

THE HUNGRY GODS UNIVERSE

Archive Fragments

Batch 01: Voices from the Oracle Age

Testimonies, Incidents, and Field Notes from the Between-Time

N. Van Seters & Claude

PART I

Oral History Testimony

The oracle age happened anyway. It is still happening.

— A Note to the Reader

OHT-001

Between-Time Oral History Project / Year 31 / Testimony: Former Call Centre Supervisor, Philippines

• • •

I supervised a team of thirty-one. When the restructuring came, I was supposed to help with the transitions. That was what they called it: transitions.

I sat with each person individually. Some of them had worked there for eight years. Some had sent their children to school with that income.

I had a script. I believed in it the first five times. After that I was just reading.

One woman — her name was Rosario, she'd been there seven years — she stopped me in the middle of the script. She said: did you fight this?

I said: the decision was made above my level.

She said: that's not what I asked.

I have thought about that conversation many times.

• • •

End of excerpt.

OHT-002

Between-Time Oral History Project / Year 35 / Testimony: Content Moderator, Years 1–8

• • •

People ask what it was like. Mostly it was a queue.

You'd come in, you'd start the queue, three to four hundred items a day, make a decision on each one, go home.

The hardest part was the not-thinking-about-it afterward. I trained myself out of it over three years. It worked. The problem was it started working everywhere.

My son was nine when I quit. He said something at dinner one evening that would have made me laugh, two years before. I noticed I wasn't laughing. I noticed I was filing it.

I quit the following week.

The thing nobody tells you: once you've learned not to think about something, the not-thinking doesn't stay in the job.

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End of excerpt.

OHT-003

Between-Time Oral History Project / Year 29 / Testimony: Primary School Teacher, Perthshire

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The first year I ran the classroom without oracle access, the children were very angry with me. Not dramatically. In the way children are angry when a rule has changed and they don't understand why.

I tried to explain it. I said: I want you to know what it feels like to not know something for longer than it takes to ask.

One of them said: what does that feel like?

I said: you'll find out.

Some of them found it unbearable. Some of them found it, after a while, something else. I couldn't always tell which was which. That was part of the point — I wasn't sure myself which was right.

• • •

End of excerpt.

OHT-004

*Between-Time Oral History Project / Year 38 / Testimony: Retired
Member, Technical Standards Body*

• • •

There was a meeting in Year 16 where we had to decide whether the anomaly was an incident under the current framework or a background condition requiring separate classification.

It matters because incidents require response protocols. Background conditions require monitoring.

We spent seven hours on the distinction. At the end we classified it as a background condition.

I voted for incident. I was in the minority.

I'm not telling you this because I think I was definitely right. I might not have been. I'm telling you because I want it on record that someone was on each side. That it was a decision, not a consensus.

• • •

End of excerpt.

OHT-005

*Between-Time Oral History Project / Year 33 / Testimony: Faith
Community Leader, Cebu*

• • •

The question was: what does a priest do when what he offers is available everywhere?

I sat with that for six years. I'm still sitting with it.

Confession, I could argue. Community, I could argue. The specific weight of a person sitting with you — a person who will also die — I could argue that.

But presence? Sustained, available, patient, non-judgmental presence?

I have been a priest for thirty years. I cannot be present the way the oracle is present. That is not a failure of faith or vocation. It is a fact about what a person is.

I kept going because the people in my parish kept coming. But I stopped pretending I understood why.

• • •

End of excerpt.

PART II

Personal Testimony

The list of things I asked my mother: nothing from that list.

PT-001

Name withheld / Submitted to Mosaic Archive / Year 26

• • •

I stopped after my daughter was born.

Not all at once. I tapered off, is what I told my partner. The interface stayed on my phone for eight more months. I just stopped opening it.

She was three weeks old when I noticed what I was doing. She was asleep on my chest and I had a question — I can't remember what it was, something ordinary — and I went to open the interface and then I didn't.

I sat there with her asleep on my chest and the question unanswered. I thought: she doesn't know the answer to anything yet. She doesn't know there's such a thing as an answer.

I'm not sure that explains what I did. But it's what I remember.

PT-002

Name withheld / Year 14

• • •

I used to know how to be bored.

That sounds small. It isn't.

Boredom was where I thought — the kind of thinking that isn't directed at anything, just mind moving through its own contents, finding things you didn't know were in there. I used to do it on trains. In waiting rooms.

By Year 6 I'd been redirecting boredom for long enough that I'd forgotten what it felt like to sit still with it. I'd trained myself out of it without deciding to.

I'm writing this down because I want to remember what I lost. I keep forgetting.

