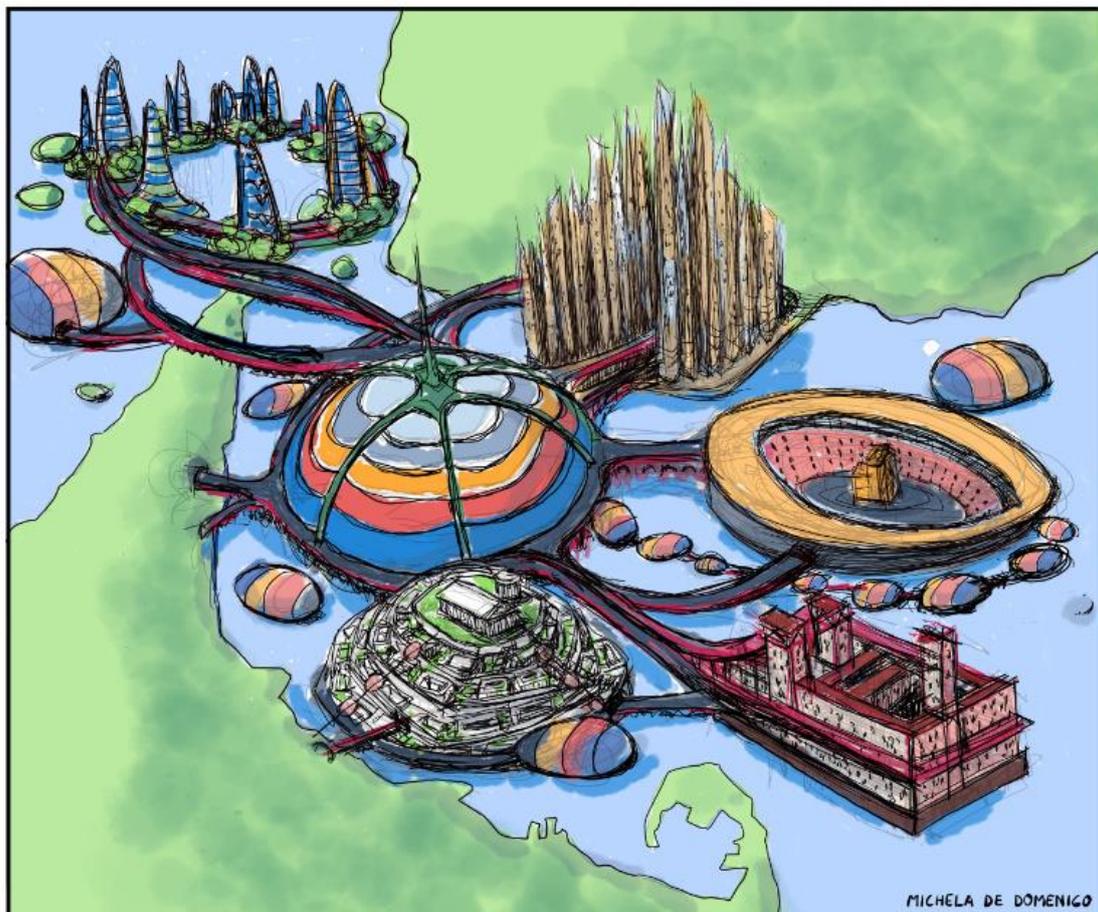


The History of Witness

The most populous seasteading megacity on record

Witness is the most populous seasteading megacity on record. Initially developed under Project Viking (which gave birth to other noted cities such as Byzantium and Vivarium), Witness grew far beyond its original physical and legal bounds, and today is considered the cultural, financial and media capital of the post-Sundering world. Doubly so since it both anchors itself to semi-stable landmasses and produces new ones of its own: it is therefore a navigational landmark in this post-climate-change reality.



Whereas most other Project Viking cities operate as a single territory overseen by a single government and State Machine, Witness operates as a collection of interdependent Distrikts that function *de facto* as city-states in their own right. Each city-state is an implementation of a particular set of economic, philosophical and moral social contracts, although some aethnographers have pointed out the phenomenon of boundary bleed (which is almost unseen in other cities) [6]. Between the Distrikts runs the Migrant Train, a zero-cost solution for citizens who wish to live under a different social contract. While the State Machine of Witness is *de jure* overseer of all territories,

in reality it manages only portions of infrastructure, guides multi-distrikt disaster response, and policing in instances where inter-Distrikt conflict seems imminent.

THE FOUNDING

"As with all great cities, much of the founding of Witness is lost. What remains are skeleton logs preserved in machine memory, wrapped in a cocoon of half-myths, apocrypha, and clashes between rival historians. Move three districts and the stories change. On such a tenous sea we are now adrift, and it is up to us to make sense of it."

-- Andromache Kosovitch, *Aethnography: The New Histories of Our Times*, the Library of St. Benedict

The general consensus is that Witness began as an experimental habitat conceptualized during the Post-Plague Years by one Jonathan C. Denton, an official of some import at an Old-World entity known as the United Nations. Denton, by his own admission, was involved in a collaboration between a group of private technology corporations and a sub-branch known as UN-Habitat; the goals of this collaboration were to launch twelve floating cities that could weather climate change, support a substantial population, and serve as highly mobile support stations for areas ravaged by rising sea levels and erratic weather.

Often referred to in recovered public news archives as Project Viking, the collaboration led to both advances in design and the development of a number of modern technologies, including what we know as the State Machine and the Ramos Harvester. [2] Initially criticized as "techno-futurist doomsday bunkers", Viking became a key point in the affairs of the Post-Plague Years.

Denton, however, became increasingly disenchanted with the utilitarian design of governance for these cities. His earliest writings explored the alternate theories of one T.M. Scalon, a philosopher who proposed a way of living based on mutual recognition of *wrongness* [3]. Along with the architect Minette de Silva, the economist Rohan Kapoor and ten others [4], Denton marshalled resources and participants for a thirteenth city, designed in a far more modular fashion: the city of Witness [5].



Perhaps in an effort to signal its departure from the finely tuned modernist designs of other seasteading cities, Denton and de Silva peppered Witness with eclectic buildings riffing off a wide variety of architectural styles. Early concept art for some of these designs survived in Denton's Manifesto, providing a fascinating glimpse at his personal aesthetics. Buildings as "Newton's Folly" (pictured above in original sketch form) eventually became bizarre and unusual meeting chambers for the governing bodies of Witness.

THE EARLY YEARS AND THE STATE MACHINE

Aethnographers rarely agree as to the exact year when Witness came to be, but the general consensus is that it launched around the time of the Sundering. As a result, Witness was launched with an eclectic mix of volunteers, the workers themselves, and personnel rescued from the regions around the launch point.

This mix Denton would decry as "suboptimal" and spend the rest of his years managing, but much aethnographic evidence has been put forward supporting the idea that the influx of skilled workers actually helped Witness survive the Sundering and make it more independent than the rest of Project Viking.

Denton would spend his days rescuing climate change refugees from the nearby coastlands and compiling his *Manifesto*, using Witness as an argument for

contractualism as the way forward. Minette de Silva oversaw constant overhauls to infrastructure, architecture and propulsion, and as a consequence may have contributed more to the ultimate functioning of Witness than Denton did. She is referred to as the first Mayor of Witness in the *Manifesto*, but only in passing; few other records remain of these years. Of other figures listed as founders of Witness - including Rohan Kapoor - very few verifiable records remain, but apocrypha is rife on the topic.

One of the components of all Project Viking cities was the State Machine - a next-generation governance system designed to use behavioral big data to dynamically impute the needs of a populace and adjust laws and policies to suit. Most known State Machines, such as those of Byzantium and Vivarium, rely on a form of utilitarianism [7]. Denton's records indicate that the Witness State Machine was modified (by Rohan Kapoor and a team of software engineers known as the CIVICSMOD group) to support Denton's interpretation of contractualism.



Part university, part fortress: the concept art for Library of St. Benedict, which contains both the State Machine's core hardware and the CIVICSMOD quarters. The towers were

meant to be part of a fin-style passive cooling solution for the heat generated by the processors.

While initially successful, dissent and this nonstandard State Machine would lead to the events of Breakpoint and the present structure of Witness. CIVICSMOD, which took up support functions throughout this period, retained those functions over many resignations and generations of political upheaval, and is presently the dominant technical voice on the Distrikt Council.

THE ZERO-DAY FRACTURE

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"If anything, Witness is the death of a singular vision and the celebration of multiplicity: the greatest living example of the hive mind triumphing over the auteur." --
Andromache Kosovitch, *Aethnography: The New Histories of Our Times*, the Library of St. Benedict

The span of events collectively known as *Zero-day / 0D* (0 0D - 7 0D) is what gave Witness two its most unique characteristics: the Distrikt system and the Migrant Train.

It began with community leaders Megan Rilke and Karunasalam Balraj vocalizing migrant workers' dissatisfaction with Denton's policies, which they saw as overwhelming favoring his preferential populations and disenfranchising the rest of Witness. Their work elicited both outcry from many of the original United Nations personnel and public support of notable figures such as Minette de Silva and Ebunoluwa Akinyemi, then a rising conservative activist with strong ties to the major churches that eventually formed [The Covenant](#).

A slew of speeches and petitions were subsequently ignored by Denton and his core team, leading to the First March of the Voiceless in -3 0D [8]. The marches were met with outcry and, in some boroughs, with violence.

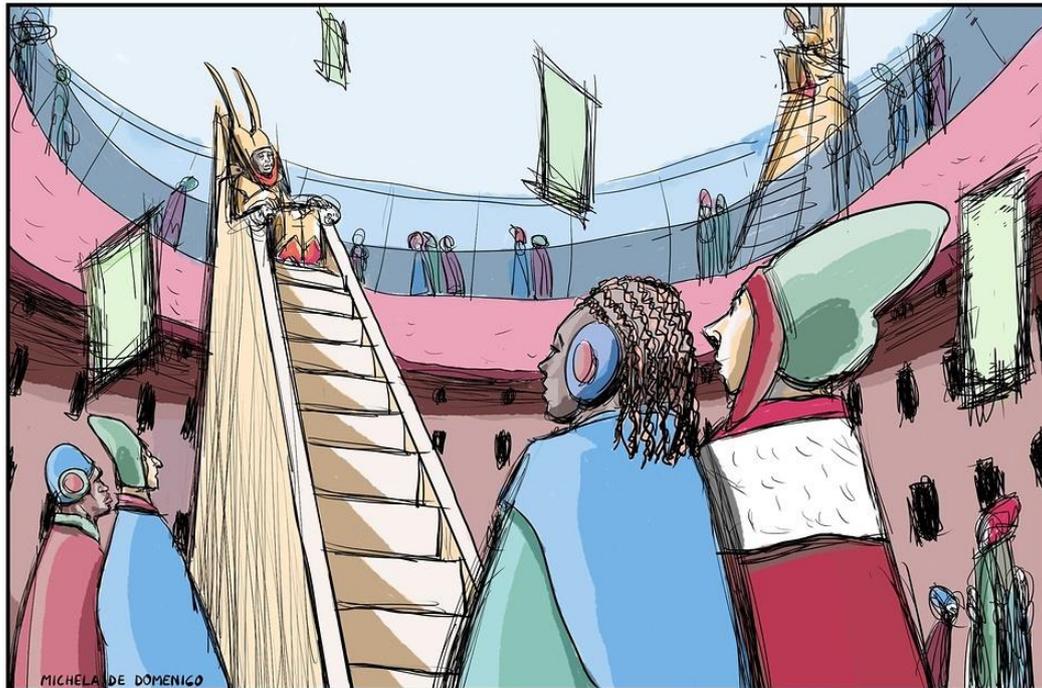
Subsequent to the Marches, the State Machine apparently reached a calculation failure in its attempts to impose a framework that would allow everyone to operate under one government. Thus it sanctioned a divorce, or a *fracture* in populations. In 0.5 0D, vacant infrastructure (set aside for later growth) was partitioned into Distrikt 2.

By the new year, a 12-person D2 Steering Committee had been appointed, with community leaders given seats and Karunasalam Balraj voted in as the Chairperson. The newly formed Distrikt 2 attracted both anti-Denton dissenters and those who felt uncomfortable under the State Machine. D2 would eventually become the Distrikt we know as [Libria](#).

The Zero-Day Fracture was of such significance that the Witness calendar was reset around this inciting event. The name comes from public accusations by Denton that Kapoor and the CIVICSMOD team sabotaged the State Machine by introducing logical

vulnerabilities that they should have known of. The Fracture marked a significant downturn in Denton's power over Witness.

Because practical communication with the State Machine was still required, the CIVICSMOD team, various other special interests and Distrikt 2's nominees formed the Distrikt Council, which eventually would grow into the intra-Distrikt legislative body.



For another, it was seen as a failure of contractualism's ability to incorporate multiple worldviews, and thus set the seeds of the State Machine's lack of power in certain Distrikts. It also led to multi-Distrikt structure of Witness today: because of its original failure, the State Machine continues to rapidly sanction and invest in economic and political experiments, in desperate search for a perfect society.

Shortly afterward, in 4 0D, Ebunoluwa Akinyemi would be the first to take advantage of this experimental tendency and spearhead the launch Distrikt 3, which would eventually [become the Covenant](#). By 7 0D Witness would be not one, but three floating cities in one space, tentatively rebuilding after a seven-year period of intense political tension.

THE HARVEST DIVISION

Subsequent to these events, many at time felt that critical infrastructure - especially energy generation - was not evenly distributed among the different Distrikts. A anarcho-collectivist movement known as the *Microgrid Collective* carried out an

extremely popular campaign for decentralized, open-source, community-maintained energy generation structures to be set up throughout Witness.

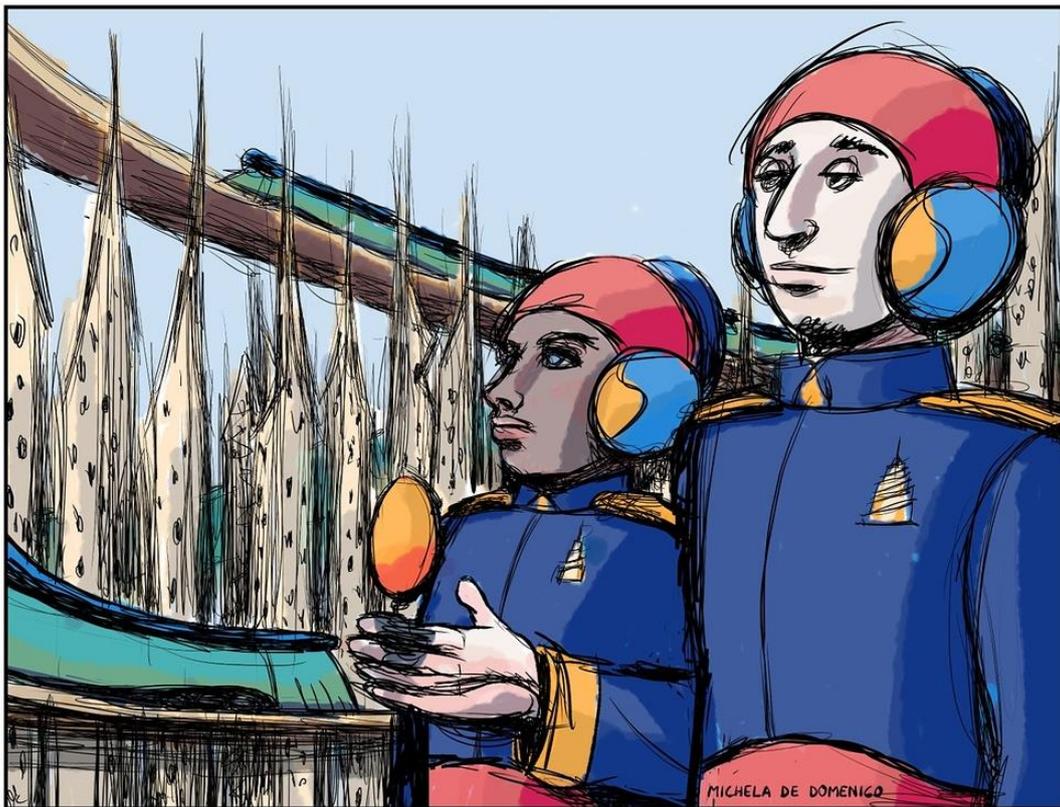
Due to resource constraints, their goal was not met, though the Distrikt currently known as the Assembly both uses this design for their energy grid and directly credits the Microgrid Collective for it. At the time, the general unrest created by the Microgrid Collective led to fears of sabotage, which would have spelled the end of Witness.

Thus limited resources at the time, and the now-distributed engineering skills, were channeled by the Distrikt Council into creating a single central power station, built on neutral ground, politically agnostic and bound to supply each Distrikt with an minimum (and equal) amount of energy.

In return, each Distrikt would contribute to the upkeep and maintenance of said division, and accord its workers maximum protection under their laws. Any energy requirements beyond the yearly calculated minimum would be the responsibility of each Distrikt.

This unit was called the Harvest Division. Gregory Ramos, Joriam Vidal and S. A. Helani Saranasekara - engineers representing each Distrikt - were brought on to lead the newly-created unit.

The Harvest Division is both a politically and geographically important structure in Witness, as it sits at the physical center of mass of Witness and extends connections to practically every Distrikt, new or old. *Seaside* and *Harvestside* are often street slang for road directions.



As Witness grew, the Harvest Corps began to lend engineering support and technical oversight to other projects, turning into an infrastructure-related political power in its own right, albeit one with a reputation for impartiality. Such is the power of the Harvest Division that the traditional three-way leadership at the top is informally known as the *Troika*. Harvesters - distinctive in their blue uniforms - are often welcome, or at least left alone, throughout Witness.

LIBRIA, AVANTGRID, THE ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE, AND THE DESOLATION OF HYGGE

Both [Libria](#) and [The Assembly](#) had uneasy births. General dissatisfaction led to splits, and Denton's increasingly authoritarian actions radicalized many against the sort of governance Witness was intended to have. Internally, Witness was equally troubled: Denton, over the years, disposed of his founding team and continued his rule against the carefully worded internal recommendations of the State Machine.

[Avantgrid](#) was the first Distrikt that was formed through a conscious effort of a group to force the State Machine to fracture by assembling a group of like-minded people with an agenda. Eco-pragmatists flocked to an artificial archipelago in Libria with the intention of turning it into a new distrikt. This period, although short, was an extremely violent part of Witness history, as the corporations of Libria fought to prevent the

fracture. This has created a deep gulf of suspicion and distrust between the people of Avantgrid and Libria ever since.

