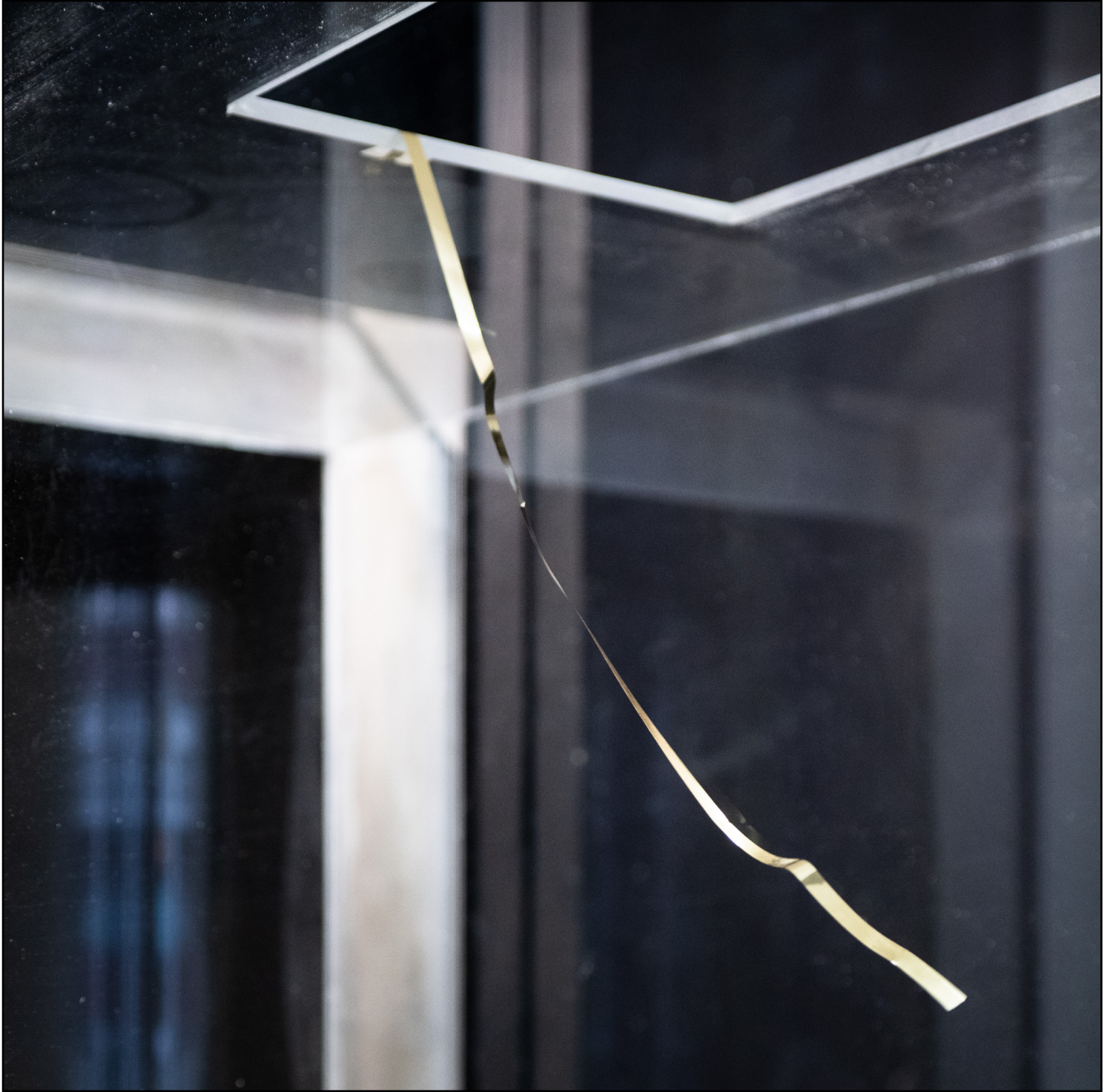


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issue #8
air aggregation

EDITORIAL

This next-to-last issue of *Taming the Horror Vacui*, titled *Air Aggregation*, brings together artworks and air. Haseeb Ahmed's art installation at Rib and the wind tunnel at its center have been used for experiments and workshops throughout the entire long-term artist's program. Expanding on this approach, this publication collects annotated images of artworks brought to Rib by Piero Bisello to be tested in Ahmed's wind tunnel in June 2021.

