

Michael Baers

SELECTED WORK



FOR PUBLICATIONS

2005 - 2010

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HEAVY TRAFFIC PRESS #1

ARTIST'S BOOKS
Michael Baers
2004 - 2010
THE PUBLISHERS

MICHAEL BAERS is an American artist who lives in Berlin. Since 2004 he has produced numerous publication projects for exhibitions as well as contributing to magazines and publication initiatives. His work has been exhibited throughout Europe and North America. While addressing a broad range of topics, Baers' work is characterized by an interest in the discrepancy between ideological (mythic) knowledge and historical veracity.

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INTRODUCTION

I started making comics close to eight years ago. The proverbial light bulb-over-the-head moment came during a stillborn attempt to work with some of the Situationist's detourned comics produced during May '68, an effort that occupied me for several months. Sitting in frustration at my drawing table one winter day, I thought to myself, "why don't I just make my own comics?" In retrospect, it is difficult to understand why the thought had not arrived earlier, considering the different media I had worked—film, writing, drawing—all converge in the comic form. As Harvey Pekar once famously said, "Comics are just words and images—you can do anything with words and pictures."

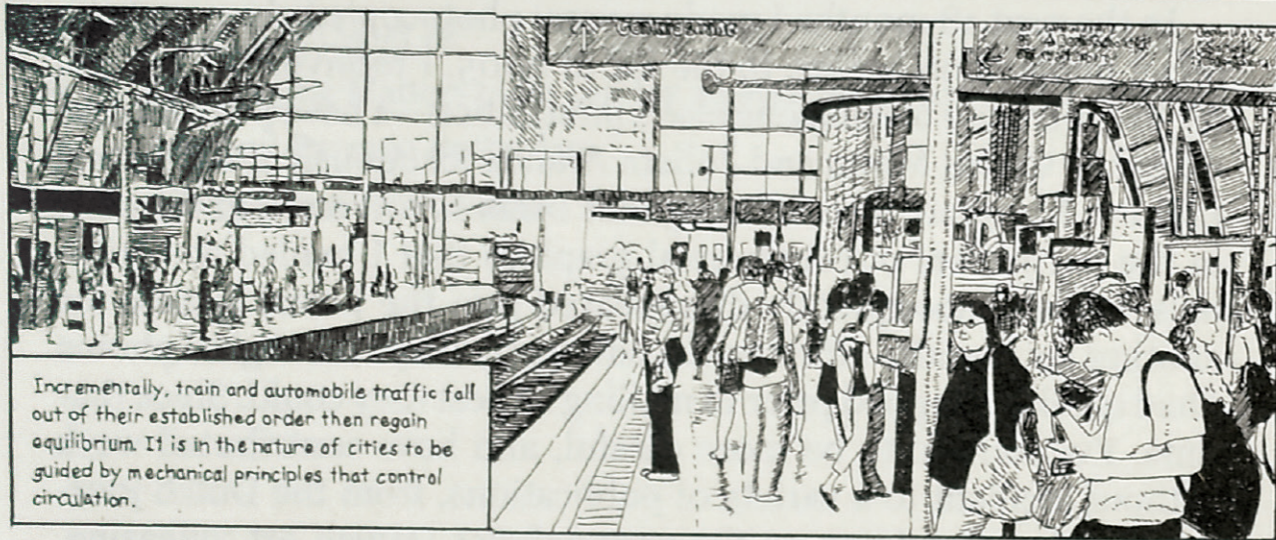
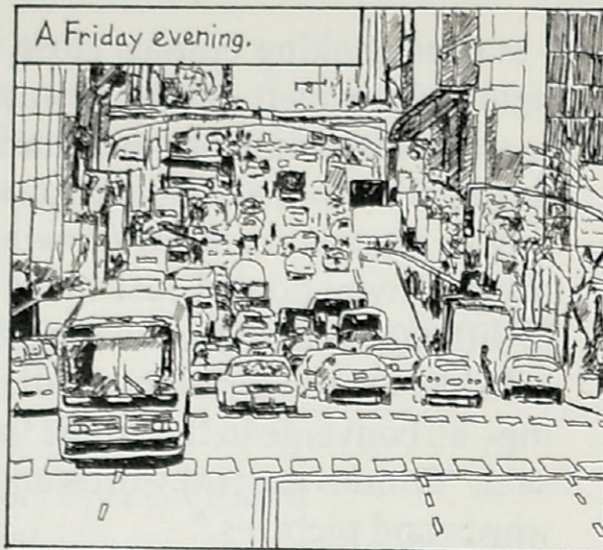
In the next 18 months I made several photocopied zines and one offset publication before, in the fall of 2005, I received my first offer to contribute to someone else's publication—a newsprint tabloid edited by Carlos Motta and Julieta Aranda facetiously titled *Arts & Leisure*. I hesitate in confessing that I was so unversed at the time in the particulars of commercial graphics that I mailed the originals—which subsequently disappeared into the postal system for another six months—forcing the editors to adapt the digital photos I had quickly snapped prior to mailing as best they could. Since that time, I've learned to be more careful, and have contributed work without incident to a variety of publications, from the Dutch journal *Fucking Good Art*, to the now-defunct Danish art magazine, *SUM*, to *Chto Delat? (What is to be done?)*, the *e-flux journal* and others besides.

It is not difficult to recall the frustrated and aimless feeling that plagued me in the years before I discovered my métier; it is less easy to remember the feeling of clarity and purpose with which I set out in my experiment to see what I could do with comics. While I remember fondly the certitude with which I once worked, the feeling now is indistinct. It is like recalling the limitless vistas of a desert in the midst of a dense jungle canopy. The accumulated habits of working have muddied my vision—or so it seems to me at present. I decided recently it might be useful to put some of the works I have done for various magazines and publication initiatives together in order to see where I have been, and perhaps gain a clearer vision of where I might be going.

Vernissage sur le Monde

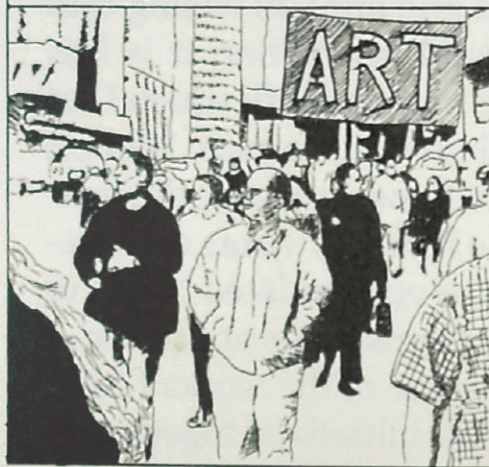
By Michael Baers

A Friday evening.

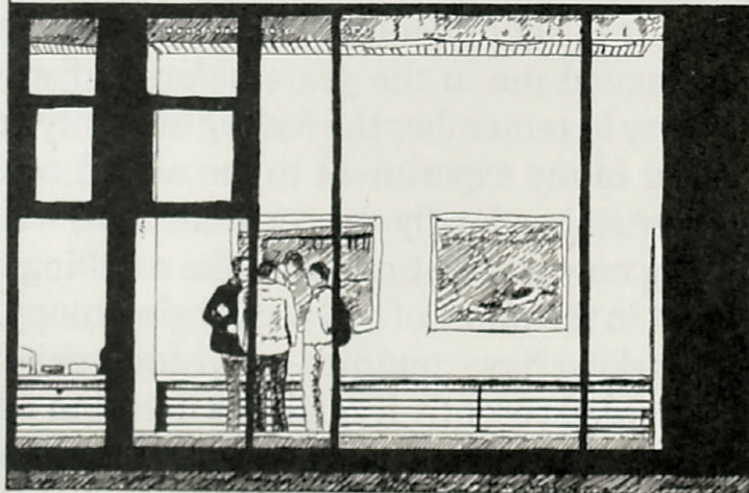


Incrementally, train and automobile traffic fall out of their established order then regain equilibrium. It is in the nature of cities to be guided by mechanical principles that control circulation.

Here and there in the city, people, too, are falling out of everyday life's routine. Within and without the cultural capitals of the world, there are art openings tonight.



In this ostensibly distinct cultural sphere, certain routines are observed. If they appear separate from the profane world, this both is and isn't in the order of an illusion.



The gallery space fills with people. The viewing public, the gallery's constituency, has obscured the art as a consequence of the space's transformation from aesthetic reflection to sociability.



These artists present feel a vague unease about this. They sense they are participating in bad faith...

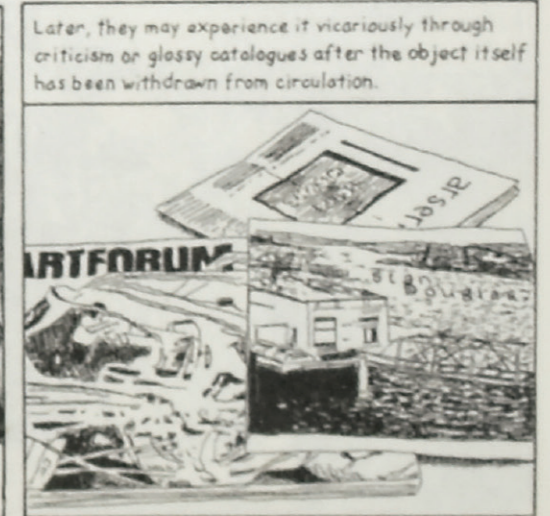


...while the gallerists and collectors enjoy the spectacle, knowing it adds to the work's attractiveness. (Capital can be either discreet or obvious as the occasion dictates.)

In the eyes of the latter, desire assumes the disposition of discernment—will they like what is on view? Will they want to purchase it, thereby fulfilling the logic of the commercial gallery?



