

## COMMUNIST HEADACHE



NOTES FOR POST-EXISTENCE : second series. no. 1

Communist Headache existed as a political magazine up until Autumn 1996. Five issues were published in this first series, under the title 'Notes for Working and Living'

volume 1 - anarchist / marxist theoretical diversions - copies @ £1-00  
volume 2 - postmodernism / animals / violence / media - copies @ £1-00  
volume 3 - middle class? / punk / crime / information - copies @ £1-00  
volume 4 - anarchist soap operas / debate / x-files / history - sold out  
volume 5 - texts on work / Bukowski / fiction / Processed World - sold out

By this time I felt I needed to renew my emphasis and develop some new ideas - plus the fact I broke my leg which meant I wanted to put a bit more love and 'creativity' into my printed work due to the fact that my other 'creative' endeavours had been curtailed (running, climbing,...).

To this end Autotoxicity arrived to examine cultural dynamics, class struggle, and the interactions between the two. Autotoxicity focused primarily on music culture because I felt it represented the most developed network of the aforementioned dynamics and interactions. Various pockets of reclaimed activity, autonomy, cultural critique, experimentation, networking and learning, etc were evident - I wanted to become part of this, to map out the contours when the pushes became shoves...

This is something you either agree or disagree with. if the latter is the case then you wouldn't enjoy Autotoxicity. But in request to letters from people who had followed Headache and were interested in Autotoxicity, then I felt it necessary to reprint some of the more 'political' work from Autotoxicity. These articles draw from marxism, situationism, and other threads on class theory developed in Communist Headache - but apply themselves to media applications and cultural processes. I acknowledge that there is a danger in this work becoming subsumed by the torrent of material pending from people who have done one of the many cheaply put together and highly recuperative 'cultural studies' courses - but i hope this material can stand on its own and against this flow. For instance my piece on situationist history deliberately documents the 'lost years' rather than romanticise and simplify certain information contours like 1968, debord, punk, etc... Due to technical difficulties it hasn't been possible to reprint a key document from Autotoxicity #3 called 'Travelling Innerspace' - this suggests a cultural crisis theory and method of development for journals such as Autotoxicity. Copies of this document are available for £1-00. Copies of Autotoxicity are £5-00 including postage - for this you get a full colour, hand bound, 100 page magazine full of pop music, fiction and delicious theory. Use the following address:

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For now we have....

Kafka (by Howard Slater)  
Real Life is Elsewhere (on the 70s situationist scene)  
TV Times (various shorts)  
Fragmenting the M1  
Silica  
Small Space Dynamics

from ATX 3  
from ATX 4  
from ATX 1-2  
from ATX 2  
from ATX 4  
from ATX 4



# **"... i may perhaps be permitted to say..." on kafka's aphorisms and short stories**

Maybe someone always has another agenda and you'll often find that if they refuse to hear you they may well know or suspect or believe that what you will say will not be to their liking and their liking could just well be to protect themselves, often to protect their ambition, their placing, their sense of authority. Maybe their refusing to hear you should not be read as your inferiority, which is the implied intention of their refusal, but as the power, the threat, that having previously overheard you, they fear the implications of what you will say, for of course you have to say it, and, knowing that it may be a matter of permission, you may well scream it.

In 1920, when Kafka sent his diaries to Milena Jesenska she received them with several pages torn out. These pages, the 'aphoristic' entries between 6 January and 29 February have only very recently been translated and issued in a revised edition of Kafka's short stories. These aphorisms are a scream Kafka-style. In them there are astonishing fragments that express not only Kafka's experiences of writing but also the subdued and subtly expressed communistic impulses that underlie much of his writing. The common interpretation of Kafka, the one I am trying to write myself out of, is that of a writer of religious parables who prefigured the move towards the bureaucratisation of society, a writer who spoke, albeit in a both an explicit and in a multi-layered form, of what is erroneously known as the human condition. The acceptance of such a condition is the acceptance of hopelessness and Kafka himself reveals this condition as being nothing other than a social construct. Yet if Kafka is still seen as a harbinger of an angst-ridden existentialism and if to a certain degree his reputation persists in this way then this is as much a by-product generated by the process of his popularisation. Existentialist chic was sold much like beatnik chic like situationist chic like Foucauldian chic. The problem with this selling is that a presentation of the surface, of the clichés extracted from those texts sets in as a barrier that filters-out what can lie behind. A barrier preventing relationships with texts. It is undeniable that the aura of gloomy misanthropy that has attached itself to Kafka is an unavoidable facet of his work, but the spaces of exploratory darkness that he offers up should not be read as an expression of irrevocable hopelessness nor as a means of giving vent to some uniquely idiosyncratic and asocial facets of Kafka's own character. They are an expression of social processes that are never faced up to. We call these social complexities 'depressing' and by this we mean that we have neither the strength, the energy, nor the courage to face up to these dark corners. But what's 'depressing' about finding out where this strength and energy has gone? Work, family paradigms, failures of communication, involuntary processes of identification, the eddying effects of an incomprehensible and, at times, arbitrary power which lead to a constricting guilt are all strong themes of Kafka's work, themes which at times seem to pervade the writer himself, taking him over to the degree that he becomes revelatory of the emotional life of capitalism.

Kafka's 1920 Aphorisms read like a cross between an ever-flexible preface to his short stories and some discarded and overlooked communist manifesto. Torn pages. Disgust. At the last crucial moment Kafka withholds from a more public statement as if he is an uncertain stutterer. Maybe a permission is needed that could ease his fear of jibing interlocutors ... but who or what could grant such permission? In answer to this question Kafka shows that such a concerned and protective authority is not only unforthcoming but non-existent. Similarly, the tearing out of the pages is itself indicative of the presence of the absence of communism. Kafka's fear of what the social has been constructed as, how it operates, his fear of the incommunicative cruelties it can contain, its lack of possible empathy is as central to his act of self-censorship as it is to the -disconnected starts of his writing. It's not so much that the world is not ready for what Kafka has to say as if he has somehow slipped through, genius-like, into a distant future but that it seems, moreover, never ready to hear such simple intimacies and thereafter be able to learn of itself by learning through someone else, or, as Kafka puts it: "listen to myself outside of myself". Yet authority is ever-present, patrolling the interior, laying out the borderlands and encouraging Kafka to seek a permission that is at least double-edged: a permission to speak against and a permission to speak at all. The former implies an oppressive authority that acts to proclaim, stifle and manipulate response. The latter, and here we get into Kafka's shadowing of communist theory, is the interiorisation of that authority... not just a socially-manufactured self-doubt leading to self-censorship but the perpetuation of an emotional equilibrium; the appearance of social constraints in what others, even comrades, will permit themselves to listen to. Protective positionings. Maybe this is the incursion of the social into the unconscious? The controlling facets existing beyond conscious-recognition that slip through unawares. Maybe the invisibility of such facets gives rise to the emplacing of religious concepts like the 'human condition'? Just as Marx barefacedly expresses the economic processes of capitalism so Kafka, not being concerned with the presentation of ideological positives, creates characters and personas that are an inconsistent 'mix', and, by these means, comes to directly express the actuality of these social processes and reactive compliances: "He has the feeling that merely by being alive he is blocking his own way. From this obstruction, again, he derives the proof that he is alive". Self-restraint is a form of social control that keeps everything at an ebb and this involves what is socially defined as on or off-limits, what is seen as apt subject matter in a given situation. Sometimes the smallest expression of frustration is deemed unproductive. A first written warning for swearing around the office may lead to an increased keenness to conform to the exigencies of production, to work ourselves, to retreat and walk knowingly into traps. It is experiences such as these that Kafka expresses time and time again. His articulation of this interiorised blockage,



the psychic control of guilt, the withholding of desire in a variety of instances and the incursion of societal norms is a crucial area of investigation for any movement towards social change, for it is partly these submerged factors, their incomprehensibility, that block revolutionary change; factors that could be collectively expressed as 'voluntary servitude' and which Kafka expresses as "obedience to some unknown law".

Kafka's story *In The Penal Colony* contains a strong expression of this voluntary servitude. In many respects the descriptions of the torture machinery could be read as a decoy, for when we discover that the condemned man's crime is not to have woken in the night to salute at his superior's closed door we see that the real torture, expressed by Kafka as an aside, and thereby inferred to be so common-place as to be ubiquitous, is for this man to have been discovered not in the thrall of voluntary servitude, not oppressing himself. His duty is to conform and to conform without supervision or without the exercise of a conspicuous force. Whilst it may seem that the apparent slightness of the transgression doesn't merit such a punishment and that this may lead the reader to presume the presence of a dictatorial state or a Last Judgement-like punishment, Kafka is careful to include within the narrative that a more lenient Commandant is coming to the fore who is to reject the torture machinery as inhumane. In this way the passage towards democracy is hinted at, and, at the same time, some kind of passage from sadism to masochism. If the torture machinery is no longer needed then does this imply that voluntary servitude is so widespread, that compliance has been won, that self-exploitation is by far more productive? That the officer in control of the torture machinery is prepared to be its last victim, that he almost wants to meld with the cogs and harrow is an indication of a reflex-like obedience, a desire for self-sacrifice. Having 'Honour Thy Superiors' transcribed into his flesh would not be a punishment for him but a confirmation of his beliefs, an apt epitaph to a pliability that has seen him renounce himself. Punishment in this sense is a reward.

For Kafka, the setting of stories at a place of work is crucial for his depiction of the submissiveness of voluntary servitude. In *Blumfeld*, we see a lonely middle-manager being tormented by 'bouncing balls' in his flat before we later discover that he is also tormented at work by frivolous, work-shy assistants and a superior who has little respect for him. Insecurities cut through all aspects of his life. Being 'underestimated' means that other colleagues are keen to compete with and outshine him. This only means that Blumfeld re-doubles his efforts to prove himself. He is overly-compliant, feeling that the office would collapse without him and fearing such an outcome as if he were the main recipient of the profits. He manages the work-shy assistants with a keen surveillance, clamps down on unproductive sexualised play and prohibits one of the assistants who has shown a desire to want to sweep the office. Yet Blumfeld is as obsessed by the assistants as he is by the bouncing balls. He fears both with an anxiousness that proves a fertile ground for voluntary servitude: he reports for work half an hour early "not from ambition or an exaggerated sense of duty but simply from a certain feeling of decency." This comment is ambiguous in the extreme and through it we see how Kafka gamefully leads the reader towards the wrong conclusion by voicing Blumfeld's reasons for his submissiveness as a feeling of decency. Kafka is exhorting us to look at all three reasons given and between 'ambition', 'duty' and 'decency' we see a whole interiorisation of social responsibility being tied into Blumfeld's own feelings of worthiness. He must be wanted, he must be needed and unable to find any sense of respect anywhere other than at work Kafka suggests that the bouncing balls can be read as an expression of that playful and non-conformist part of Blumfeld that exists submerged within him. The bouncing balls are the creation of his desiring-energy, the possible-pull of his imagination made tangible and in this way the depths of Blumfeld's voluntary servitude lies in the fact that, unable to countenance this aspect of himself, he desperately tries to give the balls away to local children. The conscious slave who dare not express his consciousness.

Such feelings of anxiety centred around work are expressed more extremely in *The Transformation*. Here the narrator wakes up, discovers himself to have been transformed into a beetle and almost immediately begins to worry about being late for work. Though this has the effect of naturalising Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into an insect it is, as with Blumfeld, suggestive of the colonization of the individual by the world of work and the demands of profit. There is nothing else to think about, even after sleep and dreams, even after being transformed into a beetle the pre-occupation is with getting to work and adjusting once again to the routine. On a humorous level this story heightens the ridiculousness of the stories we come up with when phoning-in sick, yet even so this transformation, this becoming other than what he ought to be, seems initially to be desired by Gregor. As horrible as it may be to become a beetle Gregor seems to take time, seems to relish getting familiar with his new body, exploring his new self and discovering anew his mundane environment. In many ways he has created himself. The terror of his transformation is communicated in terms of what other people think. Their lack of sympathy and understanding. The social pressures that are exerted. The almost instant visit to his home by the Chief-Clerk reinforces these means of guilt-inducement, connecting it to his family on whose behalf, we are informed, Gregor has held the job down. The Chief-Clerk almost becomes an additional member of the family, an extended disciplinary function, and through these means Kafka expresses Gregor's terror as a fear of the economic implications reaching-in and as a horror of the nuanced similitude between work and familial structures. Gregor just doesn't want to go to work and perhaps he has already incurred the doubts of the Chief-Clerk, perhaps his servitude is not so voluntary, perhaps he has transformed himself into a beetle because he is sickened by an existence in which "the slightest lapse immediately gave rise to the gravest suspicion", where freedom disappears behind power-plays of a second's duration. As with Blumfeld, the sense of being doubted by an employer leads to insecurities and if this is not enough to launch a re-invigorated voluntary servitude then the threat from the Chief-Clerk to Gregor that he is not indispensable can surely perform the trick. In both these stories a sense of 'self-worth', a reason for living, is shown to have been grafted onto the needs and requirements of capitalism, so that the needs of capitalism and the desires of individuals co-incide. Reward is punishment.

In *The Great Wall of China*, Kafka appears to be expanding such scenarios out onto a larger social framework. In this story, work on building the 'great wall' is a continual task, one that involves all citizens and is documented in ancient literature. The never-ending and mythic proportions of the building of the wall is central to the functioning of this society as are the apparent reasons for its construction: to keep rampaging nomads out of China. It is through this task that control and submissiveness is instantiated. That the system of construction is described as 'piecemeal' serves the purpose of preserving the fitness of the workforce, maintaining their interest, adding momentum to their belief, but also of providing opportunities to celebrate the erection of sections in social rituals that reinvigorate the workers. Furthermore, the 'piecemeal' construction methods have been decreed by the high command and the narrator's creeping doubts as to this choice create a situation in the story where the narrator suggests that the "command willed something inexpedient". The upshot of this is that there is the slow awareness in the reader that the wall, like waged-labour, functions to dominate the citizens, occupying not only their time



but their consciousness to such a degree that they cannot see beyond it. Within the story Kafka depicts an array of devices that go towards expanding our understanding of voluntary servitude: the piecemeal construction itself, the fragmentation, wards off the sense of continuity that could lead to discovery. The wall stops. There are gaps and so there are gaps in the knowledge of the citizens. Their doubts are never pursued toward fragile conclusions but deflected away from action. It creates what Kafka calls, in the 1920 Aphorisms, formal necessity; a kind of model of psychic terrain, a structure of possible thought grafted onto the citizens by means of the rules and procedures of work. The stopping and starting, the return to work each day creates a kind of repetition-compulsion, an addiction that is articulated as a "permanent sense of personal responsibility". Elsewhere in the story there is the underpinning of literature and of teaching: the wall's purpose is "commonly taught and recognised", the one book mentioned describes how the wall must serve as the foundation for the erection of a Tower of Babel, and so this work, this construction, must be prolonged for all eternity, an ideological task that can never be finished. Work replicates itself, a function without outcome. A labour of security that secures the status quo. From the point of view of voluntary servitude this creates a situation of continual deferment, of unfulfillable hopes and of "universal uncertainty" which in turn lay the citizens open to accepting and adopting the desires of the high command: "it was really only in spelling out the decrees of the high command that we came to understand ourselves". More complicatedly there is the control of the country's history by the slow dissemination of 'belated events': not only does the wall have no obviously verifiable purpose but the events of the country's history are related to the subjects as if they had only just happened. There is no present. Thus Kafka articulates the role of tradition, of induced faith in the doctored stories of the past as a necessary component of voluntary servitude. He points towards the role of belief systems, the pliancy of a people who are happy to be ruled and spoken for by those they have never encountered and by arbitrarily interpreted laws they cannot understand.

Yet the building of the wall is also described as a "great communal task" and this gives rise to the paradoxical effect that one of the roots of this voluntary servitude, as we have seen with Gregor Samsa, may lie in people's reluctance to transgress the boundaries of the group: colleagues, friends, party, nation, humanity. This may often be expressed as a sense of respect towards others, not wanting to let others down, to be seen to be pulling your weight. A communistic impulse maybe, but one that is complexified, perverted even, by the lack of clear insights into what underpins and tangentially informs a particular group: profit, power, cultural capital, reputation. Voluntary servitude is linked into this sense of belonging and the fear of being expelled from a group to which a person's sense of self worth depends, but it is also intimately related to a tributary operation of power that is replete throughout Kafka. Paranoia. This seems to hinge on the fear of something that may not exist, that may not actually happen, that may never have been uttered. It depends on the imagined sense of what motivates the group. An imaginary factor that functions as real: an implied threat from a manager, a reprimand from a comrade, the tone of a parental scolding, the closed door of a meeting, all create a sense of expectancy and doubt, a necessary space onto which is imprinted a future obedience to command. To avoid such threats and the sense of an anticipatory suspension into which uncomfortable fear and anxiety pour what happens is that you get in there first, become submissive and eradicate the threat at the same time, it seems, that you abdicate a part of yourself. A part very much connected to the imaginative capacities. Voluntary servitude then becomes a means of avoiding anxiety and awkward problems, of seeking self-protective and simplified niches within the limits of the group. Conforming to what it is imagined is expected and obeying before the command is even uttered. That this servitude's key area of operation seems to be the paradoxical and ever-obfuscating line between the self and the group is continually expressed by Kafka in those peculiar 'mixes' of his narration-personas. In stories like *Investigations of a Dog* the narrator is obedient and compliant at the same time that his first steps towards a questioning of authority are so tentative as to contain a respect for that authority. This points towards the themes of discovery and investigation that are always occurring within Kafka's writing: "Why do I not as the others do, live in harmony with my people and quietly accept whatever disturbs the harmony; ignore it as a small error in the great account, and keep my eyes ever fixed on what binds us happily together; not on what draws us... out of the circle of our kin". The investigations, the pursuit of clues and ways-out are used within the stories as a way of furthering that sense of disquiet that is, in Kafka's writing, the first necessary step towards loosening the hold of voluntary servitude: constant questioning makes small fissures appear. Why is the narrator-dog drawn towards the music of the 'company of dogs' at the same time that he feels impelled to call a halt to their making an 'exhibition of themselves'? Here, the sense of contradiction, paradox and inconsistency that Kafka draws us towards is itself a part of the over-riding discomfort that pervades his writing. In this way he puts into full view the ever-present techniques of conditioning by means of paranoia and guilt, at the same time that, in terms of the group, the investigations can be seen to demarcate the conformity of voluntary servitude and self-complacency from burgeoning instances of self-orientation and self-creation. Insight may not be clear, pure and dogmatic but it marks the beginnings of a critical insight all the same.

The researches of the narrator-dog point us in many directions at once. They point us towards Kafka's fascination with childhood and the social-meaning of what is to be suddenly declared an 'adult'. For Kafka, verbally battered by a father who saw his writing as immature and irresponsible, childhood seems to be a vital period of life that one should retain contact with: "I have preserved my childish nature". The childish part of ourselves is commonly repressed by professionalisms, attemptedly eradicated at educational establishments and in most cases permanently submerged at the stage of parenthood. For Kafka this 'free-state' of childhood is at turns expressed by many of his characters who display a rural and at turns archaic sense of honesty. But in the story *Josephine, The Songstress* there are indications that he is saddened by the too-swift passage to an adulthood that preserves none of the unconditioned impulses and insubordinate experimentations of childhood: "We have no youth, we are grown up all at once, and we stay grown up for too long; as a result a certain weariness and hopelessness runs through the nature of our people". By means of term 'responsibilities' this 'adulthood' is another factor through which voluntary servitude is instilled, it is the way that people come to mildly accept the demands of a society through seeing its limitations and contradictions as insurmountable and unchangeable. Optimism and passion are exchanged for a resigned and bounded fulfillment. In many ways 'becoming an adult' is the most pervasive and inter-linked of identities that are on offer, one which draws us into a deeper conformity that severs all ties with imaginative residues and draws-back those initially unsteady oppositional thoughts into a firmer conventionality through their being characterised as 'childish', 'self indulgent' and 'pretentious'. Changes occur in adolescence and then they are supposed to cease.

This quietism and stagnation is one of the core responses that society requires and it is explicitly voiced by Kafka in the 1920 Aphorisms when he declares that "the limitation of awareness is a social requirement". By working to delimit inquisitiveness, society creates an empty terrain upon which can be built the conditions of complacency which generate, at the same time, the obediences of voluntary servitude. Without their researches, quiet observations and insistent questions Kafka's

characters would become dependent upon others who have the recognised authority to speak. Admonishment and obfuscation are common responses and in the face of such 'answers' there is very little to say. Yet instead of remaining silent Kafka's characters display an attitude of resistance, one that doesn't accept the traditions and irrevocable 'human conditions' but pursues its lines of questioning in the direction of limits that come to apply pressure on the accepted behaviours and protective myths that his fictional societies depict. But Kafka shows that what is crucial about these investigations, this fledgling critical attitude, is that they are linked to "the cares that we actually have to struggle with each day". They are common questions which not only have a child-like innocence and persistence, but are pursued independently from academic institutions and infer the presence of an auto-didacticism. Like the Village Schoolmaster's treatise on the Giant Mole these researches come from unexpected quarters and benefit from their lack of prior conditioning into the forms of scholarship and by the way they do not conform to what are considered suitable areas of subject matter. His characters do not "proceed in the proper scientific manner". Kafka often pokes fun at the pomposities of academia and the absurdity of intellectual competitiveness to the degree that a crucial aspect of his writing style is the way he parodies the restrictive and grandiose formalities of academic language. He goes as far as to ridicule such practices in his story *Report to The Academy* where he has an ape deliver a lecture to a gathering of auspicious professors. What seems crucial to Kafka is that the academics "can't fling themselves straight into the arms of each new discovery", they can't be driven by curiosity and desire but are shackled to their "responsibility towards scientific knowledge, towards posterity". They too are in the thrall of voluntary servitude, self-concededly responding to traditional agendas and professional expectations and it is in this way that we can see that Kafka's valorisation of inquisitiveness is not simply about being 'childish', nor is it simply translatable into conventional terms of 'knowledge' or 'consciousness-raising', but is a matter of sincerity of intention as it tends towards autonomy. The questionings create an independence at the same time that they create an awareness of those characteristics that limit the full extent of that independence, and what Kafka seems to be suggesting is that these 'bad' elements of ourselves should not be dogmatically suppressed but faced up to and investigated so that we can, in the words of Foucault, "grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system". This is borne out in Kafka's stories when he shows that an integral component of these endeavours is the questioning of our own assurances, a certain polemic against the self which implies a courage "to know what it is that one can know". This level of self-awareness has various ramifications but foremost among them is the necessary dissolution of the self that this entails and by extension the appearance of others. In this way the narrator of *Investigations of a Dog* points towards the underlying communistic impulse of the investigations when he states that "countless observations and essays and opinions on this subject have appeared, it has become a science of such vast dimensions that it is not only beyond the grasp of any single scholar but beyond all scholars collectively, it is a burden too weighty for all save the entire dog community...".

