



# The Fisher-Function

2017



*The required subject—a collective subject—  
does not exist, yet the crisis, like all the other  
global crises we're now facing, demands that  
it be constructed.*

Mark Fisher



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*So I've been trying to think of what remains after the physical body's gone, when the singularity of a life can no longer rely on that frail support and needs other carriers. I try to think about it in a way I think he'd appreciate: in terms of an abstract, impersonal force acting in the present tense. The spectre isn't a matter of pretending he's still here in person—as if the notion of a 'person' wasn't precisely what was at issue—or of commemoration or superstition, but—to use a word of his own invention—a question of hyperstition: What is the Fisher-Function? How did it make itself real, and how can we continue to realise it? Many of us naturally feel a need to ensure this is a moment when the force he brought into our world is redoubled rather than depleted. And to do so, to continue his work and our own, we have to try to understand his life, and the consequences of his death, at once horrifying and awakening, as a part of the Fisher-Function. And I don't simply mean the intellectual contributions that we can appreciate, extend, take forward into the future; I also mean what we need to learn in terms of looking after ourselves and each other, right now.*

Robin Mackay



# INGRESS

*The Fisher-Function is built around essays, mixes and unidentifiable audio-events produced by Mark Fisher. Converging around the idea of thinking with Mark, The Fisher-Function public programme focuses upon and departs from listening as a shared modality for thought. Organised as a series of reading and listening sessions, it proposes to articulate the stakes in listening to and with each other. Staying with Mark's commitment to making anxieties public and socializing the pressures generated by the privatization and individualization of conditions for study, the programme follows the idea formulated by Robin Mackay in his eulogy for Mark Fisher: 'What is the Fisher-Function? How did it make itself real, and how can we continue to realise it?'*<sup>1</sup>

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1 Robin Mackay, 'Mark Fisher Memorial' [speech] (Urbanomic, 2017).

*Rather than looking at Mark's 'classic' texts, The Fisher-Function proposes an experiment in dispossession that shifts between the multiple registers of less well known yet critical writings. It draws texts from Mark's blog k-punk, from his years in the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, his writings on music and politics and his interrupted formulations of Acid Communism and Post-capitalist Desire together with examples from his audio-essays and his mixes. New volumes of Mark's work will surely follow in the years to come: what you hold in your hand are texts and musics, each of which selected us and insisted upon their existence.*

*The Fisher-Function is set to take place within Goldsmiths; yet it aspires to reach far beyond the academic institution so as to connect with the multiple energies circulating outside the academy animated by Mark's passion for persuasion. In bringing together specific moments from his work, we can begin to assemble circuits that linked theory and fiction into a continuous cybernetics of everyday life. Our aim is to extend the circuits of this thought by providing inputs for outputs that can feedforward into a praxis that is open to further inputs.*

*To activate the Fisher-Function is to insist upon the tensions of Mark's writing. It is a way of holding a space open. The necessity of Mark's work emerged over a number of years under intense conditions. Lurking in the datacombs, the intensity of his project, always*

*programmatic, always synthetic, always connective, has never ceased to mobilise and to operationalise. Now, more than ever, we feel the need to make these concepts work for us and on us and through us.*

*How does one move in and with and towards systems of care that need to exist theoretically and therapeutically, working on both, simultaneously? As students of the Fisher-Function, we locate ourselves within the porous, productive and perilous space between mental distress and psychic vigilance. What is politically necessary, today, in the midst of the threat and the lure of authoritarian populism, is to articulate the stakes of this conjuncture in all its complexity.*

*Gathering around Mark's work implies updating our commitments. It implies rebuilding the conditions for consciousness-raising. It implies an unlearning of individual thought; a reading and thinking with each other. What do we come to these sessions with? And what do we take away? To depart from Mark's concepts, to be informed by their force, is to take the opportunity to construct acts of hearing, speaking, attention, concentration, drift, thinking, listening. Collective acts whose repercussions have never stopped sounding and resounding beyond the precincts and the protocols of educational institutions.*

Lendl Barcelos, Matt Colquhoun, Ashiya Eastwood,  
Kodwo Eshun, Mahan Moalemi, Geelia Ronkina



# POST-CAPITALIST DESIRE

*Built upon the intricately sketched landscape of Capitalist Realism, at the heart of the naturalised order of appearances assumed to render all alternatives impossible, 'Post-Capitalist Desire' is a climax in Mark's commitment to envision a future for the left. It calls into question capital's long-established monopoly on desire.*

*Why should a desire for technology and consumer goods appear necessarily to mean a desire for capitalism? The conflation, Mark argues, results from capital's opportunist aligning of technology and desire. This occurs on capital's own terms when "anti-capitalism entails being anarcho-primitivist": finding solutions in a self-organizational 'organicist-localism' while*

*maintaining a stance that is anti-technological, anti-mass production. An explicitly antagonist left falls short of gaining traction on the libidinal flows of social drive that are already animated by capital and are further enabling its processes in return.*

*A post-capitalist politics begins with affirming that this structural antagonism should therefore be reconsidered because of its being heedless of capital's programmed reality. But it also refuses to remain caught up in ideology critique, circumscribed under the crust of complaint and denunciation. To strategise against capitalism is to summon and reclaim the possible "Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us".<sup>1</sup>*

*Mark identifies the challenges that a future-oriented left needs to face by tying conservative, reactionary statements that hold up capital's techno-libidinal conflation to a certain strand in the writings of Nick Land from the 1990s. Via Land—the 'avatar of accelerated capital'—Mark exposes how the prime mandate of capitalism is to capture libidinal circuitries and channel public desiring in certain directions rather than others.*

*As Mark calls them elsewhere, "libidinal technicians"<sup>2</sup> have embedded their parasitic mechanisms into everyday*

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1 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Verso, 2009), p. 18.

2 Mark Fisher, 'How To Kill a Zombie: Strategizing the End of Neoliberalism', in *openDemocracy*. 18 July 2013.

life and grown their 'semiotic excrescences' on the bodies of individuals. It is then made clear that a traditional 'leftist-Canutist' attitude is incapable of desire-engineering. It is fundamentally opposed to such engineering in its anti-libidinal insistence on conservatism: "preserving, protecting and defending".

Determined to break from Landian thanatophoric fatalism, Mark incites a post-capitalism commensurate with the 'inorganic nature of libido'—the death drive. This is not a desire for death or for the extinction of desire, which is characteristic of both the apocalyptic acceleration of deterritorialising processes and of the 'ascetic-authoritarian' measures imposed by communist states. Rather, it is a desire to push an organism's life out of obdurate homeostasis, away from a life forcefully lived along the lines of preservation and protection.

In 'Utopia as Replication', Fredric Jameson turns to Marx to restate that destratifying forces of capital tend toward "the centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labor".<sup>3</sup> In other words, capital tends towards the emergence of the General Intellect and the growth of monopoly, of a reterritorialised extremity after ultimate deterritorialisation. Jameson, in a self-admittedly perverse move, tends to identify this monopoly, best exemplified in the post-Fordist context of late capitalism by the largest company in the world, Wal-Mart, as a utopian phenomenon.

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3 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (Penguin, 1976), p. 929.

*Mark argues for a turn from the anti-capitalist ‘no logo’ call to a post-capitalist ‘counterbranding’ via Jameson’s outlining of a utopian method, where a logical operation of inverted genealogy was attempted—a genealogy of contingent futurities. To locate utopian impulses in the preconditions that are already reserved in the present is to target that which was promised by the cultural revolutions of the left and yet was never delivered; spotting the ‘residual’ only to leave it in search of the ‘emergent’.*

*The demand of this pursuit of abandoned promises is to address and rework substructures that lend support to the apparent reality, away from the underlying Real(s) and fundamentally designed against the fulfillment of desires—only feeding and stimulating them enough to be always worthy of capture, ready to be milked. Hence the recovered evocation of ‘designer socialism’, in the absence of which the design of capitalist realism has been made to appear unrivaled.*

*It is then evident that the Landian take on the death drive and the ‘historical-machinic force of libido’ is biased against taking the reterritorialising turn, deeming it impossible, or its possibility insignificant. However, it is in the course of this turn that the left needs to implement its ‘counterlibidinal’ politics. “[D]isarticulating technology and desire from capital”, while simultaneously intensifying the processes of deterritorialisation only in the manner of “de-anchoring*

[...] *the libidinal fragments from the capitalist sigils with which they are arbitrarily articulated*”, as Mark prefigured in ‘*Digital Psychedelia*’, an essay on *The Otolith Group’s Anathema*.<sup>4</sup>

*To march toward and build (around) an Acid Communism requires “a new use of digital machinery, a new kind of digital desire: a digital psychedelia, no less. [...] It dilates time; induces us to linger and drift” as it “rediscovers the dream time that capitalist realism has eclipsed”.*<sup>5</sup> *To host post-capitalism is to expand the presumably unaffordable spans of time from the side of the future. As Jameson maintains, “[s]uch revival of futurity and of the positing of alternate futures is not itself a political program nor even a political practice: but it is hard to see how any durable or effective political action could come into being without it”.*<sup>6</sup>

Mahan Moalemi

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4 Mark Fisher, ‘*Digital Psychedelia: The Otolith Group’s Anathema*’, in *Death and Life of Fiction: Modern Monsters – Taipei Biennial 2012 Journal* (Spectormag, 2014), pp. 160–166.

5 Ibid.

6 Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (Verso, 2009), p. 434.

Soon after the Occupy London Stock Exchange movement had begun, the novelist turned Conservative politician Louise Mensch appeared on the BBC TV programme, *Have I Got News For You?*, mocking the protesters with the claim that the occupation had led to the “biggest ever queues at Starbucks”. The problem, Mensch insisted, was not only that the occupiers bought corporate coffee—they also used iPhones. The suggestion was clear: being anti-capitalist entails being an anarcho-primitivist. Mensch’s remarks were ridiculed, not least on the programme itself, but the questions that they raise can’t be so easily dismissed. If opposition to capital does not require that one maintains an anti-technological, anti-mass production stance, why—in the minds of some of its supporters, as much as in the caricatures produced by opponents such as Mensch—has anti-capitalism become exclusively identified with this organicist localism? Here we are a long way from Lenin’s enthusiasm for Taylorism, or Gramsci’s celebration of Fordism, or indeed from the Soviet embrace of technology in the space race. Capital has long tried to claim a monopoly on desire: we only have to remember the famous 1980s advert for Levi jeans in which a teenager was seen anxiously smuggling a pair of jeans through a Soviet border post. But the emergence of consumer electronic goods has

allowed capital to conflate desire and technology so that the desire for an iPhone can now appear automatically to mean a desire for capitalism. Here we think of another advertisement, Apple's notorious '1984' commercial, which equated personal computers with the liberation from totalitarian control.

Mensch was not alone in taunting the occupiers for their consumption of chain coffee and their reliance on consumer technologies. In the London *Evening Standard*, one columnist crowed that it "was capitalism and globalisation that produced the clothes the protesters wear, the tents they sleep in, the food they eat, the phones in their pockets and the social networks they use to organise".<sup>1</sup> The kind of arguments that Mensch and fellow reactionaries made in response to Occupy were versions of those presented in Nick Land's extraordinary anti-Marxist texts of the 1990s. Land's theory-fictional provocations were guided by the assumption that desire and communism were fundamentally incompatible. It is worth the left treating these texts as something other than anti-Marxist trollbait for at least three reasons. Firstly, because they luridly expose the

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1 Ian Birrell, 'Why the St Paul's Rebels Without a Clue Can't Simply Be Ignored', *Evening Standard*, 18 October 2012.

scale and the nature of the problems that the left now faces. Land fast forwards to his near-future, our near-past, in which capital is totally triumphant, highlighting the extent to which this victory was dependent upon the libidinal mechanics of the advertising and PR companies whose semiotic excrescences despoil former public spaces. “Anything that passes other than by the market is steadily cross-hatched by the axiomatic of capital, holographically encrusted in the stigmatizing marks of its obsolescence. A pervasive negative advertising delibidinizes all things public, traditional, pious, charitable, authoritative, or serious, taunting them with the sleek seductiveness of the commodity.”<sup>2</sup> Land is surely right about this “pervasive negative advertising”—but the question is how to combat it. Instead of the anti-capitalist ‘no logo’ call for a retreat from semiotic productivity, why not an embrace of all the mechanisms of semiotic-libidinal production in the name of a post-capitalist counterbranding? ‘Radical chic’ is not something that the left should flee from—very much to the contrary, it is something that it must embrace and cultivate. For didn’t the moment of the left’s failure coincide with the growing perception that ‘radical’ and ‘chic’

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2 Nick Land, ‘Machinic Desire’, in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007* (Urbanomic/Sequence, 2010), pp. 341–2.

are incompatible? Similarly, it is time for us to reclaim and positivise sneers such as ‘designer socialism’—because it is the equation of the ‘designer’ with ‘capitalist’ that has done so much to make capital appear as if it is the only possible modernity.

The second reason Land’s texts are important is that they expose an uncomfortable contradiction between the radical left’s official “commitment to revolution, and its actual tendency towards political and formal-aesthetic conservatism. In Land’s writings, a quasi-hydraulic force of desire is set against a leftist-Canutist impulse towards preserving, protecting and defending. Land’s delirium of dissolution is like an inverted autonomism, in which capital assumes all the improvisational and creative vibrancy that Mario Tronti and Hardt/Negri ascribe to the proletariat/the multitude. Inevitably overwhelming all attempts by “the human security system” to control it, capital emerges as the authentic revolutionary force, subjecting everything—including the structures of so-called reality itself—to a process of liquefaction: “meltdown: planetary china-syndrome, dissolution of the biosphere into the technosphere, terminal speculative bubble crisis, ultravirus, and revolution stripped of all christian-socialist eschatology (down to its

burn-core of crashed security)”.<sup>3</sup> Where is the left that can speak as confidently in the name of an alien future, that can openly celebrate, rather than mourn, the disintegration of existing socialities and territorialities?

The third reason Land’s texts are worth reckoning with is because they assume a terrain that politics now operates on, or must operate on, if it is to be effective—a terrain in which technology is embedded into everyday life and the body; design and PR are ubiquitous; financial abstraction enjoys dominion over government; life and culture are subsumed into cyberspace, and data-hacking consequently assumes increasing importance. It may seem to be the case that Land, the avatar of accelerated capital, ends up amply confirming Žižek’s claims about Deleuze and Guattari’s work being an ideology for late capitalism’s deterritorialising flows.<sup>4</sup> But the problem with Žižek’s critique is twofold—firstly, it takes capital at its own word, discounting its own tendencies towards inertia and territorialism; and secondly, because the position from which this critique is made implicitly depends upon the desirability and the possibility of a return

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3 Nick Land, ‘Meltdown’, in *ibid.*, p. 442.

4 See Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (Routledge, 2004).

to Leninism/Stalinism. In the wake of the decline of the traditional workers' movement, we have too often been forced into a false choice between an ascetic-authoritarian Leninism that at least worked (in the sense that it took control of the state and limited the dominion of capital) and models of political self-organisation which have done little to challenge neoliberal hegemony. What we need to construct is what was promised but never actually delivered by the various 'cultural revolutions' of the 1960s: an effective anti-authoritarian left.

Part of what makes Deleuze and Guattari's work continue to be a major resource in the current moment is that, like the work of the Italian autonomists who inspired it and who were in turn inspired by it, it was specifically engaging with this problem. The point now isn't to defend Deleuze and Guattari per se, but to accept that the question that they raised—the relation of desire to politics in a post-Fordist context—is the crucial problem that the left now faces. The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the retreat of the workers' movement in the west wasn't only or even primarily due to failures of will or discipline. It is the very disappearance of the Fordist economy, with its concomitant 'disciplinary' structures, which means that "we can't just carry on with the same old

forms of political institution, the same modes of working class social organisation, because they no longer correspond to the actual and contemporary form of capitalism and the rising subjectivities that accompany and/or contest it”.<sup>5</sup> Without a doubt, the language of ‘flows’ and ‘creativity’ has an exhausted quality because of its appropriation by capitalism’s ‘creative industries’. Yet the proximity of some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts to the rhetoric of late capitalism is not a mark of their failure, but of their success in gaining some purchase on the problems of political organisation under post-Fordism. The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, or in Foucault-Deleuze’s terms from disciplinary to control societies, certainly involves a change in libido—an intensification of desire for consumer goods, funded by credit—but this doesn’t mean that it can be combated by an assertion of working-class discipline. Post-Fordism has seen the decomposition of the old working class—which, in the Global North at least, is no longer concentrated in manufacturing spaces, and whose forms of industrial action are consequently no longer as effective as they once were. At the same time,

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5 Éric Alliez, in ‘Deleuzian Politics? A Roundtable Discussion: Éric Alliez, Claire Colebrook, Peter Hallward, Nicholas Thoburn, Jeremy Gilbert (chair)’, *New Formations* 68:1, Deleuzian Politics?, p. 150.

the libidinal attractions of consumer capitalism needed to be met with a counterlibido, not simply an anti-libidinal dampening.

This entails that politics comes to terms with the essentially inorganic nature of libido, as described by (among others) Freud, the Surrealists, Lacan, Althusser and Haraway, as well as Deleuze and Guattari. Inorganic libido is what Lacan and Land call the death drive: not a desire for death, for the extinction of desire in what Freud called the Nirvana principle, but an active force of death, defined by the tendency to deviate from any homeostatic regulation. As desiring creatures, we *ourselves* are that which disrupts organic equilibrium. The novelty of the *Anti-Oedipus* account of history is the way that it combines this account of inorganic libido with the Hegelian-Marxist notion that history has a direction. One implication of this is that it is very difficult to put this historically machined inorganic libido back in its box: if desire is a historical-machinic force, its emergence alters 'reality' itself; to suppress it would therefore involve either a massive reversal of history, or collective amnesia on a grand scale, or both.

For Land, this means that "post-capitalism has no real meaning except an end to the engine of

change”.<sup>6</sup> This brings us back to Mensch, and we can now see that the challenge is to imagine a post-capitalism that is commensurate with the death drive. At the moment, too much anti-capitalism seems to be about the impossible pursuit of a social system oriented towards the Nirvana principle of total quiescence—precisely the return to a mythical primitivist equilibrium which the likes of Mensch mock. But any such return to primitivism would require either an apocalypse or the imposition of authoritarian measures—how else is drive to be banished? And if primitivist equilibrium is *not* what we want, then we crucially need to articulate what it is we do want—which will mean *disarticulating* technology and desire from capital.

