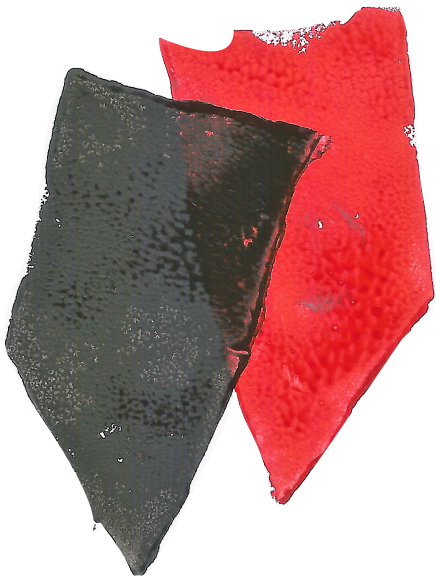


THE Curse Us

Issue 1



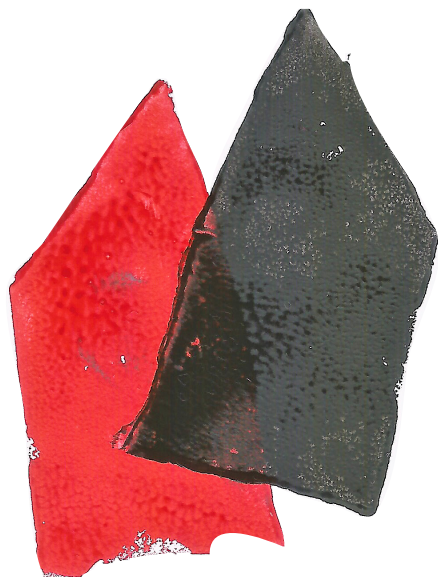
@acertainplume, @crayontramp



As it is reeled in,
the fish comforts it-
self with the fiction
of the lure. It was
never attracted by the
hook.

I DID EVERYTHING THE WORM DID NOTHING.

Interviews with members and associates of the Salon de Ver LUISANT



Interview 1

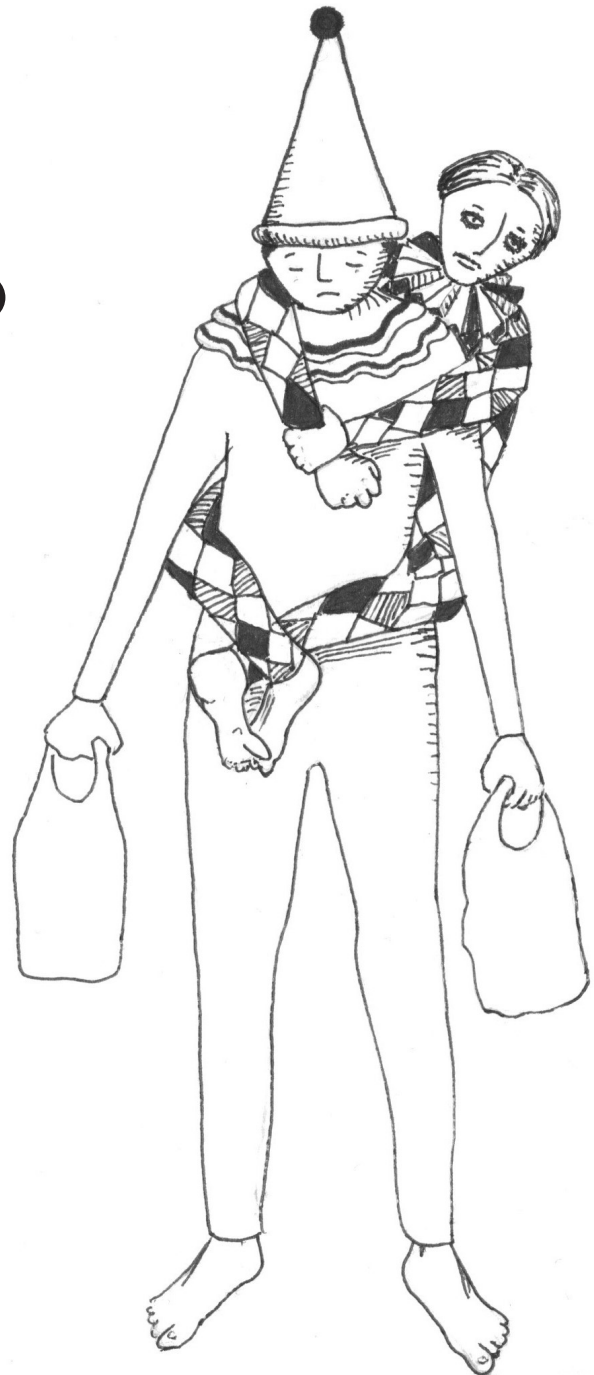
Around the age of 23 or 24, I was working as an emergency medical technician in Los Angeles County. I was an ambulance attendant and also an ambulance driver. My training to do this job was 4 weeks long. Most of what you will do you learn as you do it or others teach you.

The hours were abnormally long, because we were on the fire department schedule. Most people liked it because overtime is where the money is. I was always tired, because I also rode my bike 6 miles to work and back. We were paid 9 dollars an hour, which was on the higher end. 80 or more hours a week I was mostly surrounded by men, and occasionally women, who desired to be firemen, policemen, or nurses. Nobody I met, except for certain Vietnam veterans who liked the adrenaline, stayed in this job for more than a few years. It was an entry point to get somewhere else. I worked for a private company, contracted out from the fire department. This was common practice, at least where I was.

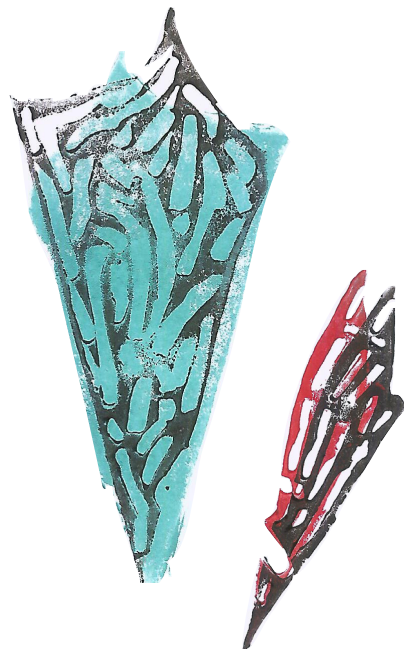


I did mostly transfers, with the occasional emergency. Basically, a transfer is usually a non-emergency situation in which a person needs to be transported by ambulance from one facility to another. Sometimes, this amounts to taking a person (often close to death) from one hospital to another because of insurance reasons. Sometimes, it could mean taking someone from a nursing home, a person who has no other option, to a simple medical appointment and back again. Sometimes, it means picking someone up from their house and taking them to a dialysis appointment down the street. Sometimes, it meant taking someone who had a 5150 hold from one psychiatric unit to another. Also, there is so much waiting around.

I was certainly not prepared for what I saw during that time. I had to read people's medical files to see what was going on with them. The mundanity of it all, the normalcy. Old and infirm people being shuffled to and from various places with no family around to care for them. People who went catatonic or insane for perfectly normal reasons after family or personal tragedies. Families silently praying. Countless things. It was quite a time.



Cherry blossom,
both fleeting and
eternal. But with
each passing year,
more fleeting and
less eternal.






Interview 2

1. I wonder if you have ever read, or seen the video of, the JG Ballard story, 'The Enormous Space'. It may refer to Xavier de Maistre's 'Journey round my room', but deals with the private space, and the sense of 'being at home' as a domain designed to realise the project of interiority. I wonder what your response to it might be?

I just watched the BBC adaption (called 'Home') after your mentioning it - what a remarkable film! I thought it was great. In some ways a very disturbing horror movie. I kind of want to undertake the project myself, minus the killing pets bit - I already partway live like this. (For readers who haven't seen/read it - the main character, Gerry Ballentyne, decides to lock himself in his home and never leave again.) Those scenes where he's hiding behind a door frame while someone looks through the windows and letterboxes are a common occurrence at my house! I spent a few years more or less completely bedridden due to my disability, and on emerging the remaining world seems frighteningly huge. I don't deal very well with open spaces, or tall buildings. I get very anxious when I'm above sea level (including being upstairs), or really thinking about outside at all. This is called 'space and motion anxiety', a sort of uncomfortableness with space. I have a strong desire for there to be no space, or time: to go back to the singularity of my bedroom. So in a lot of ways I am a Ballentyne figure.

I wonder how much bigger I perceived my bedroom at that time, compared to how I perceive it now that I have reintegrated into the rest of the home space. I certainly perceive my two bedroom council house as 'big enough', big enough to only leave for funerals.

A few scenes stick out to me: the part where he says he feels his project "dismantling all the dreams and values that hold the suburb together" - this is an interesting concept, his de-integration from socialized space appears as its total undoing, also: how much the 'point of consumption', the community-territory, depends upon participation at an exterior 'point of production'. It never really occurred to me before that houses aren't really meant to be lived in 24/7, they're a temporary private stop between public activity.



The moment where he finally hooks up his camera to the TV to see that the space actually hadn't grown like he thought it did, that it remained a regular house - how terrifying! 'Welcome to the desert of the real' etc.

"The past is a zone I regret ever entering" is a great line. Considering the past a 'zone', is very clever. How does one avoid entering a past - or a future? Also: speaking of 'zone', I realized there is some similarity between the home of the Enormous Space and the Zone of Roadside Picnic/Stalker, the difference being while the Enormous Space is a private space that excludes all public space, the Zone excludes both public and private spaces, remaining unterritorialized, a non-space.

Another interesting thing: after the project begins, the space of the home is re-contextualized - particularly the moment where the conventional food runs out and things like flowers and shampoo replace it. Under the new conditions, pre-existing items serve new purposes, the home is mechanized in a different direction. Maybe this is a clue towards the possibility of transformation away from the circuitry of Capital, or after its disappearance, where we are left with an infrastructure built to maintain a society that no longer exists: an endless amount of railroads, prisons, courts, and so on, that are no longer perform the function of railroads, prisons, etc., but stand as miles of arbitrarily formed architecture, forms without functions.

2. As someone who perceives computer games as 'rat mazes', I am averse to knowing anything about what they are and as a result am wholly ignorant of what others see in them. What could you say to an idiot like me in praise of this form?

