



Beyond Presence: A No Compromises Approach to Re-Enchanting the Lunar Common

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1) *The Lunar Common at Risk*



The above advertisement, with its image of a lunar footprint from the original Apollo moon mission, no doubt is meant to suggest that when we think ahead, we can progress, do unbelievable things, even go to the moon. But a different reading is possible: it could suggest that we, on the verge of returning to the moon, ought to pay great attention to the tracks and traces that we might leave behind, as well as to protecting the vestiges remaining from those who went ahead, since in returning again, this time with the aim of creating a permanent moon colony and more, we risk doing many things: destroying the pristine lunar environment and its landscapes, destroying world cultural heritage such as the trace represented in this image, and perhaps most significantly, sacrificing the common status of the moon itself in the name of expediency, greed, and, a lust for presence. By a lust for presence, I mean an unbridled desire to see the moon ourselves, to be there in person, to feel its wonder. This desire, I suggest, is so great that it may prompt us to make compromises that we ought not to make, even to compromise on the idea and the ideal of defending the status of the moon, in the absence of indigenous claimants, as a common property of humankind.

The claim that I make in this text is that the lust for presence is not only problematic, but that it infects many discourses aimed at giving reasons why we ought to protect the moon. In so doing, it predisposes even those advocating the protection of certain aspects of the lunar common to cede the case to others aiming for the localized efforts at lunar expropriation, since lunar advocates often imagine that what is on the moon can only be of value if we are physically there. The no-compromises approach presented here claims not that humans should never be on the moon, but rather that no concessions to inequality ought to be made in the name of establishing a presence there. It thus advocates seeking out alternate ways of living with the moon, forms of interaction that place the protection of lunar environments and social equality above the demand for establishing a human presence.

Why bother arguing for a no compromises approach to thinking about the lunar commons? The answer lies in the specificity of our historical moment. Even as many lament the worsening condition of our home planet, space expansionism is once again in full swing. We are returning to the moon. Right now, these efforts are piloted by two groups: a Chinese-led coalition interested in creating an International Lunar Research Station, and the American-led group federated by the Artemis Accords. In both cases, it seems clear that while bans on national sovereignty may be respected, the encouragement of the private expropriation of lunar resources forms and integral part of the plan. Generally speaking, all the leading actors seem to compromise on the strict reading of the Outer Space Treaty (1967) and the Moon Agreement (1979) which would dictate, in the words of Tony Milligan, that “nobody owns the Moon”(Milligan 2015). To this effect, the Trump regime already explicitly announced that the “United States does not view the moon as a global commons”, even going so far as to affirm that United States “is not a party to the Moon Agreement” and will “object” to any attempt to treat that agreement, and its constraints on the commercialization of the moon, as “reflecting or otherwise expressing customary international law”(Trump 2020). Yet Trump is not an outlier here: nearly everyone currently involved with plans for the development of the moon seems to promise that mines, hotels, factories, and more will soon dot the lunar surface. In short, at least some parts of the moon are about to become extractive zones (Gómez-Barris 2017), and those who will be driving this transformation and expropriation of the lunar commons will not be coalitions of ordinary commoners, but only those individuals and nations wealthy enough to fund moon ventures. Thus, if we want to take equality and environmental protection seriously, even in this time of terrestrial crisis, we ought to attend to the moon as well as to our home planet. We need, in a word, to re-enchant the moon, just as we are attempting to re-enchant our planetary common.

There is at present minimal popular outcry about the coming expropriation of the moon, and even less regarding the terrestrial implications of uneven lunar development. This paper explores this indifference by focusing on the disenchantment of the moon, doing so by plunging into the longer history of our ideas regarding the value and significance of the moon. It suggests that with respect to thinking the extraterrestrial common, global accounts of the secularization of the world are misleading: they fail to account for the ultimate unsecularizability of the totality of the cosmos; the ways in which the dawning of the space age altered narratives regarding the modern process of the disenchantment of the world, and likewise fail to