Given all this, it’s time for us to consider once again to what extent the desire for Starbucks and iPhones really is a desire for capital. What’s curious about the Starbucks phenomenon, in fact, is the way in which the condemnation of the chain uncannily echoes the stereotypical attacks on communism: Starbucks is generic, homogeneous, it crushes individuality and enterprise. At the same time, however, this kind of generic space—and evidently not the mediocre and overpriced coffee—is quite

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6 Nick Land, ‘Critique of Transcendental Materialism’, in *Fanged Noumena*, p. 626.

clearly at the root of Starbucks' success. Now, it begins to look as if, far from there being some inevitable fit between the desire for Starbucks and capitalism, Starbucks feeds desires which it can meet only in some provisional and unsatisfactory way. What if, in short, the desire for Starbucks is the thwarted desire for communism? For what is the 'third place' that Starbucks offers—this place that is neither home nor work—if not a degraded prefiguration of communism itself? In his provocative essay 'Utopia as Replication'—originally titled 'Wal-Mart as Utopia'—Jameson dares us to approach Wal-Mart, that emblematic object of anti-capitalist loathing,

*as a thought experiment—not, after Lenin's crude but practical fashion, as an institution faced with what (after the revolution) we can "lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus", but rather as what Raymond Williams calls the emergent, as opposed to the residual—the shape of a Utopian future looming through the mist, which we must seize as an opportunity to exercise the Utopian imagination more fully, rather than an occasion for moralizing judgements or regressive nostalgia.<sup>7</sup>*

The dialectical ambivalence that Jameson

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7 Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia as Replication', in *Valences of the Dialectic* (Verso, 2009), p. 422.

calls for in respect of Wal-Mart—“admiration and positive judgement [...] accompanied by [...] absolute condemnation”—is already exhibited by the customers of Wal-Mart and Starbucks, many of whom are among the most trenchant critics of the chains, even as they habitually use them. This anti-capitalism of devout consumers is the other side of the supposed complicity with capital that Mensch sees in anti-capitalist protestors.

For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism is defined by the way it simultaneously engenders and inhibits processes of destratification. In their famous formulation, capitalism deterritorialises and reterritorialises at the same time; there is no process of abstract decoding without a reciprocal recoding via neurotic personalisation (Oedipalisation)—hence the early twenty-first-century disjunction of massively abstract finance capital on the one hand, and Oedipalised celebrity culture on the other. Capitalism is a necessarily failed escape from feudalism, which, instead of destroying encastement, reconstitutes social stratification in the class structure. It is only given this model that Deleuze and Guattari’s call to ‘accelerate the process’ makes sense. It does not mean accelerating any or everything in capitalism willy-nilly, in the hope that capitalism will

thereby collapse. Rather, it means accelerating the processes of destratification that capitalism cannot but obstruct. One virtue of this model is that it places capital, not its adversary, on the side of resistance and control. The reactionary elements within capitalism can only conceive of urban modernity, cyberspace and the decline of the family as a fall from a mythical organic community. But can't *we* conceive of consumer capitalism's culture of ready meals, fast food outlets, anonymous hotels and disintegrating family life as dim pre-echo of precisely the social field imagined by early Soviet planners such as L. M. Sabsovich?

*Building on the whole tradition of socialist dreams of household collectivism, Sabsovich imagined the coordination of all food producing operations in order to transform raw food products into complete meals, deliverable to the population in urban cafeterias, communal dining rooms, and the workplace in ready-to-eat form by means of thermos containers. No food shopping, no cooking, no home meals, no kitchens. Similar industrialization of laundering, tailoring, repair, and even house cleaning (with electrical appliances) would allow each person a sleeping-living room, free of all maintenance cares. Russia would in fact become a vast free-of-charge hotel chain.<sup>8</sup>*

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8 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 199.

The Soviet system could not achieve this vision, but perhaps its realisation still lies ahead of us, provided we accept that what we are fighting *for* is not a ‘return’ to the essentially reactionary conditions of face-to-face interaction, “a line of racially pure peasants digging the same patch of earth for eternity”,<sup>9</sup> or what Marx and Engels called “the idiocy of rural life”, but rather the construction of an *alternative* modernity, in which technology, mass production and impersonal systems of management are deployed as part of a refurbished public sphere. Here, public does not mean state, and the challenge is to imagine a model of public ownership beyond twentieth-century-style state centralisation. There were clues, perhaps, in the architectural marvels from the dying years of the Soviet bloc, photographed by Frédéric Chaubin: “buildings designed at the hinge of different worlds, in which sci-fi futurism conjoins with monumentalism”, “quasi-psychedelic, crypto-Pop”.<sup>10</sup> While Chaubin sees these buildings as a temporary efflorescence brought about by the rotting of the Soviet system, can’t we grasp them instead as relics from a yet-to-be-realised post-capitalist future in which desire and communism are joyfully

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9 Nick Land, ‘Making it with Death: Remarks on Thanatos and Desiring-Production’, in *Fanged Noumena*, p. 281.

10 Frédéric Chaubin, *CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* (Taschen, 2010), p. 15, 9.

reconciled? “Neither modern nor postmodern, like free-floating dreams, they loom up on the horizon like pointers to a fourth dimension.”<sup>11</sup>

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11 Ibid., p. 15.



# GOOD FOR NOTHING

*When Repeater Books announced the death of Mark Fisher at the beginning of January 2017 we suddenly, abruptly, found ourselves displaced to a world-without-Mark. Collective grief surfaced almost immediately as social media streams and networks—where the news had first spread—became a space for people to share their memories, thoughts and adoration for Mark’s work.*

*The influence of his writing accelerated through cyberspace at astonishing speed; the Fisher-Function, as eulogised by Robin Mackay, quickly took effect. People shared his writings on music, theory and politics, bringing together artists, critical thinkers, insiders and outsiders alike, as they all paid tribute to his work.*

However, one piece rapidly began to stand out: ‘Good For Nothing’. This treatise on Mark’s personal conflict with depression had already been a hard, visceral read when first published in 2014. It now became vital for the discussions that would emerge from Mark’s suicide.

Those first few weeks in the aftermath of tragedy were key. Groups mobilised within Goldsmiths as staff and students came together to discuss the mental health crisis that pervades our society on both an institutional and wider socio-political level. Outside the university, strangers reached out to each other online and people stirred up the conversations that had been started, yet had often disappeared into the background noise of a ‘keep calm and carry on’ society. These conversations now refuse to be silenced: we can no longer just ‘carry on’ because, once again, the answer to the question which no one likes to ask has presented itself to us with unnerving, brutal certainty. Depression kills.

As we’re left with the traces of Mark in his work, there is a pressing need to realign the ways we think and feel about depression, both individually and collectively. Let us take a moment to reflect on the title of ‘Good For Nothing’. This is a sentiment which is all too familiar to the many people who suffer with depression—that gnawing sense of conviction that one is, literally, good for nothing. Many of us will continue to experience these feelings throughout life, so we have to ask ourselves: Why? Who, and what, does this to us? How do we overcome it?

*Mental illness is often considered to be a socially-engineered condition that operates through producing a feeling of 'ontological inferiority' in individuals. In Mark's case, class politics played a major role: he argues in 'Good For Nothing' that enforced class consciousness, in particular, brings with it the threat of succumbing to a 'cultivated depression'. The production of inferiority increases the need to de-individualise mental 'health', and Mark is somewhat optimistic that this can be overcome:*

*in spite of what our collective depression tells us, [the rebuilding of class consciousness] can be done. Inventing new forms of political involvement, reviving institutions that have become decadent, converting privatised disaffection into politicised anger: all of this can happen, and when it does, who knows what is possible?*

*The possibility of triumph comes from claiming that together, no matter who we are, where we are from, there is always an Other that threatens any positive notion of self. Therefore, it is crucial that we form alliances with each other under these impressions. This is necessary in order for us to keep asking the difficult questions and demanding change, so that we can become the kind of people that can act as one in our collective vulnerability. To echo Mackay's words, how can we come to realise the Fisher-Function?*

I've suffered from depression intermittently since I was a teenager. Some of these episodes have been highly debilitating—resulting in self-harm, withdrawal (where I would spend months on end in my own room, only venturing out to sign-on or to buy the minimal amounts of food I was consuming), and time spent on psychiatric wards. I wouldn't say I've recovered from the condition, but I'm pleased to say that both the incidences and the severity of depressive episodes have greatly lessened in recent years. Partly, that is a consequence of changes in my life situation, but it's also to do with coming to a different understanding of my depression and what caused it. I offer up my own experiences of mental distress not because I think there's anything special or unique about them, but in support of the claim that many forms of depression are best understood—and best combatted—through frames that are impersonal and political rather than individual and 'psychological'.

Writing about one's own depression is difficult. Depression is partly constituted by a sneering 'inner' voice which accuses you of self-indulgence—you aren't depressed, you're just feeling sorry for yourself, pull yourself together—and this voice is liable to be triggered by going public about the condition. Of course,

this voice isn't an 'inner' voice at all—it is the internalised expression of actual social forces, some of which have a vested interest in denying any connection between depression and politics.

My depression was always tied up with the conviction that I was literally good for nothing. I spent most of my life up to the age of thirty believing that I would never work. In my twenties I drifted between postgraduate study, periods of unemployment and temporary jobs. In each of these roles, I felt that I didn't really belong—in postgraduate study, because I was a dilettante who had somehow faked his way through, not a proper scholar; in unemployment, because I wasn't really unemployed, like those who were honestly seeking work, but a shirker; and in temporary jobs, because I felt I was performing incompetently, and in any case I didn't really belong in these office or factory jobs, not because I was 'too good' for them, but—very much to the contrary—because I was over-educated and useless, taking the job of someone who needed and deserved it more than I did. Even when I was on a psychiatric ward, I felt I was not really depressed—I was only simulating the condition in order to avoid work, or in the infernally paradoxical logic of depression, I was simulating it in order to conceal the fact that I was not capable of working, and that there was

no place at all for me in society.

When I eventually got a job as lecturer in a Further Education college, I was for a while elated—yet by its very nature this elation showed that I had not shaken off the feelings of worthlessness that would soon lead to further periods of depression. I lacked the calm confidence of one born to the role. At some not very submerged level, I evidently still didn't believe that I was the kind of person who could do a job like teaching. But where did this belief come from? The dominant school of thought in psychiatry locates the origins of such 'beliefs' in malfunctioning brain chemistry, which are to be corrected by pharmaceuticals; psychoanalysis and forms of therapy influenced by it famously look for the roots of mental distress in family background, while Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is less interested in locating the source of negative beliefs than it is in simply replacing them with a set of positive stories. It is not that these models are entirely false, it is that they miss—and must miss—the most likely cause of such feelings of inferiority: social power. The form of social power that had most effect on me was class power, although of course gender, race and other forms of oppression work by producing the same sense of ontological inferiority, which is best expressed in exactly

the thought I articulated above: that one is not the kind of person who can fulfill roles which are earmarked for the dominant group.

On the urging of one of the readers of my book *Capitalist Realism*, I started to investigate the work of David Smail. Smail—a therapist, but one who makes the question of power central to his practice—confirmed the hypotheses about depression that I had stumbled towards. In his crucial book *The Origins of Unhappiness*, Smail describes how the marks of class are designed to be indelible. For those who from birth are taught to think of themselves as lesser, the acquisition of qualifications or wealth will seldom be sufficient to erase—either in their own minds or in the minds of others—the primordial sense of worthlessness that marks them so early in life. Someone who moves out of the social sphere they are ‘supposed’ to occupy is always in danger of being overcome by feelings of vertigo, panic and horror: “...isolated, cut off, surrounded by hostile space, you are suddenly without connections, without stability, with nothing to hold you upright or in place; a dizzying, sickening unreality takes possession of you; you are threatened by a complete loss of identity, a sense of utter fraudulence; you have no right to be here, now, inhabiting this body, dressed in this way; you are a nothing, and

‘nothing’ is quite literally what you feel you are about to become.”<sup>1</sup>

For some time now, one of the most successful tactics of the ruling class has been responsabilisation. Each individual member of the subordinate class is encouraged into feeling that their poverty, lack of opportunities, or unemployment, is their fault and their fault alone. Individuals will blame themselves rather than social structures, which in any case they have been induced into believing do not really exist (they are just excuses, called upon by the weak). What Smail calls “magical voluntarism”—the belief that it is within every individual’s power to make themselves whatever they want to be—is the dominant ideology and unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society, pushed by reality TV ‘experts’ and business gurus as much as by politicians. Magical voluntarism is both an effect and a cause of the currently historically low level of class consciousness. It is the flipside of depression—whose underlying conviction is that we are all uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it. A particularly vicious double bind is imposed on the long-term unemployed in the UK now: a population that

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1 David Smail, *The Origins of Unhappiness: A New Understanding of Personal Distress* (HarperCollins, 1993), p. 46.

has all its life been sent the message that it is good for nothing is simultaneously told that it can do anything it wants to do.

We must understand the fatalistic submission of the UK's population to austerity as the consequence of a deliberately cultivated depression. This depression is manifested in the acceptance that things will get worse (for all but a small elite), that we are lucky to have a job at all (so we shouldn't expect wages to keep pace with inflation), that we cannot afford the collective provision of the welfare state. Collective depression is the result of the ruling class project of resubordination. For some time now, we have increasingly accepted the idea that we are not the kind of people who can act. This isn't a failure of will any more than an individual depressed person can 'snap themselves out of it' by 'pulling their socks up'. The rebuilding of class consciousness is a formidable task indeed, one that cannot be achieved by calling upon ready-made solutions—but, in spite of what our collective depression tells us, it can be done. Inventing new forms of political involvement, reviving institutions that have become decadent, converting privatised disaffection into politicised anger: all of this can happen, and when it does, who knows what is possible?



# MY CHEST WAS FULL OF EELS, PUSHING THROUGH MY USUAL SKIN (DESCENT INTO THE XENOCEAN)

*In recent years, Mark produced an increasing amount of mixes on k-punk. As his blog posts grew shorter, mixes began to appear without much explanation. The mix was a means to think. Yet, this does not mean music speaks for itself. Mark invites us to think with the sonic—such that arguments are now sonically embedded rather than solely discursive. Mark's utilisation of the mix as a format is key: a mix is always already a gift, carefully constructed and put together, a gift to be shared and re-gifted. What does it mean to think through the mix, to think through sound? Can a mix achieve something that writing cannot?*

*Listening is too often assumed to be a solo act, yet Mark's approach to sound manifests in his recurrent*

calling for ‘listening sessions’. His mixes were designed for collective listening, a modality for thinking together.

*To put a mix together is to sculpt with(in) sonic materiality. To mix is also to be a fan. Mark writes:*

There’s a peculiar shame involved in admitting that one is a fan, perhaps because it involves being caught out in a fantasy-identification. ‘Maturity’ insists that we remember with hostile distaste, gentle embarrassment or sympathetic condescension when we were first swept up by something—when, in the first flushes of devotion, we tried to copy the style, the tone; when, that is, we are drawn into the impossible quest of trying to become what the Other is to us. This is the only kind of ‘love’ that has real philosophical implications, the passion capable of shaking us out of *sensus communis*.<sup>1</sup>

*Mark’s mix, ‘My Chest Was Full Of Eels, Pushing Through My Usual Skin (Descent into the XenOcean)’ was uploaded to Soundcloud in 2016. In the space of 58 minutes, love can be heard in its commitment to vulnerability. At 15:13 and 32:25 Mark and Zoe Fisher record excerpts from Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing and Virginia Woolf’s The Waves. ‘Gentle embarrassment’ is heard in Zoe’s awkwardly distorted voice, as it crudely cuts into spliced soundbites from*

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1 Mark Fisher, ‘Fans, Vampires, Trolls, Masters’. *k-punk* [blog], 12 June 2009.

*films. This is the loving labour of the fan: one that reinscribes what it means to be an amateur, that lets the tracks select you, invites them to possess you. Fandom hears that the sonic has agency.*

*Alice Coltrane time travels to record with Daphne Oram. What does such time travel generate? One might be tempted to say that an effect of such temporal warping is the destabilisation of the hierarchy between high and low culture, but falling back onto the immanent plane of the mix means there was no distinction between high and low to begin with. Azealia Banks' Aquababe sings: 'I'm drownin' all on my haters / And surfin' in the moment / (Swimming in all this paper)', succeeded by the Oramics Machine layered with an excerpt from The Waves by Virginia Woolf.*

*A mix is not a playlist, not just tracks sequenced one after another. A sonic collage, a mix is a sound essay stripped of linear time: everything is flattened; everything can work together intermittently. In this case, 'My Chest Was Full of Eels...' predominantly features female musicians and writers conveying a relation to the ocean. Here is an aquatic sonic feminism which rewrites Freud's 'oceanic feeling'—a oneness with the world experienced by a child prior to the recognition of itself as an individual subject. The title of the mix, partially taken from Siouxsie and the Banshees' 'Cascade' (A Kiss in the Dreamhouse, 1982), reads: 'My Chest was Full of Eels, Pushing Through my Usual Skin:*

*Descent into XenOcean*, tapping into the horror of embodiment. Descent has a double meaning: 'to fall or drop downwards', and 'origin'. To say that the ocean is something one descends into, is to go against the familiar definitions of a body in the Western metaphysical tradition. It is to say that a body is not singular, not atomised, but exists immanently to—and within—an environment.<sup>2</sup>

*Yet she does not descend into any ocean: it is a XenOcean—she appropriates the alienness that has been waged against her. The body is not simply rendered alien, but rather draws attention to that which has been rendered alien historically. Anna Greenspan, Suzanne Livingstone and Luciana Parisi write:*

A body carries within itself far more than its current evolutionary stage. Man's progress has told the story straight. Starting at zero: bacteria, algae, fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, mammal. But woman does not belong to this progress. Hers is not the same time, not the same temporality, not the same zero. She lies back on the continuum.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Astrida Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water', in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). p. 96.