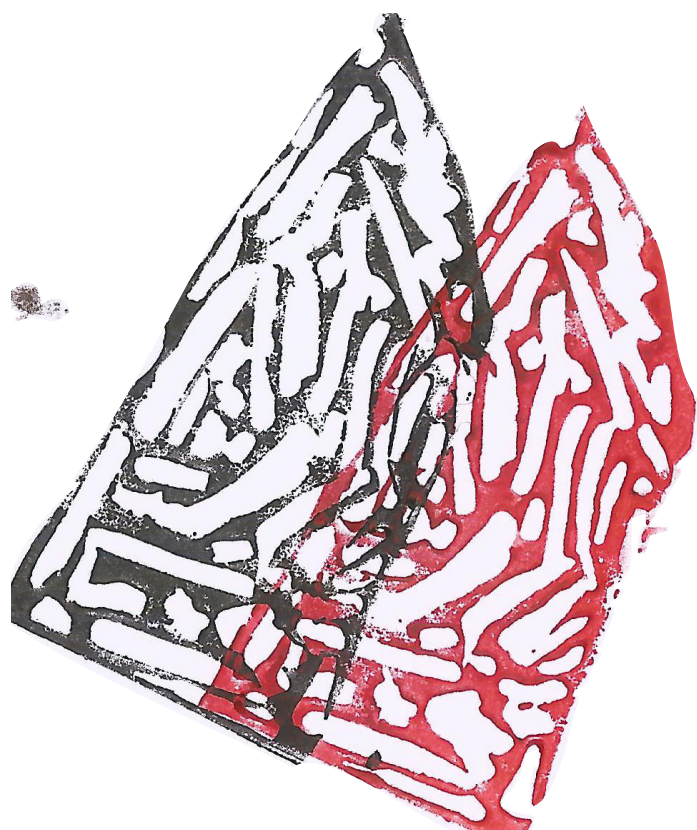
You are so right about them being rat mazes though! They are. You probably know about B. F. Skinner, who is famous for his 'operant conditioning' box, which can affect the choices an animal makes. In a skinner box, a pigeon can press a button to receive a reward. It will eventually learn that pressing the button more often will give it more rewards, and learns to make the decision to keep pressing the button. The conditioning is more effective if the pigeon doesn't receive the reward every time it presses the button, but rather if it happens after a random number of times or if it happens after a certain number of minutes, etc. This kind of conditioning also works on humans, and this is a principle most games are designed around: conditioning the player to play more, to put more money into the game, and so on. This is also true of gambling, social media, finance capital, government aid programs, etc.



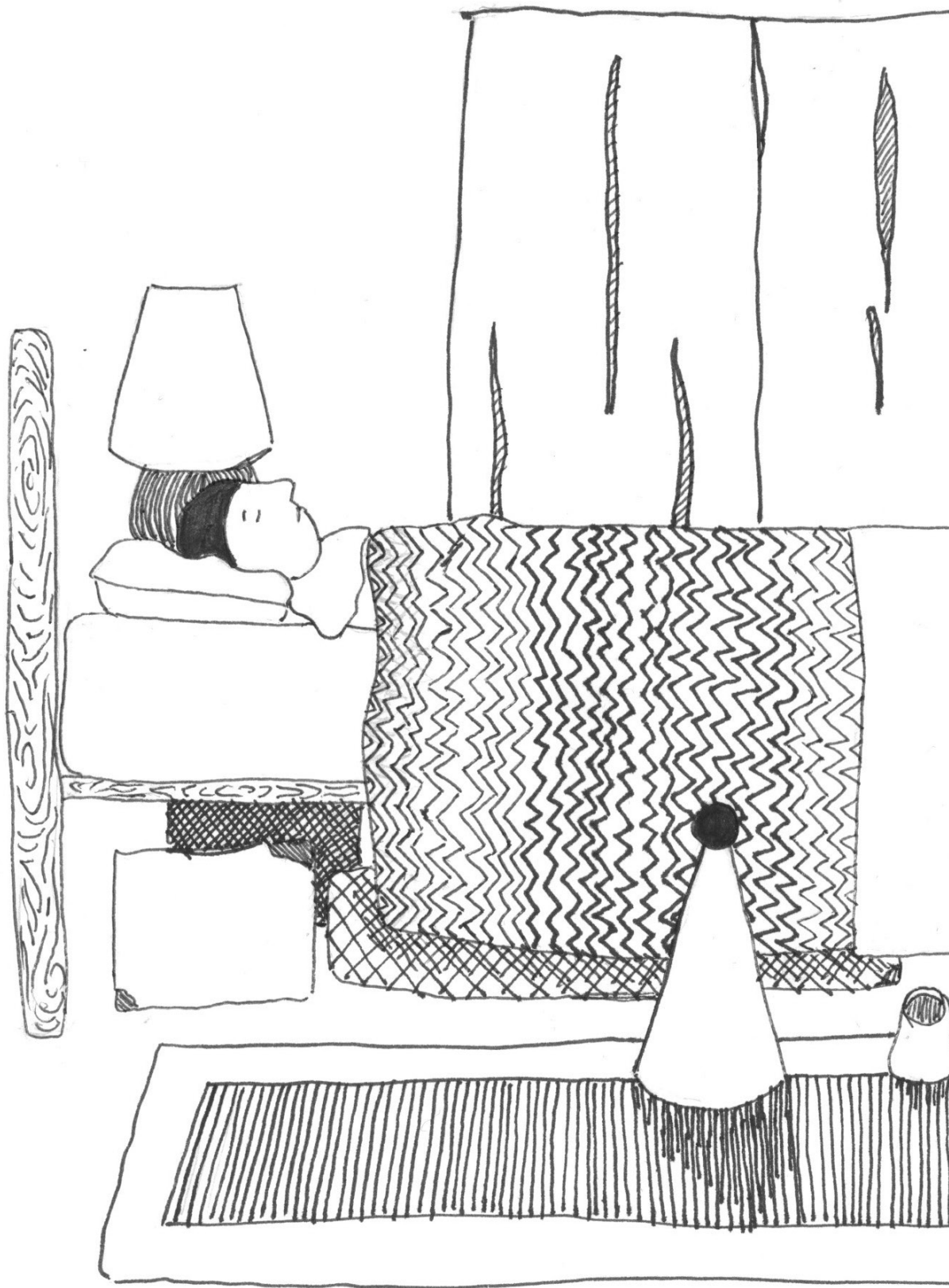
So many games, especially recently, contain enormous amounts of drudgery and busywork which fill in the gaps in a 'gameplay loop' based around a Skinnerian reward schedule. It's not even a rat maze, it's a miserable box. They are like the expression of human domestication. However, in my opinion everything else is a similar expression of this domestication, more or less obviously; everything is an expression of Capital, with no divergence - there is no exit to the rat maze. This is about as high praise as I can extend to anything - as bad as everything else! - regardless, however, there are a number of peculiarities to the media of video games that I think are worth talking about:

In games, the primary media is not the visuals or the story and so on, which is peripheral, but the actual engagement with the game. The 'game' is actually, itself, a space - a set of rules that mark out a particular zone of possibility with the intention of providing structures that can be played upon. This is true for playground chasies, conquers, backgammon, blackjack, pool, and so on, as much as video games. With video games the rules are carried out by the machine and contextualized visually, but the game itself is an imaginary space. When one is designing a game, one is writing rules that give rise to immanent systems that emerge from the rules, which is the art - a kind of invisible sculpture with moving parts, an automaton, or a building - which a player can then enter into. The work proceeds differently each time, with unforeseen consequences unfolding as the rules react to the player's improvisational actions.

Early games - as well as early 3D games and extremely low budget games - have a natural awareness of the invisible, structural existence of the game, capable of rendering it only with the vaguest lines and interiors, and making no attempt to disguise the gameness. Bad games focus-test the emerging possibilities out of existence so that the game plays like a film, the same each time, and try and disguise the game behind so much cinema, as though it were ashamed of being a game, or expand it out into an 'immersive' holodeck experience that mimics a real experience, a realistic simulation of a non-existent world. The best games are instead bold, unpredictable, at every point game like, creating meaningful play, and exist apart from the player's will, even resisting it.



If I can name drop a few outlets and projects which have had a lot of influence on how I think about games, that might be of interest to Duponts/ Dupont-adjacent readers who aren't interested in video games I'd like to mention: the Arcade Review, a (now defunct) art criticism internet mag that focused on video games, run by editor Zolani Stewart who is my hero: Liz Rhyerson's abstract game Problem Attic, as well as her blog ellaguro. blogspot.co.uk: Stephen thecatamites website at harmonyzone.org (especially the writing in the /other section): Jake Clover's games at game-jolt.com/@jakeclover, especially the traumatic 000000052573743: the games at increpare (especially the dizzying salome, where you play as the severed head of John the Baptist): the world of 'twine games': the browser game Bussy Visits the James Turrel Retrospective: the very old online social game worlds.com: and, the interactive fiction game Aisle, where the player can only make a single move. All these are free and available online, except the Arcade Review which is unfortunately closed - hopefully we'll be able to get the editions archived somewhere.





My other area of interest in games, maybe the most important part, is the (extremely) dedicated communities that gather around them, poking and prodding at all their moving pieces, disassembling and rebuilding them, reverse engineering them, discovering everything possible within the space of their rules, and creating their own works inside their logic. Fan-made 'romhacks' - new games assembled from the old games rules - and 'mods' - new rules grafted onto the old ones - are a high watermark for the possibility of the game form. 'Speedrunning' turns already existing games into races where players exploit glitches and unintended consequences in the rules to complete the game as fast as possible - and 'challenge runs' add additional rules (such as, complete without dying/'lcc', level 1 runs, etc), which are more difficult to complete, turning the game into an obstacle course for facility. These steal the game from the designer's schema in a very death-of-the-author way, making new games inside existing games through play.

80s & 90s arcade games, in Euro-America where arcades have more-or-less completely died out, only exist in these peripheral zones. The community have made free, open-source emulators that can simulate the arcade hardware on your computer's CPU and play the ROM images of the game, which are shared illegally online. Through stealing and community effort, the games can be played, but divorced from their original use as a pay-to-play toy machine: arcade games in the 90s were flashy, focus on the playable self-advertisements and their hallmark white-knuckle intensity and brutal difficulty was intended to suck money out of you while your heart was beating too fast to notice. Playing at home for free, these tricks are re-contextualized as elements of hardcore, no-filler action games that demand skill, concentration and strategy, that allow for finesse and creativity, with a refreshing single-minded focus on true play. The arcade games, once liberated from the arcades at the moment they became obsolete as commodities, they lose their alienated quality and become more vital and human.

