

Effects



Number 1

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EDITORS

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NEW EFFECTS

In recent years there has been some discussion of a new materialism in art, taken to mean a new overcoming of the oppositions between images and bodies, words and things, ideas and materials, discovering new aspects of the world as it really is. From the legendary illusions of the ancient painter Parrhasius to the transparent Celadon glazes of Goryeo Dynasty pottery to the perfect commodities of Holbein, visual art has excelled in concealing the physical structure of the world and its transformation by human labour. And what art has been able to conceal, it has also wanted to un-conceal. The first issue of *Effects* is devoted to this double capacity. A recent series by the artist Nancy Lupo provides an emblem for the wish to un-conceal:

In America, Rubbermaid® BRUTE® containers are ubiquitous, meaning that they can be found all over the place, in malls, hospitals, parks, and prisons. For this reason they are also hard to see. Factually speaking, this is the opposite of a hallucination.

The materials of the artwork, in their appropriation and transformation by the artist, have been made socially visible, as if for the first time, becoming a reflection on their own former invisibility and of the regimes that decide what is made visible. The logic of this artwork is analogous to the claims often made for radical philosophy: it reveals the mechanics by which some things are made visible and others invisible and, therefore, can make the world *as it really is* visible for the first time.

The story of modern art can be told according to the wish to un-conceal. The invention of mathematical perspective in fourteenth-century Italy brought about a new means by which space was projected into a realm beyond the surface and materials of a painting. Art became dependent on the perpetuation and improvement of this illusion, until at least the nineteenth century, when a series of avant-garde movements promised to destroy systems of representation. This played out in a series of revolutions in style and method: Impressionism reduced phenomena to the subjective perspective of the observer, Cubism offered an impossible vision of the object from all sides, imagining a mathematics that transcended the physical act of observation, Surrealism promised to discover the survival of unconscious fantasy in the observer, and abstraction claimed to finally reveal the true ground of the artwork. These experiments took place under the sign of philosophical materialism.

For centuries, materialism has been the name of a dominant method of producing truths and associated with the narrative of the advancement of philosophy towards a world free of illusions. The materialist takes an object (an idea, a concept, a feeling, a thing) and exposes its hidden material causes. The name “materialist” originates in the philosophical debates of the seventeenth century, when philosophers such as Hobbes and Descartes were accused of being atheistic materialists because they made claims about nature that were perceived to be incompatible with the doctrinal priorities of the church and its curators. Despite with association with atheism, the promise of materialism recapitulates one of the most powerful messages of Christianity: “there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed.” (Matthew, 10.26.) Alongside Christian doctrine, materialism offered to colonialists the epistemological confidence with which to weaponize the distinction between truth and superstition, convenient for dominating and controlling foreign populations.

The heretical name of materialism was adopted by philosophers in the eighteenth century who explicitly opposed institutional religion and wanted to militate for a new secular state. Materialism became the sign of philosophy’s heroic struggle against religion to capture truth once and for all. In the nineteenth century, the early writings of Marx provide a passionate defence of materialism. Needing an enemy to think against, he cast the idealist in the role of the teacher who would be taught the errors of his ways, and the followers of the idealist, naïve protesters who fell in love with their own “world-shattering phrases” instead of engaging in the difficult business of actually changing the world. After Marx, materialism became a name for the true revolutionary mode of thinking, and idealism a fantasy that permitted the masters of the world to remain in place. In the twentieth century, developments in physics informed a new skepticism towards totalizing pictures of matter. Stalin dismissed quantum physics as a form of idealism, wishing to preserve the supremacy of the official materialism inherited from Marx and Lenin.

The new materialism of the twenty-first century turns out to be an enthusiasm for taking the side of the object, forgoing the old difficulties of psychology and ideology. Sustained by the hunger for novelty of contemporary art cliques and academics, it seems to forget its commitment to struggles against existing suffering. To speak with precision of a new materialism risks resuscitating a dogmatic terminology, but assuming the plural form popular with academics to talk of new materialisms, in keeping with a neo-liberal relativism about truth claims, predestines them to be no more than so many pseudo-materialisms. This apparently radical new way of approaching the things themselves is in danger of mistaking its own historical conditions for the limits of truth.