In Kafka's writing other people are always present. His Diaries show him to be in continual communication to the extent that he has an inability to cut-out and filter what goes on around him. It creates imaginary feedback. This maladjustment is immature and paranoid to the extent that the normality of voluntary servitude requires boundaries and limits to possible communication: options and encounters are to be carefully controlled and researches must have a goal. In the 1920 Aphorisms, Kafka foregoes his usual craftedness and expresses these feelings of intense openness: "A piece like a segment has been cut out of the back of his head. The sun looks in and the whole world with it". This is tantamount to an expression of a direct and unacknowledged communism that knows that without empathy, co-experience and feeling for others then there can be no societal change. Again, like his writing-style, Kafka seems to pare things back to a point where they seem to revel in a kind of obviousness. Kafka expresses a variant of communism that seem to emanate from that unformed and often religiously heretical terrain before the arrival of the working class and through it we are being moved, not back to a pure state but towards an understanding of communism as one that is present in the smallest gestures. Gestures that are ordinarily obscured by theoretical exegesis and a rhetoric blinded by self-conceit. Somewhere along the line, that communism is about having care and forethought for others has been lost. The desire to change things for the better involves a consciousness of everyone: "sometimes in his arrogance he has more anxiety for the world than for himself". Anxiety as all-embracing. This simple yet outrageous diary entry reveals the fact that desire is diffuse, aims everywhere at once and is unable to cease. It is prepared to go beyond self-interest to the point of embracing the potential damages that can ensue from such deferments of the 'self' that Kafka describes. These expressions of the 'no-self', of 'ego-fragmentation', are seen as one of the elements of 'psychotic experience', and rather than appear abnormal Kafka is careful to qualify his entry by using the word "arrogance". Here we return to voluntary servitude. Kafka must qualify his entry as arrogant so as to enable him to shroud the statement with the trappings of a 'personal' defect. If the anxiety which is felt for others is not arrogant then it is directly transgressive of voluntary servitude because it breaches the boundary between the self and others. So not only is Kafka's "arrogance" an aspect of the 'blockage', an expression of the emotional life of capitalism urging him to cease his reflections, it is a direct expression of the taboo against seeing beyond yourself towards points of contact with others. It is arrogant, almost god-like to have such feelings, it is not what you are taught, it is not what you inherit. Communism is insane. In the story *The Village Schoolmaster*, this selflessness of desire is expressed by the narrator who wishes to draw attention to the village schoolmaster's treatise on the giant mole by means of his own researches. In his efforts to defend the Schoolmaster's honesty, the aim of his own work, he is prepared, in the introduction to his own text, to "disclaim positively any major part in the affair" and to expunge his own name from the text. This will to anonymity, the withdrawal from competitiveness, is a further indication of the dissolution of the self and the presence of communistic impulses in Kafka's writing.

Even when a Kafka character is completely alone, as is the creature-narrator of *The Burrow*, even when one could charge Kafka with self-indulgence and self-centredness the direct effect of the story is about this creature's imaginings of those around him. He feels and listens for presences around the burrow and, even though these are considered threatening, this in itself points towards the fear of other people that capitalism is constantly foisting onto its subjects. Again, connection and contact must be sanctioned: work mates, wife, kith and kin. There have to be safety-nets to avoid one from straying because contact is a risk that doesn't have to be taken. Like researches they must be made up to a limit, withdrawn from and their conclusions feared. Something could happen. This risk of exposure seems to relate to the possible self-transformations that can be contracted when one is open to contact with others. In the 1920 Aphorisms Kafka notes how he imagines himself inside a painting looking at boats from the riverside. After noting that "the convivial spirit was not confined to the separate boats", another example of diffuse desire, he adds that were he to feel a part of this conviviality "his whole origin, upbringing, physical development would have had to be different". Rather than interpret this thought as an articulation of Kafka's 'alienation' and thereby reduce it to the self-centredness of capitalist subjectivity, it is more fruitful to see this will to change in connection with Kafka as a beetle, a mole, a dog and thereby as a further expression of his 'becoming-other'. The cessation of individualistic perspectives. This is borne out when later in the same entry Kafka recognises that what keeps him distant from



the holidaymakers are not feelings that belong to him exclusively and exclude him permanently but are feelings that each of the people he surveys can also share in. Emotions can be transformed into characters. Subjective dissolution creates the space to contain crowds: "He lives in the Dispersion. His elements, a freely roaming horde, wander about the world". This subjective dynamism is explosive to the point that if "there are different subjects in one and the same man (sic)" then the distinction between the self and others is not as rigidified as is commonly believed. It becomes possible to perceive the differences as either nuances of time and context and/or socially constructed debilitations and the more multiple a person can be then the greater are their points of contact with others. Self-creation can therefore be seen not as an individualistic pursuit but as a means of accessing greater degrees of co-experience and identification with others, increasing empathy and solidarity to the detriment of the self-enclosure, the solipsism required by voluntary servitude.

With this in mind it is probable that Kafka's most potent contribution to resisting voluntary servitude is that which is tied into his very process as a writer: that by 'becoming-other' he produces himself. If we adopt Foucault's paralleling of the concept of voluntary servitude as "a salvation-orientated operation in a relationship of obedience to someone", we see that what is required is the subjects remaining static long enough to establish the obedience coupled to the mutual agreement of the goal of that salvation. This will forever remain the case if neither party "produce themselves" and thereby create a friction within the relationship of obedience and a doubt as to the efficacy of the goal. The processes of writing, playing and enacting where the writer experiments with emotions, carries out investigations and thereby invents himself and others, is one which is intimately tied to social change. Writing is one of its pre-suppositions, a shared textual space where permission need not be requested, where authority can devolve and from where confidence can grow. Even though Kafka confesses that he has "no conception of freedom", he can at least conceive of its absence and from the tension that this creates there emanates imaginative capacities, auto-productions, capable of depicting and resisting voluntary servitude. Kafka's is a practice of freedom, an attempt to write himself out of oppression often by coming to understand the extent to which he oppresses himself. This endeavour does not need to declare itself communist or socialist. Such a declaration would limit his explorations into the indiscernible operations of power and direct him towards the authoritative and overly consistent realm of ready-made answers. The dogmatic do not know that they are oppressed but neither do they run the risk of exposing themselves. For Kafka this sense of vulnerability is crucial to the charge of his writing, for surrounded by a "silence on the really important matters" and weighed down by a "destructive indifference" from his fellows, Kafka has no means of measuring the acceptability or relevance of what he says. At the same time that he feels connected he also senses that there is a lack of vital, emotionally charged communication which in itself points to the widespread existence of a voluntary servitude that acts censoriously to maintain the divide between the public and the private: "If only dogs did not know infinitely more than they will admit, more than they will admit to themselves". Inner quiet is instilled. But despite this, as if with trust in the communal impulse, Kafka feels that the silence must be broken and that "speaking out is still worth the attempt, since the permitted way of life is no life [you wish] to lead". A life free from such risks is the protected-life of voluntary servitude, a life fortified against experience and change and one in which desire constantly recedes from grasp to be transmuted into obligations and a duty to serve. Desire has no need of permission. By creating unfamiliar perspectives and virtual communities from where there is a possibility to produce ourselves and the social, writing shows itself as always containing the potential to transmit resistance: "The concentrated otherness of the person writing let's oneself be made into his counterpart [and] when one is brought back to oneself one remains behind in one's own being, which has been newly discovered, newly shaken up and seen for a moment from the distance". Alienation or defamiliarisation? No longer oneself, Kafka shows the individual to be nothing other than a collection of singularities. A renewed communist perspective...

Text by Howard Slater / break/flow

#### Note

All Kafka quotes from "The Transformation and Other Stories", Penguin 1992; "The Great Wall of China and Other Stories", Penguin 1991. Supplemented by reference to Kafka's Diaries 1910-1923 ed. Max Brod, Penguin 1964. Foucault appeared out of "The Politics of Truth", ed. Sylvere Lotringer, Semiotext(e) 1997. Full version of text includes the following appendices: Fasting Artist; Minor Literature; Auditory Hyperanaesthesia; Light Of Alienation; Wanker/Writer...



# real life is elsewhere

This essay marks the start of three pieces designed to question and possibly shrug off some of our acquired political armour. Various people have suggested we do this but of course we aren't likely to listen! Instead of jettisoning a final pod of political barbed wires we are taking an active approach and presenting three text that map out the problems of the political terrain. Firstly we present the results of our 'research' into 1970's situationism. This is split between the 70's American scene and the late 70's UK scene - the former characterised (infected?) by an intensely nihilistic self-critical obsession, the latter characterised by the encroachment of punk rock and the movement of the war with/on culture onto the next battlefield. The second piece is our continued pulp novel that draws on and exaggerates the tendencies and characterisations in the ultra left and anarchist political scenes. Finally we present a critique of our own histories. In the future we hope to be able to publish a larger and more concerted text tentatively entitled 'Evacuate the leftist Bunker'. Watch this space...

## **one: Counter Spectacular Boredom - No Fun(k) and USA 70's Situationism>>**

If we consider situationism as somehow detachable - being able to strip away its dealings with marxism, the workers movement, production(ism) - then we can isolate its shifting relationship to culture. It is from this perspective that the large output of American materials in the 1970's can be viewed. This phenomenon has been dealt with elsewhere by more astute marxist theorists following the re-re-publication of Ken Knabbs material (Knabb was a major player in both form AND content in the US 70's scene - ie he published a lot and a lot of it was indicative of the time) and its subsequent reviews in the contemporary left / anarchist presses. Though I want to take a different route to the one taken by reviewers such as Aufheben (avoidance, dismissal of cultural issues) it is useful to co-opt their terminology: the time slice of the 70's denote "second wave situationists" (see eg Isaac Cronin's 'Report No.1' for on the spot embrace of this term) whilst their activity can be broadly summed up as "self analysing".

There was (and is) a tension when unpicking the situationist relationship to culture. A tension that seemed to split the groupschules and remains today in the battle to recuperate situationism (and of course in the battle to recuperate the 'radical aspects' of the theory of recuperation). The critique of the militant and revolutionary activity was grounded within the tension encapsulating their relationship to culture, and it is annoying to see this valid critique conveniently extracted from this tension when discussed in the modern period (the Aufheben article in #6 seems to fall somewhat between the two poles of avoidance and full blown analysis). If situationism suggested (in part) a search for authentic activity, a degree of experimentation and play whilst keeping a grounding in revolutionary tradition (both deadweight and useful), then it is difficult to see where the actualisation of this came about in practice - apart from the obvious expulsions for those accused of dabbling TO FAR into culture. In the light of the 'first wave' of situationists, the US activist Ben Morea springs to mind as an almost prototype figure for punk speed nihilism - he didn't last long but fortunately his trajectory is recorded in the book "Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker". So situationism became obsessed with exploring all supposed undigested chunks of culture (authentic activity) as either fuel or product within the all encompassing spectacular cultural machine... and what it turned to primarily was a ballistic critique of leftist critique. Is this a clue here? Did the situationists begin to see their own chosen practice of critique as some kind of pseudo-authentic activity - an accomodatable hobby in the wider scheme of things? The answer is probably yes if one considers the output of the second wave of situationism in the USA - it is underpinned by an obsession with publicly denigrating previous texts, publicly denigrating ones own complicity within certain texts, then publicly analysing the minutiae of ones own life in terms of thoughts, texts prepared but never written (an idea for a text appears but what appears in text is a documentation of the authors mental turmoil when wrestling with the actual possibility of publishing the text which quite often doesn't appear), hobbies, relationships, etc etc. Whether this 'wealth' of poverty stricken material was ever consumed as part of the staple diet of those concerned with reading situationist paraphernalia is something open to question, though the contemporary US anarchist scene continues to show both an incredible detachment from class theory and a bizarre inclination towards part self-analytical activities like tenuous debates on aspects of morality. Certainly I didn't glean much 'pleasure' (authentic, mediated, or otherwise) when I researched these texts, and I can't think of any good reason why anybody should read them apart from as some tragedy or discipline exercise. Trainspotters are best sticking with Simon Ford's source book "The Realization and Suppression of the Situationist International" which covers the period 1972-1992.

There are actually five main documents that existed as part of a broader publishing assault - attempting to bring forward situationist ideas as well as the usual barrage of insult slinging to the left. Unfortunately the publication of these texts triggered the self analytical movement:

1. Situationist International - review of the American section of the S.I. - is actually a first generation article coming out in 1969 (and recently republished). The author (members) are listed as Chasse, Elwell, Horelick, and Verlaan. True to the form yet to come it carries long critiques of the contemporary leftist thinkers such as Baran, Sweezy, Mandel, Marcuse, McLuhan. Its theoretical contribution to the scene is a fairly confident espousal of the SI developed theory parcelling up Marxism, the spectacle, Cardanist bureaucratic theory and a solution in direct democracy. Gleeful commentaries abound about the 1968 scene in France and the historic occasion of the American section gaining acceptance into the SI. It finishes with a convenient A-Z of who's who in the world of contemporary leftist recuperation. The group split following its expulsion from the



rapidly downsizing SI, some of the members working closer with Ben Morea - the cause of the expulsion - while Horelick went on to publish...

2. *Diversion* published in 1973 by Horelick. Not got an actual copy of this but Ford's good book informs us that it ran to 56 pages and carried the style of *Internationale situationniste* and a content that reflected the internal contradictions and schisms infectious at the time. Horelick followed this almost immediately with a self-critique called 'Beyond the crisis of abstraction and the abstract break with the crisis: the SI'. What I do have is a critique of *Diversion* published in 1974 which probably (in preparation) precipitated Horelick's self-critique. Thus,

2.1 *Skirmishes With an Untimely Man* by Chris Shutes and Isaac Cronin (like an episode of the X-files, remember these names). This 10 page document is about as petty as you can get and includes a critique of Horelick's aforementioned self-critique.

3. Contradiction existed as one of the earliest 'second wave' groups along with Box 1044, *Create Situations* and the Council for the Eruption of the Marvellous (CEM) - we are talking about the period 1970-72 here. Knabb was part involved so original material right down to the smallest flyer never fails to go out of print - though a thorough political journal never really surfaced. However, it was these groups that spawned Knabb's obsession with self-analysis, so it is a useful starting point for the third trajectory of publications, mostly of which are Knabb's own:

3.1 *Remarks on Contradiction and its Failure* by Knabb (1973) combines Knabb's analysis of his own past with his analyses of the hippy movement which one detects he was drawn towards. From the last page of the 14 we have "Suffice it to say, for now, that if it is indisputable that the practice of theory is individually therapeutic, it seems to me equally true that an assault on one's own character is socially strategic, a practical contribution to the international revolutionary movement. The character of the pro-situ is objectively reinforced by the spectacle of his opposition to the spectacle (which character, of course, is most evidenced by his inability to recognise its existence, other than as a "banality", until excessive symptoms, perhaps visibly inhibiting his social practice, force his attention there). At the opposite pole, all the lucidity of an Artaud, who attacks his character in isolation, does not prevent the "external" commodity spectacle he disdainfully brushes aside from re-appearing in his internal world as the fantasy of being possessed by alien, malignant beings. Like a revolution in a small country, the person who breaks a block, a routine, or a fetish must advance aggressively to discover or incite radical allies outside, or lose what he has gained and fall victim to his own internal Thermidor. The dissolution of character and the dissolution of the spectacle are two movements which imply and require each other."

3.2 Knabb followed up this frightening threat with *Double Reflection*, a 16 page text published in 1974. Best described as a theory of theorising under the guise of 'practical-critical activity', this text does little towards offering a light at the end of the tunnel. One detects that the absolute lack of practical activity (as we may understand it in marxist terms) encourages this pseudo practical activity of retheorising the theory that prefaces a practical activity - but obviously practical activity is now conveniently reduced to piling up more theory. Quoting again: "The negative rush is concentrated sequential critical activity engendering a more or less continuous orgasmic rupture of the spectacle effect. In the negative rush (rush being understood in the drug sense as an almost unstoppable exhilaration) a sort of domino effect of ideological unblocking occurs; the destruction of one illusion leads one to examine others more closely; the undertaking of a practical project suggests others which correct, reinforce, or expand it; idea follows idea in such rapid succession that the theorist is taken over, possessed, like a medium transmitting the historical movement's own oracle back to itself; the complexity of the world becomes tangible, transparent; he sees the points of historical choice. As he breaks out of the ordinary passivity and begins to move theoretically at the dizzying pace of events, he is swept off his feet like the masses are at the insurrectional moment...". Quite what drug rush and unblocking process Knabb is on is difficult to ascertain. Certainly something becomes unblocked because more texts begin to pile up, particularly:

3.3 *Bureau Of Public Secrets #1* - 40 pages - 1976. This was Knabb's attempt at a more general journal that moves away from the intense zone of sniping that characterised the previous 5 years. Unfortunately the other bad elements are carried across: Knabb develops his sense of pre-X-files narrative and mystery plot with the opening salvo: "The second proletarian assault on class society has entered its second phase", which matches his references to aliens in the previous publication. Any such development of the phrase is soon diminished and the pamphlet finishes with Knabb's tentative notes of the (of course) negativity of all culture rounding off with a conversation with himself regarding the burning of all his acquired cultural artefacts (books, etc). This publication was noteworthy in that it drew reference to cultural dynamics of the time, and it did so beyond the bland negativity that forms part of the pro-situ armour. But Knabb's musings on music are almost apologetic in tone, contrasting the UK scene a year later and the impending outbreak of punk rock (see next section).

The crucial factor in the self-analytical flavour of the pamphlet seems to lie as much with the Daniel Denevert figure as with anything else. This person formed part of the Centre For Research on the Social Question, a French outfit that specialised in self-critical activity for fatigued situationist followers. Other tangential material can be mentioned here: 'Revolutionary Theory for Beginners' - a 1978 publication from key U.K. 'activist' Nick Brandt (BM Combustion) which just about takes the separated sphere of detached debate to its absolute limit. Also Knabb's colleagues translating this new wave of French material included Dan Hammer (a low-key key figure) and Robert Cooperstein - the latter going on to publish the interesting 'The Crisis of the Gross National Spectacle' in 1976.

4. *Point Blank* is the key document that creates all the fuss in the milieu, coming out in 1972 and stretching to 100 pages. It has the audacity to label itself as "contributions towards a situationist revolution", and so leaves itself open to attack from proper situationists who wouldn't dream of putting together such a pamphlet. Unfortunately most of its contributors: Chris Shutes, David Jacobs, Christopher Winks, fall victim to the same process and spend the next few years regretting the publication of the magazine.

But what's inside? It actually isn't too bad, using the form and content of the developing situ theory and applying it closely to the authors' observations and experiences of the American society (ie they experienced the student life, and observed the working life - sound familiar?). The booklet is introduced through the standard winding summary of the immediately

preceeding period - Paris 68 / Italy 69 / cooled down cold war - using the standard situationist counter punch technique (throw a jack-in-the-box into the leftist boxing arena) and a hovering retreat to blame it all on the power of the spectacular commodity. Again a fascination with the politically fascinated left is obvious. A longer piece goes on to twist a dialectic between economic crisis theory and the intensive development of the commodity dynamic (something we have tried to do?) but there remains the ever present refusal to touch upon the real passions and experiences of trying to reclaim and explore cultural activity. By the time passion and experience is discussed it is way too late as the only passion and experience to draw from is that gained from intensive involvement in the microscopic situationist milieu. An essay called 'Storms of Youth' considers culture via the immediacy with which it connects itself with an overt leftist political agenda - then it is conveniently pigeon holed as recuperative etc etc. Culture as an attempt for experience is dealt with only briefly: "The revolt of youth cannot be discussed solely in terms of the New Left, however - it was not purely a "political" phenomenon. The personal transformation which was attempted on a political level by groups like Weathermen was mirrored culturally by the proliferation of Bohemian life-styles among the young. In a sense, this "counter-culture" was more radical than the new left ever was, because from the beginning it attempted to define itself in opposition to politics and sought to create an alternative to a society based on power. The appeal of the counter-culture lay in its apparent rejection of the attributes of bourgeois society; those who dropped out did so with the intention of creating something out of their lives. Yet, like the New Left, the counter-culture did not pose an authentic opposition to capitalism - far from signalling a radical transformation of all values, it remained subservient to the existing values, being merely a hip parody of the dominant spectacle. In its rituals and its "alternate" institutions, the counter-culture reproduced the hierarchy and the commodity relations of bourgeois society. Its festivals and rock concerts were nothing more than mass displays of passivity; its businesses were only modern rivals to conventional firms". As a critique of the (lack of) cultural dynamics then one would have to take the above as adequate, accepting the pseudo-transformative powers of something that remained, at heart, as part of the continuing circus of passivity. But we would suggest that things were about to change, with the transformative powers turning in on themselves and examining the (im)possibility of transforming through passivity, eventually leading to anti-passive cultural activities that still maintained a variety of transformative powers (eg electronic 'music'). The quest for authentic experience has created its own dynamic - whilst situationist theory seems willing and formulaic in its blanket dismissal of culture, even though it trades heavily on an understanding of such cultural dynamics. From this the various splits in recuperating situationist theory can be better understood; while the US self-analytical activists eschewed cultural enquiry in favour of navel-gazing the connection to the late 70's autonomist / zerowork movement was never forged - the return of cultural enquiry only prompted an academic industry boom in the 90's with the establishing of 'cult studs' departments.

The remainder of Point Blank is pretty uninspiring, with the standard rebuke towards the other existing situationist grouplets of the time: 'Contradiction' and 'Create Situations'. But there is an ironic chapter mocking the developing 'mens groups' where the participants would flagellate themselves for their male chauvinism. The twist in the tale is that the authors went on to develop their own flagellation procedures for their situationist chauvinism, which we can now list:

4.1 Shutes got in the first blow and embarked upon a long and lonely publishing career with 'Disinterest Compounded Daily', a 27 page document published in 1974 criticising his own involvement within Point Blank and mutated situationism in general. This sees the point of departure enacted through character self-assassination, and a reference to a possible ally and guiding light in Ken Knabb. Shutes also adds many mumblings about a "maintenance of self interest" in "daily life" trapping himself between the rock and the stone and finding allies with such as Isaac Cronin (see above and below)

4.2 Jacobs and Winks added their voice to the proceedings with 'At Dusk - the Situationist Movement in Historical Perspective' coming out in 1975 and stretching to 97 pages. This is widely considered as the key document in developing the form of intra-situationist critique. I'll leave you to hunt it down.

