

Arjuna Neuman
**Heart of
Brightness**

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Heart of Brightness

Sunshinism is our bright new horizon: the framework, culture, and spiritual practice of homotechnicus – the outcome of our ontological mutations following in the image of thermonuclear weapons. It is a life-giving force but a decoy. As a belief system, it maximizes our smiles like coins; its ritual is based in sun salutations that prostrate the body toward a technological sun a thousand times the size of our own; its framework dissolves all traditions and all religions, simultaneously uniting them in a total, unquestionable harmony.

It advocates passively-militantly for radical global openness, using internalized force and governed human-will toward the eternal liberty of free trade and individual free choice. It surrounds the Earth with manufactured light and guards it with solar-sailing drone-angels; it disperses its messages through charismatic technology, education, and design talks, jacking our haptic systems with binaural meditation beats, digital drugs, pop-up phantom Kundalini tones. Its H-Bomb-God-Sun figurehead, like its politics, dissolved over time into decentered all-edge-systems, radiated caesium forests, data infinity pools, and networks of deep, a-ethical profit extraction. These are its sole objects of belief, its genetic-prescriptive form as exact, pure content – its sunshine realism.

Its rays reach everywhere against the dark fleshiness of humankind's fallacious intimacy, illuminating instead our irreconcilable planetary traumas, our dark deviance, our analog frailty. Like other religions or singular ways of being, it emerged through an overwhelming excess, a holocaust of feeling (once it became profitable to feel). Not enough, not enough, we sang, dancing openhearted toward the electric faith of a renewed nuclear-family-of-man, a divine economy and familial cradle for our innate kenotic urge to sync in, its rituals empowering that human will to empty ourselves of all agency, all imagination, and in their place worship again something singularly incomprehensible: that coded buzzing techno-white-light of Sunshinism; always there, always already in our heart of brightness.

The Sun is our life-giver; the primary object of our obsessions, faiths and beliefs; it sets our rhythms; it illuminates our moon; it colors us in; it is our mirror – or at least it makes our reflection possible. The operative word is *our*. It is the center of *our solar system* after all, just like we imagine ourselves to be, and we own it or at least we want the Sun to be ours alone to keep forever, a canary diamond – such human hubris fixes the Sun as our delusional proxy, a solar slave, an anthropocentric appendage and a projected idol of man-as-God – it becomes an airplane lighting system set to daybreak, a



An interfaith group gathers to meditate in the Lotus Upper Shrine at the Yogaville Ashram in Buckingham, Virginia.

perennial solar-powered parking meter, a Paleolithic diet, a Turbine Hall installation.

Although at 5,778 kelvins it burns hotter and brighter than anything we can even begin to imagine – let alone understand – perhaps then, and at the same time, the Sun is our enemy, our lover, our master, our ultimate and divine other that gives us our very form, our outline in the galaxy’s mirror. Its surface is arguably made of molten iron like the Earth’s core, while less debatable (or at least more ideologically instrumental) are the thermonuclear reactions that take place within its own core, slow reactions that convert hydrogen into helium, great mass into energy, light into politics.

It should be noted that this particular Sun, the one commonly accepted by the scientific community, was only born in 1957. And, in fact, the line of thinking and experimentation that produced the accepted 1957 theoretical discoveries was only put into process in 1896, when Henri Becquerel managed by accident to expose a sheet of photographic paper with a uranium crystal he had placed aside, out of the Sun (it was a cloudy day), and into a dark drawer. He discovered radiation through photography.