adequately acknowledge the particular process of secularization and becoming worldly that has occurred with respect to the nearer zones of the heavens. Re-situating the secularization narrative with respect to an extraterrestrial relocation of the inherited opposition between heaven and earth, this paper suggests that while deeper space has become a modernized version of the ancestral heaven, the moon has become perhaps the most disenchanted place in the cosmos, while the Earth, thanks in part to the magical experiences generated by the moon missions, has begun to be re-enchanted. Drawing on work by Federici (2019) and Dardot and Laval (2020), it then explores how strategic “re-enchantment” can be used to render ordinary language capable of expressing the idea that the lunar commons ought to be normatively “inappropriable.” Yet the paper also draws attention to the ways in which the lust for presence, as well as a failure to acknowledge the differences and non-analogies between planetary protection efforts on Earth onto the moon as entangled with the place of presence within our terrestrial practices of re-enchanting places, can end up inclining us to misperceive compromising projects of lunar development as the best means of protecting the lunar common.

2) *Secularization and Disenchantment*

Many historical accounts of western technological modernity describe a process of secularization, in other words, a process whereby the presence of the divine, the magical, and the enchanted disappears from the world (Taylor 2007). They place emphasis on a growing “worldliness” of the “world” (Blumenberg 1996); not only a loss of its extraordinary or occult qualities, but also a growing tendency to care about what is worldly, monetary, or practical as opposed to what is heavenly or other-worldly. In his influential account of this “disenchantment [*Entzauberung*] of the world,” Max Weber argued that within modern societies “mysterious incalculable forces” were now banished, such that what was left behind was a belief that “one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.” In this disenchanted world, one no longer needed “magical means to master or implore the spirits” since “technical means and calculations perform the service”(Weber 1992, 87).

A key text both documenting and promoting this view, Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* describe the emergence of a “prosaic understanding” of the world, one which “puts the limited and circumscribed in its place and understands it as an authentic figure [*eigentümliche Gestalt*] of finitude, humans are taken as individuals, not as incarnations of God, sun as sun, mountains as mountains, not as having within themselves spirit and will”(Hegel 1994). In this secularized space of reasons, the sun no longer counts as a divinity, its rising and setting are no longer aligned with moralized expressions of divine rage, grace, or vengeance. It is not even a poetic or enchanted thing. The sun is—at least in theory—just the sun, nothing more, nothing less. But secularization has never wholly driven magic out of the world or made the entire world worldly, to the extent that it is rare that we refer to things as just prosaically being they are. As Mark Fisher’s (2009) has noted, in everyday practice Hegel’s supposedly prosaic world often amounts to no more than a representational regime normed by “capitalist realism,” a way of ‘seeing as’ in which the moon and other objects are seen as resources, as potential sources of wealth to be appropriated by private actors, employed in technological projects, and thereby

serving their quests for power. Yet if we shift our focus outwards beyond the globe and the globalizing logic of capitalist exchange, we see that the heavens were never properly disenchanted, nor could they ever be.

It is perhaps right to say that over the course of modernity the world, understood as the terrestrial globe, became more worldly, but that which stood outside of the world remained magical. As Marcel Gleiser puts it: “the land had lost its enchantment. God was far removed from Earth, inhabiting the unreachable confines of Heaven” (Gleiser 2023, 78). Now we may wish to quibble that the heavens in the religious sense and the starry skies above were two different things, that the one referred to a region in geometrical space and the other an empyrean beyond were two different things, but in effect, given that both were equally unreachable for the great mass of moderns, the difference was indifferent in practice. Which is to say that the heavens were the heavens just so long as both could not be reached, disenchanted, brought substantively into the historical world. In other words, just as secularization never wholly demanded the sacrifice, *in foro interno*, of what John Rawls (2005) has called “comprehensive rationality” but only demanded a submission to common contractual norms of “reasonableness,” thus sparking an existential split within modern subjects, so too did the universe of the moderns involve a split *in foro externo*, whereby the accessible world, in essence the globe, became secularized, but that which lay beyond any possible access, or which was accessible only in dreams and fantasies, remained, perforce enchanting, magical, unsecularizable.

