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## Starship ‘Grateful Dead’: An Instruction Manual

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## TEXTS AND SOURCES

### Starship 'Grateful Dead': An Instruction Manual

ROBERT HUNTER

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We started this writing and then handed it over to another to finish.  
This is how you know, by this, \*it is our sign.

The space between Arc and Medeses is a corrugated cardboard box.  
This is where the idea for it came from. Also find cells with same idea.  
Enough. Transpose.\*

*En hoch tutem eteio halt\** progress 3000 revolutions retro activate  
but leave all initial seeds.

Here beneath the summer skies lay dreaming  
I a wand and you a maiden blowing  
reel beneath the fragrance of the orchids  
awake unto the fantasy beginning

To know your mission is elevating but to know from whence it  
came is staggering. Faith is the only tangible. In a world of transition  
the only tangible is the intangible. Cultivate it symbiotically with living.  
Symbiotes exist by mutual benefit to the detriment of neither achieving  
mutual edification. If you can see where this is true, your sight should then  
be sufficient to detect where it is not. The rules change and this is the first  
rule. And the change is orderly, this is the second rule. And the order may  
be aperceived. This is not a rule it is a fact; (sub 1) (an utter partial truth)

Don't follow principles which must eventually exclude others in  
this transition world. The texture of earth consciousness cannot form into



a proper ectosphere without much cooperation and the helpers will not be able to breathe.

Permission to pass through this sector of the galaxy is revocable at any time. A word to the wise is sufficient. It is not that you are unwanted; on the contrary, you are most wanted. A degree of intolerability is tolerable, and just that. Warning signs appear constantly on a hit and run basis. Helpers can't stay long because there is just nothing to breathe and this you *must* provide or perish. You will probably provide it at the expense of strong elements whose energy is channeling into null factors. There is room for antimatter universes, including one for you, but one thing at a time. It must be built, then it can be demolished, the null factor (the prime intangible) is knowing how to do it. Erection can then be instantaneous. If you think of how the flu strikes over the course of a year, you will see the nature of your intolerability. You are a fever that will continue or break. You are wild as yet, but growing.

*Cortical Five* is the galactic enterprise into which you are free to evolve. You will meet no insurmountable resistance in the direction of evolving into Cortical Five. However a certain amount of inertia must be attained by individuals who are aware of the general drifts of the Mission in order to act as terminal points for the transmission of force through a matrix of low conductive properties. Once polarized by this action there will be relatively no impedance to the flow of energy through this matrix and the ectospheric ions can polarize immediately with their natural mates. Then we can relax a bit and direct refreshed consideration to the plotting of a desirable course for Cortical Five.

Several fleets have already arrived. Your flagship has ceased emitting distress signals. This could be a bad sign or very good news. Though it is of course crucial, it is still of no concern. This message will arrive scrambled. Convert to binary and reconstruct.

That is all.

Good sailing.\*



### Note

This transcription reproduces Hunter's text as it was published except for a few editorial emendations, indicated below, following standard editorial practice for modern published texts. This allows for corrections that fulfill the goals of a readable, accessible text but reflect minimal intervention. Readers should consult the original for a full understanding of the piece. That publication has several characteristics lost in transcription, such as unusual spacing and variant spellings, as well as textual errors.

### Source

Hunter, Bob. 1969. "Starship 'Grateful Dead': An Instruction Manual." *San Francisco Oracle of the Spiritual Revolution* 1 (5): 6.

### Annotations

These annotations by Christopher K. Coffman, Nicholas G. Meriwether, and Deepak Sarma are limited. They are intended to provide a preliminary survey of the ideas and some of the allusions in Hunter's text.

p.99, L 1: "1122 ...": Though not rendered in 0 and 1, the 1-2 construction may be a possible reference to "binary," stated at the end of the piece (L 29), suggesting that the essay as a whole reflects what Hunter is instructing the reader to do: "Convert to binary and reconstruct."

p.99, L 3: "our sign." A phrase that evokes Isaiah 7.14, "and ye shall know him by this sign." Hunter used a distinctive artistic glyph to sign many of the poems and drawings he contributed to the *Dead Heads* newsletter, 1972–73.

p.99, L 4: "between Arc and Medeses": An ark safeguards its contents, and Medeses may be an incorrect translation of the plural of Medice, Latin for healer; the phrase suggests that Hunter's conception of the Dead's project falls somewhere between a vessel of protection and a means of healing, though that may be as fragile as "a cardboard box."