Some artists and poets have kept faith with the radical heritage of materialism, working towards better pictures of the physical structure of things and the processes of labour, in the hope of participating in the transformation of social life. Others have made a virtue of pseudo-materialism, developing practices that magnify or distort false pictures in order to make their deceptions visible. These two distinct practices are held in tension in this journal's focus on *effects*, understood as a force; a result; a surface phenomenon; a symptom; an invisible activity; a category of historical explanation; a psychological response; an aesthetic experience; an efficacy. The works gathered in this journal include various and recent efforts to produce thrilling new aesthetic effects and serious reflections on contemporary aesthetic production. They are united less by an artistic identity than by what their effects want to oppose: the illusions of the hegemonies that hold so much of the world in place.

This issue presents new artworks by Kevin Beasley, Thomas Hutton, Clementine Keith-Roach, Nancy Lupo, Lakshmi Luthra, Patricia Treib and David Whelan; short stories by Stacie Vos; poetry by Aisha Sasha John, Oliver Southall and Florence Uniacke; and essays by Chris Carlton, Esther Leslie and Melanie Jackson, Nicolas G. Miller, Christopher Page, Orlando Reade, Matt Rickard and Jeffrey Stuker. Whether it is a Rubbermaid® BRUTE® container or the dull glint of a pewter dish or an orchid found next to a bus stop, aesthetic experience provides thought with a point of departure, beginning with the material and the sensory, and taking us where we do not yet know.

Christopher Page & Orlando Reade
January 2018

ORGANLUST

Clementine Keith-Roach

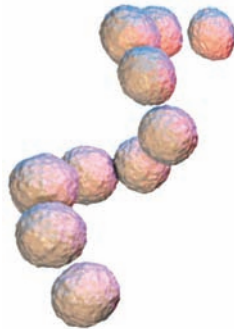


MILK MULTIPLES

Melanie Jackson & Esther Leslie



Milk is many things, as might be expected of something that appears to have been with us, for us, of us, from our very beginnings. It is dispersed into multiple histories, for it has in each moment the capacity to be various, to be other to itself, to be always made anew. Milk possesses the ability to present itself variously and in each circumstance displays diverse properties. It can be liquid, solid, powder or, emulsion. It can be poured, pressed, cast or, extruded. It is formless, but can take on any form. It takes on shapes, the shapes of others, the shape of its vessel, or the shapes pressed into it when in solid form as butter or ice-cream. Milk is indexical. It evades shaping too. Milk is other to itself. Milk has no limits, spilling and flowing, dispersing, seeping. It condenses and evaporates. It hardens and drips. Milk acts as a liquid or a crystal or something in between.



Milk is a sheer material force and the complexity of its physical properties and its chemical composition means that the instrumentalisation of its qualities has never been an easy task. Though milk is a primal substance, it is also a matter that is ever invented anew, socially annexed, and so it is fraught. Milk has generated a busy

activity of human and bovine transformations. It has lent itself to reformulation, regimentation, innovation—the rules of the nanny and the boss, the technologist and the venture capitalist and; to every kind of flow that the economy demands.



