



Crystallography

A Report on
Lucid Writing

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Crystallography, the science of crystals, literally means 'lucid writing,' a metaphor for science, if not the conceit of science, for science solves in its writing to clarify the ambiguities of language in order to fortify the consistencies of language. Science in effect yearns to create a system of interference, a system in which the diffracted meaning of the very word 'crystal' means what science is, might vanish before science, leaving behind an undiffracted *refringing*—a music without noise in a jewel.

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A Report on Lucid Writing

Karen Mac Cormack

...wishes to exist as a crystal, but the study of crystals does not exist as a science until Haüy defines crystals according to both the consistency of their planar angles and the symmetry of their rotary axes, for prior to this schema the study of crystals exists only as a poetry whose origin begins in obscurity with Pliny, when he performs an apocryphal act of misprision by mistaking broken quartz for frozen water. The English word 'crystal' descends etymologically from the Greek word *kryszallin*, meaning 'clear ice'—a glacial fragment so bright in its form that no blast furnace could melt it, permanent unless it were to melt in the heat of science.

Science begins with the parapaxis of poetry. Language, like a virus, lives in the form of a crystal, vulnerable to the high heat of the disintegration of its structure.

Crystallography

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A Report on Lucid Writing

Crystallography, the science of crystals, literally means 'lucid writing,' a metaphor for science, if not the conceit of science; for science strives in its writing to clarify the ambiguities of language in order to fortify the contiguities of language. Science in effect yearns to create a system of reference without interference, a system in which the diffracted meaning of the very word 'crystallography,' a word whose pun means what science is, might vanish before science, leaving behind an undiffracted *for*ing—a music without noise in a jewel. **Karen Mac Cormack** wishes to exist as a crystal, but the study of crystals does not exist as a science until Haüy defines crystals according to both the constancy of their planar angles and the symmetry of their rotary axes, for prior to this schema the study of crystals exists only as a poetry, whose origins begin in obscurity with Pliny, when he performs an apocryphal act of misprision by mistaking broken quartz for frozen water. The English word 'crystal' descends etymologically from the Greek word *krystallos*, meaning 'clear ice'—a glacial fragment so frigid in its form that no blast furnaces can melt it; permafrost relics.

Science begins with the parapraxis of poetry.

Language, like a virus, lives in the form of a crystal. Reference is the tragic flaw in the characters of language.

The crystal ball of knowledge.

Crystallography

A Report on Lucid Writing

for

Karen Mac Cormack

Crystallography, the science of crystals, literally means 'lucid writing,' a metaphor for science, if not the conceit of science, for science strives in its writing to clarify the ambiguities of language in order to fortify the contiguities of language. Science in effect yearns to create a system of reference without interference, a system in which the diffracted meaning of the very word 'crystallography,' a word whose pun means what science is, might vanish before science, leaving behind an undiffracted meaning—a music without noise in a jewel without defect. Science wishes to exist as a crystal, but the study of crystals does not exist as a science until Haüy defines crystals according to both the constancy of their planar angles and the symmetry of their rotary axes, for prior to this schema the study of crystals exists only as a poetry, whose origins begin in obscurity with Pliny, when he performs an apocryphal act of misprision by mistaking broken quartz for frozen water. The English word 'crystal' descends etymologically from the Greek word *krystallos*, meaning 'clear ice'—a glacial fragment so frigid in its form that no blast furnaces can melt it: permafrost relics. what is most lucid is also most

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Jean Baudrillard in *The Ecstasy of Communication* defines the crystal as a 'pure sign' that 'reacts like a virus to antibiotics, all the while maintaining its virulence,' the crystal representing through metaphor an object impervious to interpretation by a subject. The crystal functions as an absolute commodity, exchangeable but unuseable—after all, it embodies all the indifference of the meaningless, for it enshrines an enigma with no secret. The crystal is a *lapis philosophorum* that can perform the *coniunctio oppositorum*, functioning as a sublime medium of capital exchange, transmuting lead into gold, the ignoble into the noble, so that all signs, now permitted, might be permuted, if not permeated, by all other signs. The crystal becomes a catalyst for the terminal architecture of both seduction and simulation. The crystal always initiates an interplay of special effects, of appearances and disappearances, by inviting a crystallographer to enter a prison of surfaces without depth—a prismatic labyrinth of revolving mirrors. A crystallographer may value the transparency of the crystal above all else, but the crystal resists every attempt to look through it. A paradox: what is most lucid is also most opaque. be asked of it. The subject attempts to solve the Words, like gems, must be clear to have value. dis- cern. Reference is the tragic flaw in the characters of lan- guage. is. logic of the ideal form.

