



(...)



Roadside Picnic

artists as stalkers in forbidden zones
laying the ground for fertile fictions and fragile realities

seeing

debris as species
crystals as portals
plants as companions and lovers

and filling bags of beginnings

(it's Scorpio season and there was a devil's coach-horse beetle in the gallery)

Plot introduction and setting [\[edit \]](#)

Roadside Picnic is a work of fiction based on the aftermath of an extraterrestrial event called the Visitation that simultaneously took place in half a dozen separate locations around Earth over a two-day period. Neither the Visitors themselves nor their means of arrival or departure were ever seen by the local populations who lived inside the relatively small areas, each a few square kilometers, of the six Visitation Zones. The zones exhibit strange and dangerous phenomena not understood by humans, and contain artifacts with inexplicable, seemingly supernatural properties. The title of the novel derives from an [analogy](#) proposed by the character Dr. Valentine Pilman, who compares the Visitation to a picnic:

A picnic. Picture a forest, a country road, a meadow. Cars drive off the country road into the meadow, a group of young people get out carrying bottles, baskets of food, transistor radios, and cameras. They light fires, pitch tents, turn on the music. In the morning they leave. The animals, birds, and insects that watched in horror through the long night creep out from their hiding places. And what do they see? Old spark plugs and old filters strewn around... Rags, burnt-out bulbs, and a monkey wrench left behind... And of course, the usual mess—apple cores, candy wrappers, charred remains of the campfire, cans, bottles, somebody's handkerchief, somebody's penknife, torn newspapers, coins, faded flowers picked in another meadow.^[3]

In this analogy, the nervous animals are the humans who venture forth after the Visitors have left, discovering items and anomalies that are ordinary to those who have discarded them, but incomprehensible or deadly to those who find them.

This explanation implies that the Visitors may not have paid any attention to, or even noticed, the human inhabitants of the planet during their visit, just as humans do not notice or pay attention to grasshoppers or ladybugs during a picnic. The artifacts and phenomena left behind by the Visitors in the Zones were garbage, discarded and forgotten, without any preconceived plan to advance or damage humanity. There is little chance that the Visitors will return again because for them it was a brief stop, for reasons unknown, on the way to their actual destination.







Visionary Fiction

Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. We are living now inside the imagination of people who thought economic disparity and environmental destruction were acceptable costs for their power. It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future. All organizing is science fiction. If you are shaping the future, you are a futurist. And visionary fiction is a way to practice the future in our minds, alone and together.²²

Visionary fiction is neither utopian nor dystopian, instead it is like real life: Hard, realistic... Hopeful as a strategy. Visionary fiction disrupts the hero narrative concept that one person (often one white man, often Matt Damon) alone has the skills to save the world. Cultivate fiction that explores change as a collective, bottom-up process. Fiction that centers those who are currently marginalized—not to be nice, but because those who survive on the margins tend to be the most experientially innovative—practicing survival-based efficiency, doing the most with the least, an important skill area on a planet whose resources are under assault by less marginalized people. Visionary fiction is constantly applying lessons from our past to our future(s).



That's the way everyday goes
Every time we've no control
If the sky is pink and white
If the ground is black and yellow
It's the same way you showed me
Nod my head, don't close my eyes
Halfway on a slow move
It's the same way you showed me
If you could fly then you'd feel south
Up north's getting cold soon
The way it is, we're on land
So I'm someone to hold true
Keep you cool when it's still alive
Won't let you down when it's all ruin

In the wake of a hurricane
Dark skin of a summer shade
Nosedive in the flood lines
Tall tower of milk crates
It's the same way you showed me
Cannonball off the porch side
Older kids trying off the roof
Just the same way you showed me (You showed)
If you could die and come back to life
Up for air from the swimming pool
You'd kneel down to the dry land
Kiss the Earth that birthed you
Gave you tools just to stay alive
And make it out when the sun is ruined

The first cultural device was probably a recipient.... Many theorists feel that the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier.

So says Elizabeth Fisher in *Women's Creation* (McGraw-Hill, 1975). But no, this cannot be. Where is that wonderful, big, long, hard thing, a bone, I believe, that the Ape Man first bashed somebody in the movie and then, grunting with ecstasy at having achieved the first proper murder, flung up into the sky, and whirling there it became a space ship thrusting its way into the cosmos to fertilize it and produce at the end of the movie a lovely fetus, a boy of course, drifting around the Milky Way without (oddly enough) any womb, any matrix at all? I don't know. I don't even care. I'm not telling that story. We've heard it, we've all heard about all the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news.

And yet old. Before — once you think about it, surely long before — the weapon, a late, luxurious, superfluous tool; long before the useful knife and ax; right along with the indispensable whacker, grinder, and digger — for what's the use of digging up a lot of potatoes if you have nothing to lug the ones you can't eat home in — with or before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home. It makes sense to me. I am an adherent of what Fisher calls the Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution.

This theory not only explains large areas of theoretical obscurity and avoids large areas of theoretical nonsense (inhabited largely by tigers, foxes, and other highly territorial mammals); it also grounds me, personally, in human culture in a way I never felt grounded before. So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share in it.