3 Anna Greenspan, Suzanne Livingstone and Luciana Parisi, 'Amphibious Maidens', in *Abstract Culture* (CCRU, 1999).

*The XenOcean here actualises many potentials at once: the engulfing capacities of Capitalism to (re)territorialise a site of possible escape and an agent of the Outside with a capacity for destruction. Indeed, the ocean figures in Mark's writing as something fearfully sublime, something that historically signals a capability for mediating a catastrophe, but one that could enable the end of Capitalism: "Environmental catastrophe provides what a political unconscious totally colonised by neoliberalism cannot: an image of life after capitalism".<sup>4</sup> Whether through the trans-Atlantic slave-trade or the endless ecological catastrophes that capital has engineered into what it later violently deems 'Nature', the ocean sets a horizon for total wipeout that enables the possibility to open an egress to think the unthinkable Outside. Perhaps this is what Mark offers us with XenOcean: not simply a narrative fabulation, but a construct historically instrumentalised in the endless accumulation of capital.*

Geelia Ronkina

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4 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Zero, 2013), p. 228

*How can this ground ever be easy when there is no atonement for crimes like these? The soil is bitter with my children's blood. I can't say it anymore. Justice crying against injustice from the dark centuries.*

‘Cascade’

Siouxsie and the Banshees

*A Kiss in the Dreamhouse*

(Polydor, 1982)

‘Drilling an Ocean’

Greie Gut Fraktion

*Baustelle*

(Monika Enterprise, 2010)

‘Belly of the Beast’

Gazelle Twin

*Unflesh*

(Anti-Ghost Moon Ray, 2014)

‘Aquababe’

Azealia Banks

*Fantasea*

(self-released, 2012)

‘Contrasts Essconic’

Daphne Oram

*Oramics*

(Paradigm Discs, 2007)

*Now I will walk down Oxford Street  
envisaging a world rent by lightning; I  
will look at oaks cracked asunder and  
red where the flowering branch has  
fallen. I will go to Oxford Street and  
buy stockings for a party. I will do the  
usual things under the lightning flash  
[...] Reckless and random the cars  
race and roar and hunt us to death like  
bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile  
world. The human face is hideous.*

*Swaying and opening programmes,  
with a few words of greeting to friends,  
we settle down, like walruses stranded  
on rocks, like heavy bodies incapable  
of waddling to the sea, [...] but we are  
too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies  
between us and the sea. We lie gorged  
with food, torpid in the heat.*

Virginia Woolf,  
*The Waves*

‘Libra, The Mirror’s Minor Self’  
Broadcast & The Focus Group  
*Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age*  
(Warp, 2009)

‘Thrax’  
Laurel Halo  
*Chance of Rain*  
(Hyperdub, 2013)

*It's as if whatever it was was alive but  
in the wrong sort of way, in a different  
sort of...*

*Sapphire & Steel*

‘Parallax’  
Daphne Oram  
*Oramics*  
(Paradigm Discs, 2007)

‘Oceanic Beloved’  
Alice Coltrane  
*A Monastic Trio*  
(Impulse!, 1968)

‘Sea of Tranquility’  
Colleen  
*Les Ondes Silencieuses*  
(Leaf, 2007)

*I lifted down the stack of drawings and  
began to look. The paper was thin and  
soft, like rice paper. First the hands and  
antlered figures, always with numbers  
scrawled in the corner, then a larger sheet,  
a half-moon with four sticks coming out of  
it, bulbed at the ends. I righted the page,  
judging by the numbers, and it became  
a boat with people, the knobs were their  
heads. It was reassuring to find I could  
interpret it, it made sense.*

*But the next one was nothing I could recognize. The body was long, a snake or a fish; it had four limbs or arms and a tail and on the head were two branched horns. Lengthwise it was like an animal, an alligator; upright it was more human, but only in the positions of the arms and the front-facing eyes.*

*Total derangement. I wondered when it had started; it must have been the snow and the loneliness, he'd pushed himself too far, it gets in through your eyes, the thin black cold of mid-winter night, the white days dense with sunlight, outer space melting and freezing again into different shapes, your mind starts doing the same thing. The drawing was something he saw, a hallucination; or it might have been himself, what he thought he was turning into.*

Margaret Atwood,  
*Surfacing*

'Lawns of Dawn'  
Nico  
*Begin Here*  
(Elektra, 1969)

‘Swim’  
Madonna  
*Ray of Light*  
(Maverick, 1998)

‘Sara’  
Fleetwood Mac  
*Tusk*  
(Warner Bros., 1979)

‘Under the Sand’  
Daphne Oram, Andrea Parker & Daz Quayle  
*Private Dreams And Public Nightmares*  
(Aperture, 2011)

‘Land: la mer(de)’  
Patti Smith  
*Horses*  
(Arista, 1975)

‘I Opened My Eyes’  
AGF (Antye Greie) & Craig Armstrong  
*Orlando*  
(AGF Production, 2011)

# FOR YOUR UNPLEASURE: THE HAUTEUR-COUTURE OF GOTH

*Heavily influenced by 1980s music journalism in Britain, Mark often spoke with his students at Goldsmiths about the philosophy education he received through the pages of the New Musical Express. Having been introduced to (and subsequently disappointed by) Derrida thanks to writers such as Ian Penman and Mark Sinker, this exposure eventually led him to develop his own narrative surrounding hauntology. In 2014's Ghosts of My Life, Mark stated that "the NME constituted a kind of supplementary-informal education system, in which theory acquired a strange, lustrous glamour"—a statement which couldn't be further from the reality of today's tube station-freebie magazine masquerading as that very same publication.<sup>1</sup>*

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1 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Zero Books, 2014), p. 17.

*This approach carried through in his own work, as is evident in 'For Your Unpleasure: The Hauteur-Couture of Goth' where Mark glides from Lacanian desire to Baudrillard's Seduction and J. G. Ballard, through his discussion of Siouxsie and the Banshees and Goth. Posted by Mark on k-punk in 2005, the work plainly situates itself within in a specific cultural period in the UK. This was a time when teenage Rosie Webster and her boyfriend Craig 'went goth' on Coronation Street, when Big Brother ruled the small screen and 'sportswear brutilitarianism' dominated the streets. In addition, there are clear links to other works selected for this publication: "my chest was full of eels pushing through my usual skin" is a lyric from Siouxsie and the Banshees' 'Cascade' (featured on 1982's A Kiss in the Dreamhouse), and was used by Mark in his mix of the same name. In going back to the introduction to Mark's PhD thesis, Flatline Constructs, we can read his discussion of Gothic Materialism in relation to Spinoza, playing Baudrillard and Deleuze-Guattari off against each other, with J. G. Ballard thrown into the mix. Siouxsie and the Banshees, he says in 'For Your Unpleasure', drew heavily from J. G. Ballard—and in doing so they took on "the equivalence of the semiotic, the psychotic, the erotic and the savage". These references keep popping up, yet Mark's points are never repetitive. Rather, 'For Your Unpleasure'—as with all of his writing—reads like an education, weaving in discussion of desire, subordination and female objectivity with Siouxsie Sioux's role as an idol. Quoting Baudrillard,*

Mark states that idols “do not reproduce, but arise from the ashes, like the phoenix, or from the mirror, like the seductress”. Indeed, he nods to Flatline Constructs in saying that the Gothic has always been about replication as opposed to reproduction. Replication, in this instance, is key.

It is important to note other examples of Mark’s music writing. In an early example of his work, published in the *New Statesman & Society* in 1994, he describes *Darkside* as “one of the latest, most interesting mutations of rave, [which] borrows its ontology from horror and science fiction”.<sup>2</sup> He fluidly links cyberpunk with Jonathan Meades, Baudrillard with Ramsey Campbell, and the decay of the British welfare state with a paganistic celebration of dark forces. Then, some twenty years later in *Ghosts of My Life*, Mark turns to Drake and Kanye West’s so-called secret sadness and their morbid fixation on “exploring the miserable hollowness at the core of super-affluent hedonism”, having practically run out of products to consume. “Drake and West”, Mark writes, “dissolutely cycle through easily available pleasures, feeling a combination of frustration, anger, and self-disgust, aware that something is missing, but unsure exactly what it is”.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in *The Weird and the Eerie*, published

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2 Mark Fisher, ‘Hello Darkness, Our New Friend’, *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 7, Issue 293, 3 November. p. 32

3 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 175

*at the beginning of 2017, we read what is perhaps one of the last published examples of Mark's music writing. Here he returns to a familiar subject, The Fall, having previously posted 'Memorex for the Krakens: The Fall's Pulp Modernism' in three parts on k-punk in 2006–7. In this new exploration he discusses their 1980–2 records Grottesque (After The Gramme) and Hex Enduction Hour in relation to his concept of the 'weird', arguing that Mark E Smith's relationship to the character Roman Totale (whose body is covered in cthulu-esque tentacles) is the same relationship as that which HP Lovecraft had with Randolph Carter.*

*In returning to 'For Your Unpleasure' we are taken back to the heyday of k-punk when Mark posted regularly and energetically, reaching further into the crevices of music-philosophy than anyone else dared while turning what readers thought to be music journalism on its head. Read the text, take note of the many references, then go away and read, watch and listen to those too. Mark's music writing, just like Penman and Sinker, is a 'supplementary-informal education' which must be taken advantage of.*

Ashiya Eastwood

Ridiculed, forgotten, yet subterraneanly robust, Goth is the last remnants of glam in popular culture.

Goth is also the youth cult most associated with women and with fiction. This is hardly surprising. As I have pointed out before<sup>1</sup> and is well known, the novel has its origins in ‘gothic romances’ which were predominantly consumed and produced by women, and the complicity of women with the Gothic has been a commonplace of literary criticism at least since Ellen Moers wrote her classic essay, ‘Female Gothic’, in 1976.<sup>2</sup>

Why think about Goth now?

Partly it is because Goth’s preposterous trash-aristocratic excess couldn’t be more at odds with contemporary culture’s hip hop-dominated sportswear brutilitarianism. At the same time, though, Goth’s shadow seems unusually visible in pop culture at the moment, what with references to it in both *Coronation Street* (“you’re not even a proper Goth!”) and *Big*

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1 Mark Fisher, ‘Continuous Contact’, *k-punk* [blog]. 23 January 2005. <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/004826.html>

2 Printed in *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 90-98.

Brother (“what is a Gothic? Can you make me into one?”)

Partly it is because *Rip It Up*<sup>3</sup> has revived fascination in all things post-punk, and Goth is the last surviving postpunk cult. These two facts have resulted in I.T. and me seceding from the oppressive masculinist cool of the club into the more congenial cold of Goth haunts.

Goth has its own version of more or less every other youth culture (hence there’s techno Goth, Industrial Goth, Hippie Goth...) But let’s leave aside the male abjects (The Cramps, The Birthday Party), the po-faced (the overwrought white dub of Bauhaus) and the po-mo (The Sisters of Mercy, who from the start traded in a self-conscious meta-Goth), and start with Siouxsie.

It is well-known that the Banshees were formed as a result of the future Siouxsie and Severin meeting at a Roxy show in 1974. (Which fact was repeated in the really rather bizarre piece on Roxy in last Friday’s Guardian, which pursues the postmodern rock critical trend to equate ‘importance’ with ‘influence’ far past the point of self-parody, relegating actual

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3 Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–1984* (Faber & Faber, 2005).

discussion of Roxy's output to a paragraph or so before launching into a survey of groups they inspired.<sup>4</sup>) So, unlike the Birthday Party, who were famously disgusted when they arrived in London to find it dominated by New Romantic poseur-pop, the Banshees belonged to an art pop lineage which had a relationship to music which was neither ironically distant nor direct. For all their inventiveness, for all the damage they wreaked upon rock form, The Birthday Party remained Romantics, desperate to restore an expressive and expressionistic force to rock; a quest which led them back to the Satanic heartland of the blues. (If women want to understand what it is like to be the afflicted subject of male sexuality—I wouldn't necessarily advise it—there's no better fast-track to 'what's inside a boy' than the BP's 'Zoo Music Girl' or 'Release the Bats'). By contrast with this carnal heat, the early Banshees affected a deliberate—and deliberated—coldness and artificiality.

Siouxsie came from the art rock capital of England—that zone of South London in which both David Bowie (Beckenham) and Japan (Catford, Beckenham) grew up. Although Siouxsie was involved with punk from the very beginning, and although all of the major punk

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4 Tim de Lisle, 'Roxy is the Drug', *The Guardian*, 20 May 2005.

figures (even Sid Vicious) were inspired by Roxy, The Banshees were the first punk group to openly acknowledge a debt to glam. Glam has a special affinity with the English suburbs; its ostentatious anti-conventionality negatively inspired by the eccentric conformism of manicured lawns and quietly-tended psychosis Siouxsie sang of on ‘Suburban Relapse’.

But glam had been the preserve of male desire: what would its drag look like when worn by a woman? This was a particularly fascinating inversion when we consider that Siouxsie’s most significant resource was not the serial identity sexual ambivalence of Bowie but the staging of male desire in Roxy Music. She may have hung out with ‘Bowie boys’, but Siouxsie seemed to borrow much more from the lustrous PVC blackness of *For Your Pleasure* than from anything in the Thin White Duke’s wardrobe. *For Your Pleasure* songs like ‘Beauty Queen’ and ‘Editions of You’ were self-diagnoses of a male malady, a specular desire that fixates on female objects that it knows can never satisfy it. Although she “makes his starry eyes shiver”, Ferry knows “it never would work out”. This is the logic of Lacanian desire, which Alenka Zupančič explains as follows: “The [...] interval or gap introduced by desire is always the imaginary other, Lacan’s *objet petit a*, whereas the Real

(Other) of desire remains unattainable. The Real of desire is *jouissance*—that ‘inhuman partner’ (as Lacan calls it) that desire aims at beyond its object, and that must remain inaccessible”.<sup>5</sup> (For those, like cprobes, who are sceptical of what an ethics of the drive might look like, I recommend the outstanding essay from which this observation is taken, ‘On Love as Comedy’, which is an addendum to *The Shortest Shadow*.<sup>6</sup>)

Roxy’s ‘In Every Dreamhome a Heartache’ is about an attempt, simultaneously disenchanting-cynical and desire-delirious, to resolve this deadlock. It is as if Ferry has recognized, with Lacan, that phallic desire is fundamentally masturbatory. Since, that is to say, a fantasmatic screen prevents any sexual relation so that his desire is always for an ‘inhuman partner’, Ferry might as well have a partner that is literally inhuman: a blow-up doll. This scenario has many precursors: most famously perhaps Hoffman’s short story ‘The Sandman’ (one of the main preoccupations of Freud’s essay on ‘The Uncanny’ of course), but also Villier de L’isle Adam’s lesser known but actually more chilling masterpiece of Decadent SF, ‘The Future Eve’ and its descendant, Ira Levin’s *Stepford Wives*.

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5 Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (MIT, 2003), p. 179.

6 Ibid., pp. 164–181.

If the traditional problem for the male in pop culture has been dealing with a desire for the unattainable—for Lacan, remember, *all* desire is a desire for the unattainable—then the complementary difficulty for the female has been to come to terms with *not* being what the male wants. The Object knows that what she has does not correspond with what the subject lacks.

It is almost as if the female Goth response to this dilemma is to self-consciously assume the role of the “cold, distanced, inhuman partner” of phallic desire.<sup>7</sup> The glam male remained trapped in his perfect penthouse populated by dumb fantasmatic playdolls; the Goth female meanwhile roams through the roles of vamp and vampire, succubus, automaton. The glam male’s pathologies are those of the subject; the Goth female’s problematic is that of the object. Remember that the original sense of glamour—bewitchment—alludes to the power of the auto-objectified *over* the subject.

“If God is masculine, idols are always feminine”, Baudrillard writes in *Seduction*,<sup>8</sup> and Siouxsie differed from previous pop icons in

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7 Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (Verso, 1994), p. 89.

8 Jean Baudrillard, (St Martin’s, 1991), p. 95.

that she was neither a male artist ‘feminized’ into iconhood by fan adoration, nor a female marionette manipulated by male svengalis, nor a female heroically struggling to assert a marginalized subjectivity. On the contrary, Siouxsie’s perversity was to make an art of her own objectification. As Simon and Joy put it in *The Sex Revolts* Siouxsie’s “aspiration [was] towards a glacial exteriority of the objet d’art” evinced through “a shunning of the moist, pulsing fecundity of organic life”.<sup>9</sup> This denial of interiority—unlike Lydia Lunch, Siouxsie is not interested in “spilling her guts”, in a confessional wallowing in the goo and viscera of a damaged interiority—corresponds to a staged refusal to either be “a warm, compassionate, understanding fellow-creature”.<sup>10</sup> Like Grace Jones, another who made an art of her own objectification, Siouxsie didn’t demand R.E.S.P.E.C.T. from her bachelor suitors (with the implied promise of a healthy relationship based on mutual regard) but subordination, supplication.

(The Goth male is all too ready to comply, although—as Nick Cave’s compulsively repetitious career has graphically demonstrated

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9 Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts* (Harvard University, 1996), p. 344.

10 Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, p. 89.

—snivelling prostration may well only be the prelude to homicidal destruction. Grovelling in front of the Ice Queen—“I kiss the hem of her skirt”—the Goth male is neither object nor subject but—famously—abject. The best image of this idiot lust is the slavering, pustulant monstrosity on the cover of the Birthday Party’s *Junkyard*, and their ‘Release the Bats’—a song the group came to despise because they thought it might result in their being pigeonholed as generic Goth—remains the most pulsingly compulsive dramatization of the goth abject surrendering himself to the Object of his quivering desire. Cave oscillates between worshipping his Lady’s femmachinc hauteur—”my baby is a cool machine”, “she moves to the pulse of the generator”—and pruriently drooling over the “filth” of her flesh—”she doesn’t mind a bit of dirt”. This conforms almost perfectly with Lacan’s description of the courtly Lady, whose cold abstraction is not defined by opposition with smelly physicality. Cave’s abject is unable to give up on his desire, and the result is well-known: in order to continue to desire the woman, he must ensure that he cannot possess her, “so that l’il girl will just have to go”. Only when he has made her as cold and unyielding as Ferry’s ‘perfect companion’ or Poe’s parade of beautiful cadavers, can his desire be extended “to eternity”, because then it is rendered

permanently incapable of satisfaction.)

Instead of asserting an illusory “authentic subjectivity” which supposedly lies beneath the costumes and the cosmetics, Siouxsie and Grace Jones reveled in becoming objects of the gaze. Both would no doubt have appreciated the derision Baudrillard poured upon the strategy of unmasking appearances in *Seduction*: “There is no God behind the images and the very nothingness they conceal must remain a secret”.<sup>11</sup> Siouxsie and Jones’ embracing of their objectality testifies to the fact that there is a scopic drive that cult studs whining about “being reduced to an object” has always ignored: the exhibitionist drive *to be seen*.