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Words, like gems, must be clear to have value. Reference is the tragic flaw in the character of language.

Baudrillard deploys the crystalline metaphor in order to invert the philosophical hierarchy that traditionally privileges the desiring subject, with its banal strategies of reasonable explanation (science), over the seducing object, with its fatal strategies of unreasonable fascination (poetry). Baudrillard suggests that, paradoxically, each attempt by science to render the universe more explicable threatens only to render it even more inexplicable, just as each interpretation of a poem threatens only to increase the potential for more interpretation of the same poem. Baudrillard, in other words, suggests that, because of negativity, existential phenomena always exceed their containment within a referential apparatus; consequently, all things, in order to be things, must operate at the infinite disposal of a futile curiosity. The crystal fascinates and mesmerizes, transforming the subject of science into an ageless insomniac, a hapless amnesiac. The subject of science represents a sciomancer who jeopardizes the very science of the subject by gazing hypnotically into a crystal that promises to answer any question asked of it, but that instead ensnares the subject and answers the subject with only more questions to be asked of it. The subject attempts to *solve* the object, but meanwhile the object attempts to *dissolve* the subject—and ultimately, the object always triumphs.

The crystal takes revenge

triumphs
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Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investiga-
 tions* argues that the metaphysical system of logic,
 'the a priori order of the world,' must express all the
 tautological virtues of a crystal—clarity, simplicity,
 purity, uniformity; moreover, 'this crystal does not
 appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete,
 indeed, as the most concrete, as if it were the *hardest*
 thing there is.' The science of logic, like the crystal
 of science, builds a jigsaw puzzle from a broken win-
 dow so that, when the eye looks through such a lens
 upon the real, the conditions of both conception and
 perception might fall into perfect alignment, the com-
 ponent pieces integrating with each other according
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 fection only leads systematically to the *paradoxa* of
 imperfection, for each attempt to solve one problem
 only creates more problems than it solves: 'we feel as
 if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our
 fingers.' The crystal is a kind of mirror that can crack
 under the pressure of a glance, and every attempt to
 repair the damage only inflicts more damage, until the
 clarity of the gemstone has all but disappeared into
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Wittgenstein acknowledges that, when the language of logic begins to analyze the logic of language, the ambiguities of the linguistic undermine the disambiguities of the syllogistic, since logic must, paradoxically, prove itself through a medium used to prove that the medium itself cannot be used to prove—the clear making itself all the more unclear with each attempt to make itself all the more clear: 'we have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk'—'we want to walk: so we need friction.' Logic, the crystalline tautology, requires that, with certainty, it can explain itself, both comprehensively and consistently, within its own axiology, but logic cannot fulfill this strict requirement without risking the *aporia* of internal contradiction. The crystal reveals that the ambiguity of language, at first inessential, now becomes essential, to the contiguity of language. A signal must always have its noise, and this need for a flaw in a system that needs to have no flaw implies that the most credible of truths must always evolve from the most incredible of errors. The viewer away from the

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flawing the logic of the ideal form.
The crystal takes its weight.