Why this matters, of course, is that when dealing with the lunar commons and the impending return to the moon, we are talking about a place that, for almost all cultural history, and still within many cultural histories, was either enchanted or overlooked, thought of as not belonging to the world, even if now, in the space age, parts of that other world—but by no means its heavenly totality—are now worldly. What this means for how we think about the lunar common, as well as for our broader understanding of the phenomenon of modernity as involving a specifically spatialized process of disenchantment remains to be seen.

3) *The Unsecularizability of the Extraterrestrial*

The above may be read as suggesting that the extraterrestrial is still under the thrall of inherited religious thinking, as if divinity and angels, or Zeus and Hera, were still hiding in the depths of space, and that is obviously misleading. What I am intimating is that the spatiotemporal enormity of the extraterrestrial as a domain of action generates something like a singularity within the calculating, empirical thinking that is most characteristic of modernity, and it is out of these most worldly of materials that the extraterrestrial generates new and distinctively modern forms of magical beliefs.

To see this, project Weber’s idea that all things are capable of being mastered through calculation out into the abysses of space. What we encounter, at least by following our data-driven calculations, are a whole range of beliefs in the credible existence of beings that are not gods, but who possess god-like magical powers. By this, I mean that we believe that there must

be technologically advanced alien civilizations, or rather more precisely, we *calculate* that they must be there, and when we do not find them, we find this paradoxical, even taking this absence to be a kind of ontological proof of divine providence (Ćirković 2018; Gleiser 2023; Lingam and Loeb 2021). We base these calculations on new and enchanting vistas opened by advances in telescope technology, the discovery that there may be as many as “ten billion Earths” (Schrijver 2018) worth of exoplanets. Such calculations in turn yield estimations that there may be up to two hundred million civilizations within the depths of the cosmos (Frank 2023). Perhaps not probability, but at least prudence, suggests that any aliens we encounter are likely to be more technologically advanced than we are, even to the point of being superintelligent, hyperbolically more intelligent than we are (Schneider 2019). Which in turn means that they will almost surely possess technologies and capabilities of mastering us that will be, in the famous words of Arthur C. Clarke, “indistinguishable from magic” (Clarke 2013, 250), just as they themselves end up being only minimally different from the gods that they replace.

This line of thinking has a wholly other face. Just as we assume that any alien that could come to us from space must be capable of what amounts to magic, we likewise, and symmetrically, tend to calculate that if we are able to get to deeper space, this will mean that we too, or at least our post-human ancestors, will have become capable of accomplishing what amounts to magical or quasi-divine feats. This spatialization of the acquisition of magical powers is one of the most powerful drivers of space futurism and astrofuturist religiosity, whether we are talking about Russian cosmism (Eltchaninoff 2022), the space “saints” at NASA (Noble 2013), or the newer forms of “astrotopianism” among New Space entrepreneurs (Rubenstein 2022). This is nicely illustrated in Marc Andreesson’s recent *Techno-Optimist Manifesto*. He proclaims his “belief” that “our descendents will live in the stars” precisely in the midst of a discussion of overcoming the material limits imposed on growth by the increasingly well-documented constraints imposed on the liberal economy by our planet, and amidst an effort to push back on the moral norms that are being imposed on our corporations by our increasing acknowledgement that we live on a planetary common—“ESG”, “Sustainable Development Goals”, “social responsibility”, “stakeholder capitalism”, “Precautionary Principle”, “trust and safety”, “tech ethics”, “risk management”, “de-growth”, “the limits of growth” (Andreesson 2023). His argument is essentially that all these discourses are illegitimate because they do not believe in the magical horizon of the conquest of the extraterrestrial, that they lack reality because they do not see that the secular world has an immanent horizon in which the magical remains possible, and even emerges as a seemingly reasonable belief given the data provided by our technologies and other calculating machines.

