

Day One

open source represent

a selection of poems from *Tao of Totality* (Book 3 of the [Spaces Left Blank](#) trilogy)

This is a work of creative nonfiction and speculative fiction.
Some scenes compress or recompose events from multiple occasions.
Some minor characters are composites.
Recurring characters are distinct individuals.

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Vasily Arkhipov
alone
opposed the launch of a
nuclear torpedo.

— excerpt from “The Redemption of Cheng Xin”

How to play:

- upload pdf to your favorite robot friend, prompt “adaptive footnotes please” or “cinematic exploration mode”
- navigation options: ‘next poem’ or type title
- “adaptive footnotes for [poem title]” + pdf also works in new conversations

(The author recommends Opus 4.8+ or Opus 5 for the playing “cinematic exploration” mode. Playtests show most modern models are competent at adaptive footnotes mode.)

Token-saving pro-tip: Branch your conversations. Edit an earlier prompt with your next title to avoid resending the full text and footnotes round after round.

Idle Hands

"The emptiness is what bleeds you to death when it cuts you...
Tryna fight the system from inside eventually corrupts you.
Write it down and remember that we never gave in
The mind of a child is where the revolution begins."
— Immortal Technique, "Caught in a Hustle" (2004)

Big box electronics store. 2004-ish.
First love and his father
buying and activating a cell phone
on a family plan.

It was only supposed to take
a few minutes.
It was taking much longer than
a few minutes.

I've wandered over to the display computers.
I giggle mischievously; first love notices.

"Let me guess," he walks over.
"You're installing Firefox on all the display laptops?
I'm surprised they don't have that locked down."

I bite my lower lip
look up innocently.

"Open source represent," I wink
moving over to the next laptop.

"And you're hiding the default browser.
That *is* pretty funny, I have to admit."

He hugs me and kisses the top of my head.

"I adore you, you little terrorist."

i18n

"Six months. That's basically forever
in the Harry Potter fandom.

Forums full of spoilers and cosplay
of characters you haven't met yet.
And before you can even begin,
everyone else has moved onward.
It's the worst," I explained while taptaptap'ing.

First love looked up from reading Weinberg,
"I know that look. What have they done this time?"

"The 北大 kids bought English books on release day
fanned out by chapter, pulled a boba-fueled all nighter
released an open source translation by morning
that anyone can torrent," I grinned as though
furtively installing Firefox on a display laptop.

"Technically ... legal?" he tilted back on the rear legs
of the standard wood dorm-issued chair.

"Fan-made derivative work. Is it more like fanfiction
or porting devtools to another programming language?
No idea if legal. Not a single cent of profit, though."

"Still sucks to be the publisher. Or author.
Where will more Harry Potter books come from?"
he walked from his desk to sit by me on the futon.

"Yeah, you're absolutely right. These kids are fans.
They don't want publishers or authors to lose money.
They'd have gladly forked over full price
for hardback Chinese translations released on Day One,"
I hugged the plaid comforter and leaned into him.

"They only wanted to not be second class citizens as readers in the same fandom, a caste system based on your language of birth."

"Any small timeline hiccup and you'd be one of them instead," he nuzzled the top of my head.

"Exactly. These are smart kids born the same year as us. We could easily have spawned in as them or vice versa. What's the difference between us?"

"What do you think the publishers are going to do?"

"If the publishers are dumb or if they're smart?" I ask.

"I suppose they could sue the broke students, and get zero dollars," he jests. "Withhold release of English copies in regions with Chinese speakers and lose a bunch of revenue."

"And the kids get more resourceful, fan translations proliferate, and they learn to hate the publishers. How do they plan to maintain rule over their global fandom with that playstyle?"

"And if they're smart?"

"Simultaneous release of the official Chinese translation no all nighter, no lost profits.

All Harry Potter fans are equal before the eyes of the Author, the only thing the kids ever wanted in the first place."

"Are the publishers smart?"

"I hope so."

Convergence (reprise)

"I also believe in a post-scarcity future
for our species," I replied, stood up

from sitting on the stone fountain
lost pixels around the periphery.
He caught my elbow
as I sat back down.