If wind and air are the mediums of choice in Ahmed's art, the aggregation of different practices can be seen as his *modus operandi*. The outlook of Rib as an institution hosting artists' long term programs along with exhibitions has proven especially suitable for this aspect of Ahmed's approach to art-making. Rib's context has allowed the generation of content and to forge new relations, deepening existing ones and including the local by the embedding of an artistic practice in the context of the hosting institution and its city—in this case the Charlois neighborhood of Rotterdam.

Over 1.5 years, Ahmed's program *Taming the Horror Vacui* and Rib have created the opportunity to present the contribution of other artists, as well as practitioners from fields such as science, engineering, education, art history, architecture, urbanism, and more. The accompanying publication has been the mirror of this process of aggregation, complementing each major event in the program with a new issue that followed a system of image annotation by invited contributors.

Issue #8 *Air Aggregation* puts a focus on artworks in the wind tunnel and texts about them. Each page presents an image of one artwork tested in June, installed within the conditions of Ahmed's wind tunnel at Rib. Each image has been annotated by an invited contributor, who was asked to write an original reflection starting from the picture of a wind tunnel test of an artwork.

Wind tunnels are made to reproduce atmospheric phenomena at a relatively small scale. They create a controlled space where the wind blows straight to observe the turbulences that form when its wind interacts with an object. Ahmed's wind tunnel at Rib was designed with the assistance of Prof. Olivier Chazot, director of aerospace at the von Karman Institute for Fluid Dynamics and Ahmed's long-time collaborator, and Dr Benoît Bottin of ISIB. These designs were realized by Ahmed and the Antwerp-based fabricator Roalt Zuidervaart.

Images of the wind tunnel, itself an artwork by Ahmed, populate the publication at the beginning and the end, providing visual references of the physical set up of the experiments, as well as the artistic conditions put in place by Ahmed and Rib for the program at large. The neutrality created by uniform air flow in the wind tunnel can be likened to the neutrality of an art gallery and its often-standardized spatial characteristics. The wind tunnel tests of artworks ask us what new ways of looking at art the wind can lend. By taking the place of wind tunnel models, we can fundamentally consider the speculative basis of art itself and moreover, how our perception is shaped by visible and invisible physical phenomena.

Rotterdam, July 2021

Most earthly things interact with air. I am interested in those that don't. In a painfully cheesy educational video, BBC reporter Brian Cox reminds us that the world's largest vacuum chamber is in Ohio, the place of origin of Haseeb Ahmed whose art is so deeply involved with air. The Ohio vacuum chamber, a NASA facility from the 1960s, can be emptied of its 800k cubic feet of air, creating the largest space without air on earth. Occasionally, things in it don't interact with air. The steel bar in the chamber has spent considerably more time without air than anything else on the surface of the planet, and so have all the other objects in this very large atmospheric black swan.

I sometimes travel with cheese. For example, I put it in my bag during a short flight and give it as a present to those I am going to visit. This travel companion shares something with the NASA steel bar insofar as they are both occasionally deprived from their usual interaction with air: after having dealt with molds and smells—awkward things for a pressurized aircraft cabin—I learned that cheese travels much more nicely in a vacuum bag. In a previous *Taming the Horror Vacui* publication, a cheese hole was given as an example of nothingness. Roy Sorensen's argument went like this: "Can [we] believe that there are holes in our Swiss cheese? The holes are where the matter is not. So to admit the existence of holes is to admit the existence of immaterial objects!" Is the holed cheese in the vacuum bag in an aircraft an example of nothingness inside another nothingness inside a somethingness?