This is something that I think is alive in all human communities - a reclaiming of forms obsoleted by market forces. It reminds me most especially of the trend in trans lesbian communities recently to adopt, redefine and continue the work advanced by radical lesbian feminists in the 70s & 80s - which was, in its historical seat, among the most severe and focused expressions of trans misogynist violence, eventually integrating with police, lawmakers and academics to target trans women (as well as sex workers), forcing us out of hard won communities and exposing us to street violence & other destruction, totally destroying all of our history and breaking up our ability to survive, here. And yet today, in the 2010s, now that cis lesbians and wider culture have mostly abandoned its forms as incompatible, outdated, etc. It appears to us as suddenly the only option - with its emphasis on the abolition of gender and its refusal to accept female sacrifice. It's ideas are developed to contextualize our experiences and its praxis retooled to serve our survival instead of our destruction. I think this is a strategy which is valuable - a 'reclaimed space' or, conceptual squatting.

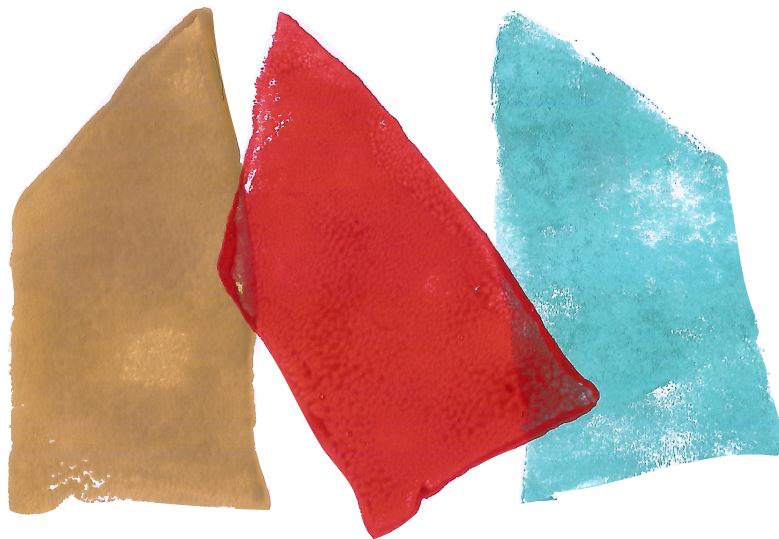
Anyway, perhaps I will never convince you/your readers that the bit in Shock Troopers where you're fighting two tanks and an attack helicopter on a narrow bridge is one of the greatest achievements of all art, but maybe its community of players can provide some clues for the development of the world of empty buildings mentioned earlier - the possibility of new functions for old forms.

2.1 In the past I used to attend conferences hosted by Nick Land, with the titles like 'Digital materialism' and 'Digital Future'. In those early days, Land, CCRU and other proponents of 'cyberspace' imagined that we could 'upload' ourselves into the internet, and live there. JG Ballard, him again, wondered whether assassinating someone in cyberspace was a crime. Baudrillard made the argument that 'disability' had become an evolutionary advantage, as it opened new possibilities for bionics and digital flesh. More than 20 years later, what do you think of early cyber-utopianism?

When I was about 14 I found out about Tor and the onion network and learned how to use it. I stumbled on some political discussion network, which is great on the 'dark web', because there are a lot of paranoids on both the extreme left and extreme right - you have Marxist-LeninistsMarxist-Leninists, 9/11 truthers, neo-Nazis and Islamic fundamentalists all talking politics alongside each other. All of this seemed extremely serious to 14 year old me. I already considered myself a communist (because of the show 'Citizen Smith'!), so I entered a page called 'the Revolutionary Catechism', by Sergey Nechayev. I didn't know at the time that you can get this basically anywhere online, nor that it was from the 1800s - I thought it was a secret, underground, illegal document being passed around by shadowy revolutionaries today.

It f###ed me up! I was 14! It opens with this line:

"The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution."



It's all lines like: "The revolutionary is a dedicated man [...] he must accustom himself to torture" and "Night and day he must have but one thought, one aim - merciless destruction." - I thought, holy sh#t! I'm not ready to be a revolutionary!!!!!! So, that was a formative cyberspace politics experience for me.

Anyway, as for the question, I (unfortunately) think the utopian aspect is probably ultimately misguided: a few days ago I watched the new documentary 'Hypernormalisation' by Adam Curtis, which touches on this a little bit. In an argument with John Perry Barlowe, who said governments & industries have no power in cyberspace, in the early days of the internet, two hackers entered an online credit company's records, found and posted his credit card history, demonstrating that cyberspace is already being used by governments & industries - I guess I am more or less on the side of the hackers here. Perhaps the internet once represented a zone of utopian possibility, but was quickly colonized completely.

I guess it goes back to what I said before about 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism', who hope that human labour will be phased out and replaced by automated labour - I always say, the automation of Capital is vastly outstripping the automation of labour, and it is exploitation, not work, that is becoming automated: it won't be humans with robot slaves but humans with robot masters. And this automation is possible almost exclusively due to the internet.

There's an interview that Peter Sunde, co-founder of thePirateBay, gave Motherboard shortly after getting out of prison, called 'I Have Given Up', which resonates with me a lot. He talks about the degree of centralization we're seeing - that "we have never seen this amount of centralization, extreme inequality, extreme capitalism in any system before."

It's what Samir Amin calls 'generalized monopoly capitalism', where in response to the point in the 70s where capital stopped growing, it became more and more centralized through globalization, financialization, etc. Monopoly Capital now controls all types of production, all markets, everywhere in the world. The fordist factory model has been replaced by a globalized chain of production that produces commodities piecemeal, so that workers no longer work for capitalists, but for subcontractors who let the factory out to different companies - one worker makes tyres in a tyre factory, another makes windows in a window factory, etc., and all of it is shipped to another factory for assembly. In this system the workers are powerless when striking, because the capitalists can simply turn to a new subcontractor who's workers are not striking. The workers who became organized through production the way that Marx & Engels talk about have been dispersed across the world. The effect is that there is no longer any power at the point of production: the power is somewhere distant, with no particular location. Amin calls this 'abstract' Capital - capital without capitalists - "the property of you don't know whom, controlled by you don't know whom," the 'political personnel' are employees. But in cyberspace it is developing to an even greater extreme: the whole of the internet is controlled by a number of companies you can count on one hand, and they have only a handful of employees each, with a product that requires no actual production:



Sunde says, "look at all the biggest companies in the world, they are all based on the internet. Look at what they are selling: nothing. Facebook has no product. Airbnb, the biggest hotel chain in the world, has no hotels. Uber, the biggest taxi company in the world, has no taxis whatsoever."

"The amount of employees in these companies are smaller than ever before and the profits are, in turn, larger. Apple and Google are passing oil companies by far. Minecraft got sold for \$2.6 billion and WhatsApp for like \$19 billion. These are insane amounts of money for nothing. That is why the internet and capitalism are so in love with each other."

The interviewer asks: "What can we do to change this?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No, I think we are at that point. I think it's really important people understand this. We lost this fight."

