

A hint can be a slight, or at least indirect, suggestion of something. You can, for example, give a hint about your true feelings about something (or someone). In this case, a hint is a rude shadow living in the dark recesses of our hearts. A hint could also be a very small trace of something. It could be the nervous smile that secretly betrays those feelings, the first dribble of water seeping through the dam of polite society. Or a hint could be a small piece of practical information or advice—a suggestion of how to do something better in the future after a mistake. A hint is, then, open towards the future. Hints make the joy or pain of discovery possible. They are a sign of what might come, some chance discovery grinding against the smooth flow of time.

Ancient Greek myths and tragic plays are full of gods, prophets, soothsayers, and mortal humans dealing with signs of this kind. The gods announce the future. What they say is no mere guess, but a certainty. What they predict will surely come true. Soothsayers, however, are human beings who try to divine the future by reading the signs of the gods. They can be accurate or not. We do not have to believe them. Humans may foresee their own future, but they rarely learn any lessons from it.

Mythic narratives sometimes tell us about an event that is happening in the present while at the same time reminding us that this event had *already been foretold*. Mythical monsters and tragic heroes are the victims of these riddles. They receive hints about the truth, but they never find it out until it is too late.

The grandeur in their responses sound amusing in English, as if their pain hints at something more than language can carry. “Ah! I am sorrow!” cries King Oedipus when he finds out his actions in the past caused the plague in Thebes. “Alas!” groans the Cyclops in misery when, after Odysseus and crew blind him, he remembers that a soothsayer once prophesied that a man called Odysseus would one day come and rob him of his sight.

Western philosophy begins as a quarrel with myth and tragedy as Plato tries to unseat Homer as the authority on human affairs. Philosophy dethrones the gods, whose participation in the world causes a rupture in time. Philosophy rejects the moral ambiguity of tragedy and prophecy. Human beings can now get hints from only one source as philosophy explains things through a single principle: *Logos* (Heraclitus), *Being* (Parmenides), *Ousia* (Aristotle), *Causa Sui* (Aquinas), *Geist* (Hegel), *der Wille zur Macht* (Nietzsche), and *Sein* (Heidegger). These concepts are, ironically, secular gods.

We have modified this in the last few hundred years by making ‘historical consciousness’ a new imperative. We not only have to take a stance on history. We have to understand human affairs through changes to our actions, speech, thoughts, institutions, laws, and beliefs as if they form an ordered sequence. Things as they are now are only a hint of better things to come. This was a disaster.

The technocrats behind Soviet-style ‘scientific socialism’ behaved like secular soothsayers. They thought Marx’s philosophy of history gave us a general knowledge of the laws of all historical and social processes. They thought

they could control societies ‘scientifically’ just as the natural sciences made it possible to control nature. The philosophy of history is, on this view, not just a hint at what is to come. It was also a rulebook that tells us what we are and what we need in advance.

The model of a revolution shared by drab Soviet bureaucrats and malevolent Nazis alike is the Industrial Revolution, not the French Revolution. There was no hint that technological progress would lead straight to the gates of Auschwitz.

When ‘really existing socialism’ failed, we were told that history had ended. There is no utopia on the horizon because the utopia is now. No hints. No mystery. Just more of the same forever. That was thirty years ago. The ‘democracy to come’ isn’t coming any time soon. We experience a present defined by an acronym from military planning that has, inevitably, become a part of management strategy—VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). What hints can we take under these conditions?

We must accept that we cannot have perfect knowledge of the laws of nature. We cannot see all of history unfold in front of us like a prophet or God. Time is not there for calculation by social engineers looking for the future in the present. No such dynamic exists. We must not, however, shy away from thinking about how to create a world that truly satisfies our needs and potential. We have to look for hints ourselves, hunting them out like detectives in search of mystery. We have to tramp the mean streets. We have to peer into dark back alleys and deserted shops; we have to stay at home, read the classics, drink some coffee, hot on the trail of a mystery safe on the sofa.

Anything can be a hint. A coffee stain in a book or newspaper circling a word or phrase. Dead leaves clogging a fountain. A twilight seat in a near-empty café once people have gone home from work. A cute dog. A pizza menu. A lost shoe. None of them points towards a fixed future.

James Lewis is old-fashioned enough to believe in the potential of advanced, necessary art. It hints at how things could be. It does this by making things as they are now appear in the light of their own potential. It does not, however, tell us how things will be. Art hints, flooded with memories of the future. Then. Now.

Lewis takes the unpredictability of the world seriously. His process is simple enough. He takes a hint hiding somewhere in the void—out there in the world, or some image from memory—and uses it to inspire the next work. These hints are the punctuation marks between works, so one unfolds onto another. They all come with their own backstory but you can put them into practice yourself. Focus on the precise image they call to mind. ‘The world is upside down,’ reads one. Too right.

Are ‘cannibal plants’ a threat to us, too? Are they going to feast on our flesh? Is the image in an ‘upside down mirror’ also upside down? What happens if you light a room with a ‘lamp multiverse’? Do the corners of the room

turn into the edges of the universe? What do you taste when you run your tongue, dense with nerve endings, over a 'broken tooth'? What is this invisible topography?

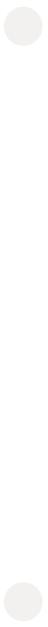
You cannot write a brief history of hints. You can no more keep track of hints than you can write a brief survey of the philosophy of history. How ironic. No story is ever complete. It can only hint at what is missed out—lifetimes of experience, or centuries of inky-fingered scholars making sense of the present by reading the best material from the past. We should read those smudged fingerprints. We might learn something.

Max L. Feldman

Mud



# Matchsticks



# Cannibal plants

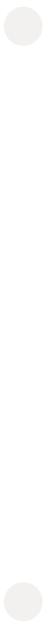
- # Lamp multiverse
-

Fish

•

# Broken tooth

•



# Drunk Forgetting



Yellow



# Stalactites



# Two lovers



# Horse limbs

- Upside  
down  
mirror
-

- Lowering  
the  
ceiling
-

• No  
weather  
• in a city



# Electricity

# Jazz

- Vent in a broken window

•

# Broken lung

•

A wild dog

•

# Lead cutlery

•



# Metric monochrome

•

# Tilting image

•

•

**6ft x 1meter**

•

•

# Sofa lump

•



# Spy holes



# Thermal Imaging



# Former constellations



# Dusk

Zoo

•

# Heavy coins

•



# Handmade plate



# Pressure



# Puddle



# Sick Tree

- 

# Zombie Class

-

Foot as  
satellite



# Fascist Zeros





# Holiday Fiction

•  
**The world is  
upside down**  
•