

THE BETATEXT



Produced in a limited edition of 27 copies
to celebrate the publication of
The Xenotext (Book 1) by Christian Bök



CHROMIUM DIOXIDE PRESS
2015

ADAM DICKINSON

Saliva is disorganized
and easily fooled by success.
It's not even true
that I eat honey.
Within the province of drive-thrus
and sleeper cells,
something else does it for me,
stuffing aspartame briefcases
with municipal snow.
At the business end of this shit,
complex sugars are abducted
by aliens as necktied
as a carpool, still rocking
classic haircuts and metabolic
pathways from the oxygen-starved
oceans of Archean Earth.
I don't have to move a muscle.
Bifidobacteria break down the best
defense and special teams,
build welfare states
and a culture of dependence
founded on hamster dental plaque,
Mongolian fermented horse cream,
pig intestines, and honeybee
digestive tracts. The limits
of my enzymes
mean the limits of my world.
Milk and honey
curd a landscape as pointless
as a fingerprint.
In the prehistory of the gut,
getting off this planet
means getting someone else
to take the wheel.

THE BETATEXT

My gut is a rainforest of microbes. Their combined cellular material, which covers my entire body, outnumbers my own by a factor of ten. These microbiota serve as a kind of *xenos* (the 'foreigner') living within me as a giant nonhuman organ, controlling the expression of genes and the imagined sense of self maintained by my immune system's sensitivity to inside and outside. It is unclear, in fact, whether the immune system controls the microbes or the microbes control the immune system. My body is a spaceship designed to optimize the proliferation and growth of its microbial cosmonauts. These organisms enact a form of biochemical writing through their integral involvement in the metabolic processes that fuel my life. In some cases, the proliferation of certain species can improve the health of the host. The oligosaccharides in honey, for example, which are indigestible to humans, can stimulate the growth of *bifidobacteria* in my gut, potentially reducing the risk of food allergies and colonization by pathogens. The enzyme *beta-fructofuranosidase* from *Bifidobacterium longum* is one such catalyst for handling the oligosaccharides from honey in the anaerobic environment of my large intestine. I know this because I have had my microbiome sequenced to better read its wet and otherworldly writing.

```
1  MTDFTPETPV  LTPIRDHAAE  LAKAEAGVAE  MAAKRNNRWY
51  PKYHIASNGG  WINDPNGLCF  YKGLWHVYFQ  LHPYGTQWGP
91  MHWGHVSSTD  MLSWKREPIM  FAPSLEQEKD  GVFSGSAVID
131 DNGDLRFYIT  GHRWANGHDN  TGGDWVQQMT  ALPDNDELTS
171 ATKQGMIIID  PTDKVDHHR  DPKVWKTGDT  WYMTFGVSSA
201 DKRGQMWLFS  SKDMVRWEYE  RVLQHPDPD  VFMLECPDFD
241 PIKDKDGNEK  WVIGFSAMGS  KPSGFMNRNV  SNAGYMIGTW
281 EPGGEFKPET  EFRLWDCGHN  YYAPQSFNVD  GRQIVYGWMS
321 PFVQPIPMED  DGWCGQLTLP  REITLGDDGD  VVTAPVAEME
361 GLREDTLDHG  SITLDMDGEQ  IIADDAEAVE  IEMTIDLAAS
401 TAERAGLKI  ATEDGAYTYV  AYDDQIGRVV  VDRQAMANGD
441 RGYRAAPLTD  AELASGKLDL  RVFVDRGSVE  VYVNGGHQVL
541 SSSYSASEGP  RAIKLVAESG  SLKVDSLKLH  HMKSIGLE
```

BETA-FRUCTOFURANOSIDASE

(AMINO ACIDS)



BETA-FRUCTOFURANOSIDASE

(PROTEIN FOLD)