

Some lingering thoughts on *TAHT* / *FUQ*

1. Thoughts that burden me between wakefulness and sleep

I frequently find myself unwittingly lost in the chaotic midst of a tiny island's incessantly excavated innards, harbouring a lingering fear that the outer crust of what is actually an imperceptible underwater mountain peak jutting above the sea will collapse in and on itself at any moment, plunging me into Plato's strange and perplexing reality of his interpretation of the world's surface; a hollow, corroded, and inhabited infinite cavity. To my surprise, as I slip into deep slumber, I slide into the impossibility of an Escherian¹ construction of Plato's reality, all the while believing that I was walking on the inside crust of this enormous hole rather than the surface of a spherical globe, believing that the sea was actually the sky as I peered through the stillness of the reflecting pool² at the sun and stars (Plato, 109A–110A).

As this shift³ in perception sinks in, I feel the chill of the humid underground envelop me and realise the cold reality of my ever-dwindling register of visual detail in its low light, as its dimly projected shadows fail to correctly inform my spatial reading of shapes and their distances. The sounds that reverberate and haphazardly reflect in the bowels of the underground chamber further thwart my attempts to understand the surrounding space and its mazelike structure under such dire conditions, and shifts my perception to new heights of ambivalence, imbuing fear and anxiety through induced claustrophobia, while strangely also instilling a sense of uncertain security and shelter through its allusion to the natural refuge of the hidden world.

This surprisingly familiar feeling of being inside the rock-hewn, subterranean womb comfortably enters me and induces a sense of *déjà vu*, as it replicates the soothing shelter that shrouds me when I enter an overground cave-refuge. Such comfort silences time to a numbing standstill. The gloom of Homer's allegorical cosmos (Akçay, 2019) suspends its enigmatic and dark beauty all around me. Its lingering mist, like miniature worlds, glows in the cosmic rays that eventually filter through the dark galaxy after millennia. Tiny dazzling bubbles of rainbow-coloured splendour float around me like the never-ending dots of Kusama's *Infinity Mirror*⁴, brightening my soul and providing much-needed comfort that not all hope is gone.

The sensation of being inside a cave reminds me of Porphyry's account of Homer's cave's mystical allure as he follows his philosophical thread that caves and caverns were appropriately dedicated to the cosmos, interpreting our planet "... as a symbol of the matter

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._C._Escher

² <https://www.eai.org/titles/the-reflecting-pool-collected-work-1977-80>

³ From being outside, on top of land to being inside and under ground.

⁴ Kusama, Y. (2023). *Infinity Mirrored Room - Filled with the Brilliance of Life* 2011/2017. Tate Modern.

out of which the cosmos is formed" (Akçay, 2019 p. 46). In some ways, such close allegiance to the concept of cosmic comfort in being both inside a cave and in an underground cavity suggests a boundlessness to place, an *apeiron* (Akçay, 2019 p. 47) or infiniteness which points to the place's memory as a defining factor in connection with its physicality, all too well suggesting some fundamental truth in the mind's concocted forming of a personal sense of place, where together, strata of rock and memory forge our experience (Schama, 1995 p. 7).

2. Thoughts that pit my childhood convictions against my modern reliance on technology

TAHT / FUQ is a work that exists at numerous intersections and feeds on uncertainty, since it employs two contemporaneous but distinct vision technologies, video and wireframe animation based on 3D scanning of the underground caverns, to immerse the observer in several realities.

Through the use of video, the work proposes an emblematic return to the cave, an ancestral throwback to the pre-modern, corporeal, and perceptual allure of gradually experiencing the rock-hewn, underground chambers of St. Paul's Catacombs in Rabat, Malta, a site whose cavities and maze-like complexity of corridors instil both the primitive impression of being inside the entrails of animals as well as the primaeval proximity of being close to the gods. The work alternates between situating the viewer in a familiar reality, using video to slowly move them forward within its tunnels, and overlaying the referenced space with a more modern, rational, and disenchanting, (Kosky, 2013) calculated depiction in the form of a wireframe animation.

The audio score's sustained drone further highlights the mystery of this subterranean realm that has beckoned humanity throughout its existence, highlighting the central premise of the work by presenting numerous philosophical questions – *Are we drawn to these underground spaces to ignite within ourselves a state of enthusiasm⁵ that leads to divination, the pursuit of divine knowledge and transcendent experiences? Or are we handicapped by technological innovation and its more sterile delineation of such spaces? Do we need any form of technology to aid human imagination or replace our memory of place? Is the use of technology further undermining the notion of divination as a means by which humans might actually reach the divine, ultimately subscribing to Max Weber's idea (1946) that modernity, with its focus on rationality, science, and technology, has led to a decline in spiritual or mystical experiences?*

⁵ See: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/modern-europe/ancient-history-middle-ages-and-feudalism/enthusiasm>

Above all, *TAHT / FUQ*'s central premise focuses on the concept of enthusiasm (or lack thereof due to technological interference) as promoted by many religions, implying a state in which one is filled with the divine, as it forces us to delve into the depths of natural caves and man-made underground spaces to understand their role in this pursuit. It probes the interplay of the human spirit and the environment itself, as well as the cave's inherent riddle, leaving us wondering whether it is the primordial character of the surroundings or the seclusion from the ordinary world that produces excitement and divinatory experiences.

As we dig deeper into the work's relationship with the underground space's specific and original intent, particularly that of facilitating divination, a paradox emerges, calling into question divination's legitimacy and its role in creating our perspective of the world. One wonders if our modern quest for knowledge, informed by technology, and our forefathers' fervent pursuit of truth, which was largely based on blind faith, both lead to ambiguous experiences and subjective interpretations, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies and confirmation biases.

3. Thoughts that try to make some sense of it all

Our exploration of caves and man-made underground spaces reveals a profound connection between humans, the divine, and the environments we choose to traverse. Whether it's the ageless attraction of natural caves or the meticulously crafted chambers of human creation, these spaces continue to serve as crucibles for divinatory experiences, encapsulating the age-old human quest for the divine. *TAHT / FUQ*'s attempts to nudge us further along our intellectual journey make us wonder if, as tourists in someone else's universe, we are entering these underground spaces to induce in ourselves a state of enthusiasm to indeed attain divination.

In this disenchanted world of technology, we are free from the spell of mysteries to rationally organise our actions and decisions to achieve known ends. Our newfound rational autonomy grants us the capacity to offer lucid and reasoned justifications for all endeavors, effectively making us masters of our own destiny. Through the repetition of the work's never-ending loop, in itself also a byproduct of imaging technologies, an intriguing light is cast on our inquiry, shifting it from one that seeks answers from the vastness of philosophical, psychological, and spiritual inquiry to one that focuses on the timeline of the journey itself, on the transformation that occurs within us during our lifespan as we descend the depths of the Earth as metaphor for the enduring mystery of human existence.

In our own way, our journey into these subterranean realms, like our finite physical life on this planet, engages with our own innermost desires and spiritual yearnings, ultimately to

grapple with the mysteries of existence and to ponder the timeless quest of discovering who we truly are and why we are here.

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References

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