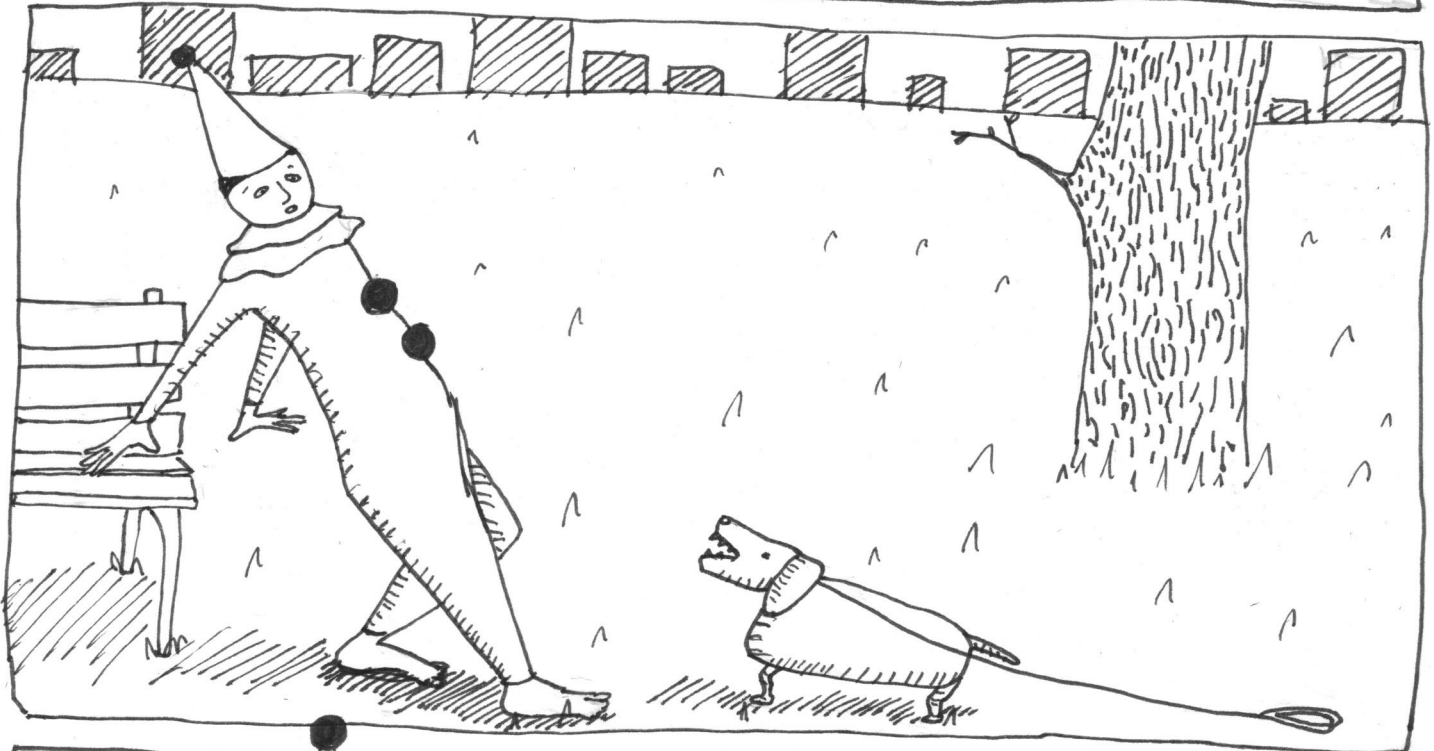
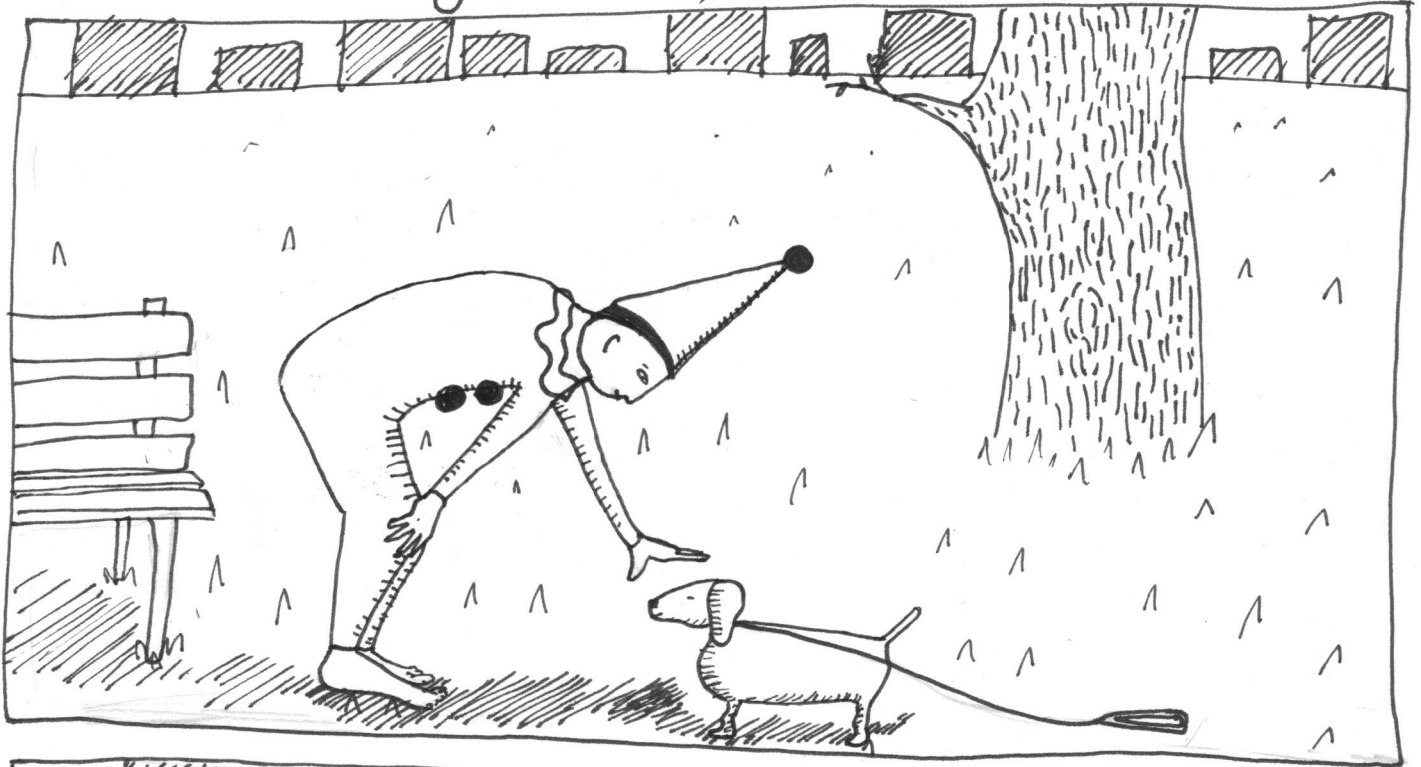
I am of the generation that grew up with internet, video games, etc., in the 3... I wonder whether we can link video-gaming to the home space with two of your recent statements: 'In video-gaming, my presence is always planned for'; and 'Searching for the end of the game within the game.' The home space is also the planned space, the home space is the site of Ibsen scale dramas and of time passing, and yet perhaps video-games introduce an other dimension of vast dimensions but what is bigger? Isn't it, even now amazing, that the physical footprint of all these internet interactions is so small, so easily contained within our home space? home, and so I never got to see the world before the 'dimension of vast dimensions' - although it seems to me that the internet does not necessarily create a world which is bigger as much as it makes the real world smaller, collapsing enormous distances & crossing time-zones instantaneously.

When I said 'my presence is always planned for', I was referring to my anxiety that video game worlds cannot exist as worlds-apart-from-me, they are always 'my world' - even the most in-depth 'immersive simulation' games, which do their best to construct coherent worlds, are like clockwork toys that rely on my viewing and allow for the possibility for my interaction. This is something that is true of a lot of things, I think: my possibilities are marked out by a designer - especially true of architecture, especially the home space. Working class areas are built in tightly lined terraces which discourage socialization, to facilitate the brief rest between work hours, and where interaction is funnelled into specifically delineated zones within the estate: the school, the church, the shops, which are easily surveilled and policed. Wealthy areas are built like fortresses, surrounded by high walls and fences and employing maze-like structures of cul-de-sacs and avenues. In each case the social existence of the inhabitants is designed by the architecture, our presence at home has always been planned for.

In a video game there is a possibility of overcoming the planning - for example, allowing the computer to control every player in a multiplayer game, so that it really plays-for-itself. But what would a home look like if it didn't plan for its homeowner - if it 'housed' for itself.



My Dog is usually FRIENDLY



Interview 3

BZ. I would like to be interviewed some time. I would think most of it would depend on the question.

CU. You tell me what the question is. I may not ask it though.

BZ. That's just it, I don't know what the question is. It's the key to it all, the right question. I don't have it.

CU. What about, 'how is the fall annotation website running?'

BZ. That's not it! But it's not bad, I can give an answer: It's going well, I maintain it and update it from time to time. Most entries were made in a drug-induced state of mania, and often were kind of overboard, I've been trying to simplify them a bit.

When discussing ideas, the less fettered I am in my expression the more I seem pretentious or affected, whereas the more guarded I am the more natural I seem. But neither state is natural, the natural state would take hard work to achieve. When unguarded I am also uncareful, and don the pretensions of others. When guarded, I am reticent and reluctant to state anything meaningful. All the cooking without a recipe, gardening without fertilizer stuff you guys tout is harder work than the alternative, in any case.

To truly say something unaffected--not of course entirely without presuppositions, which is impossible, but without reaching for a pre-determined response--is in many ways the goal of this board, I think, and it is an extremely difficult thing to do. At times drugs are helpful in this regard, mania does show us things at times, not merely delusions. So as a whole I am pleased with the site.

CU. I understand the difficulties of self-expression, but it is not one of my afflictions. I guess for me, nothing that is said matters, or more accurately, what matters is not identical with what is intended - the important stuff is in there but at the point of utterance it is not clear what amongst all the verbiage is significant. I am very slapdash... I see things as conversations rather than potentially finished products. A book is just a collection of words broken off at 200 pages rather than a completed statement. Other processes, like erosion, like winnowing, like pressure must do their work first. I want the echo of whatever I have shouted out to come back saying something else. That is why I originally liked Fall lyrics, because they have a selective (stochastic) mechanism... they are not everyday speech exactly but they are derived, or extracted, from it. How come you arrived at the Fall after the Kinks and how does any of that relate to 'country music' in your world?

Supplementary question 1: I don't understand completeness, or even annotation, do you think it is taking drugs that allows this organisation of material which depends upon both an 'overview' and attention to nuance? To show how much I don't know what I am talking about, I once took drugs and it made my legs feel icy, it wasn't exactly Walter Benjamin in Marseilles and still less Hunter S. Thompson in LA.

Supplementary question 2: How do you arrive at 'this' music, but specifically, how did you arrive at the Fall? What is it that you are looking for before you find something in a band (I am already assuming that it is the band as an entity rather than specific songs that are important to you), and once you found it, what is it about it that keeps you stimulated? For example, it is not bands for me that is important but LPs. I have always sought out 'exemplar' albums which absolutely typify the moment or the genre. I have never found the perfectly faceted, perfect in every of its songs, rave LP, punk LP, psyche LP, glam rock LP and so on. There is nearly always the equivalent of a 'Ringo' song - the problem for me is that I approach LPs as literature, as objects of knowledge. I want to know, to name some random records, Scott 4, For Your Pleasure, Safe as Milk, Village Green..... My People were fair...., I want to know these records, to listen as if I was reading them, but something which I register as a flaw, as not belonging, interrupts my approach to them.

Supplementary question 3: I'd like to include one of your annotations, which would suggest?



BZ. Holy cow that is a lot, Barbara Walters. I would be a Dutch Elm (actually I don't even know what that is). I will try to answer a little about the Fall and try to remember to answer more of it later.

The following answer I already fear is going to be too banal and autobiographical, but since we try to find meaning in autobiographical banality I will, as you suggest, try to write it and hope it echoes back to me saying something meaningful, to me or to you or to someone at least. And I must confess this is

very fun for me, so I will have a tendency to bang on too long and in too much detail. It may be mind-numbingly bad. I want to be known (sort of and not really) like anyone else would who wants to be interviewed. Feel free not to read this (but I am really thinking that I hope you do of course).

The Fall mark a turning point in my music listening. I was happily becoming sclerotic in my tastes at the outset of my forties--I was becoming more and more song-oriented, and less and less performance/sound oriented. All I was ever looking for was a good song.

I hope I can say this without it becoming too long and boring. I grew up listening to rock but drifted into country and bluegrass where I stayed for about 10 years or more. When I say "stayed" I have always been obsessive with music and become narrowly focused on one artist, constellation of artists or genre for weeks, months or years at a time. It is like being in love--anything outside my focus is annoying for not being the object of my affections. I am not like that quite so much any more, partly as the result of intentional effort. I now work at being reasonably eclectic.

So anyway I began to listen to rock music again circa 2006 or so, but this involved mostly revisiting stuff I had already liked in the past--the Ramones, the Kinks, Grateful Dead, Motörhead, John Prine. Some of these were binges that took a couple of years to play out.