Separating Milk

Separation is a capacity contained within milk. Milk separates. Skimmed milk is separated from cream, curds from whey. Milk separates itself, if left to sit in a container for some time. The cream rises to the surface and can be skimmed off by hand, or the milk drained from below. Machines with centrifugal spin were invented to accelerate the process, with added hand cranks and, then, motors. This separation into parts is only one of the many separations in which milk is involved. Separation is at work in the distancing or abstraction of milk from the female mammal's body by various means. Separation abounds in the milk industry whereby calf is parted from the cow, and the milk is extracted from animal parents for human consumption. Milk extracted or abstracted is a liquid representation of an annihilation of nature over time. In producing cows' milk for humans, there is no seasonal cycle related to gestation. Rather, there is the endless time of ever-increasing and ever-adapted milk yields. This is the time of the market, production and circulation. Production time is decoupled from the idea of limits and insists that what is profitable must be available at all times. Milk flows across the political body, its stream a symbol of the progress and perfectibility of modern times. The animate properties of milk, its ability to separate and transform into a plethora of shapes and constituents, propels it into a cascade of separations and re-combinations, makes it available for extrusions, extractions and abstractions. Milk has passed through relationships with various technologies, tools and vessels: milking hands, clay, wood, metal, electrically powered machines, robots, and now there are separations of the liquid that is milk at the smallest scale, when it is rendered in relation to the microbe, the cellular and the genetic.

The contemporary abstraction, separation and technical processing of milk is mirrored in the aseptic geometries of plastic cartons, Tetra Pak pyramids and tubs of whey powders with their holographic mytho-scientific branding. There exists packaging that stands geometric and slick with nothing but the fat percentage content in

Milk Multiples

large figures emblazoned on it. Abstracted cows formed of milk splashes or a cartoon sketch curve round the cartons' corners. Much as it is abstracted and separated, milk is also a substance that comes in close and presents something concrete. There are countless hand-drawn bucolic scenes or tidied-up photographs on dairy packaging. These realistic images—of cows and fields, skies, clouds and mountain ranges—wish to persuade us that this milk is a gift of nature, Mother Nature. It insists that nothing came between the contents and the green grass, and nothing separates us off from Nature. Representations on the packaging and the forms of the container reinforce sentimentalised versions of nature, using historical techniques and mimetic representations. Alternatively, they bask in the alienation created in commodity chains that lead from cows to humans, foregrounding the technologies of production and the triumph of invariant standardisation.

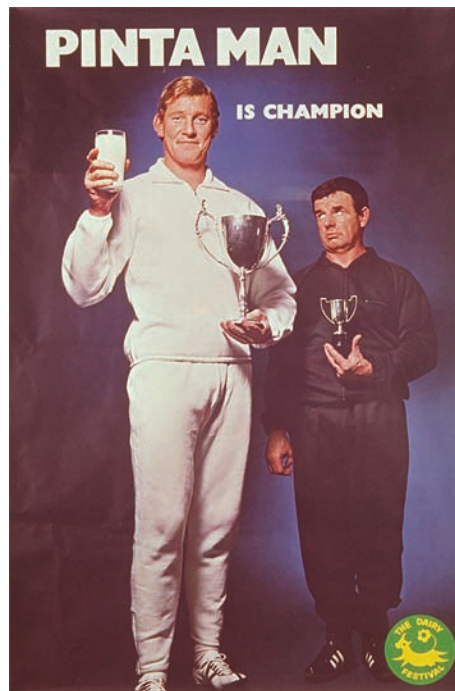


A separation occurs between nature and culture, as milk is caught up in the dairy industry. As commodity, milk is made into an exchange value, fully separate from its existence as use value. Separation may also be conceived of as part of the process of individuation. In that regard, separation is our situation. We separate from our caregivers, having passed through the nexus that milk provides. A breast may be a world to the baby, one that may not be perceived as separate from the infant, in the infant's eyes at least. Baby, world and breast are one. The milk might arrive in the baby's mouth in another way, through another object that is part of the world and perhaps part of the self, such as a bottle. But there always comes a time, when that breast, that bottle does not suffice, for the infant, or for the caregiver, and it is substituted by the glass, the cup, the vessel that is so discernibly separate and separating.

