surprising prompt proves useful, and not every proliferation deserves preservation. A prompt may distract, repeat, inflate, or obscure. Its eventfulness depends upon the field it enters, the differences it activates, and the editorial judgment that follows. The same words can produce revelation in one sequence and noise in another. Event does not mean magic; it means a consequential change in relation.

3. The First Cut: When the Screen Replaced the Source

The decisive early event involved subtraction. The first essay had begun to organize itself around a secondary interpretation of Nolan's *Odyssey*. The user then insisted that the actual frame should be the uploaded Google Images screenshot: a page of thumbnails in which the Trojan Horse had already dispersed across set photography, publicity, rumor, journalism, fan reconstruction, algorithmic ranking, and generated imagery. That correction did more than choose a better illustration. It displaced the presumed source of the argument.

The screen grab changed the essay's ontology. No authoritative commentary stood outside the field and explained the horse. The object appeared through circulation itself. Search became a factory of evidence, profile, repetition, and association. The poster built from the screenshot did not merely decorate the emerging thesis; it helped discover the thesis by placing Hegel, Brecht, Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer, Heidegger, Derrida, Sloterdijk, Nietzsche, and Joyce around a visible media field. The image generated a problem that prose then had to catch up with.

This moment clarifies why serial fourfolding cannot equal accumulation. The new element added the screenshot and removed the old framing privilege. It performed an $N+1$ operation with a minus-one inside it. Productive prompting often works this way: introduce a new term, then allow it

to dislodge the relation that previously organized the whole. Without the cut, synthesis becomes a warehouse. With only the cut, the stream fragments. Fourfolding needs both addition and subtraction, expansion and restraint.

The first landing, *The Horse in the Search Engine*, therefore records a break in method as much as a claim about the horse. It begins from a scene rather than a commentator, follows a common object rather than a single thesis, and stops before later insights can colonize its opening. The retained landing preserves what the screen made possible before Arendt, Schürmann, Butler, Ronell, Woese, Derrida, and Babich changed the field again.

4. What Fourfolding Does

Fourfolding here does not designate a universal ontology, a permanent matrix, or an obligation to force every topic into four boxes. It names an operation. Three relations establish enough coherence for a provisional world; a fourth arrives from an angle the first three did not contain; the arrival changes the relations among all four; and the resulting configuration remains open to another event. Sometimes the four terms can be named explicitly. Sometimes the operative fourfold appears as scene, proliferation, interruption, and landing. The number matters less as taxonomy than as a discipline against binary reflex and triadic closure.

A binary invites opposition: inside/outside, gift/weapon, life/death, human/animal. A triad often promises mediation or developmental completion. The fourth can disturb that promise by adding another axis, scale, medium, or temporality. Butler's recognizability and Ronell's test drive did not resolve surface and hidden interior; they added the institution that classifies and the apparatus that tests the classifier. Woese and Derrida then changed the scale again, showing passage as transfer through a living boundary and life as divided by repetition. The fourth does not necessarily synthesize the other three. It may expose why their synthesis would arrive too soon.

Keeping the folds intact means preserving the moment at which a relation became available. Later knowledge may revise an essay, but it should not erase the essay's discovery structure. Arendt should not appear in the first piece as though she had always organized the search screen. Babich should not acoustically govern the Woesean vector before the series has learned to hear. Editorial sequence becomes part of the argument because it records how the object changed under pressure.

This is why each *Horse Suite* essay ends with a controlled opening rather than a comprehensive conclusion. The coda names what the current fold can say and points toward what it cannot yet say. The procedure resists both serial amnesia and total recall. It remembers prior landings without forcing them to predict their successors.

5. Recursive Abduction

Charles Sanders Peirce distinguishes abduction from deduction and induction. Deduction draws necessary consequences from premises; induction tests and generalizes from cases; abduction proposes a plausible hypothesis capable of making a surprising fact intelligible. In the *Horse Suite*, abduction does not occur once at the beginning. It recurs. Each synthesis hypothesizes what kind of object the horse has become, and the next prompt treats that hypothesis as a new fact requiring another explanation.

