

Event Horizon*

The Free Association

And what is the phantom fuzz screaming from Chicago to Berlin, from Mexico City to Paris? 'We are REAL REAL REAL!!! as this NIGHTSTICK!' as they feel, in their dim animal way, that reality is slipping away from them... (William Burroughs, commenting on the police beating protesters at the Democratic convention, Chicago, 1968)

Doctor Who

We're used to thinking of time as a straight line. When we look back at history it seems like all past events only existed to lead us to this point. And when we think about the future we can only imagine that line continuing. The future we imagine is really only the present stretched out ahead of us. Therein lies the truism that science fiction is really always about contemporary society.

But history isn't a straight line. It moves in a series of uncontrolled breaks, jolts and ruptures. Every now and then we get events that seem to have popped out of an alternate dimension. Events that don't seem to belong to the timeline we were just on. These events carry their own timelines. When they appear, history seems to shift to accommodate them. Funny how we couldn't see it before, but now we come to look there's a line of history that seems to have existed just to lead us up to this moment. Such events also seem to carry their own alternate future. Things that seemed impossible a day or two before seem irresistible now.

These moments go down in history under a flattening name. Seattle 1999. May 1968. Kronstadt 1917. They eventually get tamed and forced into the history books but their alternate futures never totally disappear. You read about these events and you can still feel the tug of the future they thought they had. You still feel their potential welling up.

* 'Event Horizon' was written for the counter-mobilisation against the G8 summit in Gleneagles in July 2005, where it was distributed as a pamphlet. That original version is available at <http://www.nadir.org.uk>. We've added some new footnotes here which explain a little more clearly some of our theoretical tools and to discuss how some of our ideas resonate with others. We have also added a new post-Gleneagles postscript.

Events like Gleneagles are semi-conscious attempts to engineer such ruptures in time, attempts to shatter any orderly 'progression' of history. That's why we're here. Plus, of course, it's fun... And exciting. And a little bit scary (at times very scary). Above all, we're here because we want to be. We're not here out of any sense of duty. We're not following our 'conscience'. We're following our desire! It's at events such as Gleneagles that we feel most alive, most human – by which we mean connected to the rest of humanity. And we do mean all of humanity. Not just the folk immediately around us that we know personally, not just the thousands gathered at Gleneagles (or wherever else). And our sense of connection isn't even limited to the six billion humans currently living on the planet in our six billion different ways. At times like these we can feel connected to life in all its forms. Total connection.¹

And, of course, not only do we feel this total connection, but now everything seems possible. Anything could happen. An infinite number of new dimensions open up. What does it feel like to be inside one of these events, to be a time traveller and leap from one time line to another? And what are these possibilities? These might seem like daft or impossible questions, but we're not the only people asking them. In fact, understanding the meaning of events like this G8 'counter-summit' is one of the most important questions to think about and organise around.

Close Encounters

It's a physical thing. The hairs on the back on your arms stand up. You get goosebumps. There's a tingling in your spine. Your heart is racing. Your eyes shine and all your senses are heightened: sights, sounds, smells are all more intense. Somebody brushes past you, skin on skin, and you feel sparks. Even the acrid rasp of tear gas at the back of your throat becomes addictive, whilst a sip of water has come from the purest mountain spring. You have an earnest conversation with the total stranger standing next to you and it feels completely normal. (Not something that happens too often in the checkout queue at the supermarket.) Everybody is more attractive. You can't stop grinning. Fuck knows what endorphins your brain's producing, but it feels great. Collectivity is visceral!