As much as it lends itself to separation, milk also mingles. Milk is a stuff of re-combination. This milk, which is object of industry, becomes a subject, an agent. Milk is bio-responsive. In breastmilk, the mammary gland creates watery, sweet colostrum

for the first days of a baby's life, gradually adding fats and proteins. Later it fabricates sugars not to nurture the baby, but rather to encourage the bacteria that need to be generated in the baby's gut. Maternal antibodies temporarily decline in this phase to assist the growth of the bacteria—and reinstate themselves when the bacteria reach an optimum level.¹ Mammalian milk adapts to each phase of growth of the offspring. If a nursing child is ill, the milk provided will adjust its composition, conveying antibodies and leukocytes, having responded to absorption of saliva in the mammary receptor glands.² Anecdotally, mothers report shifts in its hue when this occurs.³

Male Milk



© The Dairy Council

- 1 Chiara Cerini; Grace M Aldrovandi, "Breast Milk: Proactive Immunomodulation and Mucosal Protection Against Viruses and Other Pathogens," *Future Virology* vol. 8, no. 11 (2013) pp. 1127-1134.
- 2 Saad S. Al-Shehri, Christine L. Knox, Helen G. Liley, David M. Cowley, John R. Wright, Michael G. Henman, Amitha K. Hewavitharana, Bruce G. Charles, Paul N. Shaw, Emma L. Sweeney, and John A. Duley, "Breastmilk-Saliva Interactions Boost Innate Immunity by Regulating the Oral Microbiome in Early Infancy," *PLoS One*, vol. 10, no. 9 (2015).
- 3 Amy Packham, "Mum's Breast Milk Changed Colour When Feeding Sick Baby," *Huffington Post* (23 February 2016).

Milk is polymorphic with an inclination for promiscuous collaboration—whether it be with bacteria, with cartoon avatars, with economics, pornography, racial politics or genetic re-calibration. Milk acts. Milk mingles with people. It catalyses—as its lactic acid does when it triggers processes of transformation. Milk appropriates life to itself. It appears as an elemental fluid—like semen, like ojas, like soma. In Vedic literature, milk is seen as a virile liquid, a kind of female semen. Semen itself is called bright milk. Some people think that in extracting semen, men are milked, which in tapping their seminal fluid, saps them of their strength.⁴ Man-milk is another name for cum.

Milk is masculinised, made a property of the male. Peter, in the New Testament, writes of the pure spiritual milk of God, or, to take other translations, the verbal or rational, undeceitful milk.⁵ This is craved by all Christians to nurture their life in Christ. This unadulterated spiritual milk is also identified in the course of Peter's letters as a seed or sperm, that is to say, the catalyst of belief becomes seminal. This confusion of milk with sperm might be paralleled with the capture of enlivenment by the man in the philosophy of the Stoics. For them, the Logos Spermatikos, the seminal word of God, produces order in the chaotic flux of the world through its fecundation of inanimate, passive matter. Reason is something sown by a property of man. That milk and feeding on the part of a caregiver, a female one dispensing from her breast, might be the origin of language, communication, sensibility is occluded.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote *The Poem of the Milk Dress*, in 1937. This 'words in freedom' poem, dedicated to Il Duce Mussolini and published by the propagandistic publicity office of the largest Italian Viscose manufacturer, was a celebration of futurist milk. Futurist milk was the milk of the autarchic fascist future that had been made real by the invention of Lanital, a casein-based artificial fibre of blazing whiteness.⁶ It was a transformed substance for the new Italy of electrical power-system grids, motorway networks, future fabrics and ultralight, brilliant, lasting new metals and glass. This augmented milk was adequate to Mussolini. It was milk made by man, by a man or men, milk cut away from Nature and made national instead. It was milk made martial, strong, its weaknesses removed, a milk that did not decline (except it did, when it got damp and gave off a sour smell, and, in actuality, it grew weak and stretchy over time). Lanital was wrought of Italian milk ripped from the domain of nature and made into an industrial force, better than nature, modernised, displaced from farm to factory, revitalised for the purposes of annihilation. The poem in praise

4 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 33.

5 1 Peter 2:2.

