

ANOMALIES: THE ACCIDENTAL APPEARANCE OF WHAT NEVER HAPPENS

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Whenever I voice my attention to some new obscure thing, it surprises me when whoever is listening scrubs it off by saying, "oh, well that's normal". Their retort has a way of padding my newly perceived anomaly as an already-realized standard that somehow I had missed. Equally parsed and relieved by their statement, my own wonderment soon drowns in that person's perception of 'standard'. *If this thing seems to be so anomalous to me, then just what is normal to you?*

No matter what, certain sections of humanity are bound to agree upon various customizable sets of norms, based of course on what most of us can agree to as normal – a task near impossible, and one that becomes more difficult as our systems become more complex and overlapping. These days, innovative technology and services rain down newness in storms. Inventive reactions to preceding anomalies...Oh, the panic they can create.

To begin scratching out a vision of strange occurrences through our cloudy shared vision of the world means defining our worldviews into categories as vehemently as possible, from which then the higher political orders in each field scramble to achieve consistent results. *Normal?*

The truth is, anomalies are things that almost never require pointing out because they are obvious departures from an agreed upon way of doing or seeing things. But the need to draw attention to them is important. Just because something has worked until then in theory, it may well be that its practical existence has forever been perceived as void because the system inside which it suddenly appears lacks what we cannot tolerate, or more likely what we cannot see.

Contentious as it has been, it was the Voynich Manuscript for its peculiar and unidentifiable inscriptions baffling genius decoders for centuries. It was Hailey's comet and it was Sputnik. Once upon a time it was the appearance of cancer cells and HIV. It was everything from the view of the Enterprise that didn't make sense to Pickard...It was anything demanding urgent investigation.

So given that our worldview is comprised of what we can already see in actuality, it makes sense that we discover anomalies in any setting. Up until now we have been many well-defined cultures, able to pluck out the anomaly from any meaningful category and turn its obscurities into promises for further development. Medically, astronomically, biologically, environmentally, traditional discussion around anomalies has been prefixed by science where measures are perpetually defined by their previous measures. Even human anomalies are categorized by their proximity to the paranormal, by degrees. How far off the mark do freaks appear in comparison to our so-called having been 'created equal'? The fourteen-fingered man, the human magnet, spontaneous human combustion, and reverse speech for example. Outside of science, where grayer lines contend with the very anomalies that cross them, nothing is really normal... especially when it comes to art. A sociopath, as defined by post-modern psychiatry, is no longer our only example of a social anomaly.

The fifties came close: a cozy house, white picket fence, agreeable wives with children and hoovers, J. Edgar Hoover...all normal, right?

Culturally speaking, anomalies help us articulate our context and to define our socio-economic goals. Even less so with digital cultures are we able to define norms amid the myriad ways we can interact, both with the technology and with each other. Across cultural borders, across fields and professions, across continents, anomalies that arise from the global community occur everyday and are embraced almost immediately with warmth.

When the digital world barely slows down enough for us to catch our breaths, Wikipedia's definition of a 'software anomaly' for example hasn't changed in 15 days: *anything that differs from the expectation*. Is this what it comes down to then? An anomaly, being something we never expected to see? If so, does this include all the world's latencies? When they do come, the perception of any anomaly is a queue to inquire deeply beyond our definition of normal, and digital cultures handle these questions far differently than before our enabled-by-media state of being.

It was Marty McFly back in time. It was JFK to the long-standing republicans. It was the sound of The Beatles when they first rocked Great Britain. Even closer was the 3rd Reich, from whose conformity we can delineate abnormalities in a slow and rebellious march against the gentility of socialism. It was big band and the swing era until the Foxtrot became just the trendy thing to do, even on a weeknight out. It was the crop circles requesting that we investigate the unimagined.

Unlike even the most didactic cultures of our past, digital cultures can be characterized by our expectation anomalies, and our ironic anticipation of surprise. We question our anomalies with the motivated and sustained awe of an unsolved mystery. Innovation is expected on a daily basis, each new strange thing is really quite normal. From end to end we expect that people will remix old thoughts, rebend, reshape and reinvent them in direct order to challenge the norms currently in place. We recognize that anomalies drive our culture's development at a high rate while setting standards that beckon fresh ideas out of packed up boxes. Furthermore we even expect that all of this is free-formed, data-enabled and rich. So long as the new thing continues to mystify us, until it becomes a fairly held expectation in the field reaching an acceptable degree of consensus, or until it does not take us by surprise upon its arrival: "hello, anomaly".

It was Amadeus Mozart for not being typically Baroque. It was Jackie Robinson for not being white. It was Charles Blondin, for his remarkable concentration, to walk that high thin line. It was every Rain Man, until Barry Levinson and MGM Studios made us understand the human inside autism. Today it is Zidane, and Madonna (still!), for challenging what we consider to celebrate. Whatever mysteries remain unsolved remain anomalies, imbuing wonder in everyone who considers the understated, 'Massive Change'.

So what's the tipping point? When does an anomaly become normal? How do we treat our persistent vision of utopia, and how do we create the norms we collectively believe might get us there? Or is every meaningful discovery purely accidental?

It was Mexican porn and explicit anime to the young male American comic book collector ...in fact it is anything remixed, any music that makes the listener say 'Whoa.' In fact it was Dubstep, four months ago, in New York City, not because of the beats but because of its fresh sound and dance movements released by its sound. It wasn't skateboarding in Dogtown in the seventies – that was innovation – but it was Jay Adams himself, an anomaly to a newfound concrete ocean.

Over time we realize that as much as we are a population of mere idealists, we are simply grasping for an understanding of our changing world. Through our experience with media, we may be at cross-purposes with anomalies when they arrive, but we process and recycle them into new surprises for ourselves and for others later. This way, when something out of the ordinary happens we can allow ourselves to be intrigued and surprised.... Maybe even enjoy it while it lasts.

It isn't Facebook for its addictive functionality, it is Facebook-Drama, its new verbiage that flows back and forth between the real world and the virtual world, without any apparent need for translation, and how it complicates our lives by pushing relationships into a state of further explanation. It is no longer a politician who keeps a promise, it is reduced taxes. It is....