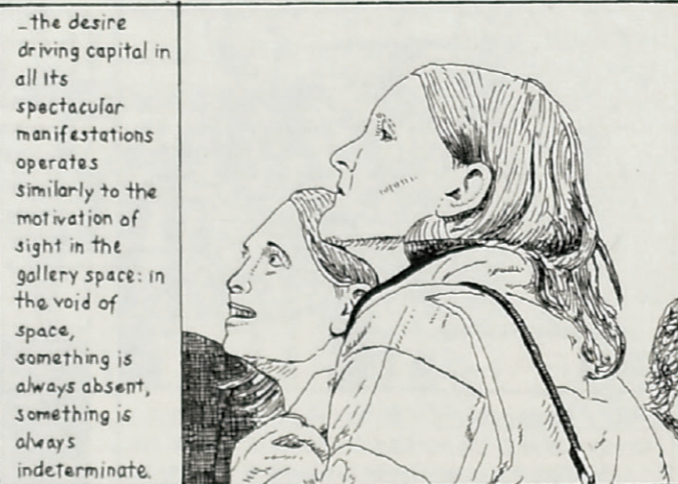
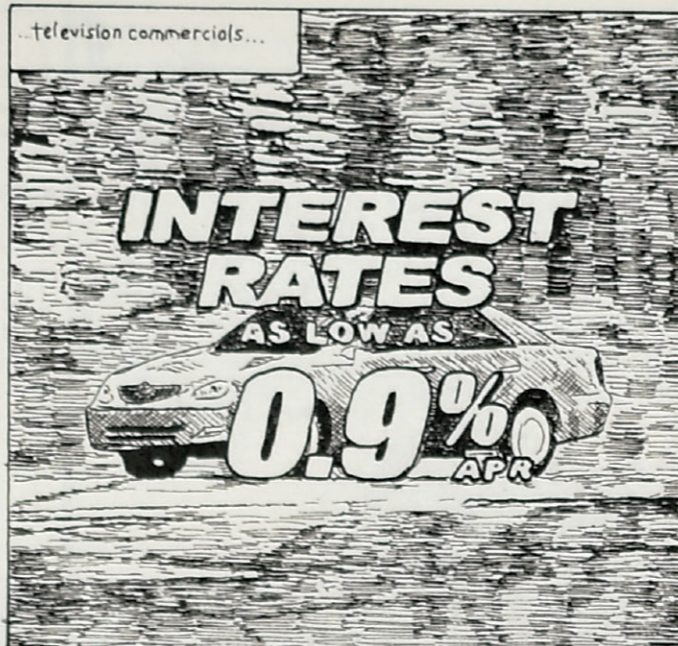
And what of the others not in a position to buy? They possess the art with their eyes, intuit its internal logic, make judgments.



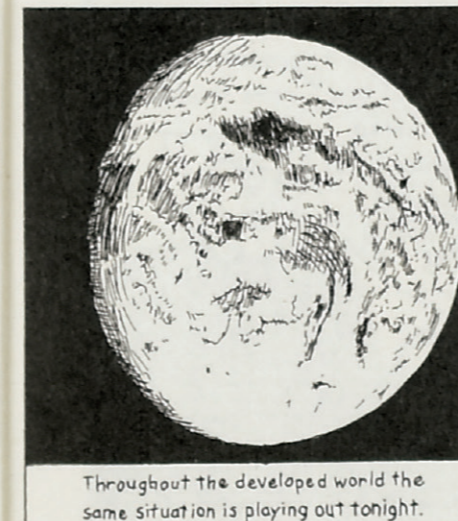
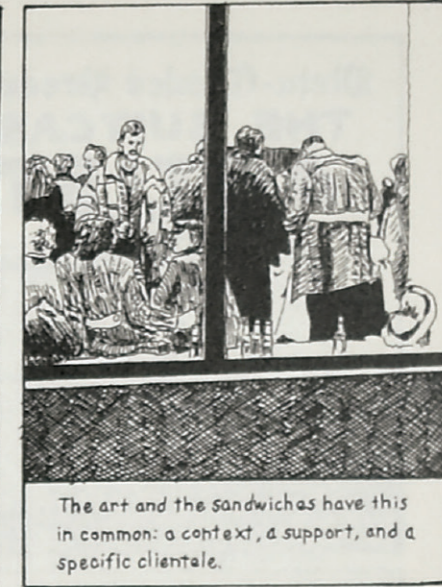
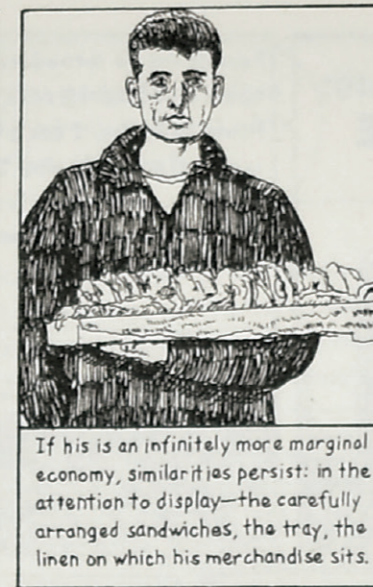
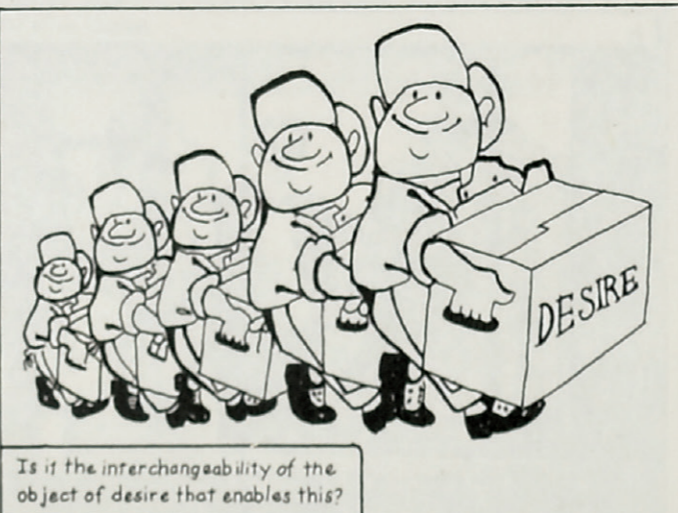
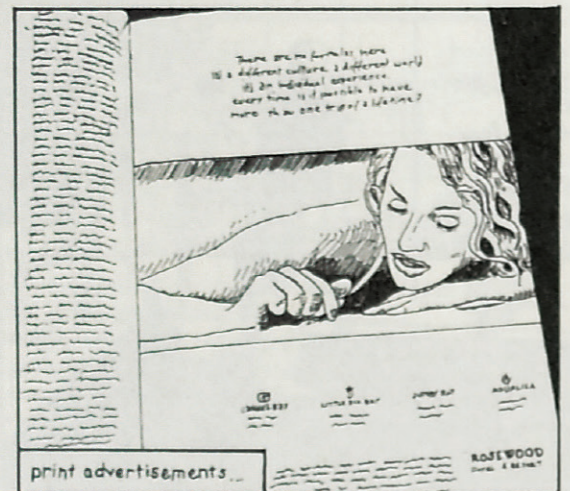
Later, they may experience it vicariously through criticism or glossy catalogues after the object itself has been withdrawn from circulation.



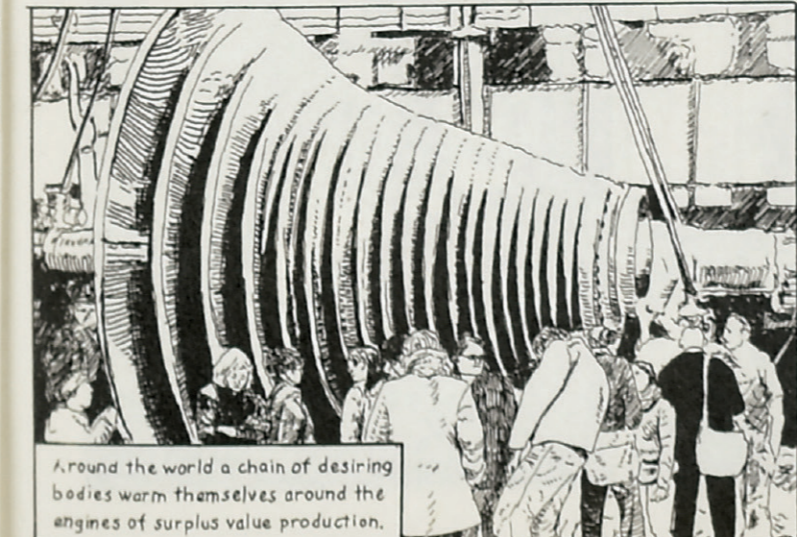
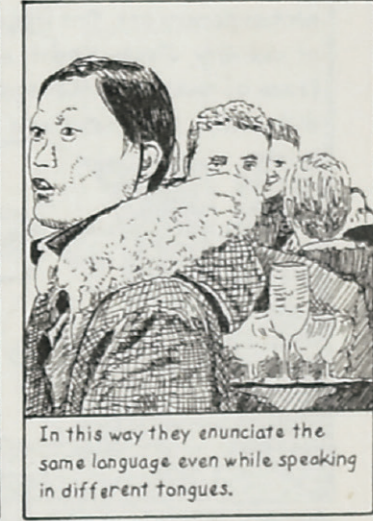
The desire one sees manifested in billboards,



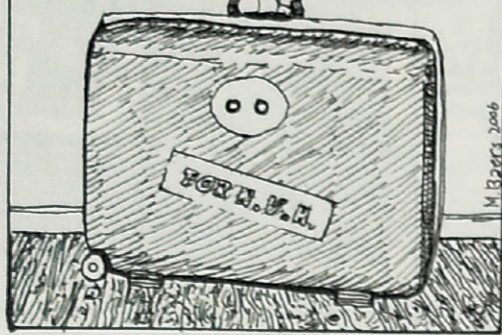
...the desire driving capital in all its spectacular manifestations operates similarly to the motivation of sight in the gallery space: in the void of space, something is always absent, something is always indeterminate.



Throughout the developed world the same situation is playing out tonight.