The spatial magic generated by the sublimity of the cosmos renders it unsecularizable, in principle incapable of being brought into the everyday world, in principle incapable of ever being visited or conquered (Ord 2021). But it is unsecularizable in a very specific way. Frequently, discourses speaking about secularization have aimed to give voice to a debt to a particular cause or origin of secular history. Yet I am claiming no such debt, but rather more a potential, generated by the vastness of space, to generate both new magical figures as well as possibilities for narratives to tie these figures back to archaic theological roots. In other words,

to claim that deeper space is unsecularizable is not an astrocultural version of Carl Schmitt's claim regarding the secularization of political theory—"All of the key concepts of modern political theory are secularized theological concepts. Not only in terms of their historical development, because they were transferred [*übertragen*] from theology to political theory, for example, by the omnipotent God becoming the omnipotent lawgiver, but also in their systematic structure, the knowledge of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts"(Schmitt 2004, 45). Aliens are not necessarily angels, and exoplanets are not necessarily Dante's empyrean spheres, even if there may well be anthropological explications rooted within the structure and limits of human rationality that explain these similarities. I understand the gesture here as closer to bringing attention to what Hans Blumenberg (1996) called "reoccupation [*umbesetzung*]," namely I want to place emphasis on how different but structurally similar forms of thought have emerged over the course of modernity, forms of thought that are different in certain details because they derive from specifically modern justificatory structures such as empirical data and mathematical calculations, but which nevertheless remind us of earlier, and supposedly non-modern thought figures such as the belief in magic being located in a transcendental beyond that we can access if, and only if, we act within this world in such a way as to show our faith and belief in the existence of this beyond.

That said, our primary aim here is not to examine the structure of astrotopian belief, but rather to explore what happens when zones of that magical beyond, and most specifically the moon, are drawn into the world, while all the while remaining outside of the historically and still paradigmatic location of disenchantment, the globe.

4) *The Disenchantment of the Moon*

Let us start by admitting—without giving a full historical account—that the moon was long enchanted and enchanting, part of the magical heavenly sphere that was only ambiguously part of the world. For those who doubt this, or who crave a more detailed account, Loske and Massey (2018), Montgomery (1999), Morton (2019), are starting places. Yet what matters to us here is less what the moon was, but how talking about the moon as moon changed as it became part of the world.

Archibald Macleish's poem, *Voyage to the Moon*, neatly plots the initial phases in these changes. *Voyage* was initially published on the front page of the *New York Times* on July 21st 1969, on the same day and page as was announced "MEN LAND ON MOON: ASTRONAUTS LAND ON PLAIN; COLLECT ROCKS, PLANT FLAG." It begins by evoking the enchanted, and enchanting, status of the moon:

You were a wonder to us, unattainable,
a longing past the reach of longing,
a light beyond our light, our lives—perhaps
a meaning to us...
Now
our hands have touched you in your depth of night.

Here—at least up until the touch down—the moon is not prosaic, it is an enchanted place, an object of poetic investment as symbolic of wonder and inappropriable purity. Yet in Macleish's poetic imagination, which mirrors discursive shifts felt elsewhere in society, the moon is depotentialized by touchdown. It loses its charm. In consequence, the poet's attention immediately shifts away from the moon, back to the Earth, which now, in an anticipation of the role that the icon of Earthrise will play in the cultural imagination (Poole 2008), appears as a poetically charged object, invested with the charms that were once bestowed on the moon:

Over us, more beautiful than the moon, a
moon, a wonder to us, unattainable,
a longing past the reach of longing,
a light beyond our light, our lives—perhaps
a meaning to us . . .
O, a meaning!
over us on these silent beaches the bright earth,
presence among us.(Macleish 1969)

This poetic re-enchantment of the Earth reminds us of Frank White's (2014) famed overview effect, "that transcendental feeling of astronauts that our home is not the house or the street or the nation where we live, but the Earth itself"(Lovelock 2009, 2). Such a feeling is hardly to be despised, the cultivating of this enchanted belief in the all-transcending holistic unity of our home planet has played a key role in re-enchanting the Earth, and in so doing encouraged more and more of us to see, and to act, as if our existence were "codependent with the life collective on this planet"(Gleiser 2023, 6). Yet what Macleish's poem also suggests is a certain unreckoned cost of the re-enchantment of the Earth. For it is in the very moment that the moon becomes available, is touched, that it loses its charm, transferring that magic to the earth.