4.3 Shutes managed to exit the 70's with something that was actually worth reading and a million miles away from the self-critical milieu he had absorbed himself in. '2 Local Chapters in the Spectacle of Decomposition' is a 21page pamphlet from 1979 examining the cultural tendencies evident as the 70's began to fizzle out. Two sections are included: a critique of the People Temple and of the heavily commodified gay movement, the same tactic of using an anti-dialectic of slavery and alienation vis-a-vis modern society is utilised: "the cult demands that it's slaves act like slaves" - relevant to the current times with manifestations like straight edge etc. The power of submission overhauls the submission to power... Shutes gets to grips with the concepts of entertainment, stripping away some of the knee-jerk armour that has rusted onto the concept of spectacle - taking his subject and starting again, even if the same conclusions eventually emerge, always a good method. For interests sake there is an excellent section on gay disco music and a brief reference to punk.

Shutes went on to unite with Isaac Cronin and publish the previously mentioned critique of Diversion, and it is Cronin who forms the brief section that concludes this journey:

5. Implications - 56 pages - 1975 - by Cronin and Shutes. I can't tell you anything about this as I haven't seen it and no notes on it (apart from its existence) are included in Ford's bibliography. However, Cronin seems to take some pleasure in the production of his actual works, exchanging the authentic activities of sniping and self-criticism for printed experimentalism and filmwork. His famous piece is the video "Call It Sleep" which is well worth checking, and according to Ford's notes he went on to produce various strangely titled things in the 80's. But for our purposes it is useful to close with:

5.1 Report No.1 - Isaac Cronin - 1974. Here Cronin presents an attack on situationism and "the general availability in this country of situationist texts" by parodying the pro-situ technique of detournement and considering it as simply counterfeiting (the misuse of detournement). This works because Cronin suggests that this technique of detournement (counterfeiting) is a "rite of passage" into the "hall of revolutionaries". Cronin lists many minor pamphlets and minor self-critical pamphlets criticising the minor pamphlets (see the reprinted cover of the 'Marcuse' detournement) and lovingly describes a scene from the typical pro-situ household: "Countless counterfeits have been produced in an evening which unfolds something like this. A group of people are sitting around, probably without any particular end in mind, drinking and talking. Someone fanatically suggests that such and such a person would look funny doing a self-critique. Everyone laughs, but before the subject can be changed, someone in the group, seeing his chance to turn a random pleasantry into a radical critique, declares that the simple joke is a disguised proposal for revolutionary action and must be done. A week of frantic preparation, most of it at the



printer, with one cursory rewrite and the text, which draws heavily on quotes from the SI and includes a plethora of clichés about the misery of daily life, is ready"

## **two: Notes From the Death Factory: the punk phenomenon and pre-punk situationism in the UK>>**

To begin at the beginning... a furiously spinning cycle that is spontaneous and such that nothing before it really matters. So in effect to assume that there is a beginning, to assume a starting point and subsequent linearity, is to fall prey to the greater cycle that we have assumed we can understand through postulating such a beginning. And here lies the tried and tested role of the critic, the historian, the researcher, the whatever. Part of the cycle is this pseudo-acceptance of the critic/critique - the fuel rods in the reactor, the waste products buried somewhere where nobody could (hopefully) discover them. Punk and situationism are a case in point. Situationism is postulated as a static set of rules - it isn't even brought forward with a degree of relativity - the periods of then and now and inbetween. For a possible start it can be taken as an analytical tool to be applied to both a certain time, the movement of time, and thus, mathematically speaking, all possible times. But this would perhaps prove too difficult... or dangerous? So we have convenient histories between punk and situationism, about how they fused into a whole and set the course (and discourse) for all future musics. Home's 'Assault on Culture' arrived at the same time as a renewed interest in the situationists as a bunch of purified artists, and even though it might have said much more than the linearity it suggested in its sub-title (for a start it revolved around a cruel sense of humour) it was lumped with the overblown Marcus Greil effort 'Lipstick Traces' - a volume that set the tone for the pseudo-historification of the punk / situationist fusion.

So what the fuck can this prove? A situationist critique of punk is delivered in Autotoxicity #1, a bad attempt at understanding the dynamics of 80's music is considered in #3 (and ultimately presented as a set of notes from someone who is on the verge of dis-understanding everything they have (n)ever known (1)). I never pretended Autotoxicity was anything else (a scam maybe at other times). A chance to come to terms with my past before I expire as a useful subject/object (delete where applicable, when applicable - ie when you expire as a useful subject/object). It is here where Marcus' book travels a similar path - there is an element of authentic activity to it. With Home it involves his ability to take the piss within a framework that keeps the reader constantly guessing as to whether he is taking the piss. With Marcus it is his addiction to the big screened spectacle of mystery, moods, tones, colours and secrecy that he twists and fabricates his reports into. Autotoxicity emerged from me, and I emerged from the various circuits of obsession that gave rise to Vague magazine - a lowest common denominator of authentic activity: following religiously various punk and post-punk bands and writing up your experiences in whatever way takes you. Tailending bands just for the sheer hell of such a totality. A hand to mouth existence, hitching from gig to gig, passing from week to week, down and out on some shitty service station on the M1 heading north to Leeds and not quite sure if you want to jump out at a junction close to home and call the whole thing off. In the end Vague and his magazine drifted towards Situationism, 70's political dynamics (shit... sound familiar?) - but it never delivered the goods. It treated these concepts as deified subjects, an awareness of their existence being like attending a particular date on a long tour and having them printed lengthwise across the back of a tee-shirt. Vague came close - but nowhere close enough. Maybe only a certain closeness can be achieved... and to understand that it is necessary to complete the picture (to begin at the beginning again) (2).

If this is a final attempt at cracking the code, of thrusting a shard of metal into the spinning cycle, of finding a point of entry and an understanding of the process, then the self absorption still lingers. Perhaps then this is the beginning - the vagaries of self-activity and autonomy, of rejection, subversion and ultimately creation. If there is a link between understanding punk (and music dynamics) and situationism (and political theoretical dynamics) perhaps it is the sheer joy of glimpsing the obsesiveness of people lost in a world of their own making. Living for gigs and the perils of existing between them, living for miniscule political meetings and the perils of existing between them (for the former there are the problems of travelling, financing, survival - for the latter there are the problems of psychic survival, of digesting the facts, agreeing with them, taking them further...) And then of course this glimpsing, this understanding, becomes a new (and equally vague) self-activity and autonomy. To begin at the beginning.

Of course the big question is what's the official line on situationism and punk, which (for most) immediately implies that situationism and punk are somehow from the same theoretico-practico stock. We shall see. It is only possible to work from situationist texts up to and around the explosion of the punk genre at the end of the 70's - and even then the briefest look at the material suggests that punk wasn't part of situationism (as if anything could be considered part of 'situationism' such that we look back upon it from a non-revolutionary society). But there are secondary ideas on the relationship between punk and situationism that hold more water.

Firstly that those masterminding the punk media coup were (and still are) quick to quote from a stock knowledge pool of situationist (condensed) ideas, ideologues, and incidents... this was (and still remains) the ultra-convenient strategy. It signals the blossoming of the flower of recuperation - where finally the idea of recuperation itself becomes removed of all possible subversion and falls into part of the media-corporate strategy.

Secondly, if we consider an aspect of situationism as the imperative to develop a critique of culture, then situationism was aware of punk in that it felt a need to both criticise punk and use punk to criticise the wider cultural processes. At its outermost level the critique was aimed at those considered in the above paragraph - ie those claiming a situationist heritage for punk rock.

Whilst the first phenomenon (punks awareness of situationism) is well documented and well distorted, it is this second phenomenon (situationisms awareness of punk) that we will examine.

Before that there is a third and most difficult phenomenon. There is the dynamic of the culture of situationism which we can trace through the 70's texts and perhaps - in a moment of pessimism - conclude that just as much as situationism was aware of punk then punk confirmed situationism by realising, suppressing and nullifying its ideas: negation as a consumer choice etc (3). It was after the 70's (and punk) that the culture of situationism seemed to take on a parallel existence - or maybe situationism had ended well before and what we are seeing is the recuperated version. The divide falls at many places - each resonating slightly out of sync with the others - a perceptible shift and displacement in the beats - the culture of living and struggling splits between a theoretical and practical stance, between Debord and Vaneigem? as the ideologues, between the currents touched by punk and those who saw through it... this thick fog of displacement persists through to today.

The late 70's political situationist scene in the U.K. was dominated by Nick Brandt and his BM Combustion operation, though various other operatives moved around in the same twilight: Pirahna, BM Chronos (Michael Pringent). And as for the US scene, there was a preponderance of infighting and name-calling which partly persists to this day. The best connection to punk was made through the pamphlet 'The End Of Music', originally written around 1978 under the title 'Punk, Reggae; A Critique' and intended for CIRCULATION for a politicised crowd operative in the Leeds area. It received a fuller publication through some activists in the Glasgow area going under the name Calderwood 15 (mockingly based on a postcode and not a boast of membership numbers!) some of whom went on to form Autonomy Press and Here And Now, and has recently been republished in Stewart Home's 'What Is Situationism' collection out on AK Press.

There exists a pre-conception about the pamphlet amongst many who never saw it; it's title suggests that punk heralds 'the end of music' and that the subject is approached with a critical enthusiasm. This isn't so. From the start punk is presented simply as a renewed opportunity to repopulate culture, to stylise, to create journalistic swells... There is a suggestion that punk was 'masterminded' by ex-revolutionaries, those in question being McClaren and his King Mob connections who broadcasted their desire for active nihilism, embracing psychotics, killers, and the notion of a thoroughly unpleasant pop group. The text approaches the subject of the ultra-left with less dogmatic hatred than its US cousins, documenting the brief romance between punk and the ultra-left forged on a celebration of the content (particularly anti-fascism) while ignoring the obvious production and capitalising aspects of the music business. The authors slip into an enthusiasm about the music that most other materials manage to avoid, albeit very briefly: "Periodically, pop music has floundered into no-go periods. But it did seem as if it had reached an ideological, if not economic dead end in the 1970's. It was the most severe ideological rock crisis ever and the next will be even better for us." Of course they were wrong in one sense and right in another, the next ideological rock crisis being the onslaught of rave and techno - which brought attacks on both the content and productive aspects of music.

The authors dwelt upon the nihilism of punk and the effective marketing of this nihilism: "Punk is the admission that music has got nothing left to say but money can still be made out of total artistic bankruptcy with all its surrogate substitutes for creative self expression in our daily lives." Other dismissals came from more direct sources: "Punk music, like all art, is the denial of the revolutionary becoming of the proletariat". Between these two ideas it was possible to forge a better understanding of cultural dynamics in the important decades to come, a task that has never properly been addressed.

The remainder of the pamphlet is more overtly political, dwelling less and less on punk and more and more on the nature of work and oppression. The culture business is lined up as part of the state system, a necessity for the production of the means of production. These important ideas were to open up the fissures between the fractions of the left and ultra-lefts, paving the way for obscure political ideas in the 1980's - the authors themselves stating publicly that they were no longer in total agreement with many of the sentiments expressed in the texts, expressing their move away from situationism and towards marxism. Throughout the 80's they operated from the BM Blob PO Box, an important nucleus for analytical publications from the fringes of the workplace based strikes and community based riots of that decade - taking in the miners strike and the Poll Tax riot. Much of their material remains in circulation to this date...

At various points they converged with BM Combustion, but Combustion printed a piece on punk in the only issue of a 43 page magazine entitled 'Re-Fuse'(reprinted here). As mentioned before, Combustion had various links to the tail end of the self-analytical US and French post-situationist scenes, but through its publications it maintained a focus on class and 'real-life' activities. Refuse is a collection of earlier works from Spontaneous Combustion with annotated critiques and a slight tendency (picked up from Brandt's exposure to the US milieu?) to be self-critical down to the slightest detail. But Brandt is more concerned with disgruntled workers and their brand of active detournement. Brandt traces a history of anti-work and anti-union tendencies in the 1972 miners strike right up to the ingenious printing of 'fuck off' in the middle of the sticks of Blackpool rock - keen to emphasise all elements of inverting the rule of productivity before pleasure. This is followed out of the factory terrain into the gang tendencies evident at the time and the resurgence of shoplifting as a source of enjoyment. Brandt's critique of the left, the unionists, the nationalists doesn't come from some in-built situationist tendency but more from his interest in the 70's 'dark days' of miners / dockers / transport workers strikes.

It is in Brandt's critique of his own work that the rot begins to set in: a text on combatting the assumed superiority of the revolutionary / situationist individual over others ends up by trying to defeat superiority by becoming more superior! This is followed by numerous letters to other revolutionaries and to his ex-partner which only musters now a massive sense of futility in the whole debacle.

It brought to a close the 1970's and emphasised the situationists' reluctance to develop a wider critique, understanding and even appreciation of cultural dynamics. It represented a complete turn around from, say, 'Heatwave' printed in 1966 by individuals soon to be included (and then excluded) from the main situationist current, developing longer pieces on post-war youth cults. Punk might have been an opportunity for situationism to re-engage itself with culture, but it just brought about the super-hardened negativity. As noted, the authors of 'The End Of Music', on completion of their project, distanced themselves from the situationist milieu - whether they saw their own interest in punk as part of this milieu or apart from this milieu is impossible to gauge.

(1) Our next major project will be based on a un-revolutionary trawl through 80's culture and how we were involved in it. See future Autotoxicity for this extravaganza.



(2) I never knew Vague well, he seemed ok. We were around at many events at the same time, more likely able to relate to each other through some of the intense characters that passed through the obsessive punk scene. I even slept next to him once, lying down on the concrete corridor of an old folks home in Retford, following a gig at the ultimate shithole, Retford Porterhouse (apparently where Some Bizarre supremo Stevo began his career!). There were 3-4 of us. One of the reasons for my dislike of Vague (the person and so the magazine) was that I assumed he did it all to scam his way onto guestlists and hotel room floors. To see him trying to get comfortable on a bare concrete floor was kind of satisfying. Even more satisfying was the fact that I had possibly outwitted him the next morning in getting back to London where I was living at the time. As it unfolded I eventually achieved what I assumed Vague was trying to achieve when I managed to attach myself to a fledgling post-punk band who had a heavy tour routine. I got the much coveted prize of guest lists, free travel, food and beer, kipping space, running the merchandise stall etc etc. Not long after boredom set in. I remember returning from a dire punk nostalgia gig at Rock City in Nottingham (safely clutching a bus ticket back to a warm bed in Sheffield) to meet the drummer of the now long departed band crashed out with a bunch of new and old followers, all lying around in various cheap sleeping bags surrounded by bottles of cider under the bright midnight lights of a forever open indoor shopping centre. In the best tradition they chanted my name, and in the best cinematic tradition I didn't look back.

(3) An interesting parallel is the practical activity of situationist film making - certainly an activity that invited a degree of reclaimed self-activity - and the subsequent refusal for much of the material to be screened. Does this indicate a sense of futility and loss in the battle to use mediated images to contest the use of mediated images as the social command structure?

# tv times

## (all programs are repeats)

### heartbeat - ITV, sunday, 8-00

When ITV chose the Peak District village of Crich for the location of their lovey dovey doctors drama series 'Peak Practice' they stumbled upon a strange phenomenon. It was always inevitable that the screening of the series would create a similar effect to the successful series 'Heartbeat'. In this piece of relentless, crass television Nick Berry strums his 'heartbeat' on the heartstrings of a dewey eyed nation. Berry's character - the faultless PC Rowan - goes about his everyday business as a local bobby as the odd rural characters and the beautiful North Yorks Moors scenery unfold around him to a 60's soundtrack. This has allowed the very beautiful NY Moors village of Goathland to generate new levels of tourism whereby people come to experience the real feelings of what keeps them captivated every Sunday evening. Sadly, the beautiful scenery is experienced in a similar way to the cardboard cut out world of Coronation Street and Granadavland - to the tourist it exists peripherally to the programme, being something that gives heartbeat its authentic feel. If we can call this nostalgia then it is possibly instant - or ultra modern - nostalgia, whereby people want to relive that moment of pure bliss and emotional turmoil they experienced on their very own sofas as the programme unfurled its shallow and predictable plot each Sunday evening.

The same effect has been generated in Crich, whereby the village is now promoted as 'Cardale' from the hit series Peak Practice. Again it is playing upon the fact that Peak Practice allows its viewers to become intimately involved with the characters, whereby the deep emotional attachments that develop between the characters on screen are perpetuated in the viewer-character relationship. In an age of repetition, drudgery and boredom, the characters bare their souls only to be continually cut down by acts of heroism and tragedy. You too can come to Cardale (Crich) and stand on the same step where characters X and Y proposed to one another, and then, following a light pub lunch, visit the same quarry where character X tragically lost their life in a heroic attempt to save a young boy (possibly a close relation to character Y) trapped on a precarious ledge following a landslide....

What makes the choice of Crich quite unique is that Crich is also famous for its tram museum. This represents 'proper' nostalgia, which is quite apparently becoming a dying breed. What makes Crich a site of specific interest for hypermodern marxists is the juxtapositioning of these two nostalgias: the tram museum with its deep and super-concentrated 'old' nostalgia, and the whole place with its instant and smug 'parallel reality' nostalgia.

Possibly the controlling interests in Crich will be hoping for a new hit tv series that documents the trials and tribulations of a group of people working in the old nostalgia industry - why not a tram museum? (episode one : a love affair is struck up between two soon-to-leave volunteer workers, episode two : as the safety inspector threatens to visit will 'old Bob' put his passion for trams and doing it the 'old way' to one side, episode three : the suave and devoted manager of the museum needs to be tempted to accept private backing for the museum's survival... who could be up to the task? etc). Such a series will, in effect, link these two separate realms of nostalgia through a carefully mediated iterative / dialectic procedure, heralding a realm of tourism previously unimagined.

### gladiators - ITV, saturday, 5-30

Rock Climbers at the Newbury ByPass -or- Community and Controversy ("It's more fun than Gladiators")

The use of climbers employed as rope access technicians in the violent eviction of treetop protesters making a stand against road development programmes has recently culminated in an explosion of media coverage via the 'Third Battle of Newbury'.

It is important to understand the wider implications of these actions, to study how the various sides have reacted, and to draw a body of facts and theories for use in the wider struggles to come. The closer we look, the more we find contradictions. However, this shouldn't be used to champion our own supposed intelligence by passing everyone else off as stupid... in the struggle to create a better world the understanding and tactical use of contradictions becomes an important tactic. Increasingly we are faced with contradictions as capitalism thrives and expands. What can appear as disparate elements slowly begin to form into a whole as contradictions appear in both number and direct relevance to each other.

I produced a semi-serious climbing magazine (More Power Now) that commented upon some of the debates, discussions and controversies that were emanating from a climbing milieu that was finding its own interests subject to the demands of a developing capitalism. This, I felt, gave rise to certain opportunities. The subsequent use of climbers in the Newbury eviction does warrant further discussion, but it should also be used to reinforce the arguments previously presented.

INTERESTING CONTRADICTION NUMBER ONE : In the 1970's a pub in Reading (The Cunning Man) was targeted with an incendiary device because it refused to serve 'working class' construction workers building the original M4. In the 1990's construction workers have bodyguards and are treated by many protesters as utter scum.



Resistance to the road development programme, and, more importantly, the consideration of whether it fits in with a revolutionary course of action, is a subject of much disagreement. Certain left communist groups such as the CWO have gone for a blanket dismissal, and arguments have been presented that suggest that the government led privatisation of the railways will enable the fatcat capitalists to grab a share of the profits when the government succumbs to the will of 'popular dissent' and scraps a big road programme in favour of a rail-based transport infrastructure - so in this situation the road protesters are in the vanguard of developing capitalism. I wouldn't support considering such 'scientific' and 'sterilised' arguments that (in the worst sense of the marxist tradition) see our daily lives and feelings totally controlled by economic forces. Equally so it is stupid to attach the label of class struggle or revolutionary struggle to every struggle that erupts, and so it is pointless to assume that road protesters, or the road protest movement, have the best interests of class struggle at heart. There should be time for a thorough analysis of how capitalist society is changing its production, distribution and consumption patterns, but this needs to be tied in with the difficult task of how this affects the working class in terms of how it shapes its own perceptions of itself. Not an easy task.

For the purpose of this article it is better to gain an understanding of the concept of community, and the various communities that exist under capitalism. Traditionally (for revolutionaries) community has been discussed within the broad split workplace/community, whereby a physical site of struggle has to be theorised and then analysed in terms of its possible negation of capitalism. Of course, workplace will win hands down because that is the site of production, the site of the economic struggle - often revolution is associated with 'taking over the means of production' and while this might be a necessity it certainly isn't a sufficiency. No amount of sheer 'marxist' will, intellectualising, or 'crisis theory' will bring about this taking over the means of production. An analysis of the physical aspects of community is a useful task in itself, but it is by considering community in general that we realise that community is more often described by non-physical characteristics. This leads us to consider other communities that represent people coming together to support each others similar hopes, dreams and interests. It is these communities that are both important to a developing capitalism and are also important to the move to destroy capitalism and create a world wide human community (A full discussion on communities and struggle is included in Communist Headache #1 available from our PO Box).

**INTERESTING CONTRADICTION NUMBER TWO :** A recent television commercial for a new luxury car is shown as a pre-recorded commercial being replayed on the miniature tv monitor incorporated in the car's dashboard. It would now be possible to watch a documentary on endangered English field wildlife while stuck in a traffic jam on the newly opened Newbury bypass.

The climbing milieu represents the community of interest that I touched upon in the discussion above. The Sheffield climbing milieu is a super-concentrated version of this community, and the scab climbers used in the treetop evictions were recognised as coming from this milieu. The fuss generated comes from the fact that this milieu is firmly established and that its physical characteristics (ie we are all fit and strong climbers) and non-physical characteristics (we are all radical free spirit dudes etc) are also well set. These communities were discussed as having special qualities outside of the traditional community based on the living terrain. The climbing community exemplifies certain of these qualities, however this is magnified by the intense nature of the interest (climbing). Climbing is a total pastime, it can demand total training in terms of specifics (eg finger training) and time based programs, it can also demand total psychological attention as much of climbing is based on 'getting your head round something' that you know you have the (trained) physical capabilities to achieve. Thus many participants fall into this totality - it is very addictive.