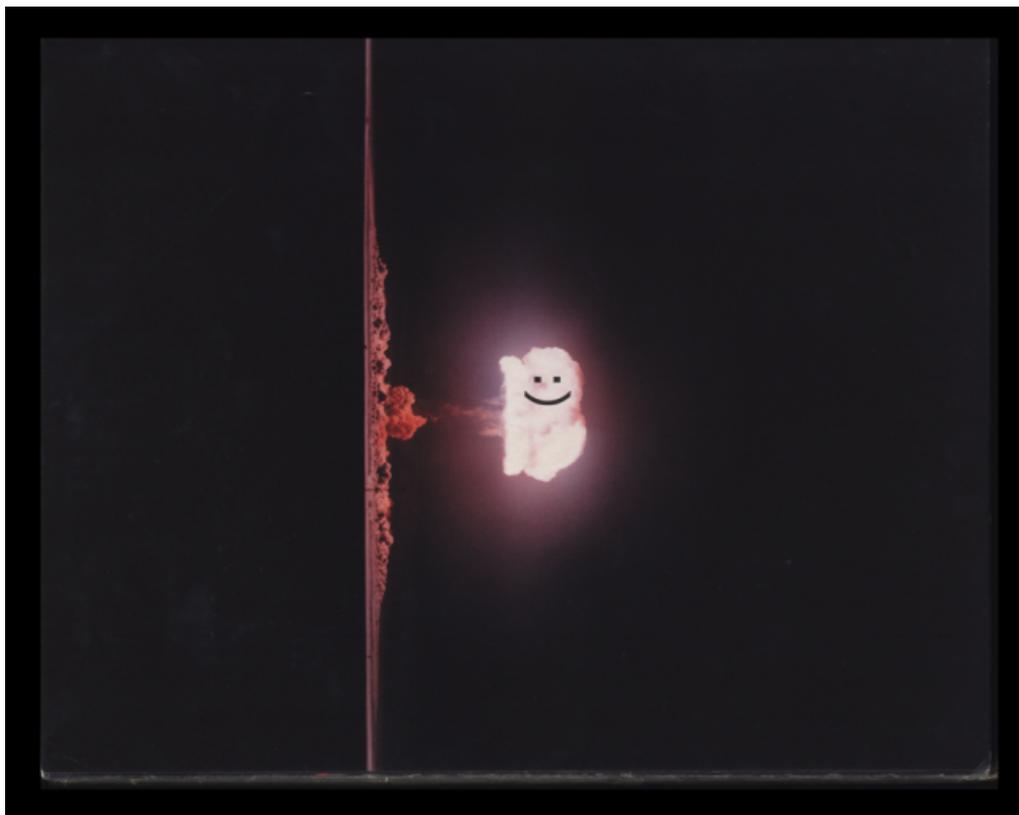
From this moment on, the Sun and photography would be materially and indexically

linked by radiation. Analog photography would emerge as the Sun’s net and network, its primary means of distributing the beginnings of a new techno-radiated-solar-dogma called Sunshinism – at least, up until the digital turn, which would bankrupt the Eastman Kodak Company.

The next key stage in the development of the modern Sun and its acceptance within science was perhaps its older twin. In 1952, the first hydrogen bomb was invented and successfully tested in the Marshall Islands (and whose orange mushroom cloud was propagated as the only color image in the 1955 “Family of Man” exhibition, which traveled around the world and is still on view in a castle in Luxembourg). This hydrogen bomb, called Ivy Mike, was over 500 times as powerful as Nagasaki’s Fat Boy, which killed a modest 80,000 in its first flash. Ivy Mike induced nuclear fusion through a two-stage, implosive-explosive process named after the scientists who invented it. This Teller-Ulam bomb is still the current design, after a schematic leak from the US government, for all nuclear warheads in circulation today – even the ones in North Korea.

As a technological miracle, the bomb’s mechanism evolved both science in general through the modern Sun’s functional definition,

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as well as the human body itself, which has begun to internalize and physically emulate the first of the bomb's two-stage fusion process. What operation Ivy Mike proved was the feasibility of man-made nuclear fusion. This sent a very clear and bright message to the scientific community, who would five years later certify that our Sun was in fact exactly the same as the hydrogen bomb (of course at different scales). Or, to put it in more precise, biblical terms, we should say that the Sun was made in the image of the hydrogen bomb.

This adapted quotation from Genesis 1:27 is in essence the side gate for a deep hack of mankind. It is a formula by which human ontology can be reengineered at one of its most base, basic levels; at least in the Judeo-Christian West, and maybe further afield thanks to the various crusades and evangelical television. The actual quotation is the sixth verse and sixth day of the creation myth: "God created mankind in His own image; in the image of God He created them." According to this moral framework, becoming godlike (cleanliness is next to godliness) is the unattainable ideal and horizon that drives social transformation.