During this time I made a good friend (DA knows him, JW) who is one of the few people whose musical tastes I could relate to and more or less even trusted. He liked some of the same country and bluegrass stuff as I, which was a kind of wedge to convince me of other things. And, while he was much hipper than I, he was not hostile toward the Grateful Dead. And he told me the Fall were his favorite band. Not just that he liked them, but his favorite band! There must be something to this, I thought. They must be masterful writers of songs (which, recall, is what I was looking for at this juncture--while the Grateful Dead were an exception insofar as I could listen to them jamming, they also write world class songs).

I asked him to give me some stuff, and he took his charge very seriously--he made me a 5 CD box set. Imagine the responsibility of receiving this gift. Wow. 5 fucking CDs to try to evaluate and report back on.

I listened to part of two CDs right away and hated it. I found it boring, it wasn't a repository of great songwriting by and large--if one were to strum one of those things on an acoustic guitar, it would evaporate. "Rebellious Jukebox" (now one of my favorite recordings) vaguely reminded me of Ska and the Clash. Yuck.

So I put it aside for about a year and a half. But two things made me return to it. One, I met people who seemed, unlike me, hip and into arty music that they could talk about offhandedly at parties, and "The Fall" would come up. I wanted to be able to talk about things like the Fall, to give a reasoned account of why I don't like it in a way that made me seem knowledgeable and hip, not like some ageing Deadhead whose opinions everyone would dismiss, who wouldn't even be taken seriously by others who thought of me as the pleasant but uncool and laughable oldster (I realize the Fall began in the 70s but this is how I thought--or at least, how I can reconstruct the impulses I recall dimly and understand even more dimly, to make this into a story). I might as well have registered in the Democratic party while I was at it, or (aesthetically there should be two things here, fill in the blank).

Secondly, I felt a responsibility to the friend who did all that work choosing and recording 68 songs on 5 CDs. He even made a photo collage and photocopied it for the cover. I may have felt this was more of a responsibility than even he did. But I took it seriously.

So I said to myself "I will listen to no but the Fall for two weeks or so, at

the end of which I will know songs, lyrics, eras, and be able to give a reasoned account of why it is boring and alienating, and why these people are misguided and should be listening to Merle Haggard or Jerry Garcia instead or, if they want to get nutty, The Velvet Underground."

II

So of course at the end of two weeks I was obsessed with the Fall (I hate the abuse of the word "obsessed" and even in this case it's probably an exaggeration, but), in fact I did not voluntarily listen to anything else for over a year. I read every book about the Fall. I lay in bed at night with headphones on. In a few months I knew every song they had ever recorded to that point. After about three months I started my site because the lyrics were obscure in a way that made one think there were things going on that one could figure out, and in fact there are a lot of things any Brit of a certain age probably understands but someone like me would not, so the need for my site seemed clear. I initially hoped to be Tom Sawyer and get others to do most of the work but by the time they came pouring in I had sunk a lot of work into it myself and felt proprietorial. It had become my site.

Anyway two things led to a sea change in my listening. I still did everything I did before but I also since plumbed vast reaches of music that heretofore I would have been unfamiliar with. One was that I soon began to shift my focus from alcohol to other drugs--including marijuana which opens up musical territory and shifts musical priorities (and one doesn't usually need the marijuana after one has "seen" one time, so the sparseness of my use was no obstacle), and opioids which have a reverse effect on me so they keep me up all night working on my site, and make me manic so that I begin to think I understand the lyrics--and the other was the Fall itself.

III

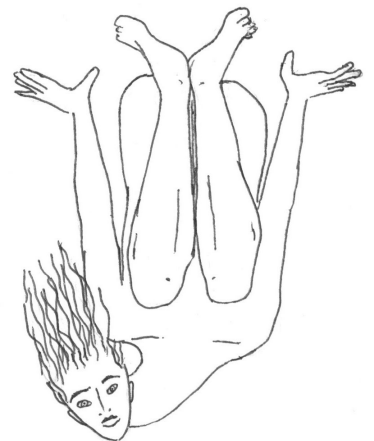
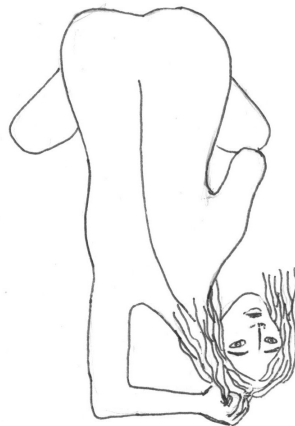
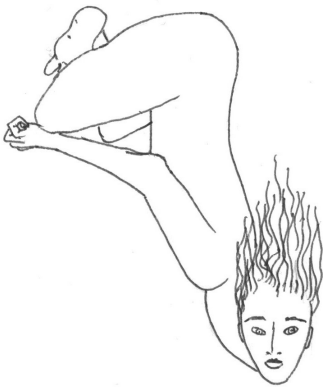
When I hear something novel the novelty doesn't strike me until it's familiar, a phenomenon I find fascinating although it may be the idiosyncratic to be interesting. So with familiarity came astonishment. No longer boring, the songs became fresh and daring. "Middle Mass" sounds like it's written and recorded by aliens. It almost makes me angry, it is so brilliant and simultaneously so alien that I want to demand that it is impossible. How dare it exist? "Winter" is a one-note plod, and even the rhythm of that one bass note is utterly unoriginal. But this only adds to its daring originality. "Daring" is the apt word--how dare it exist? The only possible reaction is for me to become obsessed with it. The same with the lyrics--how could anyone say these things? There are plenty of obscure lyricists but most of them are too original or too poetic. I can let them pass by me or appreciate their beauty, candor or lack thereof, as I choose. But MES's lyrics boldly ape meaning without being meaningful. But they mock one as one passes by--"what do you mean you don't get it? I am quoting there, you can't blame me for that line! And I stole this one from a newspaper article." If one takes the bait and tries to interpret them, they mock again--"You can't annotate me, I'm meaningless after all! You actually [i]believed[/i] me that time? Anyway, these words are in the language, why shouldn't I use them?"

Not a poet, the smallest unit of language with which MES is usually concerned is not the word but the sentence or phrase--his building blocks are more often semantic units than words or sounds. He paints with meanings, to use a hackneyed analogy. And the meanings can usually be ferreted out even if the [i]meaning[/i] cannot, which makes it perfect--and perfectly frustrating--for annotation. The site became a time-and-mind-consuming project.

To return to the theme at the end of part II, the Fall turned my head around



and soon I was listening to music bodily again, less concerned with the platonic form of a song and more attuned to rhythms, sounds, dissonances, and grooves. Coupled with drugs it sent me into a psychedelic direction. Hurtling from Apollo to Dionysus*, I discovered that the Fall were largely about the one thing I have always really sought in art, in life--Guy Debord would be horrified, Walter Benjamin would sneer (if his lip was ever to curl, this would do it), Kant would gasp, Adorno would gag--the Fall were about ecstasy. I was an old, unhip Deadhead after all, and Mark E. Smith dealt the death-blow to my hipness on behalf of Jerry Garcia & co.



But the pathways to ecstasy were more multiple, indirect, and deceptive than I had thought. And unlike Jerry, MES was a signpost pointed down the one labeled "Work." Nothing arouses his ire more than those who proclaim the path to ecstasy to itself be ecstatic. These are the dreaded "Plagiarists," who aren't so much guilty of actual plagiarism--no one does more of that than MES himself--as they are guilty of laziness. You can steal the work of others, but only as long as it is hard work to do so! And if you're lazy you don't even have to steal anything to be a "Plagiarist." I could not, of course, employ this concept when grading my students' papers, but it is a suggestive one nonetheless.

*Really from a very Dionysian Apollo--the emotional impact of George Jones, not Yes or something--to a rather Apollonian Dionysus--after all, what did I do with this material? I began to analyze and interpret it....

IV

I used to say that "New Puritan" is the gateway to my interpretation of Fall lyrics, but lately I've gutted the notes and I'm afraid they don't all make sense any more. I'll try to fix them up some so this link takes you to something usable--maybe:

<http://annotatedfall.doomby.com/pages/the-annotated-lyrics/new-puritan.html>

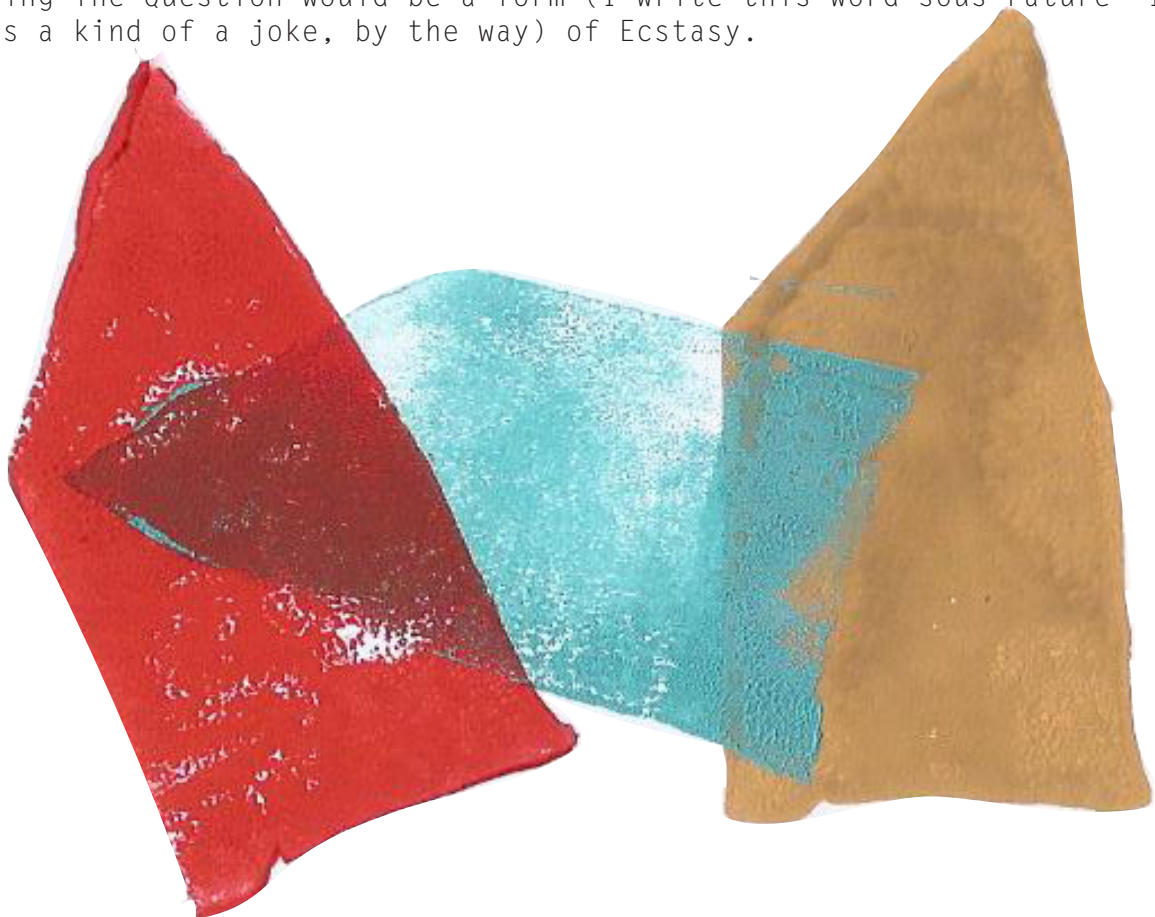
"Blindness" is I think a more presentable work, but maybe doesn't give as panoramic a picture:

<http://annotatedfall.doomby.com/pages/the-annotated-lyrics/blindness.html>

I notoriously usually have little to say about myself. But no one usually asks about anything I'm interested in...you have asked about music, and I could probably sit here typing all night. Again, my worry is that much of it will be too idiosyncratic, banal, or autobiographical to be enlightening. For better or worse, though, it was the right question...I didn't think it was, but once you specified it, it became clear that you have asked The Question...

...on the other hand, maybe The Question is the one I don't know I want to be asked, or even don't want to be asked. Perhaps The Question I'm looking for would not pry loose my lips, but transform me utterly. That's what I'm really hoping for.

Answering The Question would be a form (I write this word sous rature--I say this as a kind of a joke, by the way) of Ecstasy.



CU: Thanks BZ. This is brilliant, I hope you are available for issue 2. Just as Julian Temple has Keith Richards as his go-to raconteur, so I would like you to be my Keith Richards.

I think there might be some supplementary questions:

1. It is interesting what you say about ageing and distinct eras of music. The absolute break between a group like the Grateful Dead and the Fall is actually only ten years. In a social context where we are so constrained by the multiplication of permissions, the controversies around who is worthy to speak of suffering and so on, I wonder if the same rules apply to listening? Who has the right, the permission, the worth to 'hear' (when this is set, for example in the movement in listening between the elaborated blues band The Dead and the elaborated rockabilly band, The Fall)?

2. I enjoyed the culture on your website, the non-disputatious nature of the different readings, the humility of those making contributions to the comments. I wonder if this diffidence is a specific by-product of the Fall's music. I am interested in 'the sacred' and, of course in the nature of 'projection', how much is there in the object (how much does the object radiate certain structural messages that trigger responses) and how much is brought to the object by the faithful? Given that Dylan has won a Nobel prize for literature, I am prompted to ask, when listening to music by bands like the Fall, what is it that is in the song, or is whatever is being listened out for, like approaching hooves in the dark, or the tell tale heart, is really already fixed in the ear (in that case, the music is just the simple affirmation of already existing proclivities of the listener)?

BZ: I haven't been ignoring this, you've just upped the ante on the questions where I'm no longer sure I have something to say, but I wish I did because the questions are peculiar and interesting.

1. I am not sure about permissions in the context of Dead music, I think you're asking me to take a leap I may be too dim to see the direction of, but hic Rhodus, hic salta

Is the question whether the Dead are whites "appropriating" blues, and the Fall are Brits "exploiting" poor white Americans, and then listeners would be "supporting" this appropriation and exploitation? Fuck, I've got nothing. I don't think anyone goes that far yet, do they? But if you're asking something more subtle, I am clueless. Is it a question about authenticity? I guess that's vague enough, how could it not be about that? I have a tendency to approach music as a universal consumer unconcerned with identity and the reverse "aura" of newness or relevance, to the extent that this is possible. So I am not sure I have the right to listen to anything. Maybe decontextualized/recontextualized listening is a particular kind of thing, a sort of connoisseurship approach, which of course would have its own pretensions, and would have its own advantages as well. I rarely have ever been onto something while it was happening. Sometimes it's rough, I wish I knew what I should be hip to right now that I'll find out about in 2030. My tendency to clamp onto a sound like a jealous lover has also closed my ears to a lot of things, and even as I try to force myself to be eclectic it inevitably continues to do so.

But there is a similar effect on the side of the artist--the older artist is ripped from any context and demanded to age gracefully (and the most graceful form of ageing is to wearily curse the dying of the light-- a bit too wistfully to qualify as "raging"--the irony is that Dylan is secretly as much of a trailblazer as ever by modelling this approach--he has established detachment and irrelevance as relevant in its own way. 2.3 million NPR listeners can't be wrong...). The Fall are very much in this (non-?)niche. They only play new songs at concerts, and have established this so firmly that the fans would

actually be disappointed if they played an oldies set more than very occasionally. the majority of the band is under 40, or close to it, but because MES is at the helm it falls into the "ageing rocker" bag (now that "ageing" goes up to 88, it seems). So no matter what they produce, it cannot be consumed as "new" music, it is somewhere in an air pocket off to the side. It's only fresh and new for the fans, that is to say. It cannot be relevant, even in the Dylan way, since there can only be one, Highlander-style. So the Fall listener is certainly the ageing New Waver, but doesn't have to be--he can also be me, the "connoisseur."

The Dead on the other hand, since they are no longer with us, still have some sort of "unless you were there" vibe, although they are sometimes embraced by youngsters from the hip Pitchfork set, who are ageing into connoisseurship but still on the cusp, also claiming to identify the bleeding edge but with the hipness Reaper at their heels. Fortunately for me, I was there, as a veteran of 40 shows from 1984 on. Of course, having jumped on the bus in 1984 means I wasn't "there" at the time--I may have been too new to be authentic then (although I'm not sure if I ever noticed). But with the age demographic--do the math as it were, I'm 48--what it is now, 1984 is "then" now. So I'm covered, permission-wise.

It's possible that that reads as gibberish, which would mean I have no idea what your question means and answered a different one. I'm not sure if I was even answering the same question from sentence to sentence! Well, an exercise in "free writing," if we take away the question. Or, if a question is really just an enabling constraint for my writing--a narcissistic take on what an interview is--then that one was successful.

2. I at least understand this one, and I have spilled lots of pixels on it, in one way or another. The Fall is designed to elicit this sort of response, from one perspective (MES, or anyone really, is simultaneously too massively egotistic to leave it up to us). I think the answer is in my notes to "New Puritan," but I did not revise it like I promised to do last time. Instead of pouring it out here, I will try to go there and shape up the notes. However, I may revisit this here also, if I can get onto a lucid path of thinking on the subject. The question is really "What are the Fall all about"? which is the one necessary question--one that as far as I am aware, few fans apart from myself have tried to answer.

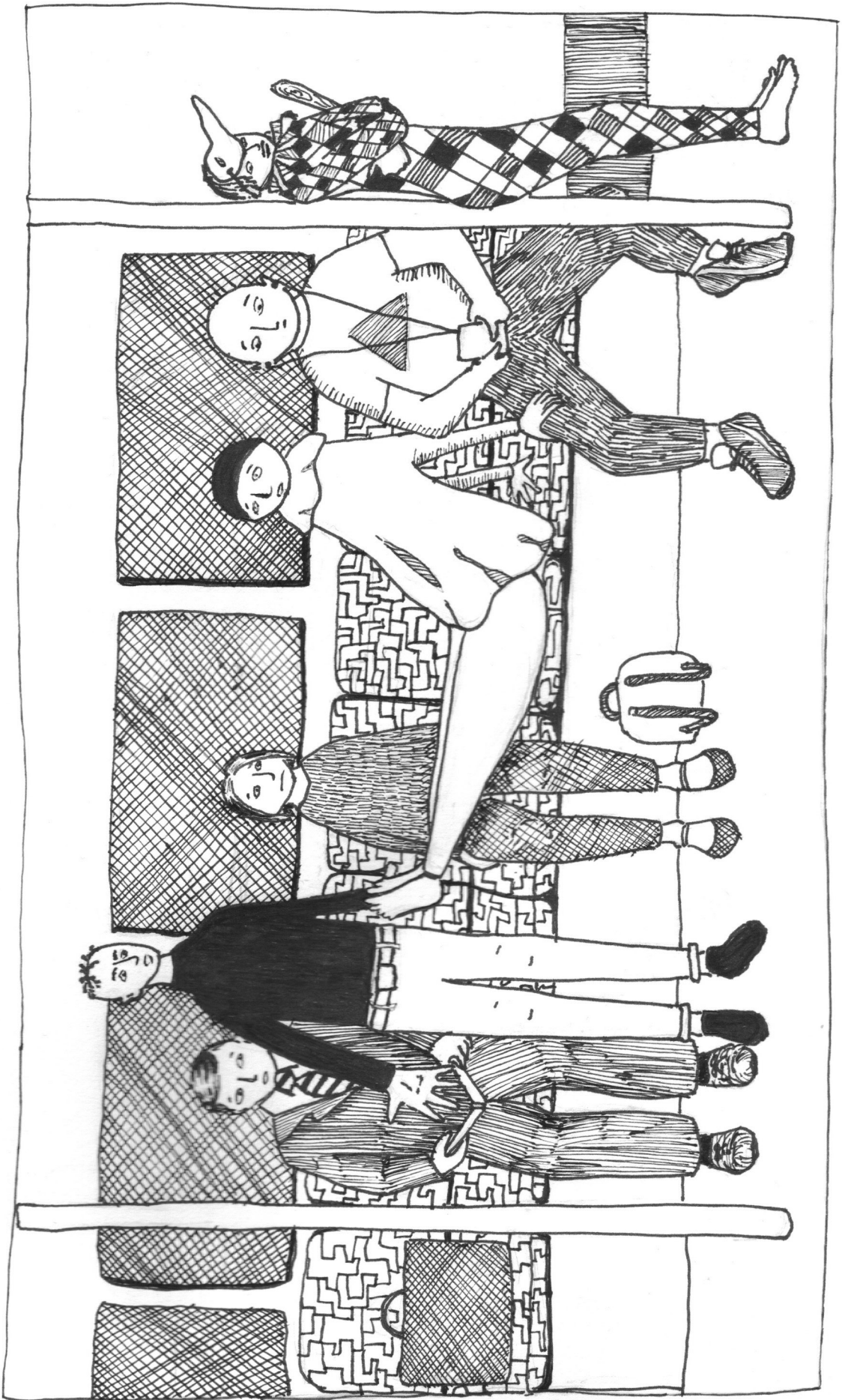
BZ runs the 'annotated fall' website: <http://annotated-fall.doomby.com>