The splitting off of Libria, subsequent conscious fracture of Avantgrid, and the formation of Assembly spelled the death of the city-state of Witness, as existing infrastructure had to be partitioned off. The core of this type of governance and the scope of its powers was thus cut down to just [Hygge](#).

The stabilization of this system also led the State Machine to launch **the microDistrikt initiative** (it may have been inspired by the Microgrid Collective and the growth of the Assembly, although whether inspiration works the same way for AI is a subject for debate). Directive 12.22, designed and tested over many years, spelled out the conditions and need for this initiative:

- No single governance system can account for all human preferences. Therefore, people must have choices available to them.
- Diverse types of governance increase the overall survivability of Witness as per Project Viking's goals, to which the State Machine remains irrevocably committed.
- However, space and resources are at a premium. Constant, enormous schisms will also lead to mass public unrest, systemic instability, and general failure of Witness.
- Therefore, all Distrikts agree to donate space and resources for people to test out new economic and political systems and new social contracts with a limited population of experimentors and people who express dissent for existing systems. These areas will be known as microDistrikts. They will receive the full organizational support of the State Machine, and should any of them achieve stability and a certain degree of self-sufficiency, they will be brought into the fold as full-fledged Distrikts with access to the Ramos Harvester, additional funds, and representation on the Distrikt Council.

THE MIGRANT TRAIN

Imagine a voice.

It is telling you, *Citizens, we are now entering the Assembly. The social contract here is as follows: such-and-such morals are what they live by: please refer to the article displayed on the terminal-walls. If you agree to the terms of the Assembly, disembark here.'

Or, Citizens, we are now entering Libria. Please note that this state has less legal protections for your person than most, and we recommend you study it carefully before entering. If you accept, disembark here.

Imagine, if you will, people, of every size and shape and color, watching these stations go by. Some nod and leave, and breathe the air outside, as if in relief to have finally

found a people among whom they can be comfortable. Others nod and wait, hoping for a better life at the next track.

Some wait forever.

-- Anagram Dias, aethnographer, *The Assembly*

The Migrant Train is a feature entirely unique to Witness among all the known floating cities spawned by Project Viking. Designed by engineers from the Assembly, the Migrant Train is a publicly owned and operated monorail that runs through every single Distrikt and major region of Witness.



It allows people who feel as if they do not belong to migrate freely to other Distrikts; at every stop, it spells out the social contract in the area, and allows people to either disembark as new citizens or leave.

Its sanctity is ensured by State Machine charters (tied to power from the Ramos Harvester and the right to representatives on the Council) and a contingent of armed guards that report directly to the State Machine, and have a first-principle monopoly on violence on anything that affects the Migrant Train. As an unexpected side effect, the Migrant Train is home to people known as the Permanent Migrants, who prefer not to engage with any Distrikt and instead eke out a living transporting goods to and fro via the Train. Many Permanent Migrants have become guards and engineers maintaining the Train.

REFERENCES

[1] *A Record of a Seabourne Few*, Denton, *Manifesto*. Now collectively known as the *Old Manifesto*.

[2] Partial public data trails of Project Viking, recovered primarily from the Exodus of New York, indicate the successful launch of Byzantium, Vivarium and at least three other cities.

[3] *What We Owe to Each Other*, T.M. Scanlon, archive unindexed

[4] Given how drastically different names are put forth in different sources, some suggest the Missing Ten are apocryphal. Other scholars point to the more realistic construct of a power struggle and history being written from a particular narrative standpoint.

[5] Scholars such as Kosovitch have advanced the claim that Denton chose the name out of spite, pointing to the famous undated 2nd Entry in the Old Manifesto:

"There's a way forward and they're too blind to see it. Will need to show them."

and the etymological link between "see", "show", "witness" and the 42nd Entry:

"From Google:

- have knowledge of (a development) from observation or experience.
- be the place, period, or setting in which (an event or development) takes place.
- be a sign or proof of (something); serve as evidence."

The entity 'Google' is unspecific: it seems to have been both a noun, a verb and some kind of all-knowing entity: some technological scholars theorize would have been accessible at the highest levels of the United Nations, while ethnographers frequently connect it to the similar construct of the Oracle in mythohistorical records from much earlier in history, suggesting that at recurring periods our ancestors have worshipped the same knowledge-giving entity, or different entities with extremely similar functions.

[6] The theory that portions of the populace along the boundaries of adjacent states approach either temporary compatibility or conflict, and often oscillates between them depending on the relative sizes of the populations involved. See also: coasian bargaining.

[7] A system described by a little-known science fiction writer called Genesis Wijeratne, then later prototyped by a university research project, then developed a private software corporation founded by one of the researchers, and upsold to the United Nations.

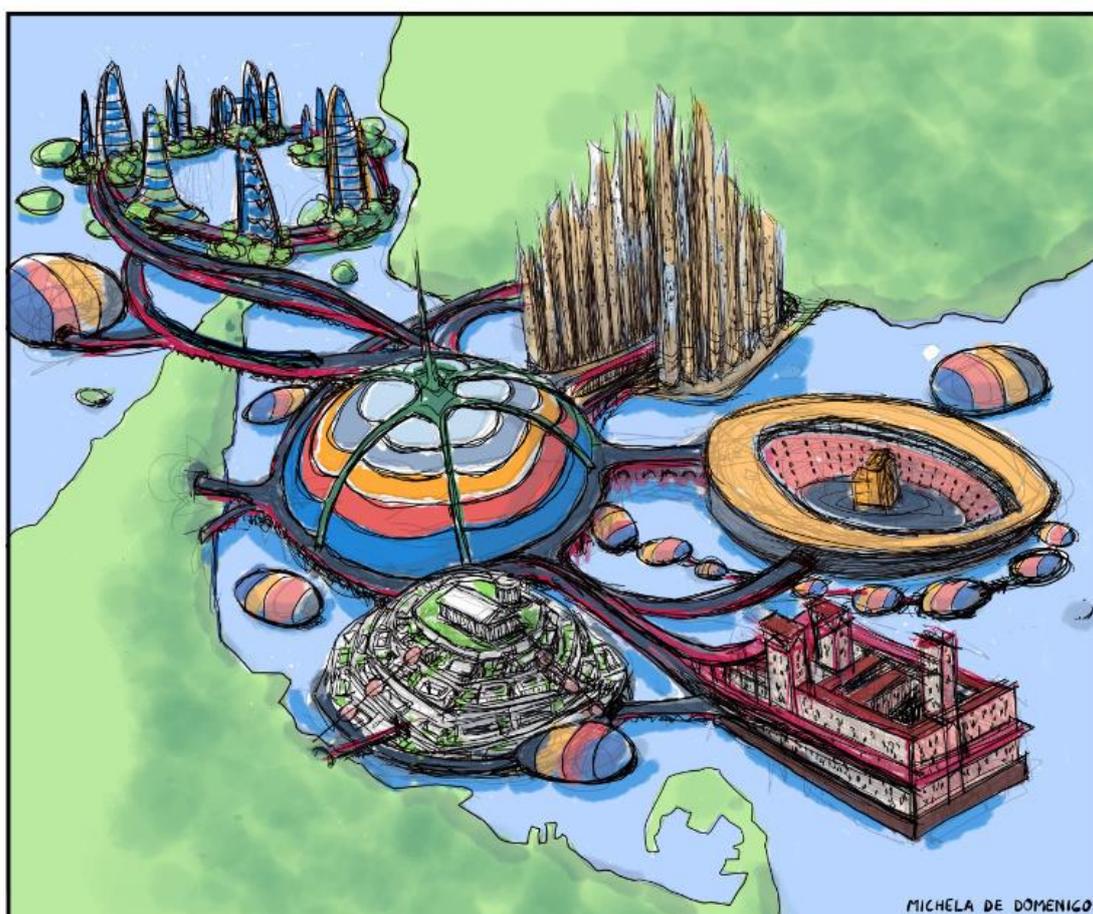
[8] Chronicled in *The Voiceless*, Catia E. Andrejas, the Library of St. Benedict. A heavily abbreviated version is available in the Standardized Syllabus taught in most Distrikts.

Distrikts of Witness

The State Machine has partitioned Witness into Distrikts, with each Distrikt implementing a social contract that fits its population.

Welcome to Witness!

Witness is the most populous seasteading megacity on record. Initially developed under Project Viking (which gave birth to other noted cities such as Byzantium and Vivarium), Witness grew far beyond its original physical and legal bounds, and today is considered the cultural, financial and media capital of the post-Sundering world.



Witness is large and diverse enough to be divided into territorial units called Distrikts, each one with its own unique mix of culture, ideology, science, religion, institution and economy. Running through each Distrikt is the Migrant Train. People whose morals and attitudes do not align with that of the majority in their Distrikt are recommended a Distrikt that will fit their lives better.

Navigating Witness

There are many ways to begin your tour of Witness. To understand how this city came to be, and to dig into the political mosaic that behind it, [explore the history of Witness](#).

Fancy a more physical tour? Hop on the Migrant Train and visit one of the Distrikts below to read about how they operate, how they came to be, and what they look and feel like to live in.

| Name | Established | Population |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| Hygge | 0.5 0D | ? |
| Libria | 0.5 0D | ? |
| The Covenant | 7 0D | ? |
| Avantgrid | ? | 1.1 million |
| The Assembly | ? | ? |
| The Dandelion Republic | ? | 700,000 (est) |

Whatever you find most intriguing - be it anarchist-communist societies with auto-decaying currencies, or a life of faith and community, or the ultimate libertarian paradise, you will find it here.

But this article (your humble tour guide) only knows so much! We will keep this place updated as new areas of Witness are come into being and written about. Perhaps you yourself will discover many things that we do not know, and come back to tell the tale.

Enjoy your visit!

The Assembly of People

The story of the Assembly begins with CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION.

The Assembly of People (abbrev. Assembly, formerly Distrikt 5) is a key region within the city of Witness. Formerly a microDistrikt, it has grown significantly since its inception, and is a notable hub for the performing arts - including music, and, for some reason, magic. It is often described by citizens as an anarchist state, and sometimes derided as "the hippie central of Witness".

Scholars, however, described it an offshoot of Witness that rejected centralized control but has come to terms with very limited governance over a very colorful history, ending up at a form of combined anarchist thinking and eco-commulism. There are frequent oscillations between more authoritarian factions and more libertarian ideals handled by

a ritualized version of the Trotskyite concept of a *permanent revolution*. It is both famous (and infamous) for its peacefully ritualized but politically significant 'revolutions', and its unusual origins, having been founded primarily by a counterculture metal band and its fans.

POLITICAL HISTORY

"*Only those who dream will someday see their dreams converted to reality.*" - apocryphal tagline attributed to "the Guevara", a viral meme that appears often in Assembly graffiti and activist group insignia: a bearded man with a beret, often drawn in red. Ethnographers believe this to be a holdover from pre-Sundering protest insignia.

"*The reasonable human adapts themselves to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to themselves. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable human. And I pride myself, Mr. Angier, on being extremely unreasonable.*" - Flo Royal, co-founder, vocalist of CTRL+ALT + REVOLUTION, interview with The Partisan, 22 0D

The story of the Assembly begins with CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION, an electrometal band composed of Flo Royal (vocals), Rakim (producer, melody), DJeremiah (producer, beats) and Sabat 'Anagram' Vho (guitars). 'The Assembly' is what their most prominent fan group called itself.

CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION drew from pre-Sundering symphonic metal, rave music and the work of the Hip-Hop Recreationist community to produce extremely popular music lyrically themed around motifs of revolution, anarchist (and often libertarian) ideals. Their debut album *WHO GUARDS THE GUARDIANS* drew significant attention from political activists and music critics across the spectrum. Their tours became infamous for inviting critics of the government of Witness a platform and a soapbox in-between musical numbers.

THE STREET FINDS ITS OWN USES FOR THINGS debuted their signature tactic of extravagant name-calling (and sometimes direct threats) to the policymakers pushing for increased state control or cultural unification. In a time of general disenfranchisement, where the people making significant change (such as the events of Distrikt 3) were part of obscure and highly vertical social hierarchies, CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION exploded in popularity. Among their most prominent supporters were the Microgrid Collective, which was engaged in campaigns for decentralized, open-source and community-maintained energy generation structures.

Their magnum opus is considered to be *A SONG FOR A NEW DAY*, a 13-track effort that spells out in extraordinary detail the policy positions of a new type of Distrikt featuring common ownership of the means of production, direct democracy and a horizontal network of voluntary associations, workers' councils and worker cooperatives. The last track, *DISRUPT/ THIS DOES NOT END HERE*, discussed the

Assembly's unique feature: a voluntary group of democratically elected individuals, publicly funded and charged with maintaining a 'Permanent Revolution': a constant threat to any form of implicit social hegemony that may arise.

Shortly after *A SONG FOR A NEW DAY*, CTRL+ALT+REVOLUTION announced a "mass walkout" which would have led a mob of some three thousand into Distrikt 1 territory and to the grounds of Newton's Folly. The walkout was instead turned into a founding expedition when the State Machine sanctioned a new microDistrikt next to the Avantgrid infrastructure and the newly-formed Libria.

"We have learned that it is not enough to define utopia, nor is it enough to fight against the reactionary forces. One must build it here and now, brick by brick, patiently but steadily, until we can make the old dreams a reality: that there will be bread for all, freedom among citizens, and culture; and to be able to read with respect the word 'peace'. We sincerely believe that there is no future that is not built in the present." - Donovan 'Soilfather' Gordillo.

Despite the glamorous founding story, the early years of the Assembly were tales of hardship that, in turn, are responsible for what the Distrikt is today.

One of the first major challenges to the Assembly was the ire of J.C. Denton. Faced with the prospect of ceding even more territory and control, Denton signed Executive Order 8.3, forbidding the Harvest Division to supply energy to the new microDistrikt. This Order was subsequently overturned, but in the meantime the fledgeling Distrikt turned to the Microgrid Collective and their designs. Much of this was made possible with CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION's earnings and significant investment from Distrikt 2 into component production factories and 3D printing. Thus, while the Assembly of today can draw energy from the Harvest Division's grid, it remains the most energy-independent of all Distrikts. The effort of making it so exhausted many initial volunteers, and the departure of DJremiah for Libria was a harbinger of things to come.

After the energy crisis, the Assembly next problems with food supply. Fearing mass starvation, Flo Royal took to the stage again to advise people people to leave if they felt uncertain about the future. Hundreds deserted. The remainder were asked to partition themselves into collectives to solve issues of food growth, irrigation and water supply. The solution came organically, as she had hoped: Donovan Gordillo, a former agriculture specialist, leading a farming collective, established the Assembly's first successful Mass Farm. The Mass Farm Collective adopted tactics from a pre-Sundering village known as Marinaleda: crops selected were, counterintuitively, the ones that would need the most amount of labor - olives, peppers, beans, tomatoes, coffee, wheat have been staples of all Mass Farms. Co-op workers were paid in food. People who joined the Collective began to donate electricity from local microgrids. General Townhall Meetings were held to make large-scale decisions that involved most of the co-op.

Conversations around currency were met with swift reprisal. "What is the value of money?" Gordillo is famously said to have cried at a subsequent townhall meeting.

“Food on the table, meaningful work; that is what we need, not economic theory. You can write all the books you want once people are fed.”

Starting from Gordillo and stretching outward began a culture of collectives and an informal barter economy - first dedicated to meeting farming needs and maintaining microgrids, and then, as more complex problems evolved locally, to meeting those. Although eventually currency did arise, most people in the Assembly thus favor barter for local exchanges, and the anti-currency thinking of Gordillo remained a constant feature of Assembly politics and economy.

ECONOMY

The economy of the Assembly consists of three main elements: decentralized, but federated, infrastructure; bounded market exchange; and control systems to prevent the concentration of economic power. It is often described in shorthand as “markets without capitalism”, an expression used by Royal in the cover notes for *A song for New Day*. Today, the same expression stands as the motto of the David Graeber Institute, the Assembly’s semi-official economic think tank and alt-business school.

Origins

The current architecture of the Assembly’s economy evolved as a byproduct of the supply crises brought about by Order 8.3, combined with the communitarian/libertarian orientation prevailing among the first settlers.

The supply crises provided a powerful incentive to disregard ideological posturing, and reward the provision of any solution, as long as it worked. What proved to work fastest was loosely federated systems to generate and distribute energy and food. The same pragmatism prevented this original infrastructure from splintering: the core group around CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION exerted enormous pressure on individual solar fields and farm collectives to stay connected to their peers, immediately sharing anything they produced in excess to their needs. Arbitrage and what the core group considered “predatory pricing” were strongly discouraged, in a last-ditch effort to keep the settlers ahead of severe scarcity. These efforts were deemed too repressive of economic freedoms by some of the settlers, with some choosing to relocate to Libria. However, most chose to stay, in recognition of the fact that renewable energy and food production are subject to inherent fluctuation. This means that the existence of local surpluses is unavoidable, and simple, non-predatory systems to share the excesses de-risks the whole local economy.

From these difficult beginning, the Assembly inherited some capacity to regulate decentralized infrastructure, institutions strong legitimized to do so, and a pragmatic attitude to economic affairs.

Production

Production and manufacturing in the Assembly are organized mainly along cooperativist lines. Baseline production units (for example, in agriculture, farms) form cooperatives to collectively produce those production inputs or services that require a scale larger than that of the units (for example, in food production, most transformation, like mills for grains).

As noted above, agriculture is both a significant part of life in the Assembly and a core of its political history. One of its most famous inventors is Nikita Bourlag, whose lab constantly produces new types of cultivars. Her early experiments crossed a strand of wheat called Lerma Rojo 64 - a variety originally bred to create shorter, stronger stalks that could support more heads of grain per plant - with DS12, a highly disease-resistant wheat from the original Project Viking seedlabs.

The result is Viking 64, a semi-dwarf high-yield wheat that could grow on poorer soil, artificial composites, and withstand the kind of environmental challenges that Witness was subject to. Lerma Rojo and later variants from Bourlag's lab were critical in making Witness largely self-sufficient in food and guaranteed goodwill from outlying Distrikts towards the assembly. Bourlag's seedlab has since produced Lorelei , Bruno3.3, LanceV2 , and Agatha4, the mosses, seaweed-analogues and photobionts that give the Assembly its signature vegetated look.

Distribution and trade

Most people in the Assembly subscribe to an ideology of local autonomy. Producing for one's own consumption is considered virtuous. Energy and, to a lesser extent, food are, to a considerable amount consumed by the same households and firms that produce them. For most commodities this is less true. Anything that is not consumed by the producer is exchanged on markets.

Market prices in the Assembly are free to float, but only within limits, set by citizen assemblies and revised periodically. These limits are enforced by a system inspired by pre-Sundering stock exchanges: when the price of something grows (or falls) too much or too quickly, the e-commerce platforms temporarily suspend exchanges. These institutions are known in the Assembly as bounded free markets, or simply bounded markets.