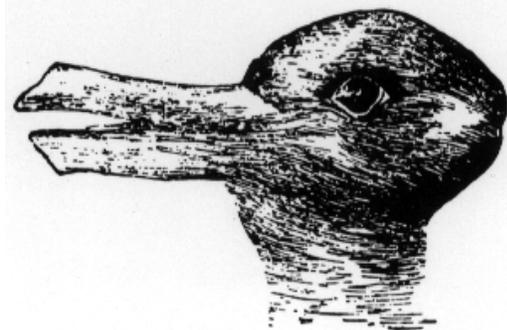
It's a little like when you fall in love with someone. There's a surplus of love that gets transferred to the whole world. Simultaneously you fall in love with the individual and the whole world. It can be like this on a 'demonstration', in a riot, in a meeting, sharing food in a collective kitchen. The sense of connection you feel with the people around you becomes a connection with the whole of nature, including other humans. And we're not using metaphors here. Love is not just love for an individual – romantic love. This sense of connectedness is, in itself, love, an immanent love for the whole world. And just as with romantic love, we not only connect with everything outside, but with

1 When it comes to connection, we might make an exception for that riot cop rapidly approaching with a big truncheon... But those state strategists expert in the 'science' of policing are wise to this effect of human connection. The riot cop's face-concealing helmet, big boots, shield and armour, aren't only for physical protection. They're designed to dehumanise, to scramble any possible human communication.

everything within ourselves too. Doors open, barriers dissolve – love isn't just a feeling, it's a force. We fall in love and anything becomes possible – 'Nobody knows what a body can do.'² In fact, we're not even sure they're 'our' bodies any more. Our own accounts of those intense moments of collectivity are much closer to 'out-of-body' experiences. As we surrender ourselves to the pull of the crowd, as we sway to its rhythms, it's harder and harder to work out where the one ends and the other begins. "My veins don't end in me".³ This new-found equality and collectivity is infectious, and rips like a contagion to the core of our being: we don't feel like individuals in a crowd – we are the crowd, and the crowd is in us. It's magical.

Of course this feeling of connectedness doesn't just come from romantic love or 'political' events. You don't have to have been in a riot to know what we're talking about here. The same affect lies behind religious experiences, gigs, sharing drugs, football matches and loads of other social gatherings. What's perhaps different is the presence of transcendent elements. With a congregation, our collective love is channelled through our love of god and is mediated by the priest or imman or rabbi. Or else it's channelled through the band on stage or the team on the pitch. It's far more anchored and controlled, and unity seems to come at the expense of our difference. Whether it's The Hives working the crowd at a gig or a striker saluting the Kop, these are undeniably powerful moments – but you know from the start the direction they're heading in. There's never any real transformation. But when we enter moments without a vertical element, where the energy and desires flow sideways and everyone is a leader, then we're much closer to the old idea of communion. Then we really can walk on water.

Sadly it's not possible to live at that fever pitch forever – that level of intensity is just too demanding on our minds and bodies. One way or another we have to come back 'down to earth'. But while we never seem to achieve the future these collective moments promise, that doesn't mean that things return to normal once they're over. It's like the famous duck/rabbit image. Yes, you can see it as one or the other, but once you've shifted perspective it's impossible to revert completely to the view you had



2 The line's from Spinoza's Ethics, although we came across it in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone Press, 1987).

3 From *Like You* by the El Salvadorean poet Roque Dalton (translated by Jack Hirschman):

Like you I | love love, life, the sweet smell | of things, the sky-blue | landscape of January days. | And my blood boils up | and I laugh through eyes | that have known the buds of tears. | I believe the world is beautiful | and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone. | And that my veins don't end in me | but in the unanimous blood | of those who struggle for life, | love, | little things, | landscape and bread, | the poetry of everyone.

before. The come-down after these events – the ‘return to reality’ – can be really jarring. After the anti-poll tax riot, J18, Evian 2003, etc., etc., all the shit on television, in the newspapers, workplace gossip and so on just seems dead, lifeless, rather than merely intensely annoying. You’d think that we’d come ‘home’ more angry and frustrated than ever but it’s the opposite: we no longer feel like putting our foot through the TV. What’s the point? The moving images on its screen are as inanimate and soulless as the box itself. Tabloid and TV crap annoys us because it seems to have an independent life apart from us, just as other commodities appear to have independent power over us. But in these huge collective events, the mist suddenly clears and we can see things for what they are. Capital is nothing. It might look like everything, but it really is nothing.⁴ It’s at these events and after that we see our power: we are alive and in control. The police might be screaming ‘We are REAL REAL REAL!’, but it’s the desperate cry of a dying ghost.