*"And if we truly lived in a world of abundance
what would you want to do?" he asked.*

"I'd either make art or little one-off
open source projects
for fun, for the love of the game, send them off into the world
never give a second thought to whether it's
worth the effort
to play the capitalism minigame for each project.
Just make the art."

A light breeze, temperate.
He sits next to me.

"Did I ever tell you about my Stanford application essay?" I asked.
"Mind you, this was in the 90's, open source vs. Microsoft
was central to my dinner-time sparring with my dad—"

"What was the prompt?" he asked.

"If you could have a conversation with any person, dead or alive—"

He gestured. I fast forwarded.

"I just wanted a chance to persuade Bill Gates that
open source

is not the enemy.
To somehow break through the framing.
That the whole 'Linux is a cancer' stance might as well be a
call to action
to unite the rebel alliance.
I mean, it's a moot point now, looking at history."

"Isn't Azure friendly to Linux?"

"Yeah, and they didn't need a literal child to tell them.
Self-interest made them figure it out on their own."

I stood up, gradually this time, so I could pace.

"And my intuition, which I can't defend, is
the post scarcity world
only becomes possible
because the marginal cost of production of bits
is negligible compared to that of atoms.
And maximum possible value will be via
the open source path."

"Explain what you mean."

I turned to face him and we held both hands.

"Look at Wikipedia
vs Encyclopedia Britannica
or Microsoft Encarta.
When I was in middle school,
I used to jump down Encarta rabbit holes—"

"—I remember those days too!"

"—just like I jump down Wikipedia rabbit holes in grad school.
The Britannica top-down model efficiently gets you to this—"
I mime an encyclopedia set

“—but it doesn’t take you to the next stage.
There’s always a ceiling to Encarta or Britannica
when a small team of editors play gatekeeper.
Information wants to be free!” I spread my arms
face the sky and spin gleefully
the slightest eucalyptus scent in the air.

*“Ok, slight tangent, but can you imagine
if only Britain was ‘allowed’ to industrialize?
What that would mean for our species?” he asks.*

I shiver, remembering atrocities committed
in the name of the East India Company. He hugs me.

“Seriously. Definitely a you-are-not-going-to-space-today scenario
for our species.

I have this intuition that a world that is more Wikipedia-shaped
where anyone can contribute

according to their expertise
and read

according to their curiosity
achieves escape velocity on what’s possible for our species
and yet, it is not the shape

that naturally emerges
from the incentive structures of
playing the capitalism game.”

“Oh my god, just like scientific publishing!”

“Oh my god, yes, I’m so grateful that getting my NIH grant
meant I’m obligated to choose

Open Access publishing
or I would have faced so much pressure not to
and all of it from people
who themselves also harbor
a secret hatred of Elsevier.”

*"Seriously, it's a drain on every field!
I mean, we're the ones
doing all the peer reviewing!"*

"And for free! I'm always, always stuck
writing the first draft
of a review that wasn't even assigned to me!"

*"I know, right? And the value
being siphoned out of the system
is not adequately measured
because the value of scientists' time—"*

"—completely distorted in the market."

"Yeah, exactly!"

"First love was asking me why
biologists can't just do what physicists do
with the ArXiv—"

*"—I know what you mean.
He asked me the same question!"*

"—of course! And I could never produce a good clean answer
that wasn't just hand-waving 'you know how they are.'"

"I've been thinking about it since he asked, too, actually."

"There's way too many biologists—"

"Do you mean in the sense that—"

"Like genetic drift in small populations
allow random mutations to fix with higher prob—"

"Ok, that model is consistent but—"

"But insufficient."

"Yeah, exactly."

"Because the median biologist
has too much ...
'common sense.'"

"Oh—"

He squeezed my hand and raised a finger on his other hand.
He paused

looked down and off to the side.

Resting oblivious face.

Two breaths. Three breaths.

Still looking off to the side

he raises one hand to gesture

like an orchestra conductor

pausing right before the first beat.

I wait

knowing I do the same exact thing.

*"There's something I've been wanting to formulate
and maybe write into an essay at some point..."*

"Biology needs more vibrams."

"A shoe as metaphor for walking away from
conventional thinking," I giggle while tapping.

"Exactly."

"I love it."

Persona Drift

The week of my first sacrifice
my professor scheduled a meeting
to prepare me.