This is something that might not have immediately seemed to matter. The Apollo astronauts went back to Earth, then others came, but finally all returned to Earth, and no humans came back. Arguably, this resulted in the moon becoming, for a while, prosaic in the Hegelian sense of the term: it was just the moon, available, but just there, we were ultimately indifferent to it, and it might as well have returned to its old status of enchanted unavailability, but that was in a way barred, for it really was within our horizon, within the scope of the enchanted world. Now that we had been there no new aliens were spouting forth out of the regolith, and remarkable few tales of lunar colonization as well. But if many thought that then, the impending return to the moon suggests that we were wrong, or at least that the moon is now no longer just a moon, but a resource. Returns to the moon are becoming increasingly coherent as projects within the language of capitalist realism, coherent with narratives in which our moon missions do not only amount to having an experience, doing some science, and making declarations regarding peace and all mankind, but with making a return on investments. The moon may have been judged by international organizations a global common in the period in which it was merely a moon, but now it is neither magical nor out of reach, it is merely appropriable. This is evident in how astrophysicist Joseph Silk, in his recent *Back to the Moon*, describes the lunar future:

The international space agencies plan to build moon villages for habitation. There are plans to tap commercial interests to develop luxury hotel resorts. As terrestrial resources

of the rare earth elements and semiconductor materials become sparse, lunar mining operations are also envisioned. (Silk 2022, 2-3)

5) *Re-Enchantment as Inappropriability*

The connection between the dynamics of enchantment and people's propensity to sacrifice their commons has been studied by numerous scholars focused on terrestrial contexts ranging from local to global. Sylvia Federici, for example, has tied expropriations of the commons to the emergence of discourses which see places as only as usable according to the "reasons and logics" of capitalist development, while simultaneously arguing that "re-enchanting the world," in our terms, developing alternate ways of wording the world that insist on its value for forms of life that are other than extractive, as a "a precondition for resistance to exploitation" and the protection of the "common" (Federici 2019). To re-enchant the moon thus demands what Thomas Kuhn would call a "gestalt switch" (2012, 85), a consensual acceptance of interpreting and expressing what the moon is differently, from the three versions that we have seen above, for the moon, to be protected as a common, must not be judged out of reach, nor as merely being there, nor finally as a resource, but rather as some other thing.

Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, in their massive treatise *Common*, have helpfully suggested that what is "common" falls under "a norm of inappropriability." What they mean by this is that the common is not "that which one cannot appropriate"—for example, the moon understood as transcendently unreachable, but rather that "which one ought to not appropriate, which is to say that which it is not permitted to appropriate because it ought to be reserved to common usage"(2020, 936-7). I take this to basically imply that when we experience a common as a common, we experience it as wrong to treat it as appropriable. It is perhaps easier to illustrate than to explicate this point. Consider how we might talk about the pyramids in Egypt. Few of us would describe them as just triangular piles of stone, and equally few—even assuming the all-pervasiveness of capitalism—would see them as source of lithic resources. We would employ language associated with history, tradition, and culture. We would be concerned about how to facilitate access to them while simultaneously preserving them for the future. We are not talking about gods here, but rather about a normative consensus among human actors, a consensus that is perhaps an imaginary entity or a heuristic fiction, but which also bears not on our fate in the afterlife, but on the future of things and others in this world, and which in effect casts an aura of magic around the pyramids, encouraging us to believe that it is wrong to not deal with them as inappropriable. This means that we believe that we ought to use them in ways other than is consistent with the common usage, that are consistent with the maximum of number of current and future people being able to enjoy them as we have.

If this, then, is a paradigm for thinking about re-enchantment as a tool for protecting the commons, the question then arises as to how and whether we can cast similar secular spells over other and larger domains, with the most critical question in our context being whether we can translate this recipe for enchantment out into space, onto the moon, where we might suppose (wrongly) that this is exactly how we should think if we want to protect those lunar footprints with which we have begun.