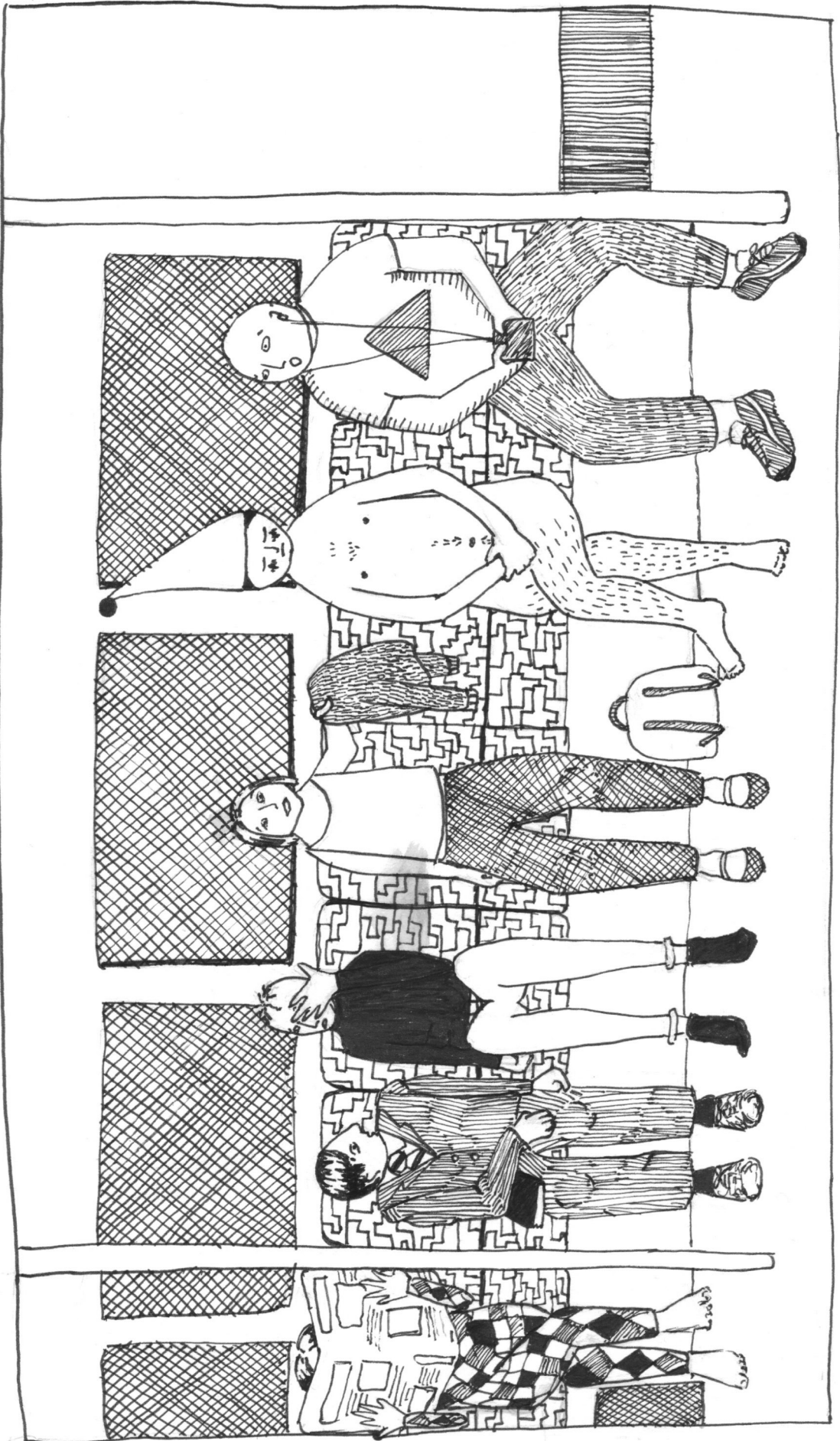




I search
for the lost
city only in
arguments
against its
existence.







Interview 4

Q. Tell me something arbitrary that may be fixed to where you are speaking from. A fragment of something inadvertent in lieu of biography that can be attached to your words..

A. "... You write well, clearly. You are an intelligent man. But—finger in the air—silence is waiting. Milosz believes there is a Word at the end that explains. There is silence at the end, and it doesn't explain, it doesn't even ask. He spread chutney on his bread, meticulously, out to the corners."
(Robert Hass, "Interrupted Meditation")

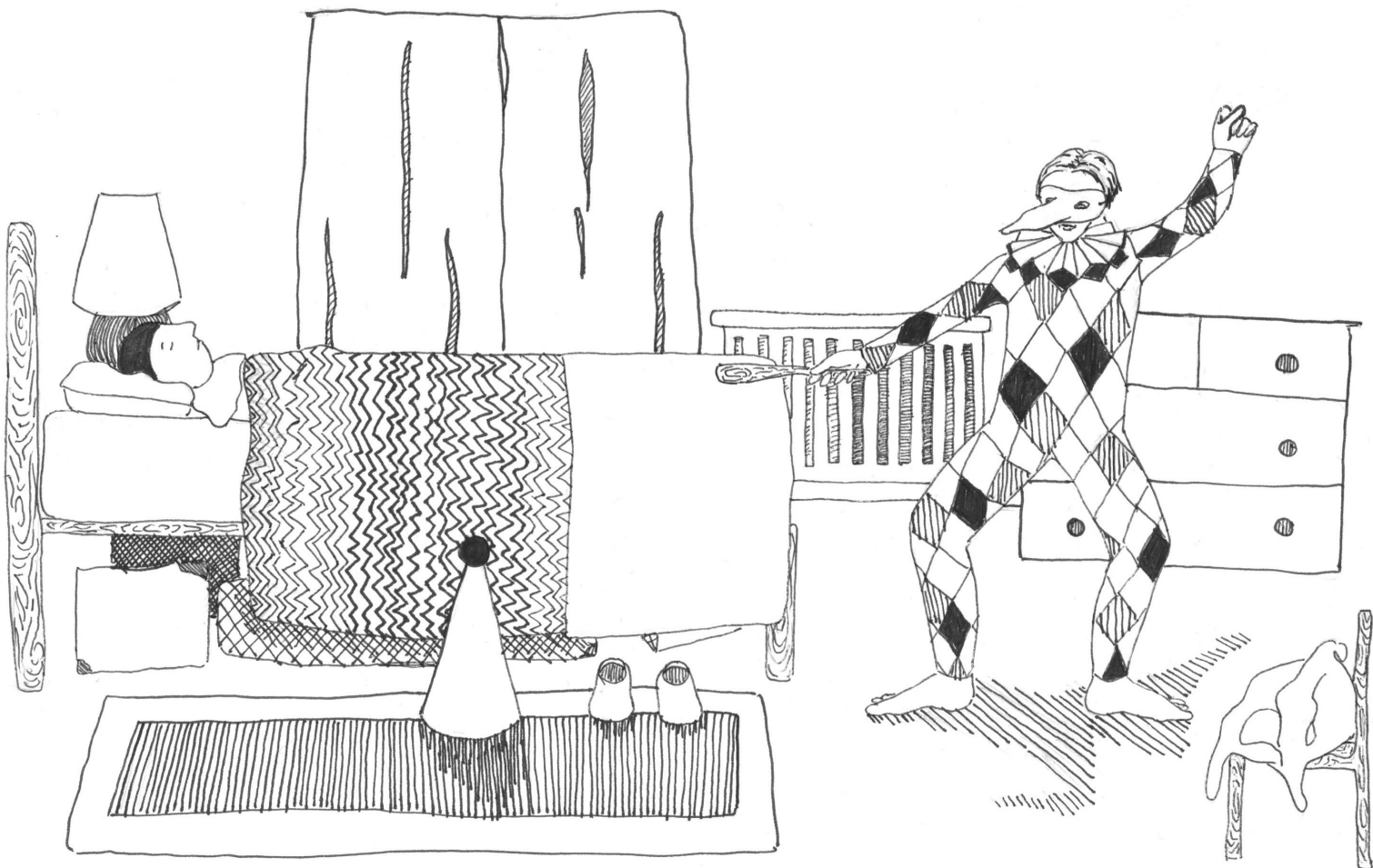
Q. Supplement: In 'Confusion' Zweig talks of a decisive, constitutive second within a life where the totality of the character of an individual is written but which the biography and narrative of that person constantly erases, can you locate that moment in your self?

A. Tough question. Perhaps the last time I appeared in court, years ago? A plea hearing: I had been charged with felony theft. Standing before the judge alone, no loved ones or 'comrades' behind me, only an indifferent state-appointed attorney at my side, I was unnerved. Trembling. To incriminate myself (and only myself) was terrible; to beg the court's mercy, humiliating. How does this pathetic moment relate to the question? Maybe I'll never 'get over' the heroic mythos.

Q. Biographical supplement. Someone recently said to me that when it is reduced to a bold statement, revolt is the desire to be someone else in another world. If such a demand is unachievable, what is the ideal form of a consolatory life that could you imagine for yourself? Would you like to live collectively? Would you endlessly travel? Retreat into the mountains?