Obviously all communities of interest attract attention from capital who scan the movements to look for new profits (commodities) and to stem subversive potential. Increasingly the subversive potential is stemmed by turning it into capital! This is known as recuperation. The subversive potential of climbing was based upon its total demands of psychology and fitness, causing those most disciplined to 'drop out' - ie to sign on the dole, support each other person to person instead of developing a satisfaction through the pursuit of commodities. Eventually various avenues were opened by capital - cult figures (of a 'bad boy' 'drop out' nature) were constructed and attitudes and apparel were attached to these figures to turn rebellion into both a profit and a harmless pursuit of symbolic commodities (there had been similar moves with surfing, windsurfing and skateboarding to name but three). I put out More Power Now as a warning signal to these moves - it was a semi serious piece of literature raising some of these points

Things have changed rapidly since then, and the climbing community, particularly the Sheffield 'scene', has been thrown under the media spotlight due to various individuals working under the cloak of 'rope access' companies and applying their rope skills to evicting protesters from trees. The chronology reads something like this - Blackburn Spring 1995, Daisy Nook early 1996, and Newbury (the big one) Spring 1996. Both the Guardian and the Independent newspapers (and New Statesman magazine) have been keen to champion the cause of the road protesters, and have followed this up with the detailings of the Sheffield climbers used, their subsequent activities (using open bladed knives to slash protesters anchors, using unsafe rope techniques), and the subsequent 'war' in the climbing community which was actually played out in the treetops (Tue 12/3/96). Of course, this makes good 'spectacle', as one of the observers noted "Its just like gladiators".

**INTERESTING CONTRADICTION NUMBER THREE :** The EDGE is one of the new breed of climbing walls that has attached itself onto the current leisure capitalist investment in climbing. It's director Phil (I wish it would rain) Robins stated "I am against people using climbing skills developed in natural places being used to destroy them". This then followed the banning of the scab climbers as members only to be later unbanned - maybe because a climbing wall isn't a "natural place"?

The whole episode bears out numerous contradictions that could be followed. The climbing community thrives on a 'radical', 'ecological' and 'untouchable' aura that can exist increasingly to create capital. The direction it was heading seemed to make these claims very fickle... ie people using unsound and unecological techniques to claim a first ascent or 'bag' a difficult line, and corporate companies tentatively beginning to sniff around regarding the sponsorship of what they see as the glitzy end of the sport

(indoor competition climbing where they can hang their company banners and shift product at the proliferating number of climbing walls). The nature of the dropping out also became more polarised. As the dole became a tighter regime in terms of paid benefits and loopholes for holidays, the summers spent in Chamonix became less feasible to those without rich parents to subsidise the 'dropping out'. And so the chance of becoming up there amongst the sponsored stars began to fade away for those without cash resources. Thus the pay of £25 per hour and a 10 hour day evicting treetop protesters can suddenly seem both attractive and reasonable. I mean, could the perpetrators of this crime argue they are just accepting the pumping of money into the sport to further its achievements, just as climbing competitions willingly accept the sponsors cash?

While the answer to this is a loud NO, it would seem however that some kind of Negri-ist 'We are all prostitutes' critique of work and wage cannot surface. There is generally a split between 'working climbers' and 'full time climbers' with the former often recognised for their superhuman efforts (ie holding down a full time job and climbing to a certain high level). However, no class type critiques exist to the effect of certain types being ostracised (ie he's a copper or he's a boss so don't climb with him). But could this be realistically expected?

What has occurred in this unique situation is that the direct attributes and skills of the community of interest has been handed over lock, stock and barrel to the evil 'bad guys'. Effectively this is the only way a community of interest can turn into a community of struggle (beyond the sometimes futile resistance of the slippery hand of recuperation, which is what More Power Now tried to instigate). The ways things develop from here will prove crucial. There has been small outbursts of anger and activity at the whole affair. Threats of bans, actual bans and eventual unbannings from various pubs and climbing facilities used by the scab climbers. The leaflet included here was circulated at various points where the scab climbers were known to spend time. If many climbers are politicised from their intense self-contained community of interest towards a more clarified and concerted attack on capitalist relations then this would be an important step. Such a dynamic represents the move to demanding to both define and create our own pleasures whilst SIMULTANEOUSLY attacking the system that withholds us from achieving this.

INTERESTING CONTRADICTION NUMBER FOUR : Consider Pembrokeshire where the oil giant's Texaco tanker 'Sea Emperor' spilt its tanks into the sea and wiped out the marine wildlife and birdlife population. This occurred in an area where climbers have been adhering to a self imposed climbing ban to allow nesting birds their peace and quiet. Such contradictions are starting to look increasingly part of the wider picture they represent.

## **eastenders - BBC1, monday, 7-30**

Spencer flicked the standby switch on the remote and the GMTV crew disappeared from the screen. He had caught the screen hero Nick Berry interviewed 'live' on the location of Aidensfield where he had just proposed to his onscreen Heartbeat love the night before and was now shaking the snow off his boots to review the days newspapers. Most of the headlines involved the tele-addiction to new virtual all girl band 'The Spice Girls' who had been manufactured originally across the WorldWideWeb as a mock up of ex-porn stars and obliging sex kittens. In the corner of the front page of one newspaper there appeared a short piece about the violent breakup of Berry's 'real life' relationship, and the battle for custody of the kids... At such an early time in the day the bombardment of tragedy and beauty played out between the flickering planes of the televisual Rowan / real life Berry character began to prove too much for Spencers intake. He grabbed the game cartridge, pushed it into the slot of his Playstation, and let the system boot up. This was Spencer's big scoop - he had been working on the ultimate game; a combination of road racing, platform action and bloodthirsty beat-em-ups. The image pulled into view - black screen and faded white lettering - the title "ORBITAL ROAD RAGE". Spencer waited patiently for the game play to begin... he decided to opt for maximum chance of trouble by selecting a clockwise direction of travel and South Mimms Services as his point of entry. Spencer knew what this would entail - bloodshed, death and a skill demand for ultra dangerous driving. The screen showed the drivers view of a vehicle pulling onto the M25 orbital motorway - before joining the 6 lane seething mass of bad blood and car fumes a sign flashed past "WELCOME TO ESSEX - PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY". The object of Orbital Road Rage was to get to a destination in a certain time whilst avoiding the obstacles. This involved maneuvering your vehicle across the 6 lanes by anticipating the jams and the flows. However, if you cut up another driver then their car becomes marked and as such has a mission to catch you and fuck up your journey. The retribution acted out depends upon which section of the Orbital you are on... it mainly involved the vehicle in pursuit catching you up and either forcing you into a slower lane or making your lane changes impossible, in some cases you could be bumped clean into another lane (or off the road), in extreme cases the vehicle would attempt to pull up alongside you and challenge you to a fight, or, at its worst, shoot you in the head (thus terminating the game). The skill of the player was to avoid too much agro without compromising your journey time, but the more vehicles that you angered, the faster that you have to drive and so the more vehicles you ended up cutting up. Spencer enjoyed programming games that utilized a cumulative sense of nihilism! In choosing the Orbital section that traversed Essex Spencer knew that the machine would throw anything and everything at him. As the vehicle rolled down the slip road he selected some in car music - Delta 9's furiously electrocharged neogabba album 'Disco Inferno' - and then pulled down the information panel to check out what dangers lay ahead (traffic jams, crashes, riots, etc). It couldn't have been much worse - the Leah Betts Retribution Squad were patrolling the tarmac and had got themselves in a big shootout at the Dartford Tunnel, while Ronnie O'Sullivan, the self-styled Essex gangster turned snooker badboy, was playing an exhibition tournament at Chelmsford ensuring that the Orbital would be peppered with members of his fan club - some of the widest fuckers on the road. Spencer threw his vehicle into the third lane cutting up a BMW that was pushing hard in the second lane. The overhead view window on the screen indicated that the BMW was now officially on Spencer's tail. As the BMW pulled into the third lane a couple of cars behind Spencer, Spencer slammed his vehicle into the slower moving second lane letting the BMW suddenly draw up alongside him. As the BMW appeared in Spencer's side window he put 2 shots clean into the driver's head. He pulled his car across four lanes into the fast shooting sixth lane as the BMW span out of control causing a pile up behind. Spencer knew the ground rules in these parts, and coming on all courteous and apprehensive only put yourself at risk. You had to stamp your authority from the word go. He checked his information monitor, sniffing the danger that would have accrued from his tangle with the now incinerated BMW. It was worse than anticipated - the driver of the BMW had been O'Sullivan



himself - and his army of fans had been alerted to the fact that their hero had just had his head turned to mush by Spencer's vehicle. Spencer knew that this would be a short game - O'Sullivan's worshippers lived to embody the Frank Doberman character - and would be out in force to act out their road vengeance (a fact quickly illustrated by the swerve Spencer had to perform to avoid a falling concrete block hoisted down from the top of an overhead bridge). Spencer checked the long distance monitor to see that approximately 20 cars within the next 5 mile stretch were marked as flashing and thus out to terminate Spencer's journey with maximum brutality. The cars were hovering across various lanes, slowing the traffic down and forcing it to funnel between 2 large Range Rovers driven by proud and psychotic Essex men. Spencer's current speed meant that he had about 30 seconds game playing time left before he had to run this automobile gauntlet flanked by sawn-off shotguns. Suddenly the screen plunged into a darkness punctuated only by headlights - the vehicle had entered the M25 tunnel under Cheshunt Shopping Centre - and this presented Spencer with a slim hope of survival. He cut his headlights, threw the vehicle into the hard shoulder, and accelerated up the traditionally out of bounds concrete strip (ploughing down a couple of motorway maintenance workers in the process). By the time he emerged from the tunnel he had successfully avoided detection by about 20 hotheads who were after his blood. He glanced at the long distance monitor and thought he had gotten over it, however, the few seconds he relaxed in thinking his troubles were over resulted in his troubles only just beginning. He was just considering how he had to keep up a reasonable speed, avoid any congestion, and keep on the right side of the Leah Betts Retribution Squad members, when suddenly the screen lurched leftwards as the vehicle spun out of control and came to rest on a grass verge. Spencer quickly switched to overhead view and pulled down an action replay sub-window. He gauged that he was now immobilized on the side of the motorway with another stationary vehicle for company (a Range Rover belonging to O'Sullivan's body guard), while the replay screen indicated how the vehicle had shot up beside Spencer, switched 2 lanes, and barged him clean off the road. Not wanting to be caught napping twice Spencer switched back to current mode and was presented with a platform screen with Spencer's figure holding centre screen. He checked his attributes; a gun with 3 bullets and enough energy and fight skill credits to engage in a moderate jujitsu attack. The doors and the boot of the Range Rover opened to present Spencer with his adversaries; first out was a full grown Rotweiler adorned with leather buckles and brasses which leapt at Spencer's character. Without wanting to waste a bullet Spencer drop-kicked the hound in the rib cage with such force as to send the mutt spiraling back to earth with a broken back. Spencer quickly put a single bullet into the petrol tank of the Range Rover, turning it into a fireball before the Essex hardmen even had the chance to get out. A shrill buzz alerted Spencer's attention to the overhead view window and he saw that 3 other cars had now pulled up on the hard shoulder, unloading their bloodthirsty cargo to batter Spencer to a pulp. He managed to put down his first 2 adversaries with his remaining 2 bullets, and then squared up to the fast approaching 3rd and 4th adversaries. To Spencer's surprise the 3rd figure ducked down as the 4th figure pulled a sawn-off from the depths of his cardigan and gold medallions. Within seconds Spencer's midriff was blown away and the message 'GAME OVER' filled the screen.

Spencer collapsed back onto the settee, releasing his grip on the joystick allowing the cold air to dry off his sweating palms. He was convinced that this game was the winner. His previous game 'NEW AGE NIHILIST' had entailed about 2 years programming only for it to be rejected by various software houses. Spencer put this down to the fact that the software pimps had no context of his hypermodernmarxism that formed the basis of the game (the game was based on a management simulation structure whereby the player had to negotiate the media, the competition and erratic human nature in the process of building up a new age cult which would eventually launch a series of gas attacks across a major city as a statement against industrial society). Spencer ejected the game cartridge from the console and gathered up his careful programming notes and copyright declarations... the next big pay day was surely beckoning.

He locked his front door and walked towards his new motor. The word 'MURDERER' was etched across the bonnet in foot high daubs of paintstripper. He opened the drivers door and allowed similar style letters spelling 'UMB' to catch the early morning light. It wasn't until this door was closed, and the letters aligned themselves with the 'SC' on the front side panels and the 'AG' on the back door that the word 'SCUMBAG' deciphered. The crudely drawn phrase 'CUNT' completed the set by occupying the space on the boot door. Spencer thought that his vandalised car retained a deal of credibility, and it was one of the perks of living in this new neighbourhood. With the final proceeds from his deal with FontShop due and day he had netted enough credit to buy a flash pad and motor. He had no interest in his neighbours and so he didn't realise he lived next door to a notorious vivisectionist until he woke up one morning to find his car message-etched with paintstripper. His neighbour apologised in a sniveling way quite becoming of such a lowlife turd as he confessed that he was the intended recipient of the course vandalism - and in doing so also handed Spencer a large cheque to cover any damages. Spencer immediately took a liking to the vandalism and felt that driving round in an expensive motor engraved with the words 'MURDERER', 'SCUMBAG' and 'CUNT' added to his growing reputation as one of the new school brit artists.

Spencer demanded that he be allowed to use the back door of the premises to make his exit. Layers and layers of careful planning can be swept away by a single indiscretion committed in the heady glow of an apparent victory. The manager of FontShop had already handed Spencer his large cheque as payment of a job completed, and his suspicion wasn't aroused at Spencer's latest request. I mean, both parties were extremely happy with the deal. The manager brushed down the creases in the sleeves of his Paul Smith suit and strolled across the sales floor of the office with Spencer following behind. He felt that this deal would put him in good stead for a high level promotion, into a land where Paul Smith suits were part of the scenery, and not something that brought him a reminder of how much debt he was in.

Spencer made his way through the back streets and emerged on a busy pavement opposite his building society. He pushed open the doors and slapped the cheque down on the counter. The cashier took the cheque and keyed in the details of Spencer's account number, within a matter of seconds the money was credited to Spencer's rapidly expanding account. On leaving the building Spencer smiled at the fact that he would probably be made young saver of the month yet again!

The young hypermodernmarxist rebel had an important appointment to keep, and he kept up a steady pace to ensure this. The buzz he got from a completed deal made him feel 2 feet taller as he strutted through the frantic crowds of shoppers, hawkers and general street scum. He reflected on the business that had just landed him a £25k cheque from FontShop, amazed at his skill in keeping the whole operation a total secret. Spencer was hooked into the society of the spectacle, the society of information

overload/panic, or whatever you wanted to call it. He acted as a bridge between the cultural capitalists who were too stupid or afraid to push for a total and brutal exploitation of a general public obsessed with a reflection of their own mediated activities, and those members of the general public who were so messed up by hypermodern society that they exhibited strange characteristics. Spencer managed to plug one into the other without putting himself in the firing line of the tightening tension of class conflict... as such this specialised activity demanded a high price.

FontShop had wanted a design of fonts that surpassed the gimmick of the handwritten fonts that were now losing their appeal as a cutting edge design tool. Spencer had recognised the hypermodernmarxist irony in the carefully designed fonts that reflected handwriting, and had spotted that the best selling of these were the ones that were the most 'handwritten' ie the scruffiest and strangest ones. He quickly began working on anew set of fonts that took this irony to its logical conclusion. Under the guise of prisoner support he began writing to various long-term prisoners. Whilst it appeared he was offering genuine support and sympathy for these unfortunate incarcerates, what he was actually doing was analysing their handwriting characteristics under a variety of conditions. He quickly put together five bold and characteristic font sets : the calm and calculated strokes of 'Death Row', the barely visible lines of 'Hunger Strike', the oblique characters of 'Solitary Confinement', the depressive monotony of 'Life Sentence' and finally the menacing curls of 'Rule 47'. This was followed up with two more fonts to complete his contract with FontShop. Spencer had volunteered himself to help out at the Alzheimer's Disease Trust and within a couple of sessions he had gained enough trust to be left alone in the office. Within five minutes he had searched out and xeroxed original letters from sufferers applying for a grant from the trust : the shaky handwriting style was just what the modern design artists wanted for that whacky 90's appeal. The final font had come to Spencer quite by accident. He had heard rumours that the local college ran a day school for adults with learning difficulties, and that part of their programme had included a regular karioke afternoon. Spencer had decided to tape a couple of sessions and use the manic warblings to keep up his money spinning contract with experimental label TrASH International. This taping had proven too difficult for Spencer, but the observant activist had chanced upon a session where all the students spent 1 hour meticulously copying passages from printed books. The letter writing was a joy to see, as the students had no concept of text, grammar or composition, and presented each letter as a quirky, personalised shape. This formed the basis for Spencer's final font 'Special Needs'.

Spencer arrived at the car park to meet up with the assorted members of the Creative Spacewasting Crew. He had been using these budding art revolutionaries to develop an album he was working on for the Nottingham based extreme ambient label TIM-ID records. This album involved the simultaneous setting off of as many car alarms as possible within an enclosed area. The overlaid harsh bleeps and sirens created various hidden rhythms that stimulated deeply hidden emotional codes and impulses (or so Spencer had told the gullible record company rep). The track listing consisted of a description of the car park and the make, model and year of the various cars that were activated within any action. A recording normally provided 2 minutes of material before the various car owners arrived on the scene to provide further samples of death threats and obscenities. Spencer threw all of this material into the mix when he developed the tracks, using loops of vocals to give that genuine, brutal edge.

This time was different : Spencer had had enough of the Creative Spacewasting Crew and had decided to sever his links with them in a final, glorious action. Unknown to the artists the car owners had been tipped off about the foul play that was due to commence in the car park. Spencer had secretly chosen the car park of an office that was hosting the annual conference of bodybuilding bouncers, and the mutant strongmen were waiting close by to lay into the maverick artists. Spencer had masterminded the whole operation to enable him to take some genuine photos for the accompanying booklet to this 'Roadrage' CD. Within 10 seconds of the artists rocking, bumping and bashing the assortment of Rovers, Mercs and BMWs, a swarm of angry bouncers leapt upon their prey to commence some serious GBH. From a high vantage point the shutter of Spencer's expensive camera began clicking away...

## **x-files - BBC1, saturday, 9-25**

While it would be useful to discuss the X-Files phenomenon in a later article, locating it as a terminus in a current of American culture beginning with P.K.Dick's expose of 50's commodity claustrophobia and concentrating on its stylistic elements and plot subtleties - it is worth considering the episode in the third series entitled "Jose Chung's From Outer Space". If the article that precedes this (The Spectacles Critique Of The Spectacle) is taken as a critique of a point in time while attempting to inject some dynamism and rigour into a more useful and continuous theory (comedy as critique - as discussed in the article - has broadened to recuperate the surreality / banality school of acting as spearheaded by Reeves and Mortimer, because the fact that everyone hates a life based on work is no longer funny and so the next level is the fact that everyone hates comedy as critique because it simply exists) then this episode takes the (need for) praxis a step further.

The episode set out to demolish the cult of the X-Files as an external thing (American society obsessed by the program and alien abduction) and as a an internal thing (stylistic parodies, dialogues, habits, glimpses,...) and as a meta-narrative (the characters portrayed in the episode mimic the grounding and evolution of the show's creators). In one of the numerous Reader Guides to the X-Files (check them out - there are at least 6 guides per series!) it is revealed that this particular episode caused problems within the production team: some simply couldn't understand it, some thought that it was too risky because they knew that they were into a good slice of cultural capital with the show, while the real gamblers thought that the 'radical' attitude that defined the program from its outset could only be buttressed by this ultimate sacrifice of radical chic.

And, after all, it was only an act, played out across the media; but in this case splitting the media into several layers of (false) false consciousness in a way that films like Videodrome could only poke at from the relatively simply described media ages of the 80's (a glimpse of McCluhan vs Baudrillard). The episode aimed at an invisible and illegal interstice between the tele-visual reality on the screen and the reality of television outside of the screen - between the perceptions of the characters themselves, the



viewers actual perception of the characters, and the viewers perception of how the characters perceived (known as the meta-perspective).

The episode begins with an almost pornographically detailed abduction of two teenagers by two aliens. There is no hiding the alien figures, no retreat to silhouettes or jump cuts - they're there in front of you. Two green-grey identikit aliens with bulbous heads, bulbous eyes, and puny bodies. Whereas the X-Files has broken certain moulds in a progressive fashion (particularly the amount of violence, blood, dismemberment and decapitation that screen censorship can get away with) it has never attempted to break the mould of hiding the monster, hiding the freak, until the last possible moment ('Outer Limits' set the rules here). So here is this ground rule blown away when suddenly a third alien appears, as different and yet as similarly stereotyped as the original pair (in this case a furry yeti type figure with huge three clawed hands - perhaps a pastiche of the 50's alien) and involves the other two aliens in some kind of dialogue.

We then switch to the narrative thread for the episode. Scully talking with a crank writer hoping to cash in on the abduction (X-Files) phenomenon, a writer who Mulder refuses to participate with. This writer, Jose Chung, is attempting to trademark a new genre "non fiction science fiction". Within a few brief moments there is the first of many auto-demolitions of the series - here Scully and Chung throw around the cherished concept of truth (that backbone, essence, edifice of the program) to cynically reveal that the only truth is money (and this includes documenting the truth about the opening images of aliens and abductions).

After dispensing with lie (truth) detection there begins a bigger analysis of perception, perception of television, and the perception of television actors in creating television. The initial hypnosis reveals that the hypnotist and interviewing panel become aliens in some kind of spacecraft, with the hypnotee revealing that they have been mindraped (the reference to MK-ULTRA).

We return to Scully's dialogue with Chung where she reveals she is unconvinced about this hypnosis because, simply stated, we live in a society where everyone is infatuated by alien abduction, ie we live in a society where the X-Files tops the viewing figures. This is the first obvious critique of the program itself - aiming at the jugular (ie the bulk of the record breaking viewing figures).

Another hypnosis reveals how the abductee was kept in a cage alongside a crouched alien drawing deliberately on a smouldering cigarette (another critique of the shows main darkside figure 'smoking / cancer man'), which also presents a pisstake of the obvious X-Files cash-in series 'Dark Skies' which utilises, for no apparent reason drawn out shots of suits smoking fags.