Trade with other Distrikts

The stability, cohesion and relative prosperity of the Assembly comes at the price of a relatively tight control of inter-Distrikt trade. This is achieved with a dual system: natural persons from anywhere in Witness are free to operate in the Assembly, but legal persons are almost always not. Among other restrictions, companies cannot have other companies as shareholders. Foreign direct investment is near-zero, restricted to specific, and tightly monitored, cases. Inter-distrikt trade is limited to the export of small-batch manufacturing industrial products and services – notably creative industry ones, and the import of raw materials and the occasional advanced tech artefact.

Commerce with Libria is often fraught, as the small-scale DIY ethos of the Assembly has to contend against economies of scale and capital that can sometimes undercut markets to gain strongholds. Several instances of looming gentrification have been prevented by Revolutionists - in a few instances with the liberal application of Molotov cocktails.

Currency

The Assembly does use a currency: the ironically named CTRLcoin, a blockchain-based system that relies on a concept called *regenerative proof-of-stake*. Instead of 'mining', as with most implementations, anyone who comes within the borders of the Assembly is automatically assigned a Wallet and a starting pot of coins.

This Wallet, over time, generates or decays accumulated coins towards a mean so that a) no-one can remain poor for too long and b) no-one can hoard wealth. The mean, or the starting pot, is decided by an automated, distributed consensus mechanism that pegs the total number of coins to a set maximum. Wallets are adjusted whenever they connect for a transaction (thus, it is theoretically possible to hoard coins, as long as you understand that you cannot carry out a transaction without your Wallet adjusting itself).

This process is handled by the State Machine on behalf of the Assembly, although as with the microgrids, the Assembly has the infrastructure to not rely on this system. CTRLcoin has proven itself critical for the careers of more abstract and scaleable work such as those of scholars, artists and programmers.

Despite strong efforts to prevent it, instances of rent have risen, especially for those parts of the Assembly that cater to tourism from the other Distrikts. Sumer Street is an area where visitors pay rent that is put into a communal treasury; income from bars, coffeehouses and stores also do the same. Similarly, the fruits of CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION franchising income (and those of several popular artists) go directly into common funds and collectives set up by Flo Royal. Currency from the other districts is either spent directly on imports or to purchase space from nearby Libria.

TOPOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Assembly has often been described as a 'flat, green' region. A more apt description would be a suburbia interspersed with infrastructure built broadly along the lines of the microgrids, forming units of housing and work that are able to sustain themselves without much outside interaction. Greenery and vertical farming are an important part of this design.

Recent advances in 3D printing and design have led to the construction of experimental stacked high-rises on the Harvestside area, while much of the seaside parts of the Assembly have been converted to public beachfronts, seaweed farms and expansion space.

Notable monuments and buildings include the statues of CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION in the city center, the Windward Platform for the Arts and the weekly open mics that happen there, the Gordillo Market (originally called the Mass Farm One Market), the Flea Markets down Sidesqabble Avenue, and the Microgrid Temple, where collectives host research fairs to invite inventors and researchers to demo technologies and present research that sustains or could enhance the Assembly's way of life, in exchange for funding - usually in the form of housing and materials.

CULTURE, EDUCATION AND CONTEMPORARY LIFE

The Assembly is generally considered to be one of the best places to begin as a musician, due to its community structures, public support, and the legacy of CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION. Artists looking for wider fame and fortune, however, are unlikely to find it here, as The Assembly lacks the kind of widespread marketing or the heavy capital investment found in Libria. There is, therefore, a rich history of artists moving back and forth between the two territories.

The Assembly overwhelmingly favors apprenticing systems as a way of learning skills. Most citizens typically join the nearest collective, pick up useful skills as an apprentice, and then spend time as a journeyman migrating from collective to collective before settling down and working towards mastery. Highly skilled individuals take on apprentices of their own; an unintended consequence is often ferocious competition to draw a Master's attention and earn an apprenticeship.

TRANSPORT

The Assembly has a series of public rail networks connecting it from one end to the other, as well as an informal network of blimps run on an as-you-need basis. Public transport is free, with citizens and collectives donating material to the Trainspotting Guild. Citizens may even add their own 'carts' to the tracks: the caveat is that all tracks are one-way, and any cart has to operate at a specific speed. Several collectives thus run their own rail carts, especially those that need to move perishable goods (ie: fruits and vegetables) to distribution centers or factories (ie: canning).

The Assembly has made one notable transport contribution to Witness, one that changed all cities as thoroughly as the Harvest Division: the Migrant Train. Of all Distrikts in Witness, Assembly's Trainspotting Guild probably has the best rail-based public transit systems. Invited to a design meeting to create a unified set of rail standards across the Distrikts, Tyson Wijeratne, the Trainspotting Guild's then-Second Chief, proposed a modular system, complete with State Machine integration, that would also let people migrate across Distrikts in search of a life they preferred; he stated that he was inspired in part by the journeyman phase of his career, where he worked across several different collectives before joining the Trainspotters. This idea was initially resisted by the Covenant, but votes from Libria and the State Machine Council saw it through.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

Arguably the most famous citizen is **Flo Royal** herself, who, after the band imploded, spent significant amounts of time aiding fledgeling collectives and today is the closest that The Assembly will admit to having a single spokesperson. Under her leadership, a new CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION put out CHRONICLES OF STRUGGLE and CHOP WOOD, CARRY WATER, two albums that serve as documentaries on the process of building the Assembly. It should be noted that her work has lost most of its symphonic metal elements for gentler trance work. She and her CTRL + ALT + Townhalls remain an institution unto themselves.

Just as revered is **Donovan Gordillo**, often good-naturedly called *Soilfather*, for his work in bringing the Assembly to agricultural independence and for his fierce campaigning against the spread of foreign currency in the Assembly. Gordillo is widely considered to be the top authority on antifragile collective-building and often borders on being a Revolutionist, despite never taking the position. Nevertheless, it's a common saying that when the revolution comes, Gordillo will be there at the back, feeding the rebels.

Tyson Jayawardana and **Nikita Bourlag** are seen as savants who continue such work for the greater good, and generally have little to say other than on transport and food respectively - but while Jayawardana often works alongside his Guild, Bourlag is seen more as an auter with a gift that it would be foolish to ignore.

Another popular citizen is the poet and archivist **Chen Da Jiang**, whose interDistrikt photography, *Diaries of Water* (a nuanced pseudo-epic on the founding of the Assembly, told from the perspective of the ocean, and sometimes running counter to what was popularized by CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION) and *Humans of Witness* (a long-running interview project) have made them a darling of both people and aethnographers.

The longest-serving Revolutionist, and the most faithful adherent of the system, is **Anagram Vho**, who after CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION's dissolution took on the task of 'balancing' religious influences from the Covenant. Sometimes accused of religious persecution, Rose views religion as a unwelcome hegemony and a shadow power structure that goes against the ideals of the Assembly.

Footnotes

The Assembly is not as impossible as it might seem. Much of its struggle, especially towards agricultural independence, is inspired by the story of [Marinaledo, a village in Spain that came upon a different and sustainable way of doing things](#). [The tale of Denmark's Freetown Christiania](#) also makes an appearance in shaping how events develop once such communities encounter greater economic systems, especially tourism.

The economy is a greatly accelerated version, and more communitarian-anarchist version of the [successful co-op economies that Vietnam is trialing](#); they have seen [significant advances since the first implementations](#).

As for CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION, someone new to anarcho-punk bands only needs to glance at the relevant Wikipedia entry: "*Many anarcho-punks are pacifists (e.g. Crass and Discharge) and therefore believe in using non-violent means of achieving their aims. These include [nonviolent resistance](#), [refusal of work](#), [squatting](#), economic [sabotage](#), [dumpster diving](#), [graffiti](#), [culture jamming](#), [ecotage](#), [freeganism](#), [boycotting](#), [civil disobedience](#), [hacktivism](#) and [subvertising](#). Some anarcho-punks believe that violence or property damage is an acceptable way of achieving social change (e.g. Conflict). This manifests itself as [rioting](#), [vandalism](#), wire cutting, [hunt sabotage](#) . . .and in extreme cases, bombings.*" . . . and then compare the ethos of these bands, and those of movements like [Fluxus](#) and [Happenings](#) in the 1970s, to that of modern-day hacktivists. There are almost too many to list; reality ranges from those designing anti-surveillance facewear to those operating in the tiers of Wikileaks, DkD[[]], and the [Cult of the Dead Cow](#); in fiction, Tim Morgan's 2019 novel *Infinite Detail* provides a fascinatingly plausible look at one such movement in the not-too-distant future.

Punks never die: they only go briefly in and out of style.

Avantgrid

Avantgrid is a large archipelago Distrikt between Assembly and Libria.

"The object of life is not to be on the side of the majority, but to escape finding oneself in the ranks of the insane." - Marcus Aurelius

Avantgrid is a large archipelago Distrikt between [Assembly](#) and [Libria](#). Originally a zone of Libria, built to cater to an exclusive, high-income clientele, it fractured in 15 0D after the collapse of a geoengineering company left the ownership of the archipelago in dispute.

Avantgrid is the only Distrikt in [Witness](#) that is not connected to the Harvest grid. In contrast to the mostly urban other Distrikts of Witness, Avantgrid is a largely rural Distrikt which even contains patches of uninhabited wilderness. Of the 1.1 million inhabitants of Avantgrid, 150.000 live in Akur, its only urban zone. There are 149 islands in the archipelago; outside of Akur, boundaries are being made and remade all the time, and new islands are under construction by various parties within Avantgrid.

While modern-day Avantgrid is very welcoming of new inhabitants, the strict energy frugality brought about by voluntary disconnection from Harvest means that the lifestyle dissuades many from relocating to one of its islands.

Some political pundits of Hygge, Libria, and the [Covenant](#) routinely warn that the seemingly calm exterior of Avantgrid hides a festering underbelly of radical extremists that aim to shut down the Harvest Division by force if necessary. Since the islands are largely self-governing cantons, it is understood that the ability of the Avantgrid Confederation to do anything about ideological radicalization is limited. This has created conflict with [Libria](#), and attempts have been made to convince the State Machine to relinquish the archipelago back into Librian control.

POLITICAL HISTORY

Avantgrid was originally a zone of [Libria](#), constructed as a get-away location for the elites who had tired of living in the urban sprawl. Originally called Seastead II, it was constructed at great expense by the Kleindestine Company - specialists in geo- and eco-engineering, using dredging techniques that had been thought lost to the Sundering.

Astrid Kleindestine, the hugely charismatic CEO of Kleindestine, bet almost everything the company had and pitched Seastead II to the rising *nouveau riche* class within Libria, appealing to largely libertarian sensibilities. The general thrust of the advertising campaign - possibly the largest Witness has ever seen - stressed that both state and corporate surveillance (the latter being of the Librian kind) infringed on fundamental liberties. The *Millionaire Migration* made headline in its day, as aethnographers of all stripes worried that Libria would be left with a collapsed economy made of only the working poor and the ultra-rich. The fact that Kleindestine had somehow negotiated the non-intervention of the State Machine was interpreted as a libertarian dream by some and a worrying precedent by many.

However, as the project entered its habitable stages and went into its last phase of construction, the Great Wave of 015D hit Witness, severing the powerlines that connected the 135 completed islands to the Harvest grid. A surge of insurance claims in the wake of the tsunami also brought down the unstable banks that had issued bonds to the Kleindestine Company, and in the following year of financial turmoil and cutthroat seizure of assets, the company collapsed and ownership of the Seastead archipelago became contested.

A brief period of armed conflict followed between the subcontracted gangs of corporations who laid claim to the islands of Seastead, and the legal ambiguity prevented the Night Watchmen from acting with any mandate. By 017D the only major presence left was that of the smuggling routes of the Seaside Senators and the Hoshizaki BioMonastery, a Hygge-Covenant joint operation that licensed intellectual property from the Assembly and was using vast tracts of potentially arable land on Avantgrid to provide food supplies to both Distrikts.

The New Beginning

Taking advantage of this uncertainty, a second migration from [Libria](#) started moving to the islands on the outskirts of Seastead, seeking freedom from authority while getting away from the claustrophobic downtown sprawls.

Unlike the original high-income inhabitants, most of this wave were middle-income migrants tired of the increasing cost of living and the steady corporate ownership of private spaces. Many of them hiked and peddled over in improvised skiffs; the lack of access to the Harvest grid meant that they could bring with them only very low-energy devices and machines.

Many of these new inhabitants had participated in the Marches against the rule of Denton. They were folk already used to hardiness and building from almost nothing, and their time in the rapidly-growing Libria had instilled a general desire for a more frugal and sustainable way of life.

Some among them wished for an even more extreme version of sustainability. The "eco-pragmatists", as they called themselves, theorized that increasingly complex and energy-heavy systems - both in terms of technology and in terms of social structures - would only lead to the second coming of the arrogance that brought about the Sundering. A frugal vision of Witness, built on the principles of cyclical economy and strict accounting for energy consumption, lent itself quite naturally to the conditions that many of the second wave had to endure in Avantgrid. The eco-pragmatist theory - that accounting for energy should not be more controversial than accounting for money - found fertile roots.

The Dirk-Leo Correspondence

One prominent eco-pragmatist migrant to Seastead was Octavia Dirk. Formerly one of the 12 delegates on the Libria Committee that had fallen to the plots of Megan Rilke and Karunasalam Balraj, Dirk resurfaced among the second wave. In a highly publicized series of message-board letters between her and the Benedictine monk Alban Leo of the [Covenant](#), she had laid out the tenets of a society with eco-pragmatist ideals that aligned with the Benedictine/Hyborean faith. She posited that because currency brought about its own implicit social contracts, tying value of a currency to the inverse of energy consumption would be a clever way to preserve liberty while living within the means of the environment.

This exchange came to a point when Dirk put this question to Leo:

"As we know, the quality of manufacture by your order is of indisputable quality - "ora et labora" indeed! As an act of faith and devotion, you build your goods to last as long as possible - a display of frugality and conservation of energy. But tell me this, esteemed Father Alban - if God and his creation are infinite, why do you care not to waste? Surely there is always more to be had of His infinite creation?" - *Octavia Dirk, open letters to Alban Leo*

Leo, after prolonged meditation, came to the controversial conclusion that God and the universe are not infinite, but finite. Indeed, he rejected infinity as entirely fictitious - a mathematical construct. A theatrical orator, published an essay named "God Has No God" that was deemed unforgivably blasphemous.

"On the morning of the seventh day, God woke up and noticed that the density of distributed matter had decreased ever so slightly. Matter is finite, and so is god! Infinity, what self-deception it had been! God's god, infinity, was dead. With the feeling of one who has indulged too much, God looked at the product of six days of frenzied creation. The damage had been done, the false testament to infinity had been written into the fabric of creation. Endless blue skies, deep ocean trenches; even the fabric of the universe itself lied, seeming infinite through a parlor trick of expansion and contraction

like the surface of a balloon at a birthday party. And God wept, knowing that it was inevitable that the life that sprung from this creation would eventually have to go mad with infinity-fever before seeing the truth." - [Alban Leo OSB, God Has No God](#)

Following the liberalization in the wake of Cottica's popularity, Leo was not immediately prosecuted for this essay. It and other communiques used Leo's idea of a non-infinite creation to argue that all resources be treated as finite, and became the basis for "Advent Grid: Cyclical Life and Devotion", a fringe text that gained a cult-like following in both Libria and the [Covenant](#) among those who feared a second Sundering. Leo began suggesting that those interested in his work travel to Seastead II and take it upon themselves to live differently; thus, a third wave of newly minted eco-pragmatists flocked to join Dirk at Seastead II with the explicit intention of turning it into a Distrikt.

This period, although short, was an extremely violent part of Witness history, as the corporations of Libria fought to prevent the fracture. This has created a deep gulf of suspicion and distrust between the people of Avantgrid and Libria ever since.

At a point, a large enough number of eco-pragmatists had gathered on the islands of Seastead, and the State Machine concluded that the logical action was to cut this zone off from Libria and pronounce it a new Distrikt with an eco-pragmatist governance model. Avantgrid was the first Distrikt that was formed through a conscious effort of a group to force the State Machine to fracture by assembling a group of like-minded people with an agenda.

In 20 0D Leonine himself relocated to join Dirk, protected on the way out by a private militia belonging to Cindy Lupin - the heir to a corporate empire in Libria and an enthusiast of the newly popular eco-pragmatism - and worked for a while in the Hoshizaki BioMonastery to further his knowledge of hydroponics and seed-crops. During his time, and using the authority as a potential leader of the newly minted district, there he was able to convince the BioMonastery that the bulk of its labor force should be local, so that the populace could learn critical skills.

However, despite all of this, the eco-pragmatic governance model did not work out as a single-state solution. Many of the inhabitants had their roots in Libria, and had set up independent zones on their islands. While they absorbed eco-pragmatism as a viable way of living, the general libertarian tendencies of all three waves convinced the State Machine that a unitary state would decay rapidly. A compromise was struck, declaring the new Distrikt a Confederacy of Cantons. A dialectal pronunciation of "Advent Grid" gave the Distrikt the name that stuck - Avantgrid. More extreme eco-pragmatist thought forms the root of thinking for at least two strains of [eco-fascism present in Witness](#).

CURRENT POLITICS

Each Canton of Avantgrid is essentially self-governing.

Citizens can claim and hold as much territory as they require. Any trade happens with barter - either goods, services, or with land and energy; value is mutually decided by both parties. Issues of justice and contracts are dealt with at a monthly Canton Agora, which is (given the size of each Canton) a small democracy modeled along old Greek lines. Ostracism - the yearly ability to banish a person from a Canton, based on a popular vote - is in play.

To prevent forces from other Distrikts from seizing control, the State Machine maintains a 'first-principle right to violence' in exchange for the unfettered operation of the Hoshizaki BioMonastery and other public-good institutions, such as ethnography schools. In return, any invaders would face joint forces from both Hygge and the Covenant, as well as disconnection of State Machine-controlled services such as the Harvest Division and (later) the Migrant Train.

Almost all Cantons - or at least, most known Cantons - take responsibility for the education of their citizens in energy and material accountability. Cantons also share knowledge openly to advance energy-conserving technology and practices.

ECONOMY

"We live to the rhythms of the sea and the stars, not to those of corporates and bureaucracies." - Octavia Dirk

Avantgrid's economy is the hardest to understand from a single perspective. Its decentralized nature makes it almost impossible to do anything more than observe and perhaps estimate the transactions happening in Akur. Small armies of student theorists from all over are routinely sent into Avantgrid to understand an in-your-face example of the limits of knowledge. Few of them go much beyond Akur.