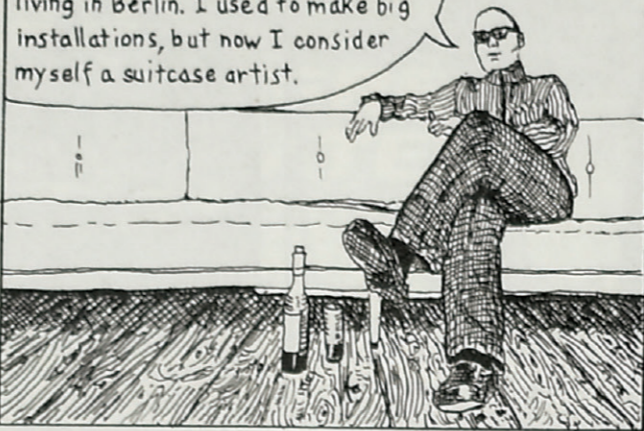


Meta-Comics Presents:
**THE SUITCASE
ARTIST**



M. Baers 2006

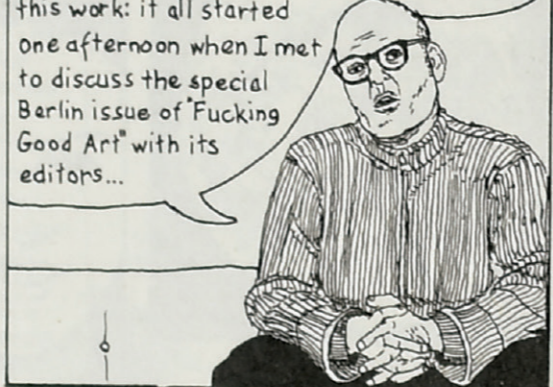
Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Michael Baers, an American living in Berlin. I used to make big installations, but now I consider myself a suitcase artist.



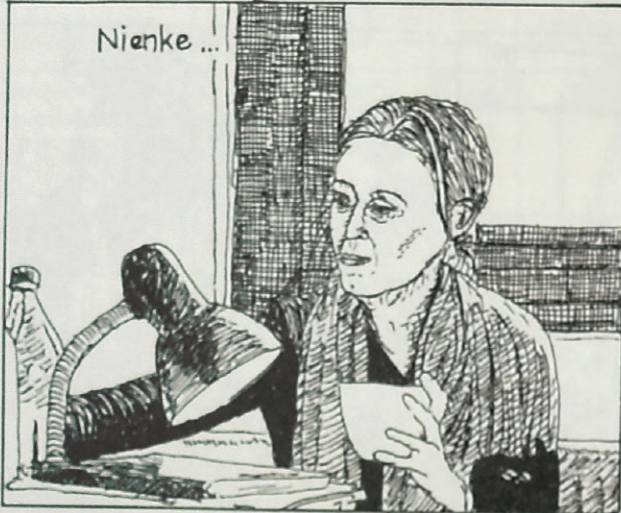
Describing the suitcase's ubiquity in contemporary art, Irit Rogoff calls this signifier of mobility, displacement, and duality "a split trace of meaning within specific contexts of dislocation...half 'not there' half 'not that'..."



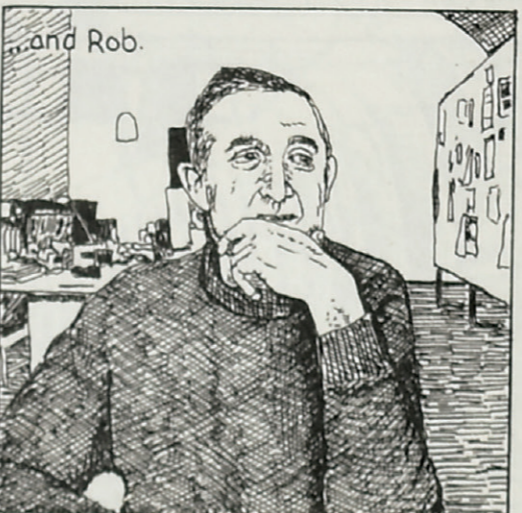
...to paraphrase Derrida." But my concern with the suitcase as a signifier is as much a function of its utility as its symbolic value. Let me tell you about how I came to make this work: it all started one afternoon when I met to discuss the special Berlin issue of 'Fucking Good Art' with its editors...



Nienke ...



...and Rob.

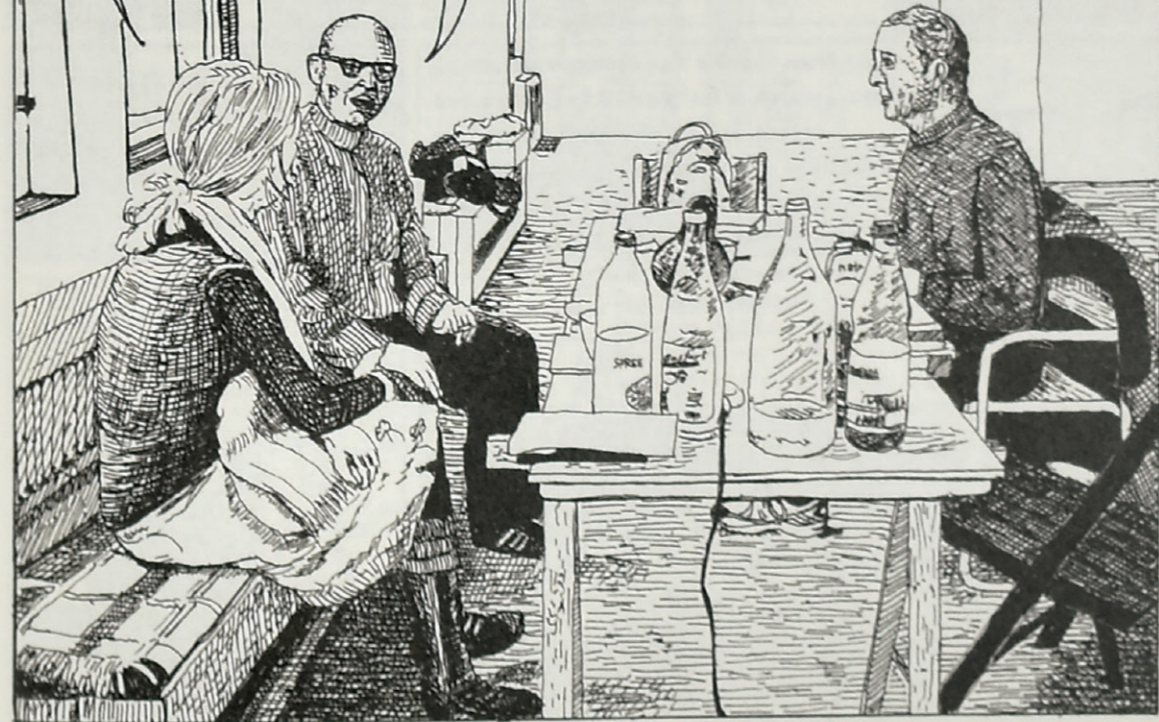


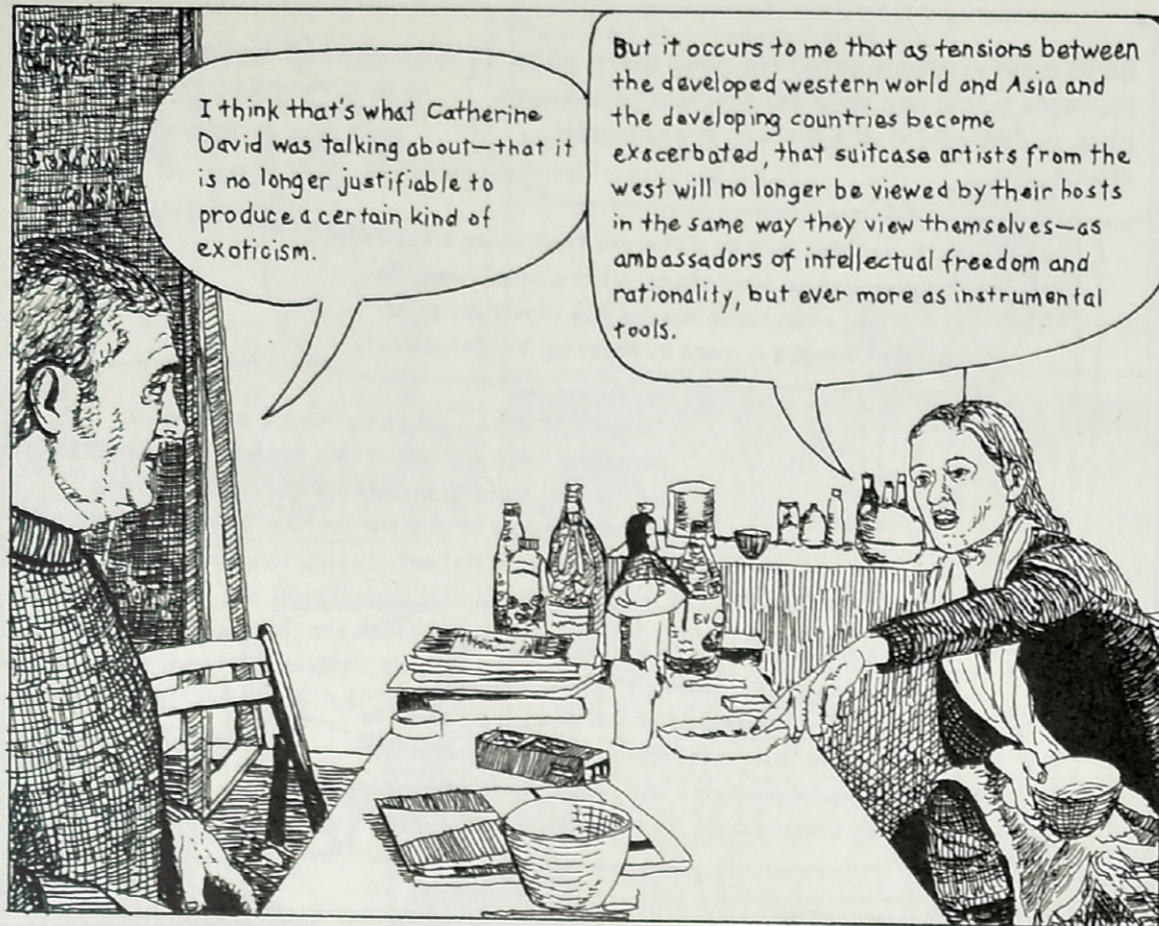
Berlin is full of artists going here, going there. We're privileged in that way, no? Most people are stuck some place, go to their job, and that's it. We can travel around.

Yeah, but this isn't so different from being a business traveler: you go somewhere, sit in a hotel room, do your work, come home. Maybe the conversation at business dinners is more interesting, but maybe not.

In our last issue I asked Catherine David about globalization in art, about this tendency for artists to, as I put it, leave their own sphere and collect the strange images of another culture. In response she said, tourism is not art.