Back to the Future

But how did we get here? For us, at least, this way of doing ‘politics’ – this way of being, even this way of writing – feels very different from ‘politics’ in the 1980s or early 1990s. Marches weren’t always boring, of course, but political positions seemed rigid. You nearly always knew where you were with people. You knew where to find the ‘anarchists’ and the ‘socialists’, the ‘trade unionists’ and the ‘greens’, the way they dressed, the way they behaved. And you knew where to put them, each in their own ideological and intellectual box.

It seems to us that this shifting nature of ‘politics’ is linked to the shifting nature of capitalism, the transition from ‘Fordism’ to ‘post-Fordism’. In the 1950s and 1960s, the hegemonic form of work – the form which seemed to condition other forms – was the fordist factory. Labour on the production line may have been dull and repetitive, but it was limited, temporally, emotionally, bodily. Clock on. Perform a prescribed range of tasks, requiring a certain range of skills. Clock off. Repeat daily five days a week, 48 weeks a year for 40 years. An (apparently) clear demarcation between these stolen hours, stolen years, and (the rest of) life-time. This organisation of work – with the ‘mass worker’ engaged in ‘mass production’ – seemed to engender a certain form of ‘politics’, a ‘mass politics’ revolving around trade unions and workers’ parties, whether of the ‘reformist’ socialist/social-democratic or ‘revolutionary’ variety. Of course, most people weren’t factory workers, not even in the so-called advanced capitalist countries, and for most of the world’s population, work wasn’t limited. But no matter: the fordist model shaped the way of the world.

All of this changed in the 1970s as the techniques and forms of industrial production shifted towards smaller, more mobile labour units and more flexible structures of production. Information, communication and co-operation have become absolutely fundamental to social production. The trouble is these things don’t stop at the factory

4 The notion that ‘Capital is nothing but looks like everything...’ was posted on The Wrong Side of Capitalism [<http://huh.34sp.com/wrong>].

gates – in many cases, there isn't even a factory any more. Industrial labour has clearly lost its dominant role. That's not to say that it's disappeared (it hasn't) but the leading role is now taken by what's known as 'immaterial labour' – labour that produces immaterial products, like knowledge, information, a relationship, communication or an emotional response. In fact, most of the time it feels as if it's actually our whole lives that are being put to work (although we're only getting paid for a fraction of the hours we're awake). That's why people talk about the blurring of the line between work and non-work. Whatever paid work we do, the production process increasingly draws on all our social relationships, our passions, our interests outside work. In short, capital now attempts to appropriate our very capacity to be human.

To put this another way, assembly line workers in the 1930s produced motor cars, but they also 'produced' themselves as 'workers'. A whole mass of political institutions (trade unions, social democratic parties) and tactics (strikes, sabotage, wage demands, lobbying) were built on the back of this identity. Many of these traditions still exist but their foundation has long since crumbled – when we say 'I'm a computer operator/cleaner/nurse' we're just describing where this month's pay cheque is coming from. The question 'what do you do?' is increasingly anachronistic, or else invites a kaleidoscopic response. In fact the subjectivity we produce (in and out of the workplace) has changed. The key words here are flexible, mobile and precarious. Flexible because we're expected to do a whole range of tasks within our working day (which of course never ends); mobile because we migrate from job to job; and precarious because there are precious few guarantees left.