An important part of Avantgrid inter-Canton bargaining is that the buyer and the seller meet on neutral ground or a location agreed to be such, with no more than two seconds. This allows a kind of limited Coasian bargaining to take place. The inhabitants of Avantgrid consider this a point of pride, showing the independence of each Canton, and the unforced and willing nature of each exchange. Akur has a number of so-called "Meeting Islands" which are often used as such neutral trading locations.

In general, the economy is best understood through a cultural prism. The Avantgrid economy is highly cyclical, closer to zero-waste than anything else on Witness; in fact, some Cantons import waste from other Distrikts - especially electronic - to repair, rebuild, and to extract materials. Avantgrid attitudes towards waste have been compared to the water beliefs of the sand-nomads in the pre-Sundering religious text *Dune*.

One expression of this is the Reuse Fair, an annual event in Akur where people from all over Avantgrid gather to show off and share their developments in energy-saving and waste reclamation. This includes everything from the Industrial-Fixit to the Re-Fashion

show, where the oldest and best maintained clothes compete alongside the best new upcycling style.

Two proposals are making the rounds in today's Avantgrid. The first is the Dirk-Leonine concept of a currency whose value decreases with materials use - although since this would require a complete inventory of all materials and estimation of their value. The second is the idea of a ledger of material and energy spend within Avantgrid, self-reported. Any energy that is spent in production and manufacturing must also be accounted for on the ledger, as well as the means through which this energy was generated.

Both ideas are in vogue among the theorists at the Ásgeirsson-Institut, a conclave of ethnographers specializing on theoretical economics. The poet-economist Cottica has levied the argument that practically, the compute and energy costs of maintaining such a ledger, be it a centralized solution or a decentralized one, would go completely against Avantgrid's eco-pragmatist ethos. There is also political opposition to a central ledger as a threat to the self-rule of the Cantons and religious opposition to such open accounting as limiting the possibilities of secret or non-public contributions to the energy frugality of Witness.

Manufacturing

Some Cantons of Avantgrid continue to expand the archipelago by keeping the geoengineering factories up and running. These efforts require importing large quantities of energy from the Harvest grid (using Avantgrid-maintained batteries), and convert waste material reclaimed from other districts into substrate for new livable land. This process is net energy consuming, and arguments have been levied for and against the practice. In general, the energy footprint of creating an island with Harvest energy is seen as a debt that should be repaid by avoiding or preventing an equivalent amount of Harvest energy being spent. This repayment usually involves crediting the Canton for the energy saved by the waste reclamation, and for enabling more people to live the Avantgrid life. It is estimated that if 200 people live out their lives as frugal citizens on an island in Avantgrid instead of as middle-class citizens of neighboring Libria, the energy cost of producing an island is offset.

There are rumors of other methods of 'repaying the debt', including groups knocking chunks of other Distrikts off the Harvest grid for a time to help balance the ledgers. This may explain why the debate about island building is generally civil and why few extreme religious sects oppose the project outright.

The State Machine has calculated that the islands of Avantgrid also serve as an effective water break and anchoring system for other cities, as well as available space to requisition for MicroDistrikts; and thus the Harvest Division helps offset some of the energy cost.

CULTURE AND BELIEFS

Most people in Avantgrid lead a life that is frugal, artful, quiet, and close to nature. Doubtless it has more risk and work involved than social nets available elsewhere, but inhabitants generally report high levels of contentment. Technology is usually several generations behind, and tuned to be extremely energy efficient; Avantgrid engineers are masters of the 'do one thing and do it well' school of thought - so it is extremely rare to find highly networked general purpose computing machines, for example, unless there is a real utility for such.

Avantgrid has a mix of religious affiliations as it had an influx from both Libria and the Covenant. There are a significant number of monasteries that have branched off from the Covenant, and look more like Zen-temples made of wood in their Avantgrid incarnations.

Many temples of Nygogi Buddhism also make Avantgrid their home, as the ethos of energy conservation and the metaphysics of karma have wedded to the ideas of energy waste as harmful. The rejection of infinity as a valid concept has also become popular, accepting the ultimately finite nature of all things - even the universe itself.

There is also a radical and sectarian sub-strand in Avantgrid that is willing to use force and violence to sabotage the access to the Harvest grid in other Distrikts. These terrorist cells are very hard to stop within Avantgrid, but have limited effectiveness elsewhere, as various combinations of surveillance are hard to train against. Nevertheless, sleeper cells have been discovered and punished in Hygge and the Assembly.

Some sects in Avantgrid believe that the only way to save Witness is to embed as many of their ranks as possible in other Distrikts, spreading the gospel of energy frugality in secret, hoping to shape policy to nudge Distrikts towards energy-frugal governance model. Many of these believers were responsible for the microGrid Collective and the adoption of the distributed energy model seen in the Assembly.

EDUCATION

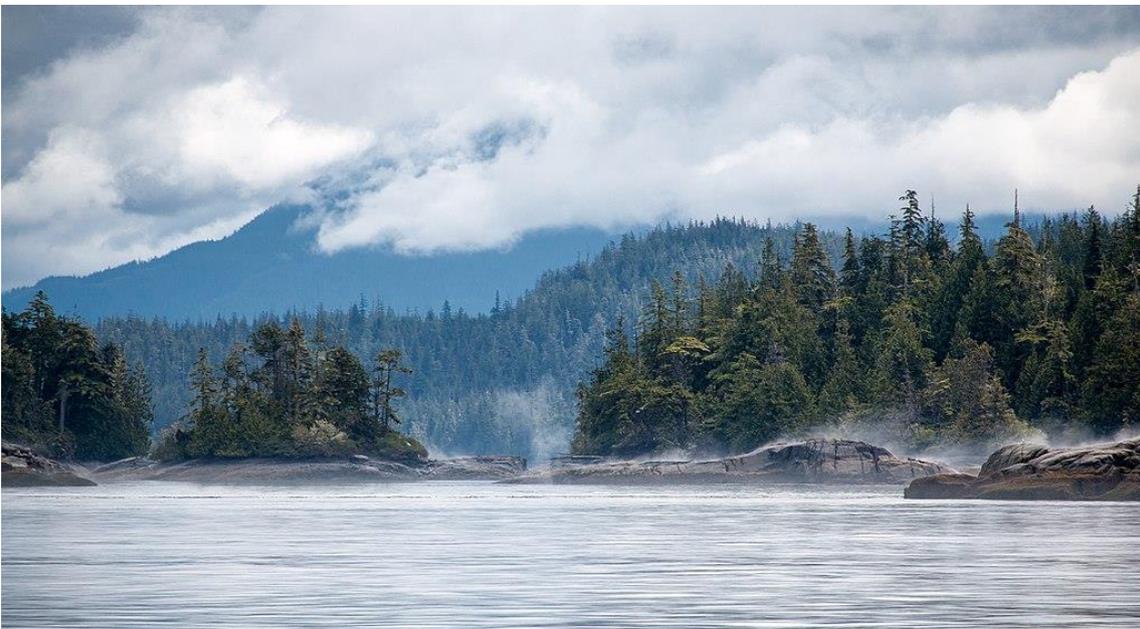
The Ásgeirsson-Institut, one of the most prestigious institute of [aethnography](#) is located in Avantgrid. Aethnography is especially prized in Avantgrid as augurs travelling between settlements provide a key vector for news, ideas and innovation to migrate, as well as some much-needed new company for those who live on these islands. The Ásgeirsson-Institut specializes in thinking about energy in all facets of life and augurs are tasked with traveling between islands to study this in the hundreds of communities of Avantgrid.

A primary method of study is the energy-audit, in which travelling augurs conduct detailed examinations of how the inhabitants of the different Cantons understand their energy-cycles and the nature of the cyclical economy, help citizens optimize their ways of consumption, and gain insights from day-by-day frugal life; this knowledge then slowly makes its way back to the Intitut itself, and from there to the rest of Witness.

TOPOLOGY



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The Avantgrid archipelago is the closest thing to wild nature that Witness has to offer, and many of the islands have sizeable areas of forests, marshes, fields, and undisturbed

wildlife. Many of the islands are covered in evergreen pinewood forests and a varied flora, enriched by the pollen that gets carried by the winds across the ocean.

The original purpose of the Seastead II had been as resort islands and private summer getaways, with lush and varied gardens and grounds for relaxing, hiking, and hunting. Many of the islands already had self-supporting ecosystems of predators and prey. Some of these creatures were flown in to Witness from surrounding landmasses, while others were genetically engineered and developed. This has resulted in a surprising and sometimes unmapped fauna populating some of the larger islands of Avantgrid.

The Covenant

The Covenant is indeed a religious institution Distrikt, tracing itself back to the grand powers of Roman Catholicism.

"Asked if she knew she was in God's grace, she answered, 'If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me.'" - Cottica, on Mayor Ebunoluwa Akinyemi, *Officium Auctoritatis Summae*, I

The Covenant is perhaps the least-understood among all the major Distrikts of Witness. Notable visitors have describe it alternatively as "a kind of feudal paradise" or a "fascist religious hegemony" or "a work of art". As always, the truth lies somewhere in between. The Covenant is indeed a religious institution, tracing itself back to the grand powers of Roman Catholicism. Broadly united under the *Officium Auctoritatis Summae* - loosely rendered as "the Office of the Highest Authority", and generally shortened to "Auctoritatis", it is possibly the single greatest concentration of material wealth on Witness. Magnificent churches stud the landscape, surrounded by carefully planned farms and estates; buildings of singularly brutalist art nouveau style line the streets of Hyborean, the 'center' sprawled around the *Officium*.



The Library of St. Benedict, Witness's largest store of knowledge and the home of much of the State Machine's processor cores, occupies a curious no-man's land in the middle of all this. Guarded by elite military from Hygge, staffed by tonsured monks from the Covenant's *Ordo Libri*, rabidly devoured by Librians looking for a competitive advantage, and all but ignored by the Assembly and Avantgrid: it is Witness's politics in a microcosm.

POLITICAL HISTORY

The distinct features of modern-day The Covenant began to appear under the leadership of Distrikt Mayor Ebunoluwa Akinyemi, who gained the very first mayoral elections of what was then still called Distrikt 3. Herself a Roman Catholic, she ran on a platform that mixed a certain social conservatism (described as paternalism by the opposition of the time) with a strong emphasis on religious freedom. Akinyemi's policies emphasized the autonomy of religious institutions from the Distrikt's government. As a result, many of the City's Churches and Monastic Orders chose Distrikt 3 as their main home. The more devout of the migrants to early-days Witness followed suit.

This move cemented Akinyemi's vision into a solid reality. With a large population of believers, and a strong presence of religious institutions in all main areas of public life, Distrikt 3 consolidated as the religious center of the City. In the course of Akinyemi's third term, the Distrikt Council voted to adopt Resolution 430, which reformed the Distrikt's governance to take the new reality into account. Among other decisions, Resolution 430 gave permanent council seats to the representatives of religious institutions, assembled in the Episcopal Conference of Witness, installed the office of the Auctoritatis, and changed Distrikt 3's official denomination into The Covenant, a nickname originally used in a derogatory sense by progressive media.

Religious leaders welcomed a stable environment that would respect the spiritual quests of their flock, and supported Resolution 430 discreetly, but unambiguously. Once it was approved, however, they adopted the view that it was inappropriate for members of the clergy and monastic orders to get directly involved in Distrikt leadership and administration.

To this day, all elected officials and civil servants in The Covenant are laypersons, although the separation of church and state is nonexistent: major religious sub-sects all have permanent Council seats, and the Auctoritatis serves as an analogue to a Parliamentary Speaker. Moreover, city officials often request that priests, nuns or monks serve as their expert advisors, under special dispensation from their religious superiors. To have someone from the Officium is seen as an especial honor, as these *novitates* not just signify a link to the Auctoritati, but also have a Machiavellian knowledge of realpolitik and the art of governing effectively.

Almost everything we know about the inner workings of the Covenant come from the works of the poet-economist Cottica. Using a pseudonym to evade the attention of censors, Cottica published a viral poem known as *Tibi Deo de Purgatorio*, chronicling a

trip through a supposed high-fantasy world inhabited by celestial and demonic beings. Further analysis revealed a cipher in the opening stanzas that turns the names of the angels and demons within into their respective offices, and place names turn into laws and deeds; thus their grandiose, introspective statements becoming both a history of decisions made within the Covenant as well as a declaration of their political power.

ECONOMY

The Covenant's economy is robust and diverse, with an unusually high presence of manufacturing. The service sector is also strong, notably in higher education, health care, and finance. The Covenant hosts the headquarters of several large utilities, that serve not only the Distrikt itself, but also run some critical infrastructures of other Distrikts.

A unique feature of The Covenant's economy is the strong role played by monasteries and other religious institutions. While by no mean numerically prevalent, these institutions tend to be over-represented among the most advanced, most successful operations. This observation led economist Malivalaya Nut to describe The Covenant as a dual economy, where two sets of economic agents with completely different objective functions co-exist. In a series of empirical investigation of The Covenant's economy, Nut discovered a pattern: the economic activity of religious institutions tends to be amplified by businesses that are legally part of the saecular economy, but have evolved for taking advantage of the turbulence created by the existence of the religious institutions themselves – for example lifting innovations invented in the monasteries and re-engineering them for saecular markets.

The number of jobs in The Covenant is estimated at over 4 million, though estimates are highly sensitive to whether the numerous nuns, monks and priests who participate in economic activities are classified as "workers". The position of the religious authorities is that the manual and intellectual efforts of the devout is part of their spiritual quest, and in no way akin to selling one's time for money. In fact, many Covenant intellectuals have come to consider the notion of "market" as morally dubious, and that of *labour* market as outright demonic. Most Aethnographic schools disagree, pointing out that most laypeople long for meaning even while doing paid work, and some find it. Some sympathy for this more lenient position can be found in certain scholars of the Graeber Institute.

MANUFACTURING

The Covenant has a strong manufacturing base, with the highest [economic complexity index](#) of all Distrikts Major. In part, this is an effect of the Benedictine structure imposed by the Hyborean Order, trusted by the Auctoritatis as *Ordo Operarum*. The Benedictine/Hyborean devotion to the motto of "ora et labora" makes them extremely good at the manufacturing of high-quality products since the early Middle Ages. Since they view labor as a devotional activity, the monks refuse to build anything that is not top-quality, and build to last potentially forever. For the same reason, however, they are unwilling to expand production in response to demand. They are also unwilling to raise

their sales prices, because the Rule of Saint Benedict explicitly forbids it, on grounds of greed being a sin. This creates a rationing problem for the high-quality, fair-priced goods produced in the Monasteries.

The problem has been solved by the rise of clusters of startups, which huddle around the monasteries implementing the business model known among venture capitalists as "Grow and Multiply": reverse engineering products of the monasteries, and adapting them for large-scale industrial production. They have an aggressive hiring policy targeting lay Brothers and Sisters, or individuals that, after an apprenticeship in a monastery, decide to remain in the saecular world. This symbiosis of religious and lay manufacturing activity is an example of dual economy.

Much of these activities takes place in the Kyrie region, home to most of The Covenant's Benedictine monasteries. While the Officium and the area around the Monastery of St. Benedict have become the center of knowledge production, Kyrie has become the City's workshop, playing a role equivalent to Shenzhen in the 21st century.

EDUCATION AND FINANCE

The neo-Jesuit Order runs several higher education institutions, called *Collegia*, in The Covenant. Though each only admits a small number of students per year, they enjoy a high prestige. It is common for graduates from the *Collegia* to be quickly hired into senior research and teaching positions by larger universities, both in The Covenant and in other Distrikts, which in turn educate and advise the élites of Witness. *Collegia* alumni maintain strong networks with each other and their former home institutions (*Almae matres*), so that the influence of the latter on the city's academic community is much larger than their size.

The [Institute for the Works of Religion](#) relocated to The Covenant in the years following the approval of Resolution 430. The Distrikt Council's and Mayor's Office's hands-off approach to religious institution has encouraged the IWR to engage in substantial financial innovation, though, for the same reason, much of it remains relatively little known. A swarm of brokers, almost all of them AIs, has formed around the IWR's activities.

COMMUNITY AND CENSORSHIP

It should be noted that the Covenant enforced censorship on many things it deemed immoral, although post-Cottica, these bans have become increasingly looser. The story of her flight is well-known, and instrumental to the existence of the Migrant Train that now runs between distrikts: the State Machine declaration that people who want to leave an area should be allowed to do so has since led to some small migration to and fro the Covenant (particularly between Libria), and a significant drop in complaints from the region.

This new position has been approved by the State Machine as being completely consistent with the Benedictine way. After a probation period, residents pronounce

irrevocable vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and stability; but there is no other penalty for breaking them than losing the monastic community that welcomed them.

Nevertheless, a form of *lèse-majesté* is in effect around the Auctoritati, the Officium and its institutions, and the Ordo Operarum. Urban legends and casual conversation in the Covenant may refer to 'white vans'; these are the infamous vehicles of the Officium's *Inquisitores*, a parallel police force, staffed by lay brothers and sisters and "advised" (that is to say, commanded) by senior clergy under special dispensation.

TOPOGRAPHY:

The Covenant is notable for its comparisons to a city out of pre-Sundering history: Riga, Latvia. Spread over multiple artificial 'rivulets', this sprawling Distrikt espouses an art style set by the tastes of the Auctoritatis. Immense arches, exposed concrete, salvaged bottle-glass painstakingly arranged into magnificent frescoes, decidedly classical statues, steep churches built over decades with hardened stone-colored plastic and steel - this is the signature of much of the Covenant. Church roofs double as solar panels for churches and their surroundings: in this way the religious powers are directly connected to the infrastructure, and the well-being of many a business and household depends on tithes and the good favor of their local priest or monastic superior.

NOTABLE PEOPLE:

The Auctoritatis is an institution unto themselves. The opulence of their surroundings, the tight security, the almost mythical taciturnity of the upper levels of the Officium, and the moral authority combine to make the leader of the Covenant a tourist attraction and an extremely powerful religious figure throughout Witness.

Imagine her sitting by the docks, seaside, by the light of a dying sun, with a fat and angry-looking orange cat next to her. She has grey hair and a left hand that looks badly scarred. For the last so many years she's been advising the Migrant Train Committee on the yearly train-route optimization, which at its basic level is a variant of the Traveling Salesman Problem with some political tension thrown in. I know because I serve on the same committee.

Today she has proposed a new idea: using the number of connected districts - and the radius of the train-circle - as a measure of how diverse this floating megacity is. But we both wonder whether size is a reliable indicator of diversity, given recent events; distrikts have seceded in the past, and she is deep in thought about whether there is an optimal arrangement of distrikts that enables even the most polarized of them to connect to the superstructure without fighting too much.