6 Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "The Fabric of Modern Times," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Autumn, 1997) pp. 191-245.

of Lanital by Marinetti was accompanied by Bruno Munari's photomontages of human intestines and stomachs with industrial boilers, brimming milk, flowing tanks and aerial squadrons. Lanital, the army and the state march towards new horizons. Marinetti's poem begins: 'Milk milk freshly milked I drink milk in an iron cup/I am baked an Ethiopian thirst burns my throats a friend gave me the miraculous present of a can of luminous concentrated paradise'.⁷ Marinetti's poem sings praises to 'the ideal European milk' which responds to the command uttered by Mussolini 'Milk divide yourself'. The milk yields to factory process: the poem describes how casein is separated, cajoled into solid masses, then spun into luminous threads and these filaments are industrially woven, or gridded, eventually into fabrics. This fabric Lanital is described as a 'hard man', a solidified cheese form, whereby cheese, analogy for the moment of human origin, a fixing by the male seed of the uterine blood into an embryonic person. The processing does not stop there. The human must be collectivised. Lanital is described as a heroic nation: 'And let this complicated milk be welcome **power power power** let's exalt this **MILK MADE OF REINFORCED STEEL/ MILK OF WAR/ MILITARIZED MILK**'.⁸

Breastmilk is the only fluid created by the human body that science has presumed across the ages to have exceeded. It is not until the twenty-first century that the full complexities of human milk begin to be apprehended. It is subtle, responsive, biodynamic: an adaptable, multi-purposed liquid, which is emulated and subject to optimisations. Despite historical claims and efforts to improve on the fluid, despite the addition of vitamins, prebiotics, probiotics, omega 3, conjuring up versions that are organic, 100% lactose, GMO-free, palm-oil free and so on, no such task of supersession has been accomplished.

Technological processes for separation allow for the ubiquity of formula milk. Formula milk is nowadays couched in the language of the technically advanced upgrade, genetically and bio-technologically optimised to emulate the smartness of breastmilk—mirrored in brand naming. These are resonant of growth and transcendence: 'Optimal', 'Advantage', 'Humana', 'Platinum' 'Gold'. There are promises of great futures and social advantage. In Asian markets, the anglicised brand names reflect the market confidence, regulation and corporate standardisation alluded to by suggesting Western origination—combined with aspirational technophilic fantasy: 'Smart Baby', 'Gene-Plus', 'Nu-Gene', 'Neo-Baby', 'Neo-Kid'. In all this, there is an imperative of intelligence, improvement and insinuated is a transfer of smartness from milk substitute substance to baby brain. Where these do not suffice, the Western imports

7 Schnapp, p. 237.

8 Ibid, p. 238.

Milk Multiples

from Nestlé, Danone, Mead Johnson Nutrition and Abbott are available at a vast premium, way beyond anything paid in the West.⁹ These too promise the transfer of some sort of advantage in a highly competitive, globalised environment. Just like the smart phone, that is smarter than us and makes us smart, milk is smart—technically augmented—and makes for smart babies. There are also breast pumps ‘featuring new iQ Technology’; the pitch is: the pump’s memory chip makes it smart, but the name also plays on claims that human milk, like fortified formula milks, raise I.Q. scores.



Smart Baby (Production Still, *Deeper in the Pyramid*)
Melanie Jackson 2017

Recent research into cockroach milk, a pale yellow liquid that seeps from the brood sac of a Pacific beetle and crystallises in the gut of the embryonic beetle roach, proposed it as a protein-rich ‘superfood of the future’.¹⁰ Three times richer in calories than buffalo milk, an extremely protein- and calorie-rich milk, four times more nutritious than cow’s milk, a relation between human and non-human milks is extended the insect world, and researchers attempt to reverse-bioengineer it for mass production, possibly as a supplement. This dense food is not designed for wealthy mouths.

