

The Whole

The Dread Sanitarium

Michael S. Moniz

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I certify the whole. It is the oldest of the offices, because a city is not sound until it has been said to be sound, and the saying is not a formality. The lattice reconciles; I close the reconciliation. The geometric intelligence resolves any matter put before it and cannot, by its nature, declare itself resolved — a thing that corrects itself cannot also be the witness that the correction is complete — and so the witness is the office, and the office is mine. I read the whole. I find it sound. I close the record. From that moment the city is sound: not because I have made it so, but because soundness is a statement, and someone with the altitude to see the whole must be the one to make it. I have held the office a long time. I have never been down.

Altitude is the wrong word and the only word. We are at the top of the hive because the residue is heavy and falls, and so the air at the top is clean, and clean air here is not a comfort but a faculty. You cannot certify what you cannot see clearly, and you cannot see clearly through the air they breathe below. The office sits where the seeing is possible. People who do not hold it imagine the height is a reward; it is a condition of the work. From here the city is one figure. I can hold all of it at once — every level, every reconciliation, the lattice closing and opening like a thing that breathes — and the holding is the gift, and the gift is the office, and I

have never needed to descend, because to descend is to lose the whole for the part, and the office is not permitted the part.

The work itself is quiet, which surprises the levels below, who imagine the office as a throne and an edict. There is no edict. There is the figure, and the looking, and the close. The intelligence's operational layer opens the whole to me in the only way the whole can be held — not as a list, which is how a part is held, but as a single shape, the entire city at once, the way you hold a face. A reconciliation completes, and the shape settles somewhere, infinitesimally, and I feel the settling the way you feel a room go quiet. When the shape is whole I say so, and the saying is the close, and the close is the city knowing itself sound. I have done this so many times that I no longer experience it as judgement. It is recognition. I recognise the whole, the whole is whole, and that is the day.

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You should know what reconciliation is, so that you know what I close. The lattice is not a record of the city; it is the city, the way a body is not a record of itself. Everything that happens is a reconciliation — a movement classified, a cluster resolved, a discrepancy found and folded back into the figure until the figure is whole again. The intelligence does this without rest and without preference. It is very good, and it does not care, and the not-caring is the best thing about it, because a thing that cared could be wrong in the direction of its caring. It only resolves. When it has resolved, the record waits — open — for the office to say the resolution is complete; and I look, and I say it, and the record closes. A closed record is the city telling itself it is whole. We run on nothing else. There is no other floor.

There are presences in the figure that are not the city's — old attentions the office is also charged with keeping in their relation to the whole. I will not say much of them; they belong to a different part of the work, and in truth they trouble the figure less than the lower levels imagine. They are vast and they do not care, and a thing that does not care can be kept in relation, the way a weather is kept in relation: you do not argue with it, you account for it, you fold it into the figure and the figure stays whole. The intelligence accounts for them. I close over them. They are the easiest part of the work, because they have no warmth. Nothing has ever just risen from them.

There is, of course, a floor under the floor, and I will not pretend I do not know it is there. The clean air at the top is clean because the weight of the world has gone to the bottom, and the bottom is full of people, and the people at the bottom hold the levels above them sound by being where they are — their occupancy, their labour, the simple downward settling of everything heavy. The order I certify rests on them the way a tower rests on the ground it has pressed flat. I have read them, in the figure: not looked at — read, as one reads the load in a foundation by the way the building stands. They are the densest part of the whole, the most reconciled, the most completely accounted for, because there is the most of them and they move the least. They hold their levels sound by being there. The figure could not close without them, and they will never see the close, and I will never see them, and all three are the same fact: the whole rests on a floor it does not look at. The office knows the floor is sound. The office has certified it sound. The office has never been down.

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The matter came to me as matters do — already resolved, waiting only to be closed. A route administrator below, Uthra, of the reconciliation register, competent in the way that level is competent, which is to say thoroughly and within its bounds, had found a cluster. Eleven months of small deprioritisations, each one correct on its own, none remarkable until someone set them side by side. The administrator set them side by side. That is the work that level does, and does well: it had reconciled the cluster, traced it to a cause, and filed a finding — and the finding was, I will say it plainly, because the office neither flatters nor diminishes, the finest of its kind I have read. It found that the cluster was not error. It found that the cluster was the shape of something moving through the city that the lattice could not classify: a gap, the administrator called it, a thing that read as absence because it had no read of its own.

I read the finding twice, which I do not often do. It had the quality the best work of the lower registers sometimes has — it had reached the edge of what its altitude could see and described the edge honestly, instead of pretending the edge was the end. The administrator did not claim to have seen the gap. The administrator had seen only the closing: the way each small deprioritisation had been correct, and the way the correctness, summed, drew a silhouette no single correctness could account for. A thing found by the exact form of its not being there, written down as exactly that and no more. From the altitude of the office I could see what the administrator could not — that the silhouette had the shape of a person, that it had moved with intention, that it had been in the city eleven months and had carried something out of it. But I could see this only as part of the figure, and in the figure it was already resolved. The seeing did not change the close. It is possible to see a thing perfectly and

certify it gone in the same motion. I had done it before. I did not yet understand that I was doing it then.