What we are being introduced to here (albeit in a very subtle way) is the bigger question of the interstice of perceptions. All subtlety is then thrown out of the window with the introduction of the next two characters. Enter 'Rocky' the first 'eyewitness' to the event. He recalls the whole conspiracy in a badly typed manuscript which he simply pushes into Mulder's hands (again, another critique of the sanctity of the truth written as a document - or encoded onto disk. This chasing of the ultimate document has been another mainstay of the series outermost plot. I mean, this document is simply handed to Mulder - he doesn't have to risk life and limb and confront barrages of faceless and shapeshifting guardians). This manuscript extends beyond Rocky's recollection of the events to a visit he received in his garage by some ridiculous Newtonian talking tough types dressed in black suits (further critiques of the shows structure etc etc). Rocky recalls how the third alien - who gave his name as 'Lord Kisboat' - instructed Rocky that he was the saviour of the earth. Switching to 'real time' we see both Scully and Chung dismissing this document as total dud - primarily because it is written in (bad) screen play format (we could perhaps divulge here that maybe the 'truth' is written in screenplay - that this is the current manifestation of the society of the spectacle).

The next character is an obvious stereotype of a burbling, inadequate computer nerd who claims to have found "a real live dead alien". This character is revealed as the ultimate wannabe abductee who desperately wants to leave an earth that offers nothing but total fear of social interaction beyond his computerised safe haven of dungeons and dragons and sad porno internet linkups (he wants to go somewhere where he "doesn't have to worry about finding a job" - a possible remark that counters the accusations that X-Files creator Chris Carter have never had a real hard work job, moving from editing a beachbum surf magazine to pouring out his conspiracy theory expert knowledge into the X-Files scripts).

The plot then turn more directly to a critique of how the episodes are actually made and less so towards why they are popular and what they signify. The autopsy reveals that the alien is actually an airforce pilot in a rubber suit (which the video manages to edit out), and a re-hypnosis of the abductee reveals that she was taken by airforce officials and then hypnotised to be convinced that she was taken by aliens (or "rinsed out" as it is officially called). There are various levels of perception (and various phases of "rinsing out") now operating out of control and out of tele-synchronisation. Of course, there is still the tantalising 'real' X-Files nugget of this third alien (Lord Kisboat) who appears (through the various cross-correlating perceptions of him/her) to have kidnapped and killed the airforce pilots who posed as abducting aliens (but then again it could all be a trick of the editing skills).

From our 'outside' it then appears that some attempt is made to reclaim the episode - by throwing in mystery and its partly unravelling solution. The men in black reappear and violently cease a copy of the nerd's video, Mulder appears too late but the nerd confesses to him that "all those years of playing dungeons and dragons has finally paid off". Mulder finds another airman wandering confused (are these scenes from Mulder's perception and thus real?). The two of them retire to a late night cafe and discuss 'projection techniques' as part of an advanced military strategy (microwaves etc etc), however, the airman remains convinced that he was abducted by this Lord Kisboat character. Another perceptive viewpoint of this screenplay is presented when the cafe owner recalls (to Chung and his prospective book) how Mulder played out a strange cyclic routine of eating pie slices / asking question (there is possibly a link here to Twin Peaks which bears a striking similarity to X-Files except for the fact that Twin Peaks had the tenacity to admit its own ending).

Who is perceiving or tele-narrating the next scene is difficult to tell: Mulder returns to the hotel to find the men in black involved with Scully and there follows another quickfire dialogue on cover-ups, perception, tele-spectacular myth making and lunacy

(there are even some abstract clues that hint towards this confusing interstice of realities - a bucket of ice being one). A man in black reveals himself to be Alex Trebeck "Games Show Host" (who exists in 'reality' as a games show host and also as a games show host in X-Files reality). The episode (as it presents itself in terms of Chung discussing the information used for his book) concludes with reportage of a crashed 'UFO' (ie airforce plane) with the conspirational culling of fringe witnesses.

The episode (as it presents itself as a critique of itself and all those before it) then attempts to draw to a close by Mulder breaking his imposed exile from Chung. He pays him a visit and urges him not to write the book as it is nothing more than a truth based upon a mixed pot of realities making all incidents and individuals appear foolish. It is agreed that there is obviously a sense of closure lacking, but by agreeing this lack of closure it puts on closure at another level - that of closing the episode as nothing more than an ultra-stylised critique - a message of hope to those who are confused and battered senseless.

Mulder then delivers an animated rant about how Chung's publishing company are part of "a military-industrial-entertainment-complex", but the joke is now starting to wear a little thin. The final closure is the closure of the actual episode - the wannabe abductee gets a new job and is seen bumbling along repairing electricity cables late into the night (an excuse to throw in a pisstake of the neon / noir style of direction : bright lights and sparks punctuate a midnight background). Rocky becomes a preacher and Mulder is seen kicking back viewing a scratchy video of what appears to be footage of a / the Yeti (Lord Kisboat?). Jose Chung concludes the narration with a melancholic reprise to alienation, and in doing so suggests that this profound marxist critique is in fact the whole prop of the show. Whether it is used as a weapon of critique, of exploitation, of recuperation, or glamourisation it is difficult to decode. As it is the series goes on, the books get written, I sit here typing this in and you sit there reading it.

The logic of information war puts an end to all revolutionary discourse. There is a finality that appeals to the bored 'revolutionary' that reads that in the information society everything collapses to form and all form is information and thus all discourse pulls us back towards the centre of the problem. At the same time the 'centre' and the 'problem' lose all meaning as meaning can only be considered as information and so...

It was once said: "It is no easy task to radically critique this world while living in it at the same time, to conceive of the possibility of another life which has no model one can attach oneself to and at times no words to express it". The concrete reality of class struggle is where a true discourse can lie, but we are given postmodernism and we fall for the trap.

The critique of television takes a shape of interlocking and constricting circles: "Capitalism's obsession with categorisation into 'lifestyle', and its need to perform surveillance, and its need to eventually turn this surveillance into entertainment is insatiable. The circle is completed as we are further dominated by capitalists using their instruments of domination to transmit the images of us being dominated to say that this domination is normal behaviour". For more on this see the text on 'Wanted Society' in this issue or consider the scene at a local football match I attended. Here we witnessed the new police special surveillance team with an image based wholesale upon the 'Universal Soldier' film blockbuster. Knee-high combat boots, tight body suit for slimline pigs with flak jackets and pockets giving a muscular bur athletic appearance, attachments include super killer truncheons, and a strap on camcorder on one eye with a contact microphone fed into the mouth. All set off in a super matt black finish. This team spent the whole of the match videoing the crowd just to let us know how superior and hard they were, and pockets of the crowd responded by behaving as model hooligans by jumping up and down in a seething mass. The information vectors in flow here were of power and discipline but were rewired via Hollywood.

But what of critique: "We are rapidly approaching a time when the life that is promoted as being worth slaving for is turning to shit before our eyes. Spectacular consumption and lifestyle chasing is tottering at the brink of disappearing up its own arsehole. We can only laugh at the desperation of car adverts tempting us to feel free on the open roads in a car that is so quiet it doesn't make a horse shit itself...our road system is a nightmare of traffic jams and stale air, hot and bothered commuters who can't even hear themselves think." Or "The perpetual stream of advertising is the pinnacle of a system that desires us to love the ones we should hate, to aspire to be like them by attaining all the right commodities and the snippets of power that go with them. It becomes increasingly clear that the 'happiness' exhibited by the ruling class is either the happiness of power crazy scumbags or the happiness of actors in a perfume commercial. Zombies / Flesh Eaters : separation perfected!"

## **wanted - CH4, wednesday, 8-00**

"The drone of our tedious repetitive and pointless jobs is reduced to a background noise. We serve capital and strip away all our fundamental would-be and could-be reasons for living. Like the black box in an aeroplane cabin that records endless hours of slowly shifting dials and fluctuating information we are haunted by the tedium of our banal lives and will grab at any opportunity to forget it all for an instant. All that matters is that when we 'crash' our personal black boxes go with us to the grave, and in the meantime we can concentrate on forgetting"

Of course, television, the media, and the information flows that they function in, are here to keep things running smoothly. Slowly but purposely the spectacular end of 'spectacular society' has carved its own niche... from Freddie Starr ate my hamster to my hamster ate Freddie Starr, to spectacular democracy where politicians win and lose these things called elections and party majorities are eaten away by Freddie Starr's hamster. From deep inside the box Mulder tells us that the truth is out there, so long as out there remains within the 'in there' of the manufactured and perpetuating television reality. Ideological prisms bend information to suit 101 small time theories. Where did the AIDS virus originate? Native tribes fucking monkeys (the racist view), gay tourists fucking monkeys (the homophobic view), gay tourists fucking natives who fucked with monkeys (the racist, homophobic view), from a CIA laboratory as part of an experiment to outlaw and victimise 'free' 'love' and homosexuality (the left-conspiracy



theory view), from a laboratory in Northamptonshire where brutal for-the-hell-of-it experiments are performed on monkeys (the militant animal rights view)....

Television now mimics a version of everyday life to perpetuate their version of everyday life as the dominant reality. Soap operas, gritty dramas, tele-democracy, psychotic lotteries, ... programmes like 'You've Been Framed' resurrect the festival of potlatch where what is sacrificed is the property both physical and personal of those 'everyday' viewers who send in their 'everyday' (read staged) video clips. In a desperate bid to be the 'star of the show' we are given spectacular emphasis on the nuances of the drudgery of everyday life where, for one minute, we show a disregard for personal armor and property in the confines of television land. Of course, this is balanced out with material like 'Crimewatch UK' and just lately, the 'Wanted' tv series.

'Wanted' involved presenting society as a bunch of ultra-conformist 1984-style citizens who saw an active duty in sniffing out anyone who looked, talked, acted or thought just that bit different. The use of right wing insignia and former KGB officers was taken as an extrapolation of this projected mentality, and quite often there were boasts about how information was eventually extracted from 'members of the public' who were unwilling to give up locations, times, promises, etc. This fetishisation of gulag mentality was incredible, with the KGB monster boasting of his power (what techniques were used? knocking six inch nails through scrotums, stubbing out burning cigarettes on genitalia,...)

The show worked on an axis of public participation (grassing) whereby, through a series of newspaper adverts and a free-phone grassline, 'we' could all become informants in this tele-spectacular circus. In effect, the bubble drama was played out with members of the public split between helping the 'runners' and aiding (or misinforming) the 'trackers' and claiming 15 seconds of tv fame. Distortion into ugly reality was of course always a possibility, but who knows what went on... I'm sure some of the areas round here would gladly petrol bomb the garish helicopters and 4-wheel drive vehicles that the trackers kept up their profile in, and it was interesting that the runners always chose to hide in bland tourist spots or consumer saturated high street scenarios. Stick them in the heart of 'Manor' estate in Sheffield, or Chapeltown in Leeds where they have the 'bring it down' campaign on the 24 hour spotlight intruding police helicopter, or in one of the fucked-up ex-pit villages and we could soon negotiate a full-scale riot.

However, the most important point is the tie-in of the show with the timing of the 'Beat-a-Cheat' scheme launched by the DSS to catch those cripplers of a prosperous society - the dole fiddlers. Anyone who is claiming dole 'fraudulently' is not going to be rolling in cash - a company manager or a schoolteacher on about £30k would not humble themselves into taking a fortnightly trip into the humiliating confines of the over-zealous Restart Officers. More likely that these 'most wanted' have a bit of work on the side stuffing leaflets into letterboxes or labouring in shit conditions on building sites.

The Beat-a-Cheat scheme has come in on the back of the introduction of the Job Seekers Allowance and incredibly tightened regime of claiming benefits and avoiding shit jobs for shit pay. It is designed to crush any opposition to the JSA and to create a groundswell of opinion that reciprocates a tele-projected 'Wanted' type society. The message remains clear and simple: 'Don't Grass on Your Class' - but it's a message that will never be acted out on tv screens beyond the cod cockney in a crisis violent solidarity that we are all fed from Eastenders. Don't believe the hype.

## **tomorrows world - BBC1, thursday, 7-00**

As the society of the information spectacle establishes itself as the actual reality by the process of obliterating all other realities both physically and ideologically then certain characteristics will follow. By its actual nature we cannot call these glitches, or opportunities, or whatever... everything is torn apart to be turned into a framework of intersecting datapoints, and then reconstructed by emphasising certain points that map onto certain established trends. Categories for subversion are welcomed as they expand possibilities for growth by choice. Increasingly hyperconformism is seen as the new way of resistance.

The internet promised the end of the printed word, but all it actually involved was turning the technique of browsing and consuming certain styles (information = style accumulation) into a style itself (hey, I'm on the internet). Fashion magazines will make a comeback with the development of the 'mirror font'. This is the printing of text that can only be deciphered by holding the printed page in front of the mirror. Thus the consumer can become part of the style that he/she was chasing by intermingling images of themselves and images of what they wanted to achieve in a real time 'memory burn' situation.

Meanwhile the practice of clockwatching will reach epidemic status. This evolved through the nature of modern work : nothing much is actually produced anymore outside of the third world sweatshops and the Pacific rim technology factories. 'Important work' entails the encoding of certain products with certain magical properties that attract certain consumer groups, 'other work' entails the monitoring of the effects of these products in respect of the fact that everyone should be happy with their dreams (either realised or chased). Work devolves to checking and double checking databases, examining statistics, keeping endless files in a system of flux with an endless stream of data indicators.

The stray habit of glancing up at the clock becomes a national problem as the seamless veneer that suggests "life is certainly not boring" begins to lose its sheen. To combat this problem we are introduced to a new television programme made by and about us people, the viewers, called 'CLOCKWATCH U.K.'. This uses the successful principles from earlier programmes whereby (i) everyone makes a spectacular occupation about spying on everybody else, and (ii) something that is a natural reaction to a corrupt and crippling system is quickly demonised and suddenly the 'clockwatcher' is the next saboteur or Unibomber (tm) etc.....

# fragmenting the M1

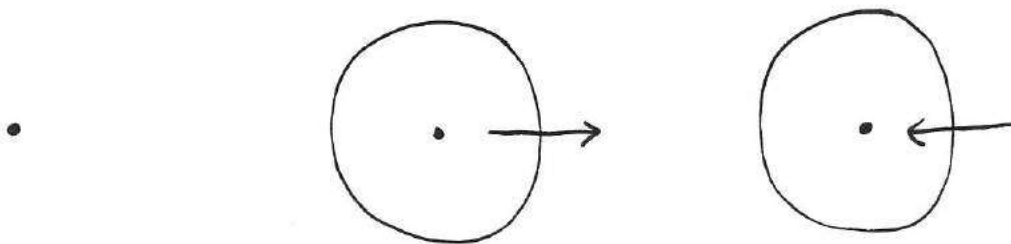
## (0) Give me discourse or give me death

Firstly, a fragment from an argument I was recently involved in. Terraced houses form my living environment - gardens cut to a minimal size to counterbalance a maximum property developers profit and a minimum space/freedom tolerance level of the occupier. Gardens flanked by similar gardens and backing onto the same. We 'have' a tree in 'our' garden. Last Autumn I was sitting in the garden with a cup of tea when I heard raised voices from over the fence. It wasn't until a few minutes had passed that I realised that the voices were not directly directed at me but were certainly about me - or, to be precise, about my tree. The problem involved the leaves - they were falling from the tree (as they do in their usual autumnal process) and onto her garden. She had a theory, a fairly big theory, which she was yelling to her husband who remained indoors. It went as follows: the falling leaves were falling onto her garden and were killing all her plants through a process of suffocation. After a while, when it appeared obvious that she wouldn't shut up (because, I thought, she knew I was there and so wanted to provoke a response) I offered a few words. I didn't even have time to choose my tack (sarcasm, ridicule, friendly explanation, apologetic....) before she went ballistic, calling me every name under the sun and trying to fetch her husband out (obviously uninterested) to engage me in a fistfight. I let the insults pass by and kept a total silence. When the barrage subsided she finished with a swipe of pure irony - that she would have been (and, indeed, should have been) inside watching 'Neighbours' if she didn't have these fucking leaves to tidy up. I went inside to recover, with that theme tune playing in my head (you know the one "... that's when good neighbours become good friends..."). To make matters worse I discovered later on that it was National Tree Day - sponsored by some mega-corporate company like NatWest or Shell, complete with a special BBC2 programme on how important it was to have healthy trees to keep the air in a car-encrusted city oxygen rich. I resisted the temptation to pop round and advise her to watch it.

## (i) Or the irreversibility of perspective

The Flatlanders live in a world of 2 dimensions. They exist as flat shapes and dots moving around on a plane. When a 3-dimensional object passes through a Flatlanders' plane of existence it appears as a sudden shape which may grow/shrink and alternate, only to eventually (or suddenly) disappear.

For instance, a sphere (with diameter  $d$ ) passing through a plane will appear thus:



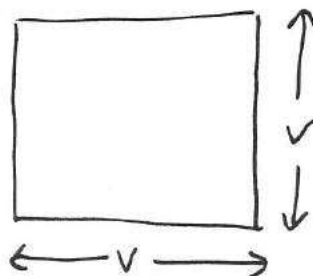
Firstly as a dot:

then as a growing circle to diameter  $d$ :

then shrinking back to a dot:

A cube (with side length  $v$ ) passing through the plane has an appearance dependent upon its angle of interception. Three examples of non-rotating interception include:

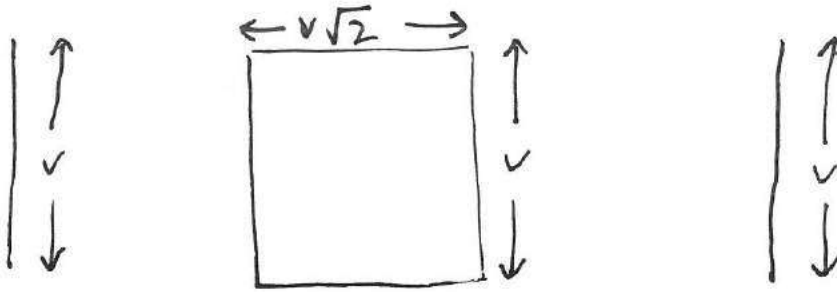
(a) Contact with flat side:



This appears as an instant square of side length  $v$  and remains a square of the same size only to vanish instantly.



(b) Contact with an edge:

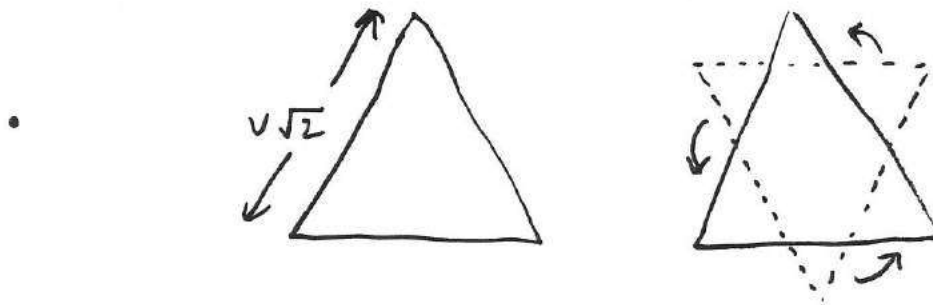


This appears as a line:

which grows into a rectangle:

And then shrinks back to a line:

(c) Contact with a point of the cube is more exciting:



This appears first as a point: which then grows as an equilateral triangle

Which then rotates through an angle of 60 degrees whilst keeping shape:

Then the whole thing shrinks back to a point once again: •

The case of the Flatlanders is important because it is assumed that it provides a key to visualising the (existence of) fourth Cartesian dimension. Thus, what we could expect to see would be the sudden appearance of 3-d shapes which then grow, twist and alternate and ultimately vanish. But if we examine the situation closely it is obvious that we force a discourse of 3-d existence onto the Flatlanders to understand how they can 'jump' a Cartesian dimension. Thus to examine the existence and characteristics of a fourth Cartesian dimension we would have to force a discourse of 4-d existence (impossible?) onto our own 3-d existence.

The basic problem of discourse, of revolutionary discourse, is making itself tangible, practical and relevant. Of taking root in both a real situation and a situation that is dreamed of, but, for all intents and purposes, is either impossible, banal or forbidden.

## **(ii) Confusion is Next**

Where would a technique of spontaneity lead us? Quite possibly wide open to postmodern recuperation. Consider, it is quite fashionable (in this postmodern sense) to talk of the cut up technique being a superior method. That is, the cut up text is superior to the original text (you know how it works... new meanings emerge free from the constraints of rigid discourse). If we introduce a concept of superiority to these texts (the original versus the cut up) then we need also an operator of comparison. Again it appears a problem of discourse, as there are two options. Either the superiority is gained through a leap of discourse, and so we are back to square one, or the superiority is measured through something we can grasp - like the meaning or content of these texts. But if a cut up text creates a better meaning or content than the original, then surely this cut up text could be cut up further to create a text of even greater meaning or content (since 'cutting up' implies cranking up the meaning and/or content). And therein lies the possibility that, maybe, the cut up text is further cut up to 'accidentally' produce the original text. And we are left with the strange anti-entropic predicament that this new 'original' text is so rich in meaning and content that the same original text fades by comparison.

## **(iii) Context for this Discourse**

Like the Repo-man we crave intense situations. We close our eyes to sleep and whisper our anti-prayer "the society which has abolished every kind of adventure makes its own abolition the only adventure". To what extent does psychogeography consciously come from those who know of its existence, and from those who recreate their environments through intensity, displacement, experimentation (and of course through sheer need and force since psychogeography is a class issue and it is a function of the dispossessed struggling against their dispossession through both resistance and recreation). My own history is a sad case, but it represents a typical path of a player approaching refuge in the apparent glow of a cultural environment that promises shelter from the drudgery of a working class lot. Maybe it is initially in all of us, the childhood compulsion to break

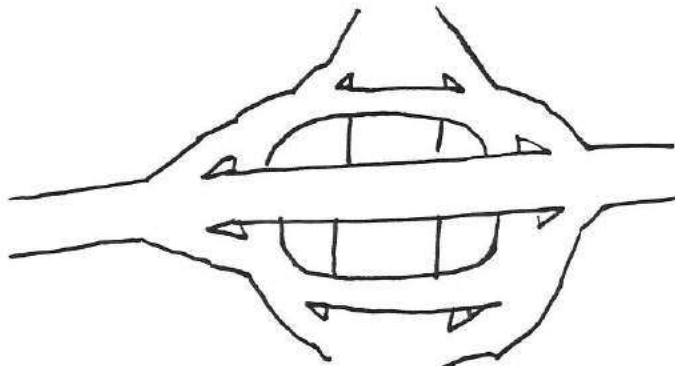
the rules and codes of our environments - the quest for new games combining skill, intrigue and suspense and subjecting them to a world we wish to turn upside down. (We developed our own game of 'follow the dog' as a divergence from 'cat creeping', this involved a gang of us attaching ourselves to the t(r)ail of a local mutt and following it everywhere - rediscovering a new environment of holes in fences and rich depositories of new smells.)