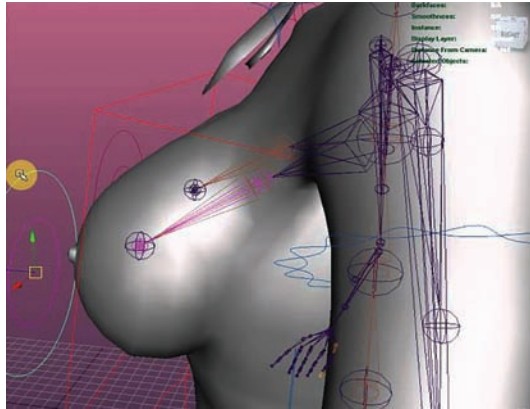
9 The Changing Markets Foundation, *Milking It: How Milk Formula Companies are Putting Profits Before Science* (Online: October 2017) p. 59.

10 Jacinta Bowler, “Scientists Think Cockroach Milk Could Be The Superfood of The Future,” *Science Alert* (Online: 25 July 2016).

Melanie Jackson and Esther Leslie

Milk and Mess

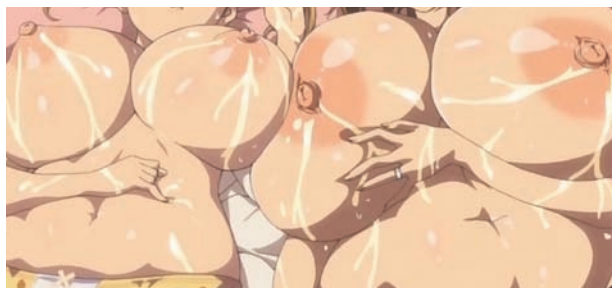
Once the milk is separated from the feeding baby—conceptually or for purposes of representation—it is available for pornography. Once it is separated from the breast itself, it fuses with ejaculate, to provide an image ubiquitous in Western advertising over the last twenty years, of a milk-soaked woman in an ecstatic pose.



Rigging Dynamic Breasts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNZw57nC7Cs>

Women are endowed with messy bodies, bodies that seep, bodies that are made problematic. Formula milk and expressed milk extract, separate, and attempt to recombine that problematic fluid into something more streamlined. Bodies become erased in the dynamic of technologically realised reproduction. Modes are sought of imagining breastfeeding and breast milk that obliterate intimacy and bodily exchange. This is why it returns as again and again as pornographica and as excessively visceral fantasy. There is a strange ambivalence about its visibility as a source of nutrition and comfort for babies. As a seeping spurting image for adult sexual consumption, by contrast, in a return of the repressed, lactating breasts form their market niche in the pornographic index: Preggo/Milky or Lacto-Porn.



Anime Babes with Massive Milky Boobs

https://www.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph56bb71e97dfd2

In Japan, maid bars proliferate. In Tokyo and beyond, cosplay waitresses act out servile European maid roles. As an extension of these, there is a well-developed milkmaid based pornography and a pornographic collectables market replete with lactating figurines. Adult males can drink expressed breast milk in the Bonyu Bar in Tokyo, and, for a financial premium, drink directly from source. It has been reported in China that the corruption of the bureaucracy manifests in the attendance of high ranking government officials at orgies held by businessmen. Here the officials accept bribes and favoured activities include the drinking of breastmilk from young nursing mothers for \$800 a go.¹¹