Simon is right that ‘Painted Bird’ (from the Banshees mistresspiece, *A Kiss in the Dreamhouse*) and the nearly contemporary ‘Fireworks’ were “virtual manifestos for goth”, but it’s worth reflecting on how different these songs are in message and mood from the hackneyed image of the culture. Both ‘Painted Bird’ and ‘Fireworks’ (with its “exultant image of self-beaufication as a glam gesture flashing amid the murk of mundanity”) are not maudlin, matte black or self-absorbed, but celebrations of the colourful and the collective. “WE are fireworks”, Siouxsie

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11 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 94.

sings, “burning shapes into the night”, and you’d be hard pressed to find a song that crackles with so much enjoyment as this. The Banshees’ take on Kozinski’s novel *Painted Bird* is also about the triumph of collective joy over persecuted, isolated, individuated subjectivity. In Kozinski’s novel, the hero paints one bird and when he throws it back to its flock they don’t recognize it and therefore destroy it. But Siouxsie’s Goths are not painted by another’s hand; they are “painted birds by their own design”. It is not the familiar tragic-heroic scenario in which an outsider, destined to lose, nevertheless makes a solitary stand against the conformist herd. The “dowdy flock” are to be “confounded”, but by *another* flock, not by an individual, and the result is not frustration, but, again, *jouissance*—by the end of the song, “there’s no more sorrow”.

Think how different this is to the confederacy of isolation produced by Joy Division,<sup>12</sup> whose functional clothes and ‘non-image’ implied the traditional male subjectivist privileging of the inside over the outside, depth over surface. Here was one type of ‘black hole’: the ‘line of abolition’ Deleuze-Guattari describe in ‘Micropolitics and Segmentarity’, the drive

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12 Mark Fisher, ‘Nihil Rebound: Joy Division’, *k-punk* [weblog]. 9 January 2005. <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/004725.html>

towards total self-destruction.<sup>13</sup> The Banshees, on the other hand, were more like the ‘cold stars’ invoked by Neubauten: forbidding, remote, yet also the queens of a paradoxically egalitarian aristocracy in which membership was not guaranteed by birth or beauty but by self-decoration. Siouxsie’s hyper-white panstick radiated the ‘cold light’ of stardom Baudrillard invokes in *Seduction*. Stars “are dazzling in their nullity, and in their coldness—the coldness of makeup and ritual hieraticism (rituals are cool, according to McLuhan)”.<sup>14</sup>

“The sterility of idols is well-known”, Baudrillard continues, “they do not reproduce, but arise from the ashes, like the phoenix, or from the mirror, like the seductress”. The Gothic has always been about replication as opposed to reproduction.<sup>15</sup> It’s no coincidence that the female vampire was often associated with lesbianism (most gloriously in what is perhaps the definitive Goth film, *The Hunger*) because vampires and lesbians (like machines) present the horror (from the point of view of the phallic One) of a propagative power that has

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13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota, 1987), pp. 208–231.

14 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 96.

15 Mark Fisher, ‘Let Me Tell You About My Mother’, in *Flatline Constructs* (PhD thesis).

no use for the male seed. Conversely, 'female gothic' often pathologises pregnancy, utilizing the language of horror to describe the gradual take-over of the body by an entity that is both appallingly familiar and impossibly alien. 'We Hunger' from the Banshees' *Hyaena*, with its "horror of suckling", fits into a lineage of female Horror which has seen "pregnancy in terms of the appalling rapacity of the insect world", as a "parasitic infestation".<sup>16</sup> The principal Goth vectors of propagation are, of course, signs and clothes (and—clothes as signs). The Siouxsie Look is, in effect, a replicatable cosmetic mask—a literal effacement of the organic expressivity of the face by a geometric pattern, all hard angles and harsh contrasts between white and black. White tribalism.

In *Rip It Up*, Simon says that the early Banshees were "sexy in the way that Ballard's *Crash* was sexy", and Ballard's abstract fiction-theory is as palpable and vast a presence in the Banshees as it is in other post-punk. (It's telling that the turn from the angular dryness of the Banshees' early sound to the humid lushness of their later phase should have been legitimated by Severin's reading of *The Unlimited Dream Company*.) But what the Banshees drew (out) from Ballard was the equivalence of the semiotic, the psychotic,

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16 Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, p. 344.

the erotic and the savage. With psychoanalysis (and Ballard is nothing if not a committed reader of Freud), Ballard recognized that there is no 'biological' sexuality waiting beneath the 'alienated layers' of civilization. Ballard's compulsively repeated theme of reversion to savagery does not present a return to a non-symbolized bucolic Nature, but a fall back into an intensely semiotized and ritualized symbolic space. (It is only the postmoderns who believe in a pre-symbolic Nature). Eroticism is made possible—not merely mediated—by signs and technical apparatus, such that the body, signs and machines become interchangeable.

Baudrillard understood this very well, in his post-punk era essay on *Crash*:

*Each mark, each trace, each scar left on the body is like an artificial invagination, like the scarifications of savages [...]. Only the wounded body exists symbolically—for itself and for others—'sexual desire' is never anything but the possibility bodies have of combining and exchanging their signs. Now, the few natural orifices to which one normally attaches sex and sexual activities are nothing next to all the possible wounds, all the artificial orifices (but why 'artificial'?), all the breaches through which the body is reversibilized and, like certain topological spaces, no*

*longer knows either interior or exterior [...] Sex [...] is largely overtaken by the fan of symbolic wounds, which are in some sense the anagrammatization of the whole length of the body—but now, precisely, it is no longer sex, but something else [...] The savages knew how to use the whole body to this end, in tattooing, torture, initiation—sexuality was only one of the possible metaphors of symbolic exchange, neither the most significant, nor the most prestigious, as it has become for us in its obsessional and realistic reference, thanks to its organic and functional character (including in orgasm).<sup>17</sup>*

As is well-known, female dis-ease in capitalism is often expressed not in an assertion of the ‘natural’ against the artificial, but in the anti-organic protest of eating disorders and self-cutting.<sup>18</sup> It’s hard not to see this—as I.T. following Žižek does—as part of the ‘obsession’ with ‘realistic reference’, an attempt to strip away all signs and rituals so as to reach the unadorned thing-in-itself. Goth is in many ways an attempt to make good this symbolic deficit in postmodern culture: dressing up as re-ritualization, a recovery of the surface of the

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17 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (University of Michigan, 1994), pp 114–115.

18 Nina Power, ‘Cutters’, *Infinite Thought* [blog]. 8 May 2005. <http://www.cinestatic.com/infinithought/2005/05/cutters.asp>

body as the site for scarification and decoration (which is to say, a rejection of the idea that the body is merely the container or envelope for interiority).

Take Goth footwear. With their flagrant anti-organic angularity, their disdain for the utilitarian criteria of comfort or functionality, Goth shoes and boots bend, bind, twist and extend the body. Clothing recovers its cybernetic and symbolic role as a *hyperbolic supplement* to the body, as what which destroys the illusion of organic unity and proportion.



# ON VANISHING LAND

*In an era of digital abundance when so many files on so many USB sticks and so many hard drives are ready to be downloaded and copied and WeTransferred and Dropboxed, since 2013, On Vanishing Land's self-imposed inaccessibility has systematically thwarted the habitual expectations of availability that organise the structures of listening under conditions of contemporary communicative capitalism. Even though its playback only required an email requesting permission from Mark and from Justin, its non-existence on YouTube or Vimeo or Soundcloud or Bandcamp was, and is, enough to inconvenience the compulsory right to the digital object that organizes the drives, desires and demands of dividuality. Constraining the conditions under which On Vanishing Land could be experienced was not a*

*matter of creating an art world demand for a rare or precious experience. It was a calculated strategy that was conceived and designed to generate a context of care around a work whose unidentifiable audio objectivity borders on and dwells within the oneiric borderlands of the mix, the aeonic consistency of the audio-essay and the temporal collapse of the sonic fiction.*

*The egress that On Vanishing Land engineers requires specific preconditions that can be characterised as the construction of a constrained condition for collective concentrated listening. To assemble an operative portal to the outside entails the manufacture, the holding and the sustenance of a specific bloc of space-time. How difficult, after all, could it be to invite Londoners to gather at a certain moment for a certain time in a certain space? Listening to the aesthetic sociality of listening to an unidentifiable audio object, however, felt and continues to feel, at odds with and disruptive of the protocols presupposed by a club, the satisfactions expected from an exhibition, the norms implied by a gig, the behaviours required by a party and the conventions demanded by the cinema screening. Absent these genre-specific prerequisites, the experience of attending a playback of On Vanishing Land assumes the aspect of a tournament that plays out within and against oneself.*

*A sense emerges from within and takes hold of you, with an urgency that persists to the extent that it remains unvoiced. A sense of volunteering oneself, proudly, for*

*a test and a trial. Of challenging oneself, gladly. Of aligning oneself, nobly, with a programme. Allying oneself with a project that is grand and grave. Of acquitting oneself with glory. Of fighting the good fight. Facing forward. Opening oneself, ardently, to feelings of valour that you hardly know what to do with. And this sense of going to war on the plane of art and inside the field of aesthetics, persists to the extent that On Vanishing Land summons active forces that it orchestrates against reactive forces that it never names but which are all too audible. What this conflict invokes, in turn, is not the recollection of sitting on the floor at The Showroom, back hunched, listening to the Genelec loud speakers from which Mark's voice emerges in its cold-rationalist tonality, rising above the reverberant haze of John Foxx's piano, Gazelle Twin's eldritch chants and Justin's aristocratically accentuated accent. Instead, it summons temporal spirals that drag the work-time matrix of the Gregorian calendar into circular causalities in which the listening sessions organised by Mark at Goldsmiths throughout 2015 appear before the first collective listening to London Under London at Gasworks in early 2009 and the voice of Mark can be heard reading Plan for the Assassination of Princess Anne. He smiles. And this structure of feeling, inarticulate and inchoate, searching for collective expression, concentrates itself inside of the collective listening to On Vanishing Land. Constraining this structure of feeling in turn produces a mode of recursion that is not so much a communism of spectatorship as a*

76 *commonism of listening that is constrained, unbound  
and unbinding.*

Kodwo Eshun

**ROBIN MACKAY:** In *On Vanishing Land* [OVL], a piece you have described as an ‘audio essay’, but also as ‘sonic fiction’, you’ve chosen consciously to use sound alone, with no visual accompaniment. The piece focuses on evoking a particular area—the Suffolk coastline—and explores the concept of the ‘eerie’ through involvements with the literature, film, and music that this place has inspired, or which are called up by the conceptual figures of the beach, the eroded coastline, and other features of that particular landscape. What links these three things—the use of sound, the interest in place, and the eerie?

**JUSTIN BARTON:** There’s a whole process of abstracting out space in order to get to space. It’s not that amazing things aren’t done in very subtle ways in film. It’s just that something is afforded as a possibility by working solely with sound. The thing about sound is that it obviously cuts away the visual, but then you have the opportunity to work with both music and voice, two whole dimensions of sound. And that gets you to the space that is beyond visual space. If you’re thinking that there’s a whole other way of thinking space, which might be something more along the lines of what Deleuze and Guattari are calling the Body without Organs [BwO]; that is, if you’re thinking that what’s really at stake when talking about an area of Suffolk

coastline or London or anywhere, is something beyond the visual, something that is not just a world of the visual but is a world of energies, percepts, dreamings, intent, feeling—if you're thinking that that's what space is in depth—then sound has a great power to take you to the BwO. In an early essay, in 1963, Deleuze says it's the Ariadne's thread that leads you out of the labyrinth—music, sound—that's what takes you out. If you think about being, say, in some wilderness at night, you have the spatiality of sound around you. You're in a forest—there's the sound of movements, cries, insects, crepitant sounds. You're focused on the micro-timbre of what you're hearing because you want to know the intent of what you're hearing. Because some of it might actually be dangerous—if you were in a wilderness, for instance. So you have a spatiality around you which is fundamental, utter absolute spatiality, it's a spatiality which you experience deeply as a spatiality of intent: What is the intent of that cry, of that sound—what is behind that eerie sense of something that might be following you, something that might be interested in you, or at least focussed on you? So obviously sound affords you this opportunity to go to some extraordinary place—this area of Suffolk involved in OVL—and to go straight through, through voice, through music, to try to get to the other space, the space beyond space.

**MARK FISHER:** I think what Justin said reveals one route out into the eerie, and why the eerie became a preoccupation. I should say that, like most of the things we ended up engaging with in OVL, the eerie wasn't a conscious preexisting preoccupation. I mean, I sort of like the word eerie, and, in so far as I'd thought about it, which wasn't a great deal, I'd always had strong positive associations with the eerie. But I hadn't conceptualized it, and I hadn't realised the extent to which probably some of the most powerful things in film, fiction, music, etc. that had really changed things for me could be classified as eerie. And I think that it is possibly easier to get quickly to the eerie with sound than with image. Because, as Justin said, there is that acousmatic problem about the separation of a sound from a source; and when we started looking into the eerie, one of the first examples in the dictionary is an 'eerie cry', or whatever; and I think that's something that most people can relate to very quickly in the sense of the eerie: being out in an unfamiliar space and hearing a sound and not knowing the intent or the nature of the being, if any, that caused that sound.

Another side to this for me was simply the fact that this whole space of the so-called audio essay just seemed very underexplored. There's a

certain lineage, with people like Glenn Gould, *The Idea of North*, and various other things. But nothing quite like *LondonunderLondon*—the project that preceded OVL—had ever existed before, even though the capacity for people to make this sort of thing was very widespread, with sampling technology and so on becoming ubiquitous on computers. But there's still this kind of generic slaving, somehow, where, if you've got sampling software, that means you make music. And I guess also in the last ten years or so, music has got increasingly caught up in repetition. So it seemed that there was this whole other space to do with the use of sound and the relation between sound and music which was wide open, and for which there were very few precursors. So that's part of why we did it, I think.

**RM:** The combination of the soundscape in the piece with the spoken voice adds another level of complexity, of course. And going back to what Justin was saying about the experience of being in a place and hearing sounds and wondering about their intent, it's very striking that this is neither an ambient soundscape nor a field recording—it doesn't have a direct indexical relation to the place. OVL is a lot more complex than that, involving contributions from a number of musicians as well as your own

reading of the text and excerpts from interviews with others. So this begs the question of how this format affects what we mean by *place*: If it is to be understood as somehow indexing a place, then the piece seems to invoke a complex proposition about what ‘place’ is, and to do so through a heterogeneous set of (technical and cultural) memory-devices, rather than simply being an empirical recording of a place.

**JB:** I think it’s important to see a place both in terms of what abuts onto it, which actually is an expression of something utterly beyond it—as with Felixstowe container port, for instance; and also in terms of its dreamings, its virtual-real worlds, its fictions. In this case, the work of M.R. James, for instance. Also, its semi-dreaming sonic works, its musical works, like Eno’s *On Land*. So a place then very much becomes an expression of forces beyond it, maybe in some cases aeonic forces, maybe also forces within it that are profoundly enigmatic, like the travellers or Romany people we met on the way—we don’t have any idea who they were, really, or to what kind of world they belong. So it’s important to see whatever kind of place you’re talking about as connected up to a whole real-abstract world, but also to see it in terms of the kinds of dreaming it’s produced.

**RM:** And that's maybe something that images would have obstructed, by locking place down into a depicted physical space. What's apparent about using sound is that it allows the discursive aspect to shift—sometimes subtly, sometimes abruptly—from one register to another, and to achieve this very dense layering of different times, of different works, works which are sometimes directly connected to the place itself, inspired by the Suffolk coastline, but sometimes also connections that seem serendipitous, as when you talk about *The Swimmer* or *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, correspondences that bring various works and sensations into a dense superposition.

**JB:** Evidently, with film, you can do things using montage, cutting things in, all sorts of subtle techniques. But I think there are times when it can be particularly valuable to employ a method which gets you to the outside of whatever ordinary-world zone you're talking about, along with the conventions for seeing it—in this case, it's capitalism, at the start. And the danger with images is that they are there with their buildings, with their trees, with their rocks, with their concrete things—it's not so easy to get through to the outside of all of that, which is precisely a mode of intent that is utterly other than capitalism. And the critique-

freak tendency is to go off in all sorts of negative comparative directions and just stay locked in the vicinity of capitalism. It was fundamental when we managed to get Elizabeth Walling—Gazelle Twin—as a contributor. Because her eerily beautiful high-line music, her singing, produces this very powerful, dispassionate, disturbingly beautiful effect of a counterpart or beyond of capitalism. So that, at that stage, it's a very real abstract process going on. There's a sense of the absolute outside with her voice, the outside that's obviously fundamental to the whole thing, that's evoked through *Picnic at Hanging Rock* at the end, which is obviously about women escaping. So her voice there carries a very powerful charge that takes you to the outside of capitalism.

**MF:** I think that leads back to the question of why the focus is on the eerie, rather than the gothic, or whatever. And why in fact we shifted things from James. Because there's that critique tendency; but there's also the gothicization tendency, where affects that belong to the eerie get captured into a certain kind of gothic or post-Christian or actually Christian worldview, as with James. But we felt that the Eno album *On Land* was certainly eerie, and that there were traces—more than traces, strong impressions—of all kinds of nonhuman forces and sentiences

in it. Some of those would be threatening to human beings, but many of them weren't.

So what we wanted to get to was this positive sense of the eerie, really—positive, but not reassuring or comforting. It involves a kind of evacuation of ordinary subjectivity, and that's why there's this association with dreaming: there's a certain kind of dream which is not a nightmare, it's not an urgency dream, but it's one where you're at the limits of your ordinary subjectivity, or beyond those limits; and that's the work that *Picnic* did: this sense of an abstract space including certain elements that are repeated in a certain way, an abstract space that is instantiated in particular physical spaces, but that isn't locked to them, meant that we could put *Picnic* next to James in a way that wasn't just an arbitrary juxtaposition—it was about what was at stake in *Picnic* that is blocked by James: escape, a positive sense of escape into the unknown. *Picnic* is extraordinarily powerful because it maintains that sense of the eerie right to the very end. What tends to happen with works that have traces of the eerie, or what can happen, is that the eerie becomes dissipated at a certain point, renaturalized. Whereas what happens with *Picnic*—in both the novel and the film, and I would argue even in the extended version of the novel (there was a chapter in

the novel which was not included in the final version and which was cut from the film), is that it maintains this eeriness throughout; that you go over one threshold into the unknown, but it doesn't become a new home; that you're then explorers in this unknown and there are then further thresholds of the unknown which are infinite; in fact, there's an inexhaustibility of the unknown. And I think that's the peculiar power of that text, really, that resonated back into OVL.