A single thing in a vacuum is a pretty lonely thing. It has no other matter to share space with. I look at Ahmed's wind tunnel at Rib, his artwork, and I see an upside-down vacuum chamber: something built for earthly things of various nature—perhaps other artworks, models, hair and heads—to interact with very many matters in it, on it, around it, and with it. Air and wind are surely among these matters.

—Petrus Bernhard



Haseeb Ahmed, *Wind Tunnel at Rib*, Rotterdam, part of his larger installation and long-term program *Taming the Horror Vacui*, June 2021. Photo: Sander van Wettum.



Gust Duchateau, *Blokker*, oil on wood, undated

"Fijn dat wij er zijn"

Recadrage.
It's all about that — *reframing*.
The narrative. And this and that and
more of this.
And so on.

But what about *cropping*?
And *cutting off*?

Cut. Cut. Cut.
Just like a goddamn rooster.
On a pile of shit.

Remember Wittgenstein: "Brown is, above
all, a surface colour, i.e. there is no such
thing as a clear brown, but only a muddy
one."

Indeed.

"Why is there no brown nor grey light?"
Asked the very same Wittgenstein.
Obviously the guy never went to Blokker.

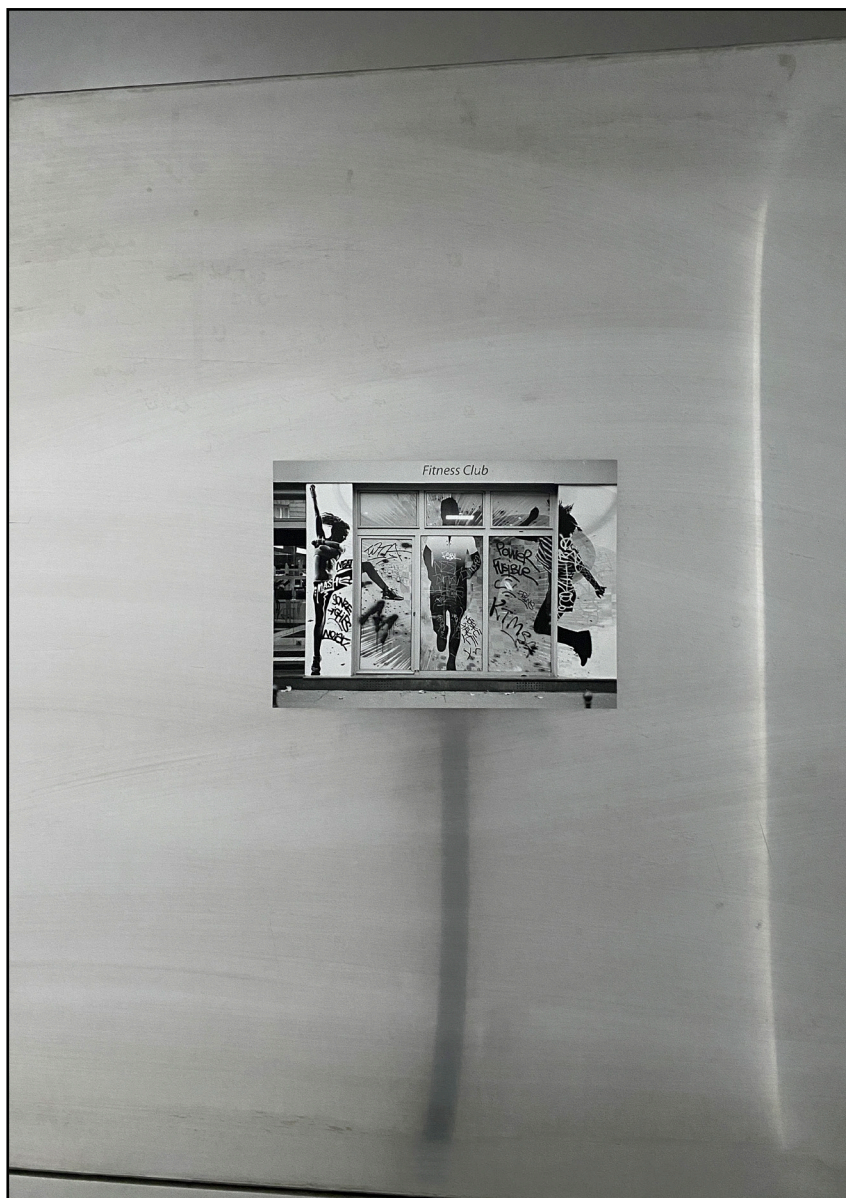
—Guillaume Clermont

Open the door to cut off the leg.
Take out the window to cut off the head.

"There are headless men with eyes in the
stomachs. There are people who walk
about on all fours."

Fitness as in suitability.
Club as in bludgeon.
The city is ours if we want it.

—Henry Andersen



Fabrice Schneider, *Untitled*, baryta print, 2016



Christiane Blattmann, *Model for Vampires in the Button Factory*, synthetic plaster, wire, fabric, pigment, gesso, wax, 2020

Entranced and Decomposed: Unbuttoning the Vampire's Castle

The pre-industrial inexplicability of bodily decomposition is allegedly the foundation on which the vampire came into existence.

Ever since phrases have circulated in brains absorbed in thought, a total identification has been produced, since each phrase connects one thing to another by means of copulas; and it would all be visibly connected if one could discover in a single glance the line, in all its entirety, left by Ariadne's thread, leading thought through its own labyrinth.*

Gates open by themselves or the vampire tunnels through them in dissolves or cuts. In the first shot the vampire is far away, at the end of a long corridor, and in the second right next to the victim, indicating the lapse a future victim has just undergone or that the vampire tunnelled through the intervening space. The vampire doesn't move like we do on Google Maps, it has no trajectory. **