Unreliable Matriarchs

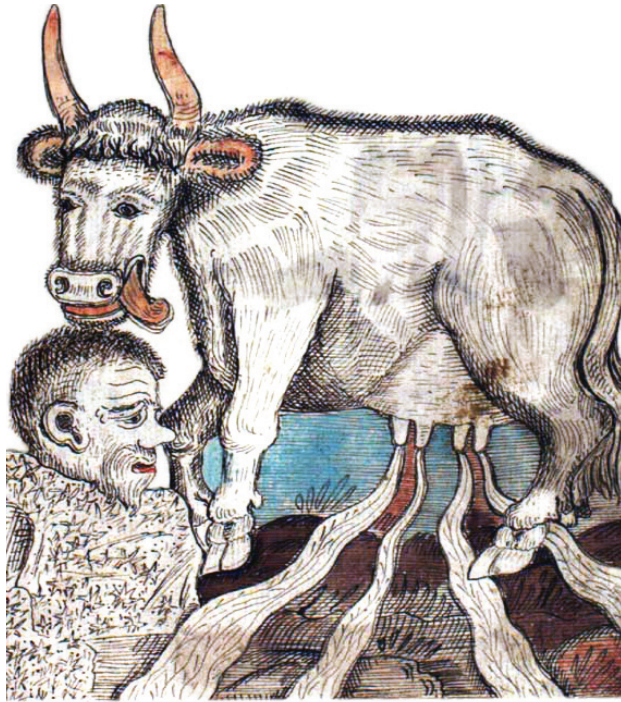
Milk is abysmal, plunging us into abysmal depths. Milk re-combines, breeching a small gap between milk giver and child, an abyss between animal and human, between nature and culture, between self and other, between myth and world. Milk breeches the separations. Milk is a given but it is not always given. Milk for babies has always had to be supplied. How this supply occurs has manifested historically in many different ways, but it has also long been imagined. Imagined is its provision as well as its denial. Separating the supply of milk from women's control, and from the breast, is envisaged in origin myths of the world. Indeed it is there in the origin myths that envision the beginnings of time and space and account thereby for the emergence of the starry Milky Way.

According to the foundation myth of Ancient Greece, the Milky Way was formed when the philandering Zeus held up his lover's baby to his wife Hera's breast as she slept, hoping to suckle a little divine milk for his part-mortal son. Hera awoke to find the usurper upon her and knocked it away. As she did so an arc of milky droplets reached far into space. In Roman myth too, the Milky Way forms from the milk spilt from Opis's breast, in her attempt to save her new-born son Jupiter from being devoured by his father Saturn, King of the Skies. She wrapped a rock in swaddling cloth to try to foil the hungry God. When forced by him to nurse the decoy infant one last time, her milk splattered into the heavens, as her breast pressed against the rock's hard body. Jupiter is taken away and brought up by the Nymphs. The Gods want control of the supply, to wrest it from the unreliable matriarchs. They want to steal away the milk that comes from bodies they would rather not have to rely on.

In Ancient Egyptian myth, the Milky Way was thought to be a pool of milk that flowed from the udders of a heavenly cow. It was deified in the form of Bata, a cow goddess. This cow surrounded by stars was associated with life. Hathor, the Goddess,

11 Joe Weisenthal, "China: Where Building New Government Buildings Are Banned, And Officials Reportedly Engage in Breast Milk Orgies," *Business Insider* (Online: 24 July, 2014).

was presented sometimes as a personification of the Milky Way, a sparkly pool of milk. But sometimes the galaxy was seen as a waterway in the heavens, a Great Nile in the sky, which was prone to flooding, just as was its earthly counterpart each year. In this form, the Goddess, also known as Mehturt, or Great Flood, manifested as a herald of imminent birth, of the breaking of the waters of the amniotic sac.



Auðumbla and Búri

From the 18th century Icelandic manuscript, NKS 1867 4to,
The Royal Library, Denmark

In these myths of antiquity, where our own galaxy is presented as in formation, spilt milk evades the lips of the babies, hits the heavens, creates a cosmos and is codified as milk of the abysmal, of death and destruction. Milk becomes stars, dead twinkling rocks far from the earthly home of suckling babes. What could give life denies it too. These myths found visual form in the paintings of the Renaissance, where the epic squirt of breast milk reaching far into the cosmos is rendered in splashes of oil paint, as in Tintoretto's *Origin of the Milky Way* (c.1575-80) and Rubens' painting of the same imagined scene, from 1637. It was also in this epoch that Galileo Galilei fixed the stars through a lens. The Ancient Greek philosophers had thought that the Milky

Milk Multiples

Way might be a vast collection of stars, too dim to make out individually. But proof came when Galileo pointed his crude telescope at the night skies in 1610, and was able to see that the Milky Way was composed of countless stars. Through his lens the smooth splash of the Milky Way was revealed as a cluster, as points—pixels of light.