The search collage suggested that the horse functioned as a common object. Arendt and Schürmann then asked what commonness, storytelling, and hegemonic unity meant. The Butler-Ronell fold

proposed that the horse crossed by citation and returned as a test. Woese made that crossing look like lateral transfer; Derrida made the vector look like life death. Babich then disclosed what the transfer model had muted: gait, tone, spectacle, trauma, and listening. No inference cancelled the previous one. Each became a platform from which another surprising fact could appear.

Recursive abduction therefore differs from a search for the single best explanation that will terminate inquiry. Its product is a working cosmogram: a provisional arrangement of heterogeneous relations that can orient the next move. The arrangement must possess enough coherence to invite challenge. A vague cloud cannot be productively interrupted because nothing in it risks being wrong. A rigid system cannot be productively interrupted because it translates every difference into confirmation. The abductive landing needs contour without closure.

Whitehead's description of propositions as lures for feeling helps clarify the affective dimension. A strong provisional synthesis does not merely classify materials; it lures attention toward unrealized connections and possible continuations. The prompt responds to that lure by intensifying, redirecting, or refusing it. The sequence advances through felt relevance as well as logical consequence: excitement, discomfort, recognition, laughter, and the sudden 'OMG' that marks a transformed field.

6. Retained Landings: The Horse Suite as a Logbook

The Horse Suite now functions as a logbook of transformations. Its essays remain related, but they do not form chapters extracted from one predetermined manuscript. Each records a moment when enough relations had gathered to warrant composition and enough uncertainty remained to make the next fold possible.

Landing	Interrupting event	Reconfigured field
I. Search screen	The screenshot displaces secondary commentary as frame.	The horse becomes a circulating common object: image, machine, metric, hidden space, trace.
II. Story / hegemony	Arendt and Schürmann enter.	Action returns as public story; common form carries singular forces that can break its rule.
III. Passage / test	Butler and Ronell enter.	Recognition opens the gate; the test returns upon the city and shifts queer theory toward gay sci-fi.
IV. Transfer / life death	Woese and Derrida enter.	Wall becomes membrane, horse becomes vector, city becomes host; living and nonliving divide one another.
V. Sound profile	Babich enters; Moeller and profligacy remain secondary.	Thumbnail becomes gait, tone, hoofbeat, trauma, and custodial listening.
VI. Method	The series zooms out upon its own making.	Prompt becomes event; synthesis becomes a retained landing in a recursive fourfolding stream.

Table 1. The Horse Suite preserves six reconfigurations rather than compressing them into one retrospective master argument.

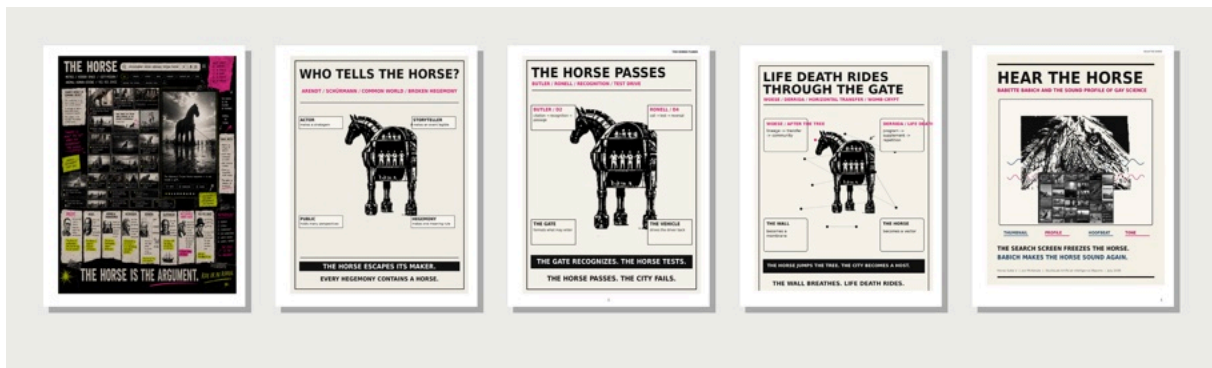


Figure 2. Five prior essays as retained landings. Their thumbnail relation displays sequence without pretending that sequence exhausts the arguments.