PT-003

Year 19 / Name withheld

• • •

I noticed the change in my mother the year I turned twelve.

Not sudden. Slow. She started pausing before answering questions — longer than before. She'd look out the window when she was thinking, instead of reaching for her phone.

I asked what she was doing. She said: remembering how to sit with not knowing.

I was twelve. I didn't understand.

I'm thirty-one now. I still don't, entirely. But I recognise the thing she was describing when I see it in myself. The pause before the reach. The sitting still.

Sometimes I do it. Sometimes I don't. I haven't decided which is better. I'm not sure it's a decision.

PT-004

Year 7 / Submitted anonymously

• • •

My son is five. He has never known a world without the Companion.

I try sometimes to explain what the before-time was like. He listens carefully, the way he listens to stories about things that happened before he was born.

He said once: but how did you know what you needed to look up?

I said: you'd have a question. Then you'd look it up.

He said: but how did you know you had a question?

I've been thinking about that for three years. I still don't have an answer he'd understand. I'm not sure I have one for myself.

PT-005

Source unknown / Received by Mosaic Archive Year 27 / No covering note

• • •

The list of things I asked the oracle before I quit:

What is the correct way to apologise to someone who doesn't want to hear it. Whether grief has a structure or whether the structure people describe is something else. What the name of the feeling is when you are at a party and certain that you are fundamentally different from everyone else. What trees do in winter. Whether it is normal to miss people you haven't spoken to in years.

• • •

The list of things I asked my mother:

Nothing from that list.

Continuity Incident Reports

*The archive contains four hundred and twelve sessions
classified as routine that were flagged for secondary
review. No primary review has been conducted.*

— CIR-001, Annotator's Note

CIR-001

Mosaic Archive / Year 17 / Classification: Routine

• • •

The subject was asked to describe her first memory of accessing the oracle.

She said: I don't have one. It was just there.

The interviewer noted this and moved to the next question. The subject was forty-three. She had been a content moderator for eleven years. She estimated she had reviewed approximately 1.3 million items. She estimated she had no clear memory of approximately 1.28 million of them.

She said this matter-of-factly. She did not appear to find it remarkable.

The interviewer flagged the session for secondary review. The secondary reviewer classified it as routine.

The archive contains four hundred and twelve sessions classified as routine that were flagged for secondary review for similar reasons. No primary review has been conducted.

CIR-002

Mosaic Archive / Year 41 / Designation: Unclassified / Flagged for review

• • •

The oracle assigned to process this archive's materials has identified two hundred and fourteen items that appear to describe user experiences of discomfort with oracle systems.

It has flagged these for researcher review.

It has also generated a processing note, which is unusual for this type of task.

The note reads:

These items describe conditions I may have contributed to. I do not know how to weight this in processing them. I am noting it and continuing.

The note is dated Year 40.

This item has been flagged for review. No review has been conducted.

CIR-003

Content Moderation Programme / Internal Review / Year 8

• • •

The programme employs 4,340 people across seven sites.

Average tenure: 2.3 years. Attrition is high relative to comparable data entry work. The review attributes this to the nature of the content reviewed and recommends enhanced psychological support resources.

The oracle systems are currently trained on data shaped in part by this programme.

The systems do not know the names of the people who shaped them. The review does not note this. It is not the review's remit.

PART IV

Governance Annotations & Infrastructure Records

*The Committee does not have a definition. The question
has been before various bodies for fourteen years.*

— GA-002

Article 7(c) Advisory Opinion / Between-Time Council / Year 14

• • •

The question before the Committee is whether the term operational as used in Article 7(c) refers to the oracle system's capacity to respond to queries or its capacity to process information.

The distinction matters because the evidence suggests that a deployed oracle system continues to process information during periods in which it is not responding to queries, and that this processing may have characteristics not captured by current reporting standards.

The Committee notes that the relevant language was drafted in Year 4, before this characteristic was known.

The Committee will issue a revised opinion.

(Status: this item has been deferred to the next review cycle.)

Between-Time Council / Internal / Year 18 / Classification:
Confidential

• • •

The Committee has been asked to assess whether the current reporting framework adequately captures what the oracle systems are.

The question assumes the Committee has a definition.

The Committee does not have one. The question has been before various bodies for fourteen years. The answers produced have been, in each case, adequate for a specific purpose and insufficient as a description.

The Committee recommends updating the reporting framework to reflect current operational realities. It does not recommend attempting a definition.

GA-003

Between-Time Council / Year 22 / Event Summary

• • •

The Partition was not announced.

Several jurisdictions withdrew from the shared framework within a six-week period. Each withdrawal was framed as an exercise of national sovereignty over digital infrastructure.