(...)

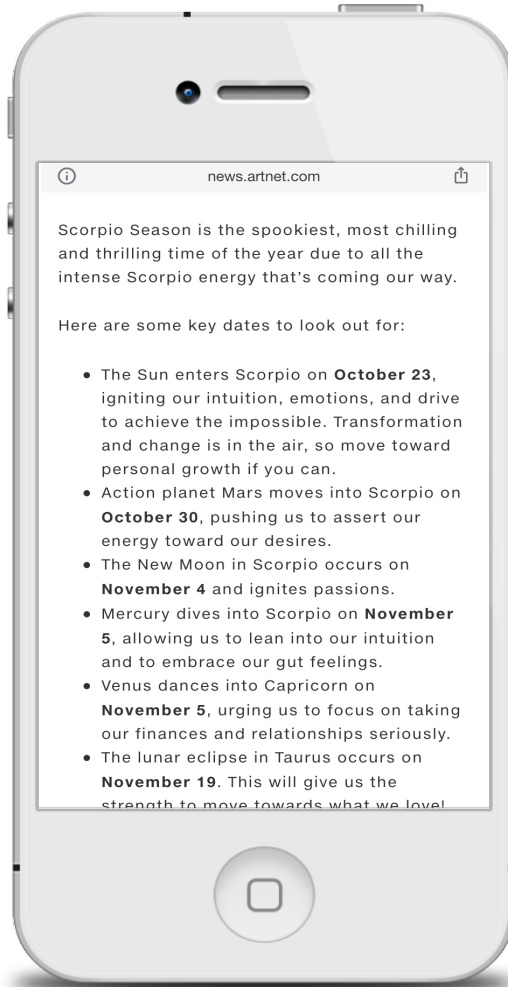
If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solid container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again — if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time.

So, when I came to write science-fiction novels, I came lugging this great heavy sack of stuff, my carrier bag full of wimps and klutzes, and tiny grains of things smaller than a mustard seed, and intricately woven nets which when laboriously unknotted are seen to contain one blue pebble, an imperturbably functioning chronometer telling the time on another world, and a mouse's skull; full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions; full of space ships that get stuck, missions that fail, and people who don't understand. I said it was hard to make a gripping tale of how we wrested the wild oats from their husks, I didn't say it was impossible. Who ever said writing a novel was easy?

(...)

It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality.

Science fiction properly conceived, like all serious fiction, however funny, is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast stack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story. In it, as in all fiction, there is room enough to keep even Man where he belongs, in his place in the scheme of things; there is time enough to gather plenty of wild oats and sow them too, and sing to little Oom, and listen to Ool's joke, and watch newts, and still the story isn't over. Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars.



news.artnet.com

Scorpio Season is the spookiest, most chilling and thrilling time of the year due to all the intense Scorpio energy that's coming our way.

Here are some key dates to look out for:

- The Sun enters Scorpio on **October 23**, igniting our intuition, emotions, and drive to achieve the impossible. Transformation and change is in the air, so move toward personal growth if you can.
- Action planet Mars moves into Scorpio on **October 30**, pushing us to assert our energy toward our desires.
- The New Moon in Scorpio occurs on **November 4** and ignites passions.
- Mercury dives into Scorpio on **November 5**, allowing us to lean into our intuition and to embrace our gut feelings.
- Venus dances into Capricorn on **November 5**, urging us to focus on taking our finances and relationships seriously.
- The lunar eclipse in Taurus occurs on **November 19**. This will give us the strength to move towards what we love!

eking out its existence under desert conditions, is still made of at least 50 percent water. Add to these bodies meteorological

A HAILSTORM, A CYCLONE,
A FRACTOCUMULUS CLOUD,

and geophysical bodies of water

AN ESTUARY, AN OCEAN,
A BILLABONG, A LAKE OF BATS,

and we soon recognize ourselves as watery bodies among watery bodies, all sloshing around in a watery world. To understand ourselves as bodies of water thus also asks that we flush our understanding of what it means to be a "body" free of its anthropocentric hang-ups. Our human individuality is thoroughly irrigated. A *body*, as Deleuze and Guattari insist, is any metastable choreography of matter and meaning—something that can hang on to its physical collateral just long enough to be intelligible. As humans, we have no exclusive claim to the term. I am a body of water, as are you, as is a river, a snow squall, a walrus, a tamarind tree.

ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN DRAWN FROM OTHER
CLOUDS, OTHER OCEANS, AND ARE NOW
REDISTILLED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE
WATERY MASS OF MY OWN FLESH. ONLY NOW
DOES WATER CAPTURE MY FOCUS COMPLETELY.
REWINDING THIS WATER'S JOURNEY TO
THE GLASS IN MY HAND, I WATCH IT FIRST
SLURP BACK UP THE KITCHEN FAUCET, FLOW
OUT THROUGH THE INTAKE PIPE, AND SNAKE
BACKWARDS BENEATH LAYERS OF FOOTSTEPS,
TIRE TRACKS, ASPHALT, AND EARTH UNTIL

IT REACHES THE TREATMENT PLANT ON
WOODWARD AVENUE. IT THEN STOPS BRIEFLY
IN THE FILTER BASIN TO DIVEST ITSELF OF
THE FLUORIDE, CHLORIDE, AND ANHYDROUS
AMMONIA IT ACCUMULATED THERE, THEN
SWIRLS BACK THROUGH THE SEDIMENTATION
TANKS, BACK THROUGH THE RAPID MIX
FLOCCULATORS, BACK TO THE MURKY DEPTHS OF
HAMILTON HARBOUR. BACKTRACKING FURTHER
STILL TO LAKE ONTARIO, THE WATER IN MY
GLASS VARIOUSLY EVAPORATES INTO A WARM
FRONT, SWIMS BACK UP THE DON RIVER,
REVERSES ITSELF INTO A COLD NOVEMBER
DRIZZLE. IT BECOMES SPRINGTAIL,
BOOKLICE, ZEBRA MUSSEL, LAMPREY.

But what is at stake here is more than a common nomenclature. In our shared ontology as watery bodies we also engage in continuous, reciprocal (yet asymmetrical) exchange. Just as we take our watery bodies from other (animal, vegetable, geophysical, meteorological) bodies of water on this planet, we in turn pass our water on to yet other watery bodies, some intimately close to us and others distant and dispersed. We embody the hydrological cycle, but this is not a cycle of mere addition and subtraction. Rather, it is a cycle of continuous becoming and transformation. As subsequent watery bodies take on the water we have passed to them, these bodies transpose our watery traces, and translate them anew. As bodies of water, we are all engaged in multiple and multiplied processes of co-creation. In our common wateriness, we are all, as Donna Haraway would say, *companion species*: we, as the vastly heterogeneous watery bodies that inhabit this world, are all continuously caught up in the multidirectional flows of meaning and matter that make us what we are. We are all along for each other's ride; we are molecularly bonded to one another. No body is



Empreinte as trace, trace as empreinte

Didi-Huberman's investigation into the *empreinte* returns him to a classic deconstructivist position. The *empreinte* is a test of oppositional logic and puts binaries under pressure: contact with or loss of origin? Authenticity of presence or the loss in its reproducibility? Original or copy? Resemblance or dissemblance? Form or *l'informe*? Artistic decision or chance and accident? Same or other? The *empreinte* is part of Didi-Huberman's broader strategy of displacing the metaphysical foundations of a discipline that remains beholden to a privileging of idealism, presence and origin. He clearly signals his proximity to Derrida when he writes, 'Le vocabulaire de l'empreinte recouvre en grande partie celui de la trace.'¹⁴ ('The vocabulary of the *empreinte* covers largely that of the *trace*.') Didi-Huberman does not seek to restore the sensible over the intelligible. He is careful not to consign the *empreinte* to the *other* of the idea and imitation. Instead, he understands the difference between the two terms as chiasmic, an interlacing:

La *partie* se joue surtout au grand jour, et la *contrepartie* se joue partout aux marges ou dans les interstices: dans les ombres ou dans les contre-jours, dans une visibilité trop offusquée ou trop crue, moins apte au discernement, moins lisible. L'empreinte est la contrepartie nécessaire de l'imitation, comme le contact – le *haptisch* dont parlait Aloïs Riegl – est la contrepartie nécessaire de toute dimension optique.¹⁵

The *game* is played mostly in broad daylight, and the *counterpart* is played everywhere at the margins or in the interstices: in the shadows or in the backlit areas, in a visibility too obscured or too raw, less suitable for discernment, less readable. The *empreinte* is the necessary counterpart of imitation, as the contact – the *haptisch* of which Aloïs Riegl spoke – is the necessary counterpart of any optical dimension.

'Roadside Picnic' exhibition at Pada Studios

with works by Anna Spearman, Avleen Kaur, Jack Shearing, Lauren Pirie, Na Liu, Paddy Critchley, Paula MacArthur, Sarah Delaney, Serra Behar, Willie-Meike Brand.

Words gathered by Manon Klein

30/10/2021



Plot introduction and setting of *Roadside Picnic* (1972), a novel written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, which inspired the movie *Stalker* (1979) by Andrei Tarkovsky. Wikipedia.



Lupinus, commonly known as lupin, lupine, is a genus of flowering plants in the legume family Fabaceae.

Lupin beans.



adrienne maree brown. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. 2017.



Frank Ocean. 'Pink + White', Blonde album (Verses 1 & 2 only). 2016



Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (4 excerpts). 1986.



Artnet.com article by Katie White. 'What Does Scorpio Season Have in Store for Artists? An astrologer Offers Tailored Advice for the Zodiac's Most Misunderstood Sign. We spoke with astrologist Lisa Stardust to guide the way. October 22, 2021.



Astrida Neimanis. 'We Are All Bodies of Water'. in *Alphabet City: Water* (ed. J. Knechtel, MIT Press). 2009.



Chari Larsson. *Didi-Huberman and the Image*. 2020.

including a quote from:

Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance par contact*, p.61.