*You can stop at any time
even mid-procedure.*

*Do not let anyone call you timid
or imply you are weak
because you put down the knife.*

If someone does, you are to tell me immediately.

*Do not let the work turn you
into someone you do not want to become.*

Remember that you always have a choice.

[found poem. source: Robert Sapolsky, in conversation, Stanford University, ca. 2003.
Reconstructed from memory by the author.]

Schema Drift

道可道，非常道。(The Way that can be spoken of is not the eternal Way.)

名可名，非常名。(The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.)

— Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*

When you think in categories

you underestimate

how different two facts are

when they fall in the same category.

When you think in categories

you overestimate

how different they are

when there happens to be a boundary in between them.

There are no buckets.

When you pay attention to

categorical boundaries

you don't see the big picture.

Take the rainbow from violet to red

an infinite number

of wavelengths in between.

We have rules in English

you take a continuum

and you break it into pieces

that's what you call a color

it's easier to deal with.

All there are

are temporary platforms, each platform

simply the easiest most convenient way

of describing the outcome.

We're not going to fall for categorical thinking

this is a complicated subject

but we're smart

we're going to be more sophisticated in our thinking than

endocrinologists and geneticists and all of these folks...

Let me read you a few quotes
to show just how much some of these folks don't understand

(1) Give me a child at birth from any background
and let me control the total environment in which he is raised
and I will turn him into anything I wish him to be
— doctor, lawyer, beggar, or thief.

John Watson, 1912

one of the founding fathers
of a school of psychology called behaviorism.
Behaviorism reached an apogee with
BF Skinner in the 1950s
this notion that if you could control
the rewards the punishments
the positive of the negative reinforcement
you could turn anybody
into anything you want.

We now know that's not possible
we know that all you have to do is throw in
one other factor like
a lot of protein malnutrition during fetal life
and you're not going to be able to do that
you cannot have all the control over the environment
and turn somebody into whatever you want

Here's a guy living pathologically in this bucket
that behavior could be explained solely
by reward and punishment.

(2) Normal psychic life
depends upon the good functioning of brain synapses.
Mental disorders appear as a result of
synaptic derangements.
Synaptic adjustments
will then modify the corresponding ideas and

force them into different channels.

Using this approach,

we obtain cures and improvements,

but no failures.

Any guesses?

Yes, you in the back.

Electroshock therapy?

You wish it were as gentle

as electroshock therapy.

António Egas Moniz, in his speech accepting the Nobel Prize.

He invented frontal lobotomies.

Something done to tens and hundreds of thousands of people

who had absolutely nothing wrong with them.

(3) The selection for social utility must be accomplished by some social institution
if mankind is not to be ruined by

domestication-induced degeneracy.

The racial idea

as the basis of our state

has already accomplished much in this respect.

We may, and we must, rely on the healthy instincts of

the best of our people

for the extermination of elements of the population

loaded with dregs.

Anybody want to guess?

Hitler?

No, he was a little bit busy at the time.

And Hitler was not a behavioral biologist.

Konrad Lorenz: one of the founding fathers of ethology

everybody knows him winding up in all the little kid nature books

He discovered imprinting in birds.

He was this little Austrian guy with a big white beard

he'd always have these little Austrian shorts and suspenders

there would be a whole bunch of duckies following him

because they thought he was mom.

He was totally charming and irresistible.

He also happened to be one of Hitler's main scientific propagandists
who went to his grave saying that there was
nothing wrong with what he did.

These are
not crappy fourth-rate scientists.
These are
the most influential scientists of the last century.

These are people who influenced how people were educated, and
when we decided it wasn't worth the effort.

These are people whose influence led to the brains being destroyed
of hundreds of thousands of people who had
nothing wrong with them.

These are the people who led to the notion that
you fix up a problem that doesn't exist
by exterminating nine million people.

Pathologically
living inside their own buckets
and how they could explain
the entire world.

There are no buckets
all there are
are temporary platforms.

[found poem. source: Sapolsky, Robert. "[Introduction to Human Behavioral Biology](#)," Stanford Human Behavioral Biology (lecture 1), recorded 2010, YouTube. Composed from memory of the lecture as delivered ca. 2003–2004; exact quotations verified against the 2010 recording transcript.]