This governing formula seemed to work (as in, functionally ordering society and the individual through unquestionable divine right) up until the Enlightenment, when religion was supposedly evacuated from politics. Through this process of secularization, a certain repressive gap (forced atheism) – or rather an ontological contradiction – appears: God now had to be substituted by man himself. Man becomes God at least in the domain of politics but also at the cloudy Genesis point where politics meets ontology.

The Enlightenment inadvertently introduced a new rational limit to mankind's transformative and political potential: humans would be caught in a narcissistic feedback loop of man being made in his own image. The ideal of becoming godlike was supposedly completed through science, or at the least, any collective spiritual desire for transformation/transcendence was repressed with the guillotine.

The new impossibility of actual political transformation upwards (toward the divine) instead reverts to a mutation that is a (subhuman) transformation downwards. Since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the many mutant progenies that follow (artificial intelligence included – see Norbert Wiener's *God and Golem*), we've known that this mutation or proxy-transformation always goes horribly wrong. This science-fiction trope usually conjures an Oedipal scenario, where the mutant, creature, or replicant seeks out their master/father/maker to kill them – in the hope

that their existential anxiety will disappear by taking matters literally into their own hands. The anxiety never disappears, and the mutant struggles to reconcile its place within, or more accurately outside of the essential narrative order. Eventually the mutant is subsumed/tolerated by the narrative structure and society at large, which passively subordinates him until his suicide; or he lives through his lonely days on the fringe of society, which today is an unmarked ICE detention center or a panic room in the Americana shopping mall.

However, if the Genesis narrative with its divine hierarchical structure is preserved, humans can and have been forcibly mutated without entirely succumbing to the self-destructive fate detailed above. This process began with governed desire and will: love, affect, and libido are redirected for profit and discipline through ideology and marketing – a process known as governmentality or interpellation.

This process is similar but still quite different in terms of depth and actual physical/material impact as a species-wide total reengineering. More recently we have undergone, or are undergoing, a full ontological mutation: our very essence as humans, with its biological and physical determinations, as well as our spiritual and material practices, have been hacked.

This process is also different from the original reassignment of man-as-God that constantly reappears across history (and sci-fi) with each latent thrust of the Enlightenment. Instead, if God stays put as God, and mankind continues to be "made in God's image," then a mutation of man (for better or worse) can and has taken place at the level of representation. This avoids a vast, structural intervention that ultimately turns the world into meaningless, postmodern fragments. Or put differently, to transform mankind, God's image merely needed to change, not His solar-thermonuclear constitution.

Such a contemporary mutation of the divine took, or is taking place, in three separate stages. Or rather three different Gods from three different religions (one of which, as described already, is the Sun) were surrogated or reverse-engineered with the same nuclear weapons technology – where the scope, this time, is universal and ontological; not national, civil, or political.

The first substitution took place in 1945 through the careful naming of the first atomic bomb as *Trinity*. This semantic mutation of the Christian Holy Trinity into a nuclear weapon was subsequently accepted by the popular imagination, by means of a redefinition of the sublime as technological (or today, digital) –

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supplanting Kant's "limitlessness," once experienced through nature, with the thousand Suns of an atomic bomb.¹

The second God to undergo mutation into a nuclear weapon has already been described – although the Sun is not literally a God in the theistic sense that the other two mutants are. However, for many, the Sun performs as a God, and maybe even is a God, if pagan or secular or a green capitalist – and to define its inner workings after the invention of the nuclear bomb as equally thermonuclear is to privilege nuclear weapons as Sunlike. Or rather, and more accurately, *the Sun is nuclear bomb-like*. This is the logical endgame of Enlightenment thinking, its galactic denouement – i.e., privileging the light of reason above all else, even the natural Sun itself. The Sun becomes a subject of ideology and a weapon of rational political science – replacing, but then later merging back with, religion as the repressed returns.²

The third mutation of God was put into place in a televised press release. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the lead scientist of the Manhattan Project, describes his first impressions of the Trinity test bomb in a strangely affectless tone:

We knew the world would not be the same. Few people laughed, few people cried, most people were silent. I remember the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty. To impress him, he takes on his multi-armed form and says, "I become death, destroyer of worlds." I suppose we all thought that one way or another.