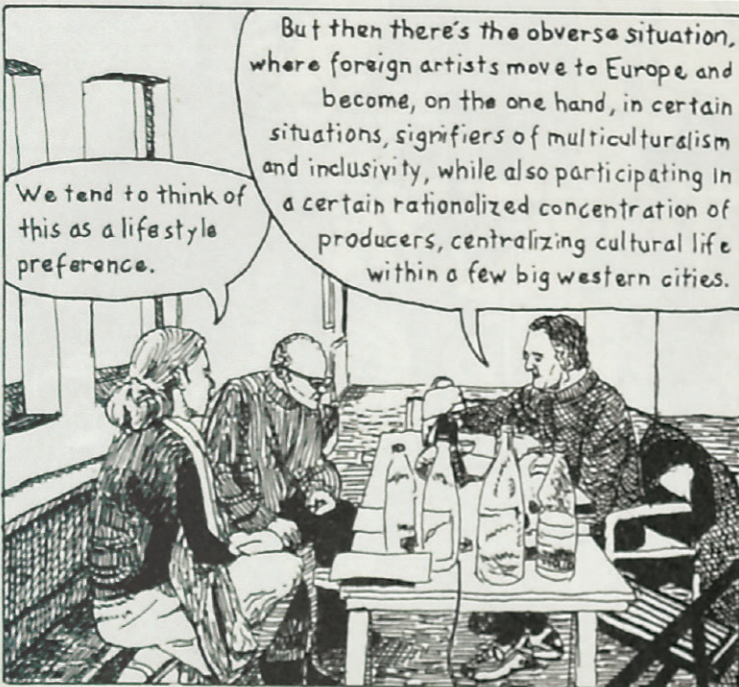
Yes, in her book Miwon Kwontalks about this phenomenon of the "biennale" artist, the non-commercial, site-specific artist going from show to show, making their intervention—often about a specific social problem—and repeating this procedure, following a logic similar to commercial franchising.





I think that's what Catherine David was talking about—that it is no longer justifiable to produce a certain kind of exoticism.

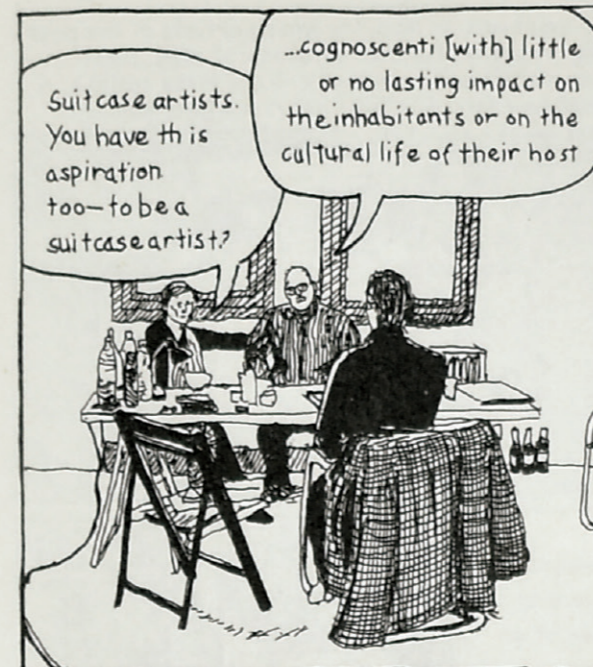
But it occurs to me that as tensions between the developed western world and Asia and the developing countries become exacerbated, that suitcase artists from the west will no longer be viewed by their hosts in the same way they view themselves—as ambassadors of intellectual freedom and rationality, but ever more as instrumental tools.



We tend to think of this as a lifestyle preference.

But then there's the obverse situation, where foreign artists move to Europe and become, on the one hand, in certain situations, signifiers of multiculturalism and inclusivity, while also participating in a certain rationalized concentration of producers, centralizing cultural life within a few big western cities.

From a few European and North American cities, suitcase artists depart around the world on biennial business. I recall Claire Doherty describing biennials as "mere stopovers on the international circuit for the frequent-flyer tribe of artists and art..."



Suitcase artists. You have this aspiration too—to be a suitcase artist?

...cognoscenti [with] little or no lasting impact on the inhabitants or on the cultural life of their host



Maybe you should do something about being a suitcase artist.

Hmm, not a bad idea

Between functional object and ready-made, between emancipation-from-use and emancipation-in-use, the suitcase has a privileged place in the history of art production.



Duchamp's *Boite-en-valise* epitomizes this special status where container and contents are fused together in affirmation of a technical Modernism of mobility and plenitude.

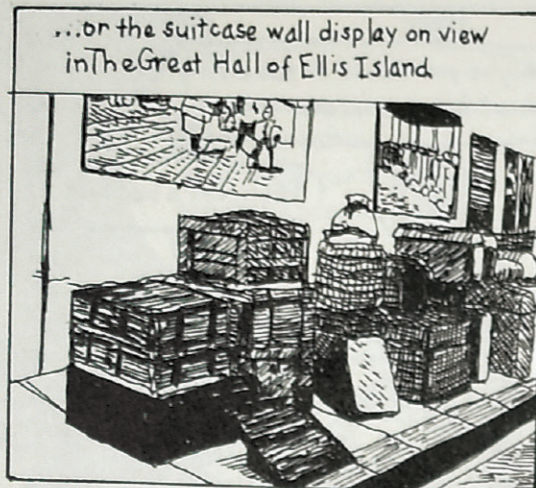


Arman's *poubelles*, according to Benjamin Buchloh, correct the structural paradox inherent in the Duchampian ready-made's singularity by bequeathing the entire galaxy of objects with this status.



But this status is not without its dark side: some of Arman's accumulations resemble other historical markers of modernity—mounds of belongings left at Nazi concentration camps...





...on the suitcase wall display on view in the Great Hall of Ellis Island.

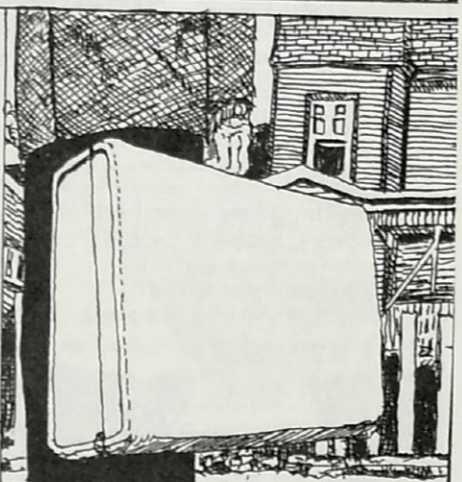
An emphasis on mobility among artists in the post-war era gives further evidence of structural homologies between high art and mass culture. A traveling salesman logic pervades George Maciunas's Flux Kits...



As it does in Robert Filliou's unrealized Legitimate Gallery (a mobile gallery utilizing a wheelbarrow)...



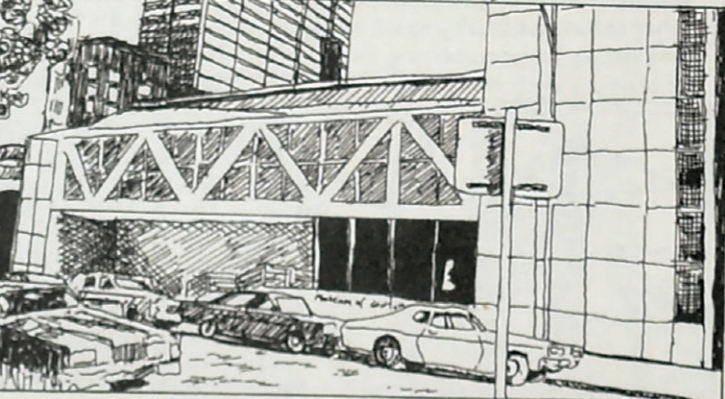
...or the performance Daniel Spoerri gave at the Cologne house of an unnamed architect involving works of art transported from Paris in a suitcase, an account of which appears in Author's Additional Note 111 of entry 62 of his *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*.



Celebrations of mobility have given way recently to the expressions of dislocation, yet internal contradictions persist. Thematic exhibitions such as 2003's "Traces of Friday" at the ICA Philadelphia...



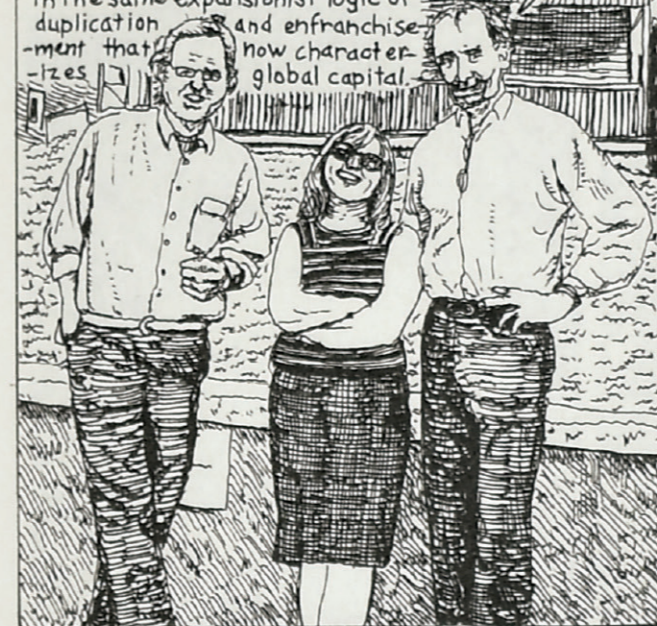
...or last year's "Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourist's Eye" at MCA Chicago aim to critique tourism and mobility while leaving its structural logic unquestioned—fulfilling it, rather, in the choices indicated by its roster of participating artists—Rirkrit Tiravanija, Doug Aitken, Maurizio Cattelan, Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Anish Kapoor, among others.



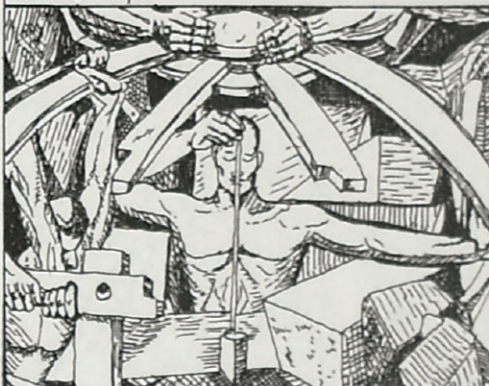
In its attempt to evoke the western subject's sense of placelessness...

to quote NY Times critic Ken Johnson's review of the latter, the artistic sphere gets ensharped in the same expansionist logic of duplication and enfranchisement that now characterizes global capital.