6) *Misleading Analogies and the Problem of Presence*

Back in 1965, Bruce Mazlish highlighted the possible importance of employing “historical analogies” as a “device of anticipation” for thinking the future implications of the then-nascent space program (Mazlish 1965). His particular focus was on the analogy between rockets and railroads, and the question that intrigued him was whether rockets, like railroads, would lead to a settling of the frontiers of interplanetary space. Without at all calling the importance of such efforts at thinking through analogies into question, it is also true that in this moment of space history it is also critical to focus on historical disanalogies, and in particular ways in which the grip of certain analogies upon our imaginations may be blinding us to understanding the conditions proper to coping with the extraterrestrial condition that is our own. Stated briefly, what the analogy between rockets and railroads suggests is that the natural order of development will pass through settlements in which human beings will be present on the moon, as if the form of being present were the only imaginable common usage of the moon. That we are inclined to think this way is unsurprising: it is in the mode of being present that we mostly use common places on Earth such as the pyramids: we visit them from places that are not common, and while visiting them we restrict our usage in such ways that future people can be present, essentially merely being present in them. But the question arises with respect to the moon: how much is presence, this figure for how we use many commons on Earth worth? Is it worth sacrificing a part of the common?

Consider the following lines of thought, both of which have to do with spellcasting and their relationship to presence, and so also link back to larger discourses on how we can re-enchant the terrestrial commons. Above, we have suggested that the moon became significantly disenchanted after Apollo, while the Earth, in a significant part due to the enchantment of seeing our home planet as a planet, hence exotic and distant, came to be reenchanted. Yet I cited a poet imagining the experience of visiting the moon and not an astronaut describing the experience of being there. Now, if we look at the testimonies of the astronauts, a different and more enchanting representation of the lunar landscape emerges. These are the words of Buzz Aldrin, the second man on the moon:

In every direction I could see detailed characteristics of the gray ash-colored lunar scenery, pocked with thousands of little craters and with every variety and shape of rock. I saw the horizon curving a mile and a half away. With no atmosphere, there was no haze on the moon. It was crystal clear. “Beautiful view!” I said. “Isn’t that something!” Neil gushed. “Magnificent sight out here.” I slowly allowed my eyes to drink in the unusual majesty of the moon. In its starkness and monochromatic hues, it was indeed beautiful. But it was a different sort of beauty than I had ever before seen. Magnificent, I thought, then said, “Magnificent desolation” (Aldrin 2009, 33-4).

They are in many ways reminiscent of the following lines from John Muir’s *My First Summer in the Sierra*, a text that was foundational for the creation of that inappropriable space which is Yosemite National Park:

We are near the North Fork of the Merced. The night wind is telling the wonders of the upper mountains, their snow fountains and gardens, forests and groves; even their

topography is in its tones. And the stars, the everlasting sky lilies, how bright they are now that we have climbed above the lowland dust! The horizon is bounded and adorned by a spiry wall of pines, every tree harmoniously related to every other; definite symbols, divine hieroglyphics written with sunbeams. Would I could understand them! The stream flowing past the camp through ferns and lilies and alders makes sweet music to the ear, but the pines marshaled around the edge of the sky make a yet sweeter music to the eye. Divine beauty all. Here I could stay tethered forever with just bread and water, nor would I be lonely; loved friends and neighbors, as love for everything increased, would seem all the nearer however many the miles and mountains between us. (Muir 2018, 16-7)

The analogies between the two passages are undeniable. Both describe an aesthetic experience generated by a striking landscape. Both—though this is more explicit in Muir than in Aldrin who merely alludes to it in the idea of ‘drinking in’—suggest that the vision of this sublimity alone, the pure being there coupled with the minimal necessities, is sufficient to nourish the observer, hence, to cut off the desire to appropriate and transform that zone into something else, a place more civilized and less desolate. Both provide arguments for what Holmes Rolston would call the “aesthetic value” and even the “recreational value” of these places, arguments which would encourage us to leave them wild so that not only the few, but many of us, and for a long time into the future, can be privy to such transcendental experiences (Rolston 2010). Such speech acts, bear witness to the power of presence to cast what David Abram has called the “spell of the sensuous” which includes what he describes as “the moral efficacy of the landscape—this power of the land to ensure mindful and respectful behavior in the community” (Abram 2012, 156). Thus, it may seem to follow that what we need to do to protect the lunar common is to go there, to see for ourselves, and so to come to care about the moon. But the problem here is that unlike Yosemite, merely getting to the moon to protect it in this way demands a sacrifice.