A. In my early twenties, I took a full-time call center job and began the 8 week training program. The trainer led us through a series team-building exercises. In the third week, she had us describe our ideal careers. Friday of the fourth week I told her I was quitting. She replied kindly: "When you answered 'travelling philosopher', I knew it was just a matter of time -- this job could never be satisfying for you." A decade later, I don't know how to answer this question. Have I become accustomed to being alienated, surviving without being consoled? I think so -- more or less, for better and worse, I've remained functional. Of course there have been rocky patches: quitting jobs without having another one lined up, a couple serious fights with my long-term partner due to an itch to return to my former 'insurrectionist' ways, and so on, but these also seem matter of course after enduring them. As long as I have 1. time to think, read, write, 2. the companionship of my partner, 3. a minimal livelihood, then your question hardly occurs to me. I guess I've learned that working 30 hours/week is my limit; that I find easy camaraderie with most co-workers but this rarely if ever transforms into friendship; that I would rather be alone studying or hanging with my partner or discussing with interesting people, usually online, than attempting to have a 'social life'. Somewhere Guatari shares the story of an unfortunate octopus scientists had saved from toxic environs and placed in a tank of unpolluted water. Less than a minute later, the octopus was dead.

Q. Since encountering the figure of the atheist Roman Catholic in the novels of Graham Greene, who is characterised as one who belongs to a community and has no desire to leave but cannot also accept the basis of its value system, I have thought what it is to age in a community of juvenile or outmoded ideas without also renouncing them. For so many radicals, their early ideas are simply the formulation for their exit via maturity from their milieu. What if this exit from the belief system is suspended but the values are no longer adhered to? How would it be to live as a non-believing communist?



A. You remind me I should read Graham Greene ... Alas, it is hard to imagine believing communists enduring the presence of an open, explicit non-believer in their midst. I reside in the USA. Social ties are objectively resilient, but as one lives them, they are daunted, precarious, unreliable. So the situation is only worse in the case of self-consciously 'revolutionary' ties. From experience, communists -- including the Leninists, tankies, and anarchists -- almost without exception subscribe to a doctrine of salvation by works: what you've called the ideology of practice. Admittedly, the work normally amounts to preaching the gospel, but the emphasis on practice is undeniable. Everyone is supposed to devote as much energy as possible to agitating and organizing the community, the workplace, against Trump/the police/fascism and so on.

If before this 'community' -- a euphemism -- the non-practicing communist stands condemned ... then how much more the one who does not, and cannot, muster belief?

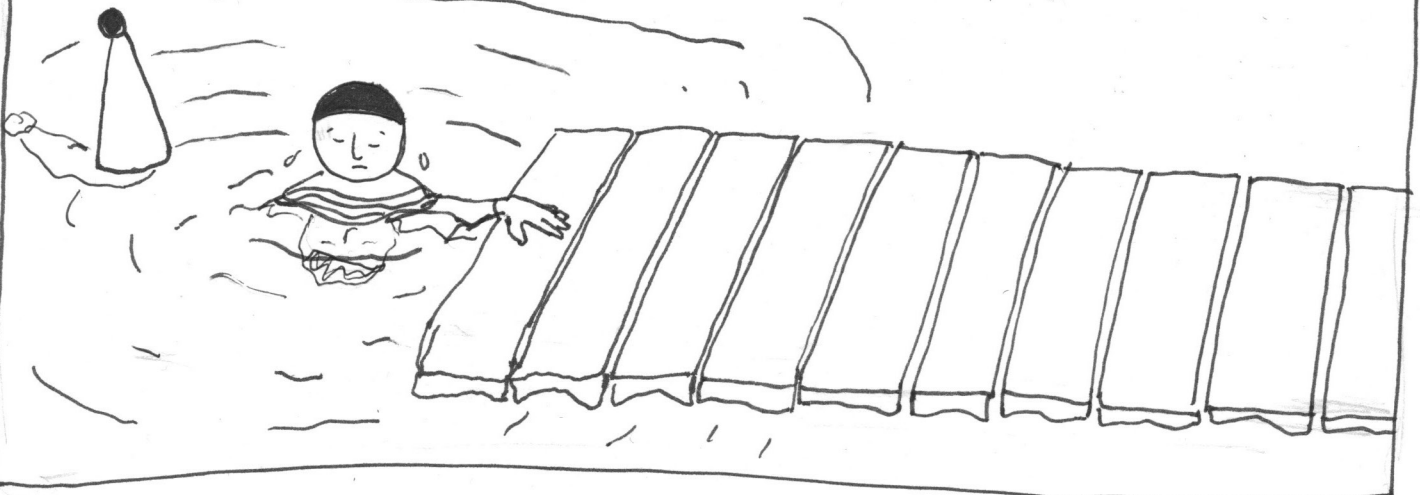
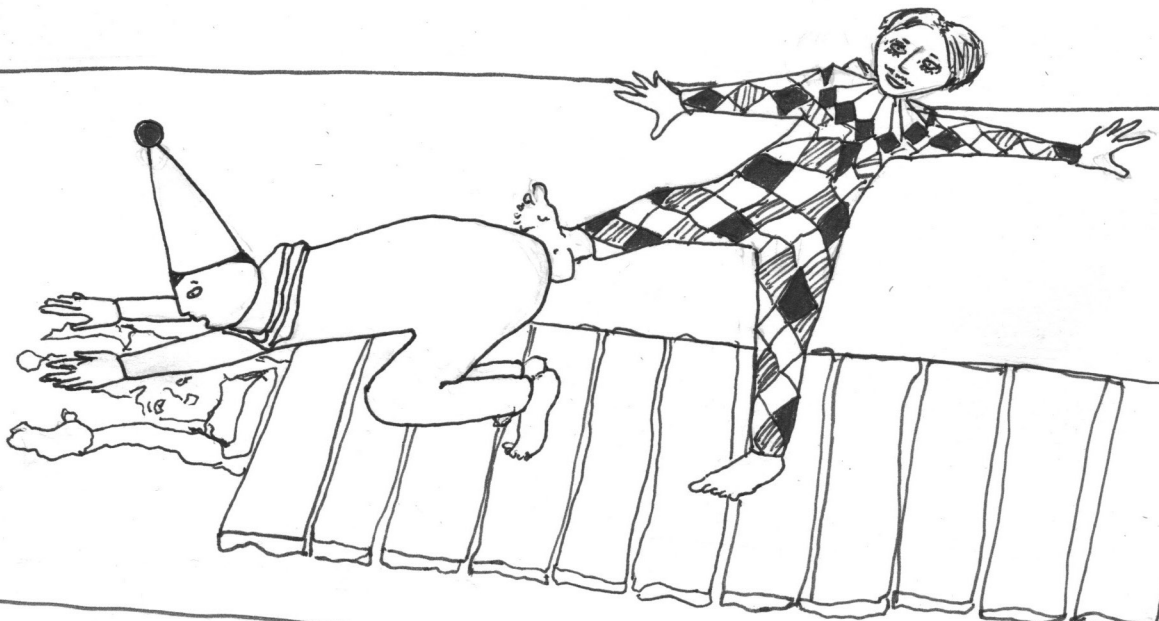
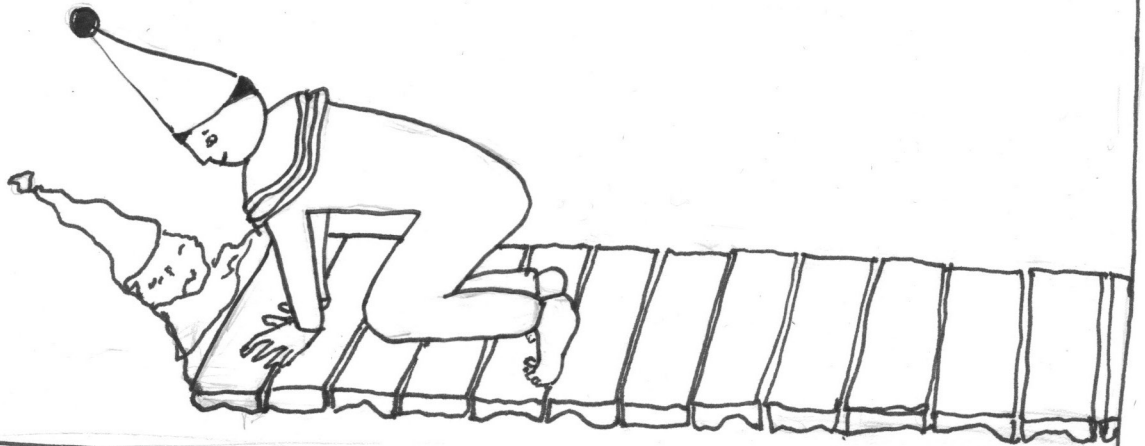
However. I am drawn to communists -- (apparent) believers too, and at least some are drawn to me ... and in personal communication with these acquaintances I find myself taking a gentler approach than when I am thinking by myself or writing for no one in particular. But am I a thorough non-believer? I doubt it ... the seasons change, I swerve: a Ferguson happens, for a time I read @ Damn_Jehu's blog almost devotionally, etc. ... and still my 'position' is not settled long enough to plant a flag ... in the words of John Gray, "We cannot believe as we please; beliefs are traces left by our unchosen lives."

Q. I don't want to ask directly about the book that has had a big influence on you. Instead, open a book of your choice at any passage and say something about it..

A. "There is no denying that *in the long run* every one of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laughter, reason, and nature: the short tragedy always gave way again and returned into the eternal comedy of existence; and 'the waves of countless laughter' -- to cite Aeschylus -- must in the end overwhelm even the greatest of these tragedians." (Nietzsche, Gay Science). Just before this excerpt, Nietzsche announces the possibility of a gay science. Thus far "even the best have lacked sufficient sense for the truth and the most gifted have had too little genius" to laugh at themselves in the manner "the whole truth" would require. True to form he cracks wise at our 'metaphysical need', mocks our gullibility for tragedians (*the* teachers of the purpose of existence), their canons of heroes/martyrs. But near the end of the passage he admits that metaphysical need -- tragedy and its heroes -- cannot be simply laughed off-stage. Well: hasn't communism functioned as a response to metaphysical need? Hasn't its tradition been sufficiently tragic? Perhaps such thoughts can help 'us' draw the tragicomic figure of a non-believing communist. Non-believing because all whys, including communism, are phantasms unworthy of devotion; haplessly communist because one still needs a 'why' or something close -- a talisman. Like that joke from the final scene of Annie Hall: "A guy walks into a psychiatrist's office and says, Hey doc, my brother's crazy! He thinks he's a chicken. Then the doc says, why don't you turn him in? Then the guy says, I would but I need the eggs."



CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS





You arrived at the
bend in the river.
Nothing marked it
as the end of your
outward journey.
Still, you turned
back.

Curse us if what
was said could not
be heard. Bless
them if what was
given could not be
kept.