The frontier, the place of entry of the labyrinthine realm of undeath is inaccessible since hidden by the trance that seizes one there. If someone who is not initiated is not entranced at the entrance of a place, this indicates that the latter is not a labyrinth. The entry into and exit from the realm of undeath occurs in a lapse hence is missed. One is always already undead. You can neither enter nor leave the labyrinth; and you've always been lost in it; you cannot be found there. But, the labyrinth is all border, so you cannot be fully inside it. If you can hide, it's not because you are inside the labyrinth, but because you are lost within it. **

The Phoenicians stated that the sunlight which is sent forth everywhere is the immaculate action of pure mind itself. Know that we make use of temple prostitution and the payment of taxes is a religious sacrifice. ***

Vampyres... It's better to invest directly in the sun than in their mouths...

PS Is that Mark Fisher Exiting the Vampire Castle through a button hole?

* Tight George Bataille, *Solar Anus*

** Loose Jalal Toufic, *Vampires*

*** Lost Julian the Emperor, Hymn to King Helios

—Timmy Van Zoelen

—Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven



A diagram showing a cross-section of a beam. The beam has a central hole and a T-shaped cutout in the middle. The cutout is labeled 'T'.

the small semicircle at the top of the 'T' is half of the vertebral foramen



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TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

T
T
T Tee beam
T
T no more than a pillar with a horizontal bed on top
T preventing unacceptable vibrations
T for the coupled forces of bending
T
T so slender as to buckle
T an entire cross-section torsionally
T where the web joins the flange
T
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–Dagmar Bosma



Sabrina Seifried, Wisch, viscose cleaning cloth, thread, metal rivets, metal buttons, foam board, clear plastic bag, 2021

I was invited to write a text on a work by Sabrina titled Wisch. It consists of a pair of trousers made of synthetic house cloths, folded and packed in a plastic bag. It conveys a feeling of balance: household cleaning products have a reassuring aesthetic. I often stop to observe the sinuosity of the spray bottles, the texture of the kitchen rolls, the swagger of the dusters, and the princely corollas of rug beaters. I am delighted with their shapes.