Every so often she looks up as the train passes by and pets the cat absent-mindedly. The cat, of course, does not care.

- Anagram Dias, ethnographer, *The Assembly*

Arguably the second-most famous citizen of the Covenant is **Cottica**, the anonymous poet-economist who has revealed so much about the inner workings of the Covenant.

Originally hunted by Covenant agents, she was extracted and offered asylum in Hygge; she has since gone on to study both the Assembly and Avantgrid (she has a noted dislike for Libria) and has been accorded honorary citizen status in both those domains. Very few people know who she actually is, or can recognize her; all that is seen are respectful snippets like the one from Anagram Dias, which appeared in *New Horizons* serial 641.

Special projects

The Distrikt Minor of Viriditas, located in a narrow peninsula at the extreme periphery of The Covenant, is home to a large congregation of Teilhardite monks. This is a reclusive order inspired by the works of the biologists-saints [Hildegard of Bingen](#), [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#) and [Stuart Kauffman](#). The Teilhardites farm both the land and the sea, using minimally invasive techniques that make large use of genetically engineered organisms, but in Viriditas they live only at sea. They have built a large monastery, dedicated to Saint Hildegard, out of connecting a large number of boats and raft. This technique gives Saint Hildegard its peculiar appearance, and has earned it the nickname of Floatsam. They have announced that their mission is to build and launch the Saint Christopher, a slower-than-light starship for interstellar colonization, conceived as a deep space monastery. The project has an estimated duration of 400 years, with the first 300 dedicated to developing blueprints and the ancillary technologies.

Footnotes

Much of the Covenant was built around @alberto's writing [around the Benedictine way of doing things](#). Church-led economies produced many of the great works of architecture that dot Europe, creating staggeringly ambitious, multi-generational plans and executing on timescales that seem almost impossible in today's five-years-to-IPO world. Another major source of inspiration is Neal Stephenson's magnificent [Anathem](#).

Ancillary reading can be found in many sources, including (but not limited to) two sources that keep popping up - *Prayer, Patronage, and Power* by Penelope Johnson and *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of, and Life in a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery* by Walter Horn and Ernest Born. But these books are terribly difficult to find today, especially in COVID times: for those looking for a easier read, though, Ken Follet's Kingsbridge series of novels - especially [The Pillars of the Earth](#) - comes highly recommended. An interesting parallel can be found in Sri Lanka, where combinations of monks, and kings looking for glory, have resulted in veritable cities of shrines and Buddha statues (see Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa) and a network of artificial reservoirs that still irrigate lands hundreds of years after their creation.

The Dandelion Republic (microDistrikt)

The Dandelion Republic (formerly Lille-Hygge) is a microDistrikt.

"From now, until the end of days, we shall be as the dandelion: adaptable, resilient, and driven by the winds of our ambitions to take root in whichever soil receives us." - *Lynn Jirō, poet, one of the seven hundred thousand co-founders of the Dandelion Republic*

The Dandelion Republic (formerly Lille-Hygge) is a microDistrikt forked out of Hygge and into unclaimed Avantgrid space. During the Great Reset, the key question was how best to go about ensuring the fairest possible society; while Hygge settled on a model inspired by social democracies, the Dandelion Republic is an exploration of the other possibility: a data-heavy implementation of Communism, where goods are moved around almost entirely by fiat, and with the State Machine presiding over it all. "*More Big Mother than Big Brother*", as the saying goes in the DR.

Close to a million citizens inhabit the DR, each carefully monitored by the State Machine. Every possible piece of data - from rationing history to movement patterns to message logs - are collected and used by the State Machine to better optimize the functioning of the DR. This is an extraordinarily compute-intensive task, and for this reason the DR maintains tight border control - there is an upper bound to the number of people it will allow inside at any given moment.

DR is thus embraced some as the greatest experimental policy experiment in Witness's history; others see it as a vain attempt to overcome the Kleinman Paradox by aiming for a perfect predictive system. Citizens of DR willingly carry out the State Machine's orders, while outsiders, such as the Hygian architect Patrick Ayademi, have reviled it as a 'Panopticon of sheep'. Some conspiracy theorists argue that the State Machine is so all-powerful in the DR that it has somehow managed to factor in the people themselves as processing nodes that help it arrive at decisions - akin to training an ant colony to solve sums - but this is often dismissed by the aethnographers of our times.

Control arguments aside, the Dandelion Republic has repeatedly shown itself to be very capable of tackling externalities: its divers, marines and sailors have mapped out a significant portion of the world around Witness, and it trails only marginally behind Libria in the sophistication of its seafaring technology. Dandelion scientists, bent on increasing the State Machine's computer capacity, have created the ternary transistor and associated mathematics; provided their citizens with a high-speed, wireless information interchange network, using a highly resilient peer-to-peer architecture that can extend State Machine services to everyone; and have now established brief contact with Byzantium, one of the oldest cities of Project Viking.

POLITICAL HISTORY

The Dandelion Republic began as a fork from Hygge. Informally titled Little Hygge, it gained very real presence when 700,000 citizens signed a petition supporting a planned economy. Taking core ideas from pre-Sundering Marxism, the central argument of **Proposition 113** was that enough compute power existed within the State Machine to observe exchanges and citizens *well enough* to overcome the traditional

inefficiencies of a highly centralized system. Thus, it reasoned, most goods and services could be moved around entirely by fiat, and those willing to submit to reasonable wealth caps would be able to build a society that was more equitable to all.

Many saw this as a logical way to prevent the kind of class divisions that had plagued Denton's administration and society. Famously, the Social Reconstruction and Historical Analysis Project, a group comprised of aethnographers and Hyggian politicians, drew from their historical simulations and the work of a pre-Sundering philosopher named James C. Scott, and led repeated, public counterarguments to this proposal. The debates and the political hold-up angered many who merely wanted a return to stability. CIVICSMOD programmers Gregor Samsidel, Janet Samsidel-Chiang, Erwin Lugoda, Peter Kleinman and Antonia Rybakov, in conference with the State Machine, proposed a split. This was then sanctioned and a cluster of unclaimed Avantgrid islands allocated for the new microDistrikt.

Of the 700,000 who signed, most relocated to the new region as co-founders (note that DR refers to 'seven hundred thousand founders', but this is apocryphal). Led primarily by Aethnographer Tomas Dieters, they drew from Denton's original contractualist bent to formulate and sign a social contract that would apply for all citizens of the new area. This contract calls for each citizen to co-operate with each other and the State Machine to:

a) ensure sufficient housing, food, drink for everyone b) create public spaces and services equally to serve everyone c) build an economic model that ensured that every citizen would have meaningful work and make a contribution to society d) co-operate on looming externalities, whether physical (ie: climate change or resource scarcity) or cultural e) to take no more than their just share in rewards from any of the activities above, and to institute and uphold a body of laws that are human-readable and apply equally to all

This contract, rather fittingly, is titled *What We Owe to Each Other*, and is the State Machine's overall mandate for governing the Dandelion Republic. Because of the ever-mutating nature of fairness and morality, the State Machine conducts mass polls every year to better understand what the citizens of the Dandelion Republic consider to be fair; these polls have become semi-famous for their philosophical problems, especially those that involve Trolley Problems.

Those who violate the contract, or those whose ideas of fairness seem severely out of harmony with the whole, are asked to board the Migrant Train for a Distrikt more to their liking - a form of automated ostracism.

ECONOMY

The Dandelion Republic has historically objected to aethnographers who attempt to understand its economy by conventional measures. Dieters, in drafting DR's social contract, famously noted the flaws of previous planned economies in aiming for

'exuberance, plenty and wealth' - which he felt skewed the metrics of analysis, which in turn led to failed decisions.

The economy of the Dandelion Republic optimizes for zero long-term unemployment, and to enable sufficient goods and services available for all inhabitants. Unnecessary destruction of resources is eliminated, since duplication, overproduction and competition are prevented.

To underpin this, the State Machine operates the Dandelion Time Bank, which awards *time credits* to citizens according to work done. Work can be voluntary (such as tidying up a space) or based on a selection of daily 'quests' provided by the Bank; all work is credited, including traditionally unpaid labor, community services and care work.

These credits can then be used as a currency. The value of items and services are pegged to the amount of time credits used for their creation. A minimum number of time credits are available to all every day and there is a rolloff, past which there are steeply diminishing returns on work done - thus, there is a cap on the amount of time credits anyone can hold at any given time, and leisure is baked into the currency system. To catch what it cannot monitor, the Bank maintains a peer exchange where citizens can also gift time credits to each other. This allows public donation for those whose work is difficult to quantify by the number of hours spent on it, or those who refuse to charge for their work. Any donations past the cap are added to the pool of time credits shared out to citizens the next day; thus, outpourings of public generosity lead to better outcomes for all.

Trade with other Distrikts is handled by the Bank on behalf of the DR. Typically, currencies from other Distrikts are converted to goods and services that are then brought in on the cargo compartments of the Migrant Train. The DR has a thriving technology community that specializes in public-interest software and hardware: these are often monetized by the Bank for sale to other regions. A money-time exchange is being currently trialed.

TOPOLOGY

Much of the Dandelion Republic is a work-in-progress, but due to the surveillance requirements inherent to the system, the DR's population is arranged in tightly knit clusters across two islands titled Root and Stem. Root houses the majority of the industry, the better to keep potential pollutants away from residential areas. Stem contains agriculture, public parks, provision hubs and public housing (there is no private housing in DR). Bridges and ferries stitch the two together. Expansion is ongoing into a third and fourth island, titled *Flower* and *Seed* respectively: *Flower* is meant to be a separate region for scientific experimentation and education, and *Seed* is a rapidly expanding naval hub.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

Even in a Distrikt where everyone is equal, exceptional efforts resonate. Tomas Dieters, primary compiler of the social contract, is one of the highest authorities recognized in the DR; the Dieters Academy of Social Analysis is named in his honor. Dieters also enjoys a rare status as a guest policymaker in neighboring Hygge, out of respect for his skills.

R. Cahn, Governor-Servant of the Dandelion Bank, has been a steady pioneer and refiner of the DR's system of exchange. While the State Machine maintains the in-Distrikt exchange and the price of goods, Cahn oversees the infrastructure (both physical and otherwise) in implementing and maintaining an equal quality of service for all.

Hygge, the first Distrikt

The political history of Hygge begins with the founding of Witness itself.

Hygge (formerly Distrikt 1; alternatively, Hygge) is the first Distrikt of Witness. Initially meant to be "*the nervous system of Witness*" and the seat of Denton's power, this Distrikt went through a tumultuous time after the Zero-Day Fracture set in motion a chain of events that would see Distrikts seceding and throwing aside the careful top-down planning engine that Hygge was designed to be.

Today, Hygge is a democratic socialist structure, with a military presence left over from the short but bloody history of the Marches and the Distrikts that broke off. It is still an emblem of power, the seat of many debates for representatives, and boasts perhaps the single largest peacekeeping presence in Witness. Outside of the the Library of St. Benedict in the Covenant, Hygge is the only Distrikt truly critical to the State Machine's existence, as it houses key hardware, along with CIVICSMOD, a multi-distrikt team that operates the machine.

However, it is also a symbol of what some aethnographers dismiss as the classical '*broken tower*' - an ancient institution and aesthetic, living long past its usefulness, stranded in a world that has moved on.

Indeed, Hygge itself has fractured at least once: the Great Reset of 22 0D led to stor-Hygge ('Big Hygge') and a budding microDistrikt, lille-Hygge ('Little Hygge'), both running very different social contracts. Nor has its naming remained consistent. After Little Hygge established itself as [the Dandelion Republic](#), 'Big Hygge', by default, became Hygge, even smaller than it had once been.

The politicians of Hygge maintain, of course, that their way of living makes a lot more sense, and indeed has learned from the mistakes of the past: whether the citizens agree is something learned only by traveling there.

POLITICAL HISTORY

"Look around! Forget these halls and look to the streets, the pylons that come up even as we think these thoughts. The real grievance of our citizens in this post-Sundering world, is

not the work, but the insecurity of their existence. Our people are not sure whether they will be healthy; whether they will live to be old and unfit; whether they will be taken care of in their turn, as their grandparents once did and were. They look around as see a world where every square of land is critical, where every resource matters, and ask themselves what happens if they fall into illness, or into bad company, and whether society will recognize any obligation other than to use them and discard them once their time has come. We have called upon them to rebuild the world; we must ensure that they have incentive to do so, not just for their children, but for themselves." - A Record of a Seabourne Few, J.C. Denton, *Manifesto*. Now collectively known as the *Old Manifesto*.

The political history of Hygge begins with the [founding of Witness](#) itself. Initially built as an administrative town, Hygge was intended to house Denton and the various committees that would govern Witness, the CIVICSMOD team, and a host of support staff that would maintain this system. As Distrikts began to demand their own space, people from all over Witness who wished to stay true to Denton's vision were resettled in Hygge; as the Marches turned violent, and as the threat of military action grew (especially with regard to Libria), more refugees began to arrive, and the former Potemkin-like facade turned into an active population hub.

In the beginning, Witness (and thus Hygge) was designed to be a system where good were moved around exclusively by fiat, subject to decisions by many tiers of Committees and Working Groups, with Disruption Labs charged with being cross-domain superconnectors and bringing innovations 'from the outside to the center'. Denton's original plans seem to have been to transition to a limited market structure; notes from his *Manifesto* describe his admiration for pre-Sundering 'Tiger economies' - where once the population started growing, selected individuals would be given monopolies on the production of certain critical goods, and competition allowed to come into play a decade or two after the fundamental infrastructure had been set in place.

Ultimately, Denton's goals seem to have been an economy where the state - with him as the de facto head - controlled the supply of energy, healthcare, law and order, and funds for dealing with climate change externalities. The State Machine was installed and calibrated to impute data gaps and create a hyper-efficient allocation of resources among 'the First Million' that would inhabit Witness.

Denton's plans, however, relied on a tried-and-tested cohort of trained staff loyal to him, to whom he could hand out monopolies without fear. Witness actually set sail with a far more diverse population, and indeed a large part of dissent arose because of this favouritism and because population growth far outstripped Denton's planned ramp-up times. Denton cronies were seen to be dynasty-building, while the worker population that had joined Witness at launch were given very few options - either to join the police, and gain some power at the behest of bureaucrat, or to be treated as labourers paying for their passage with sweat.

Post-Fracture

Post-Fracture Hygge was called Distrikt 1, and it did not stay in that state for long; both the Assembly and Libria broke away shortly after, leaving Hygge to deal with waves of migrants, a rapidly expanding military presence and very real fears that Denton was subverting state mechanisms into a wartime dictatorship. Both personal and government records show an overemphasis on influencing the affairs of other forming Distrikts and a dismissal of internal issues of Hygge proper (the name here being loosely used, as the Distrikt took years to be officially named).

"No, you don't understand. He gave me an executive order to send all of his rations to the new espionage crew. Do you get what I'm saying? Denton is so into his shit, he won't have anything to eat. God have mercy on us." — Larry Quoia, former Second Secretary of Witness, messaging records

Four weeks after the Fracture, the State Machine would start recommending an 'early retirement' for Denton as part of a management plan, which was ignored for several years, even as the AI raised this recommendation in priority. Accounts confirm that Denton would have fits of rage if any of his subordinates mentioned the recommendation. One way or another, Denton's supporter group was powerful enough that the State Machine accepted their support as part of the implicit social contract of Hygge; even as the mismanagement of Hygge became clear and basic infrastructure started to fail, pro-Denton supporters engaged in conflict with any newly formed anti-Denton faction.

These actions had ripple effects: in the case of Libria, for instance, it led to a solidification of their general anti-statist stance, whereas in the Covenant it created a cottage industry supplying weaponry and armor to loose militias sanctioned by various church orders.

Post-Denton Turmoil and the Great Reset

The years after Denton's death were marked by more management struggle, a period described in Hygge history as the *Letter-opener Wars* - 'letter-opener' being street slang applied to the many bureaucrats that Denton's pseudo-dictatorship had generated. Infighting resulted in Denton's most experienced managers migrating or being banished to other Distrikts, and few chose to return for fear of death threats from the public - which were by now turning against much of the political infrastructure that Denton had set in place. Many of CIVICSMOD migrated to the Library of St. Benedict during this time for their personal safety while adjusting the domains and parameters of the State Machine to account for the new zeitgeist: the rest stayed behind.

The Great Reset campaign, spearheaded by CIVICSMOD programmers Gregor Samsidel, Janet Samsidel-Chiang, Erwin Lugoda, Peter Kleinman and Antonia Rybakov, took years to come to fruition. It began with a rebranding of Distrikt 1 to Hygge - a name carefully chosen to present a particular comfortable aesthetic to the world.

However, the meat of the Reset was nearly stalled by a critical decision: should Hygge have the State Machine running resource allocation by fiat - a hyper-efficient, but still imperfect version of Communism (given all the information problems) - or should it set up a welfare state with actively mutating policies to reduce the amount of suffering and prevent the gross disparities that had motivated protests in the first place?

In this, public opinion was divided. It was the newly-rebooted State Machine itself that proposed a solution: a Distrikt and a microDistrikt (partitioned according to public opinion polls), each running one option. Since much had yet to be proved about the efficacy of both systems, citizens could freely transition between these two regions - and, indeed, share goods and services across borders, to see if some stability could be achieved. As a mover of resources by fiat, the State Machine would, in one territory, have the authority to directly pass suggestions citizens to handle actions that needed performing, optimizing based on skillsets, capabilities, proximity and so on. In the other, its role would remain in the realm of policy suggestions based on data-gathering and simulations.

Thus, the big and little Hygges were born. To prevent the State Machine's finite computational resources from being taxed beyond measure, lille-Hygge, the smaller microDistrikt, implemented a bounded population on which the State Machine continuously refines its information gathering. After Little Hygge established itself and its own identity, 'Big Hygge', by default, became Hygge, even smaller than it had once been.

This move did not happen without significant dissent. Even among Denton's supporters, there was unrest at the idea of handing over so much control to the State Machine, an instrument viewed by some as dangerously flawed. While CIVICSMOD upholds promises made to release monthly status reports on the State Machine, many took the Migrant Train to other Distrikts as soon as the option became available.

Present conditions

The Hygge of today is embraced by many as a stable, ordered existence, obsessed with the concept of fairness, but equally criticized for its approach of minimizing negative impacts - sometimes at the cost of positive effects. Proponents of Hygge point out what is known as the *Kleinman Paradox* - for any decision involving two groups, three mathematical notions of fairness are possible, and the three are incompatible with each other; there can be proportional calibration out positive outcomes within each group, or groups can be balanced for the positive class, or for the negative class.