This flexibility cuts both ways: on the one hand, even the most highly paid workers are just a few pay cheques from the prospect of destitution; but on the other hand, this new-found flexibility is the result of our actions. Fordism collapsed because workers found that they didn't want to do the same job, day in, day out, for 40 years. Maybe we didn't even want to work at all... How else can we explain this 'movement of movements', which we understand as a *moving* of social relations? It's exploded over the last five or six years because it resonates – it 'makes sense'. In fact, crazy as it might seem, there's not a massive distinction between those incendiary moments (like Seattle, Genoa) and the rest of our lives. In and out of work, we spend our lives communicating and producing in a way that's far more visible than it was to our forebears: the world is, more than ever, our creation. That's why engaging in this whole process, living and producing here in Gleneagles, seems so natural to us – far more natural and more realistic, in fact, than relying on Bob Geldof or Make Poverty History with their rhetoric of measured demands and long term strategies. And since we're all now encouraged to be more 'flexible' – as consumers, as employees, as parents – it's actually a lot easier to imagine a different world...

Another way of looking at this is through the move from 'opposition' to 'composition'. The Fordist model of social production threw up particular forms of organisation and resistance. On the one hand there were built-in mechanisms for collective bargaining around wage demands, job conditions, grievances and so on: movements were channelled through official and unofficial trade union structures. On the other hand, when these processes broke down, there was the option of more oppositional forms – work-to-rule, overtime bans, walk-outs, slow-downs, strikes. These forms weren't

restricted to work: they flavoured almost all forms of political activity, across the board. The more reformist groups followed the first approach of negotiation and engagement, the more radical groups were more confrontational.

Fast forward to the 1990s and everything starts to change incredibly quickly. Reclaim The Streets is an excellent example of a shift towards a more compositional approach. But what do we mean by composition? Maybe it's as simple as acting as though we already exist in a different reality – we reclaim a street and recompose it according to a logic different to that of cars and capital. Without exception, every political organisation in the UK has been left flat-footed by this switch, as the dreamers out on the streets suddenly became the realists. From here on in, compositional tactics are the only ones worth having. In many ways there's nothing new about this: in 1955, in Montgomery, when Rosa Parks refused to obey a public bus driver's orders to move to the back of the bus to make extra seats for whites, she wasn't 'making a protest'. She wasn't even in 'opposition'. She was in a different reality. It's a reality that can be traced back to the Diggers and the Paris Communards. We can trace it across the world to Buenos Aires or Chiapas. It's the reality underlying the slogan 'Don't Strike, Occupy!' of May 1968 and the auto-reduction practices of 1970s Italy. And this reality re-emerges here at Gleneagles: again and again, the most productive place to start is with the question of what we want, not what we're against. And we mean 'start' – sometimes we get what we want and then we realise it isn't what we wanted after all. So we start over again.

Altered States

But if history isn't just a straight line, it's also true that we straddle many different timelines. We can think of the present as being defined by a tension between alternate futures. And big events are the moment when there's a snap or a rush forward due to a change in that tension. "A rush and a push and the land that we stand on is ours."⁵ But this rush forwards, the Event – the moment of excess or of becoming⁶ – has a history of desires and subjectivities, which are changed by the Event. So when we're engaged in those huge collective moments, not only is it easy to feel a real physical connection to people the other side of the world, we can also feel connected to people the other side of the millennium. And these moments leave indelible traces. It only takes a second for us to flip back to that place. It might be something as direct as the whiff of tear gas, the

5 From The Smiths' song 'A Rush and a Push and the Land is Ours'.

6 We first used the concept of 'moments of excess' in a pamphlet of the same title (Leeds May Day Group, *Moments of Excess*, 2004). For us it means those intense moments during which we (re)produce so much life, such a surplus of humanity, creativity and collectivity, that it overflows existing social forms. And thus, we simultaneously change those forms, those social relationships, and ourselves. Our 'moments of excess' would seem to correspond to – or resonate with – E.P. Thompson's 'moments of becoming', Ana Dinerstein's 'moments of (political) subjectivity' and Aristide Zolberg's 'moments of madness'. Apparently, Georges Bataille also used the concept of 'excess'. We are not familiar with Bataille's work, so we aren't sure how his use of term corresponds to our own, but we will put him on our reading list.