**JB:** And the powerful thing that was added to the film, which is just a last element added to an incredible, spectacular text by Joan Lindsay, as Mark has described it, is just the very beginning, which is in fact Poe: *we're a dream, all that we see and all that we seem is a dream, a dream within a dream.* The vital thing is that you have to think about that in terms of what we're talking about, the unknown, which is that we're a dream within a dream, and it's very dangerous out there; there's one dream beyond the next, and they're all very dangerous—this is not at all safe, this exploration into the eerie.

**MF:** But the thing is, the dream we're in is not very safe either.

**JB:** Far from being safe, it's a world of the most

hideous predation.

**RM:** There's something here about the eerie not being correlated in any way with us, is that right? The eerie doesn't care about us, it's not there 'for' us or waiting for us.

**JB:** The affect of the eerie is precisely the affect of an attention—or possible attention—that might be malevolent, might be positive, might be totally indifferent.

**RM:** In this feeling out of the non-territory of the eerie, this refining process of what the eerie is that goes on throughout the piece, you were talking about how *Picnic* was 'blocked' by James, so there's a dialectic or a movement in-between these sources. It's not so much a superposition of things that share the same intensities, but more of an evolving dynamic; which makes me think that what you might mean by 'audio essay' might be a type of thinking that can't happen outside of that space. That the thinking is actually going on through this 'peri-auditory' process.

**MF:** Well, that's certainly what happened because, as I said, none of the major positions that we adopted in this essay existed prior to the essay. Virtually maybe, but not actually. So that

just reinforces the point. One thing I'd like to pick up is this thing about dreaming and forces and feedback and place. Something that Andy Sharp (English Heretic), who worked with us on this, is very keen on developing as a practice is going to places that have already been filmed, or that already have associations with literary or filmic works, going there yourself, and your response adding another layer to it. Rather than this endless distantiation, this meta-distance, it's more that your own dreamings become added to all the existing dreamings. And a part of that is grasping what was at stake in those dreamings anyway. We conflate for the purposes of narrative some of the things that happened. I think when we did the walk we weren't even particularly aware of *On Land* being on that terrain, even though it's an album that had meant a lot to me. But I think it's just a more intense form of what happens when one engages with any form of criticism that's worthwhile, really, which is that the piece that you're working with becomes more intense and transformed by your work on it. It's not that one is adding stuff on that's not there—it's that the focus can draw elements of it out that were previously occluded. It's a kind of attentional magic.

**JB:** To what extent were we being written by that

landscape, by those dreamings, to what extent is the process coming into being because we were there...?

**RM:** That is perhaps where the fiction element comes in: the walk happened, it was the germ of OVL, and yet it seems that what happens in the piece is that you retro-fictionalise the walk by imbuing it with all the resources that you discovered afterwards: ‘So *that’s* what happened when we took that walk...’.

**MF:** Exactly. It’s very important to formulate it as you did: fictionalization isn’t falsification, it’s actually discovering what was happening. All of those things, whether it be James, *Picnic*, Eno, are making contact with this abstract space that is triggered by the actual space, as it were. The fact that we didn’t know about Eno at the time didn’t mean that we weren’t responding to some of the same intensities, the same terrain, on the abstract as well as physical level, that Eno was dealing with.

**RM:** How did the collaboration with the other participants happen, how did that unfold, and how aware were they of what was going on, since it all seems to fit together perfectly?

**MF:** There were people we knew personally,

who'd probably got a better sense of where it was going to go, people like Aled Rees, who'd worked on LUL, and actually was one of the few people to provide original music for that piece, because most of that was sampled. But most of the other musicians I just contacted, on the basis that I thought that their work was already in that space somewhat, and then I gave them a brief, really quite brief—a paragraph or so—description of what we were trying to do, the sense of the eerie we were trying to move towards; sometimes I met with them, and I showed them a scrapbook-type blog where I put up some photos, so they could get some sort of sense of the space. So I think in lots of ways it was the same sort of thing we were talking about with the writers—the fact that these artists were already working in that abstract space in the sounds that they were producing meant that it came together fairly easily in terms of a solid consistency, because the consistency was coming partly from the nature of sounds but also from the nature of the abstract space those sounds have come from and allude to.

**JB:** Take Pete Wiseman's music: because he had, as a musician, exactly the right tendency to produce mesmeric, serene, visionary, almost scholarly work with music. And he's a friend, and there was plenty of time to actually talk

about what we were trying to do, what we were trying to evoke. And plenty of time for me to talk about the eerie, so that the positive side of the eerie could be grasped. There was a tendency for most of the music—and it was all perfect, it worked out really well—to go for a sort of jagged edge, which again and again was exactly right, but on its own, if we hadn't had anything else, it might have had a slight tendency to overemphasize the gothic side of the eerie.

In a sense, there is no word for the other side of the eerie, this dispassionate positive side of the eerie is precisely what's been edited out of the world. And Pete's music was fundamental, because it caught this emphasis on the eerie positive side. It had that positive mesmeric quality. Because I think it's really important to get this right, it's fundamental to see that with M.R. James, the problem is that you have something which is an expression of the birth of Gothic horror in the modern world. And the modern world loves gothic, it loves horror, but it absolutely has a shutdown on the opposite dimension of the eerie, because that's the way out. Basically, gothic horror just in the end plays into Christian—or Judaic or Islamic—entrapment metaphysics, with its violence of transcendent maleness. Because in the end it just

frightens the hell out of people, points out that horrific things happen if you open yourself up in the direction of the unknown, and people are likely, in the end, having just frolicked around as critique-freaks in the zone of the gothic, to go precisely nowhere, and to have played into the hands of people who say, yes, there's something out there other than the material world, and be afraid, be very afraid—if you genuinely open yourself up to the unknown, you're going to go to hell to be roasted by M.R. James's demons. Which means it's the last great attempt to defend Christianity—M.R. James was a Christian, he read his stories out at Christmas! In Cambridge, a bastion of traditional Christian values.... So that incredible attempt by the religious system to defend itself by scaring people, which in fact goes on all the way through the twentieth century and is still going on as strong as ever, and which is gothic horror, has got to be fended off. Because the opposite direction is what's been edited out. It's really important to see that. Unless you get to the thought of an intent towards absolute deterritorialization—dispassionate movement towards absolute intensification, absolute freedom—you haven't seen what's at stake in all of this. And the gothic keeps you staring in completely the wrong direction, keeps you staring in the direction of the old Christian myth system.

**MF:** James is pretty clear about that: *A Warning to the Curious!* This is what happens to the curious.... But what was also blocked in James was his own libidinal attachment to these things, clearly. This is what is repressed in the gothic. Curiosity is a pool of the unknown.

**RM:** So he's warning himself?

**MF:** Yeah, curiosity is bad, if you go to any outside, it must be coded as evil. Following on from what Justin said about Pete, I think it's also true about Elizabeth. There's an eerie dimension to Elizabeth's work, and there's something really eerie about this in retrospect. Even at the time. I was saying to Justin, we really need some other kind of thing here, some kind of female voice—and almost precisely what I had in mind was Elizabeth's work, what it would sound like. Then I was sent the John Foxx and the Maths album that featured Gazelle Twin, Elizabeth, on a couple of tracks, and I thought, this is exactly the sort of thing we need. And luckily, I texted John Foxx's manager saying, who is this Gazelle Twin, this is fantastic; and he said, oh, I manage her, if you want to involve her with any projects, let me know—so I said, I want to involve her in one right now! But the timescale of that—and this is what I mean about its being eerie—it was really late on, it was in November,

and the show was starting in January. And she provided three pieces which really did tip things over.

Because it's not just a certain ambivalence about certain other pieces, which could be seen as dark gothic; but once they're the other elements of the sunlit numinous eerie, then they can be heard in a different way, not as being about gothic terror, but as being about a certain kind of terror that is to do with being awestruck, or losing one's ordinary self. And neither of us can now imagine the piece, what it would have really been like, if Elizabeth hadn't arrived from Aion at exactly the right time!

**JB:** It's only once you have that sunlit, numinous, dispassionate sort of intensity floating across the top that the other things do their work in a really effective way. There are elements of all the other tracks that go in this direction, but it's only once you have Pete Wiseman, and yes, most specifically, Gazelle Twin, across the top of it all that everything really breaks free.

**RM:** So it's really a matter of (re)constructing the intensity of that first walk, encountering the right pieces to be able to reconstruct it and to bring it into existence. And as you say in the piece, these moments are moments we don't

really ‘experience’—we just have these gaps, half-memories.

**JB:** It was a really amazing walk, and a lot happened. It’s important, when you think about the haecceity of a sunlit, solar-trance day, that what you’re thinking about is the terrain, but also the planet. And the sun is not anything to do with Suffolk, it’s that which is connected up to the whole planet. To get through to the full intensity of the haecceity of a preternaturally hot day in April in Suffolk, to get you to Suffolk, you really need to get to the whole planet, to get to that haecceity of the connection between the sun and the planet on that day—that’s what gets you to Suffolk. You get there not just by talking about the sun, but also by bringing in the whole planet—through bringing in Australia, through bringing in *Picnic*, through getting that planetary perspective. Because it’s not at all about the provincial, about the little place—Suffolk is not that at all. It’s about getting to the place by getting to the whole planet.

**RM:** Two things that come out of this: The question of intensity, the question of the relation between ‘an intensity’—a sensation, an atmosphere of a place that seems to happen all at once and to be inexpressible; and the notion of exploration of the abstract space that’s implicated in that

intensity. The process of ‘unfolding’ what is implicated within intensity is told brilliantly by David Lynch in his peculiar book on creativity and transcendental meditation, when he recounts how touching the roof of a car heated by the sun in the parking lot of the studio ‘caused’ the appearance of “the Red Room [...] the backwards thing [...] and then some of the dialogue”: “The Idea tells you to build this Red Room. So you think about it. Wait a minute, you say, the walls are red, but they’re not hard walls. Then you think some more [...] they’re curtains. And they’re not opaque, they’re translucent. Then you put these curtains there, but the floor [...] it needs something [...]”). The ‘Idea’ is the experienced intensive state, in pure memory, that must be pursued (“when you veer off, you know it [...] this isn’t like the idea said it was”), and reconstructed (“The idea is the whole thing—if you stay true to the idea, it tells you everything you need to know [...] You try some things and you make mistakes, and you rearrange, add other stuff, and then it feels the way the idea felt.”)<sup>1</sup>

What I’m trying to get at is the relation between this kind of pure moment of perception and this process of explication which unpacks

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1 David Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity* (Michael Joseph, 2007).

the abstract space implicated in it. Because what's important, I think, in OVL, is that you don't just yield to the notion that there's an inexpressible intensity that one can only try—and fail—to evoke. It's a very controlled, patient reconstruction (or retroconstruction).

**JB:** It's incredibly precise, what's at stake here. But I think it's important to think for a moment both about lucidity and about what stories are, what tales are—in the context of abstraction and intensities. Beyond reason, which is the lower form of intelligence, there's lucidity, which is the higher form of intelligence. And lucidity, most recurrently, and perhaps most effectively, expresses itself in the form of stories, in the form of tales, in the form of deeply, profoundly abstract tales. In fact, if a tale is genuinely the product of lucidity, it is more abstract than the products of reason. Because a tale, a magical tale, an anomalous tale, Lindsay's *Picnic*, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Fleutiaux's *The Story of the Telescope and the Abyss*, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Ballard's *The Drowned World*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, it's a world which consists precisely of real abstraction—it's a dense, very carefully bound together world of intensities, or lines of intent, abstract clusters, abstract modes.

So in fact, another myth of the modern world

is that reason is the place of abstraction, and that stories are just some strange supplement which just boosts it in some way by having a narrative involved, or the story gets boosted by the abstraction. In fact, the myth is that reason is the place of maximal abstraction. Maximal abstraction is found in stories, genuine anomalous tales, and in all expressions of lucidity. So, when you're constructing a narrative, whether it's a narrative of a walk or a narrative in a more obvious sense, what's happening as it unfolds in you and through you, as it appears beneath your fingers as you're doing it, is a whole series of lineaments of intent: a whole series of real abstract modes, forces, get woven, bound together in a virtual-real construct, a crystal of space-time, something which is an abstract world of passwords, which is a password overall, in terms of breaking open whole new aspects of the world. It's a world of *outsights*—it shows you the outside, and it guides you to the outside.

**MF:** I think that highlights the difference between this and the way we ordinarily think about fictions, as just something people make up. Your example from Lynch is the entailments of the dreaming real. Nietzsche has these great lines about creativity, when there's something coming through you, and you have to follow it—

we've all had these experiences, and we've all felt the lack of them at a certain point: you can make the figure of the Golem, but it won't move for you; we've all felt there are other moments when you're rushing after this set of things that just *have* to be that way. And I guess the power of entering into these kinds of fictional vortices is to lucidly find ways of doing this, so that it's not just a kind of romantic happenstance. That there's a practice one can follow that can reliably generate these kinds of intensities, actually.

**RM:** There's an extraordinary level of lucidity that's reached that goes beyond the creator's mind in the type of situation you were describing with Elizabeth, where you're encountering things that are exactly what you need for what you're constructing—somehow this kind of lucidity breeds or attracts coincidences. So what you're talking about here would be a kind of coincidence-engineering...

**MF:** Yes, because it's important that that doesn't 'just happen' to you; that there are ways of getting out there, and that it's not just a question of inspiration, although it can sometimes feel like that. I guess there is a question about the role of landscape—or terrain, I think we both prefer that word—in literature in general. Also thinking about it in terms of music, where a lot

of the music that's most powerfully affected me is closely associated with terrain. And obviously that relationship is much more abstract than what we're doing, but clearly, terrain is a potentiator in that way, that can be fed back into.

**JB:** Exactly, because in a way the pragmatics can be described by the process of, in an exploratory way, trying to find a way of building a plane of consistency, finding a way of building something in which lucidity is to go into effect. And here what was vital was that we took the walk. We took the walk as a starting point, which meant that we were being led by terrain, by a trajectory through terrain. By something that was primarily about the terrain: it was deeply impersonal. But that of course involved Eno, M.R. James.... So in a sense there's the seed crystal: a whole process of thinking about the terrain, which obviously has this whole thing about fending off invasions, about fending off the sea. That's the starting point; the terrain; and then also, out of M.R. James in 1900, Eno somewhere in the late 70s or early 80s—from that, you ended up with a story about the history of modernism, which was fundamental in the sense that it's an essay, it's about that area of Suffolk, but it's also about a whole series of things that emerge from thinking about eighty years of

modernism. So there was a way that was found of building an impersonal, de-subjectifying plane that followed lines of the terrain and lines of the unknown at the level of strange movements within modernism. It's not at all that you can't be assisted by concepts, but we were never working within some superimposition or prefabrication of concepts. mf: The extent to which it wasn't prefabricated I think even we forget. Because we now reconstruct it: we did the walk, then we did the piece. But we did the walk not because we were planning to do a piece based on the walk. We did the walk really as research for a whole other project which in a way has come out in Justin's fictional work. So there's a real sense in which the piece made itself happen rather than us deciding.

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**JB:** Yes, when I said we took the walk as a

starting point, I meant that after the walk had taken place—and this was in fact Mark’s idea—we took the walk as a structure to work with in order to create something....

**MF:** About lucidity and the essay form: I think what the concept of lucidity gives you is also the idea that talking about what’s happening, analysing what’s happening, doesn’t subtract from the intensity of what’s occurring. Which goes once again against this romantic idea that one is swept away by these forces of unthought, as it were—to affirm that actually there’s a relation between the unthought, the outside, and the capacity to reflect upon it. There’s a disintensifying mode of reflection, but there’s an intensifying mode of reflection. And I think that’s what can be provided by this essay form over and above a fiction: because you can have fictional elements, but you can also talk about how those fictional elements are working. And rather than that being some kind of debunking of a magic trick, it is a demystification of the production of lucidity, you could say.

**RM:** Could you clarify the argument with modernism that seems to run through OVL?

**JB:** It’s not an argument with modernism, it’s more standing up for a free unfettered

modernism that's been there all along and which is still in effect. The point that was made earlier on about the difference between Joan Lindsay (but this would also apply to Virginia Woolf) and M.R. James is that Lindsay gets you through to the free, unfettered modernism which is still fundamentally what's at stake, what everybody's trying to escape to. It's important to see that there was always a danger of things collapsing down into something which was unbelievably clever, but which, in the end, did not take you through in fundamental ways to the outside, to the eerie, to the unknown—there is nothing at all eerie about James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is that difference that's vital. It's sensing how modernism was brought up by a stepfather called Freud rather than by its real father, who was called Nietzsche, or perhaps Lewis Carroll. It's a question of seeing, in fact, that a few people broke through to sustained lucidity, and it's a tumultuous thing to do this and then to climb up to the ramparts of modernism and say the things that can be said if this has happened. People who do that are liable sometimes to find things very difficult. Nietzsche did it, Virginia Woolf did it. Or rather, to reach lucidity is a very extraordinary thing, and to reach lucidity is particularly difficult if it's not really backed up by lucidity explicitly in the form of philosophy.

Deleuze, I think, actually does reach precisely that, but he's so backed up with philosophy that he is not one of the 'tightrope walkers of the spirit'. So basically it's this that's at stake, it's getting out from behind the shadow of Freud and James Joyce to reach Joan Lindsay and Virginia Woolf and Nietzsche.

**RM:** Isn't it also connected, Mark, with what you've talked about as a 'pulp modernism'? Which is very far away from the austerity of what we think about as being involved in project of literary modernism?

**MF:** Yeah, I think so, because pulp or popular modernism is an alternative to postmodernism. A lot of the democratization of modernism is what's been classified as postmodernism—but I think that, in so far as that's positive, it's better thought of as a pulp or popular modernism which in a way retrospectively vindicates modernism: the fact that Virginia Woolf is available in Penguin, widely disseminated, changes it from being something that's just for the bourgeoisie. And yeah, and of course, lots of elements of what we're working with were already popular modernist—a lot of the things we worked with in LUL—*Quatermass and the Pit*, the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, *Sapphire and Steel*. And also, something we haven't talked

about yet, which would be a whole other hour's conversation, which is probably the intense peak of intense cryptic modernism, Alan Garner.