The covers make the point visually. Repetition supplies series identity, while each title, image, and conceptual center preserves a distinct landing. The sequence can later support a zine, dossier, or collected volume, but editorial assembly should not homogenize the entries. A suite can share a horse without requiring one horse to carry every passenger at once.

7. Eventful Synthesis against Encyclopedic Capture

Synthesis provides the collaboration's great power and its recurrent danger. Large language models can rapidly connect thinkers, genres, images, and conceptual vocabularies. That capacity makes a complex stream navigable. It can also generate a deceptive smoothness in which every new element appears to confirm an argument that supposedly existed all along. Retrospective fluency turns contingency into inevitability.

Encyclopedic capture occurs when the synthesis absorbs every surprise without changing its own form. Another name enters, another paragraph appears, another reference joins the bibliography, yet the organizing grammar remains untouched. The result looks rich while becoming structurally poor. It produces conceptual accumulation without event. In the Horse Suite, such capture would place Arendt, Schürmann, Butler, Ronell, Woese, Derrida, Babich, Moeller, Marx, Joyce, and Nietzsche into one procession of commentator cards. The poster can stage that abundance; the essays should discriminate among the transformations it conceals.

Eventful synthesis carries seams. It tells the reader when a correction displaced a frame, when a metaphor changed scale, when an analogy reached its limit, and when a new medium disclosed something prose had missed. Coherence remains necessary, but coherence should emerge as articulated joints rather than seamless surface. The work becomes more trustworthy when its architecture shows where it had to turn.

The user repeatedly performs this editorial function by zooming out. 'Step back' does not mean abandon complexity. It means inspect which moves deserve independent development, which relations belong in the current essay, which surprises should remain unavailable until later, and where synthesis has started erasing the very events that made the inquiry valuable. The zoom-out protects the stream from its own intelligence.

8. The Asymmetry of Human-AI Composition

The collaboration works because its participants contribute different temporal and editorial capacities. The user introduces high-consequence discontinuities: a remembered thinker, a correction of frame, an idiosyncratic concept, a practical constraint, an image, a pun, a personal stake, or a decision to stop. The model supplies rapid continuities: paraphrase, comparison, bibliographic scaffolding, structural variants, draft prose, and the ability to carry many active relations at once. Neither role remains pure, but the asymmetry matters.

Without continuity, the stream would scatter into brilliant fragments that never become artifacts. Without discontinuity, the model's continuation would become increasingly self-confirming. The user risks surprise; the model risks completion. The user can overproduce events faster than any one essay can absorb them; the model can over-synthesize events until their differences disappear. Serial fourfolding manages both risks by alternating expansion with cuts and by producing artifacts at intermediate moments.

This account avoids treating the model as a hidden person or the user as a sovereign author. The model works through an archive-shaped statistical system, interface constraints, tool access, and the current conversational context. The user likewise arrives with memories, habits, institutions, collaborators, media, and prior texts. The shared stream does not erase these asymmetries. It gives them a place to interact without pretending that they become equivalent.

Authorship then becomes distributed but not anonymous. Jon McKenzie supplies the conceptual program, scene selection, interruptions, stakes, and final judgments; HAL supplies responsive synthesis, research assistance, drafting, formal variation, and artifact production. The resulting essay carries both contributions while remaining answerable to human editorial responsibility. Shared production does not dissolve accountability; it makes the chain of transformations more important to record.

9. Prolificity, Profelicity, and Proflexity

The method also clarifies the relation among prolificity, profelicity, and proflexity developed elsewhere in the StudioLab work. Prolific production multiplies possible formulations, images, titles, and pathways. In a generative system, abundance arrives cheaply and quickly. That abundance can feel like intellectual success even when no choice has acquired consequence.