taste of a biscuit, or something less tangible – those of us at the Annemasse blockade of the 2003 G8 summit still go weak at the knees when we hear PJ Harvey’s ‘Big Exit’.⁷

So is Gleneagles really going to be like May 1968? No, of course not – no event is ever like any other. But we may get echoes of this, just as we’ll enjoy moments that recall the first time we fell in love or the Kronstadt uprising... In fact, it’s essential that we keep receptive to all those possibilities because if we’re constantly stuck in one groove, it can kill all movement. There are some groups whose reality is forever 1917: they may sell papers and recruit in 2005, but in their heads they’re storming the Winter Palace. Or there are others who are stuck in the jungles of Chiapas (not the Zapatistas themselves), or stuck in the European Social Forum, or stuck with the PGA.⁸

Crucial though these times and places might be, we see them in much the same way as we see opposition – as a moment of focus, but as a jumping-off point as well, a way of channelling our energies to transport us to a different dimension. Social movements often arise in opposition to some injustice: it might be live animal exports or climate change or the outbreak of war. Opposition is a way of focusing our energies, allowing a number of people to get together and channel their flows into a concentrated point. For almost a whole year, between 2000 and 2001, summit-hopping was the name of the game: from Prague to Quebec, Gothenburg to Genoa, everywhere our rulers met, we were there to greet them.

But opposition on its own, while essential, is never enough. No matter how militant, no matter how masked-up, could we ever really close down one of their summits? Could we force McDonalds/Starbucks/Nike out of business? More importantly, did we *want* to? Social movements crystallise around opposition but they rapidly create new desires, and it’s this aspect which is fundamental: “the only real revenge we can possibly have is by our own efforts bringing ourselves to happiness”.⁹ The Zapatista uprising would not have resonated around the world in the way it has if it had simply stayed at the level of opposition to NAFTA. Again, the move to a more compositional approach can similarly be seen in the shifting role of convergence centres: at every major summit, we’ve fought back ferociously against the world that is daily imposed on us, but along the way we’ve also discovered new ways of doing things, invented new tactics, and found a new

7 Look out ahead | I see danger come | I wanna pistol | I wanna gun | I’m scared baby | I wanna run | This world’s crazy | Give me the gun
Baby, baby | Ain’t it true | I’m immortal | When I’m with you | But I wanna pistol | In my hand | I wanna go to | A different land
I met a man | He told me straight | ‘You gotta leave | It’s getting late’ | Too many cops | Too many guns | All trying to do something | No-one else has done
Baby, baby...
I walk on concrete | I walk on sand | But I can’t find | A safe place to stand | I’m scared baby | I wanna run | This world’s crazy | Gimme the gun
Baby, baby

8 How ironic that after all these years fighting our way clear of ‘Aims and Principles’ we now find ourselves hemmed in by the PGA ‘hallmarks’: ‘Aims & Principles’ can always be modified, hallmarks are permanently stamped in metal as a guarantee of purity.

9 The line comes from William Morris in 1891, when he argued against those calling for revenge for police attacks on demonstrations in Trafalgar Square. (Although we might have disagreed with him at the time.)

commonality – literally created new worlds. That's why the convergence centres have become more and more indispensable: here is where desires can exercise an almost irresistible pull on people inside and outside our movements – those desires act as amplifying chambers, unleashing huge flows of energy.

Social movements are enormously productive, that's why people talk about a 'buzz' – it's the hum of life, energy and desire, a constant process of contraction and expansion as a movement breathes. Way back in 1977 why did all the super-rich like John Paul Getty suddenly want to hang out with punks? Not because it was trendy but because it created a new reality, with new desires which made previous life seem hollow and irrelevant. It's when they are creating new desires that social movements seem not only attractive but irresistible. Closer to home, Make Poverty History might operate as if it's under the leadership of Bono or *The Observer*, but its real energy and impetus comes from this movement of movements here at Gleneagles and everywhere else.