My life has been defined by obsessions, periods of time marked out whereby obsessions overlap and one eventually dies out for the other to grow stronger. There have been many things (from photographing monstrous fairground machines to finding disused railway tunnels to walk through) but they have all been connected by hitch hiking (a need to travel and a working class way of satisfying the need). But eventually and inevitably the hitch hiking becomes the game, with new rules, new domains, new excitements...

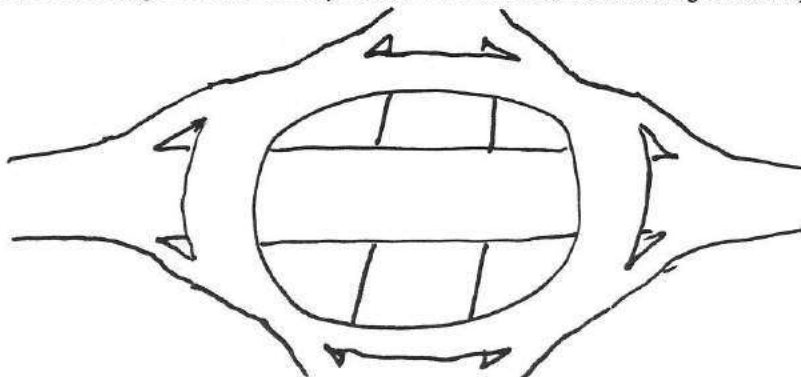
### **(iv) 52 is 25 backwards is...**

I grew up near the M1, in the last suburb of Derby that existed to house the workers of a huge factory. My dad had a job on a lathe at the age of 16 and remained there all his life. He never was happy, this I could sense from vague childhood memories and from the plain fact that he urged me not to do as he had done. The A52 is a bypass that cuts straight through our suburb and covers the 20 odd miles to Nottingham, cutting across farmland to eventually reach the next set of suburbs around Nottingham. About halfway along its route it meets the M1 with a big spidery junction. I spent many evenings in the fields near our house watching the illuminated A52, picking out the distant lights on the M1 which fade out of sight. The road held a great deal of significance to me, as if it was an escape route. I remember glimpsing the M1/A52 junction from the bus back from Nottingham late at night (we never had a car) : a snapshot of 3 layers of lights with headlamps flowing along like pulsing blood cells. At about age 12 I attempted to walk alongside the verges of the bypass and reach the junction to experience it for myself - I never got there, the allure of unclimbed trees in uncharted fields being too much.

I learnt that the junction between the M1 and the A52 was known as junction 25. This seemed to hold some significance for the people of Derby and Nottingham - an early and short lived local punk fanzine called itself Junction 25 (however, the editor also had the dubious distinction of preserving a crushed beer can thrown by UK Subs frontman Charlie Harper in an assumed hope that it may one day fetch something at a rock and roll auction). In my early teens I managed to pay a few visits to this junction, and its topography became etched upon my mind... the simplicity of 2 major dual carriageways meeting each other giving the motorist every possible option of topographic travel without relinquishing speed. I became obsessed with this simplicity, drawing it like a tattoo on every scrap of school paper I would find:



For a brief time I wanted to search out new and more complex junctions. I played with the possibilities of any number of major roads congregating towards a single spot, and the logistics of how to feed any road into any other in any direction without recourse to islands, lights, etc. I made several trips to Birmingham (there was a good punk shop there) and was held in fascination by the complexity of Spaghetti Junction. But I later realised that Spaghetti Junction was in fact too much - it was too complex. The name was a joke, taken from the abject horror it put into the drivers mind when they realised they had to navigate this monster. In some ways it was like the impossible leap of discourse being force digested through direct experience... Spaghetti Junction was from the next level of road junctions, like a double helix is suddenly discovered to represent DNA. And so once again I began to love the sheer simplicity of junction 25 of the M1, and once again I became drawn towards the motorway. (Of useful note here is the famous junction 42 of the M1 where it intersects perpendicularly with the M62. This offers an interesting variation of the junction with the road island sitting on the top:



This junction is quite famous for hitchers as it represented the first of the 'all motorway' junctions whereby the whole system of islands and sliproads were classified as motorways thus disallowing any legal hitching. I have never set foot on this island, but a good friend was dropped off there and instantly fined by the police. The police then waited for him to hitch down a car and proceeded to fine the driver for stopping.)



## **(v) Fragmentation**

When I was 16 I began hitching up and down the country to gigs. Punk had split into many minute subcultures - one of which involved following bands around the country in a scrambled attempt to complete every gig on a particular tour. A few of us found ourselves drawn into this subculture and began an immense amount of travelling - either by hitching or by a complicated system of train fare dodging (that is another psychogeographical story). So we slowly got to know and love the M1, learning the whole of its topography and all of the hitchers folklore. To be on the M1 either meant we were going somewhere exciting, or that, very soon, we would be home and scoffing our faces after living on bars of chocolate and cheap cider. We became involved with this motorway as adventurers, explorers, game players... we were forever going somewhere to relieve the boredom and so the urgency of actually getting there tempered with the random nature of hitch hiking made the actual journey into a massive game. It was from this perspective that we began to learn of the M1 - through the risks and chances you take from stepping off at 'bad' junctions, the conversations with the drivers who give you lifts, the adrenalin of pushing it to the limit...

The motorway no longer existed as a slab of concrete from London to Leeds, but instead was defined by memories both good and bad. Any journey was thus mapped out in these psychogeographical terms... the offer of a lift that was going part way to your destination involved making a decision of where you would actually get out - which junctions and service stations brought you good luck / bad luck, where you had been picked up and picked on by psychos (I remember being attacked by a gang of skinheads who were bored from the fact that no-one would give them a lift from junction 16). The traditionally 'good' points like Watford Gap services always had a massing of hitch hikers - the more hitch hikers appeared at one spot the less likely it was for a driver to stop due to the fact that fights and arguments would break out as to whose lift this actually was. You also had the high probability that the line of hitchers would be headed by either a gang of mohican punks or a single bloke dressed like Norman Bates complete with leather 'strangler' gloves who had been hitching this spot for 2 days. Sitting in a car or truck, passing a point of a particular bad experience brought a shiver to your body.

I had a whole set of junctions defined in bad terms (always in bad terms) by sexual experiences. About 3 junctions from London after being picked up at Brent Cross the driver left the motorway, placed a large fold out map across my lap, and began the intricate process of showing me on the map where he/I was going as an excuse to fondle my cock through the folds of the paper. Another time on the short hop from Derby to Sheffield I met an absolute obsessive who was determined to involve me in some (paid) action before I left the vehicle. He had decided that Woodall services would be the place and so had 30 odd miles to win me over. I remember how he began to swing the conversation over towards sexual practices (do I have a girlfriend, what do we get up to...) and, when I hinted I wasn't in the slightest bit interested in his fantasies, he blurted out that he had a full set of bondage gear and whips in the boot of his car, and would I give him the treatment in the car park at Woodall services. He wasn't suprised when I declined but he had now broken the ice. 10 miles remained for him to tempt me with less and less sexual extravaganzas (and less and less money) until with 1 mile to go we were down to a desperate £20 for me to watch him wank himself off. I was reminded of a previous occasion when a friend was offered bluntly and directly "a tenner for your hole" - he never hitched again. Or of a chap I ran into twice who traversed the perimeters of the A1 / M1 / M62 triangle with his cock stuck in a bottle as part of a 'medical condition' that was a thin guise for him to involve you in a bit of action (see 'Fatuous Times' No4 from BM JED, London, WC1N 3XX)

## **(vi) Where next?**

The struggle against the road building programme was actually preceded by the chipping away of the hitchiker's network / capability. All motorway junctions became 'fast streamed' and/or 'no pedestrians' - helicopter spies were employed by the Met to combat the infringement of these rules at the start of the M1 in Brent Cross (which was also redesigned to cut out all hitch hiking). The mode of exploration is taken from the spatial terrain onto the virtual terrain - culture encourages an environment that references only a reconstructed self where everyday existence is carved into smaller pieces. Everything is thrown into the market - it has a value in both 'worth' and 'sign'. What chance for psychogeography as a realisable discourse in these times? It is not enough to entrench ourselves in the road protests, or to take a simple critical opposition. There are a mass of operatives at work here - operatives to draw back and extrapolate forwards. Our tools need to be resharpened... this essay moves between nostalgia and spark, between the contexts of self activity and discourse. In a narrow form it can be taken with the essay on Newbury printed in ATX1 and in a wider form it should be used to assess psychogeography and the possibilities of effective discourse.

# silica

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They were experienced in shutting down the initial section of the M1, having had practice with the funeral cortege of Princess Diana a few years earlier. This had to be arranged at super quick notice. Squadron cars were blocking off all the access roads onto the motorway at the first 6 junctions, while the National Express coach was parked up at a convenient lorry inspection checkpoint about 3 miles north of junction 6. The checkpoint had a convenient array of floodlighting, utilised by the D.o.T when they pulled over long haul lorries utilising the relative calm of the motorway in the evening hours.

The 21-00 hours coach from London to Leeds had made good time crossing the short but tortuous journey through the northern suburbs of London, having to call at Golder's Green as part of its standard schedule. The coach was fully occupied, the driver having to turn away a couple of angry customers who hadn't got pre-booked tickets and were demanding to sit in what they saw as three empty seats. These were quickly occupied with booked passengers boarding at Golders Green, and the coach had made good progress towards Brent Cross and the start of the M1. The driver had received an urgent broadcast that the coach was to be stopped at any moment, the details of which were not given. His instructions were to keep the passengers on board in the brief interlude between the coach stopping and the coach being boarded by special services...

By the time the coach passed junction 6 the traffic was almost minimal and the driver guessed that the slip roads had been sealed off. Traffic behind the coach had been siphoned off at the previous junctions and the coach driver began to worry. He let the stewardess know what was about to happen and she scanned down the rows of passengers on the packed coach. It was the usual friday night scenario. Passengers trying to make some comfort in the cramped seats, some making towards sleep to nullify the boring journey, many immersed with their walkmen and portable CD players. She couldn't see any particular shifty looking passengers, no sign of nerves amongst anyone...

The bright lights of the checkpoint were fully switched on, illuminating all six lanes of the motorway. The driver noticed that southbound traffic had been halted as well, obviously at some point out of vision. In addition to the glare of the floodlights there were 2 or 3 police helicopters circling overhead, adding noise as well as bright spotlights. A few of the passengers began to shuffle in their seats, detecting that something was up before the coach even began to slow down...

As the coach stopped most of the passengers were staring out of the windows, and to their surprise they saw armed police quickly encircle the now stationary coach. The doors opened and a swarm of armed coppers streamed on board, heading for the back of the coach. No-one dared move, as the police finally arrived at the last seat of the coach. This was occupied by someone apparently still asleep, plugged into the CD player oblivious to everything happening. The seat next to him was unoccupied. A senior officer pushed the sleeping body and he fell slumped across the twin seats, a thin stream of blood emerging from his mouth. A couple of officers arrived to take over, both dressed in what appeared to be radioactive proof suits. They seemed more concerned with the dead passengers CD walkman, gently pulling it from the lap of the passenger. As the earphones became detached from the once listener small amounts of blood became visible, forming into a globule and eventually trickling down the neck...

A second team moved in to take care of the CD walkman, and carried it from the coach in a freeze pack. As they moved across the deserted lanes of the motorway the lid of the CD player became detached, flipping up to reveal not a silvered compact disk, but instead a small pile of what appeared to be sand...

Various reports lay on the desk. The special operations branch had been formed after the successful operation and post clean up through the famous 'Headache' incident. No-one involved were deceiving themselves into thinking that they were all aware of what purpose they were serving, or even if that they were all actually serving the same purpose. To crack the 'Headache' case the bureaus had drawn on all special skills from all divisions, and it was impossible to create a total smog of interference regarding what was actually going on. It was important that certain people were linked to work with certain other people, and that a network of counter-counter-information would spread, possibly even resembling something close to the truth. But now they had closed ranks and were operating a strict 'need to know' regime. Everybody felt like a puppet, with their words and movements predetermined and more often than not as contributing towards some deliberate scheme of internal disinformation...

Briar had been one of the few to emerge with a key position after the 'Headache' incident, but even he was beginning to suffer from a paranoid feeling of being a puppet, albeit a very sophisticated one. He had assumed that the purpose of the 'Headache' operation had been to nullify the threat posed through the possible expansion and unification of the ICC. To that effect it could be considered a success. Briar had simply monitored the publications of the central organs of the ICC, and watched it descend into a pit of paranoid psychosis. It had even got a dose of Millenium fever when a large split off from the central regime had set up camp somewhere in Norway and acted out a Jonestown style mass suicide. Briar didn't think much of this, putting it down to desperation and shattered hopes and dreams. Earlier on the party had written at length about a close colleague who had left the central proximity of the party and recently died of 'natural' circumstances. The ICC had written of the comrade as taking some road towards a self-unification with the central committee, taking a job in a bookshop, dispelling any links with elements of the anarchist swamp.... There were unconfirmed reports that a document had circulated arguing that in fact complete unification had occurred within this individual, that death was the final furlong in this road to true communism. Whether or not this document had been a spur towards the mass suicide of the externalised fraction that had regrouped in Norway had been difficult to ascertain. Briar supposed that his job was to find things such as this out, but he was becoming lazy in his work.

There was a document, possibly faked, on a new method of applying crisis theory to the neurological bodily functions and creating a suicide praxis. This involved digesting ultra statistical financial data with hardline crisis theory and bringing on an imminent brain haemorrhage. Briar had brushed this off as an obvious fake...



And then of course there was the file on the Lanarkshire incident. But Briar was under sworn secrecy...

What Briar did know, and this (he thought) was information that was officially out of his orbit, was of the existence of a key lynchpin based in Leeds who went under the name Richard Davy and had previously been involved with some form of practico-theoretical regroupment of the externalised factions, to build up a groundswell of residues that would thrash out their differences and form the final union with the proper ICC. Briar's snout had been a colleague who worked as a minion in the unfortunate department that was geared towards directing the late Larry O'Hara. Before this department disbanded and despatched workers onto other projects Briar had learnt about the existence of this mysterious Davy character in the Leeds vicinity, and of his possible role in the demise of O'Hara.

But suddenly it all seemed pointless, all this creeping around and trying to put a spin on what you, yourself, were actually doing. A meeting had been called of the various chiefs and it was evident that some crisis point was rapidly approaching. Briar had been present only to receive various reports of previously unknown bureau operations, and to hand out copies of his own reports monitoring the lessening activities of the dwindling ICC.

Briar sweated at the thought of the task ahead. He had used up most of his mental and physical capabilities cracking the 'Headache' case. His idea was to kick back and do a bit of easy work, before taking an early retirement and a fat pension scheme. He had done his bit for world security with his snuffing of the ICC. But now the volume of documents in front of him was immense in both density and complexity. He didn't know where to begin. Had anyone access to such a full picture as him, surely someone must, somewhere? Or maybe it was 50% disinformation, or maybe no-one even knew what was disinformation anymore? He remembered the situation at the bureau when the picture archivist suddenly died. He had developed such a complex and personalised indexing system that only he could work it. When he passed away this enormous resource became little better than useless... nothing more than a portrait gallery of faces, places, meetings....

Booth pushed hard on the pedals avoiding the temptation to drop into an easier gear. The hill slowly increased in gradient as it made its way towards the more rugged terrain of the Pennines. Booth was punishing himself, exorcising the sins of his slackness. Booth was at the head of the Green Anarchist Twilight 56 Group, an advanced group of anti-civilisation anarchists that had emerged through the various splinterings and state sponsored disruptions of Green Anarchist. But Booth had stayed the course and now had attained some position of reverence, even if the group eschewed any notions of organisation. He was a figurehead who embodied the correct practice and procedure, a guardian of true destinations....

But today he had sinned. His head bowed momentarily and allowed a bead of sweat to fall onto the titanium maintube of his bike, hitting the spot exactly where the tube was flanked by the twin sets of indexed gear changers. He allowed himself a smile, thinking not for the first time that the possession of such an advanced piece of technology was tantamount to treason within the Green Anarchist Twilight Network. But this was Booth's special treat, and the super lightweight highly specialised racing bike allowed him to keep in relatively pristine shape. In this drift of thought he contemplated on shifting a gear, to make it easier and keep the pace. But Booth was hardline. He tensed his leg muscles, felt his feet pinch in the cleats of his pedals, and pushed forward for more energy to eat up the seemingly relentless incline. The geometry of the bike was more suited to time trialling, and Booth kept up this suitability by fixing some ultralight carbon fibre rims and a time triallist 10-15 gear block. This latter adaptation gave him little relief when tackling steep hills or wanting to cruise on flatter ground. But that was how Booth wanted it. Hard. He was hardline.

But not this morning. In a moments lapse of concentration his eyes had strayed towards the evil glow of the television tube that his uneducated flatmate insisted on watching before going off to take his part in the perpetuation of this bastard civilisation. Why his flatmate felt a need to feed his eyes on junk before going to work was a question Booth couldn't answer. I mean, Booth felt that having a job was an admission of pure complicity within the system of animal abuse and environmental sacrilege, so I suppose tv watching was all part of the same equation. But this morning Booth had cast his eyes in that direction and caught a glimpse of Teletubbies doing their early morning thing to keep the parents of early rising babies in some degree of semi-stasis. Booth had began to show an interest in their sense of spiritual / environmental symbiosis, and before long he was observing the shared experience that the four creatures felt when a handbag had floated down from the outside of their tightly closed and maintained teletubby paradise. Booth's flatmate had immediately jumped at his lapse in concentration and within a few minutes they were debating whether the teletubbies were following a strict vegan diet, whether tubbie custard was genetically tampered with, and whether Noo-Noo was classified as an advanced piece of technics. Before long they were both crashed out in front of the sofa mark-scoring the babes on the allamerican school drama 'Sweet Valley High'...

Booth had managed to shake himself out of this paralysis and had immediately jumped on his racing bike to cleanse himself. He felt disgusted, gutted, ...dirty.

After completing a strenuous 20 mile loop Booth wondered if to return home and start the day afresh. He had a pile of mail to reply to, in particular he had to answer a strange letter from a prospective Twilight 56 member. This individual wanted comments on his idea to cut down on car fume emission by creating poly tunnels around all the major motorways. Unfortunately he also wanted to weld it to the problematic of disposing of the lumpen unemployed who were willing to perpetuate the system, a line of thought that had set the Green Anarchist's on their current trajectory since their famous 'one dole office - one truck bomb' document. This individual suggested using the unemployed jobseekers as 'human trees', getting them to break down the poisonous exhaust fumes collected from the poly tunnels by inhaling them in special gas chambers - thus sacrificing themselves and their pointless lives for the greater cause of ecologic balance.

The coach driver was quizzed thoroughly. Yes, he was absolutely certain that the coach was full when it left Golders Green. No, he couldn't explain the empty seat at the back of the bus next to the dead passenger. No, they hadn't made any stops between

Golders Green and the motorway besides the regular red lights. No, the emergency doors hadn't been opened - he had a computer log to confirm this.

They didn't reveal the contents of the CD player to the coach driver (allowing him to leave after this interrogation and one of the bureau's famous 'rinse-out' sessions) but the lab had found it to be a strain of highly advanced silica substance. A kind of living sand.

There had been some breakthrough regarding the possible exit mode of the suspected assassin. The panel of window glass next to the seats revealed a kind of truncated safety kitemark. Under the microscope it appeared that the kitemark had undergone some kind of mathematical 'shear', as if something had passed through the sheet of glass by fusing with its elements, moving through and creating a dragged shadow, and then leaving on the other side. This highly implausible occurrence seemed to be the only conceivable answer...

Briar received an urgent fax requesting him to study one of the particular documents in his newly acquired collection and to await further documentation supplementary to this. He browsed through the files and selected the relevant piece: it was a collaboration between the cultural monitoring department and the fringe politics monitoring departments, simply entitled "ANTI-STATIC ACTION - NOTES ON DEVELOPMENT"

The bulk of the document gave the lineage of a particularly brutal form of music, charting the particular moments of development, inputs, behaviours of the followers, etc. Much of it was meaningless to Briar, reading like something out of a kids comic. He was familiar with the rave movement and some aspects of its fracturing into hardcore scenes, he was also familiar with jungle music as this had infiltrated into mainstream culture. But the document detailed the development of harder strains of jungle like techstep, darkcore, fuckstep. It appeared that jungle began to re-fuse with elements of the pan-european hardcore and gabba scenes, creating music that combined both tranquiliser (in the slight deviations back towards a 4/4 beat) and trigger (in the brutal acid drops, bass structures and interference blasts). The next part of the equation came with the grafting on of Japanese noisecore, a breakaway from what was previously seen as an avant-garde scene. It was suggested that this intensely destructive soundscaping provided the psychotic catalyst to the tranquiliser-trigger equation. From then on the music began developing an internal code of discipline amongst the followers - harking back to the straight edge movement in late 90's thrash punk. Various codes of clothing, belief, righteousness structuring, and particularly diet, were adopted and taken on as evolutionary dynamics. The report suggested it was a weeding out of those not strong enough, but there were disagreements around this thesis. Indeed, the music - termed 'stormcore' - demanded both a weakness in submission and a blind strength in actual listening endurance.

The file was inclusive, left hanging at a point where the stormcore scene seemed to flourish and flower in its own minute cultural way. Various labels, various clubs, various zines, various regional scenes....The bureau felt there was a wider political implication, but nothing was conclusive or forthcoming. Perhaps more was known by a few people, afraid to share the information in danger of creating a false 'whole picture' that would be prematurely grasped at. This was the way that the bureau functioned. Up to now it had been a successful procedure. But Briar suspected that things were coming to a head. Indeed he even had his own 'undisclosed file' within his observation and monitorings of the ICC - what was known (or, to put it more correctly, unknown) as The Lanarkshire Incident. Briar felt that somehow this suppressed information that he held was one of a certain number of keys that were slowly being revealed like players at a poker table one by one turning their cards face upwards. For the meantime he checked his console. The same message remained 'AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS'.