The Birth of the Milky Way,
Pieter Paul Rubens 1636-1638 (Museo del Prado)

The galaxy of billions of stars is our milky first home. It is a pool of cow's milk to the Ancient Egyptians. It is a creamy circle to the Greeks. It is the milky place out of which and into which we are made. Its oldest glitter was there at the beginning of time. This spilt milk is fizzing gases and solid rocks, not fluids. The splash is a constellation, is dots, an array, but only the lens can tell us that. These lenses reveal that the milk is everywhere, the galactic structures spill across the skies, so large but they were never seen before in their particularity. The Milky Way is a silver slipstream of turbulence, a galactic minefield. But it is also a silver screen, a place where time's beginnings can be plotted. It is where catastrophic futures are modelled. It emits bubbles, stretching 27,000 light years from its centre. It spurts ghostly jets, after-images from a million years ago—these are still recordable. New wavelengths reveal the oldest shimmer from beginning of time. This vast white spillage is wrapped in a cocoon of dark matter. Is there more dark than gleaming matter?

Pure white milk is an ideal-type. White milk is a stabilisation of something dynamic, a fixing into a single state of something in motion. It comes to us from the supermarket shelf where it waits, apparently radiant with an even whiteness glowing through its glass or plastic vessels. Pure white milk is an exemplar, a model, norm and, as such, it is a product of our fantasy, just as it is a product of industry. Pure white milk is, by and large, a product of fantasy, though industry plays its role in making it an actuality, through homogenisation. The processing of milk into an even whiteness illuminates and enlarges it as a white presence in the world.

Milky Dialectics

In milk, all contradictions can be contained. Out of milk arises all imagination—but not an expansive one for those who imagine milk to be white and only white and so without hope. Hidden in milk, beneath and inside that whiteness, is a multitude, another world or worlds, invisible things and knowledges. Milk fans out widely, from reason to imagination. Any understanding of a phenomenon, such as this one of milk, is achieved through a synthesis of the ‘whole’ entity. This entirety of the thing includes all that is magical, dreamlike, absurd and incredible, as well as all that is, all that is real and lucid. In milk, there is blackness and whiteness and all that might be found in its spectrum of all possible and impossible colours.

Milk is white. Milk is every colour and so milk has also been black, black in the mind’s eye. As Paul Celan put it in his poem from 1944 titled ‘Death Fugue’: ‘Black milk of morning we drink you at dusktime, we drink you at noontime and dawntime we drink you at night, we drink and drink.’¹² Celan’s black milk is a perversity and a necessity. It is other to itself, wholly defamiliarised, a horror that must be imbibed without respite. For Elif Şafak, *Black Milk*, the title of her book on motherhood and writing, is a reference to postpartum depression.¹³ It ‘shows that mother’s milk is not always as white and spotless as society likes to think it is’. Out of that negativity, though, she claims, comes something generative: ‘out of that black milk I was able to develop some sort of ink’.¹⁴ Like Cixous, she might say: ‘I’m brimming over. My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink. Nursing time. And me? I’m hungry too. The milky taste of ink!’¹⁵

12 Paul Celan, “Death Fugue,” *Poems for the Millennium: The University of California Book of Modern and Postmodern Poetry, Volume Two: From Postwar to Millennium* ed. Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) p. 24.

13 Elif Şafak, *Black Milk: On Writing and Motherhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2013).

14 Elif Şafak in interview with Caroline Baum, “Breaking down the boundaries,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (17 March 2010).

15 Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 31.

Milk Multiples

There is another world of black milk, as Marcus Wood calls it, the milk of the Black slave mother, milk that flowed from the breasts of the Mammy and the Mãe Preta into the mouths of white infants for four centuries in Brazil and North America, while their own children were compelled to go hungry or had to be fed on dirty water and animal milk.¹⁶



Monumento à Mãe Preta
Sao Paulo, Brazil, Júlio Guerra, 1953

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