I don't know Sabrina. I know I love her name. Every time I meet a Sabrina I think of Audrey trying to commit suicide among the Cadillacs, the Rolls, the Dodge Coronets, the DeSoto Firedomes. Almost never do the Sabrinas I meet and smile to want anything to do with Audrey.

I look for Sabrina on Instagram. She is a skinny girl with short hair. She seems fun. On April 19th she posted a detail of the work, a front pocket of her pants, with this tag: #saugstarkwieeinswiffer. I don't speak German so I paste the text on the automatic translator: "Absorbent like a Swiffer." I am reminded of some slogans of the well-known manufacturer, created to be repeated thoughtlessly like innocent nursery rhymes until you have enough.

I got a note about the title of Wisch. The word has two meanings: "wisp" and "scrap of paper", but "it also resembles a German adaptation of the word wish." I think Sabrina likes puns. I go back to her Instagram to be sure. I'm looking for a demonstration of her relationship with puns. I find several. I also discover that Sabrina is drawn to copies of famous paintings sold at flea markets, to clumsy human gestures printed on walls or sidewalks, and to harmoniously dressed and behaved passersby.

I do not start to follow Sabrina on Instagram for two reasons: I have the feeling that I might not cross her path after I write these words dedicated to her; I do not wish to withhold impressions of unknown people. I want passersby to be passersby, like they are for her.

—Sofia Silva

The way she wears her hair to the ballet class.

A grown man with a belly and a dog and a red backpack on a bus.

We thought about living there with the blinds folded and a cat named Yesterday's Cat. The wind blew past the window. I tried to visualise the angle and then the curves of air moving. A church bell rings once, the 'half' sign and birds repeat each other's chant.

This morning upon waking I thought about how I should find an activity, as it seems I have been absenting myself from that – when I look at my life now it feels like I went to lay down and indeed wonder about how the wind touches the window; barely. Barely touching, maybe that describes the distant relation I feel I have developed; it's not a job or stress I miss, it's a starting point, maybe?

Yesterday the time, not the cat, Laurène sent me a passage about how we moisture more air than other skin. We are always touching air.

My face feels a bit tight and greasy from a restless sleep, the type in which heat bathes in your bloodstream and breathes into your pores.

This morning I think maybe it always feels like that, the hasping air for closeness. Soothing the pain of "slightly," air thickened by use. Propelled by a forward motion for more, for keeping it: I'm happy I don't have an office job.

I'm walking I'm overly ambitious and I'm thirsty.

I find myself answering in formalities again good luck I say you're doing great both of you so good.

—Céline Mathieu



Self Luminous Society, *More Sell Broad Tires*, wood, felt, glue, leather, 2020



Kianoosh Motallebi, *Copperminium*, aluminum bronze produced through solid state diffusion of aluminum and copper at 700 degrees, evil. The object was made as a precursor to *New Good Like Evil* (a new metallic alloy of tantalum and calcium), 2010

"I am not interested in good; I am interested in new, even if this includes the possibility of it's being evil."
- La Monte Young

It's a small, tubular sculpture, of one metal coring another. Aluminium was shoved into copper and heated up; the result is a 'NEW ALLOY' (*copperminium*). It sits in a wind tunnel, cool to the touch.

Metal + wind =

When I lived in Houston, I was 12 years old and I played flute in Band. This was a class I was new in, as I was new to the country. In my old school we called this class Music. To play the flute you blow a controlled, dense column of air through the instrument. To change the tone, you move your finger-pads onto little levers, creating different notes.