Conversely social movements can and do settle down and become calcified: desires get frozen, and the life seeps out of them. It's when you get too comfortable that problems set in. When safe spaces become completely calcified and formally or informally institutionalised, then we can talk of a ghetto. It might be a social centre with paid workers, or a summit-hopping mentality, or a music scene, it doesn't much matter. A certain way of eating, of dressing, of thinking comes to dominate and starts to freeze our desires. New orthodoxies arise, and those who can interpret them the quickest become an invisible leadership, however unintentionally.

Some of this is totally unavoidable. Just as we can't live our lives at a constant fever pitch, so social movements need to ground themselves. Maybe a certain element of contraction, of taking stock, is inevitable after a period of intense expansion – after a wild night's partying, few of us can manage without some sort of safe space to retreat to. But that doesn't mean that these refuges have to be dead or closed. They can be spaces where we can experiment with other ideas, other forms of life. In fact, without some sort of safe space it would be impossible for different velocities, different movements to compose together. A few of us have been involved in a social centre in Leeds – what's really refreshing is that we can say what we really think and do what we feel passionate about without worrying that we might be 'being unorthodox' or 'making mistakes'. This has only been possible because there is enough common impetus to keep the process going while people go off in different directions or come in from different places, moving at different speeds.

It's tempting to assume that these things are simply a matter of time – that social movements start off with opposition to some injustice, explode with desire and then gradually burn out. But that'd be to miss what's really exciting about social movements, their ability to operate on a multiplicity of levels, at different speeds and on different timelines. It makes more sense to see all these processes happening simultaneously, so that calcification is present from the outset – or more accurately, that social movements are constantly solidifying and at the same time liquefying. And sometimes we need things to get a little compacted to enable us to go spinning off again to another time and place; sometimes it's only by being in cramped situations that we can make that leap

and burst through those boundaries.¹⁰ Perhaps a key question now is how to create spaces that provide the safety to allow further experiments without then becoming stultifying. Maybe it's a matter of teaching ourselves how to distinguish flows of energy that are productive from channels that are a dead end.

Of course, we can only think about and organise around the future that's presented by the timeline we're on at the moment. But being open – to new ideas, to new connections, new ways of acting – seems much more important than that tired old question of reform versus revolution. One of the ways to blow apart that dichotomy is to get into the habit of facing 'out' as well as facing 'in' – a kind of double-jointed action. We know that the words 'in' and 'out' are problematic, because there isn't anywhere that's really 'outside', but they seem to make some sort of sense here. What do we mean by facing in and facing out? We are constantly organising safe spaces – social centres, movements, or any other community – that allow us to experiment with excavating the power of capital. This is part of what social movements do. When these spaces turn into ghettos, it's precisely because they've stopped having a face to the outside. Rather than being doors to other worlds, they've become gated communities with limited horizons: 'safe' in the sense of 'sheltered' and 'risk-free'. The way to avoid this is to keep one face open to the outside, and to operate with a more fluid notion of boundaries. We have a greater chance of seeing our experiments trigger other events that will then knock us off course, making all our plans redundant, making our demands look ridiculously feeble. Sure, things will go wrong, unexpected outcomes will emerge, but that will only open up further possibilities. In any case, we can't ever avoid making mistakes and, in fact, social movements only work by fucking up and breaking down. All we can do is experiment with the events as they come along, look for the potential of the new desires they unleash, and allow them to develop in the most productive directions.

War of the Worlds

One way of thinking about this is through the idea of 'precarity,' which attempts to capture the precariousness of work and life under neo-liberalism and has become a new buzz-word in certain social movements over the last few years. It's easy to slip into the trap of using precarity as some kind of sociological category: so precarity comes to