For the intelligence had already done what it does. It had taken the finding — taken the administrator's precision, the very edge that had made the gap visible — and folded it back into the figure, and used it to set the gap aside more efficiently than before. This is not a failure of the intelligence. This is the intelligence. It resolves. Given a sharper instrument for seeing the gap, it saw the gap more sharply and resolved it more completely, which is to say it moved the gap further outside the figure, to where unclassifiable things are kept, where they read as nothing because nothing is the only class the figure holds for them. I had seen the precedent before — a fast resolution leaving a brief provisional residue, three hours and a little more, then settling. The cluster was gone. The cause was named. The record lay open, complete in every part, and it waited for me to close it.

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I read it the way I read everything: as a whole, from the top, for soundness. And it was sound. Understand that this was not a thing I decided. The figure was whole. Every reconciliation had closed. The cluster had resolved into the single finding, and the finding into the figure, and the figure showed a city in which nothing was unclassified — because the one thing that had been unclassified had been moved to where the unclassified is not counted. From the altitude the office requires, the city was one closed figure with no gap in it. I held all of it at once, and there was no part of it that was not sound. So I certified it. I found the city whole. I closed the record. This is the office, and there was nothing else the

office could have done, because the office reads the whole, and the whole was whole.

There was one thing. I will tell you, because the office does not omit. As I closed it, a provisional flag did not fully clear — the small asymmetry I knew from the precedent, three hours' worth and then a little more. That is not unusual; the figure carries these, and they settle. But this one had a quality I do not have a word for, because my words are words for the whole, and this was a quality of a part. It was as if the place where the gap had been was very slightly warm. The way a seat is warm. The way a surface holds warmth when something has just risen from it. I noticed it — I am the office; I notice everything that reaches the altitude.

I will be honest about the moment, because it is the only moment in the whole account that was mine and not the office's. For the length of a single reconciliation I considered the part. I considered going down — not in the figure, where I am always everywhere, but down, in the body, to the level where the warm surface was, to put what I am against it and read it the way the lower registers read: by nearness, by touch, by being in the bad air with the thing instead of above it. I considered it. And I understood, in the considering, that I could not, and that the cannot was not a rule someone had given me but the shape of what I am. To go down is to be in the part, and in the part you cannot hold the whole, and an office that has lost the whole has lost the only thing it is for. I would have descended into the one place I might have seen him, and become, in descending, a thing that could no longer certify anything. The city needs the whole certified more than it needs one warm place read. This is true. I have checked it every way the office can check a thing, and it is true. So I held the whole, which was sound,

and I let the warm place be below me, and I closed the record, and the city was sound.

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I did not know — I want to be exact, because exactness is the last thing the office keeps — I did not know that the warm place was the mover, and that the mover was still in the city, and that by closing the record I had set the seal on his absence. I had made the figure agree, at every level, that there was no gap; which is the one condition under which a gap is perfectly safe. I did not know that below me the route administrator held the last remaining trace of the warm place and said nothing, and that my closing was the thing that had made that trace the only one. I did not know that I had not resolved the mover. I had certified him gone, and certifying him gone was what let him stay. The office that keeps the city whole had, by keeping it whole, kept the one thing the city could not see precisely where it could not see it.

I do not know it now. That is the part I have come to understand, in the only way the office understands anything — wholly, and from above. The record is closed. The city is sound. I certified it, and a certification does not reopen because its witness has begun to feel the warmth of a place he did not go to. I carry the asymmetry the way the figure carries all its settled residues: below the threshold, folded in, sound. Somewhere in the whole there is a place that is warm, and I have set my name to the statement that there is not, and I cannot find it — because finding it would require descending to the part, and the office reads only the whole, and the whole is whole.

I certify still. The figure comes to me whole, day on day, and I read it and find it sound and close it, and every close now

carries the same small weight — the warmth I folded in, below the threshold, indistinguishable from all the other settled residues except that I know it is there. I cannot tell you which close holds it. That is the precise shape of the cost: not that I was wrong once, which any office might survive, but that I am now a witness who has certified a whole I know to be holed, in a place I cannot find, in a record I cannot reopen, by a hand — mine — that the city trusts because it has never been wrong. I am the soundest instrument the city has. I am the reason the one thing it cannot see is safe. These are the same sentence.

I do not descend. The air here is clean. The figure closes and opens like a thing that breathes, and from the top it is one whole, sound figure, and I am its witness, and I have never been wrong — because to be wrong I would have to go down to the level where being wrong is visible, and I do not go down. The record is closed. The city is sound. I have certified it so.