Let me offer another example in the same vein. Alice Gorman (2019) has rightly argued that the Apollo landing sites—and even more precisely the footprints represented in the newspaper advertisement with which we have begun—are, like the Egyptian pyramids, of great “cultural significance,” worthy of being protected as we would protect other sites against the ravages of extractive and other activities on the moon. In this she is obviously right. Yet if we are not careful, we easily find ourselves believing that we then ought to use this place as we do use the pyramids. We ought to be able to go there, to see the prints for ourselves, a line of thought that Gorman, implicitly endorses: “Only twelve people have ever seen the surface of the Moon from inside their own bodies. One day, perhaps in the not too distant future, that number will increase, and perhaps there may be poets and artists among them who will see new colours and textures in the shadows and dust, to refigure the Moon for new generations” (Gorman 2019, loc. 2241). Gorman perfectly well understands that having visitors on the moon will further enchant these traces, helping to protect them, just as visitors to Yosemite, carried away in wonder and awe, contribute to the enchantment of the place, adding chapters to what Kim Stanley Robinson has narrated as the “love story” of the “high Sierra” (Robinson 2022). But once again, the issue is not whether having people present will cast this spell, but whether bringing them into presence might not entail compromises elsewhere that are incompatible with keeping the lunar commons a common.

The answer, in the strictest sense, is probably no: we do not need to sacrifice parts of the lunar common to make lunar presence possible. But in a more practical sense, the answer given by many who aim to protect the lunar commons involves compromises. For when we base our lunar protection arguments on the premise of presence, we seem to suggest that these places will only become enchanted and valuable when we can see them for ourselves. Which means that without at least a plan for future presence, they are at present without value, charm, or interest. Thus, the very idea of procuring protection for these places can intersect with a logic of sacrifice, whereby other zones of the moon, even though they belong to the common, are imagined as worth sacrificing, giving over to private exploitation, just so these zones of particular interest can more rapidly become present and hence further protected by the spell casting power of presence.

7) *Bad Bargains*

Here we come to the question of compromise. If we value the common, we ought to have a certain resistance to this desire for presence to the extent that it prompts us to cede to social inequality, we ought to exercise our imaginations in a quest for other modes of casting spells that do not demand our being there, but which are more compatible with keeping the lunar common common. Yet that said, it seems vital to continue reflecting on why some advocates for lunar commons protection might cede parts of the common to private industry in the name of enabling presence and its enchanting powers.

Consider the case of Joseph Silk, who we have already cited above. He is not a space entrepreneur, but rather an astrophysicist interested in creating a large international telescope on the moon. This is a common interest project, a communal usage of the lunar common. He is likewise someone who is wholly sensible to the importance and value of preserving what he calls “the pristine nature of the lunar environment” (Silk 2022, 228). But he also, as we have seen, accepts the spread of extractivism on the moon. Why? Is this not in cognitive dissonance with both his commitment to protecting the aesthetic aspects of the pristine lunar environment and the lunar silence so critical for the functioning of the large lunar radiotelescope that he cares about?