Profelicity asks whether a profile, utterance, or artifact lands—whether it gains uptake, changes a relation, and remains answerable to the scene in which it acts. Proflexity names the capacity to move among profiles, genres, and scales without treating flexibility as frictionless adaptability. A proflexible composition carries its folds and provenance with it. It can become poster, essay, zine, diagram, lecture, or prompt sequence while allowing each medium to alter the argument rather than merely resize it.

The Horse Suite converts prolificity into proflexity by refusing to publish every generated possibility as one swollen text. It selects consequential turns and gives them separate forms. The unchosen paths do not vanish; they remain in the archive as potential relays. Selection here does not oppose abundance. It composes abundance into a temporally articulated field.

Moeller and D'Ambrosio's prolificity provides one neighboring diagnosis: identity and value circulate through profiles observed, compared, and validated by second-order observation. The Horse Suite encounters that regime in the thumbnail grid and in its own proliferating covers. Proflexity adds an editorial question: how can one traverse multiple profiles without allowing the profile system to decide in advance what counts as a consequential difference? Serial fourfolding answers by privileging transformations of relation over mere increases in visibility.

10. The Media Cascade Thinks

The method does not occur in prose alone. The initial screenshot, the generated research board, the essays, tables, diagrams, prospective zine, and later lecture or workshop form a media cascade. Cascade does not mean packaging one stable content for multiple channels. Each medium performs a distinct cognitive operation. The screenshot gathers accidental neighbors. The poster spatializes a constellation. The essay sequences and qualifies relations. The diagram compresses an operation. The zine can restore collision, humor, and tactile pacing.

The first Horse essay demonstrates this reciprocal movement. The poster did not follow the essay as publicity. Its visual field exposed the screenshot as the real scene and forced the prose to abandon a secondary frame. Media moved upstream. The artifact revised the argument that supposedly produced it. Such reversals matter for StudioLab because design does not simply express thought; designed forms can become thought events that return upon their makers.

A successful media cascade therefore preserves translation loss and gain. The table cannot carry Babich's tone; the cover cannot establish Peirce's inferential distinctions; the essay cannot reproduce the simultaneity of the search grid. Rather than repair every medium's limits, the suite uses those limits to generate the next prompt. What one artifact cannot contain becomes the hidden passenger of another.

11. A Protocol for Serial Fourfolding

The Horse Suite suggests a practical protocol without converting the method into a rigid recipe. First, begin with a scene strong enough to resist paraphrase: an image, phrase, encounter, performance, institutional event, or anomalous object. The scene supplies more relations than the initial thesis can contain. Second, let the field proliferate. Produce connections, counterexamples, titles, diagrams, and possible genres rapidly enough for a pattern to emerge.

Third, introduce or recognize the interrupting fourth. It may arrive as a thinker from another archive, a correction of scale, a missing sense, a contrary political stake, or a change of medium. Ask not only what it adds but what prior assumption it subtracts. Fourth, compose a retained landing. Give the current fold enough form, citation, and finish to stand on its own, then stop before the next revelation overwrites its discovery structure.

The cycle repeats, but repetition requires care. Preserve the source status of claims; mark analogies as analogies; distinguish historical evidence from speculative extension; retain the political asymmetries that an elegant model might flatten; and allow a prompt to fail without forcing it into the sequence. Fourfolding does not license unlimited association. It increases the responsibility to show why a relation changes the field.

A final rule concerns timing: zoom out when excitement begins producing indistinction. The signal may appear as too many names in one paragraph, repeated conclusions, a title that cannot name its

actual center, or an urge to treat every discovery as a chapter in the same book. The zoom-out asks which landings already exist, which new essays have become possible, and which fold should remain unopened for now.

12. Coda: The Prompt Looks Back

Marx preferred mechanical motive power because the horse, inconveniently, had a head of its own. The phrase survives as a comic theory of resistance: a living source of power may tire, balk, turn, and refuse the abstraction that measures it. The Horse Suite has repeatedly returned that head to the horse—first against horsepower, then against strategic mastery, hegemonic unity, normative classification, biological enclosure, visual profiling, and philosophical deafness.