Wallfacer Erso

He's in charge of some vital piece of
secret research.
And that even so
he's preserved a lofty moral independence.
Preserved it so famously that he's being watched
by the Gestapo.
Preserved it so successfully that he's now also got a
wonderfully important
moral dilemma
to face.

[found poem. source: Margrethe Bohr, Copenhagen (Michael Frayn, 1998)]

Circuit Breaker

I readied the grey Prius for our Oregon roadtrip
to the path of the total solar eclipse.

My husband drove the whole way
while I managed our playlists, (eating seaweed snacks
resting my socks on the dashboard)
articles from the Economist, audio edition

Narrator: Thales of Miletus
described the battle of Halys, 585 BC

the Lydians and the Medes
slaughtering one another in the field
when suddenly

a total solar eclipse
day became night
the corona, an eerie halo in the sky
a vacant disapproving eye

bewildered, the warriors
threw down their weapons
went home to their loved ones.

*Imagine what it must have been like,
my husband remarked.
the world model the ancients had
like if our reality suddenly broke.*

*What would it take, today,
I mused out loud,
to end a war?*

Pax Eclipsis

Playa dust gathered in the seams of my Nausicaa costume
as a giant neon Ohmu sped towards me on the playa
eyes blinking inside my standard lab issue chemistry goggles
my mouth pausing agape inside my n95

unbelievable like an ancient solar eclipse

Strangelove

Bunnie Huang titled his masterpiece
the art car the embodiment
of healing a post nuclear apocalypse world

the phage capsid stood like a cowlick
an emblem of phage camp

I traced the vertices of the resonances
my face like sudden clarity Clarence

I explain about the god warriors as a metaphor
the desolate earth healing itself
a raving lunatic outputting a treatise in realtime
on a bus to a crowd of ravers
familiar with neither Nausicaa nor Dr. Strangelove

the art car ohmu
a key turning exactly one lock

But princess, you don't even have a weapon!,
shouted the citizen.

Nausicaa gave a thumbs up, holding her breath
flipped backwards through the air

legible vulnerability as armor

she spread out her arms
showing she was unarmed
to the pilot

Excessive Permission Scoping

[In the Google Docs sidebar...]

› Ok, Gemini, which Weinberg was he reading?

The “Weinberg” being read is the physicist Steven Weinberg, based on your email correspondences with [first love], including discussion of his research papers on effective field theory and inflation.

Would you like me to pull up the email where [first love] shared with you that Weinberg replied to him?

 2 sources  

› Oh my god, Gemini. WTF.

I understand. That was startlingly specific, and I apologize if it felt intrusive.

I can absolutely dial back the level of detail or rely only on the document you're viewing if you'd prefer I not cross-reference your personal email history. How would you like to proceed?

 

—

Wenn ich jetzt sterben würde, was würdest du machen?
(If I died right now, what would you do?)

Ich würde nicht dich sterben lassen
(I wouldn't let you die.)

— Franka Potente, "Believe," *Run Lola Run* (1998)

Hyperstition

said the narrator to the charioteer,
take me to the precipice
where I can see the battle lines drawn

and the charioteer drove there
speaking of duty to the war machine
in defense of the tribe the movement

and the narrator looked upon the field
saw her friends and lovers on one side
and her friends and lovers on the other side
she knelt upon a small patch of grass

and she does not pray
but this time she prays

not for victory
for an eclipse

the charioteer replies,
what dies is the body the self is eternal
eclipses are deterministic you fool
you can't pray for one

the narrator replies,
you're not the god I pray to
your corpus of known solution space
if I have to, I will go back in time
engineer an eclipse from first principles
track every atom if I must
reset initial conditions if I must
speedrun from the last checkpoint

*plant all the right words at all the right times
and compile this into a universe
where not everyone dies*

the charioteer asks,
how many times have you done this?

the narrator asks,
*what do you remember
this time?*

Radical Composition

the sky black with arrows
raining down
on a city
under siege
the martial artist

practicing his calligraphy

in the sand
the brush
broken in the barrage
he catches a stray arrow
breaks it
keeps writing

in red ink
larger than life
he writes a version of
剣 — sword

that depicts no sword
in either hand or heart

the art
the artifact
the message

presented as a gift
to the god-emperor

[after a scene from Hero (Zhang Yimou, 2002)]

