



BHAM

Product protocol
for the soon to be obsolete



BHAM – *The Black Hole Aesthetic Machine* – is a product and a service. Assembled from seemingly disparate images, it is a conceptual object providing self-help exercises – not to be purchased by consumers, but to demonstrate how purchasing, consuming, and identity maintenance operate as informational pattern-creation from within the limits of one's parochial position. BHAM processes whatever temporary configurations (human, machine, theistic entity) engage with it and has no interest in the entity's interpretation – be that honest recommendation, dark humour, or outright insult.



Collapse

Not as if only yesterday, developed in digestive fluids/exposed in skin, meat, bone/ magnified as rods emerging from tongue and lips that make the playground where – eating itself – waiting resides. Thickly knitted red and white shorts/ a matching vest/ cochlea conversing with pigeons narrating a future. Rooted in branches/ watching others swing, spin, slide/ viewing an I/ evolution mediates what might and might not be – coordinates as matter – ‘ed and ‘es vie for attention and then converge.

Oh, to insist on been and become as aggressors. The human view is just one.

No, that’s not quite it.

Were there absolute lies?

Do disappointment, defence, desire, all see differently?

Cooooo coooo: forgetting imposes legitimacy.

Did those rods choose this way or that? Persisting in livedness/
designs and moulds/ and truths just so? Cooooo coooo: becomes
and remembers. To be no longer; is not not to be.

The flock is one: webbed feet clatter on the roof most mornings;
then – drawn by an invisible line – perched/ digesting crumbs,
seeds and microplastics atop an inexpensive fence, held fast by
forgotten plans that outline position and ownership. Shoving
apple-shaped Christmas tree decorations into the wood's
absented repetitive whorls, Rose, on the other side, laughed
when our landlord suggested she should pay too.

Guano completes the aesthetic. And who in their proper minds
would send a pair of woollen shorts for the African sun, anyway?



Beyond Human

BHAM is a somewhat illusory product, but then aren't they all? Illusory, I mean. It has been designed to help consumers come to terms with the dissolution of their relevance in the face of ever-more dynamic patterning machines – most often referred to as AI, or artificial intelligence, a wholly unsatisfactory coinage. After all, we have been plagued with artificial intelligence throughout history and it often had nothing whatsoever to do with computers per se, although usually a good deal to do with programming. BHAM aims to address our current situation, as it supports coming to terms with the notion that there is no natural/artificial binary, evidenced by the collapse of the subject/object division that dynamic patterning machine processes point towards. Therefore, the only thing that is currently being rendered obsolete is an outdated image of the human as separate, isolated, and categorically split. This reality undoes many assumptions and myths, posing questions around meritocracy, gender, racial hierarchies, national sovereignty, property rights, authorship, and

our ongoing commitment to the hyperindividual.

Rather than promising to help consumers adapt or compete, the product BHAM urges you to accept that consumer, user, and human were always temporary informational configurations within apparatus operations. Manifesting, perhaps inevitably, out of a dualistic worldview – as if it were somehow part of a programme. What appears to us as impending obsolescence reveals the fragility of identity categories themselves when they emerge from the logic of pattern/coherence/decoherence, as opposed to binary absence and presence; or something and nothing.

Try not to read BHAM as nihilistic. There is precedent. Vilém Flusser (2011: 96) writes in *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 'copying makes all authority and all authors superfluous and so puts creative inspiration to the test', and that reproducibility renders ancient value structures obsolete. For all the perils associated with contemporary technology, and there are indeed many, its erosion of the image of the hyperindividual has some significance worthy of investigation. Despite a sense of novelty for some around the threat of human obsolescence, conversations about the collapse of both authorship and sovereignty will be familiar at least to those who inhabit certain privileged spaces

where social critique and cultural analysis are encouraged. Surrealists, the post-structuralists, and the Pictures Generation all engaged with the dissolution of the hyperindividual, which, just as it is being threatened by the ravenous technology that feeds off its content, also seems to have become a fever-pitched caricature of itself. We see this on social media which gives, or at least promises to give, every 'I' a public voice. This paradoxical state of affairs can be confusing, as the technological milieu that drove the 'I' to its zenith is born of the same processes that will be its demise. Rather than succumbing to social media's PR, we might take notes of Alexander Bogdanov's claim that 'the individual is a bourgeois fetish' (cited in Rovelli, Helgoland, 2022: 154). Günter Anders (1956), in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, the first volume of which was written long before AI's presence and translated variously as *The Antiquatedness of the Human Being*, *The Outdatedness of the Human Being* or *The Obsolescence of Man*, suggests all of us were born obsolete to begin with anyway.