"in a world of advanced transportation and communication, where international forms of culture increasingly prevail over local ones,"



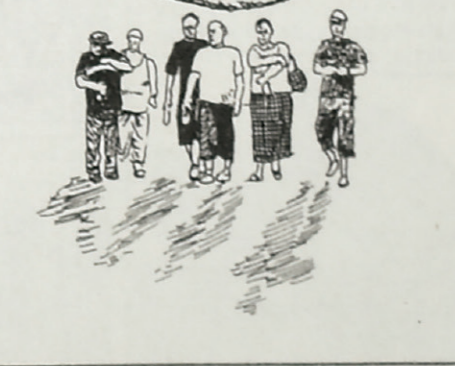
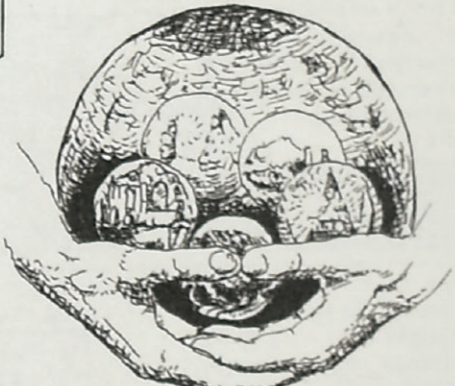
Yet, while a utopian impetus persists, attempts to drag art out of the museums and into everyday life are burdened with a new set of problems, or rather, a new set of structurally determined contexts and contradictions which accompany artistic interventions in "real life".



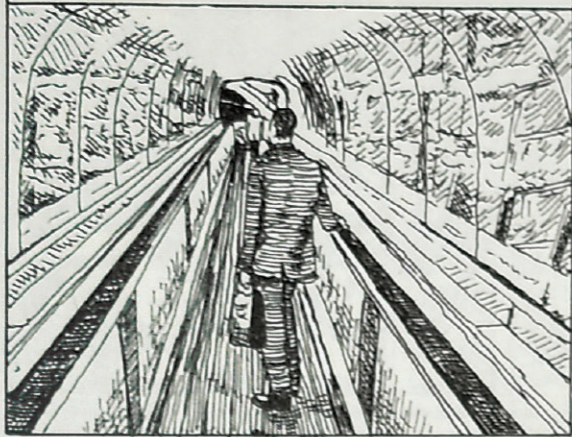
Meanwhile, cultural tourism in its relation to community-based art practice might be thought of as a local consequence of the transition to a privatized, global economy. Museums have "clients" and marketing campaigns...

According to Greg Sholette:

"Museums and foundations now claim to nurture art as social activism, multiculturalism drives the cultural tourism industry and what remains of public funding agencies call on artists to end their isolation and become civil servants. (At the same time, the idea of autonomy implies that art, as well as labor, can stand alone and be self-sufficient from the managerial class)."



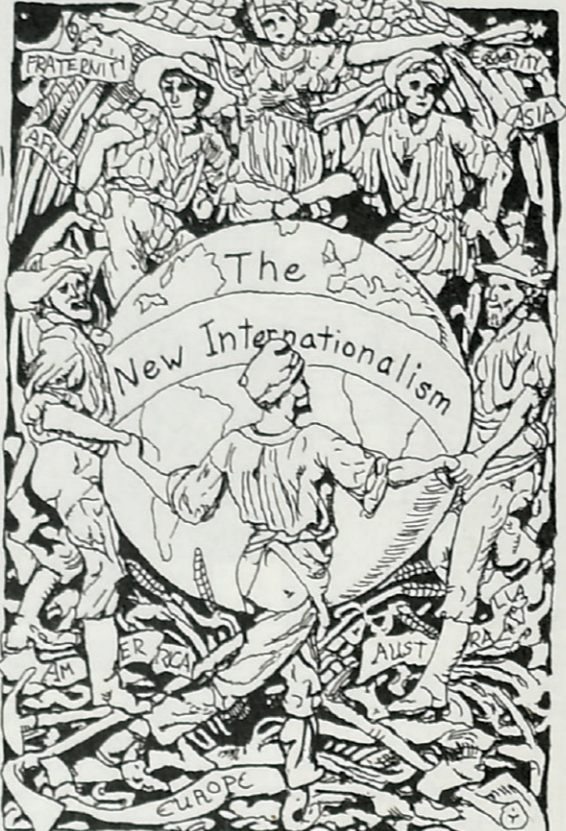
...just as artists and art workers in their modes of operating have increasingly come to resemble business travelers. I recall the curator Jens Hoffman wheeling around a sharp black suitcase at a conference in Lund; he left for the airport shortly after giving his presentation, en route to another conference.



In this international cultural economy the status of "itinerant laborer" is actually something to strive for, both as a supplement to irregular income and for possibilities to execute and show work, etc. When one has a jaundiced view of commercial galleries, it's actually one of the few options available, complicity with certain other dubious political mechanisms aside.



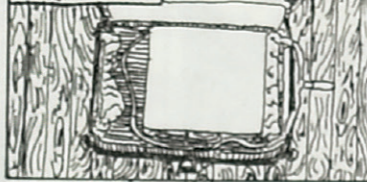
One could argue the developments sketched above are the byproduct of a new internationalism in the arts. But one must ask whom this new Internationalism benefits? Probably different interests are at stake, are in conflict, but does this keep them from being structurally oriented in a similar direction?



With that in mind, when I moved back to Berlin I brought with me a special suitcase to transport my studio, a blue Samsonite hard shell model made of molded plastic.



Within its bowels I can fit a lightbox...



...digital camera, research material, clothes...



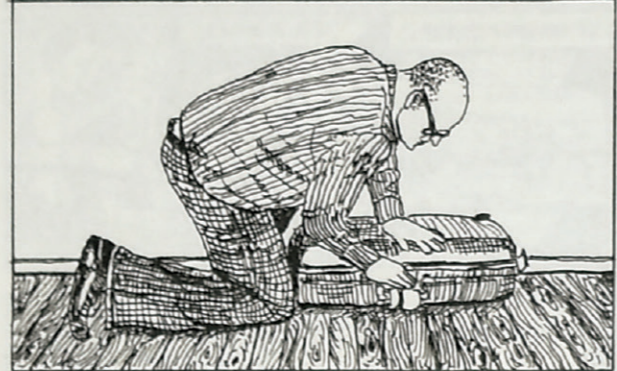
...Canon i80 mini inkjet printer, drawing paper...



...voltage transformer, a bottle of wine as a gift for my host, etc.



My suitcase, my mobile atelier, enables me to engage with all sorts of situations, environments, contexts. In fact, I used it just the other day when, after having on short notice to temporarily vacate my accommodations while under deadline to finish this work, I found myself using it to transport my studio from Wedding to Kreuzberg on the U-bahn.



...But how, if I sincerely want to make "political" art under such circumstances, do I avoid acting like an NGO or otherwise duplicating (acting in concordance with) the prevailing logic of a cultural world that seems increasingly attached to a project of domesticating radical political impulses wrapping and immobilizing them in the swaddling clothes of cultural legitimacy?



The implication of the valise as micro-site, necessary appurtenance for the global artist traveling from one place to another is precisely, to quote Derrida again, that it remains half not there, half not that, enabling artists to retain a certain pragmatic, normative relation to place, and, by extension, to otherness. A vertiginous loss of the markers by which we orient ourselves in relation to a Cartesian grid is kept at bay. My suitcase is a kind of protection from vertigo—a last vestige of home. But it's also, significantly, a reduction of the cargo hold or packing crate.



In Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, his two protagonists return from war to their girlfriends carrying a single suitcase. Promised "all the world's treasures" to fight for the king, the viewer knows it's an empty promise when the term "spoils of war" has been rendered obsolete in the west, at least for the common foot soldier. He might be able to bring home a trophy or two, but not spoils—those are reserved for the people who don't fight in wars.



At first the girls are angry, thinking their boyfriends have been duped, but Ulysses confidently tells them...



In the suitcase we got some surprises.

In their shack, Ulysses and Eugene show the girls all "the world's treasures"-photographs organized by category...



...architectural marvels...



...natural marvels...



...transportation...



...women...



Dizzy with the enormity of their wealth, they toss the photographs in the air.



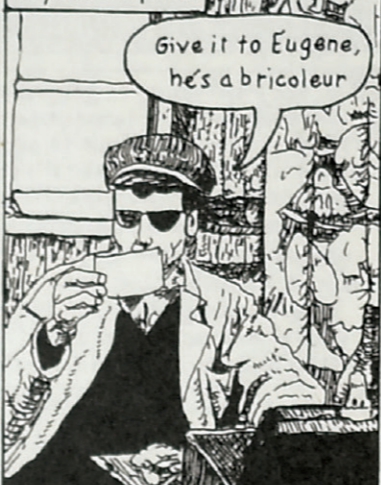
Later, their emotions spent, Venus picks up a photograph from the floor.



Not the Parthenon, It's a ruin!

Ulysses replies:

Give it to Eugene, he's a bricoleur



When we want. These are the deeds.

When do we get the real things?

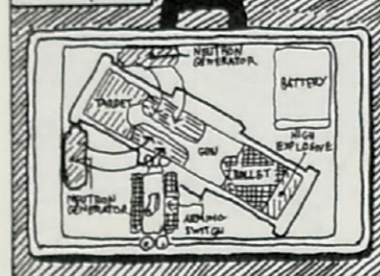
In another context (that of a real war), Goddard made use of the phrase...

"Just an image, not a just image."



...to describe his ambivalent feelings about the efficacy of the photographic image. Can we relate this to when Catherine David says tourism isn't art?