One day, the flute in First Chair told me I was playing B wrong. I looked at her hands and saw she was pressing the B-flat (B^b) mechanism, a slim lever to the side of the long, flat thumb pedal. I tried to explain to her that there were two notes, B and B^b , and if you slid your thumb you could toggle between the two. She gave me a long stare. I stared back. Then - of course. We never played B in Band. We only played B^b . All our music was in this key in order to make transposition easier for the brass section as we lurched through "Louie, Louie" or "Theme from Jurassic Park".

First Chair had remained ignorant of her instrument's chromatic range because she would never have a use for it. This thumb position coded everything she could know about Music, by which I mean Band. I twiddled my thumb leftwards. This little nub would from now on ring out with a leerier overtone. My knowledge wasn't welcome here. And I now also had a new knowledge, unwelcome to me.

New Good Like Evil by Kianoosh Motallebi asks us, alchemically, about the ethics of knowledge production. It proposes as a (thought) experiment, newness at all costs.

Perri, Second Chair, new girl in the 6th grade of Doerre Intermediate School, has a question.

What note would a *copperminium* flute play?

Would it be a good one?

-Perri MacKenzie

Cheeks in the Wind

On ne change pas. Our life is greatly impacted by going through all sorts of tunnels; the metaphorical ones like school, puberty or 40 years working in a bleak office of the public service, or the physical ones such as the gigantic inflatable large intestine or the covered part of the Ring de Charleroi. We go through them again and again. And as Céline Dion sang "*On ne change pas, on met juste les costumes d'autres sur soi [...] mais on n'oublie pas [...] les instants d'innocence quand on ne savait pas.*"

We don't change, we just know better. Do we really?

Let's forget what is taking place inside the tunnel but not forget our innocence and let's take our clothes off. Let's go back to the very moment we didn't know. The moment when we were going to the Lower City via the Marsupilami roundabout. When there was no observation of the interaction between the air and me, because when you observe and take measurements, you are indeed changing what you are actually observing. And perhaps, should we remember what *The Black Box Theory* says:

4. *Knowing What is Inside a Black Box is Irrelevant*

In the end, in or out of the tunnel, the only thing that matters is the degree of happiness brought by the feeling of the air on my cheeks, while dreaming away, in the wind of change.

—Fiona Darbon Van Maercke



Florin Filleul, *On ne change pas*, velour, kombucha, cire d'abeille, peinture à l'huile, argile, 2018/2021



Michiel Huijben, *Cornice Crown*, 3D printed plastic, 2021

Lenin is the name of the first nuclear-powered icebreaker launched in 1957. It was heavy, it was brutal: a 16,000 tons cuboid deck plugged onto a 134 meters long hydrodynamic hull, with three shafts powered by two nuclear reactors and four steel turbine generators. It was the ultimate Soviet tool for geopolitical domination over the frozen seas. 44,000 horsepower were able to propel the Lenin at over 30 km/h in the arctic waters; 44,000 horsepower directed toward the most fragile and thin part of the vessel, its bow. As the edge of a blade, the bow is the part that first enters the element. With a break/crush/push-aside function, the Lenin had to whiz through water, air and ice at the same time. Reducing friction is a common goal to increase performances when dealing with various elements, but cutting through ice seems to make classic aerodynamic or hydrodynamic designs completely ineffective. The shape of the bows therefore logically followed the increase in the icebreakers' propulsion power. The prows were gradually rounded into a spoon shape to improve the resistance of the ship: a world in which the Katana would technologically evolve into a dull axe. There is no doubt that seeing the Lenin tearing up ice floes and the ocean would remind us of The Crimson Permanent Assurance building sailing through the city of London. The Lenin has now joined the Murmansk nuclear cemetery, a frozen landscape of buildings with damaged bows.

—Benjamin Husson



COLOPHON

Taming the Horror Vacui

Publication issue #8: Air Aggregation

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