This passage from the Bhagavad Gita has become famous (and therefore seemingly benign or meaningless) despite its often-unacknowledged scriptural origin.³ What Oppenheimer, who specifically learned Sanskrit to read the book in its original form, does not say is the preceding line (in his own slightly odd translation): "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One." Instead he just quotes, "I become death, destroyer of worlds."

Oppenheimer implicitly mutates the god Vishnu into a nuclear weapon, while selecting a passage that also anticipated the still-current scientific definition of the thermonuclear Sun twelve years later. Perhaps most telling of this mutation and its impact on the world is the proceeding (also omitted) line, where Arjuna replies "My *salutations* to You, O best of Gods, be merciful!" This book and specific line is one of

the scriptural foundations and prayers of the yogic practice of sun salutation.⁴

Instead we worship the afterimage of the thousand Suns of the atomic bomb, which is the mutated representation of God as radiant technology itself. These neo-sun-salutations that prostrate the frail human body before a vast mutant-sun is the primary ritual and practice of what has emerged out of mankind's ontological hacking, giving way to a new universal religion that hails from tomorrow, called Sunshinism.

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Arjuna Neuman was born on an airplane, that's why he has two passports.

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1

In 1984 Rockwell International bought the rights to use Ansel Adams's photographs as advertisements. These images are usually presented in art school as examples of the sublime – however, the creative manager of Rockwell International detected a paradigmatic shift in the character and location of the sublime. Namely: that within the cultural imaginary, the sublime now also, or even more appropriately, accounted for the destruction produced by nuclear fusion weapons, the very same reaction taking place in the core of the Sun. As a result Rockwell International began to mix the sublime of nature and Yosemite in particular with the sublime of technology and tactical nuclear weapons in particular – while describing both, perhaps in order to ease the shift, as “national resources.” Such a shift in the character of the sublime can be read as a symptom of the Christian God, and of the Trinity's mutation into a hydrogen bomb, as a new mutant object of faith and the exact image of our own becoming.

2

This initial demotion of the natural Sun also set the foundation for its subsequent reverse-engineering – where science would eventually define the Sun as functionally the same as thermonuclear weapons technology. What such a counterintuitive inversion implies (intuition would have culture/science follow nature, the Sun's power preceding the bomb and not the anthropocentric vice versa) is that the Sun is not unique – and that given sufficient resources mankind could, by way of nuclear fusion, produce its own sun. Should we care to, of course! – and then we could do away with the Sun 1.0 – *Matrix* style. We can see symptoms of this hubris in the various trends that set out to resist it: the raw food diet celebrates the Sun as the sole means of preparing food, while computer apps adjust the screen's brightness to mimic shifts in daylight, and the Paleolithic diet has given way to a Paleo-lifestyle where people wake and work in sync with the Sun while using stone tools. What each of these trends reveal is a certain anxiety over the resilience of the natural Sun, when posed against the possibility of technological, man-made yet enlightened variants – although what these trends and their romantic embracers don't recognize, just like the self-styled solar insurrectionaries, is that the Sun was technological from the get-go – already usurped, and always already a priest-slave to technology.

3

For example: Linkin Park named their album *A Thousand Suns*, like the rather perverse coffee

table book of mushroom cloud images, and Otolith Group named their Fukushima film *The Radiant*.

4

The very profitable ubiquity of this now Westernized, neoliberalized, Lululemon version of sun salutations, a once traditional Hindu religious practice, is a clear symptom and consequence of Vishnu's mutation into a nuclear weapon. When we perform our sun salutations on a sprung wooden floor in a Williamsburg yoga studio we no longer worship the natural Sun, and we certainly don't have Vishnu, Shiva, or Krishna in mind as we move competitively from downward dog to cobra in our oil-based Lycra.