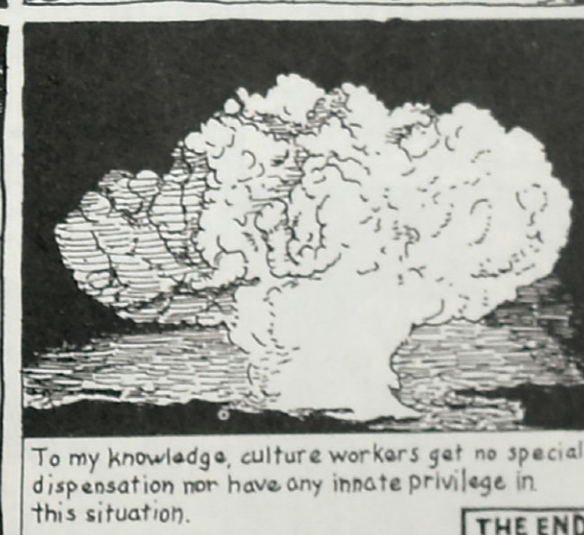
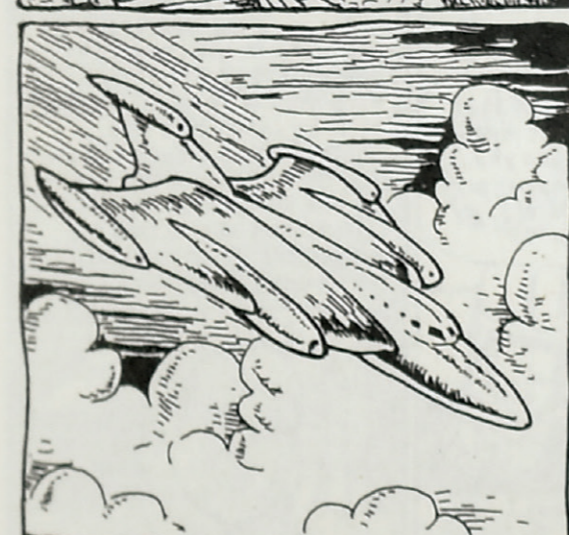
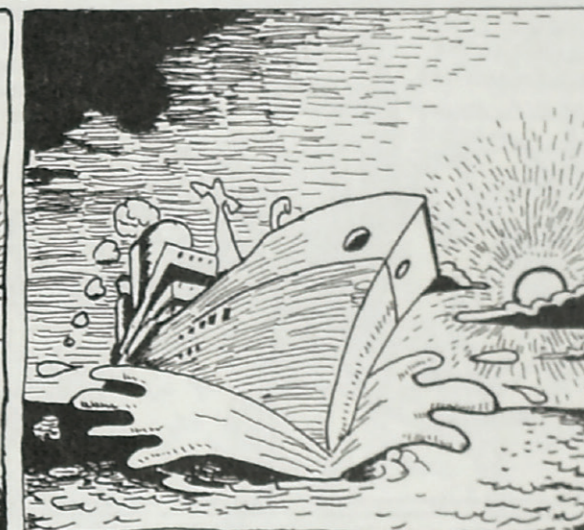
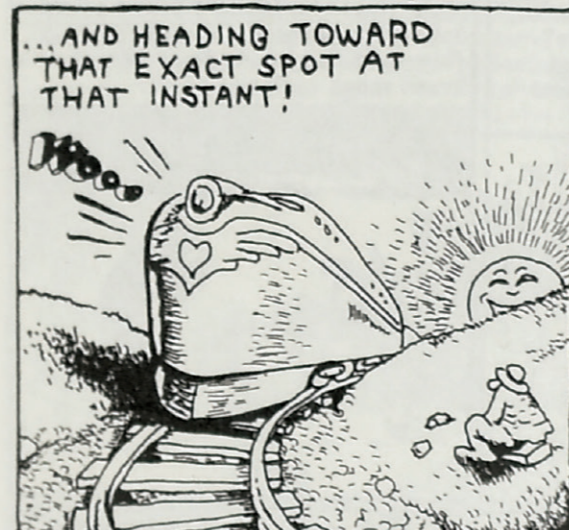
Today, wars of armies have been supplemented by wars of civilians. The civilized world, its systems of transportation, industry, and recreation have been weaponized, their rational exploitation rationally exploited. Images, too, play their part.



To quote Guy Debord:

No less justified, in our opinion, are the actions of those Danish comrades who have resorted to incendiary bombs against the travel agencies that organize tours to Spain, or carried out pirate radio broadcasts warning of the dangers of nuclear arms...it is most encouraging to see the emergence of people whose violence exposes some aspects of the other violence that lies at the foundation of this "humanized" social order—its monopoly of information, for example, or the organized alienation of its tourism and other leisure activities—along with the horrible flip side...Not only is this peace not life, it is a peace built on the threat of atomic death; not only is organized tourism a miserable spectacle that conceals the real countries through which one travels, but the reality of the country thus transformed into a neutral spectacle is Franco's police.

War photographs and photographic wars... Today one might be more likely to consider today's soldier, instead of returning from war carrying a suitcase, going off to war with one.



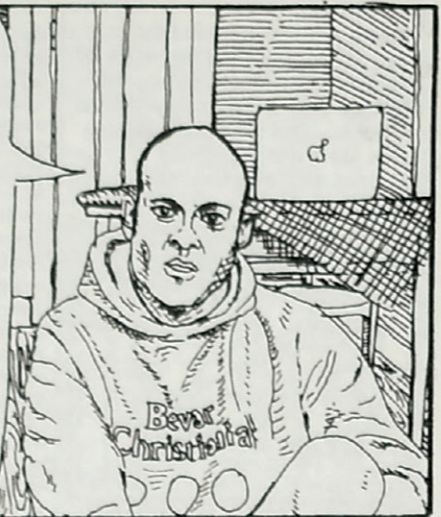
To my knowledge, culture workers get no special dispensation nor have any innate privilege in this situation.

THE END

Urban Flight
Comix Presents
**WHAT IS
THE
MYSTERY?**
A tale in eight parts
This work was made
possible by the
Christiania Researcher
in Residence Program

Michael J. Barts

I came to Christiania in early march, living here for about a month, I observed the daily police patrols, the clandestine hash economy, the nervous uncertainty about the state and city commune's plan to "normalize" Christiania. Was it out of blind principal or cynical self-interest that politicians objected to Christiania? Was there an alternative view? It was the uncertainty about the government's motivation that generated the pervasive paranoia all around. That is how it felt to me.



One day I took a walk on the still-frozen lake.



A swan walked on the ice, taking to flight when I approached. Its wings made an ominous sound echoing off the ice.



Near the little island I found a half-submerged boat flying a Christiania flag—was this an image of Christiania or an image in Christiania?



Soon, I determined to produce a feuilleton for the Ugaspejlet. Perhaps a work based on historical facts, like Chinatown, that, through the codes of the detective genre, tells a true story.



Every detective story needs a secret. Martha Rosler, the American artist, has written:

"The secret is that to know the meaning of a culture you must recognize the limits of your own."

So from the beginning I felt apprehensive about my project, about my capacity to learn the secret of Christiania.

Nevertheless, I surmised there were two secrets: one having to do with how the inhabitants of Christiania envision and manifest an image of their community and another about why the state and municipality were so eager to end Christiania. Maybe the first thing was to find a detective. Then maybe I'd discover the mystery.



WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? Part II



One day I stopped by Emmerik Warburg's house. A young woman was there—Lisa Madsen. Emmerik said to me: "Here's your detective."

Lisa had a detective alter-ego. Previously he had starred in a mystery involving a Madrid woman who Lisa's collaborator thought was in need of a little "excitement." Now she wanted to move into a vacant trailer in Christiania's New Forrest neighborhood, optimistically placing her shingle out front.

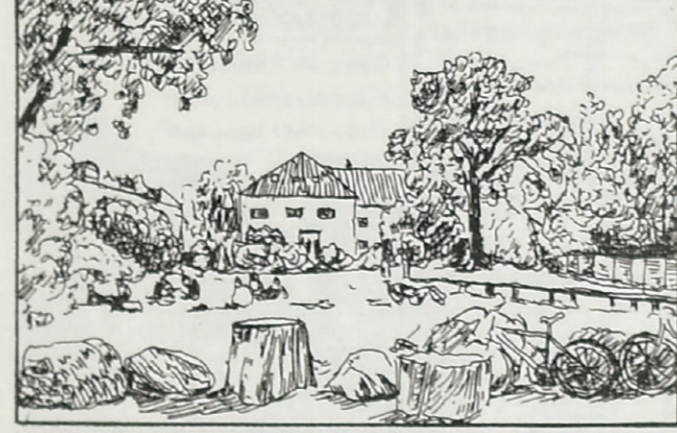


We agreed to collaborate. At our first meeting, Lisa brought up the dream-image idea I was also thinking of.

It's as if Christiania needs to be embodied in a mental image that can be projected onto the physical world. Maybe the conflict with the government is a contest of images. The government wants to impose its own dream-image.



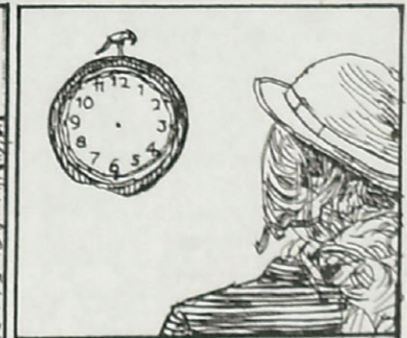
One could describe the image-ideal / dream-image as a representation of utopian counter-ideology. For instance, this photograph from the Christiania website seems to do more than merely illustrate.



Places like Christiania are what Michel Foucault terms "heterotopias", a kind of effectively enacted utopia. They mirror society while retaining images from past utopian aspirations.



Reflections of Christiania can be found in communes, squats, religious communities, hobo camps, and favellas.



There was something else, Lisa thought. If Christiania space was hetero-topic, Christiania time was what Foucault would term "heterochronous". Lisa pictured it as lying at the center of a clock deprived of its hands, rotating imperceptibly on its axis.

This image had something to do with Lisa's ongoing negotiations to move into the vacant trailer.



WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? Part III: After talking about Christiania in those speculative terms, I began sketching out my idea for a detective story.

Someone disappears and when they show up again, they're changed. They've become an agitator for the government or something... brainwashed.

How does the detective get involved? Who hires him?



Someone hiring the detective is only a pretext. Philip Marlowe is always "hired", but he ends up staying on the case for personal reasons. But anyway, I have an image of the detective lying in bed thinking when there's a knock on the door. A friend of the missing person has come asking for help.