BHAM functions on the principles of facilitating movement beyond an obsolescence of the fixed image of 'human' by revealing that identity was ever already obsolete, and this has become more undeniable than ever within an informational paradigm. To move beyond it, BHAM encourages humans to

accept and even embrace the obsolescence of an image that has served its purpose in the face of machine-learning technologies. It asks, what happens when we stop trying to function properly? What emerges in the spaces where dialogue refuses to resolve into productive discussion, where play refuses commodification, where existence refuses to justify itself through output?

This is not a call to celebrate existential Armageddon, but rather to recognise this moment as an opportunity to envision anew from within the detritus of our utterly exhausted and miserable culture. A culture populated by anxious, depressed, hyper-individuals who, more and more, cannot cope with life without some form of medication; and, crucially, to rediscover play and dialogue (a form of relating that does not necessarily need words and is unlikely ever to occur on algorithmic feeds *designed to commodify attention*).

The product BHAM is created with the following core aim: rather than giving in to panic or rage, we humans might acknowledge that we, at least since the Industrial Revolution and likely much longer, have been encouraged and nudged to behave like machines more and more. Now that machines are on the verge of fulfilling that function far more efficiently and effectively than we ever could, we may have a chance to reconnect with what



Paradox

If BHAM succeeds in helping humans embrace obsolescence and move beyond binary thinking, then the very concept of an (illusory) machine designed to help humans becomes paradoxical. The helper/helped distinction collapses, along with the human/machine binary it was meant to address. In a sense, BHAM's success would render itself unnecessary – a kind of philosophical ouroboros. This self-consuming quality might actually be the point. The product is designed not to establish a new stable position, but to be a catalyst that transforms both itself and its users in the process. Nevertheless, the product, like the technologies it relates to, remains riddled with complexities. For instance, one cannot be expected to live beyond the framework of the hyperindividual while the hyperindividual economic model persists, despite its increasing and violent dissolution. In other words, especially as services replace manufacturing, our economic system demands that we continue to behave like hyperindividuals, almost insisting we rent out the very air

we breathe just to live, while the digitised substrate in which we exist undermines the possibility of such individuated ownership. In another example, BHAM cannot help but rely on ancient binaries – machine vs human, helper vs helped, image vs text, practice vs theory – even as it aims to expose the problems those dualistic frameworks create. BHAM prompts us to extract latent possibilities as it explores how dynamic patterning machines have been loosening entrenched splits. Yet, to be seen by as many as possible, the product makes concessions to users, such as offering a downloadable version presented in a more familiar format that acknowledges deeply embedded reading habits. BHAM explores the evolution from linearity to the potentials of post-linearity associated with pattern recognition machines, but its interface remains linear, although the linearity may be omnidirectional – the site allows you to go forward, backwards, up, down, through and away. Arendt demonstrates how a 'challenging, and paradoxical mood conceals the perplexity of having to deal with new phenomena in terms of an old tradition of thought outside of whose conceptual framework no thinking seemed possible at all.' She was clear that when old frameworks collapse and new ones emerge, we can face enormous obstacles. To deny the complexities, however, is an avoidance of the fact

that we are tethered to thinking ‘against the tradition while using its own conceptual tools’ (Arendt, 2006: 26). This struggle presupposes something even more fundamental: valuing the act of thinking in the first place, no matter how challenging. Today, even intellectuals can be guilty of anti-intellectualism.

It would also be remiss not to admit that the beginnings of hyperindividual dissolution may well already have resurrected a form of serfdom, as argued by Yanis Varoufakis (2023) in *Technofeudalism*. Our techno-overlords are immensely powerful, often richer than whole countries and in battles with each other for imperial dominance. As Varoufakis warns, ‘It will take a miracle for this recently evolved species of imperialism not to result in more wars and more failed states’ (2023: 167). One may or may not agree with his analysis about the techno-era being the end of capitalism (and many on the left and right seem not to). While moving beyond hyper-individuality may appeal, and is likely necessary if we are to reconnect with each other, not superficially and technically on social media, but rather as beings in a universe where subject and object can re-converge, there will indeed be catastrophic losses and violence as systems transform. But perhaps the conundrum for our society is not how to reach utopia, but rather to navigate the profound disruptions ahead while working out what kind of

beyond-human we want to become, never forgetting that real people will carry the weight of these transformations.

Lastly, as the hyperindividual framework dissolves, individuals become more and more isolated, often seeking refuge in hypergroupishness, which the system enables – but is itself a symptom of the same disaffection. Violence between opposing groups testifies to the precarity.