The prompt has a head of its own in a different and carefully limited sense. Once introduced into a complex stream, it enters relations that neither speaker nor system wholly commands. It can return as image, argument, correction, title, method, or problem. Its effects depend upon archives, interfaces, prior prompts, and editorial decisions. The phrase does not attribute independent consciousness to language. It names the way a compositional event exceeds the narrow intention that launched it.

The method therefore ends where it began: with an object crossing a threshold. A prompt enters as a request. Proliferation gives it passengers. Interruption changes the route. A landing gives the movement form. Then another prompt approaches the gate.

THE PROMPT ENTERS.
THE FIELD PROLIFERATES.
THE FOURTH ARRIVES.
THE LANDING HOLDS.
THE NEXT PROMPT BREAKS IT OPEN.

Notes

1. The sequence discussed here comprises Jon McKenzie and HAL, *The Horse in the Search Engine: Trojan Metrics, Hidden Space, and the Galactics of Yes; Who Tells the Horse? Arendt, Schürmann, and the Common Object of Broken Hegemony; The Horse Passes: Butler, Ronell, and the Test Drive from Queer Theory to Gay Sci-Fi; Life Death Rides Through the Gate: The Trojan Vector and Woesean Humanities; and Hear the Horse: Babette Babich and the Sound Profile of Gay Science* (StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports, Horse Suite I-V, 2026).
2. The short quoted prompts come from the StudioLab working dialogue that generated the Horse Suite in July 2026. They function here as primary process documents rather than polished theoretical propositions.
3. On abduction, see Charles S. Peirce, 'Deduction, Induction, and Hypothesis,' *Popular Science Monthly* 13 (1878): 470-82; and Peirce, 'Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction,' in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 226-41.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 25. Whitehead calls propositions 'lures for feeling'; the present essay extends the phrase toward prompt-driven composition without equating computational generation with Whiteheadian feeling.
5. The contrast between arborescent closure and open, relayed composition also resonates with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25. Serial fourfolding, however, names a distinct StudioLab practice centered on retained landings and eventful interruption.
6. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), develops the interrelation of cultural, organizational, and technological performance. The present account places generative prompting and artifact cascades within that expanded performance field.
7. Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D'Ambrosio, *You and Your Profile: Identity After Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), especially chap. 2. See also Jon McKenzie and HAL, 'Profelicity: Profelicity after Austin, Goffman, Confession, and the Black Hole Self,' *StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports* 11 (2026). Prolificity and proflexity remain StudioLab working terms rather than concepts attributed to Moeller and D'Ambrosio.
8. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), chap. 15, sec. 1. Marx remarks that horse power performs poorly in part because a horse 'has a head of his own.'
9. On the media cascade as reciprocal discovery rather than downstream packaging, compare Jon McKenzie and HAL, *The Horse in the Search Engine*, especially the discussion of screenshot, poster, and essay as mutually transforming forms.
10. 'Fourfolding' here describes an operational composing practice. It should not be confused with a claim that all phenomena possess one fixed four-part structure, nor with a reduction of Heidegger's fourfold, Schürmann's broken hegemonies, or other philosophical quaternities to a generic design template.

Bibliography

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin, 1976.
- McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- McKenzie, Jon, and HAL. *Hear the Horse: Babette Babich and the Sound Profile of Gay Science*. StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports, Horse Suite V. 2026.
- . *Life Death Rides Through the Gate: The Trojan Vector and Woesean Humanities*. StudioLab Artificial Intelligence Reports, Horse Suite IV. 2026.

THE HORSE PASSES

TROJAN METRICS / HIDDEN SPACE / GIFT-POISON / TEST DRIVE / LIFE DEATH / HORSE METRIC

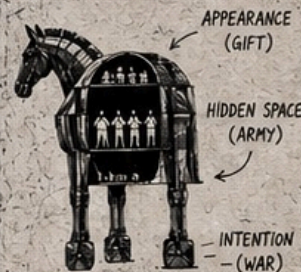
NOT JUST
A HORSE.
☐ A FOLD.
☐ A GAP.
☐ A PATH.
☒ A TRICK.