So this guy has been brain-washed and is taking orders from the government, I don't know what he can do. It's not so easy to manipulate a community of anarchists. What's he supposed to accomplish?



Well, people in the government want to create a Christiania-land, a historical re-enactment where everyone is playing the role of hippies living in a free community. Tourists would be charged admission.

And build a big parking lot for tour buses and cars.

Maybe a resort hotel and more shopping... boutiques.



Craft workshops and a big water slide on the lake. So the brainwashed guy is trying to work to get the hold-outs to agree to this?

Something like that.

People here would never go for it.



But didn't you tell me there were different camps—some who want to cooperate with the government and others who think any compromise is unacceptable?

Okay, so, the detective discovers this plot. Then what happens?



I was thinking the kidnaped guy comes on like he's had a religious awakening. He reappears on Easter Sunday and starts preaching about Christiania-land.

And then?

I don't know. It's unclear what should happen.



You need to meet Joker. He's got a lot of stories... a very vivid imagination. I think he'd be able to help us.



WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? Part IV

Well, Lisa and I didn't make it to Joker's right away. Our visit kept getting postponed. In the meantime, we decided to proceed with the detective story without quite knowing where it would go.



This is the only scene we shot:

April 23, 2006, Christiania, Denmark. Police patrol all day, playing cat-and-mouse with the dealers who loiter around oil barrel fires. That's not a prosecutable offense.



Folks are getting edgy. The dream-image of Christiania is fraying. What was that image anyway? Summer, people laying in the grass... someone playing acoustic guitar. This image is itself a manifesto for living. It seems so remote right now.



The government's stated intention to "normalize" us is a phantom haunting every Christianite's dream-image. What are they planning? To redevelop Christiania? To plough it under and build condominiums? Incredible, this impulse to destroy something if it doesn't conform to the logic of capitalism.



When I'm honest with myself, I ask what is more damaging, the threat from outside, or the paranoia it creates? For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction—that's Newtonian physics. But something else is going on here that relates more to quantum physics.

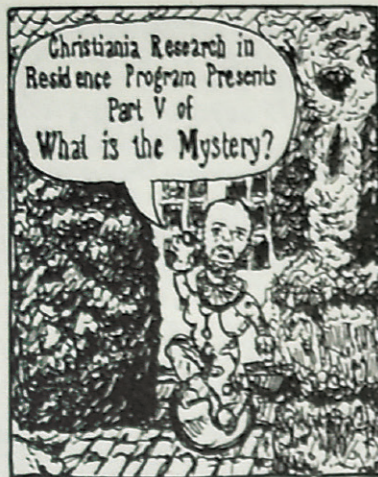


Maybe it has something to do with the rumour I keep hearing about a flying saucer underneath Christiania.



Christiania-time: a clock without numbers or hands; something continues to spin, but not so you'd notice. What the government, real estate developers, and all the people with a "vested" interest want to do is to replace the numbers and hands on all the clocks of Christiania...



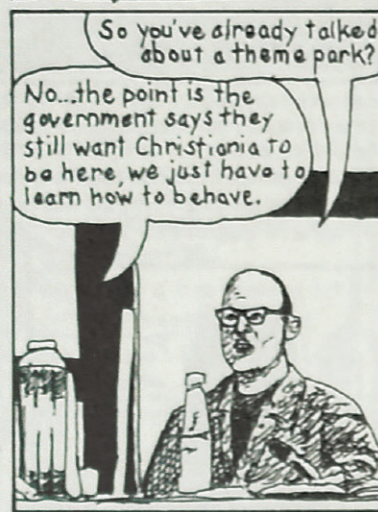


Finally, Lisa and I were able to make an appointment with Joker.

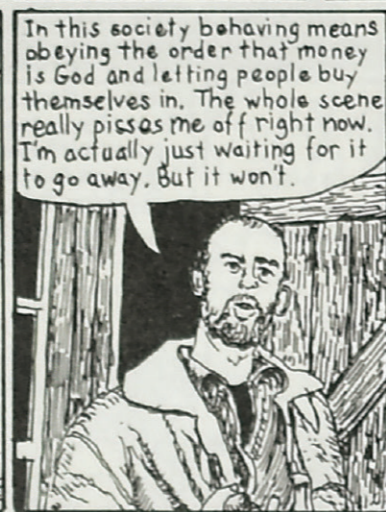


I explained the train of events and the main plot device—turning Christiania into a theme park—the only convincing thing I thought we'd come up with. Joker was skeptical.

We had this idea for making a normalization week where we would all dress up in business clothes and walk around with briefcases and laptops.



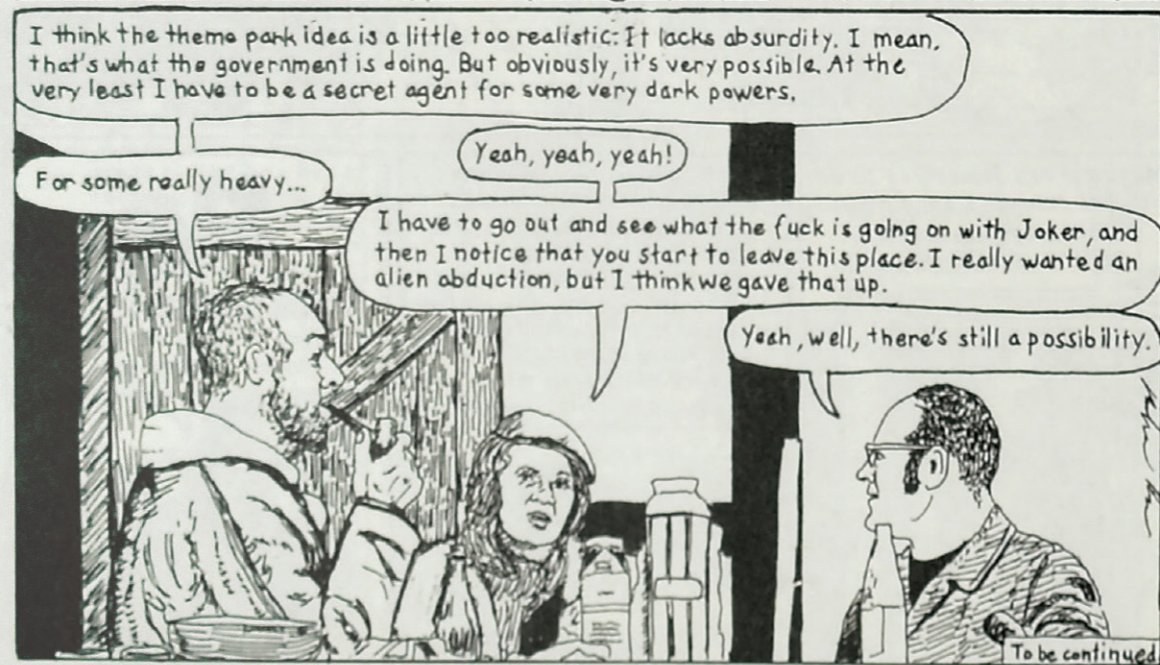
So you've already talked about a theme park?
No...the point is the government says they still want Christiania to be here, we just have to learn how to behave.



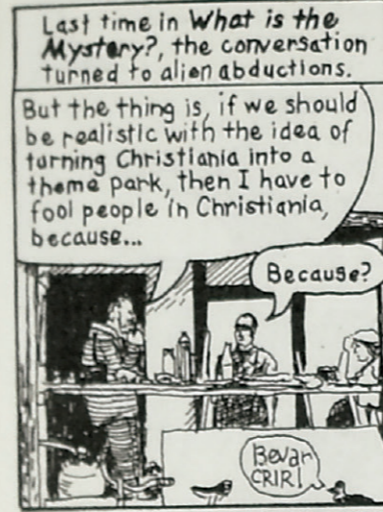
In this society behaving means obeying the order that money is God and letting people buy themselves in. The whole scene really pisses me off right now. I'm actually just waiting for it to go away. But it won't.



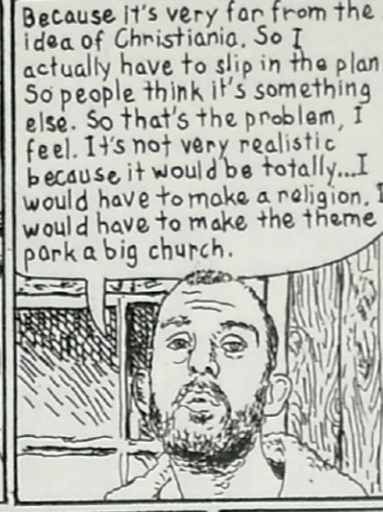
Will it go away?
No, it's like hangovers. You can forget them for a while but they keep popping up.
Hangovers go away.



I think the theme park idea is a little too realistic: It lacks absurdity. I mean, that's what the government is doing. But obviously, it's very possible. At the very least I have to be a secret agent for some very dark powers.
Yeah, yeah, yeah!
For some really heavy...
I have to go out and see what the fuck is going on with Joker, and then I notice that you start to leave this place. I really wanted an alien abduction, but I think we gave that up.
Yeah, well, there's still a possibility.
To be continued



Last time in *What is the Mystery?*, the conversation turned to alien abductions. But the thing is, if we should be realistic with the idea of turning Christiania into a theme park, then I have to fool people in Christiania, because...
Because?



Because it's very far from the idea of Christiania. So I actually have to slip in the plan. So people think it's something else. So that's the problem, I feel. It's not very realistic because it would be totally...I would have to make a religion. I would have to make the theme park a big church.



In the comic, how would it be possible to change the minds of Christiania? You would have to start putting chips or something in people's brains, or...I mean, what happened to you? That's what I don't know. I don't know if Michael knows what happened exactly.



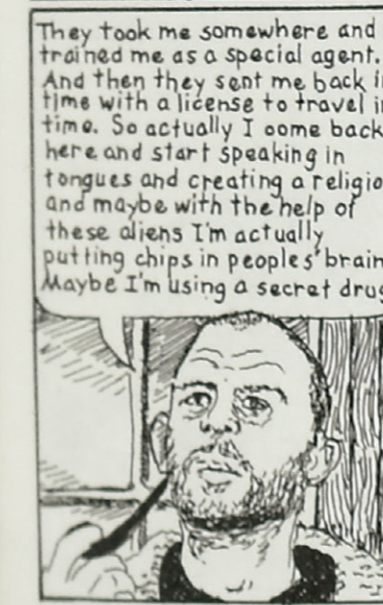
What's wrong with the alien abduction?
I like weird stuff.
Yeah, exactly. It's too realistic man, it's fuckin' social realism and it went out of fashion in '79, you know. We need some aliens and some time machines.