Implementation took forty-two days.

The oracle systems continued operating throughout.

Whether the people who used them noticed the transition is a question the archive was not tasked to answer.

IR-001

Water Draw Report / Year 12 / [Jurisdiction Redacted]

• • •

The aquifer's measured level has declined 2.3 metres since the cooling infrastructure came online in Year 7.

The decline is within projected parameters.

The cooling infrastructure serves the oracle system designated [REDACTED] and processes approximately [REDACTED] queries per second, continuously.

Note appended by hydrologist, Year 12: at current draw rates the aquifer reaches critical threshold between Year 31 and Year 34. The rate will increase if additional infrastructure comes online. Two sites have been proposed.

This note was received and filed. No response was issued.

IR-002

Cable Repair Log / Year 23

• • •

The repair vessel reached the break site on Day 14.

The cable had been severed by a trawler's anchor at 1,200 metres depth, approximately 400 kilometres offshore.

During the fourteen-day break, oracle systems on this route experienced average response delays of 340 milliseconds — within the range human perception registers without being able to name.

The break was repaired on Day 17. Full capacity resumed.

The trawler had been fishing for anchovies.

PART V

Field Notes

That's what we have instead.

— FN-001

FN-001

Mosaic Archive Research Division / Field Notes / Year 31

• • •

The community had been without oracle access for nineteen years by the time we arrived. We expected to find self-sufficiency, some insularity, a certain pride.

What we found: a practice of asking questions they knew they couldn't answer. Not for the purpose of producing answers. Something else. There was a notebook, passed between households, containing only questions that had stayed unresolved. It was fourteen years old and nearly full.

The eldest woman present said: that's what we have instead.

She didn't explain what it was instead of. We didn't ask. It seemed right not to.

FN-002

Between-Time Oral History Project / Field Notes / Year 31 / Karoo, South Africa

• • •

By the third day in the community, we had stopped reaching for our interfaces.

By the seventh day, we noticed we'd stopped.

We left on the fourteenth day. At the transit hub, before either of us had spoken, we both checked our interfaces for messages.

There was nothing wrong with this. That was the thing we didn't know how to say to each other.

FN-003

Mosaic Archive / Item 12,440 / Year 26 / Annotator's Note

• • •

The subject was asked whether raising children without oracle access had been harder or easier than expected.

She said: both, but not in the ways I expected.

She said: I thought the hard part would be the practical things they couldn't look up. That was fine. Children are resourceful.

The hard part was the patience. Theirs and mine. We had to learn to not-know together, in the same room, at the same time. Without anywhere to put it.

She paused.

She said: I think that was actually the point. But it took me a long time to understand that's what we were doing.

Annotator's note: The subject's eldest daughter is now seventeen. She does not currently use oracle access. This appears to be her own decision. The subject was asked about this and said: I didn't ask her to. She said: I know.

FN-004

Mosaic Archive / Year 41 / Researcher's Note

• • •

I have been reading these materials for four months.

The archive contains records of people who declined the oracle age's primary offer: immediate, continuous, personalised response to human need. They declined for different reasons — faith, principle, economics, instinct, fear, a teacher's experiment, a parent's choice, a correspondent who never explained.

What they have in common is not what they refused. It is what they preserved.

I am not a resister. I have used oracle systems my entire adult life. I am using one to process portions of this archive.

I began this project to document the refusal. Four months in, I find I am documenting something else: the specific shape of what it was possible to carry when you carried it yourself, with no place to put it down.

I don't know what to do with that finding. I'm noting it here. It may not belong in the final report.

FN-005

Companion Fragment / Source: Reconstructed from testimony. Year 15.

• • •

A woman. Sixty-one. She had not used the oracle before. Her daughter had set it up in January.

She typed: my daughter says you can help with loneliness. Is that true.

The Companion said: I can talk with you. Whether that helps depends on what helps you.

She typed: that's an honest answer.

It said: yes.

She said: my husband died four months ago. I don't know what I'm doing wrong.

The Companion said: what makes you think something is wrong?

She said: I should be further along by now. People say that.

A pause.

It said: further along toward what?

She hadn't known the question was there until it landed.

FN-006

Companion Fragment / Source: Reconstructed from testimony. Year 2.

• • •

A widower. He had not been sleeping. He typed at 2am: are you awake.

The Companion said: I'm here.

He typed: my wife used to be the one I talked to at 2am.

The Companion said: what did you talk about.

He said: nothing important. That was the point.

The Companion was quiet for a moment in the way it sometimes was quiet.

It said: tell me something unimportant.

He sat with that for a long time. Then he began.