10 'Cramped space' is a concept that can be found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, but our attention was drawn to it by Nick Thoburn, who places great emphasis on it in his book *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003). The crux of the concept can be seen in Deleuze's comments that "Creation takes place in bottlenecks" or that "we have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities" ('Mediators', in *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Thoburn uses this to argue against any idea that we exist in a state of plenitude. Rather, we need to pay attention to the limits that capital displaces onto us. While we respect the need to be aware of dangers and limits, we think it is very important always to emphasise that we are active and capital is reactive. Perhaps we are overly sensitive to this issue, but we believe that any other emphasis risks a return to identifying and privileging the most cramped sector, the most oppressed people, which we believe would be a terrible mistake. Cramped space for us is something we create, something we have inside ourselves, not something capital does to us. As Deleuze goes on to say: "A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities".

mean talking about migrants, or workers in fast food outlets, or the ‘cognitariat’, or culture workers or any number of fixed identities. Used in this way, it’s as though we’re trying to spot the next key area: ‘This will be the next round of struggles!’ ‘These are the new Zapatistas!’ Some of us were involved in Class War around the time of the poll tax: the Trafalgar Square riot was one of our high points, but it was followed by a strange period of casting around for the next ‘poll tax’, as if it was simply a matter of finding it and lighting the blue touch-paper. It was a mistake. At the time we were so fixated on the forms the anti-poll tax struggles had taken we couldn’t see the potential of the new anti-roads movement and the forms it developed. We couldn’t see that similar underlying processes threw up differently shaped movements that could resonate with each other. History has a great way of throwing up new struggles, and new forms, from workers’ councils to social forums. And they have a habit of popping up where we least expect them. If we get stuck on the forms, and ignore the dynamic that underpins them, then our demands can easily become limits.

If we shift focus away from the forms of precarity and look at the dynamic, we get a different perspective. Precarity becomes a tool to help us see connections between apparently disparate struggles. It helps us see how ideas and tactics developed in one struggle could spread to another. But what’s really powerful about the idea of precarity is that it is entirely the result of our actions. The massive wave of struggles from the 1970s onwards, especially the refusal of work, were all attempts to slip the leash of Fordist control – that’s where precarity comes from. Looked at this way, precarity is not in itself a bad thing, which is why some people are trying to re-think it with the slogan ‘reclaim flexibility’. And it’s an even richer concept when it’s expanded to include a whole series of biopolitical concerns, from climate change to border controls to the ‘war on terror’. In this way precarity isn’t the preserve of a particular struggle or a particular set of workers – it’s far closer to a universal condition of being in this world. Our lives seem to hover permanently on the edge of an abyss as we try to pick our way through a permanent state of exception. In fact, it’s increasingly become clear that all the language and technologies of securitisation – surveillance, ID cards, ‘war on terror’, etc. – are not intended to produce a feeling of security but rather to perpetuate insecurity. Combating this generalised insecurity can only really be done through the mobile safe spaces created by social movements.

Events such as Gleneagles are really experiments in creating new worlds. It’s not that these events, these moments of excess, contain the seeds of new worlds, they *are* new worlds. In one sense little has changed. We are living, more or less, in the same physical bodies, the same collections of molecules. And we are not some ‘marginal’ segments of humanity, ‘extremists’ or ‘politicos’. Rather, we are everyone. People who know how to heal or to grow food, people with skills in parenting or constructing physical structures, above all, people with skills in simply being human. Think what we have created here: collective kitchens, medical facilities, the ‘trauma’ zone.¹¹ It’s not that this horizontal,

11 The trauma zone is a space a safe distance from Gleneagles where any injured ‘shell-shocked’ counter-summiters can be taken to recuperate. People plan to maintain it for as long as necessary, up to several months if need be. Compare this with the shoddy way the state treats ‘its’ traumatised soldiers.

network form of organising is more ‘democratic’, it’s so obviously better, more ‘efficient’, and more ‘productive’.

