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Angie Keefen: AN OCTOPUS IN PLAN VIEW

Bruce Sterling: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MEDIA

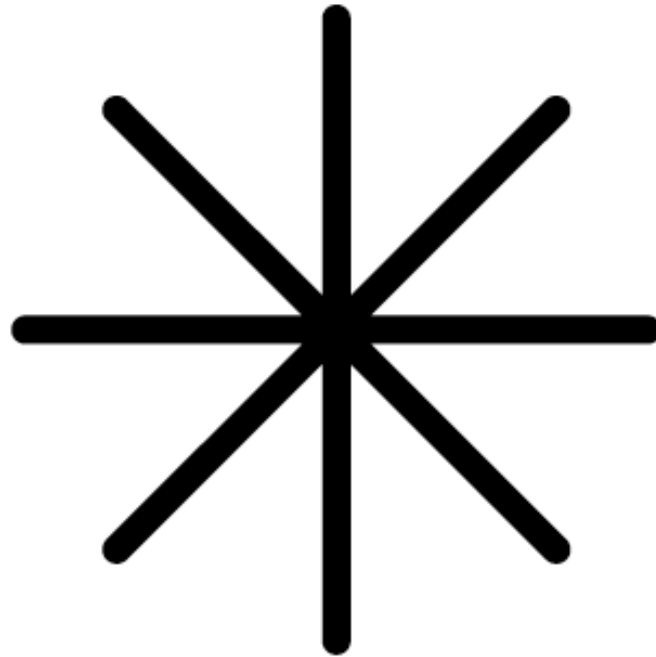
Rob Gampietro, David Reinfurt: FROM 1 TO 0

Rob Gampietro, David Reinfurt: FROM 0 TO 1



Dexter Snister: A NOTE ON THE TIME

Dexter Snister: A NOTE ON THE TYPE



## I. The etymology of the word “octopus”

Octopus. Noun. A mollusk with eight sucker-bearing arms, a soft sac-like body, strong beak-like jaws, and no internal shell. A taxonomic genus within the family octopodidae. Origin: Greek, from OKTO-, meaning “eight,” plus -POUS, meaning “foot.” Plural: debatable.

Octopus. The word migrated to English in the late 1700s by way of New Latin, or NEO-Latin, as it is sometimes called—and which means the same thing, but with a Greek prefix, which is like saying “new” in an antiquated way. A product of moveable type, New Latin evolved as a living tongue between the invention of the printing press and the beginning of the 20th century, when it was embalmed and shelved once more. Unlike classical Latin, its u’s were not v’s; its l’s were not j’s; its s’s looked like swooning f’s, except at the ends of words, when they looked like s’s. This was Latin resuscitated as the international language of scientific taxonomy.

According to the tidy rules of Latin declension, the New Latin plural of “octopus” would be “octoPI.” Fine. But according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a foreign word that enters the English fray must be treated like an English word, and duly adhere to the untidy rules of ENGLISH declension, in which case the plural of “octopus” would be “octoPUSES,” with an Anglicized tail: -e, -s. Okay, “octopuses.” Also fine. However, the correct PRIMARY plural, per today’s *Revised O.E.D.*, is not “octopuses,” in fact, but a word you’ve probably never heard unless you speak Greek: “octoPODES.”

“Octopodes”? Surely “octopus” would do just as well for the plural as the singular—like “deer” or “moose.” To complicate matters further, in a demonstration of native recalcitrance, the American *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* lists all three as acceptable plural forms. And bulwark American publications like the *New York Times* deploy both “octopuses” and “octopi” regularly, though “octopuses” has reportedly been gaining ground over the past thirty years.

In summary, both are used today to indicate more than one octopus, neither word is properly Greek or Latin or incorrect, while the ultra-correct “octopodes” is used solely in accounts of its own disuse.



























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This essay was produced under the very particular auspices of a project by Shannon Ebner & Dexter Sinister in 2011.

It was researched and written by Angie Keefer in Hudson, NY; edited by Stuart Bailey & David Reinfurt in Los Angeles & New York; the eight parts individually spoken and recorded as audio files by Isla Leaver-Yap & Shannon Ebner in a specially-constructed breeze-black cabin at the Frieze Art Fair in London; then re-edited, stuck together, and played as a whole to a dedicated audience on the 31st floor of the Chrysler Building back in New York. The deliberately circuitous nature of this process explains some of the more wayward allusions in the text.

What follows is an extended, re-edited version of the original audio essay, currently archived at [www.thechryslerseries.com](http://www.thechryslerseries.com).

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