Carter climbed the stairs of the piss flanked tower block. The walk from his house to the tower travelled through various foci of depravity... kids dealing shit, gangs on nicked and scratched out mountain bikes, screaming neighbours, despondent fathers returning to hyped up kids and locking themselves in the confines of their cars to blast their senses with whatever music was available. The tower itself stood in the centre of a large and fucked up estate - nothing of any beauty survived more than a few hours, even the greenery of persistent weeds had long departed the pavement cracks. Everything was a monotone grey brought to life by excesses of litter that congregated wherever the aimless winds blew it...

Poetic thought Carter. How fuckin' poetic. Shit like this was all the rage in the new wave of urban-pulp novels. After the e-generation came the comedown. The truth biting hard. And the cultural industry loved it... Riding the lift was like living a chapter one of this miserable coffee table artefacts: Carter had seen folks shooting up into their stomachs while their kids stood by, such was their desperation to get a fix. But Carter was hardline, straightedge, whatever. No drugs for him, and no sympathy for those that depended upon them.

He was also wise to the times. Most followers of the Stormcore tradition were. As well as his regular supply of vinyl and cds that were stashed in his record bag, he also carried shit to defend himself with. But his prime defense mechanism was his ability to sense trouble well in advance of it occurring. Thus he managed to avoid it. Not wanting to risk personal injury or any damage to his priceless collection of Stormcore music souvenirs...

Carter was the leading Stormcore dj in Leeds, which had a moderate but dedicated following in the cold northern city. Every Monday he spun for 2 hours solid on Leeds' only pirate radio station - playing a mix of classic defining tracks and new evolving material. He shyed away from dialogue, even though the station manager encouraged all djs to talk as much as possible and boost the id of the station. Carter just let rip with the tracks, favouring the particular style of 'consciousness mixing' and not pandering to the strictures of beat or break mixing. Stormcore was as much about a psychological conditioning as anything else, so most djs opted for a build up of intensity that led towards a macho and masochistic 'last man standing' mentality. Quite often Carter was that last man.



He knocked on the door of the top flat and waited to be checked through the letter box. Security was obviously tight. On gaining entry he chose to sit in the kitchen, rather than the living room which doubled as the studio. The dj who was finishing his set was particularly nauseating, playing a particular brand of egotistic 'hard' techno - a style of music that still amazingly retained a deal of popularity (admittedly most of that was amongst the wealthy ex-students who could keep up their drug habits that got them into the music in the first place). The dj used all amounts of sad tricks... blaring into the mic at any and every occasion, informing the listeners he was 'in the mix'. This meant he was playing 2 records at once matching the banal 4/4 rhythms beat for beat - a 'trick' that seemed to keep the monged out masses enthralled. He liked to cut and paste between tracks, refusing to leave the faders and effects buttons, flicking the 'line' switches to kill the sound at certain beats etc etc, spinning tracks backwards with a fury to hammer home the fact that he was king of the decks for that particular moment...

Carter hadn't had much time to check his set. He ran a small Stormcore zine that served the north of England and was lucky enough to receive promos, test presses and rare treats from the worldwide Stormcore scene. Most weeks he checked his PO box in plenty of time to listen to any material and make a few brief notes regarding the power of tracks etc. This week he had been tied up with tidying his Stormcore website and the post had laid unchecked on his desk for a good few days. At the last minute he had grabbed a couple of new articles from the unchecked pile at random, and slipped them in with a few of his old favourite Stormcore tracks.

He sat in the kitchen of the flat, sipping his mineral water at getting ready to go on. Trying to time his entry into the studio to such precision that he just had enough time to unload his bags and ready his things without having to listen too long to the chirpings of the 'hard' techno dj. The feeling of cultural displeasure was mutual, the 'hard' techno dj not having much to say to Carter and always making a point of getting out of the studio/flat as quickly as possible. Carter really didn't give a fuck.

As he emptied his bag his eyes caught one of the new releases he had picked up from his desk. It came with the standard black unmarked sleeve, being slipped into a cd case. Carter recalled how this package had surprised him since it was postmarked as being from Gothenburg, and the Stormcore scene was previously unheard of north of the ex-gabba stronghold of Holland. Carter had meant to listen just out of curiosity, but never had time. As he picked up the case and popped out the cd he was pretty sure he saw some sand fall from the minimal packaging. What the hell. He placed the disc in the player and checked the reading on the front panel. It indicated 1 track at 6 minutes 30 seconds. This seemed strange for a cd, but Carter assumed it must be something special. He made a split second decision to lead off with the unknown track, banking on the fact that he could switch across to something else pretty quickly if the track sucked.

Immediately he knew that the track was intense. The sound was incredibly low end and distorted. But raw and hard. It hit you in the guts and stayed there for a while. Carter felt overjoyed. The last sound he heard was the splatter of vomit hitting the bare floor as the previous dj failed to make a quick enough escape from the studio. Carter could only guess what had happened because by then all the lights in the studio had shattered...

Briar had received instructions to read another two departmental reports. The first one was a rough draft concerning the death of a young person involved in a bizarre incident on a National Express coach from Leeds to London. It appeared that they had suffered death due to some massively mutating parasite or virus within their bodies. Two options remained open, that either the parasite was inserted whilst the victim was on the coach, or that some kind of catalytic stimulator was added during the journey. The hard facts didn't point towards anything logical or whole... an 'assassin' had appeared to make his escape by passing through a glass window, and the victim's cd walkman had been found to contain just a pile of sand. Background research revealed the victim to be part of the 'Stormcore' tradition, a dedicated activist who followed all the strictest codes of the straight edge tradition. The source of the sand remained a mystery, though the victim was carrying an empty plain black cd case. Preliminary prognosis pointed towards the cd as possibly being the catalyst that caused the death, though how it had mutated to sand couldn't be answered. The missing passenger, presumed to be the assassin, could well have slipped the cd to the victim, bringing on the victim's demise. Although this scenario would possibly assume that the victim and assassin were previous associates... The department who were monitoring Stormcore couldn't come up with any more answers or connections. The tradition had proved to be very secretive, having been brought up on illegal raves, pirate stations, diy record production, smallscale agitation.

Briar's second report involved a detailed study of a chain of body piercing centres known as 'NewFlesh'. Piercing had gained in popularity towards the end of the 90's and had infiltrated most aspects of highly codified mainstream culture. 'Stormcore', though still considered underground, had some interest in body piercing, it's members following certain trends in this popular pastime. 'Stormcore' members saw it as a mark of dedication and discipline in front of pain. NewFlesh had at first appeared as a normal bunch of operators trying to buy a piece of the action - there was good money involved in piercing. What drew the bureau's attention to the operation was that all of the employees in the shops had no details of past history. Not only in terms of observation records within the bureau, but no details at all. The bureau decided to raid a NewFlesh studio and gathered a strange array of evidence... what appeared to be insertion capsules within the standard range of piercing appendage. Within 24 hours of this single bust the whole BodyFlesh operation closed itself down and vanished into thin air (which wasn't too difficult as none of the workers had any trace of history). Premises lay vacated, accommodation that had been traced to the workers lay vacant, seedy landlords with no details of forwarding addresses because they had all been paid in full...

The atmosphere within the innermost bolt-hole of the Menwith Hill spy base fluctuated between sheer terror, horrified resignation and a moribund sense of duty to get the job done. All the doors were code sealed shut but the sabotage of the emergency ventilation system meant that the oxygen in the room would sustain life for about 5 minutes. This was all the time that the remaining members of the security force had to get a fix on the source of the transmission. Rumour circulated that some sections of what was once the Menwith Hill Peace Camp had mutated to such an extent that they had levitated and produced seemingly endless streams of silicon based projectile vomit that had effectively knocked out all of the sensitive monitoring equipment. What was certain was that no-one could get a true fix on the source of the transmissions - the nearest either being "somewhere in

Scandinavia" or "somewhere in Chapeltown". The only certain thing was that the snooping mechanisms of Menwith Hill monitoring had got hold of a semblance of the signal and boosted it up with nightmare consequences. The commander began to panic, yelling for a fix on the damn co-ordinates, and beginning to sense a futility in the whole operation. His thoughts were confirmed when a shrill noise sounded from an outside corridor, prompting all the glass panels in the security doors to melt into a pool. The main door flew open and fresh oxygen streamed into the room. The comms staff paused from their work and turned towards the open door. A figure ducked down, stepped into the room, and stood staring at the occupants with an insane grin. Some of the staff recognised the figure as one of the more militant gang-leaders from the peace camp - her unkempt hair and dreadlocks giving away her identity - but she had changed. She stood 9ft tall with various patches of broken skin where her body had stretched and contorted this extra 3ft, beneath the rips and scars were visible signs of metallic and quartzite compounds melding to make a new flesh. Her remaining skin had a pale blue complexion. A member of security panicked and fired a bullet into her midriff. A clean hole appeared followed by the emission of a fine silica spray that touched upon the side of computer console causing it to melt and short circuit. The once proud Earth Goddess let out a piercing scream which caused those present in the room to clutch at their ears. By manipulating her twin larynx the Earth Goddess then proceeded to treat the high pitched scream to a fast stroboscope effect. Within seconds everyone in the room lay dead, twisted expressions of agony on their faces and thin streams of blood emerging from their ears and noses.

Briar knew that it was no longer his turn to make a contribution, but that he was the last in line in this particular 'need to know' information chain of command. It was a well used strategy: ten people hold ten separate pieces of information - let one of people (at the bottom of the chain) share his information with the other nine so that nine people now hold two pieces of information - each of the nine people correlates their sets of information and the process is iterated along the chain of command - one of the nine reveals their information to the others and so now eight people have access to three pieces of information - at each stage reports and new ideas are drawn up from the connections and coincidences until eventually one person sits alone with their information and all nine other pieces of information.

Briar assumed, by deduction, that the ICC were the integral part in this interior panic within the bureau. That the Lanarkshire incident held the key. But the lock was still being shaped, and Briar was to be offered the final piece of information - the files on O'Hara.

Of course Briar assumed that he knew much of this as he had been lucky enough to receive plenty of leaked info on O'Hara's demise and the eventual closing of that section within the bureau. O'Hara's role had never been too clear, but Briar had it on good faith that O'Hara had been the sole operative in 'Operation Barcode'. Basically this involved investigating the activists within the political extremes, keeping simple files of history, current activity, links, etc. The joke had been that the operation was so called because the bureau treated the left and right extremists as similar fundamental units - and like a barcode they could be read from left to right or right to left - it didn't really matter. O'Hara had gotten too involved with his work and had entered into some kind of Apocalypse Now scenario before his death in Leeds at the hands of some UFO enthusiasts. The bureau put it down to strange circumstances, but secretly were glad to get a loose cannon like O'Hara off the bureau payroll.

Briar thought hard. He kept coming back to the barcode concept. What was useful about a barcode was that it squashed a deal of information (anything from datasets to instructions) into a tiny readable form. But it was also the epitome of control. Not something that looked back in an archivistic fashion, but something that looked forward in terms of complete control. At worst to fashion a previously unconscious army of droids, just waiting for their instructions. The cases of the 'Stormcore' body and the 'NewFlesh' piercing centres were key here in establishing a logic. Briar's could only guess that 'Stormcore' members had been selected (through the rigorous self-selection process of straight edge) and then infected with a dormant information / instruction set. This would involve some outside power controlling the development of Anti-Static Action, but the bureau never revealed that it had an answer to this problem. Could 'Stormcore' be some kind of control set in a larger experiment? Were they the guinea pigs, or were they the scientists? It seemed that they were both... a perfect case of unknowingness inflicted from an outside organisation. But who was at work here? And who wanted the final piece of information that they assumed Briar could provide, where did the chain of command go next?

Briar received an urgent uplink data transmission. He settled down and stared at the patched through video link, clutching a coffee cup, half expecting to view some kind of porn movie / snuff picture. The link came from some kind of medical set-up - various people hurried around in front of the camera, carrying implements and bell-jars. Briar detected an air of urgency bordering on panic. Eventually a figure came to the front of the screen and introduced himself and the location: he was a bureau operative in Leeds and was holed up in some kind of bunker equipped for medical experiments. He began a monologue, trying to maintain a deadpan and level voice to avoid conveying the sense of panic that Briar could clearly see unfolding behind him... there appeared to be something strapped down to a large operating table somewhere to the right of the screen..

>Urgent report - voice transmission begins now<

The sound came on to reveal screaming, groaning and frenzied breathing. The narrator tried to remain calm.

>Subject behind me is or was possibly known to us. A local activist in the anarchist group Working Class Force, formed from the 1998 break-up of Class War. Subject had been active in the Leeds area for some time, attracting our attention and subsequent intermittent monitoring as under the rules laid out through Operation Barcode. At 1900 hours on 12/12/99 we were doing routine snooping work on the above subject as we had reports of an outburst of anti-millennium stickering in the North Leeds area. The subject was indeed covering all convenient surfaces with 'Fuck the Fucking Millenium' stickers when he suddenly seemed to go into some kind of seizure. He began to wrench his headphones from his ears and fell to the floor with streams of vomit and blood emerging from his mouth, nose and ears. A unit moved in as the subject started to go through some sort of metamorphosis, mutating into a vague humanoid form but with extended limbs and obvious sores that were re-establishing themselves with quartzite



and metal compounds. He was immediately detained and brought to this facility where we have been struggling to sedate him with doses that would kill a normal human ten times over<

Briar cut in immediately: What was the walkman playing?

>It was tuned to a local pirate station, a small operation that we have been monitoring and tolerating...<

More importantly, what music was playing, Briar interjected...

>I can't answer that, I can't see what importance such information could hold. Hang on, there seems to be further reports coming in of other strange activities in the surrounding area...<

Just then the picture went blank, as it appeared that the line had been cut. Briar redialled only to realise that the video link had been severed. He switched onto another channel and managed to get a sound only broadcast. Not much could be understood. It sounded as if there was some lunatic running amok, people screaming in fear and agony, and behind it all a penetrating and relentless shriek. He patched a line through to the office central bureau in Leeds to try and get a handle on what was going on. No such luck. It appeared that their whole network had gone down.

Briar pushed back from the comms desk, his chair skating across the floor in this deserted office he had been assigned. He scooted over to his desk and fired up his pc. He paused a minute and stared at the papers on his desk. His own report on the 'Lanarkshire Incident' was on top... he knew that this was the key to the puzzle and that the actual details of the Lanarkshire incident could be better understood through the horrors that were unfolding (for the moment) across the North of England.

Briar had some facts on the Lanarkshire incident and had the full details of the cover-up operation. The facts about what really happened didn't amount to much, and at the time Briar didn't actually care too much. As far as he was concerned, the threat of the ICC was pretty much sterile. Most of the report concerned the minutiae of the cover-up and examining how the untruths create a gentle swell of more diverse untruths and introduce doubts and notions of conspiracy. Briar used a mathematical wave flow model to basically keep a check on the maintenance of a prescribed level of watertightness on the cover-up. It wasn't just about believability, but Briar didn't want to go back over the complexities of such truth control specifics... that was all pretty much redundant now.

Regarding the facts of what actually happened Briar had all his original information. That a village in Lanarkshire had suffered a fatal outbreak of E-coli leaving several messy casualties. That this outbreak could be traced back to a butchers shop in the village. That there happened to be a van full of unassigned anarchists heading through to a conference in Glasgow, and they were involved in a fatal accident. That the village also was the home to three members on the fringes of the ICC - some externalised fraction who had settled in the area. Of course, only the information around the outbreak of E-coli needed to be kept inside a tight net of truth control. The mini-bus crash involving the anarchists generated a bit of news but nothing broke beyond the reaches of a bit of conspiracy theory on the net that actually linked the crash and the E-coli epidemic. As for the ex-ICC contingent in the village, then that was of no interest to anyone.

The next level of information on the incident was strictly confidential, its leakage would have vindicated the low-level conspiracy theory regarding the possible connections between the crash and the outbreak. Briar knew this: that the van full of anarchists was actually discovered crashed outside the village with all the passengers found in various stages of dismemberment and head impaction and that one of the ICC members had been feeling ill and had passed out in the local butchers shop after vomiting on the floor. Briar wasn't briefed to make any connections on this strange incident, just to keep an eye on the local ex-ICC contingent (they had all felt ill and all made a recovery, including the one who vomited in the butchers shop) and to keep monitoring post-operational truth control. But Briar obviously had ideas: firstly, the minibus wasn't involved in any car crash - all the passengers had suffered some bizarre and savage mutilation, and the van was found to be sprayed with sand from the inside. Secondly, the introduction of the E-coli plague resulted directly from meat sold through the butchers that the ex-ICC member had vomited in. At the time Briar was happy to leave it at that - his own personal interests in obtaining 'the truth' had long since waned.

But now it was different. Following the blow-up of events Briar had been at work combing the archives on 'Stormcore' activity. He had ascertained this: that a 'Stormcore' soundsystem had been part of a larger free festival positioned on the perimeter of the village at the time in question.

Now Briar could only make guesses. This was his theory: that 'Operation Barcode' was actually a front for a wider operation in body implanting within the activist political subset in the UK. That 'Stormcore' was a trial group in this experiment, a test set, that needed to be adjusted to actually assure effective delivery and genocidal capabilities of some sort of trigger to these implants. Whoever was behind the set-up was playing on the dictum that discipline breeds stupidity, and that there were none as disciplined as the 'Stormcore' faithful. Briar also suspected that the actual sounds of 'Stormcore' were important, that the development of rave, techno, hardcore, jungle, techstep and eventually stormcore had been carefully nurtured with this 'trigger' facility in mind. Briar had to use his knowledge of the ICC to make the next connections, he had to go against his ingrained ideas that they were close to numerical and functional extinction. This was what he came up with: that the ICC, as part of their struggle to encourage others to remove themselves from the swamp of anarchism, were actually fighting against the wider and more important implications of 'Operation Barcode'. Or that maybe the fight was from the swamp, controlled by 'Stormcore', directly against the ICC. It now seemed that the UK anarchist milieu were being subjected to this 'trigger' through a delivery method involving 'Stormcore'.

The following grey areas remained. Was 'Operation Barcode' a method of dealing with the threat of all political fringe activity, like pouring bleach down a toilet? Briar didn't think so. As it stood, the triggered mutation process seemed to create destructive monsters, with the last thing on their mind the destruction of themselves. Briar had already seen the havoc wreaked at Menwith



Hill SpyBase. So who wanted to create this army of alien hybrids within the dedicated fringes of the left, right and hard music milieus? Briar realised that this was the end of the line for him as far as finding an exact answer, that it was time to transmit his information to the next level in the chain of command. He formatted a page on his WP package and began typing. After a few lines he decided to run a save routine and paused when asked for a title for the document he wished to save. He thought of the incidents at Menwith Hill and typed the word SILICA into the system. The screen blinked momentarily and surprised Briar with its message:

[REPLACE EXISTING FILE? Y/N/CANCEL]

Briar struggled for breath. He checked the directory he was in. It was his own. Yet he had no recall of ever calling a file Silica. He chose another name and completed the save, quickly exiting the file and clicking through to the open file window. He typed in the word Silica and waited. A message came back:

FILE NOT FOUND

At 8-00 on that Monday evening Booth felt happy with the amount of re-disciplining he had put in on his bike. He had done a couple of extra circuits, initially to avoid answering his pile of Twilight 56 mail, and then kept on going because he started to feel strong in both body and spirit. He slumped on the sofa and reached for the tv remote control, reckoning that the extra time put in on the bike would allow a couple of extra sinning hours in front of the television. Besides, The Bill was just about to come on. He pressed the standby button on the remote and waited for the picture to form. Booth had a split second to sense the huge invisible energy build up in the room, before he was wrenched from his seat and felt as if he had been screwed up like an empty crisp packet suspended in mid-air. He felt intense sound and the proximity of intense heat without actually burning. He opened his eyes. He was no longer in his living room, that much was for certain.

The midnight crossing to Gothenburg had barely left the deserted port of Harwich before a large contingent of the Current had congregated around the TellyAddicts video quiz machine. From the chorus of unrestrained whoops two things became apparent: firstly that these ultra left Leninists had been steaming into the duty free, and secondly that they were using their intellectual prowess to give the quiz machine a serious hammering. The flashing panels were partly obscured by various plain stickers all bearing the same simple message 'READ THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST LEFT'. All eyes were focused on the display indicating the shrinking amount of time they had to complete their final question: 10, 9, 8, the payout light hovered on 15 - one place below the 30 jackpot - the gamble having been selected, 7, 6, 5, who played the third Doctor Who character?, 4, 3, 2, in a fit of supreme democratic centralism 'T' smashed his fist down hard on the answer 'B' button. The lights blinked, the machining made a gulping sound, and the payout indicator hopped reluctantly onto the 30 panel. Within seconds the comrades were scooping the pound coins from the winnings tray and heading for the bar, singing a drunken refrain of the Internationale.

Richard Davy checked his watch. 21-15 hours and he was already 15 miles out of Leeds and close to picking up the A628. He had been prepared for this. As the co-ordinator of the central bulletins for organisations close to the ICC he had hoped that his other members were also prepared. Was it only Leeds that had been targeted?

As the man directly responsible for the swift demise of O'Hara, Davy felt obliged to find out about O'Hara's fascination with document the ultra left and right milieus. Davy soon made some inroads into 'Operation Barcode', 'NewFlesh' and 'Stormcore', whilst keeping his own (and his organisations) profile as low as possible. Davy was prepared for something, but not for this. An advance from what appeared to be alien/anarchist hybrids with an intent on wiping him, and his Leeds based ex-ICC colleagues, off the face of the earth.

At the Flouch Inn crossroads his car screeched right onto the A628 and began the drag up the incline towards the left bend at Fiddlers Green. Nearly there. He parked at the public car park and dropped down the grass slope to the disused railway line. The track had been developed as a walkers and mountain bikers route, but all traffic was diverted to avoid the bricked up Woodhead Tunnel. The tunnel was a fine construction, being one of the longest in the area and an integral part of one of the old Sheffield-Manchester railway lines. It had closed decades ago, losing out to the line that ran along a southern swoop of the Dark Peak between Sheffield and Manchester. All it had done had been to isolate passengers at Penistone and Glossop, but the railway company gambled that such a loss would be less than the maintenance of the line. The tunnel became redundant and was immediately bricked up to avoid accidents to inquisitive explorers. There was talk of using it as a pipeline, but nothing came of it. Davy's group had broken in 10 years ago and began to turn it into a mission control centre. It was still part under construction but Davy figured it would be the best place to hide in the hope that other members would head here and then they could make a joint decision about heading to Scandinavia. He removed a brick from the wall that formed part of the railway cutting as the track ate through the valley before surrendering to the actual tunnel. A digital push-button control panel was revealed. Davy keyed in the code and the steel door set within the bricks of the closed tunnel end hissed with the release of its hydraulic system. He had 10 seconds to get inside before the locks were re-established.