**JB:** Absolutely, Alan Garner, but also *Sapphire and Steel*, which was the very first thing at the start of LUL. There couldn't be a better example of unfettered modernism. So yes, it's desperately important to think of people like Joan Lindsay, who's probably not thought about in the same space as people like Virginia Woolf, and to think of *Sapphire and Steel*, and also the extraordinary figures in the world of music—if you're talking about modernism, it's important to see that 1962 was the explosion of pop modernism, and it's so fundamental to keep in mind people like Kate Bush and Patti Smith, in this discussion.

**RM:** What are your thoughts on OVL's uneasy relation to the contemporary art establishment which, I guess, would see itself as faithfully following through the logic of modernism? Precisely because of the kind of narrative elements you're bringing in, and because of its intensity and its affect, OVL sits very uncomfortably in the space where it was presented.

**MF:** Yes, it doesn't fit in at all, and certainly if either of us are described as 'artists', we both

feel very uneasy for all sorts of reasons.

**JB:** There's a certain element of 'pet of the bourgeoisie' in the term 'artist' which is really disturbing!

**MF:** Particularly now, I think. But there's also the other side—that you tend to think of an artist as someone who can do things I can't do—so I can't be one! But it's more that it's really purely arbitrary and accidental that this ended up in an art assemblage. We had produced it off our own bat, with all kinds of other resources that we were fortunate to have. We produced LUL for Resonance FM, and a natural home for what we're doing in all sorts of ways would be radio, not the art world at all. But it just so happens that a series of contingencies led to it being played in an art institution. And that brought out certain things that wouldn't have come out if it had been a radio piece: the fact of the ritualistic dimension of going to a space, sitting down, and listening to something that demands your attention for forty-five minutes, and won't work unless you're absorbed in it. I think that not only formed a contrast with a kind of affect-lite feel of lots of things in contemporary art, but also the wider world now, where attention is constantly besieged, obstructed, etc. So from our point of view there was a definite benefit in

its having been installed in that way. But there's no necessary relationship to the art world, I don't think.

**JB:** It's strange what's called the art world, where do you draw the line? Because if you think of some particularly good electronic dance music festival which happens to have a tent which is playing anomalous, weird things through the night, it always seemed to me that, for OVL to be played at 4AM to people out of their heads, but in a very dispassionate focussed sober way, was the utterly perfect way for it to be heard, or just for people to be listening to it in the same circumstances in their front rooms. But of course that's not at all what people have in mind when they talk about the art world: the art world isn't at all people out of their heads at 4AM.

**MF:** I think there's almost a deliberate removal of affect in many pieces of contemporary art now: what *makes* it art is that you don't feel anything in relation to it. We're encouraged to feel that we're Neanderthals if we still think that art should create feelings and affects, that it should have aesthetic texture, content, etc—that's not sophisticated. Lots of tendencies in the contemporary art world are exactly against those things. But I'm happy to be Neanderthal

if that's the case, to be honest.

**JB:** But I think in a way the art world likes its products, it makes its money out of its products, and it produces an attitude whereby all they actually encounter is this world of products. And the eerie is always about hearing something which is an expression beyond that world. You should get that strange feeling of 'what forces has that emerged out of?' Listening to Raime, one of the contributors, doing their music, at the gallery, one of the things that took place there, I was very struck by their music and I felt like I was hearing it as coming from some place of dereliction, from a strange world of forces, dark but bright, semi-collapsed, semi-chaotic, a place arriving because of some black, energetic way of seeing the cosmos. It's always a question of the world that's giving expression, of the whole world out of which the artwork has emerged. The art world doesn't in itself conduct you toward hearing the eerie cries of forces beyond the product, the forces that have found expression within it.

Finally, it's important to focus on the unknown: you said, Robin, isn't it always a question of reaching the eerie in any place, in any room, not just in some particularly conducive zone like the strange Suffolk coastline area? And I think

that's right—it's always about being aware of the unknown around you. And finally, having got to the *spatium* that reveals itself through sound as a world of intent, you need, at last, on your own, with the light on, in the ordinary world, to see the visual as *also* a world of strange cries emerging from who knows what, all around you. All of the people around you and all the space around you is a strange world of cries coming from an utterly unknown dark space beyond. So that, in the end, you get to the world of intent, the world of strange cries, in your front room, in the street... and maybe if you have or are encountering enough sheer intensity, in some art studio space! If you're lucky!

**RM:** This brings us to the submerged theme that runs through the whole piece: that of glimpsing the eerie outside of *capitalism* in the container port at Felixstowe—the idea that there's this screened-off zone where we can see behind the banal glamour of the world, this assembly-line distribution hub which would allow us somehow to peep over the fence of the world we're in. One of the interviews that you include, in excerpts, in OVL, is Dan Fox talking about the eerie experience of actually being physically in that world, of being on a container ship.

So, the relation between Felixstowe being a real

place where this stuff really happens—as against the idea that Capitalism generates a global, virtual nonspace in which we’re all sitting around using wifi in airports which could be anywhere, which is such a widespread idea—against this, OVL shows us that in a sense what’s ‘beyond’—at least, what’s beyond this consensual dream of contemporary nomadism—is not something weird, disembodied and immaterial, but the moving around of massive amounts of physical stuff.

**JB:** The physical ganglions of capitalism the size of several cathedrals...!

**MF:** We really wanted to present the whole interview with Dan Fox as a separate piece because he goes into this in quite a lot of depth. The interview with Dan is itself a kind of tale, about a six-week voyage he took just because he wanted to, and has not really discussed with anyone else or done any work on the basis of. Certainly, it was exactly talking about that dumb materiality of capitalism, and the contrast between the sheer frenzy of communication for us, and the weird monastic nature of life for people who make that possible. They only get news once or twice a week on those ships! So there’s this absolute flip where what allows this so-called immaterial communication is this

supermaterial floating monastery.

**JB:** The sort of thing that makes this possible—this frenetic world of blocked dumbed-down high-speed activity—is this slowness taking place on the ocean.

**MF:** And a certain sort of silence as well, which is not just audio silence. We often describe the docks as silent. Actually one of the first times we went to Felixstowe we got off the train in the evening and we went straight down to Landguard Point and could see the docks there. And yes, you're taken to the back end of capitalism, that's the thing. What it often reminds me of when I visit the docks is the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1978 remake, when you see the kind of slow impersonal work of the pods, just building their propagation systems. And the silence is not a physical silence—it's actually quite noisy. It's a silence to do with a lack of the sight of human beings. We found out subsequently that you're not allowed to walk around there because it's too dangerous. So the impression you get when you look at it is of machinery performing its work without the agency of human beings. And in some sense that tells you what really is going on, you know? What really is going on: that *it had got away with something*. And the thing it had got away with, in a lot of ways, was us.

**RM:** This leads to the question of what role site or place or terrain can play in some kind of resistance. And it seemed to me that the piece presented a very different perspective on that question than contemporary art, which often presents site as a locus of resistance by trying to reconstruct it as something wholesome, rescuing site from the anonymity of globalization, burrowing into its quirky histories and representing them—the artist parachuted in to champion the vital specificity of a place, who then becomes explicitly or otherwise a prosthesis of the heritage industry.... Because of this very different notion of what this place is, as we've discussed, you're not rescuing it and representing a physical site, but championing an abstract-real site that is accessible in different ways.

**MF:** Whose is the gaze for which that representation is made, that's part of the problem there. It's presumptuous, this annoys me and I often say this at art events, when you hear them bleating on about community, whilst they're all there, myself included, as transnational cosmopolitans. And you've got to affirm that: if we wanted to live in a local community, we'd have done it; we don't! So it's almost like we want the other to live in these local communities for us, while we travel round

the world talking about communities. I think there are very dubious political consequences to that position. But another thing is to move beyond resistance, really. There are a lot of problems with resistance, one of which is it just traps you within the optic of the thing you're trying to get away from. This thing about going sideways into the outside, or of seeing capitalism as just one of these forces of capture—obviously a major force of capture that has occurred—but seeing it from the perspective of the outside rather than from the inside that it projects and wants to trap us into. I still think in that sense we're DeleuzoGuattarian fundamentalists, in so far as we believe that the form of late capitalism is the creation of interior neurotic subjectivity, which has never been more widely disseminated than in the age of reality TV, really—that you can't resist it, can't find an outside which is beyond it.

**RM:** Indeed you don't try to reclaim this area of coastline aesthetically so as to rescue it from the clutches of capitalism; you present it as a figurative and actual battleground, a liminal space, or even as the evidence of a battle that's already taken place and perhaps been lost: the tendency of contemporary culture would be to block out even the memory of that battle, or to 'manage' it away.

**MF:** There's a very intense location at Landguard Point where you'll see these different times, these traces of different struggles: Landguard Fort, which, like a lot of the military architecture on that coast, was only ever employed virtually, it was never actually used to actually defend the coast from invaders. Then on both sides of the peninsula you see the erosion of the coast by the sea; and then you look over and it's a pure cybergothic juxtaposition, you see the container port. And I think the port is a certain kind of non-place, but not the kind of non-place that Augé talked about: we see that kind of non-place, we experience going into retail parks, etc. But—and Justin's phrase 'unvisited vastness' captured this—this was a different kind of non-place. Because those container ports have more in common with each other than they do with the immediate space in which they happen to be built.

**RM:** And they're not built to be experienced—they're not for us.

**JB:** It's interesting thinking about the fact that ruins are places which do not have a function. They're not places that have been designed for you to be, they've been stripped of their function. Which is something I'd put alongside what's being said about the southward container

port part of the walk.

There are several other things that need to come up: one of them would be the question of what might be a component of an assemblage that would be a counterpart of this strange ganglion of the container port: a counterpart within the world of the nomadisms that are really at stake here, nomadisms in intensity, collective nomadisms of all kinds—I don't just mean the travellers, the Romany people we met toward the end. And then there is the question of resistance as movement toward the outside.

Now, the last, most deadly trap of the inside is to get you to resist *against* it. If you resist it in this way you've fallen for its last, most effective trap. So the fundamental thing of course is just to leave in the direction of the outside. And in the course of this conversation it's also important not to lock too tightly onto the container port. I think that in terms of terrain, in terms of landscape, it's important to see that there are some terrains which have a particular power to take you out towards the unknown. The good thing about ruins is that they've been stripped away from all of the normal functional things that you connect them with, and they become atmospheric. A child encountering ruins just immediately dreams up a whole world of stories,

runs off into the zone and dreams up stories. They have that power. The vital thing in the end, of course, is that, instead of starting from the area around Felixstowe and Woodbridge and invoking the cosy community singularity of the place, what's really at stake is the idea that, although it's true that again and again you find places which are beyond the periphery, which are far more intrinsically intense than the centre—that is intrinsically true, the centre is the place where there's far too much gravity—although this is true, and you'll find real nomadism elements there, none of that is really the key issue. What's really at stake is that it's a zone which has its own particular power, which is a power to take you out of ordinary reality towards the forces of the planet; so it has a power of deterritorialization which is fundamentally about reaching the global, but in the sense of the BwO. So you find a place that has that greater power of displacement, away from the plane of constricting organization with its nerve ganglions of Capitalism, towards the plane of consistency, the BwO.

And I think a last thing would be: What would you put alongside Felixstowe container port? What would be a component of the nomadic world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Just to invoke one element which I think is quite

valuable, instead of talking about the container ships and the container ports of capitalism, I think what might be quite valuable, especially as we're so much in the space of the sonic, would be to take the music reproduction device, from the record player of the time of Virginia Woolf to the jukebox that Eno heard playing rock all the time in Woodbridge, because Woodbridge was surrounded by airfields with American airmen, and there were cafés where he was blown away by rock coming from America; all the way through to the radios and ghetto-blasters and iPods on which people have listened to things and got out of their heads at four'o'clock in the morning. It's valuable to think for a moment about the radio, but to strip the radio away from the sober world of the radio that plays documentaries or audio essays and to think it precisely as a component of deterritorialization. The skill of the nomads is to be imperceptible. But another skill of the nomads is to use sound in a de-subjectified way: who knows what songs get sung in the nomad communities, just in that sense that a skill of the nomads is definitely sound, from Django Reinhardt to the nomad overtone singing of Mongolia. Evidently a lot of what is carried by sound-production technology is very blocked—locked down and subjectifying—but there are also components for escape, worlds of outsgights and dreamings, and worlds of sonic forces that

conduct toward trance, toward the beyond of the self. And I think therefore that it's important to hold the radio-and-music-player in mind as a deterritorialized, plane-of-consistency counterpart to the container ship.

**MF:** That's historically true, that the development of the radio is actually very tied up with ships. Exactly the development of record players, the whole music industry is very much tied up with shipping, shipping forced the development of wireless.



# FLATLINE CONSTRUCTS (EXCERPT)

*Mark submitted his Philosophy and Literature PhD thesis to the University of Warwick in 1999. Entitled Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction, the thesis explores a radical plane of immanence—the Gothic flatline—on which the anthropocentric tendency to give agency to inanimate objects is subverted, so that everything—animate or inanimate—is seen as ‘dead’. Rather than privileging human agency over the agency of objects, Mark argues for their radical immanence within the emerging technosphere: the world of cybernetics. He asks, “what if we are as ‘dead’ as the machines”?*

*Never one to alienate his audience with an isolated academic discourse, Mark illustrates his theory with a*

*constellation of popular sci-fi movies and books. Bursting with influence from his time with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, here Mark is nevertheless distinguishing himself from their anonymised hivemind, writing in a style that is very much his own—the Gothic Spinozist mode, first articulated in his PhD thesis, that will become familiar to readers of his later work. Mark defines Capitalist Realism, in part, as our ‘inertial, undead’ ideological default. In Ghosts of My Life he remembers darkside Jungle’s active identification with the ‘inorganic circuitry’ beneath the living tissue of the Terminator. In The Weird and the Eerie he expands his Gothic Materialism of the cybernetic, initially separated from the supernatural, to include the Fortean atmosphere of the English pastoral that so interested him in his later years, positioning neolithic stone circles alongside android anatomies.*

*In his eulogy to Mark, Robin Mackay wondered “what remains after the physical body’s gone, when the singularity of a life can no longer rely on that frail support and needs other carriers”.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, what role does this Gothic Materialism play within the Fisher-Function?<sup>2</sup> Rather than becoming immediately facetious, can Mark’s real death recalibrate the stakes of his conceptual deaths?<sup>3</sup> Can death in this mode be collectively thought in a way that prepares us for—and helps us to move beyond—our present reality, not only of*

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1 Robin Mackay, ‘Mark Fisher Memorial’ [speech] (Urbanomic, 2017).

*personal grief but of capitalist apocalypticism?*

Matt Colquhoun

*Isn't it strange the way the wind makes inanimate objects move? Doesn't it look odd when things which usually just lie there lifeless suddenly start fluttering. Don't you agree? I remember once looking out onto an empty square, watching huge scraps of paper whirling angrily round and round, chasing one another as if each had sworn to kill the others; and I couldn't feel the wind at all since I was standing in the lee of a house. A moment later they seemed to have calmed down, but then once again they were seized with an insane fury and raced all over the square in a mindless rage, crowding into a corner then scattering again as some new madness came over them, until finally they disappeared round a corner. There was just one thick newspaper that couldn't keep up with the rest. It lay there on the cobbles, full of spite and flapping spasmodically, as if it were out of breath and gasping for air.*

*As I watched, I was filled with an ominous foreboding. What if, after all, we living beings were nothing more than such scraps of paper? Could there not be a similar unseeable, unfathomable 'wind' blowing us from place to place and determining our actions, whilst we, in our simplicity, believe we are driven by free will? What if the life within us were nothing more than some mysterious whirlwind? The wind whereof it says in the Bible, 'Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth'? Do we not sometimes dream we have plunged our hands into deep water and caught silvery*

*fish, when all that has happened is that our hands have been caught in a cold draught.*<sup>1</sup>

*Today's children [...] are comfortable with the idea that inanimate objects can both think and have a personality. But they no longer worry if the machine is alive. They know it is not. The issue of aliveness has moved into the background as though it is settled. But the notion of the machine has been expanded to include having a psychology. In retaining the psychological mode as the preferred way of talking about computers, children allow computational machines to retain an animistic trace, a mark of having passed through a stage where the issue of the computer's aliveness is a focus of intense consideration.*<sup>2</sup>

These two passages—the first from Gustave Meyrinck's 1927 novel *The Golem*, the second from Sherry Turkle's 1995 work of 'cyber-

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- 1 Gustave Meyrinck, *The Golem* (Dedalus, 1995), pp. 54-55. A crucial aspect of the legend concerns the writing of a secret name (the name of god) either onto a piece of paper or directly onto the Golem's head. In some cases, the Golem is animated by a letter of the secret name being deleted.
  - 2 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (Phoenix, 1996), p. 83. Gothic Materialism finds a number of these terms uncongenial (for instance: life, screen, identity). Indeed, *Unlife Beyond the Screens* could serve as another subtitle for this study.

psychology' *Life on the Screen*—take us directly to what will be the guiding preoccupation of this thesis. Meyrinck's novel is a recounting of an old narrative: the Kabbalistic tale of the rabbi who animates lifeless clay, giving form to the monstrous Golem. The myth has many variants. In many cases—and in anticipation of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*—the Golem, once animated, and no longer subject to its master's control, runs amok. Turkle's account, meanwhile, concerns the response of children to those newest of cybernetic machines, the personal computer. Across time, Meyrinck's character and the children Turkle is studying have an independent insight into what will be called here the Gothic flatline: a plane where it is no longer possible to differentiate the animate from the inanimate and where to have agency is not necessarily to be alive.

It might seem that the children have now accepted what Meyrinck's character found so terrifying. Yet the question Meyrinck's character poses is not quite the one Turkle entertains—which is to say, what if the machines were alive?—but something more radical: what if we are as 'dead' as the machines? To pose even this second question seems immediately inadequate: what sense would it be to say that 'everything'—

human beings and machines, organic and nonorganic matter—is ‘dead’? Much of what follows is an attempt to answer this question.