Here I want to return to our earlier discussions on the unsecularizability of deeper space and the magical thinking that it engenders. As Silk writes, explaining why we ought to establish a base on the moon, and justifying the employment of private expropriation of the lunar common while doing so: “ultimately lunar rocket fuel will launch us further into the solar system. The habitable facilities developed for lunar exploration will enable exploitation of lunar resources and help to demonstrate the feasibility of the next great chapter in interplanetary exploration, which will take us to Mars and beyond” (Silk 2022, 3). When this happens—at least in Silk’s enchanted imagination—any number of terrestrial and extraterrestrial problems will be resolved. Humans will have access to “millions of years” worth of rare earths required for further expanding our dependence on electronic devices, and they will obtain fuel capable of resolving our terrestrial energy problems. They will also have a fix for the pollution problems associated with extractivism, since toxic by-products will be shipped to “the nearest and most

efficient giant incinerator—the Sun”. Thanks to the miracles made possible by extra-terrestrial medical advances humans will attain “quasi-immortality”(Silk 2022, 35-40). If all of this is not magical thinking, the effect of deep space on modern technological rationality, then I do not know what is. Moreover, what I take this line of thought to illustrate is that it is not only the desire for presence that drives us to sacrifice the moon, but the belief that what will be given up in order to get there will always be available again, as if by magic, over the next horizon, which means that all of the inequalities and the environmental degradations encountered along the way are imagined to not really matter, paradoxically enough, precisely within that space in which we anticipate ourselves as being present. On this line of thought, sacrificing the lunar commons simply doesn’t matter, because we can always anticipate magically getting better or more in return.

8) *On Secular Magic*

Wittgenstein once described philosophy as “a struggle against the bewitchment [*Verhexung*] of our understanding by the means of our language”(Wittgenstein 2003, 109). This bears on the bidirectional gestalt switch that we have been attempting here; and is itself a line that needs to be read in a bidirectional way: as reminding us that just so long as we are inside language, we will have bewitchments of our understanding which we call philosophy, but also as reading that we will have philosophy which is to say spell casting just so long as we speak. On the one hand, I have attempted to draw into question a certain way of thinking about secularization, about presence, and about the magical power of being present in space, particularly laying emphasis on how these encourage magical forms of thinking that incline us to compromise regarding the commonality of the lunar common. On the other hand, I have argued that we need to work to cast a spell over the moon, to re-enchant it as normatively inappropriable. I have been suggesting that the kinds of spells which have been cast over the Earth, which are deeply entangled with a relation of care embedded in sensual experience and the magic of presence, may mislead us as we attempt to find ways and forms of care applicable to the protection of the lunar common and its “different sort of beauty.” But what does strike me as common in both cases is the means for dealing with enchantment and disenchantment, namely our language and other forms of expression, as well as the need in both cases to hew towards the secular, to envision re-enchantment not in terms of a return to wrathful divinities, but rather to a common social commitment to responsibility exercised in the name of common vulnerability and co-dependency within a common and limited world.

One key aspect of this paper has been a particular focus on the question of presence. Derrida insisted on the imbrication of what he called the metaphysics of presence with the notion of the “transcendental signifier,” the figure that held all things together, the implicit “ultimate reference” of all of our analogies, the one that confers on articulations their “semantic content or a form of presence guaranteeing from outside the general movement of the text”(1972, 67-8). In the Anthropocene, the name increasingly given to this signifier, its figuration as present despite its phenomenal absence in everyday experience, is, following an impulse of Gayatri Spivak’s, the “planet,” a word that she herself suggested was rather a transcendental “figure” than a signifier, rather an “animating gift” than a primordial debt (2003, loc. 1129). But

animating gift that the figure of the planet might be, it also has limits. The spell that the planet casts, and the spell casting that planetizes through presence, ought not to be taken transcendently as synonymous with the world, if only because the moon is, as I have argued, in the world, of the planet, but is not the planet. To re-enchant the moon without disenchanting the planet, that is a work for what Derrida called *différance*. But the question of how to open a double session, the question of the means necessary for cultivating care for the moon that thinks magic beyond presence or by means of telepresence, remains to be thought. Which is not to say that spells have not been cast elsewhere, only that thinking them has not been our task here, merely clearing away ideas that would keep us, enraptured by the spell cast by planetary presence, from keeping the lunar common common.

The no-compromise view presented here, then, stakes almost no claim to telling us how we ought to deal with the lunar common, it merely seeks to remind readers how we shouldn't.

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