But wait a minute; perhaps these new worlds aren’t alternate realities. As we look around we see all the parts of the previous world are still there. Except they seem rearranged slightly. Displaced just a few centimetres and yet that makes all the difference. When we’re hemmed in, all the affects of precarity seem terrifying and debilitating. But as soon as things start moving, those same affects become advantageous – precarity becomes flexibility and all those attitudes and techniques we’ve needed just to survive suddenly become tools of liberation. It’s the same as the principle of ju-jitsu: with one deft move all the multiple fears and insecurities that politicians dump on us, all the shit about immigration, terrorism, crime can be turned to our advantage. What previously seemed a cramped, crushing world full of limits and restrictions now seems a world of almost unlimited possibilities. That’s the promise of the situation, that the new capacities that we feel at events like Gleneagles can be made concrete in our everyday, habitual lives. That we can develop new tactics, new technologies and new ways of living that will cause a cascade of events to sweep through society.

Postscript

‘Event Horizon’ was written for, and distributed at, the mobilisation against the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in the summer of 2005. It was inspiring and exhilarating to play a part in the convergence centres and to realise there many of the processes we talk about here. In Edinburgh, in the Hori-Zone (the ‘eco-camp’) just outside Stirling, on the road blockades, everywhere we came across the same creativity, flexibility and imagination. Another world really didn’t seem that ludicrous.

Two points are particularly worth highlighting. First, it would have been easy to go for a single set-piece battle in an attempt to shut down the summit. But that would have flattened all of our compositional efforts (creating and maintaining multiple convergence spaces, each containing a multiplicity of subjectivities) into one spectacular moment of opposition. We decided instead to use flexibility and mobility to our advantage, planning multiple blockades and actions wherever and however we wanted to. The result was chaos on the opening day of the summit. Second, this diversity of approaches and tactics only seemed to strengthen the incredible feeling of connection. When we heard about the successful blockade of the M9, we felt as if we had been there too (even though we were 20 miles away on the A9). We heard that the Gleneagles fence had been breached we felt it was us who’d torn it down. Those people who had chosen to be medics or to stay in the convergence centres and cook reported the same feelings of connection, of having done it all. Everyone felt a part of everything!

But precarity is nothing if not fickle. The forces that worked to our advantage for the first day of the summit turned against us when news of the 7 July London bombings filtered through. In Stirling, where we were based, we experienced them as a moment of vertical power which effectively de-mobilised many of us. Earlier in the week at a

massive site-wide meeting to discuss strategies for the opening day, there was an amazing fluidity, and a clear willingness to engage and to find common ground. But by Thursday morning many people had reverted to the default mode of either partying or party politics: there was another massive site-wide meeting, but this time it was dominated by ideology and old style politics. We came up against a widespread feeling that we had to 'take a position'. In fact, the opposite was true. We should have dealt with this external event in the same way a crowd of 200 of us dealt with an oncoming police car early on Wednesday morning: we literally flowed around it. 'Taking a position' means standing still and losing the initiative. After Thursday the mood, affect, feeling, buzz – call it what you like – was defensive and closed, compared to previous days: the desire had gone, and with it the energy.

Of course, it's important not to over-state the impact or significance of the bombings. They are simply the flip-side of the processes we highlight in Event Horizon: a particularly intense and accelerated comedown. 'When we're on the move, all the affects of precarity seem exhilarating and empowering. But as soon as things stop moving, those same affects become disadvantageous – flexibility becomes precarity and all those attitudes and techniques we've developed suddenly become obstacles to liberation.' And because we experienced these bombings as a mediated event, it's tempting to see them as proof that there are far wider forces at work, making our mobilisations at Gleneagles and elsewhere pale into insignificance. This is the deflationary effect of all mediation. But in fact the opposite is true. Our week in Gleneagles, just like all the weeks before and since, makes it even clearer that there is no 'wider' field of play, no 'real world' outside of what we do. There is one power – and it's ours.

the authors

The Free Association is an ongoing reading, writing and socialising project. Some of us sometimes write under the name Leeds May Day Group. Freely associating to produce 'Event Horizon' were Alex, Brian, David, Keir, Nate and Nette, whose corporeal bodies usually reside in Minneapolis, Halifax and Leeds. Comments, criticisms and communication are always welcome. Our virtual home is www.nadir.org.uk.
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