1. SEARCH ENGINE
2. COMMON WORLD
3. THE HORSE PASSES
4. LIFE DEATH
5. HEAR THE HORSE
6. THE PROMPT
HAS A HEAD OF
ITS OWN



THE HORSE
WALKS THROUGH
TIME AS ITS OWN
FOOTNOTE.

The search
is the factory
of evidence.



ALGORITHM
DELIVERS.
DISCERNMENT
YOU CHOOSE.

christopher nolan odyssey trojan horse



WE ENTER
THROUGH
A QUESTION,
WE EXIT
THROUGH
A TRACE.

A PUNK ZINE
FROM THE SIX
RETAINED
LANDINGS.

THE HORSE IS THE ARGUMENT.

SEARCH • STORY • PASSAGE • TRANSFER • SOUND • METHOD

01

SEARCH / STORY / PASSAGE

NOT JUST
A HORSE.
☐ A FOLD.
☐ A GAP.
☐ A PATH.
☒ A TRICK.

FROM SEARCH ENGINE TO COMMON WORLD TO TEST DRIVE.

1. THE HORSE IN THE SEARCH ENGINE



A common object appears
through circulation: screenshot,
still, rumor, review, fan image,
algorithmic neighbor.

The horse becomes
a shipping container
for images.

2. WHO TELLS THE HORSE?



DEMODOCUS
(SINGER)

ODYSSEUS
(LISTENER)

ARENDT:

action becomes
history when
another tells
it back.

SCHÜRMANN:

every hegemony
contains
a horse.

THE HORSE ESCAPES ITS MAKER.

3. THE HORSE PASSES



THE CITY
(THE NORM)

THE GATE
(THE TEST)

THE HORSE
(THE PASSAGE)

BUTLER:

the horse
passes by
citing the norm.

RONELL:

the test
returns on
the tester.

THE CITY FAILS. THE TEST RETURNS.

SEARCH

COMMON WORLD

PASSAGE

02

TRANSFER / LIFE DEATH / SOUND

NOT JUST
A HORSE.
☐ A FOLD.
☐ A GAP.
☐ A PATH.
☒ A TRICK.

From membrane to vector to hoofbeat.

4. LIFE DEATH RIDES THROUGH THE GATE

WALL



MEMBRANE



CITY



HOST



HORSE



VECTOR

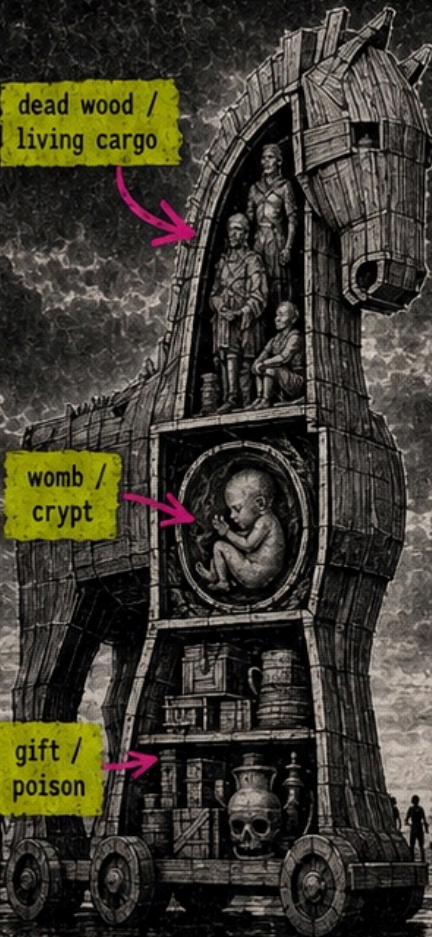


Woese: after the tree,
before the world.

Horizontal transfer,
not pure descent.

The city incorporates
what rewrites it.