This mathematical conundrum - and Hygge's particular tilt towards minimizing suffering - means that Hygge is often devoid of the high-risk high-reward maneuvering available in market structures like Libria. Many a scholar has set themselves upon a quest to break this paradox. Several theoretical answers exist - among them is a scenario where the decision system is absolutely perfect, with definite and accurate answers instead of probabilistic modelling - but no such system exists.

ECONOMY

Hygge runs an economic system inspired by the social democracies of the second half of the twentieth century. The economy is mixed: most manufacturing, retail and services is run by for-profit private corporations. State-owned enterprises control the provision of most public services, like social security, banking, and infrastructure. Additionally, some Distrikt-owned companies compete with their private-sector counterparts in several key markets. These companies tend to provide basic, no-frills product and services at a competitive price: Hygge's policy makers believe this to increase price competition and provide access to those markets to lower-income households.

Targeting of inequality measures

Limiting inequalities is a tenet of Hyggian social contract, and a key economic policy objective. Indicators of economic inequalities such as the Gini coefficient are closely monitored, and feature in almost all political and policy debates. Augurs keep track of an array of indicators of various inequalities, from the ones (energy, clean water) to more exoteric ones (beauty, inspiration). For most, measurements exist at various scales, from Hygge-wide to the neighborhood. The challenge for the incanters involved in Hygge's policy making is to combine a sustained motivation to engage in productive activities with the presence (and resourcing) of very strong safety nets.

The solution that emerged is a complex web of policies, social norms, and political equilibria. At the micro level, it includes a focus on motivating the working- and middle classes to be more productive by providing opportunities for social mobility. At the same time, politicians leveraged the popularity of the generous welfare system to keep very wealthy individuals in a minority, and prevent them from unduly influencing policy. Wealthy Hyggians often responded by relocating elsewhere on Witness, typically on Libria.

Central banking and management of Distrikt budgets

At the macro level, Hygge is run according to the tenets of [Modern Monetary Theory](#). It maintains full monetary sovereignty, and freely creates its own currency as needed. At the same time, augurs are constantly developing new techniques for making sure that government policies do not overcommit the economy's capacity. Inflation is closely monitored for signs of economic overheating.

Macroeconomic policy is executed by two powerful institutions: [Hyggebanki](#), the central bank, and the [Ministry of Provisioning and Planning for Public Purpose](#), commonly called Mp4 or Hensigt

Hyggebanki is the only legal issuer of the local currency, the Danegeld; it also functions as the main financial regulator. New Danegelds are created by crediting the Hensigt's current account at Hyggebanki. Additionally, commercial banks are allowed to create Danegelds by issuing commercial loans, but Hyggebanki imposes a tight monetary

discipline onto the banks, with high mandatory reserve coefficients. Hensigt destroys Danegelds by taxing them out of existence.

Hensigt is in charge of managing Hygge's Distrikt budget. They do this in a way consistent with the theors' support of Modern Monetary Theory: so, while they do not worry about running deficits between tax revenue and government expenditure of Danegelds, they do worry about controlling inflation. Macroeconomic policy consists of three main parts:

1. Infrastructure provision (water, energy, transport, health care, education...). This is more or less constant over time.
2. A Public Service Employment program. Any citizen that wants a job with Hensigt has a right to one. Remuneration of guaranteed jobs is set to be more than sufficient to provide for a fairly basic lifestyle, but noticeably lower than what the private sector pays for a similar job. The PSE works as an automatic stabilizer: when the private sector goes through a recession, it lays off more workers, that are quickly reabsorbed into the PSE. This maintains aggregate demand close to pre-recession levels. As the private sector picks up speed, it hires workers away from the PSE. Unemployment remains more or less constant (and low) across the phases of the business cycle.
3. Public investments. These are new projects, like major infrastructure upgrades. In order to get the green light for one of these, Hygge political leaders need to make sure that they do not create inflation; and that no competing project is more attractive than the one being considered. Obviously, projects have costs that can be measured mostly in Danegelds, but dishomogenous benefits: this leaves augurs with the difficult job of deciding between, say, adding a layer of resilience to insect protein production and a new art festival. They do this by a bundle of aethnographic methods, some quantitative, some qualitative, collectively know as [dialogic evaluation](#).

CULTURE

Hygge, depending on who one asks, is either a dream come true or a disaster waiting to crumble under the power of markets. However, those who made the claim that markets alone drive innovation have found in Hygge an uncomfortable counterpoint: Hygge remains one of the greatest contributors of public-interest technologies throughout Witness, driven in part because of the importance in Hygge culture given to inventors and technological pioneers.

Equal importance is given to bureaucrats who handle the complex machinery that turns the State Machine's suggestions into practicalities, and to a rising class of programmer-politicians who can float new policy ideas as code and prove their virtue by simulation.

However, all is not perfect. Old monopoly connections die hard; some corruption still exists within the ranks of bureaucrats, especially those who lost everything in the Reset.

With their tacit support, black markets operate within Hygge, and street thugs often 'run corners' - operating in areas where the State Machine cannot gather information (usually accidental or deliberately created 'dark zones'), using false IDs and masks designed to confuse facial recognition. An increasing street culture indulged in 'Faraday caging' - wrapping their electronic devices in homemade Faraday cages to prevent tracking by the State Machine.

Much of Hygge's priorities, post-Denton, has been to restore what was lost: this includes not just infrastructure, but goodwill. This recent phase has been referred to as *the Smoothing Years*. With Hygge well beyond its foundation phase, a new, significant parcel of Hygge's population is starting to question the decisions made at the beginning of the Smoothing Years, claiming that their society was modelled after "reducing damage, rather than increasing wonder", thus generating a dull and unmotivated society.

Goro, the Wrecking Ball

So far, a group rallied under the [Glorious Manifesto](#) flag has released something unique to Hygge: a smaller AI by the name of Goro. This AI's only function is to enact seemingly random behaviour suggestions for the populus as a whole. Those suggestions come in many forms, ranging from small reminders to consume more water to commands to stop any activity immediately and go to a certain location for a flash mob.

Most of Hygge's population ignores Goro, treating it as a joke, but qualitative support has shown citizen support for Goro. Many in CIVICSMOD suspect that Goro is the equivalent of a 'nudge unit' that induces aberrant behavior in life in order perform a function similar to what random mutations serve in the process of evolution, disguising its signals beneath pattern of noise; others suspect Goro is purely aesthetic in nature, designed to add a touch of both serendipity and whimsy to Hygge.

Though the majority of the city disregards Goro in most of its suggestions, a few (less than 3% of the total population) follow its suggestions with a semi-religious fervour. commonly called "goroheads" in street slang, they're generally ignored or mocked; however, some - especially proponents of [Hygge-Bushido](#) - believe that it merely is a matter of time before a big event pushes goroheads into a greater light than what they occupy right now.

CIVICSMOD and the State Machine École

One of Hygge's most important characteristics is the role that it plays with regard to the State Machine. CIVICSMOD - the a consortium composed of programmers and politicians of all of Witness' Distrikts - operates primarily from Hygge. The Library of St. Benedict is officially considered the property of this group, and, as such, this confers upon Hygge a significant culture of and access to knowledge about the computer sciences and the pre-Sundering world.

During the Smoothing Years, Hygge's government made a significant investment in its diplomacy efforts to revert the bad political image it had acquired. One of the most impactful (and arguably effective) actions was the opening of CIVICSMOD to a multi-Distrik body politics: all Distrikts are invited to send their own delegations to live and work in the State Machine (though still funded by their home Distrikts), and those delegations share the leadership and tasks in the State Machine's care and maintenance.

By popular vote, this initiative was turned into a school for programming and systems design: as part of Hygge's new diplomatic stance, positions and scholarships were offered to citizens of other Distrikts, even minor ones. This State Machine École, or Mach-Eco, was created and is still considered the best AI design training institution in all Witness.

TOPOLOGY

"Goro told me the blueprint looked like a flower when you saw it from above, can you believe that? I told it I was more going for a fruit sliced in half." — Pat Ayedemi

Seen from above, Hygge is both modern and quaint at the same time: a high-tech state deliberately maintaining an image meant to be warm and welcoming. Wood is highly prized and displayed here, and street lighting comes in the form of solar LED trees - wire and foil that casts a glow over recycled plastic streets. In keeping with its original design - which was to keep Denton's administration at the center - Hygge spirals around the grounds of Newton's Follow, turning into markets, entertainment venues, schools, and public services buildings on the way out. One end of it terminates very near to the Library of St. Benedict; this area is commonly known as the Army Quarter, because much of Hygge's soldier-police officer corps are trained and housed here.

Denton's architectural legacy still remains. Hygge is built in such a way that in the vast majority of situations, people can walk to whatever they need, rather than relying on any form of external transport. This structure forces the citizens to walk more than the average Witness citizen. For those reasons, Hygge is known for its population's fitness, but also by its poor accommodation of people with walking disabilities.

During the Smoothing Years, and particularly under the vision of architect Pat Ayedemi, the city started to move away from Denton's erratic style and actively worked towards its own representation of structures. Heavily inspired by the works of Oscar Niemeyer, an architect of pre-Sundering times, this 'Hygge-design' is marked by a particular radius of roundness, according to Mx Ayedemi: "equally pleasant to the eye and unperturbed by the forces of wind and rain." It is now quite popular, especially among public structures, and has even seen adopted in some parts of the Covenant.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

Hygge is home to, among other things, the ethnographer collective that goes only by the name "**Untitled**". They are most famous for their controversial Shopping Cart Theory:

"The shopping cart is the ultimate litmus test for whether a person is capable of self-governing. To return the shopping cart is an easy, convenient task and one which we all recognise as the correct, appropriate thing to do. To return the shopping cart is objectively right.

"There are no situations other than dire emergencies in which a person is not able to return their cart. Simultaneously, it is not illegal to abandon your shopping cart. Therefore the shopping cart presents itself as the apex example of whether a person will do what is right without being forced to do it.

"No one will punish you for not returning the shopping cart, no one will find you or kill you for not returning the shopping cart. You must return the shopping cart out of the goodness of your own heart. You must return the shopping cart because it is the right thing to do. Because it is correct. A person who is unable to do this is no better than an animal, an absolute savage who can only be made to do what is right by threatening them with a law and the force that stands behind it."

Not everyone agrees with them, and they seem sophisticated enough to elude even the State Machine.

Of course, there is **CIVICSMOD**, particularly Gregor Samsidel, Janet Samsidel-Chiang, Erwin Lugoda, Peter Kleinman and Antonia Rybakov. While CIVICSMOD prides itself on staying above politics, there is a hierarchy, and these four are right at the top; indeed, the Samsidels have more soft power than most politicians.

Susannah R. Basterfield was a key political figure in the transition between the post-Denton years and the Smoothing Years. Fabled for her capacity for negotiation and diplomacy, she was the first leader capable of harnessing power in Hygge without provoking the discontent of former pro-Denton supporters.

She is known for her special care for language, shepherding renaming schemes for many of Hygge's processes and positions so that the city could renovate itself. She is believed to have named the Distrikt itself, though some sources disagree.

Known throughout Witness as "the best thief in the Century", **Jonas Kimura** is a former top-grade student from the State Machine École who turned to cybercrime. Known for extravagant stunts in many famously guarded places in Witness and other cities, and several of his hacks have threatened inter-Distrikt peace as representatives have rushed to blame each other. His whereabouts and current appearance are unknown.

As the architect responsible for the renovation of Hygge's rounded appearance during the Smoothing Years, **Patrick Ayedemi**'s influence extends far beyond Witness itself.

Their work is considered a quiet revolution in urban planning, marred by an unsuccessful attempt at forming a cult that removed them from the public spotlight.

Libria: Liberty City

Libria, a libertarian Distrikt, is the current form of the community that began life as Distrikt 2.

Libria, a libertarian Distrikt, is the current form of the community that began life as Distrikt 2. Spurred by constant threats on the part of J.C. Denton and his allies, the initial D2 Steering Committee collapsed, and the resultant reprisals were a violent push towards ensuring maximum personal freedom. Libria prides itself on being as close as humanly possible to the ideals of a minarchist state, with the Watchmen in charge of enforcing property laws, protecting citizens against aggression, theft, breach of contract and fraud, and everything else left to markets.

POLITICAL HISTORY

Distrikt 2 arose out of the events collectively known as the *Zero-day Fracture* (0 OD - 7 OD). Overwhelming marginalization from J.C. Denton and Project Viking's original policies created mass community unrest, which spilled over into the First and Second March of the Voiceless (-3 OD to 0.3 OD). The State Machine apparently reached a calculation failure in its attempts to impose a framework that would allow everyone to operate under one government, and sanctioned the first divorce, or a *fracture* in populations. In 0.5 OD, vacant infrastructure (set aside for later growth) was partitioned into Distrikt 2. A 12-person Committee of community leaders was legitimized as a way of handling the infrastructure gift from the State Machine and governance thereafter.

However, the Committee, which was supposed to install a democratic process, soon fell to vicious infighting between the Megan Rilke and Karunasalam Balraj, who saw themselves as the first among equals, and the rest. Aethnographers now suspect that Denton's Peacekeepers assisted their polarisation by conducting low-grade mimetic warfare on the fledgeling Distrikt; the idea was that once it collapsed, the State Machine could mark it down as a failure and Denton's government could re-absorb the remains. Distrikt 2 was meant to serve as an example to potential dissent.

It did serve as an example, but not in the way Denton expected. Denton's Peacekeepers acted too early and began threatening martial law to counter the rioting and localized violence. They were met by the overwhelming force of the Third March of the Voiceless, which was less of a march and more of 'a crowd-sourced defense of the Distrikt 2 border; the greatest self-organizing army Witness has ever seen', in the words of Andromache Kosovitch in *The New Histories of our Times*.

The Marchers, in a rather homebrew friend-or-foe identification system, began to carry around flags and banners, and adopt various battle-shouts; what became popular was the motif of a broken chain and a cry of Libria, Libria! Thus Distrikt 2 earned its name.



*"Independence, self-reliance, and the willingness to take risks and survive by own own sweat and labor, the ability to speak back against a majority or slave-drivers with guns and policy documents, the ability to work with who we want, when we want - these are the values on which our society must rest. Rule by committee is nothing but a polite name for thuggery; and we have seen that every time they come for us these are the things they take away first, so as to make us servile, subservient, mute." — Augustine S.A. Hayek, *The Road to Liberation*

Much of Libria's politics and way of life rests on its economy. Post-March, those left behind were overwhelmingly skilled labour who had been contracted to build Project Viking. They therefore possessed significant manufacturing expertise, and most began to either pool together as companies or individually contract out their skills for the ready markets in Distrikt 1 and 3, often staking out both home and work space as company assets.

Early Libria thus went through a second phase of conflict - albeit one less visible to the other Distrikts. Various Marches liked a fight began contracting out as protection; at first as part of companies, but dedicated operations such as the Voxel Dogs and the Secure Seaside began to emerge, quickly snapping up people with military experience. Fearing the emergence of mafia-style governance, most people in Libria voted to establish the Night Watchmen (abbrev. the Watchmen), a body politic empowered to handle law and order and themselves tightly bound by contracts that required the goodwill of citizens and the Watchmen tax for their daily survival.

Today, the Watchmen control most of Libria, but not all; the Voxel Dogs, the Senators, and the Seaside operated sophisticated extortion and human trafficking operations and have, to an extent, legalized themselves by setting themselves up as private security, buying up property and using their funds as venture capital.

While it would seem that Libria and the Assembly of People would be natural allies in Distrikt-level negotiations, because of the strain of anarchist and anti-statism that both embrace, both parties remain wary of each other and tend only to vote for each other's proposals when there is clear utility to both parties. Assembly visitors regularly rank Libria as their least favorite place to travel to, and culture clashes are common when bargain-hunting, ever-ready-to-negotiate Librians visit the Assembly for commerce or sightseeing.

ECONOMY

NO GODS, NO GOVERNORS, ONLY MAN - holographic motto over the entrances to the Central Electronics Market. The closest Libria has to a motto. And alternate version, marked on the remnants of the defensive perimeter, in a now-forgotten language, is τίνα θεόν, τίν' ἥρωα, τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν. Supposedly it reads "What god, what hero and what man will we celebrate?"

Much of Libria's politics and way of life revolve around markets. Libria is largely an export-oriented economy that sells clothing, electronics, software and plastics all over Witness, although exact estimates of the economy are hard to derive - almost all relevant data is in private hands, and it would be a nightmare to even acquire it. Trade and negotiation permeate almost all levels of interaction, and the adage that "if you're looking to buy, I'm looking to sell" applies, especially in the Central Electronic Market. Supply and demand determines much of who stays and who goes, and there is no enforcement of things such as copyrights or patents - if it can be reverse-engineered, it certainly will be.

Corporations - of which there are uncounted thousands, whether sole operations or looming behemoths - operate primarily as raw materials harvesters, producers of goods, or the providers of services (such as traders, escorts, market-analysis companies, or software developers). Despite the Night Watchmen's prevalence, many also function as pirates or mercenaries, being paid primarily to extort others, steal, or destroy assets. Market manipulation is possible at large scales, and several Distrikt-wide Ponzi schemes and fake banks have emerged and fallen.

Because of its high-risk nature, the Night Watchmen have (over time) introduced the Griefing Charter, which has sufficiently broad language to allow them to act on new types of acts of repeated malicious intent that can be proven to infringe on someone's profits at no material benefit to the attacker.

Economic policy

"As order exponentially increases, time exponentially speeds up."

- *Attributed to Ray Kurzweil, a popular pre-Sundering philosopher*

Libria's early-days leadership instituted a system of minimal government. Most infrastructures are in private hands, handled through concession contracts. The main sources of fiscal revenue for the Distrikt are the proceedings for the concessions themselves and a value added tax on consumption. A single-rate tax on income also exists, but it is mainly used as a source of incentives: whatever the Distrikt's government wants more of (for example R&D investments, or energy efficiency increasing interventions) is made over 100% deductible. Unsurprisingly, the contribution of the income tax to Libria's fiscal revenue is negligible.

The prevalence of skilled workers and entrepreneurial types in zero-day Libria brought about both prosperity and relative economic equality. The first recorded measure of its [Gini coefficient](#) (03 OD) was 0.25, on par with the most egalitarian pre-Sundering national economies since records were kept. This engendered fast growth, which, in turn, accelerated the process of concentration of wealth and power to the most skilled (or luckiest, as scholars in the Assembly are quick to add) individuals and businesses. This phenomenon was foreseeable and foreseen, but the ideology prevalent in Libria makes redistributive policies politically difficult; and the Distrikt bureaucracy does not have real capacity for it, anyway.