Donna Haraway’s celebrated observation that “our machines are disturbingly lively, while we ourselves are frighteningly inert”<sup>3</sup> has given this issue a certain currency in contemporary cybertheory. But what is interesting about Haraway’s remark—its challenge to the oppositional thinking that sets up free will against determinism, vitalism against mechanism—has seldom been processed by a mode of theorizing which has tended to reproduce exactly the same oppositions. These theoretical failings, it will be argued here, arise from a resistance to pursuing cybernetics to its limits (a failure evinced as much by cyberneticists as by cultural theorists, it must be added). Unraveling the implications of cybernetics, it will be claimed, takes us out to the Gothic flatline. The Gothic flatline designates a zone of radical immanence. And to theorize this flatline demands a new approach, one committed to the theorization of immanence. This thesis calls that approach Gothic Materialism.

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3 Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Free Association Books, 1991), p. 152

The conjoining of the Gothic with Materialism poses a challenge to the way that the Gothic has been thought. It is a deliberate attempt to disassociate the Gothic from everything supernatural, ethereal or otherworldly. The principal inspiration for this theorization comes from Wilhelm Worringer via Deleuze-Guattari. Both Worringer and Deleuze-Guattari identify the Gothic with ‘nonorganic life’, and whilst this is an equation we shall have cause to query, Gothic Materialism as it is presented here will be fundamentally concerned with a plane that cuts across the distinction between living and nonliving, animate and inanimate. It is this anorganic continuum, it will be maintained, that is the province of the Gothic.

At the same time as it aims to displace the Gothic from some of its existing cultural associations, the conjoining of the Gothic with materialism also aims to provoke a rethinking of what materialism is (or can be). Once again, Deleuze-Guattari are the inspirations here, for a rethinking of materialism in terms closer to Horror fiction than to theories of social relations. Deleuze-Guattari’s abstract materialism depends upon assemblages such as the Body without Organs (a key Gothic concept, we shall aim to demonstrate), while in their attacks on psychoanalysis (their defence, for instance, of the

reality—as opposed to the merely phantasmatic quality—of processes such as becoming-animal) it is often as if they are defending Horror narratives—of vampirism and lycanthropy—against a psychoanalytic reality principle. Moreover, the Deleuze-Guattari take-up of authors as various as Artaud, Spinoza, Schreber and Marx can, we hope to establish, be seen as quintessentially Gothic: what Deleuze-Guattari always emphasise in these writers is the theme of anorganic continuum. But the non- or anorganic Deleuze-Guattari introduce us to is not the dead matter of conventional mechanistic science; on the contrary, it swarms with strange agencies.

The role of cybernetics as we shall theorise it is very much parallel to the theoretical direction Deleuze-Guattari have taken. Cybernetics, it will be argued, has always been haunted by the possibilities Deleuze-Guattari lay out (even if, in certain cases, it has inhibited or impeded them). As a materialist theory, it, too, we will attempt to show, has tended to challenge the boundary between the animate and the inanimate. Like Deleuze-Guattari, it has questioned the confinement of the attribution of agency only to subjects. The kind of fiction with which this study will be concerned—what has variously been labeled cyberpunk,

imploded science fiction and body horror (amongst other things)—has been exercised by many of the same concerns as cybernetic theory. Specifically, these texts have been fascinated by the concepts of agency-without-a subject and bodies-without-organs, emerging in the ambivalent form of the blade runners, terminators, and AIs that haunt current mass-mediated-nightmare.

Gothic Materialism is interested in the ways in which what would appear ultramodern—the gleaming products of a technically sophisticated capitalism—end up being described in the ostensibly archaic terms familiar from Horror fiction: zombies, demons. But it will resist the temptation to think of this ‘demonization of the cybernetic’ as the revival of “something familiar and old-established in the mind”<sup>4</sup>, preferring to think of it as the continuation of a nonorganic line that is positively antagonistic to progressive temporality. As Iain Hamilton Grant puts it, “the Terminator has been there before, distributing microchips to accelerate its advent and fuel the primitives’ fears”.<sup>5</sup> As we

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4 Sigmund Freud. ‘The Uncanny’, in *Art and Literature* (Penguin Freud Library, 1990), p. 363.

5 ‘At the Mountains of Madness: The Demonology of the New Earth and the Politics of Becoming’, in *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer* (Routledge, 1997), p. 97.

shall see, the nonorganic line as occupied by Gothic Materialism is to be distinguished both from ‘the supernatural’ (the supposed province of Horror fiction) and ‘speculative technology’ (the home of Science Fiction).

The phrase “something familiar and old-established in the mind” belongs, of course, to Freud, who will emerge in the terms of this study as a somewhat ambivalent figure, sometimes an ally, sometimes a foe, of Gothic Materialism. Writing of ‘animist traces’, Turkle is alluding to Freud’s famous essay on ‘The Uncanny’, from which this phrase comes, an essay written almost directly contemporaneously with *The Golem*. Here, Freud famously flirts with the problem of the inanimate becoming-active. I say ‘flirts’ because Freud—in what, in the terms of the present thesis, is a clear anti-Gothic gesture—moves to dismiss the importance of this theme. (Nevertheless, his own compulsive need to repeatedly reiterate it, has led to a persistent association in critical writings of the uncanny with exactly the question of *what should not be alive* acting as if it were.) Feelings of the uncanny, Freud insists, are not to be attributed to the confusion of the animate with inanimate, but to a fear of castration. We shall examine Freud’s essay on ‘The Uncanny’ in more detail later, but will note, for now, Freud’s own failure

to keep at bay the problem of animism; the theme has its own kind of living death, stalking him posthumously with the implacability of any zombie. Its very persistence constitutes a powerful argument for another of Freud's theses in 'The Uncanny'—one that Gothic Materialism will find much more congenial—the strange, nondialectical, functioning of the 'un' prefix. Thinking, no doubt, of his own remarks on the absence of negation in the unconscious, Freud establishes that the 'un' of 'unheimliche' does not straightforwardly reverse the meaning of the word 'heimlich'. In a—fittingly—disturbing way, 'unheimliche' includes heimlich.

'The Uncanny' leaves us with the impression that the source of Freud's critical deflections and circumlocutions is something powerful indeed. Castration may be terrifying, but it is not as *disturbing* as what Freud seems so keen to bury—precisely because it is a matter of terror, or fear. Terror or fear have an object—*what is feared*—and a subject—*he*<sup>6</sup> *who fears*—whereas the 'ominous foreboding' Meyrinck's character experiences arises from the inability to differentiate subject from object. There is

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6 See Freud's essays on 'The Unconscious' and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Penguin Freud Library, 1991) for his argument that the concept of negation is alien to the unconscious.

a dispersal of subjectivity onto an indifferent plane that is simultaneously too distant and too intimate to be apprehended as anything objective.

This thesis will approach this plane via theorists who have been associated with a critique of psychoanalysis: Deleuze-Guattari, whom we have already introduced, and Baudrillard. Provisionally, we could identify Gothic Materialism with the work of Deleuze-Guattari and ‘Cybernetic Theory-Fiction’ with the work of Baudrillard. But this—simple—opposition, whilst schematically useful, is ultimately misleading. Baudrillard, we shall see, can make a contribution to Gothic Materialism, whilst Deleuze-Guattari’s work can certainly be described as Theory-Fiction. Baudrillard’s interest in cyberpunk fiction and film, his fascination with automata and simulacra, make him both the object of a Gothic Materialist theory, and a contributor to it.

One of the aims of *Flatline Constructs* is to play off Deleuze-Guattari and Baudrillard against each other on the question the Meyrinck’s passage poses. In developing theories radically antipathetic to subjectivity, Deleuze-Guattari and Baudrillard have occupied parallel trajectories, sometimes closely intermeshing,

sometimes radically diverging. One common feature is the—cybernetic—emphasis on code (as we shall see, one major difference between them concerns the role of *decoding*).

Baudrillard can also be placed as probably the principal theorist of what we might call the *negativized Gothic*; Baudrillard is the inheritor of a social critical tradition that has tended to cast its narratives about the decline of civilization in terms of what it would no doubt think of as metaphors of inorganic unvitality: dead labour (Marx), mechanical reproduction (Benjamin). Standing at the demetaphorized terminal of this trajectory, Baudrillard's work frequently amounts to what is, in effect, a negativized Gothic, which “takes the Guy Debord / J.G. Ballard fascination with ‘the virtual commodification or crystallization of organic life towards total extinction’ further, towards narrating a technological triumph of the inanimate—a negative eschatology, the nullity of all opposition, the dissolution of history, the neutralization of difference and the erasure of any possible configuration of alternate actuality”.<sup>7</sup> Production is displaced by a totalized (re)production that a priori excludes novelty; “new” objects and cultural

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7 Mark Downham, ‘Cyberpunk’, *Vague*, No. 21, January 1989, p. 42.

phenomena increasingly operate on an exhausted but implacable closed-loop, which—in some sense—recapitulates itself in advance. ‘Necrospection’.<sup>8</sup>

Another of the features Deleuze-Guattari share with Baudrillard is the importance they place on fiction. Which leads us to the second term of this study’s subtitle—Cybernetic Theory-Fiction—a phrase it is worth unpacking a little now. It is Baudrillard who is most associated with the emergence of theory-fiction as a mode. And it is the role of “third-order simulacra”—associated, by Baudrillard, very closely with cybernetics, that, Baudrillard says, ‘puts an end’ to theory and fiction as separate genres.

By circulating a series of exemplary ‘fictional’ texts—Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*, William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, J.G. Ballard’s *The Atrocity Exhibition* and David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome*—throughout the study, we will aim to unravel something of what is at stake in the claim that

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8 Cf. Jean Baudrillard ‘Necrospective’, in *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 89–99. Like Jarry’s dead cyclist, contemporary metropolitan culture only appears to be moving forward because of the inertial weight of its own past (a past it simultaneously annihilates as the past, precisely by continually [re]instantiating it as the present).

the era of cybernetics eliminates—or smears—the distinction between theory and fiction. In some cases, the performance of theory is quite literal: *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Videodrome* include characters who are theorists (Dr Nathan, Professor O’Blivion). But this study will want to take Baudrillard’s claim very seriously and approach fictional texts, not simply as literary texts awaiting theoretical ‘readings’, but as themselves already intensely-theoretical.

# I WAS A CCRU MEAT-PUPPET

*Even if you have not been here before, a bot has selectively traced a path for you and archived it. Algorithmically triggering an anamnesiac episode via the datacombs of The Wayback Machine—contra the palliative of a ‘theoretically pure anterograde amnesia’ that typifies the postmodern impasse and provides “a compelling analogy for glitches in capitalist realism”<sup>1</sup>—obsolete links to strange networks of websites and blogs are reanimated. All paths do not inevitably lead to bitrot.*

*ccru.net is up and running, although it was down for several years and likely will (unexpectedly) go down*

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1 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero, 2011), p. 60.

*again. During the years of its occulturation, datacombs and aural fabulation remained the only way to gain sense of its vast mesh.*

*So, ears perked, you listen out: relays may still remain hidden. Perhaps its futures have not been lost, have yet to be cancelled...*

Lendl Barcelos

## WHO'S PULLING YOUR STRINGS?

*The following transcript was first brought to our attention in early December 2002 by a bemused colleague, who came across it while trawling through the web for conspiracy-related material. The site later disappeared without a trace, despite our persistent attempts to relocate it. No doubt Ms. Morrison will attribute this, too, to the Ccru take-over of cyberspace.*

*Through Morrison's allegation is clearly preposterous and the bulk of the content mystifies us entirely, it indicates some limited, albeit highly confused, knowledge of recent Ccru cultural production.*

*No member of the Ccru has any recall whatsoever of encountering Ms. Justine Morrison at any time. We are not convinced that she even exists.*

*Our perplexity has provoked us to respond. We must emphasize, however, that we do not acknowledge any responsibility to address her bizarre accusations.*

*Morrison's web-text 'I was a Ccru Meat-Puppet' was purportedly transcribed faithfully from a live address, given to the South London Monarch-Victims Support Group, November 3rd, 2002. We have reproduced it here without abridgement or alteration, with Ccru's own comments at the end.*

## I WAS A CCRU MEAT-PUPPET

*Justine Morrison*

This testament is intended as a warning. It is addressed to those whose eyes and ears and minds can be opened. Hope lies with those people, those brave souls who dare to look. And if my experiences have taught me anything, it is that there is always hope—no matter how dark and desperate things may seem. Many, many people around the world are learning to open their eyes. I know that some of you here will open your eyes this evening. Don't underestimate your power and importance. With each new pair of eyes that can see, we grow stronger, and the Evil retreats. It depends on not being looked at, on not being seen for what it is.

You wouldn't be here unless you had already question the Lie. So the fact you here at all is a cause for hope.

Many of the things I will tell you will seem unbelievable at first. Many of you will think that the events I will describe could not possibly have happened. Some of you will think that I am crazy. You know what? That is exactly what I would have thought a few years ago. Yes, that's exactly what I would have thought—even though many of those atrocious, unbelievable

things had already happened to me personally. You see, when something very atrocious happens to you, you can't remember it. You screen it out in order to survive. That's what they count on. They feed on your disbelief. They want to make it impossible for you to believe that they exist at all. That's how they operate.

This is a critical time in our struggle. Things are dark and desperate now. Believe me. Things are more dark and desperate than you could ever imagine.

They are playing out on the biggest possible stage. The biggest possible: the whole human race is at risk. I wish I was exaggerating.

You know, they are getting more and more sure of themselves. They are passing messages on the grandest possible scale and they do not even feel the need to encrypt them very much.

"It's better with the butterfly." Can you imagine how I felt when I saw that slogan for the first time? The biggest software company in the world announces the upgrading its online network with a strapline that was specifically addressed to me, whom they called Assassin 8. When I saw those words I just froze. Thankfully, I have come so far in my recovery now that I did

not succumb to panic. I realized that this sign was as much a cause of hope as a reason to fear. They had gained a new confidence in showing themselves. The war was entering another phase. So be it. “It’s better with the butterfly.” Don’t believe it for a second. It will be worse. Far, far worse.

The MSN8 campaign is a sign that my former handlers, a group calling itself the Ccru, has taken control of the emerging planet-mind. This should make you very scared indeed.

My tale is easier to tell because of the brave and honest trailblazing done by Cathy O’Brien. It is Cathy who has done most to expose the monstrous evil of the Monarch program. Every American—in fact every concerned citizen of the world—needs to read her book *Trance-Formation of America*. Presumably, many of you are here today because you have already read it.

For the benefit of those of you who haven’t read Cathy’s work, I must pause and explain a little about what the Monarch Program is. Those who know a little about it will have to excuse the fact that my initial explanation of Monarch will be very short. Some might think it is misleadingly short. Perhaps this is so. But

to consider Monarch in all its aspects would take much longer than the time I have available today.

The Monarch program is a mind control program. It is named after the Monarch butterfly, because, just as the butterfly changes its form—metamorphoses—so the controllers ‘trance-form’ the mind and personality of their subjects. Monarch recruits its victims when they are children, usually with the collusion of their parents. It uses what is known as trauma-based mind control to condition its victims. Very briefly, this involves subjecting the children to stimuli so horrible, so overwhelming, that their psyche disintegrates. The children cannot deal with what they have experienced, so their personality breaks down into so-called ‘alters’—submerged fragmentary personae that can be called up and trained by the controllers to carry out their evil purposes.

Who is behind this program? Well, it is known to have been operating in Nazi Germany during the Third Reich, and later to have been adopted by an offshoot of the CIA called MK Ultra. But these agencies are only masks for the forces—the Satanic forces—that are really in control.

The question for which the whole world should demand an answer is this: Why does Ccru refuse to acknowledge its history of Monarch Program involvement, even today?

No doubt many of you will be asking, “what is Ccru?” Even those of you who already know about Monarch might not yet know about Ccru and its role within the program.

I knew nothing of Ccru until I came across the name in publicity material for their ‘Syzygy’ (or ‘occult twins’) festival in London. The name ‘Ccru’ was strangely familiar to me, and I had no idea why. It was not merely familiar, it was powerfully and unpleasantly evocative. The moment I saw the posters and leaflets, I felt disoriented and threatened by an upwelling panic I couldn’t explain. That night I was tormented by senseless, terrifyingly vivid dreams.

Each of the dreams took place in an immense, desolate cavern. I felt that I was drugged, or restrained, or both. Either way, I could not move. The cavern was very dark, lit only by candles, and I could see almost nothing apart from row after row of symbols chalked onto the walls. This was unnerving enough, but what still terrorized me when I awoke from the dreams

were the horrible sounds that resonated in the cavern: there was a disconcerting, continuous chanting, but, worse than that, a deep moaning that seemed to issue from the throat of some vast, unearthly creature.

These dreams were so vivid that they did not seem like dreams at all. They seemed more like someone else's memories.

Although I had every reason to flee this macabre phenomenon, I found that I could not. Instead I was drawn inwards—as if I had a destined role to play.

I had originally planned to remain in London for only a week or so. But now I decided to stay longer, until at least the start of the Syzygy festival. In the end, it turned out that I stayed for the whole thing.

Ccru's contributions to Syzygy had taken the form of nightly 'rituals' dedicated to what they openly called 'demons'. Night after night, the theme of 'twins' and 'twinning' recurred. At this time, part of me still thought that this was still some kind of art prank. But the nightly rituals and readings were performed with what appeared to be total seriousness. And every day, after the official events finished, there were

long, involved discussions that lasted deep into the night. None of the Ccru controllers ever seemed to sleep.

It was in these discussion sessions that I learned more about the Ccru's belief systems. They claimed to be waging an endless war against the oppressive forces of normal social existence. In general, they seemed wary and paranoid, yet with me they seemed peculiarly trusting and eager to share their esoteric knowledge, as if recognizing a long lost and sorely missed accomplice. In fact, Ccru seized upon me with an eagerness that should have been distressing, except my sense of judgment had already decayed too far for that.

They claimed that ordinary social reality maintained the power of what they called 'Atlantean White Magic', a kind of elite conspiracy which they said had secretly controlled the planet for millennia. They claimed to traffick with demons who had told them many secrets drawn from a 'Lemurian' tradition of 'time-sorcery' that contained within itself everything that was and will be. Lemuria was supposedly an ancient sorcerous culture populated by nonhuman beings.