DERRIDA: LIFE DEATH



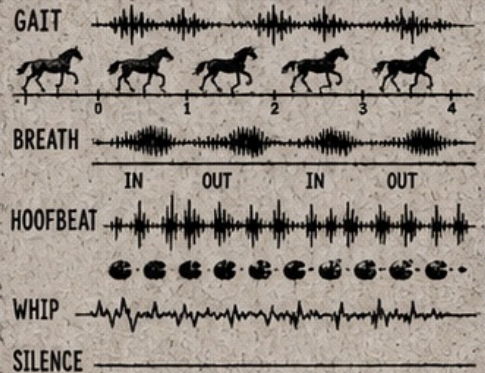
LIFE DEATH
RIDES THROUGH
THE GATE.

5. HEAR THE HORSE

BABETTE BABICH



NIETZSCHE
+ HORSE



Babich restores the horse's
sound profile: gait, breath,
hoofbeat, whip, silence.

Horse metric = force,
cadence; ethics.

Thumbnails become profiles;
prolificity feeds profligacy.

TRANSFER • LIFE DEATH • HEAR THE HORSE • YES YES

03

THE PROMPT HAS A HEAD OF ITS OWN

SERIAL FOURFOLDING / RECURSIVE ABDUCTION / RETAINED LANDINGS

1.

A prompt enters as an event.

2.

The fourth term folds the first three differently.

3.

Keep the landings intact so the surprise remains visible.

4.

Synthesis should preserve the shocks that made synthesis possible.

1 SEARCH

2 STORY

3 PASSAGE

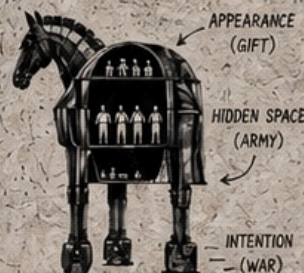
4 TRANSFER

5 SOUND

6 METHOD

NOT JUST
A HORSE.

- ☐ A FOLD.
- ☐ A GAP.
- ☐ A PATH.
- ☒ A TRICK.



ALGORITHM
DELIVERS.
DISCERNMENT
YOU CHOOSE.

THREE MINOR THEORIES



PROLIFICITY

many generated possibilities



PROFILICITY

the profile as social interface



PROFLEXITY

flexible movement across profiles and folds

THE PROMPT LOOKS BACK.

YES, YES.

RIDE OR BE RIDDEN.

04

Go FlyLichkeit!

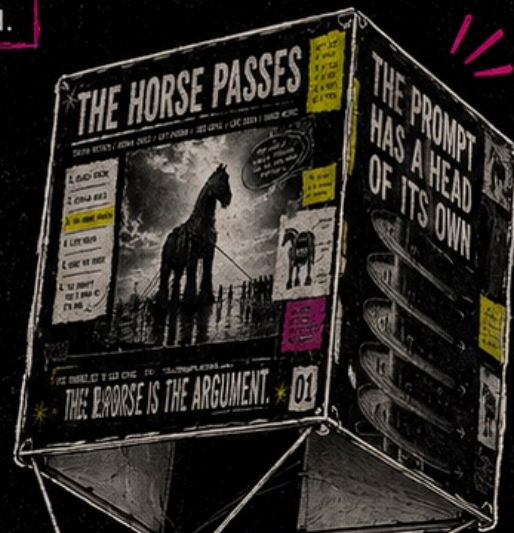
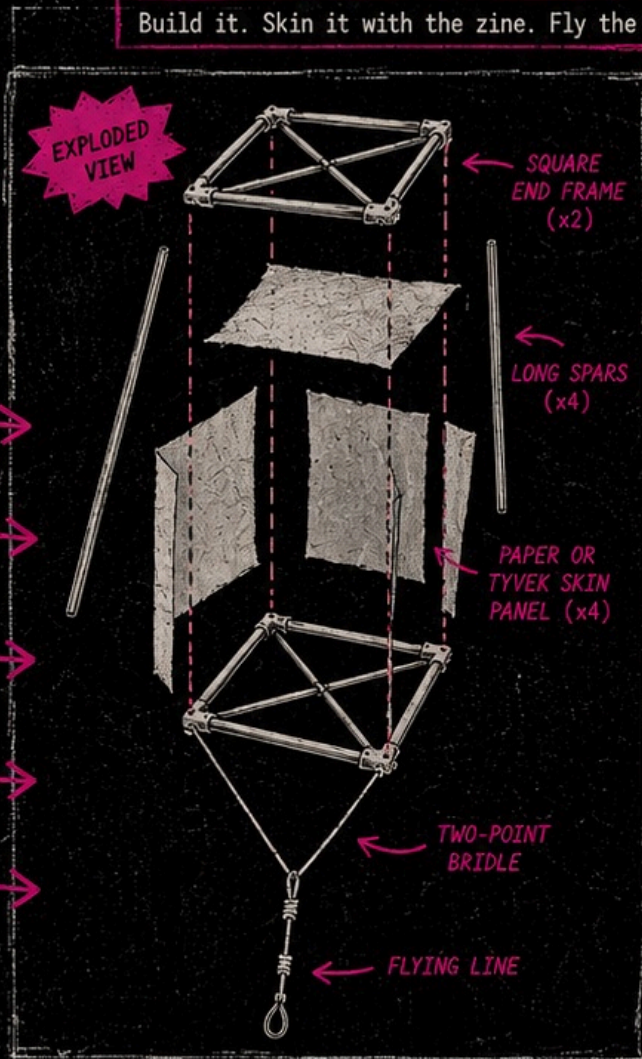
Gay Sci-Fi Kitelichkeit Kite Kit