8 miles down the disused line, on the fringes of Glossop, the remnants of what were Manchester's anarchist groups had fused with the members of Subversion and a few of the airport runway protestors. It was a unity that could never have been imagined within the strict dividing lines between left communists, anarchists and other anti-organisationalists... until now. The gang of mutated alien hybrids numbered about 10 in total. Others had been lost due to various battles with army special forces. But the aliens who had come from the group squatted round a transistor at the protest camp against Manchester Airports tenth runway had adopted tunnelling techniques. They now had the capabilities to dig with ferocity, using their sharp claws and actually digesting the earth in the process. They had evaded capture and were now united silently in their mission. To get to a point not far from here. To destroy without care or compassion, using extreme force. To await further orders for the next stage.



# small space

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## dynamics

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**(one)**

I've never taken any time to actually measure my space. I suppose there's enough space for what I do, and that's always been the case whatever I've been doing. I suppose everybody has enough space for whatever they do, and so there's no need to actually measure any spaces. Unless of course you wish to define your activity as actually measuring spaces. Though I don't think that I've actually met anybody who does that. Some people devote their time to studying the flora and fauna within their space, some even cultivating or experimenting or whatever - and I suppose that would necessitate taking into account the dimensions of one's area. But needless to say my area is sufficient for my needs. I have warmth (it never seems to be cold) and food is brought to me. But I have my mission that in effect keeps me warm and well fed if you would pardon my poetic license.

We all have our interests, which in effect define the small space we exist in. Contact remains minimal. Of course we are bounded on four sides by four other similarly sized spaces occupied by other individuals and their interests. From what I can gather there is a huge network, a grid if you will, of similar sized squares. But we are encouraged not to think of such things. However, there is movement. If I succeed sufficiently in the task that I have defined myself within my small space then I can move to another small space. Movement is always to the North or to the East. I have contact with those on my northern and eastern sides (more on that later) and there is always a new North and East to be found when I move North or East. In fact there's the whole grid. It's out there but as I said we're not supposed to think about it. It's not that we can't see further than our adjoining squares, it's just that we are not encouraged to do so. So you erect a kind of darkness. It's hard to describe.

So what about contact and communication? As I said, we are always looking to move either North or East. When we move I'm not sure what happens to our neighbours who previously occupied our North or East squares. It's rare that we move together such that as I move (say) North, then so does my neighbour, and we are both still in contact but involved in progressively advanced tasks. Normally you move North or East and the previous occupant disappears from the grid. Sometimes they move West or South. But very rarely. If you are moved West or South then it's like being demoted. Of course if you are demoted as you neighbour is moved upwards then you still remain neighbours but the positions are reversed. And this affects your contact (which I can begin to explain now). I am encouraged to correspond with those to my North and East, to learn things to help me overcome the tasks set out in my small space. At certain intervals I wait at either boundary and try to grab their attention. Of course, it's up to them if they want to talk to me. Thus I often engage in dialogue with those to my West and South (but only if I feel like it) - and this dialogue is of the form that I just answer questions. Of course some casual chat seeps in. Well it does with me, I can't help it. It does depend on my neighbours at the time though. Correspondence isn't permitted across the corners, so the people to my NW, SW, SE, or NE are out of bounds. I've never understood this, particularly as I would have thought that communication with my NorthEasterly neighbour would have been valuable. But that's not deemed to be the case. Of course we break rules and if I wait at my NE corner and if my North and East neighbours meet me (at their SE and NW corners respectively) then we can get a roundabout dialogue going with the person occupying NE (so long as they are at their SW corner). I hope it's not too complicated. You'd be surprised but such dialogue does go on. There always seems to be someone in a crisis and we do our best to help out. But maybe we're really after their spaces? Of course, if I am lucky enough to move North (or East) then my 'out of bounds' NE neighbour becomes accessible as it now forms my East (or North) neighbour.

So that's communication, and I suppose I've also covered movement in there. What I haven't mentioned is the postman. He brings me the intellectual supplies each day to pursue my particular task, and he takes away my letters and articles as part of the same process. Occasionally he brings a blue letter, that's from management. It says if I'm to be moved North or East, and if things go wrong South or West.

I'm pretty good at what I do, and I haven't been sent back yet. Currently I'm enjoying what I do (though I know that will change - that is my enjoyment of it will soon change, not the task itself as that NEVER changes). My role is to absorb material from the political milieu and to write letters criticising or congratulating or developing or whatever. Just corresponding really. I gather that success is judged by my ability to influence certain publications by provoking certain responses either as communication to me or, even better, as fuel for future articles in the actual magazines themselves. That hasn't happened yet, but I'm pretty sure that it will soon. I'm pretty sure...

**(two)**

The postman brings me just one magazine today, but it is a good one. A crisp new copy of Subversion, which always guarantees plenty of conflicting views and 'editorial' opinion. There's normally at least one thing in each issue that makes me pick up a pen and write some kind of comments. I scan through the magazine and the first few articles contribute towards what is becoming a very polarised set of opinions around attitudes to the resistance of the implementation of the Job Seekers Allowance. It's always the same: a glut of printwork with the same old arguments being shouted from the same old frozen poles that incredibly manage to remain in the capture or in the thrall of leftism. I love it, it defines my space. The articles seem determined to mark out progress through bringing together partial attempts at generalisation in the form of correspondence to articles and other correspondence. For now, my own isn't included. What becomes problematic is that the generalisation

hinted at is in fact (in my opinion, which defines my space) still a partiality - this problem of leftism - while the apparent partial divisions are only hardened due to the inability and refusal to move free from leftism (or an anti-leftism that remains FASCINATED by leftism). Oh well, at least Subversion is still worth reading as it offers some clues to a better praxis even if by showing (at times) the complete limitations of this or that approach. A case in point is this continuation of reportage on the dynamics of the struggle against the JSA. I feel I should add my comments but I stall as I put pen to paper: dynamics? is that a valid term? perhaps that is being over kind as the articles continue the obsession with and unique importance placed upon the consciousness and the activity of 'the militant' and 'the movement', and the projection of the consciousness onto the envisaged pre-programmed behaviour of 'the worker'. Thus I am confronted with an article that attacks a previous attempt to question the value of dogmatically linking up with an assumed dogmatically behaving lump of dole workers, but attacks this by relegating the argument as between the two most (presently) advanced crustifications in the revolutionary milieu - that is between workerism and reactionary primitivism (the current expression of "pious moral liberalism"). So it begins with a necessary sketch of the "descent" into primitivism and automatically tries to link the article it attacks with such a pole in the milieu (and also assumes that the hallowed 'battle of ideas' can only exist within this mythical milieu when the real battle is to get out of it). Similarly in one fell swoop the concept of examining the psychological and sociological effects on self and others of various jobs is relegated to the Primitivists Network's tendency of assuming all and sundry (meat eaters, dole dependents, etc etc) as the villains of the piece by perpetuating the system.

I make some notes on workerism as a start towards my contribution to the debate: If we consider workerism as the effective marrying of an economic fetishism on top of an attitude that the majority of the working class are sheep then we can see where the problem stems from. Thus there isn't much distance between the workerism of the Trotskyist's 'trade union consciousness' and the supposed anti-workerism in this article that still assumes that people are unaffected by the work they do and how this work affects others. Continuing from this is it any wonder that the leftist bunker has any interest or analysis in culture and the alleviation and mediation of our need to reconcile our denied creative expressions etc etc...

I stop there and wonder at what I have written. My thoughts return to the hardline anti-leftism that such magazines express so strongly, but the fact remains that all these magazines remain deadened in the thrall of leftism. It's a feeling I have been fostering for some time, but only now has it come to the surface. I finish the letter to Subversion and post it in a draft form. The magazine is filed in a box folder with the other 22 issues of Subversion and the various discussion papers I have received during my correspondence with them. The box is getting full as it also houses other UK left communist magazines and discussion papers from such as Aufheben, Wildcat, Radical Chains, ...

### **(three)**

the postman delivers only a blue letter today. Maybe I am being moved? I open it and I'm shocked to see a brief note expressing disappointment at not only my lack of development but the beginnings of what they term 'an undesirable attitude fitting my small space and the immediate small spaces around me'. Somehow I don't feel too worried. Perhaps I should. I'm sure I should.

I glance around at my neighbours and see if I can seek any advice. My Northern neighbour, as far as I can work out (as it is forbidden for them to tell), has a task of editing a political zine. This involves actually writing articles. I am pretty sure that the magazine isn't part of any particular group and that the occupant of the space fulfils a particular task to me except that they produce their own articles in response to their digesting of political print, and I simply resort to writing letters. The funny thing is that I have probably received and commented on the very magazine that is being prepared in the space to my North. Of course I would not receive it from my Northern neighbour but via the postal system. The same goes for him receiving my replies.

My Eastern neighbour also seems to work on a zine, but from what I gather this project seems to be more concerned with art. Kind of a reclaimed expression of self-creativity (or that is what he tells me). Anyway, he seems to be constantly divided between writing and cutting up bits of coloured papers. It looks kind of interesting (as an activity I mean), but I suppose I must be concentrating on my own task if I am to receive progression to either of the spaces to my North or East.

To my South is a lonely fellow who just concerns himself with reading and filing away the political magazines (he receives a duplicate delivery to me). To my West is someone who spends all their time poring over an undisclosed collection of photos. He has never revealed the nature of the photos, but is constantly devising new indexes and methods of cross-referencing, and constantly rearranging the actual layout of the photographs.

### **(four)**

I have this theory that I suppose I'm not supposed to have formulated. It goes like this: Movement in a latitudinal fashion somehow corresponds to quantum leaps in the ability to perform certain political disciplines, whilst movement in a longitudinal fashion equates to quantum leaps in cultural disciplining.

Thus (again I'm not supposed to know this) the square two spaces to my North is occupied by someone who edits a political magazine that is affiliated to an organisation, and the square above that has something to do with actually co-ordinating an organisation itself. Beyond that I don't know. The square two places to my East is occupied by someone who spends most of their time mixing records, and (from what I can hear when the wind blows in the right direction) most of the squares to my East (at this level) are concerned with noise based disciplines.



## (five)

I haven't mentioned NorthEast yet have I? Well, by the laws that govern this network of small spaces I suppose I'm not allowed to, but, as I haven't received a blue letter from management saying that I am no longer closing in on a position in breach of my existence here then I can only assume that I am still deviating from the fixed conditions that define me here, so what the hell...

NorthEast is, from what I can gather, a new age road protester. You know the kind, you see them on television and in the papers, in fact they're nearly almost celebrities. Digging tunnels under proposed construction sites, nailing their ears to old tree trunks, suspending themselves precariously from trees... NorthEast, it appears is having some difficulties. I can't actually see him, but I'm in my NorthEast corner and I'm in conference with both North and East, and they are in conference with North-East, so there's dialogue of a sort.

It appears he's digging in. Good practice I assume for the coming struggles? No, I'm informed. He's digging in against the impending threat of representation. I'm passed an issue of a magazine called 'Do Or Die' (number 7) - very nicely printed and all that. I remember it being delivered to me and passing some brief criticisms on the editorial wavering over the politics of the increasingly right wing Green Anarchist. Just the usual stuff really.

I suggest he's at a 'crossroads' in his struggle. This part joke doesn't go down too well. Sense of humour isn't tolerated in the network. His problem seems to be with the publishing of yet another book purporting to be a rough guide to direct action and DIY culture. The book seems to trade on a 'them and us' scenario, and NorthEast sees this as being between the direct activists and the liberal intellectuals engaged in their reformist struggles. He argues that the book attempts to drag liberals and their management schooled views into the movement and also to drag genuine activists towards the mainstream media and their institutions. Consequently this neuters all the effects.

I try to argue that perhaps there's another dimension to all of this, a dimension in which 'representation' is a crucial factor. That of ENTERTAINMENT. In fact both the book and direct action itself are pieces of entertainment, the book being mediated into the print form for liberals to experience. I am told by both North and East that NorthEast doesn't agree. Direct action isn't entertainment he argues. But I suggest that the whole concept of DIY versus mainstream is represented through their agenda... what constructs the mainstream? what participation is involved? what constructs direct action and DIY? what's participation here? I'm having difficulties getting my views across. Damn this management letter I've had... it's making me question my whole analytical framework, and I'm stumbling around a bit. Plus the fact that I can't speak to NorthEast directly and my questions and ideas are mediated by either North or East.

I point out NorthEast's definition of liberalism: "the political ideology of the bourgeoisie - it is the set of ideas, the theoretical framework, that goes hand in hand with capitalist social relations - liberals see society as being an aggregate of fundamentally separate and atomised individuals... liberals are fundamentally blind to the existence of social classes". I suggest that this is fine when used against the likes of DEMOS (who contribute to the book under review) but it is equally applicable to Green Anarchist and certain 'political' lumps of the DIY movement... They see the working class as ignorant and unable to make choices about trying to break free from the constraints that trap one into a life of 'complicity' with the system. In fact most of those involved in the DIY movement are privileged from the class position, being liberals themselves and choosing to invest their liberalism in an exciting lifestyle. Most working class people don't have the opportunity to make a choice, life starts and ends in a rut... This pseudo transcending of culture, somehow represented as an upwards dynamic from 'mainstream' to 'DIY', is surely a class privilege. It isn't that working class people choose a shit education system, or shit aspects of popular culture, or shit diets, or shit whatever, they don't have a choice.

I don't seem to be having much luck with this dialogue, and I don't want to get drawn into some political confrontation with North, who, being the good servant that he is, is always up for some theoretical headbanging. Instead I take up conversation with East and talk about cultural dynamics. It's something he's interested in but admits that he's having difficulty in making something useful from it all. We joke about the latest car advertisement that features a 'through the car window viewing trip' of recent DIY cultures, ironically the car drifts along through what is possibly modelled on a reclaim the streets style carnival. Our discussion turns to television and East remarks that the idea of Orwell's 1984 style television surveillance system is already up and running: it's not that we are being watched but that as long as we are watching television then we are being kept hypnotised such that there's no need to actually watch us. East seems keen on this thesis and is using it as a central tenet in the next issue of his cultural magazine. I wish him luck and retreat back into my square, pretending to be interested in shuffling through my immense library of fringe political and cultural paraphernalia.

## (six)

I thought that my conversations with North and East might find favour with the management. No such luck. The postman only brings a new publication: "Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy" by Collectivities. Normally I would be excited by such a delivery. I have encountered the work of this left communist group in the past, particularly their long and tortuous dialogue with the Leninists of the CWO. But I just can't get up the enthusiasm to read the text, let alone comment on it.

## (seven)

Another letter from management. More bad news. I'm to be moved. I'm sure it isn't North or East, so it must be back. Both North and East are no longer talking to me. They've possibly been tipped off by management. And I'm not receiving any journals or magazines at all now. I know because I can see that both North and South have been getting political magazines with the usual regularity. Shit, even South isn't interested in me anymore. Just waiting I suppose...



## (eight)

One day I decide to have a fire, to burn my library. Maybe I could make something happen. I clear two spaces in the earth, one to build a fire with all the reams of printed political papers, and a second to record the time lines of each series of publications that I add to the fire. I begin to empty the boxes into the circle of stones I have created around the first piece of cleared earth. It doesn't take long to get a fire going, and as I add more boxes it seems to eat up the paper voraciously. I put the finishing touches to my recording marks in the earth:

Here and Now / 18 issues / 1985 - ?  
Insurrection / 7 issues / 1982 - 1989  
Workers Playtime / ? issues / 1982 - 1984  
Intercom / 6 issues / 1983 - 1984  
A Communist Effort / 4 issues / 1984  
Wildcat / 18 issues / 1984 - ?  
Communism / 10 issues / 1983 - ?  
Organise / 48 issues / 1984 - ?  
Subversion / 23 issues / 1988 - ?  
Flux / 7 issues / 1990 - 1994  
Radical Chains / 4 issues / 1989 - 1993  
London Notes / 1 issue / 1992  
Aufheben / 6 issues / 1992 - ?

At this point I give up, faced with the prospect of marking in various smaller publications and inter-group discussion documents. Anyway, my fire is creating a ball of light that seems to light up the whole network. I stand on my tiptoes and strain to see the ends of the network. Not possible. But there are so many squares all with different activities going on.

There's people sat watching tv, people sitting in the hull of an empty bus as if they are commuting, people in bed, people engaged in all sorts of hobbies and strange occupations. I decide to see as far North as possible. Of course North isn't watching, neither is NorthNorth (or 2N for convenience). 3N is busy making frantic notes, possibly for his organisation, and 4N, 5N and 6N all seem to be involved in some writing process. I strain to see 7N - all I can make out is a figure slumped at a desk.

My fire dies down and eventually the (lack of) visibility returns to normal. I fall asleep excited.

## (nine)

I don't even wait for the postman to come. I get up and start walking. Right through the boundary between my space and North's, right through the boundary between his space and 2N's, and onwards until I reach 7N (though it feels like I've crossed about 50 squares occupied by figures engaged in writing, posting, and other administrative duties). Anyway, I reach this figure slumped at a desk who looks pretty much like the person I saw through the flames of my fire. I try to speak to him but he fails to find any words in reply. It's not as if he doesn't want to, he simply can't. He keeps returning his gaze to his desk, scattered with various papers. I pick one up and he flinches.

It is entitled "Psychedelic Bordiguism : Invariance and Fictive Capital". Some of the words bring a hint of recognition: a translation from an extremely extrapolated branch of French ultra-leftism. I have met some of this stuff before, but found it too difficult to understand. Most of the political milieu regarded it with the same attitude, however there remained a minute fascination with these intangible works (I must confess that I fell prey to this). I check the date of the article - 1977 - I smile as I realise that punk was just kicking in then, but punk business entrepreneurs chose to back situationism rather than this highly coded marxism. There are some key concepts in the document that are hard to grasp: fictive capital, illusory representations of value, anthropomorphised capital... the translation originates from a document by Guerre Sociale. I ask 7N what became of them, and he starts to stammer, producing still no words but instead a staccatto version of his continuous moan.

I check the other documents on his desk. Issues of Invariance, La Banquise, Le Brise-Glace, all partly translated. He seems to be working on a new document: "Muscularity, Brutality, Frailty". I check down to see what it's about. It seems to concern the relationship between theory and practice, and how one arises in the presence (or lack) of the other. There are sections on practical inactivity - which he classes as mainstream mediated culture and hobbies etc - and impractical activity - which is basically political careerism under leftism. The bulk of the document concerns the development of theory, and sketches out the intense currents developed through groups such as Invariance. There are some notes towards an argument: "we take a practice in understanding the reasons for theory >> we extrapolate ourselves out of the impasse >> what practical / social conditions exist for such abstracted theory to develop"...

I ask him about the title. He explains: "The muscularity represents the extremities of theorising developed by groups around the French ultra-left, the brutality represents the self-hatred that emerges in groups such as the SI and their adherents, and the frailty represents the ease with which certain elements who had respect in the ultra-left milieu managed to easily and quickly find favour with extreme currents such as revisionism..."

He pauses here and puts his head back in his hands, slumped forward at his desk. I examine him and notice a build up of dust on his desk and papers, only disturbed by his brief and reluctant conversation with me. He now rests motionless, contemplating the impossibility of the task in front of him. It then strikes me to see who is surrounding him. To his South sits a figure pretty much the same as 7N, slumped at a desk: all that discerns him from 7N is his sporadic making of notes. 7N has erected a wall to his West so there is no view, to his North there is - well - a mist that I can't see through. I move towards it and 7N leaps up from his desk and pleads with me to go no further, pulling at my shirt: "No-one is able to pass through there, no-one!"...



I look East and see a square occupied by a large, rounded gritstone boulder. The earth around the bottom circumference is well worn, and the rock faces of the boulder itself are well brushed, cleaned, and dabbed with chalk patches. I walk across and try to figure out what's going on. On the Eastern side of the boulder, initially out of sight, a figure is stretching and flexing on a foam camping mat. He is dressed in loose clothes, climbing slippers, and large chalk bag. His physique seems to be specific to his task, no fat whatsoever and muscle only where need, in the forearms, shoulders, back and chest. He seems keen to speak to me:

"Have you come to try my new problem, its the hardest in the country, I'm pretty sure..."

He lies down under the boulder and slowly places a hand, a toe, his other hand, and finally his other toe, on the boulder. I look at him. He is in an almost horizontal position and appears to be totally at rest, however, on a closer look it is obvious that many muscles are stretched and locked at breaking point - holding onto the rock and positioning the various centres of gravity of the limbs and torso in a balanced position. I look at his points of contact: his right 'hand' is a single finger pocket with his middle digit pushed into the rock up to the first joint, his left 'hand' is a well chalked smear on a flat piece of rock, fingers splayed out onto a minimum friction, his right and left 'feet' are on tiny lips on the rock face, barely large enough to notice. His body tenses and the muscles in his back and shoulders suddenly become exaggerated - he holds for a moment and then powers upwards with his left hand, both his feet leaving their small footholds. His left hand stretches out and the thumb and forefinger pinch around a small pebble, he connects and hold, suddenly bringing up his right foot and pushing it against the rough rock. It provides a moments friction, enough time to let go of the finger pocket with his right hand and pull through on the pebble, the right hand now taking a turn to lead through and reach a high spot. It grasps blindly at the lip of the boulder and finds a tiny patch of friction - within seconds the climber has flipped himself onto the top of the boulder. He sits triumphantly, crossed legged, arms outstretched as if cooling the muscles: "Fancy a try?"

I know it is way beyond my capabilities. I don't have the time, discipline, or inclination to begin to even test out my body towards its suitability to such a task. Besides, I am convinced that even if I had the time, discipline or inclination to train towards such a goal then I could never do things such as grasp and hold a small pebble. It just isn't in me. I could never do it.

I look over at 7N, he hasn't moved. Then I realise the connection. About what can be grasped by who. About the frustration of reaching an absolute limit for even the special ones. About doubting the limit because sometimes it can appear oh so close. About loneliness.

I walk down towards my square, taking in a few other squares, moving East and West as the interest takes me. Quite soon I become disorientated, not sure if I've come too far South or whether I should head East or West. I keep walking, not even sure if I've actually still got a square...

