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An Encounter with New Realities: IVORY

By following the example of IVORY, a multifaceted character that gradually emerged alongside a long-term exploratory engagement with synthetic polymers, the proposed paper investigates how and why such figures arise in response to changing environments, and what role they may play in helping us orient ourselves within realities that increasingly exceed established modes of relation.

Starting from the peculiar emergence of IVORY, the paper raises questions about the conditions under which such characters appear, about the roles they perform, and about the possibility that historically, other mythical figures might have emerged through similar processes. Thereby, rather than offering a general theory of mythmaking, the paper takes the subjective and highly specific case of IVORY as an opportunity to revisit questions surrounding the emergence, stabilization, and responsibilities of such personifications. It asks what changes when situated conditions become translated into characters, and how the appearance of such figures may itself transform the realities to which they relate.

The paper deliberately resists collapsing these questions into either side of the relation. IVORY herself may well be imaginary, yet the material transformations and cultural tensions accompanying synthetic materialities are not. The self-reinforcing effects of a simultaneous devaluation and idealization of plastics remain operational, as does our reluctance to grant these materials their own processes of aging, and our tendency to position new artificialities outside of nature itself. Reducing the figure to fiction would risk erasing the conditions it accompanies, just as reducing it to mere representation would overlook the transformative role such characters may play.

However, if IVORY needs to remain ambiguous, then so does the proposed paper. Rather than resolving the question of a figure's ontological status, it deliberately remains indeterminate between such polarities. Just as places cannot be separated from the connotations people relate to them, neither can characters like IVORY be separated from the stories describing their presence. The paper therefore acknowledges its own participation in these processes, rather than depicting IVORY or speaking in her name, it seeks to accompany her and widen her reach.

In this sense, the text itself becomes one further layer through which IVORY is reconstructed, enacted, extended, and transformed. The paper does not seek to resolve every question IVORY might raise, nor to explain away the very circumstances of her appearance. What role does personification play in the cultivation of human empathy? Why this rather than another name? These questions may remain deliberately open.

Likewise, as it enters the very forms of relation that IVORY is capable of bundling and stabilizing, the paper can hardly seek to reconstruct the specific conditions from which those figures become possible or even necessary. Rather than isolating IVORY as an exceptional case, the paper therefore gradually encounters her as part of a wider population of characters, companions, and personified conditions that have long accompanied human worlds, some of which are known to many, others only to few.