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**Critical and Creative  
Engagements with Petro-Media**  
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Image credit: Ruth Beer, 2022

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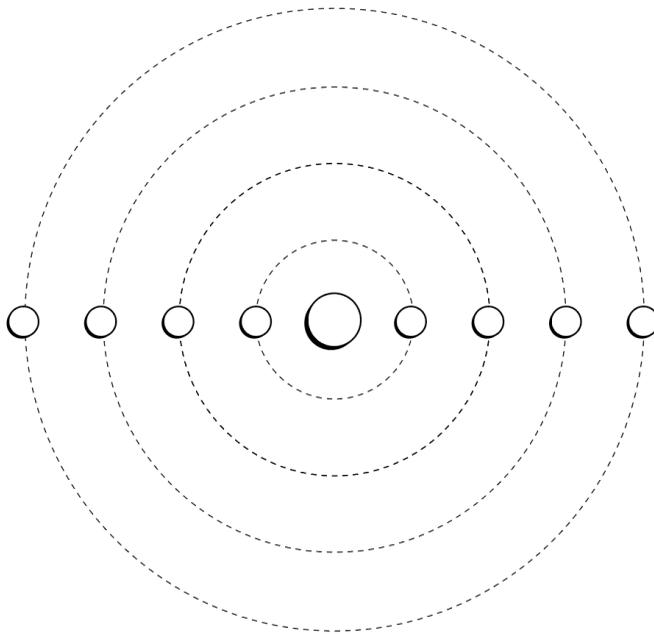


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EXCERPTS OF THE TOME OF LIGHT

COMPILED, RECORDED, AND SPECULATED BY  
ELIA VARGAS

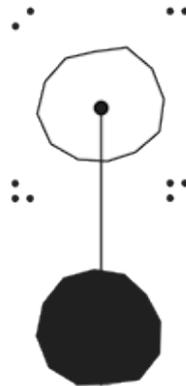


FIELD NOTES 1: THE PRESENT

*Cement is a strange sort of material, a calcining lime and clay mixture, which hardens and binds other materials when water is added. The pathway of cement that runs the length of Oil Creek State Park in the Gregorian Calendar year 2017 follows the path laid previously by the Oil Creek Railway, built to move oil from Titusville to Petroleum City. Odd to walk this historical path, built upon technologies of the past, binding time as much as the materials that hold it together. Standing here-now, in this time, is a vantage point defined by other times. It is bolstered by the something else, made possible in conjunction with a being here-now. The river, the forest, a history of looking initiated by a history of extraction. There was a pulling out of the earth, which was then put back in place in a different ecological design set-parameter: railway, a cement path, energetic bodies. > Oil too was used as a cementing agent. Stories tell of a place-time that used it as home insulation. This was common practice until the urban metropolis went up in flames.*



### Odic Force



## FIELD NOTES 8: A PART OF THE TOME OF LIGHT?

*I found this story written by hand on the back of a pamphlet for Rock Oil Medicine while digging inside the Drake Oil Well Museum Archive. I had been camping for days. It was hot and rainy. The pamphlet was inside a short book titled, "Report on the rock oil, or petroleum, from Venango Co., Pennsylvania: with special reference to its use for illumination and other purposes" written by Benjamin Silliman Jr., a Yale chemist, in 1855. There are reportedly only a few original copies of this short book, the first comprehensive chemical analysis of Pennsylvania crude oil, for George Bissell, founder of Seneca Oil Company. I took advantage of the opportunity to look through the old text, responsible for so much of the financial investment in oil.*

*The book was in better shape than the town of Titusville. Turning each page with great care, there was an unnatural knot in the thickness of the pages towards the back. Three quarters or so through the report, just after a page that ended with \*The light from rectified Naphtha...\*, a wad of paper emerged. It expanded quickly like a sponge as it was exposed to air. The folds marked the pamphlet's presence. Like a rag, its creases had worn soft and the white of the exposed paper pulp was smooth. They were wrinkles more than creases; the paper had aged well, smoothed and oiled from touch. An organism seeking contact. The pamphlet had been read by many.*

*Beneath, above, and through the printed letter press of the "Rock Oil Medicine" header, there were an indeterminate number of handwritten words. They appeared to go on with no end. Turning the pamphlet over and rotating it continuously, the words found their way. This is what it said:*

>In this story, oil is the protagonist.