M.C. Escher in 'The Regular Division of the Plane' writes that 'the text of crystallographic publications is mostly beyond my comprehension,' but 'the figures with which they are often illustrated bring me occasionally on the track of new possibilities for my work.' Escher conceives an aesthetic, whose theories explore the mathematical structure of crystalline repetition, his work endlessly subdividing an infinite plane into congruent polygons, contiguous on all sides, without any interstices between them. Escher perceives, for example, that while the majolica tiling in the Alhambra embodies this principle of repetition, such byzantine tessellations repeat only abstract designs (such as t-mazes), not concrete images (such as insects), and he attributes this formalistic rigour to Islamic prohibitions against representation. Escher stresses also that, while he might use a concrete image for his own jigsaw puzzles, perhaps multiplying the single silhouette of a swan, he does so only to draw attention away from its concrete status—to accentuate its form in the abstract. The crystal is a compound eye that multiplies all the dimensions of perspective, misdirecting the viewer away from the illusion of this reality toward the reality of its illusion: crystal sings in silence so that the eye can hear.

A crystal must repeat parts that do not refer to anything, and if they do, their repetition must undermine their reference

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the crystal represents a formula for evoking a landscape, the refrain always constituting an aesthetic act of territorialization, in which the expressive becomes possessive—the melodies of a songbird, for example, marking the domains of its flights. The refrain serves a catalytic function by annexing incoherent parts in order to accelerate their interactions in a coherent whole, the crystal establishing, at random, its centre, the nucleus, a seed that in turn generates a region of central organization, the seed dis-terminating amongst particles near it and attracting compatible ones to itself, until the seed in turn produces a region of centrifugal organization, the seed growing outward only along its surface and thus improving another territory beyond its immediate vicinity. Such a seed represents a catastrophic singularity that exists paradoxically both inside and outside the boundaries for its own germination. All such growth is an event that can only take place at the margin of things. A crystal represents a jigsaw puzzle that starts from a piece at the centre, but solves itself around the edges without reference to any puzzle piece, each piece falling as it by chance into its proper locus, creating image ex nihilo out of its abyss. A crystal spontaneously transcodes chaos into order in the same way that universes appear through a break in their symmetry.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the artist turns his or her attention to the microscopic, to crystals, to molecules, atoms, and particles, not for scientific conformity, but for movement—a movement that deterritorializes the terrain of the refrain. Deleuze and Guattari discuss such movement by contrasting two kinds of space—the *striated* and the *smoothed*: the former, Euclidean, metric, rigid, and morphous; the latter, Riemannian, rhythmic, fluid, and amorphous. The distinction between these two spaces appears to correspond to the difference in structure between the crystal and the vitreal, since a crystal embodies the regular, clathrate form of a lattice (a striated space), whereas the vitreal embodies the irregular, aggregate form of a mosaic (a smoothed space): the former, predominantly *molar* since its parts express the global, long-range order of a solid; the latter, predominantly *molecular* since its parts express the local, short-range order of a liquid. These two states of matter (law and art) comprise the entire medium of language, and each mode can easily transform without warning into the mode of the other—either through heating or cooling. Poetry represents a phaseshift in the temperature of science, because of an ambivalence in the meaning of one. A glassblower holds a burning bubble full of breath at the distant tip of a pipe—silent trumpeter—with the following erratum: for 'crystal,' read 'vitreal,' wherever possible.

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Deleuze and Guattari establish a spatial typology in which the distinctions between a striated space (the crystal) and a smoothed space (the vitreal) almost appear to correspond metaphorically to the distinctions between a poetic economy and a prosaic economy, the former traditionally recognized by its metrical symmetries, the latter traditionally recognized by its rhythmical asymmetries. The differences, however, between these two spaces, remain contrastive, but not exclusive, since each space can manifest itself in the other: for example, a striated space can traverse the smoothed space of a prosaic text when such a text appears in typewritten form, each isocratic character spaced discretely and regularly, within a rigid, textual grid, one keystroke per unit-cell; similarly, a smoothed space can traverse the striated space of a poetic text when such a text appears in handwritten form, each idiocratic character linked cursorily and irregularly, within a fluid, textual field, no unit-cell per penstroke. The crystal and the vitreal, moreover, resemble each other superficially, the jewel often mistaken for the glass, the word 'crystal' often referring to the vitreal, the boundary between the two spaces, the two states, blurring because of an ambivalence in the meaning of one word, *stal* writes this message at random for an audience. A crystallographer, uncertain, re-reads this text, with the following erratum, for 'crystal,' read 'vitreal,' wherever possible.