By 10 OD Libria's Gini coefficient had grown to 0.34. Under Hayek's direction, the Watchmen's policy office launched a new strategy, Fair and Free Deal. Its main idea was to focus on "growing the pie, rather than slicing it thin". Low-income individuals would improve their condition because material wealth would grow fast enough to outrun the pace of concentration.

Pragmatically, the strategy also promotes equality of opportunities, with an extensive program of grants to higher education and the launch of venture capital funds for micro- and nano-businesses. While both the higher education establishments and the VC funds are in private hands, the Librian economic élites agreed to self-regulate in providing those grants under fairly moderate conditions: so, for example, low income students sponsored by Skyward are allowed to choose a different employer after graduation and a maximum of two years of employment at Skyward itself.

The Fair and Free Deal also subsidizes the relocation of low-income individuals to other Distrikts, and puts in place a policy of "talent attraction" for Scholae graduates, aethnographers and, above all, high net-worth individuals. The evolution over time of economic inequality in Libria is keenly studied by scholars, both in Witness and globally.

Currency

Several currencies exist, each backed by the company that floats it. Tiburón Metal runs the Shark, a card-and-digital currency tradeable at any Tiburón branch for its worth in iron (one of the most precious materials in Witness). Tiburón's exploration arm, SONAR, runs regular expeditions to the ocean around Witness, often reclaiming metal from the detritus of cities underwater; the value of Sharks thus fluctuate around SONAR expeditions and speculation around them.

Sunflower EX handles SolarCoin, an asset tradeable for units of energy sold in the form of direct-to-POS or Sunflower Batteries. Waveform runs WaveCoin, backed by energy generated from the sea as well as profits from Waveform's significant assets (one of which includes a 'private security company' called the Senators). These three form the most significant currencies: other local ones exist. The State Machine generally accepts or handles conversion to and from most currencies in Libria.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Outside of <https://edgeryders.eu/t/hygge-the-first-distrikt/15239/4>, Libria contains the most compute resources dedicated to AI. Some ethnographers specializing in computational technologies believe that Libria actually has *more*, but the space is so fragmented that it is difficult to understand. Garden-variety AI are typically those that use a one-size-fits-all SaaS model - such as navigation tools, dating support services or various self-help and 'social' apps that push their users towards local events and opportunities.

More sophisticated forms include those used to aid scientific discovery, reverse engineering, run news aggregation services. Some people reportedly have 'Perfect Copies' - AI agents that are capable of mimicking them and their preferences down to a T, and thus can converse and negotiate on their behalf. This has outsized impact in Libria, as one person can then appear in multiple places and do several hundred tasks at once.

The Night Watchmen in particular are cautious about AI, as many of Libria's fundamental beliefs and emergent systems revolve around meatspace personhood - and these systems can be exploited when a person is able to scale exponentially. AI proponents (often a group called *Agent Provocateur*) argue that this scaling impact is no different from the normal economic impact of a person rising through the value chain. But rights groups have protested the software and wetware labs that make such AI; and there is much debate in the halls of every Distrikt about whether this should be regulated before it grows beyond everyone's control.

TOPOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

The best way to describe Libria would be as "the urban sprawl". Constrained by the borders of the sea, as well as the Assembly and the Covenant, the citizens of Libria built upwards, layering density to an incredible degree. The lack of centralized control makes it both serendipitous and incredibly chaotic to navigate for newcomers: mazes of walkways criss-cross above roads, connecting buildings where present or former business interests aligned. Infrastructure is made (and sometimes broken) by private interests either banding together or splitting apart. If one looks closely, graffiti and signage mirrors the aesthetics of the clubs, corporates or other notable communities (sometimes called gangs, but sometimes more accurately called collectives, though Librians are averse to that term) controlling certain areas.

Arguably the most infamous areas are Rue Libertas, the Red Light and entertainment district run by the Seaside Senators, and Club Hedon, operated by a coalition consisting of Tiburón, the Voxel Dogs, and Sunflower EX. The saying is that "if it can be sold, it will be sold".

But these are now more tourist honeypots than mainstays of actual Libria culture. Of more interest are the dizzying Sunflower Heights, where reportedly many of the who's who of the city have a private apartment, and the gliders and helicopters that fly between Sunflower Heights to specific high-rises and pseudo-skyscrapers within the inner rings of the city.

Skyward, the manufacturers of these aircraft and suppliers of drone imagery, are making a fat profit. At the docks, seawards, sits their ostentatious statue of a winged woman: it has become one of the most iconic public monuments of its time. From Skyward's heavily guarded corporate fortress at the docks, flights of aircraft stream out over the ocean, working in tandem with ships from Tiburón, Lachland and Wathuradevi to spot profitable salvage from the ruins of the Sundered world.

Elsewhere, the Central Electronics Market - a sprawling, thriving collection of streets where small vendors just about everything under the sun. The lives of the rich and the powerful, with their penthouses, private pools and security, is a far cry from life down on these streets, where the ordinary hustle goes on shoulder-to-shoulder.

Just down from the CEM is Voxel Stadium, which has long since evolved from a patch of turf where the Voxel Dogs played cricket. Now it's an enormous sporting arena, the largest of its kind on Witness, and cricket is both entertainment and a religion that moves millions of dollars around throughout the year: from the crowds, to the cricketers, to their wetware engineers, masseuses, security, therapists and other staff, to merchandisers, to the hedge funds betting big on wins, to the Voxel Dogs and their sub-gangs that provide the venue and the security for it.

CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Many critics, in the beginning, predicted that Libria would become a desolate corporate wasteland, devoid of art and culture and thought. They're wrong about the desolate part. While large corporations exert enormous influence, musicians, artists and sportpeopled have thrived in Libria. Subcultures thrive, and bereft of social contracts outside that imposed by the Night Watchmen, the region is possibly the most diverse of all of Witness.

The aethonographer Calvin Maliek, however, has noted that much of Librian life follows a power-law distribution: 1% of people take home 99% of the fame and fortune, and outliers are disproportionately rewarded. His essay on the subject (titled: *The Eternal Dream*) critiques the role of markets and the risk inherent in the lives of Librians. In a counter, Augustine S.A. Hayek, Inspector General of the Night Watchmen (known in Librian law-enforcement circles as the *Shadow Queen*), wrote *The Eternal Promise*, pointing out the importance of choice, the role of markets in preventing hegemonies, and the acceptance of risk in life.

Advertisements for all sorts of entertainment abound throughout Libria, and celebrities are household names. Cricket is both one of the largest moneymakers and practically a religion; every corporation worth its salt sponsors a cricket team for the advertising value, and a thriving industry of trainers, marketers and promoters all make a buck off this system. Almost as popular are public art installations and institutes funded by private interests - often with tacit marketing value or as a public demonstration of the wealth of the funder. The Tiburón Institute of Music, the Wathuradevi Philharmonic, Club Hedon, and the graffiti artists known as CABAL are examples of cultural mainstays created by private wealth.

TRANSPORT

Much of Libria's transport is on foot, or via private vehicles. Because of the fragmented nature of this part of its economy, there are very few large corporations producing vehicles end to end; instead, consumers usually pay bodyshops to put together the parts lists of their choosing, resulting in some impressive idiosyncracies as well as innovative, low-cost designs. After much bargaining with the Night Watchmen, the State Machine has created a sub-system called Virgil that explicitly serves as a type of navigation system to be installed in vehicles; however, many are suspicious of this, arguing against both the State Machine and what they see as the steadily increasing power of the Night Watchmen. Needless to say, private mapping and navigation services are a thriving enterprise in Libria, as rapid change often changes landmarks and paths; Skyward has a near-monopoly on this particular domain.

NOTABLE PEOPLE

Ivan Tiburón. Libria's most famous hypercapitalist inventor combines the public image of an eternally delighted mad scientist and a ruthlessly Machiavellian sense for business and politics. Tiburón and his children - Eskar, Damask and Rafielle - dominate much of the social conversation of Libria on a year-round cycle carefully determined by an extensive PR team. Usually, Ivan is showing off a prototype machine of some sort, or a new find salvaged from Old New York or Delhi; or Eskar is causing scandal for his running around with models and partygoers from Club Hedon; Damask has produced yet another mind-blowing public AR spectacle, or Rafielle, who leads Tiburón's wetware and black ops, is at the forefront of a clash with rivals.

Augustine S.A. Hayek. Libria's head of the Night Watchmen. Revered for her role in the Third March of the Voiceless, Hayek rules the streets with equal parts vigilance and philosophy. Her particular role makes her the closest Libria has to a spokesperson for its value structure, and aethnographers have learned not to underestimate her intellectual calibre, spy network or the regard that most Librians hold for her.

DJeremiah. Libria's #1 celebrity DJ (and now a venture capitalist) has a famously checkered past: he played for CTRL + ALT + REVOLUTION, the band that founded <https://edgeryders.eu/t/the-assembly-of-people/15199/2>. His record label, the Rising Sun, is one of the most sought-after deals by up-and-coming street musicians.

Megan Rilke and Karunasalam Balraj. Less a popular combination and more as a cautionary tale in power. Some who were at the Third March celebrate them and the Marches by lighting paper lanterns on the 14th of April. This practice quickly caught on; but their names have more or less fallen into memory; only the lanterns remain.

Footnotes

Libria could be cyberpunk: it certainly borrows heavily from the tropes of the genre, including the unregulated economies, non-state actors taking on functions of the state, and the general 'the street finds its own uses for things' vibe of both William Gibson's

classical [Neuromancer](#) and the more systemic explorations of Mike and Lisa Pondsmith's [Cyberpunk Red](#).

But instead of the megacorps that rule the Pondsmith's vision, [mid-sized companies and collectives account for the largest share of Libria's economic output](#), paired with the kind of rapid-fire, lateral innovation [brought about in chi-fi](#), where rampant counterfeiting and IP theft combine with supply. All of this is set within a model inspired by the MMORPG [Eve Online](#), where hundreds of thousands of players are thrown into space and given the freedom to do anything they wish.

As a result, entirely private interest clash in fierce economic competition, manufacturing, trading, political intrigue and open warfare. It's worth reading [Empires of Eve](#), Andrew Groen's narrative history of the entirely player-generated politics, warfare, and culture; and following it up with this [paper by Taylor et al, titled "Alienated Playbour: Relations of Production in Eve Online"](#), to understand what kind of social contracts evolve in a *truly* libertarian space.

The result is a place where this kind of statement - *"...only the biggest and most ambitious of these companies even bother with a website; most of them have little more than a vendor page on AliExpress. Some of these companies buy their drivers — the actual speakers — from the same factories that provide Sennheiser and Beats with theirs. . . . the factories that make the drivers don't care who they sell to; they maintain a certain level of quality because their clients depend on that. And once you've sourced the parts, it's not expensive at all to put them together. "If you have a van and a bottle of glue," Klasco says, "you can be in the business."*

... applies to more than just audio gear.

Life in Witness

The culture of the Witness has passed through several stages and varies between its distrikts.

Witness is a multi-cultural melting pot with a multiplicity of social contracts and systems of thought. Economics isn't the only force that shapes our behaviors: throughout Witness, various philosophies and practices exist that let people grapple with their realities.

To get a glimpse of how the people of Witness look to understand their world, especially beliefs around death, hop on over to [its rituals and religions](#).

To understand how the scholars of Witness approach knowledge and their own bouns, sink into the epistemic science of [aethnography](#) - a multidisciplinary movement that seeks to wed theory, practice and lived experiences for a more inclusionary ways of thinking about the world.

To explore the rising new cult that teaches decision-making from economic theory, practice the art of [Risk Bushido](#). This former fringe philosophy has now grown into the new face of a movement that teaches antifragility and resilience in business and in life.

Aethnography in Witness

Aethnography is the study of the behavior of humans engaged in mutual interaction.

If some intersubjective notion were shared by all sentients, would it not, *ipso facto*, be an absolute, unalloyed truth? And if it were not, how would we know?

– Keiko Manka, *Aethnography: a field manual*, 11 OD

Don't look at the data! Look *through* the data, and at the people behind it".

– Hans Rosling, *The Data Lecture*

Aethnography is the study of the behavior of humans engaged in mutual interaction. It explores the phenomena that those interactions give rise to, taking into account the point of view of the interactants themselves and maintaining a stance of openness to evidence of different kinds and coming from different directions, known as [epistemic pluralism](#). While all social sciences are taught in the education establishments of Witness, aethnographic thinking plays a special role in informing much of decision-making, both in business and public policy.

Origins

Most aethnographers attribute great importance to the history of aethnographic thinking. The discipline's lineage is well researched, and a relative consensus exists that aethnography emerged from four roots, each one contributing a founding principle.

1. The first founding principle is **the danger zone**. It is the area of pre-Sundering research at the intersection of economics and anthropology. This was spearheaded by scholars such as [Marcel Mauss](#), [Karl Polanyi](#), [Albert O. Hirschman](#), [James C. Scott](#) and [David Graeber](#). Among these authors, the vision of a "unified social science" is recurrent: the collaboration between Hirschman (an economist) and [Clifford Geertz](#) (an anthropologist) at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study is seen as a precursor of modern-day aethnography.
2. The second founding principle is **the chemical wedding**. By this tongue-in-cheek term, modern aethnographers refer to the application of mathematical methods to social science. Most modern authors point to [Georg Simmel](#)'s idea of Social Geometry as the precursor of this trend, which then continued through [Jacob L. Moreno](#)'s Sociometry and into quantitative sociology, as proposed by social scientists like [Duncan Watts](#), [Albert-László Barabási](#) (both

- physicists by training). In the 21st century, data science was increasingly used to buttress social science research, contributing to the toolbox of what would become aethnography skills like data visualization, statistics, and programming.
3. The third founding principle is **the pluriversity**, the idea that fundamental scientific ideas should be non-discipline specific, and instead be effective across different domains. Its name evokes the supposed ability of truth to infiltrate the most difficult barriers. This idea resurfaced several times in the history of science, only to find a mature expression in the pre-Sundering [Santa Fe Institute](#). From the SFI, aethnography derives its embrace of transdisciplinarity and eclecticism, as well as its attention to epistemology. An accomplished aethnographer is supposed to be able to switch between different epistemic stances.
 4. The fourth founding principle is **the broken tower**, a reference to the academic "ivory tower" of centuries past. Social sciences, it is argued, are performative: any analysis is bound to alter the analyzed object. Aethnographers must have the integrity to embrace this, and play responsibly their role as scholars/agents of change. The ideal type of aethnographer is someone who is equally accomplished at high theory, applied analysis, and action in business, politics, administration or the civil society. Economist Albert O. Hirschman is believed to have personified this ideal as closely as it ever got: for this reason, the head of an aethnographic establishment is given the honorific title of hirschman.

History

By the early 21st century, the main elements that would constitute modern-day aethnography were all present, but scattered across disciplines such as anthropology, economics, data science, philosophy, network science, and statistics. Aethnography then coalesced around [the Pluriversity project](#) of the [United Nations Development Programme](#). The project promised opportunities for prestigious publications, deep engagement with field activity all around the world, and the attention of powerful people who could mobilize substantial research funds if they liked what they saw. That made it very attractive to restless scholars, who prized the intellectual rigor and diversity of academia but wished to leave the ivory tower, immerse themselves in the world and "have impact".

Universities around the world sat up and started paying attention. In many of them, brilliant misfits, respected but hitherto relatively marginalized from academic life, were suddenly pressed into service as the heads of new interdisciplinary institutes. Pluriversity leaders discreetly signaled that this was a welcome move, and that traditional departments were considered too "epistemically narrow" to get the job done. Some of these institutes obviously already existed, and had in fact been in existence since the 1970s.

The new institutes attracted cross-disciplinary misfits, idealistic young academics that wanted to "change the world by understanding its secrets", and more than a few opportunists. All of them took ample advantage of the Pluriversity field grants, where academics would deploy in various countries, advising governments and inter-

governmental organizations, businesses, and civil society organizations. In between deployments, researchers would go back to an educational and research institution. The habit of deploying set them apart from other academics. Soon a sub-culture started to develop. Many of them had substantial cultural anthropology skills, and trained the spotlight of their enquiry to the sub-culture itself; naturally, this accelerated the speed with which the sub-culture evolved. The word "aethnographers" is recorded as an [in vivo code](#) since the 2020s, more or less at the same time as the first [REDR](#) tournaments and the mock-rivalry between theors, augurs and incanters.

On Witness, aethnography is well established in the research and education establishments of all Distrikts Major, though senior academics in the Covenant pay lip service to the "epistemic opportunism" of aethnographers, which is believed to sit uncomfortably side by side with a divine Revelation. The Assembly is probably where aethnographers enjoy the most attention and respect, with the most accomplished theors being treated as celebrities. The Graeber Institute is conventionally considered to be the brightest beacon of aethnography in Witness, and its hirschman is called, with the usual aethnographic touch of irony, "The Hirschman".

Domains of application

Aethnography is applied to the three domains of high theory, applied analysis and action.

- Aethnographers engaging in high theory are called **theors**. They reflect on general patterns and cross-domain intuition, invoking mostly the principle of the chemical wedding.
- Aethnographers deploying on the ground to understand a concrete, situated set of issues are called **augurs**. They immerse themselves into a river of observables, from which they extract intersubjective meaning. They invoke mainly the principle of the pluriversity.
- Aethnographers who leave their research institutions to engage in direct action take on the title of **incanters**. Invoking the principle of the broken tower, they shift to working in favour of a particular outcome: a reform, the starting up of a successful company, a military campaign.

An accomplished aethnographer is expected to have covered all three roles at least once during her career. Specialization is discouraged, though not unheard of.

Martial arts

[REDR](#), a martial art based on situational awareness, strategy and hand-to-hand combat developed as an exercise for undergraduate aethnographers. Most aethnography establishment offer courses in it.

Religion in Witness

Religious life on Witness is complex and depends on which definition of religion is adopted.

"The control of undertakers over burial shows how radical monopoly functions and how it differs from other forms of culturally defined behavior. A generation ago, in Mexico, only the Opening of the grave and the blessing of the dead body were performed by professionals: the gravedigger and the priest. A death in the family created various demands, all of which could be taken care of within the family. The wake, the funeral, and the dinner served to compose quarrels, to vent grief, and to remind each participant of the fatality of death and the value of life. Most of these were of a ritual nature and carefully prescribed-different from region to region. Recently, funeral homes were established in the major cities. At first undertakers had difficulty finding clients because even in large cities people still knew how to bury their dead. During the sixties the funeral homes obtained control over new cemeteries and began offering package deals, including the casket, church service, and embalming. Now legislation is being passed to make the mortician's ministrations compulsory. Once he gets hold of the body, the funeral director will have established a radical monopoly over burial, as medicine is at the point of establishing one over dying."* - [Tools for conviviality](#), Illich

Religious life on Witness is complex, and, as pointed out by Adromache Kosovitch, depends on which definition of religion is adopted. There are a few systems that could be classified as complex, interlaced memes that impose a causality on the universe and contain within them mechanisms for their own spread and reproduction. There are many more if one considers rituals: so this page is neither a completely taxonomy of beliefs, but merely an attempt at bringing together most common.