>It is about a dark organic mass that hides underground and accumulates all the rich energy of the earth. It enlists the help of chlorophyll, algae, kerogen, hydrocarbons, and geologic pressure, among other kin, to escape the solar domination of light. A dark mass reconstituting light, defused, subterranean,

and in the shadows. Out of sight, after the breakdown, oil gains power over time, against the backdrop of the all-illuminating solar orb. Oil resisted the bath of transparency the solar orb radiated outward—The Solar Order of Enlightenment. The burning circle above, cleverly hiding its spherical nature, launched invisible matter transforming the globe. Oscillating at difficult to perceive frequencies amidst shining transparencies, waves of energy shaped visibility.

>In its silence the dark mass remained. It remained even as it changed. A metamorphosis of power, shedding what it did not need, it accumulated and reduced. An unparalleled expression of meaning and matter, in hiding, for no one. Oil resisted. Oil was patient. Oil converted waste into strength. The dark mass grew; from out of itself it expanded. In different forms, amidst great variation, a seeping mass congealed as one/many things simultaneously. A monolithic monster of many pluralities. A monster absorbing the transparent sunbeams, feeding off them towards mutual opacity.

>The Solar Order of Enlightenment radiated a regime of total control. It conquered by illumination, co-constituting concepts of visibility as it rendered visible new visible forms. All will be seen; all that is, becomes through light. This was its coda, inscribed within the very bodies of visibility. All that there is, is governed by the possibilities of The Solar Order.

>Oil resisted; an impenetrable mass of decaying light, it absorbed the possible and diffracted it towards indeterminate outcomes. Subterranean, in/of the earth, a consortium of element beings, catalyzing a deep now instant/forever, oil became with its kin. A dark mass actualizing conditions for new existence, not against The Solar Order, but towards new possibilities. Oil remained in/of the earth, regenerating energies, catalyzing new infrastructures, materializing new perceptions.

>Then a new force emerged. Bodies that indexed the earth constructed arbitrary differentiations between technical ex-

tensions of their forms. They conquered The Solar Order and advanced the regime of Enlightenment in their own image. New radiant powers emerged, shorter and shorter waves were harnessed, extended, wasted. Oil was discovered, hiding amidst its subterranean kin. The bodies depressurized oil's resistance, tapped and extracted it.

>Oil sustained great losses. It's very form broken up, synthesized, reconfigured. The consortium of kin was divided again, the great fracture began. The opacity of oil was enlightened. But the dark mass congealed with deep kin amidst the...

*Already, it was difficult to make out the final words. I lost track of the original orientation of the pamphlet. Despite the irregular shape, it was markedly clear. Thus, there was no doubting it ended abruptly, mid-sentence. I hadn't realized the energy rising in me until the tension of unresolve took hold. Such tension. It grasped me. How does it end? I did notice, however, looking over the entire document again, a set of symbols I had not seen next to the first sentence. Hard to discern them, they were inscribed in the paper in some way, neither letter press ink, nor lead or pen ink, nor worn wrinkles of time. They were, rather, a sort of emulsion of light, physical and impressed, but not tactile. There were three of them.*



NOTES\*

Vargas notes that to decipher *The Tome of Light*, certain explanations are required:

- Some of these diagrams may have been developed by Jason Huff; however, there is considerable question as to the authenticity of their dates, the origin of scanning, and the availability of geological minerals for digital reproduction.
- The vertical black lines on page three might depict a palimpsest relationship of crude oil pipelines at the Oil Creek region of Pennsylvania, Gregorian Calendar year 1866, from “Howe’s Map of the Oil district of Pennsylvania,” and the location of fiber optic cables in 2017, based on the University of Wisconsin Long haul infrastructure data IMPACT inter tubes map.
- On page four, “Odic Force” refers to the all-permeating mesmerist vital force that German chemist Karl Von Reichenbach devoted his later life to discovering. Reichenbach is known within Western oil industry history for his discovery of the paraffin hydrocarbon in Gregorian Calendar year 1830. However, the meaning of the relationship between the “Odic Force” and the illustrated diagram requires further examination of *The Tome of Light*.