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Roger Caillois in *The Writing of Stones* argues that 'one might list all the...styles of human art and not find one without its parallel in mineral nature.' Caillois regards the perfection of the crystal as an art of serendipity without an author—an art before the artificial invention of art: *lusus naturae*, the mineral kingdom having already foreshadowed somewhere in the depths of its rock every possible, every conceivable, image yet to be painted by a human artist. Caillois cites, as examples, the natural paintings that often appear in the polished cross-sections of *pierres-aux-masures* from Tuscany, panels of excavated marble, the surfaces of which seem to depict stylized landscapes: Medieval forests, Manhattan skylines, Martian deserts—all produced by seismic chance for the same reason that the interior of a septarium, a black geode, might contain, as if in a locket, the aleatory portrait of a jellyfish, a spiderweb, or a supernova: a craquelure calligraphy. We can gaze upon their cracks and chasms—but the fractal of their pattern is too intricate and delicate for the pattern of our phrases. A crystal is the memorybank, the ciphertext, for these tectonic monuments, these mnemonic sediments, that fall like fossils through each stratum of the earth—the vacuum of its dream. *uwqiywqiywuchhfbchewqury*
 A crystal writes this message at random for an audience that has not yet evolved to read it.

A crystal in effect must scintillate enough to blind the eye to nature.

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Caillois argues that to decipher such writing, if
 writing it is, would not mean trying to unravel an
 inextricable mass of lines and loops, but rather
 endeavouring to interpret anew some oft-repeated
 signs so turned in upon themselves that they refer
 only to their own form—not an alphabet, but a pat-
 tern without a message. Caillois observes that we
 have seen modern painters first give up trying to
 reproduce their models exactly, then abandon models
 altogether and eschew any kind of representation:
 strange to think that nature, which can neither draw
 nor paint any likeness, sometimes creates the illusion
 of having done so, while art, which has always been
 successful at resemblances, renounces its traditional,
 almost inevitable, vocation and turns to the creation
 of such forms as nature itself abounds in—mute, un-
 premeditated, and without a model. Every sentence
 eventually begins to drift off into *xzastyrhazakxryka*
jaqurqarufqirqrfririqufjasjrajstroiuoafjoaexputqoeur
efhayryaruaydwerqurytiuhrqwryhhhrhfjbybfaor
jeoqwoitjkjjzbvrbayrupjfdhjdrgfhfjjjaerhfterhhhrds
sxkudxxudrxrxruutjsryuqfhsuyqwrepqruiqurqr
hahjafwvfjdfprpifhsfgeruyeywuyrquywwurpyweza
hzhzxvajguyeryqytytytyfqqyxerzaaaqryqwqryqyy
quyryquyqqiuwarhruivejywywqiywuchhfhchewqury
qqfhqqzxkzkxkzxkzkxtafraadkdvvxasrtuzafw
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A crystal in effect must scintillate enough to blind
 the eye to nature.

the eye to nature... A crystal in effect must scintillate enough to blind
A crystal feels its last cry...
interference from the background radiation of the uni-
verse...
a fine whisker, each broadcast intermingled with
radio-device (ery-rigged from a quartz crystal and
amplifier-cones of stereo-speakers, the poet manning a
tronic patterns into subsonic impulses, powering the
instrument of mechanical translation, converting elec-
A crystal functions as a transducer, a piezoelectric
shivering prism stage in synch with siren-calls
system. A spinning prism sheds light into kite-tails;
stolen from him all the neural signals of his nervous
just long enough to go insane. A crystal far away has
to phone this number-listens to the sound of death
A diamond hums the distance. A caller who has yet
selves re-routed all at once into twilight nothingness.
of dendritic frost. A thousand phonocalls find them-
cable when severed resembles this impugned fountain
linear and refracting the art of its syntax. A fiberoptic
from any theory of optics, deflecting the law of the
an accidental ray, the latter beam apparently deviating
that the meaning bifurcates into an incidental ray and
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Crystallography, priceless and pointless, strives to



Christian Biele
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