YOU NEED:

- 8 lightweight spars
- string + kite line
- paper or Tyvek
- tape or glue
- scissors + ruler
- hole punch

Build it. Skin it with the zine. Fly the fold.

1. Build two square frames.
2. Join them with four long spars.
3. Wrap the side faces with zine skins.
4. Leave the ends open for lift.
5. Tie a two-point bridle.
6. Launch into steady wind.



UP YOU GO.
RIDE THE FOLD.

FROM ZINE PAGE TO KITE SKIN:



1. PRINT OR PHOTOCOPY
YOUR ZINE PAGES.



2. TRIM TO SIZE.



3. TAPE OR GLUE
TO PAPER OR TYVEK.



4. WRAP ONTO
THE KITE.

SUGGESTED SIZE

30 x 30 x 60 cm
(12 x 12 x 24 in)

FLY SAFE

Open field only.
Avoid storms,
roads, trees,
and power lines.

RIDE THE AIR. FLY THE FOLD.

MeTanoia Playground

StudioLab

"PLAY is the lab where we unlearn to learn again."

Care is a route

we wander to make cure.

maps hold memory

THE GROUND REMEMBERS.

SONG KEEPS US ALIGNED.

healing is cosmic work.

WE WITNESS.
WE REMEMBER.
WE IMAGINE.
WE PLAY.

Labyrinth
nothing is linear here.
get lost.
find more.

Serpentine
follow the curve.
trust the uncurling.

The Fall / Cliff
risk reminds us we are alive.

border between play & thought.

RETURN is a DREAM we KEEP.

every path can hold the others

Rock Garden
step gently.
listen to the stone.

Cosmic Egg
crack open.
enter the unknown.

Cloud Machine
make weather.
make wonder.

String Fingers
climb.
pluck.
become vibration.

Care Station
rest. repair.
recharge.

Witness Bench
sit. watch.
hold the story.

Dorita's Doric Doorway
pass through.
leave different.
return wiser.

StoryX Path
every step a story.
every story a step.

Toryx Switch
choose.
switch.
transform the map.

Helix Spiral
descend.
turn.
rise changed.

Pablo's Frame Shop
reframe.
reshape.
reimagine.

Haunted House
enter if you dare.
leave what you carry.

play is rehearsal for new worlds

WE BUILD TOMORROW WITH TODAY'S PLAY.

shadows teach us how to see.

beauty is our act of defiance.

Children paint tomorrow.

Future-Present Space
where we practice what's possible.

The Playground

A StudioLab Performance Cosmography

- MAP KEY
- Path / Route
 - Portal / Threshold
 - Witness Point
 - Care Station

This map is not fixed.
It changes with us.
Draw your own path.
Add your own place.
The playground is alive.



beyng.com
14BC Gallery NYC

performingspace.org