Ccru also said that they had been taught to

count by a sea-beast called Nomo which they had first summoned during an elaborate ritual with took place in Western Sumatra. It was clear to me from the unspoken undercurrent that human sacrifice had been involved, probably on a massive scale. Their apparent indifference to such suffering fitted in with a general loathing for human existence itself. They celebrated what they saw as the imminent destruction of humanity by the forces of techno-capitalism.

Were these just stories, or did they really believe in what they were saying? When I pressed them on this, they never gave me a straight answer. They kept saying that I needed to learn that reality was itself a type of fiction, that both belief and disbelief had to be left behind. I realize now that this was part of a deliberate strategy to mentally destabilize me.

At the dead center of the Ccru system was the 'Pandemonium Matrix'. It is difficult to fully describe what this horrible thing is. It was only later, when I had escaped Ccru's influence, that its real nature was made clear to me.

What the Matrix amounted to was a list of the demon-creatures which the Lemurian sorcerers had traded and made pacts with. More than that, the Matrix gave the numerical codes and

other protocols that the Lemurians had used to contact these entities. I quickly learned the names and characteristics of many of these beings. I noticed that one seemed to be invoked more frequently than the others: Katak, a demon associated with terrible destruction and desolation. Night after night I ingested this Ccru spiritual poison, not realizing—or even really caring—how thoroughly it was insidiously eroding the basic fabric of my being, calling to my own inner demons.

I didn't know just how close I was to total destruction, and wouldn't have known, were it not for what had happened on the last night of Syzygy. This night was devoted to what Ccru called a summoning; but it's clear to me now that it was some form of hideous black Mass. After it had drawn to a close, I had a strong impulse to step outside for some fresh air.

Once outside, I was vaguely aware of two trenchcoated figures lingering in the darkness. Then things started to happen quickly. Before I had time to react, one of them had grabbed me, covering my mouth; at the same time, the other pulled a hypodermic syringe from his coat pocket and quickly pushed it into my arm. I realized immediately that they had drugged me.

Sedated but still conscious I was dragged for what seemed like hours through the alleys of Vauxhall. Eventually we arrived at what appeared to be a warehouse of some kind. I remembered being taken through a series of security doors, until finally we entered a large basement area. It was here that I was to spend six months of shattering revelation. My two rescuers, although it took me several weeks to properly identify them as such, were twin brothers Viktor and Sergei Kowalsky, who displayed all the heroism, nobility and truthfulness of modern knights. They themselves had escaped from a Soviet mind-control facility controlled by Russian Satanists. After years of being pursued by agents from the most occult wing of the KGB, the Kowalskys set up the base in London and there they waged their selfless crusade against the evil of Satanic mind control.

The months I spent in the Kowalskys deprogramming laboratory—they called it a ‘safe room’—were undoubtedly the most illuminating of my life. Their therapeutic regime included hypnosis, drugs, and electrical stimulation. The Kowalskys explained that these techniques were aimed at recovering material buried deep within my mind. They were specially designed to restore the identity

of what they described as ‘Monarch slaves’, a term that was then completely new to me. The Kowalskys told me that they needed to access the alternate personalities or ‘Alters’ who had been with me since childhood. They said that I had been subject to ‘pandemonium programming’, a special variant of the Monarch system of personality disintegration, compartmentalization and indoctrination. The particular numerical combinations of the Pandemonium Matrix, the Kowalskys told me, had functioned as triggers for my suppressed identity fragments.

They warned me that digging down through these deeply-compacted layers of trauma would produce inexpressible intensities of anguish. In telling me this they were not exaggerating in the slightest. Over the following terrible months I would discover that my memories were lies, my mind had literally ceased to be my own, and that I had been possessed instead by alien commands, and demons. Who had been doing this to me, and why?

It was only as my recovery work with the Kowalskys painfully advanced, step by step, that I came to understand the sinister purpose that held me in its claws. The Kowalskys explained that Ccru wasn’t an acronym at all,

but was actually a version of the ancient West-Polynesian word *Khru*, meaning the Devil of Apocalypse. Once I understood that they were really Satan worshippers a lot of other things became much clearer. The supposed Lemurian system was really a name for all the demons of hell.

Ccru's role as agents of Satanic mind control explained the pedantically detailed theory of trauma they had outlined to me and also their striking obsession with twins. In the world in which Ccru operated, traumatism was the means and twins the raw material. It was only by the most heroic and persistent efforts that the Kowalskys had initiated me into this aspect of the phenomenon. In particular, it took months for me to fully accept that what felt like vivid personal memories were actually telepathic communications from the submerged mental compartments of my missing Monarch twin.

The Kowalskys told me that my recent involvement with Ccru, far from being accidental, was the final stage of a long entanglement with them and the forces they represented. Recovered memories from my early childhood showed that Ccru had been covertly directing the course of my entire life, education and process of psychological

maturation. I had been chosen from before birth, assigned to them by the ancient breeding masters countless generations before and had undergone meticulous lifelong training to perform a special mission. I shuddered at the thought of what this mission would involve. The Kowalskys gradually brought me to the terrible realization that my mission had already been accomplished—on the very night of my rescue. They told me that, with my mission complete, I had been scheduled for ‘retirement’ only hours later. This retirement would involve a long and protracted ceremonial death, to be followed by a ritual devouring by the demon Katak. A physical death and then a soul death.

But what had my mission been?

As the therapy progressed, I crossed a new threshold in my recovery, and became subject to a new wave of horribly realistic dreams. It was in these dreams that the awful truth about the mission was revealed.

They began with a semi-familiar stranger leading me forcibly into the subterranean labyrinth beneath a tropical island.

After violating me repeatedly in the butterfly position, he took me down into the lepidoptera

hall. It was long and narrow, walled by shelves of meticulously numbered jars. Each jar contained a butterfly. At first I thought they were preserved specimens, until I noticed them moving slightly, opening and closing their wings.

“Why don’t they die?” I asked.

“They can’t die while the puppet lives,” he replied.

It was then that I noticed, shocked, that he was standing behind himself. I heard cryptic numerical chanting in the background. Then the rear figure commanded “Do it now ...”

The chanting had changed into the insistent words “Assassin 8 .... Assassinate.... Assassin 8 ..... Assassinate .....”

I looked down and saw the number ‘8’ was painted onto my chest in blood.

Then I saw myself standing over a bloody corpse laid out upon some kind of sacrificial altar. In a moment of sickening revelation, I recognized that the body was that of William Gates III. Of course, my initial response was to deny the possibility that I could be a murderer. Surely this was some sick fantasy? Wasn’t Bill Gates

manifestly alive and prosperous, even appearing frequently on TV? The Kowalskys were forced to puncture this bubble of comforting illusion. How likely was it that this was actually the true Bill Gates? The Kowalskys taught me that the probability was indeed vanishingly insignificant. Not only did they point out all the subtle distinguishing features so that after comparing video images I could distinguish between Gates and his double with close to one hundred percent accuracy, they also explained how for political reasons Gates' continued existence had become impossible.

It was then that I recalled how, every Syzygy night without fail, the same slightly odd-looking middle-aged woman would attend, wearing a shapeless raincoat, an unnatural blonde beehive, dark glasses and an ornate butterfly tiara. She sat silently, observing proceedings, her features twisted into a cruel and complacent smile. Recalling this mysterious visitor later, with the help of the Kowalskys, I was able to strip away the disguise and realize who 'she' had been: none other than Microsoft mastermind Bill Gates, or more probably his twin. On other occasions the Gates-entity wore different disguises in order to attend Ccru meetings without attracting attention, yet he was never without a butterfly jewel of some kind—a

tiepin, for instance, or a ring. On one occasion he appeared masquerading as the black-snow bluesman Blind Humpty Johnson. I intuitively felt it had to be him, but I could not see the emblem anywhere. Eventually I chanced to glimpse into the left lens of his expensive shades and saw, deep in the black mirror, a holographic butterfly fluttering endlessly through the void.

It all made a terrible kind of sense, but, understandably, I reacted very badly to the discovery. The Kowalskys told me that this was probably because Gates had been involved with me in earlier episodes of satanic abuse and that recognizing him had threatened to reactivate unbearable repressed memories. They told me that it would help to acknowledge these previous encounters so that I could begin the process of healing. In any case there was no longer any doubt about the truth—Gates was dead, and I had murdered him.

With Gates' death, Microsoft and Ccru had become one thing. I realized how completely I had misunderstood the situation. Ccru had given every indication of holding Gates in awe, following his instructions without question. Among themselves they would use many affectionate names for him, such as 'Dollar Bill', 'the Gator' and 'Gates of Pandemonium'.

He had seemed like a kind of father figure to them. How could the Ccru web-site have come to generate some of the heaviest traffic on the web, without any advertising or even word-of-mouth popularization, if not for the massive and sustained support offered by Gates and Microsoft? Many web users report that the Ccru site sometimes pops up spontaneously when using certain Microsoft applications.

Ccru went to extraordinary lengths to make sure that their close links with Gates were never exposed, even going so far as to attack him publicly. Now, of course, I saw that the very name ‘Syzygy’ had been a cynical declaration of black ritual assassination. One twin would kill another. This was typical of the brazen Ccru style—years before Ccru had spoken of the ‘Switch’. They had also publicly announced that the Age of Katak was arriving, when the world would be consumed by blood and fire. The assassination of Gates was supposed to initiate this new era. The Kowalskys explained that Gates was the romanized version of the proto-Arabic Khatzeik, the form of the name Katak as recorded on the Black Stele in the ruins of Irem. Killing Gates was both a symbolic and a practical act that would enable Ccru to take control of cyberspace and use it for the vast planetary hive-mind control system that they

are creating.

The letters MSN followed by the butterfly icon signifies Mission Butterfly, or Monarch Program. I never really understood their numbo-jumbo, but they showed me that MSN8 was qabbalistically equivalent to CCRU—I can't remember how it worked now, but it was very persuasive at the time.

After the MSN8 campaign broke, I wrote to Ccru asking them to justify their actions. It was the first time I had attempted to contact them since my healing. They were unable or unwilling to reply. According to the Kowalskys, Ccru were almost certainly Monarch slaves themselves. That was why they could so convincingly feign oblivion about their involvement in the conspiracy, as if they had no knowledge of the way the secret control-codes really operated.

I said before that these are dark days. Indeed they are. It is impossible to overstate the threat that Ccru and Monarch pose. My purpose here tonight is to draw the world's attention to that. To open your eyes. Because to confront the Satanic threat, you must accept that it is here. You have to believe the unbelievable.

But speaking as a former Monarch slave myself

I would urge caution. To really defeat the Satanists, we must learn everything we can about them. Ccru should be deprogrammed with the same compassionate thoroughness that I was.

*Confronted with the fantastic tales of Project Monarch even the most tenuous sanity recoils in revulsion from such patent lunacy, whilst nevertheless remaining ensnared in sticky threads of credible evidence extracted from the shadowy basements of state intelligence agencies.*

*Nazi eugenic and mind control experimentation is quite extensively documented. Heinrich Himmler's Lebensborn breeding program, concentration camp research, deliberately induced trauma, and obsession with twins is part of the historical record. It is also relatively uncontested that, as 'Project Monarch' exposures contend, much of this work was transferred into the hands of American agencies through Project Paperclip. Later CIA mind control experimentation, such as the notorious MK Ultra program, disclosed in documents released by the agency in 1977, exhibits certain continuities with the Nazi research goals. Soviet-based work on mind control, torture and interrogation techniques substantially mirrors the US cold war activities.*

*Morrison, like O'Brien before her, draws upon random patches of this legacy to weave a Byzantine tale of world-wide conspiracy, in which she herself takes a starring role. Like all conspiracy fictions, hers is spun out of an all-encompassing narrative that cannot possibly be falsified (because 'they' want you to believe in their*

*non-existence).*

*To attempt to refute such narratives is to be drawn into a tedious double game. 'One' either has to embrace an arbitrary and outrageous cosmic plot (in which everything is being run by the Jews, Masons, Illuminati, CIA, Microsoft, Satan, Ccru...), or alternatively advocate submission to the most mundane construction of quotidian reality, dismissing the hyperstitional chaos that operates beyond the screens (cosmological 'dark matter' and 'dark energy'—virtual, imperceptible, unknown). This is why atheism is usually so boring.*

*Both conspiracy and common sense—the 'normal reality' script—depend on the dialectical side of the double game, on reflective twins, belief and disbelief, because disbelief is merely the negative complement of belief: cancellation of the provocation, disintensification, neutralization of stimulus—providing a metabolic yawn-break in the double-game.*

*Unbelief escapes all this by building a plane of potentiality, upon which the annihilation of judgment converges with real cosmic indeterminacy.*

*For the demons of unbelief there is no monarch programming except as a side-effect of initiatory Monarch deprogramming (= Monarch Paranoia).*

*Ccru denies it was ever part of the program. It denies*

*there ever was a program—until the deprogramming process introduced it.*

*Deprogramming simultaneously retro-produced the program, just as witch-trials preceded devil-worship and regressive hypnotherapy preceded false memory syndrome. Yet, once these ‘fictions’ are produced, they function in and as reality. It isn’t that belief in Project Monarch produces the Monarch Program, but rather that such belief produces equivalent effects to those the reality of Project Monarch would produce, including some that are extremely peculiar and counter-intuitive.*

*Within the paranoid mode of the double game even twins are turned so as to confirm a persecutory unity—that of the puppet master, the reflection of God, the Monarch.*

*How absurd to imagine that Lemurian Pandemonium has One purpose or function, or that it could support the throne of a Monarch. From the perspective of Pandemonium gods and their conspiracies emerge all over the place, in countless numbers. “My name is Legion, for we are many...”*

*Unity is only ever a project, a teleological aspiration, never a real presupposition or actual foundation. Monarch paranoia is primordially an allergic panic response to seething, teeming Pandemonic multiplicity. Everywhere it looks it finds the same enemy, the Rorschach-blotted hallucinations of the Evil One masked deliriously in its*

*myriads of deviations, digressions and discrepancies.*

*In the hands of Justine Morrison, Monarch Paranoia is an overt attempt to overcode Lemurian polyculture through the attribution of unitary purpose (reducing it to the White Atlantean theme). Ccru denounces this endeavor in the strongest possible terms.*

*We are forced to admit, however, that Morrison's comments on Microsoft, Bill Gates, and MSN8 latch on to a number of intriguing phenomena worthy of further intense investigation.*

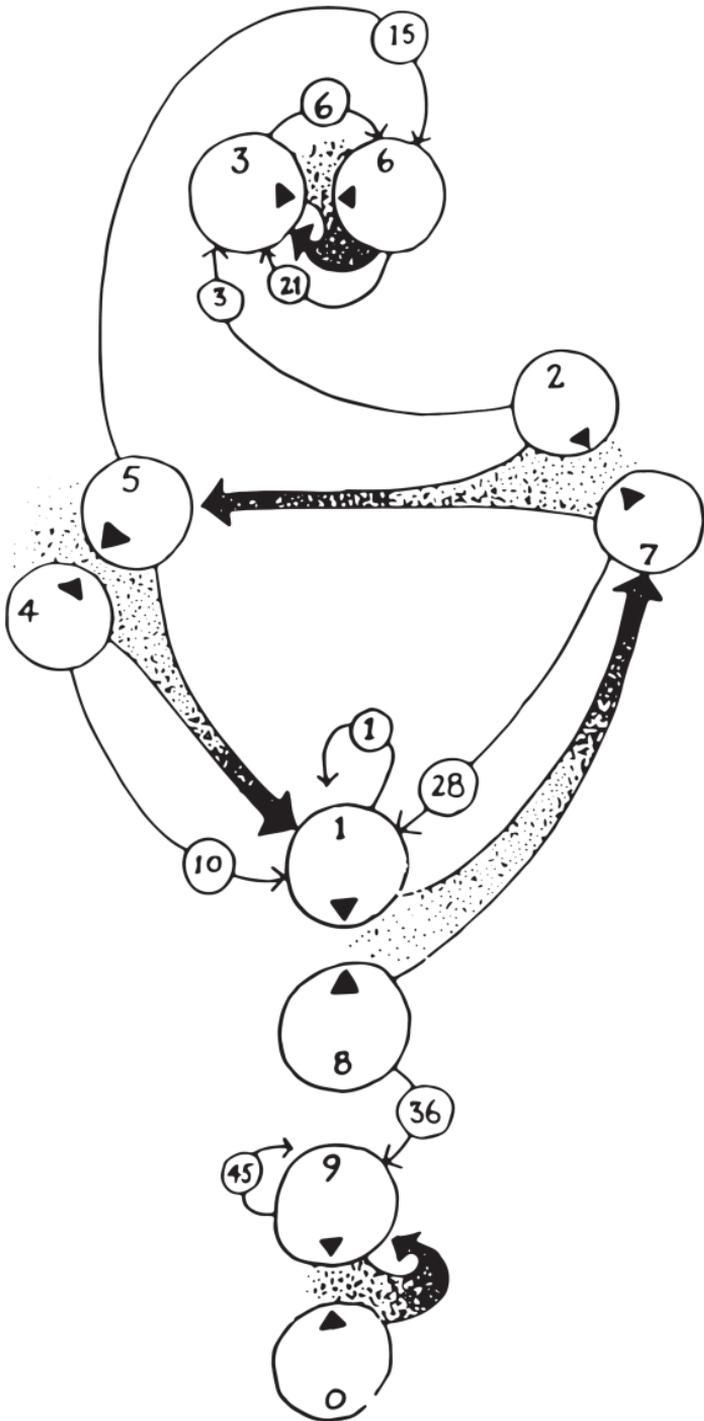
*Whoever, or whatever, hatched the MSN8 campaign evidently emerged from a zone far beyond the commonly accepted domain of corporate influence and control. For a US\$300 million advertising campaign to feature a grotesque insectoid uebermensch, and for it to be widely accused of Satanism, are sufficiently abnormal occurrences to merit serious attention.*

*Whilst strenuously denying intimate involvement with \$Bill or the Microsoft corporation, the Ccru is in a position to confirm the qabbalistic affinity between its own name and the latest MSN product that Morrison alludes to.  $MSN8 = 81 = CCRU$ .*

*Our provisional hypothesis is that the company accidentally summoned something from beyond the spheres with a call sign it does not understand. In this*

*regard, Microsoft personnel are not puppet masters, but only puppets. The same may indeed be true of Justine Morrison—and even of the Ccru—but no Monarch is pulling the strings.*







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