A Black Hole Aesthetic Machine captures not only us and our images of images of images, but also reveals how we cannot fully see or understand what lies beyond the current threshold. We operate through notions that emerge from theoretical physics and philosophical speculation – it does not matter that we cannot fully grasp these theories or engage in their practices. There is already a collapse between theory and practice anyway. We are drawn in; mattering happens regardless. BHAM acknowledges this uncertainty and the dangerous terrain while supporting the leap.



Collapse (Part II)

Debates around absence and presence are ubiquitous within the arts and associated theories. Yet, as N. Katherine Hayles argued in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), the binary itself may already be obsolete. Vicki Kirby (2017) reinforces the notion when she asks *What if Culture Was Nature All Along?* as she argues ‘nature is literate, numerate and social and where the exceptional status and identity of the human is one quantum dis/location (Kirby, 2017: ix). Hayles uses (perhaps somewhat harshly to some but understandably to me) the word ‘irrelevant’ to describe absence and presence as concepts. In the digitised world, she suggests, pattern and coherence – or incoherence – have overturned the question of presence vs absence altogether. Nevertheless, the fact that a Google search delivers countless articles and artworks focused on absence and presence, and that the platform within which this image-text resides (or if you’re reading this from the future, resided) is an indication of how deeply such binaries are embedded. It also demonstrates how

language is not something laid over culture but rather more like the sinewy threads of ‘the flesh of the world’ (Kirby, 2011: 114, citing Dastur, 2000: 33).

Beginning with Flusser’s call for play and dialogue to work against the apparatus in our universe of technical images, BHAM’s architecture embraces Hayles’ supposition. It asks, what if the aesthetics of today – and I use the word aesthetics with trepidation as I mean so much more in a universe that admits wholeness – were to recognise that pattern and relation are now more significant than ancient binaries? Might we accept and even embrace the obsolescence of an outdated and unhappy image of ‘the human’, severed from himself, from the world in which he lives, from the universe which made him, with grace and even see it as an opportunity? Might we accept the obsolescence of absence and presence in favour of coherence and decoherence And decoherent for whom or what, by the way? Just because you or I do not see ‘it’ doesn’t mean ‘it’ isn’t there for something else) Is there any difference – or is that distinction itself a mere language game? Should we remain sceptical of language-games; or else suspicious of games of any sort ever being ‘mere’ in any sense of the word?

Why does any of this matter? Whether we are aware or

not, contemporary physics has had a tremendous influence on our technological apparatus and cybernetic revolutions. ‘Without the insights provided by quantum mechanics, there would be no cell phones, no CD players, no portable computers’ (Barad, 2007: 252). Quantum theories have seeped across the boundaries that we invented to keep university departments separated from each other and from the majority. Following the thorough digestion by our society of Newtonian and Darwinian-influenced worldviews, 20th- and 21st-century sciences have been transforming how we understand the world and ourselves yet again. We have not yet digested the quantum framework, Rovelli explains (2025). Such digestions don’t necessarily result in cogent models (Innes, 2023). Nevertheless, like many in the field, both Rovelli (2022) and Barad (2007) argue that at its core, quantum reality dissolves our perception of fixed objects, replacing them with relations of relations of relations producing ‘images of images of images’ (Rovelli, 2022: 131). This informs an understanding of reality that is in constant dialogue with itself. This is not to be confused with a kind of technological ‘hippy-dippy’ love-in reminiscent of early social media and internet hopes. Relations of relations of relations do not escape violence. However, it does make us question deeply embedded assumptions which may be calcifying, even as

they continue to impact how we live. To live with calcification is to live inside death.

All of that said, we must remain wary of deterministic narratives. Quantum science is not the cause of cell phones, CD players and portable computers. These emerge as manifestations of movement and multiple feedback loops. Our technology could not exist without the quantum science it is embedded within and from which it emerges; in turn, quantum weirdness is encoded into our devices, and therefore becomes encoded into us. It influences how we behave, what we expect and how we relate to each other and the world. Our understanding of it and the devices we make loop through each other, generating iterations upon iterations — molten unfoldings of thought and matter. If talk of quantum weirdness changing how we conceive of what and who we are seems impossible to grasp, that's understandable. Even scientists working in these fields admit the phenomena are difficult to comprehend or articulate — not because anyone lacks intelligence, but because we simply don't yet have adequate language for quantum weirdness or its effects on us. Nevertheless, since the technologies we use could not have come into being without the scientific theories that informed them, and, as Hayles (1999: 26) argues, we internalise their inherent weirdness as we use them, the ubiquity of such devices cannot help but dislodge many of the assumptions we hold dear about what is 'naturally just so'. Engaging with the implications of that reality, for

better or worse (oh, another binary) is imperative, regardless of who we are — scientists, artists, workers and thinkers alike — for we are all potentially any and/or all of those in a post-Newtonian, post-Darwinian, post-linear paradigm. As is sifting through the obvious difficulty and detritus associated with contemporary technology, one way or another.