p.99, L 7: "*En hoch tutem eteio*": A multilingual concatenation of *en* (improper Latin interjection, variously translated as "Look" or "Lo" ), *hoch* (German, "high"), *tutem* (Latin, "for our safety"), and *eteio* (improper Latin for "although the"). Hunter may have intended this to mean, "Stay high for safety," which fits the tenor of the piece.

p.99, L 7: "3000 revolutions": A standard for electrical motors is 3000 rpm. In this context, it also evokes the Rolling Stones' "2000 Light Years From Home" on *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (1967).

p.99, L 9–12: "Here beneath": A possible reference to Lewis Carroll's "A Boat, Beneath a Sunny Sky," as Christopher Coffman explains in his essay, "Robert Hunter's Prose Debut," which follows this.

p.99, L 14: “world of transition”: a possible reference to the central Buddhist doctrine of “all things are transient,” sometimes expressed as “all things are not eternal.” Cf. L 22, “transition world”. This interpretation fits with the following phrase “the only tangible is the intangible” (L 15) and “the rules change ...” (L 18).

p.99, L 18–19: “The rules change and this is the first rule”: this echoes the Mahayana, and specifically the Madhyamaka practice of using language as a tool to transcend language.

p.99, L 21: “Don’t follow principles which must eventually exclude others”: this echoes the Buddhist belief in *pratityasamutpada*, the interconnectedness of all things in the universe, and the compassion a Bodhisattva (one who has made a vow to address the sufferings of others before attaining Nirvana) has for all other sentient creatures enduring *dukkha* (suffering).

p.99, L 22: “earth consciousness”: The idea that human understanding of the planet should be holistic, an idea prominent in the counterculture. Trips Festival organizer Stewart Brand promoted the idea with the publication of the first photograph of the Earth from space as the cover image of the first *Whole Earth Catalog* (1968). Brand had been advocating that NASA release the first satellite photograph of the planet, taken November 10, 1967, as a way of instilling a sense of “earth consciousness,” or awareness of the planet’s fragility and interconnectedness.

p.101, L 1: “ectosphere”: The cortical zone of the attraction sphere in the brain. In biology, it is the outer layer or zone of a centrosome, the small region of cytoplasm near the nucleus of a cell, seen at the poles of the spindle apparatus, the structure that separates the chromosomes into the daughter cells during cell division. In the context of the piece, Hunter may have meant “ecosphere,” the region of space around a star where conditions are such that planets are theoretically capable of sustaining life.

p.101, L 9: “null factor”: In mathematics, the Null Factor Law states that if the product of any two numbers is zero, then one or both of the numbers is zero. Often used in solving quadratic equations.

p.101, L 16, 18, 25: “Cortical Five”: An unrecorded song composed ca. 1968–69; Hunter published the lyrics in the revised edition of his collected lyrics—see Coffman’s essay in this volume. In this context, the reference evokes the band’s sense of a shared consciousness and group effort, often expressed with the metaphor of “bleshing” from Theodore Sturgeon’s *More Than Human* (1953).

p.101, L 26–27: “flagship has ceased emitting distress signals”: A possible allusion to the nation’s troubles in 1968 (e.g., the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the riots that followed, including at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago) as well as the Dead’s recent personnel and management difficulties that same year.

### Editorial Emendations

*Key:* p[age number], L[line number]: [editorial emendation] > (replaces) [original wording].

Note: In keeping with Hunter's later practice, the attribution of the essay has been changed from "Bob Hunter" to "Robert Hunter."

p.99, L 7: *En hoch tutem eteio* > En hoch tutem eteio

p.99, L 9: skies > skys

p.101, L 1: cooperation > co-operation

p.101, L 8: *must* > must

p.101, L 10: antimatter > anti matter

p.101, L 22: impedance > impedence

p.101, L 16, 18, 25: *Cortical Five* > Cortical Five

**ROBERT HUNTER** (1941–2019) served as the Grateful Dead's principal lyricist. His work included lyrics, songs, poetry, and prose, ranging from essays to short stories and novels. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of the Grateful Dead, the only nonperforming member to receive that honor, and was a member of the Songwriters Hall of Fame. He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Americana Music Association.