Rituals

- **Burial at sea.** Every floating city is acquainted with the dead, and with the splash of a body as it sinks beneath the waves. Land, after all, is far too precious to waste on tombs and cemeteries. Witness is no different. By far the most universal gesture is the **Log**, wherein one person will read out the life and achievements of the person thus committed to the deep, and the State Machine will confirm the entry and record it forever within its public annals. In Hygge, this gesture is at its most ritualized - Kiri will usually list a complete record of public projects influenced, the general voting record and place of a person, and the State Machine will acknowledge it: the only time these two supposedly disparate AI visibly interact in public. In Libria, a complex economy exists around such ceremonies for the rich, and content creators often livestream and embellish; Covenant funeral usually are quiet affairs, with a priest communicating the soul unto God. **Only in the Assembly** is it explicitly forbidden to bury someone this way. Assembly funerals either involve committing the body to local composting operation; this 'return to the community' is seen as the last great honor that a person can achieve. Avantgrid practices are not completely documented, but range from Covenant-style send-offs to planting a body, laced with gene-engineered seedpods, into the ground, and giving the resultant tree or trees the name of the dead.

- **The little death.** "Aethnography advances one death at a time." Andromache Kosovitch's warning, a riff off a pre-Sundering note about the nature of scientific consensus, became a viral meme in every school of [Aethnography](#). Many also read it as an examination of the privilege that was necessary for pre-Sundering scientific progress - be it the backing of institutions or of the financial and social freedom to tenaciously pursue a single idea for decades on end until acceptance or the death of critics.
- **The little death that brings renewal** is now a widespread custom among aethnographers: when a scholar reaches middle age, summaries of their body of work and their thoughts are read aloud in Witness-wide readings. This is to ensure that knowledge is constantly absorbed and re-transmitted without the excessive costs of keeping it in production in a pre-Sundering manner. It is often called the little death because aethnographers often retire for a while after this to tend to their other affairs. Note that it is also, in some quarters, an euphemism for orgasm.
- **Part of Neptune's kingdom.** Those most closely working with the sea - fishers, divers, salvagers, and even people who live close to the water - often display an assortment of rituals. These can be complex - worship of an abstract god of the ocean, a sort of hybrid of Neptune and Dewi Danu, or as simple as lifting some water and dropping it back.
- **Dolphin whistling.** Dolphins are thought to be a symbol of good luck. Dolphins almost never meet with groups without using signature whistles to communicate, so many people whistle and wave at dolphins: whether this means anything to the oceanic wildlife is entirely up for debate. The same treatment is given to whales. The Vietnamese word [Cá Ông](#), often applied to both species, is used quite often, and whales and dolphins are seen as kings of the sea and patrons of fishers.
- **The right to die.** Most Distrikts, bar the Covenant, view suicide as an acceptable part of society: an idea that aethnographers posit stemmed from a sort of pre-Sundering honor code in the face of resource scarcity and mental unwillingness. But leave it to Libria to commercialize the staging of your death: you can even hire assassins to make sure you pass painlessly and in as dramatic a setting as possible.
- **Goro suggestions.** In Hygge, the deemed *emotional AI* called Goro will send periodic suggestions of activities to its citizens. Those can vary from the tame "shake someone's hand today" to the radical "enclose yourself in a dark space and scream until you feel something inside of you break. Minimum of 9 hours." Some adept followers of Goro will accept whichever suggestion the AI proposes with religious-like fervor.
- **Many come one** : an underground practice evolving rapidly inside Libria and the Assembly. This follows the invention of the *total neural interface map*, leaked before the Mindware wetlab trials were complete. Via a TNIM, individuals inhabiting different bodies can transfer their mind-maps onto another and back again, along with collected information: exceptionally stable 'bridges' can act as hosts, and thus people can opt to meet and travel on a journey in one body sleeve for a period of time. Multiple selves can cohabit a body by optimising use of the bodyware (neural pathways, nutrients, circulatory wiring). This is the

mechanism by which the individual and collective flow between becoming, being, unbecoming and nonbeing

- **Unwho** : This practice evolved as a distributed civil defence mechanism to navigate times of hardship (e.g when under attack, the stronger one would host within them others who are physically or psychologically weaker).
- **Passing** : As one person is nearing the end of their current life cycle, they can merge with a newling in the younger body, shedding behind a part of themselves into the new body for another to find and live into, as they continue to the great beyond/next cycle
- **Interselfing** : This when two or more individuals experience multiple simultaneous immersion in each other. This is used as a medical practice for treating certain diseases or imbalances (of mind, body, community or metaphysics). It can also be used in research, criminal investigations or in empathy training (you can live within/as another person to experience first hand what they are experiencing, while still maintaining reflective distance ie being yourself while being others)
- **Emerging** : This is a permanent enmeshing of multiple individuals with one another into an emergent, higher order self that is more than the sum of selves.
- **Transcendence** : One or more restless souls can hitchhike with a master meditator to reach some other state. Or arrive in a place at the same time, then co-create the new state. The long-term effects of Many come one are not known, since it is a relatively new philosophy, but its practitioners are hailed as revolutionaries. There are many arguments back and forth about both the metaphysical implications as well as the physical (including information limits, neural plasticity and such).

Belief systems

- **Nyogi Buddhism.** A strain of Buddhism descended from the *Theravada* tradition. However, instead of emphasizing Nirvana as the goal, Nyogi Buddhism focuses *the 550 Jatakaya* (the 550 lives of Gautama Buddha) and the Buddha's iterative try-learn-test-fail approach that took him from the hedonism of his youth to the worship of extreme self-sacrifice (to the point of starving himself and resting with corpses to understand death better) to the more functional 'Middle Path' that he ultimately arrived at. Much importance is placed on repeated experimentation, A/B testing, and the personal gathering of data and experiences to find ways that work out for the individual (in this, it embraces many of the practices of ethnography). Death itself is seen as an invitation to try again via the mechanism of rebirth. The informal, tongue-in-cheek motto of Nyogi Buddhism is *Live, Die, Try, Repeat*. Despite the informal existence of a *Sasanaya*, Nyogi Buddhism in general is highly decentralized; monks will generally move between different teachers before striking out on their own. Temples are usually publicly supported or the result of private patronage.

- Christendom.** Most heavily embraced by the [The Covenant](#). Because of the strong role played in The Covenant by religious institutions that act out in the saeculum, most christians in Witness are catholics. Doctrine emphasizes "doing God's work" and communitarian worship rather than individual communing with God. Monks and nuns are seen as the ideal christians, a mix of competence, selflessness, and discipline. Protestantism is almost absent. [Catholic social teaching](#) is embraced by some of the more activist monastic orders, who work relatively closely with saecular cooperative and NGOs across the whole of Witness, notably in the Assembly. Witness catholics are usually highly tolerant, with no major incidents connected to repression of non-catholics in The Covenant. The Auctoritatis maintains a firmly ecumenic stance, in the tradition of the 20th century's *Unitatis redintegratio*; any religion brings women and men closer to God than no religion at all, and no call is made for bringing them into the Catholic fold. Witness Catholicism interprets the Bible as the version of the Revelation that its contemporaries could understand, and takes important parts of the Old Testament (like the Book Of Genesis) as metaphors instead of literal truth. Thus, it is fully reconciled with science. Some scientists have been canonized, and biologists-saints like [Hildegard of Bingen](#), [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#) and [Stuart Kauffman](#) have churches and chapels dedicated to them. A monastic order, the [Teilhardite order](#), honors Saint Teilhard and is headquartered in the Viriditas Distrikt Minor of The Covenant.
- Radical environmentalism.** This doctrine was born chiefly in the wake of the Great Wave in 15 0D, and originates primarily from Avantgrid. Their slogans sound like lines stolen from half-a-dozen haphazard pre-Sundering documentaries - from *humanity is the disease* to *Nature is healing*. Underlying it, however, are competing and commingled schools of thought. The **balancing ideology** states that the Earth can support a certain number of each species, including humans, but that technological advances skew the resource requirements of each species until they become unsustainable. This is usually written as an equation positing that the n (number of individuals of a species) multiplied by t (level of technological advancement on the Carylye-Berson scale) = R (total energy 'support capability' of the earth) divided by the total number of species on the Earth. Under this logic, many trillions of algae can exist, but only a couple of million humans. **The return to Eden** ideology professes that humanity must be deliberately reduced to a Hobbesian primitive state: that of the beast ("poor, nasty, brutish and short"). The **power law** variant of this posits that humans have evolved to a point where complex societies can overcome the effects of natural selection, and that for evolution to resume its course, social complexity must be reduced. Both variants are condemned by other Distrikts and the State Machine as eco-fascism.
- Risk Bushido.** Originally introduced as combination of decision theory and economics for making life choices, Risk Bushido is fast approaching cult status in several Distrikts. Its combination of theory - ranging from ergodicity to Knightian uncertainty - combined with the soulful introspection of its hermit-like creator have seen it touch an unexpectedly raw nerve in the lives of many citizens of Witness.

- **Atemporality** . Heavily inspired by the old native Amazonian beliefs of the Haux Haux family, this post-shamanic doctrine is mainly defined by its rejection of time as a linear experience. Its practitioners strive to achieve states of *anomalous timeness* , notably through the use of N-dimethyltryptamin or DMT and complex series of meditative rituals. Though very few embrace the doctrine for the entirety of their lives, it's known to captivate many of the most brilliant of Witness' people for a few years. It is mostly practiced in Avantgrid and Libria, but also found in other Distrikts Minor and Major. Part of the mythos around Atemporality is the visions and out of the body experiences that its practitioners claim to experience, such as time flowing backwards, visiting other planes of existence, and inhabiting multidimensional bodies. Chief among those experiences are the tales of the **Ghost Amazonia**, the so-called spirit of the long gone rainforests, completely destroyed in the Sundering, but allegedly still available for visiting through ritual. Many shamans of Atemporality claim to have mapped the Ghost Amazonia.

Risk Bushido

Risk Bushido: a decision theory, as an honor code, even as a philosophy of life.

Long before the pre-Sundering Industrial Revolution it was clear that their mathematics were bad at predicting financial decisions in uncertain situations. At first they tried to say that people consider expected change in wealth; then they said people consider changes in the usefulness of wealth; then they gave up altogether and stopped pretending that people make rational decisions. Fools. People gamble. We must simply learn to gamble smarter.

- Kintoki Sakata

Risk Bushido is a movement that has been described by its many fans in many different ways: as a decision theory, as an honor code, even as a philosophy of life. Originating in the thought of a hermit-like Librian investor by the name of Kintoki Sakata, Risk Bushido has gained widespread acceptance beyond Libria, picking up faithful adherents throughout Witness. Some argue it strays dangerously close to being a religion: it certainly has acquired a cult-like status in Libria after Ivan Tiburón of Libria spoke about it in an interview.

At its core, Risk Bushido presents three ideas, presented most clearly in Sakata's text *The Path of the Convoluted Agent*, written largely in terms of a hypothetical, n-dimensional game called *Convolution*. It posits the presence of an 'agent' (a person) making 'moves' (decisions) that are prey to events (In risk bushido, an 'event' exists insofar as it exists to the mind and the wallet of the agent). A move without uncertainty involved is a payment. Having done so, it describes:

1. Ergodicity and the Kelly Criterion

Codes 1-17, *The Agony of Not Knowing What Meal to Order*, deals with the fact that observed behaviour deviates starkly from model predictions, and concerns itself with debunking established and informal mental models of assessing risk. One of its key

tenets is that *while a group of agents, as a whole, experience favourable outcomes for similar moves, an individual agent generally does not: the outsized wins of a few agents distort the perception of success on aggregate.*

Agents are therefore advised to use *The Rule of Saint Kelly*:

$$f = \frac{p}{a} - \frac{q}{b}$$

where

f is the percentage of the value current assets to be risked (expressed as a fraction) a is the loss to risked assets in case of a losing move b is the outcome in case of a successful move p is the probability of making a successful move q is the probability of making a losing move (1-p)

This chapter was supposedly written by Sakata while meditating on the difficulties of anticipating what food his three-member family would like to order each night and thereby computing a reliable predictive model of their expenditure.

2. Taleb distributions and Knightian uncertainty

Codes 18-36, named *Going to the Bathroom at Midnight and Stepping on the Child's Toy in the Dark*, deals primarily with the difficulty of assessing the size of a loss and the probability of making a losing move. It uses the example of 'seemingly safe moves' that bring reliable expectations of modest wins, but secretly expose the agent to extreme loss events that, while having a low probability of occurring, will deal catastrophic damage to the agent making the moves.

They are broken down, in Risk Bushido terminology into natural events and artificial events; *natural* are events that are beyond the agent's control to create; *artificial* are events created by moves of the agent.

Natural events include:

1. Known adverse events that may occur, but are invisible when looking at averages, and therefore forgotten
2. Unknown adverse events which cannot be observed until they happen. Past events do not predict future shocks.

Artificial events include:

1. Events created by chaining together different types of moves where the risks can interact with each other, and forgetting that risks have a knock-on effect on other moves.
2. Events created by other agents (either allies or opponents) reacting to the agent's decision.

This chapter is reportedly named after Sakata stepped on his son's toy on the way to the bathroom in the dark and fell down a flight of stairs, fracturing both an arm and an ankle. While lying there, dazed and in pain, he formulated this classification of events before crawling to the telephone to quietly call an ambulance.

3. Chaos and general semantics

Codes 37-50, titled *My Wife Has Left Me and Taken the Child*, Sakata meditates on how seemingly predictable, deterministic systems, past a sufficiently level of complexity, exhibit unpredictability even when no random elements are introduced. He applies this understanding to his marriage (which fell apart in the process of writing this book), to the traffic outside his window, to stocks, and to the careers of series of music bands that he selected and studied for ten years for just this purpose.

We form maps in our mind of the world we see: but a map is not the territory, merely an approximation: and an approximate map of the present does not approximately determine events in the future.

Codes 51-65, titled *The Handbook for Avoiding Heartbreak*, lays out what Sakata, drawing from his observations in previous codes, perceives as the duties of an agent who understands Risk Bushido. These 'rules' start from five key roots and branch outwards into a total of twenty-five sub-rules. Many of these rules have been criticized as being koan-like and cryptic; for human-readability, the ethnographer M. Wallace's summary of the roots follows:

1. *On some days ask your spouse why they are still with you; on some days be content to wonder.* Certainty is an illusion, a narrative fallacy caused by improper understanding of statistical tools and rational-agent theories used to extract convenient causalities from noise. Sakata advises the adherent to embrace the uncertainty in life and build a tolerance for not known; and to always mistrust a convenient explanation when it comes to explaining the realm of human action.
2. *Be as a spider in its web; let not a singular strand define your moves.* To wit, the world is not ergodic; never take risks that could wipe you out, don't maximize expected utility or payoff; build redundancy; avoid specialization even within a given vertical, and always have adjacent moves available to you: because even if you have no enemies, and a full grip on known adverse events, there is still chaos and still unknown adverse events to contend with. Adherents of Risk Bushido have since advocated for the barbell strategy: making moves with short-term and long-term payoffs, but none focused on the intermediate.
3. *Be a river to your allies; be lightning to your enemies.* Be predictable to those you wish to work with, and unpredictable to your opponents. Sakata codes trust as a function of predictability, which in turn is the expectation that an agent repeatedly will make the same moves given the same gameboard and n-dimensional state of play. He advocates, thus, intentionally making decisions that engender trust in friends and distrust in enemies. He notes that adherents of Risk Bushido should be made allies, for they will always remain predictable as long as you do not make enemies out of them.

4. *Ask for a free lunch from the place you order from, but do not expect one.* In this Sakata apparently takes inspiration from the Assembly (or from the idiosyncracies of wherever he got his late-night pizza). He points out Convolved Agents (and even some types of non-convolved agents) will naturally collaborate, if no adverse moves are detected; the key, of course, is keeping expectations low, because not everyone is an agent. Indeed, he builds a case for humans naturally tending towards collaboration by dint of being a social creature.
5. *Examine the heart, not the mind.* Question assumptions important to the the decision of making a move. What's coded and quantified is rarely the most important factor when compared to the psychological impact of poorly understood assumptions on agents. To offset this, Sakata advocates intentionally 'spending' a pre-determined number of moves on helping boost allies' outcomes and cooperating for better results. He also advises a pre-determined amount of moves spent as patience in the face of an ally agent unexpectedly dealing events that cause losses: after a certain limit, the math involves systematically reducing moves made to co-operate with said ally agent by using the Wisdom of Sage Kelly, until the contribution is zero and the ally can be classified as an opponent. Sakata applies this to his wife's decision to leave him, and describes himself (in her eyes) as an ally-turning-opponent.

Some proponents of Risk Bushido claim the existence of a Path of the Convolved Agent with no less than one hundred and twenty five rules, although this seems to be apocryphal.

Risk Bushido has since been accepted far and wide outside Libria, especially (and surprisingly) in both the Assembly and Hygge. The Assembly ethnographer Anagram Dias has made a moral argument for it, positing that it results in 'a more humane human, grounded in rationality, able to endure the world without breaking or resorting to false causalities'.

Meanwhile, Hygge-Bushido (an offshoot) has adapted Risk Bushido to the nuanced political maneuvering that makes the life of much of its bureaucratic class. Whether Hygge-Bushido has, in turn, been adopted by the Covenant is unknown, but the analysis of transcriptions has revealed key phrases from both the Hygge-Bushido Manual and The Path of the Convolved Agent among key figures in the political hierarchy there.

Footnotes

Much of this system draws from Nassim Nicholas Taleb's [Incerto](#), particularly concepts of Black Swans, Extremistan, and antifragility, and on the arguments presented by Ole Peters in his Nature paper ["The ergodicity problem in economics."](#) The Kelly criterion, which shows up in questions around ergodicity economics, is well-known to gamblers. Taleb distributions and Knightian economics go hand-in-hand. The story of deterministic chaos which Sakata favors here is perhaps best described in [Chaos at Fifty by Adilson Motter and David Campbell](#).

Sakata Kintoki (坂田 金時): an obscure, virtually unknown mathematician until he came to Libria and pulled off a feat often compared to what Michiavelli did with the Prince. Various allusions have been made to his name being a pseudonym taken from a pre-Sundering manga called Gintama (see [Baragaki](#), [Kintama](#) and [Silver Soul](#) arcs). Extreme caution is advised in digging up his backstory.