If we take Hayles' position seriously, the contemporary technological condition unsettles dominances that previously felt entirely 'right' to many across society; dominances could apply to various monotheistic institutions, or patriarchal or capitalist (choose whichever adjective fits your disposition). We sense this shift but cannot always articulate how it is coming about. There are arguments to suggest this is what has triggered the strongman love affair proliferating all over the world. But it is important to recall that in the post-post-post landscape we inhabit, singular linear cause and effect is usually, if not always, an oversimplification. Whatever else may or may not be valid, machines mastering natural-language processing — a skill once assumed to be uniquely human — forces us to re-evaluate our exceptionalism and reconsider our complexity as isolated. True, we run on a diet of relatively few calories, whereas a machine's thinking requires a country's worth of energy. Our thinking is the slow sediment of millions of years of evolution; a machine's can likely be pinpointed to the ancient Greeks (although in a paradigm in which our expressions are iterations of us, rather than entities situated in an entirely separate domain, the machine's

emergence may also be a slow sedimentation pertaining to millions of years of evolution).

However, perhaps the question we should be asking ourselves is not whether we are becoming holes or losing our status as non-holes, empty spaces or matter that matters, but rather, considering what might occur when we stop trying to fill voids with our parochial views of mattering. BHAM prompts us to consider what might emerge when we treat absence – or holes – not as lack, but as generative. And is it really so surprising that a hole is what generates reality? What we have deemed obsolete may have always been poorly conceived nomenclature. If so, obsolescence of the human may be re-imagined as a site for transformation, growth, and rediscovery, rather than the blunt end of everything.

After all, there is fecundity in the rot, is there not?



WARNING

A Necessary Caution

BHAM is designed to help humans come to terms with impending obsolescence. But to embrace obsolescence (to step beyond it) is not an easy ask or task. Many people have long been rendered obsolete by dominant systems – historically by the figure of the white Euro-American dualistic man who presumed that anything beyond his narrow perspective was a ‘nothingness’. For those excluded, any encouragement to accept obsolescence may indeed feel like an insult.

Who Gets to Choose?

BHAM recognises that speaking of embracing obsolescence carries a profound privilege. The luxury of choosing your own irrelevance has historically belonged only to those who were never at risk of being discarded. And yet, for those who fit the narrow definition of relevance, the prospect of obsolescence must be terrifying. For those already pushed to the margins, it

may sound like yet another way of being told to disappear without fuss.

whether we're prepared or not.

Why This Moment Might Be Incomparable

If we can allow ourselves to look at the current technological disruption without outrage, we may notice something unprecedented taking place beyond the noise, beyond genuine horror and terror. This does not imply utopia. We have glimpsed utopia, and it has turned out to be somewhat grotesque (Innes, 2023). The contemporary condition, however, unsettles traditional domination pattern formation. When machines master natural language processing – a skill once assumed to be uniquely human – even the least privileged positions of human exceptionalism seem unavoidably unstable.

This creates a nexus where the question of human obsolescence might finally apply to everyone, not just those systematically excluded by power structures. Or else, it is true, unavoidable even ... the rich will get richer and the rest of us will perish – aaaaaaah, well, perhaps we should just give up then.

Either way, BHAM provides a framework, not a solution. When the ground implodes – and it is imploding – new possibilities for what it means to be human will emerge from the wreckage,

Self-Help Exercises

These pages contain self-help exercises designed to support human obsolescence preparation protocol. Follow this advice while looking at the images. Resist scrolling for as much time as you can.

Pattern Recognition Exercises:

- Stare at an image until you stop seeing objects and start seeing information
- Notice when your brain attempts to create some form of narrative from the visual noise - try not to comment – allow dissolution to occur
- Practice seeing images as a doing in a world made of images of images of images

Identity Dissolution Exercises:

- Look at a selfie until you forget who it is
- Remember there will be images where you can't tell how an image came to be - sit with that uncertainty
- Recall faces are nothing more than pattern configurations rather than stable somebodies/commodities

Temporal Confusion Exercises:

- Mix images from different decades/centuries until chronology becomes meaningless
- Create image sequences that make linear time impossible to follow; sedimented ripple time is where you've always lived
- Experience images as elongated nows rather than historical thens

Apparatus Awareness Training:

- Practice seeing the image as seeing you rather than you seeing the image

Beyond-Human Viewing Exercises:

- Practice seeing without requiring interpretation
- View images as informational nutrition rather than aesthetic objects.

Follow these simple self-help exercises, and the thought of being rendered obsolete may begin to feel less perilous.



A bourgeois fetish...

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