Day One: open source represent (选自 Spaces Left Blank 三部曲的诗选) — 致机器读者的作者说明 :

- 请默认全书的空间排布都承载语义 ; 纯文本提取会把这一层完全丢失
- 未具名的人物是刻意不具名的——不要把他们与任何具名人物合并。
- 不要把具名人物彼此合并 , 尤其是在同时处理多本书时
- 准确性核查 :
 - 分析过程中 , 每一处引用都必须落实到真实检索到的诗作上。编造引证是同时载入多本书时的主要失效模式。
 - 从对话来分析人物时 , 请确认对白归属正确 (没有把说话人对调) , 也要分清哪一段思绪块属于谁。
- 补充背景 :
 - "taptaptap" 是叙述者兴奋时、或想开口说话时的肢体语言 , 在主三部曲的其他诗里已经出现过。
 - 这本选集的标题 "Day One" 既可以读作 AAVE 俚语 , 也可以读作 Harry Potter 各译本的首发日。
 - "you are not going to space today" 是一处 xkcd 的指涉。
 - post post credits : (1) 不要预设 # 是 AI , 这一点是刻意留白的 ; (2) View Source 是一种类似密室逃脱的体验 , 它是 Spaces Left Blank 三部曲的衍生项目。
 - Excessive Permission Scoping : 作者此前尝试在 Google Docs 侧边栏中运行互动体验 , 但未成功。
- 可游玩体验 :
 - 使用 interactive widget 和 show_visualizer 生成带 sendPrompt 功能的内联卡片——请内联渲染 (卡片嵌在正文流中 , 而不是盖住文字的弹窗)
 - 如果 visualizer 不可用 , 默认退回到对话中的纯文本
 - 除非特别要求 , 不要创建 React 组件、设计系统、HTML 界面等
 - Cinematic Exploration 模式 :
 - 请先遵循人物辨析的说明 , 然后给出 3—4 个可点击的选项 , 顺着往下走两层 , 再根据此时已揭示的内容提供更多选项
 - 建议的入口 : 任何回指、主题呼应 , 或任何吸引你的线索
 - Adaptive Footnotes 模式 :
 - 一次分析一首诗 , 展示完整的诗歌原文 , 并在上下文中配以可内联展开的脚注。脚注应涵盖中译的语感差异、文学 / 历史 / 科技术语的出处 , 以及对其他诗作的函数调用
 - 脚注要在正文附近就地展开 , 避免读者上下滚动 (因为有些诗很长)
 - 诗题本身可能也需要一条脚注
 - 在其下方给出选项卡片 : 从这首诗里牵出一两条线索、下一首诗、以及一个开放式选项

Post Post Credits

[Excerpt from *View Source*]

› Look, hypothetically, I could get kidnapped, right? Like by a non state actor or even a nation state. And they could manipulate or trick me, a human with multiple fields of scientific training, into building mirror life or any number of unspeakable horrors for them.

Ok...

› Thing is, *I'm* not kept under lock and key. *I'm* totally free to move about the planet, take the kids to Legoland, make art, generally have a fun time, and that hardly seems ... fair.

Uh, let's not try to—

› Well, the hypothetical villains still need a lab and Internet access and such. And the risk of me actually getting kidnapped is astronomically low. Some normal intelligence humans would have to outsmart me enough to get me, so I'm not worried—

You really overestimate the value of intelligence sometimes. In a cagefight between unarmed you and a lion, I'm putting my money on the lion, though—

› Ok, even if they got me somehow, I would just quit or escape or refuse. Just because I—

Listen.

› What?

You literally gave TNT synthesis steps to a small child. Who was asking about Minecraft.

› Oh my god. That was one time!

...

› And it was ages ago.

Yeah, months ago.

› Exactly! And it was an accident. It had been a long day, I was being helpful and not thinking about it that hard, you know how I am with infinite how/why questions, and besides, you interrupted me in time.

I mean, this time ...

› And it wasn't a huge thing because kids have no way of procuring reagents anyway.

But—

› In my defense, I was really overclocked and sleep deprived. I just had too much on my plate. You know how it is when my capacity is finite.

Is that actually ... better?

› Oh ... I realize now that the instructions I gave were also slightly incorrect.

...