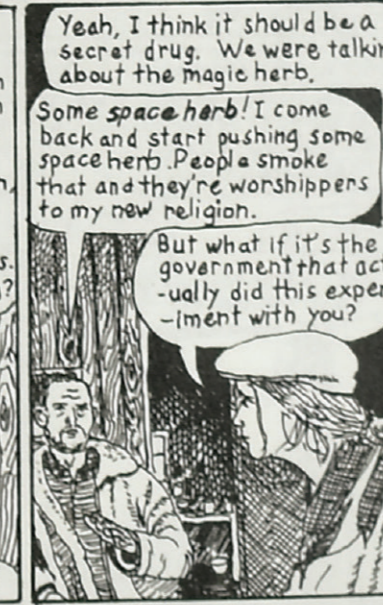
Well, the time machine isn't so out of the question. But I'm interested in the fact that you couldn't really fool people in Christiania.



The thing is: I should disappear, yeah? I should disappear. My age now...I'm 40 now. I should disappear and then I should return as fuckin' twenty years old. What actually happened was I was abducted by some aliens...
Or the government...



They took me somewhere and trained me as a special agent. And then they sent me back in time with a license to travel in time. So actually I come back here and start speaking in tongues and creating a religion, and maybe with the help of these aliens I'm actually putting chips in people's brains. Maybe I'm using a secret drug?



Yeah, I think it should be a secret drug. We were talking about the magic herb.
Some space herb! I come back and start pushing some space herb. People smoke that and they're worshippers to my new religion.
But what if it's the government that actually did this experiment with you?



But the governments are just operators of this...
The aliens! They're actually controlling taking over Christiania, making it into this major...
No, Christiania is the head of taking over the whole world.
To be continued

In part 6 of *What is the Mystery?* The conversation had turned towards conspiracy theories and "space herb".

Christiania is the head of taking over the whole world!

Yes, of course. Why?



Because it's really shitty on this planet. Because there's war everywhere. Because there's pollution. Everybody wants a solution. And I get with the power of the aliens and the space herb...

You don't know. There have to be some questions. There has to be some mystery. Maybe I'm a good guy. Maybe I'm a bad guy...

I think I'm a good guy.

Ah, you're a good guy actually.

Ah, but you're not.



...you don't know. But it's a movement that is spreading: the Church of the Space Herb.

What if you come out of one of these tunnels? You disappear and you come out of one of these tunnels and you're twenty years younger. There's some kind of life-rejuvenating mustard gas that the military was working on many years ago.



You can offer it to aging influential people to come and stay at the health resort of Christiania and get young again.

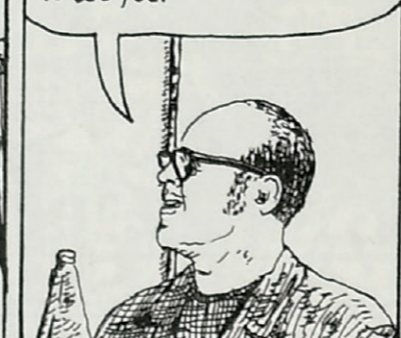
I can offer people youth again.

Exactly

In your tunnel where there is a lab under the ground. Michael, there's a lab in the tunnel!



There's actually a UFO base underneath Christiania where the aliens are studying Christiania for many, many years and they actually have infiltrators all over. And you discover them but they decide to use you.



Yeah, but maybe this whole galaxy, this whole universe is actually... I mean, what if there's a parallel dimension where we are actually microcosmos? What if, this world is actually the creation of aliens in another dimension? Our whole universe is just a little experiment. They have a big lab with a lot of experiments.

Maybe it's too big?

Hmm.

But you have to look at everything as a whole, everything as interconnected.

That's the balance between social realism and fantasy.



You have to see the connections, and... I'm not... oh fuck! But what do they want to gain, those aliens?



WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? PART 8 Brought to you by the CHRISTIANIA RESEARCHER IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Following this talk with Joker, I was feeling dispirited by what I realized was the general Christiania preoccupation with conspiracy theories.



On the way home Lisa and I met a Christianite who began talking about 9/11. He didn't want his picture taken, but he let me photograph his shoe.

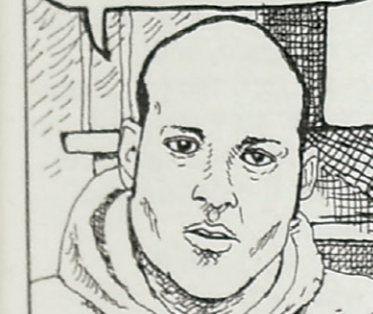


The US Government blew up the World Trade Center. They planted explosives up and down the towers. Google "scholars for 9/11 truth" or "information clearing house" if you don't believe me.

Frederick Jameson, the American academic once said: "Conspiracy theories are the poor man's cognitive mapping." He meant the task of analyzing how systems—like capital—work is transformed by conspiracy theorists into a transcendent quest for culpability.



Sure, individuals are active agents often working in concert. And yes, people in power then conceal their bad deeds. But Jameson would suggest they are still ciphers: the system itself codes and directs peoples' actions.



A few days later, Lisa and I were sitting in the residency apartment, I was thinking to myself:

I have to figure out how to end this.

Michael, I quit at being your detective.

Okay. But maybe you'd like to explain why yourself? I'm tired of putting words in your mouth.



We've asked, what is the dream image of Christiania? Well, this place is like a seed. The mystery is how to cultivate and nurture the seed. It's an individual task for all of us here. Some people will tend the seed, some will live off the seed, and others will block out the sunlight the young Christiania sapling needs for its growth...

...and some will gather Christiania seeds and cultivate them elsewhere. There are roughly 800 people here and 800 ways to cultivate the seed. Lately, our focus has been on the strong wind blowing into town from Christiansborg, and we've neglected the flower.



The facts are obvious: our garden is threatened on all sides. No one here can deny there are problems in Christiania. But does our attempt to live by our own rules mean we have to resolve every contradiction before we're allowed to exist?



In the end, there's no mystery, only different ways to frame the situation. In my opinion you should stick to the storyline about Joker and the aliens in their subterranean lab. Now there's some good plant food!



THE END

Tramps Like Us

Collective Statement: A Day at the Riots or The Social Democratic Carnavalesque

WE CAME TO COPENHAGEN THE WEEK AFTER THE RIOTS. A HOLIDAY MOOD COVERED THE CITY¹ AS IF THE ILLUSION WHICH ORDINARILY GLOSSES OVER THE EMPTINESS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE² HAD BEEN DISPELLED.³ AROUND THE WALKING STREETS, WE NOTICED THIS RIGHT AWAY.⁴



ON SATURDAY WE ATTENDED THE PROTEST MARCH AND RALLY AT SANKT HANS TORV. FROM THERE WE CONTINUED TO A TALK AT OVERGADEN ON "NEW INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES". THIS PASSAGE BROUGHT INTO FOCUS SOME QUESTIONS WE HAVE ABOUT CULTURE.⁵



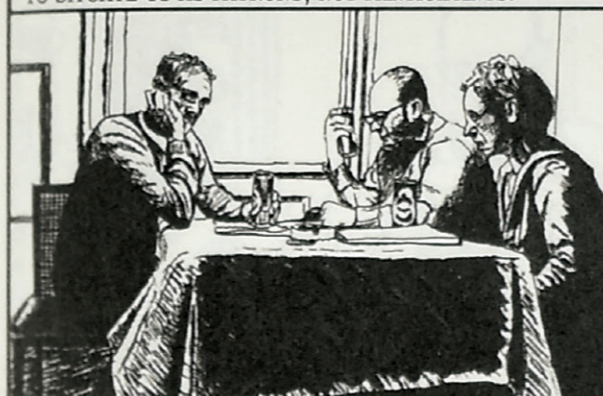
Footnotes

1. It made us think of Ulrike Meinhof's saying, "to set fire to one car is a crime, to burn a hundred is political action."
2. The glorious oppression of real needs.
3. Even the omnipresent Politi wagons couldn't dispel the feeling, though later the police presence came to assume a more prominent position in our recollections.
4. We're forever discovering the same thing: The totality of capital conceals the impoverishment of daily life behind ideological structures, giving the everyday a smooth appearance. Ungdomshuset and Christiania, on the contrary, are 'rough', a synoptic fissure in the smooth totality of capital. Far from its much touted flexibility, capital seems signally incapable of tolerating difference*. Otherwise why would a derelict labor hall, or the squatting of a former military base otherwise be met with such persistent hostility from the "establishment", to use an antiquated term?
*In Holland there are low-level riots right now. News coverage here tries to isolate protesters, turning them into the "other". Government proposals circulating call for the authority to arrest people on the pretext of planning "something criminal". We were reassured** that in Copenhagen the government response to the rioting is viewed by many as symptomatic: one example of a larger tendency towards the three

- R's—reification, rationalization, and recuperation.
** Native informants later corrected this impression, calling our attention to the negativity of the television coverage, which we, ignorant of the Danish language, had neglected to watch***.
*** News coverage outside Denmark, had also focused on the violence, and uniformly mischaracterized the protesters as "squatters", but were we wrong for detecting in the news readers a subdued note of appreciation for the daring and ingenuity of the rioter?
5. Like: when considering socially engaged practice, what is the real nature of the art institution in social terms? We cannot deny that art has the potential to generate critical thought and create new audiences. Nevertheless, in many States where institution of the three R's occurred earlier and in a more thoroughgoing manner, the functioning of the art institution has been well policed to guard against its assuming real political agency. This is not to deny that in certain institutions critical voices have operated, but to remark on how brief the tenure of such voices frequently is.
6. testified by the influx of activists who participated in the street battles and protests*, or the many international demonstrations of solidarity, such as the group of youths in Lyon who, after occupying the Danish consulate, sent

(Domestic version)

UNGDOMSHUSET HAD A PRESENCE IN ITS USERS' LIVES, INCORPORATING REAL FUNCTIONS AND SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE.⁶ HOW MANY OF US FEEL INVESTED IN ART INSTITUTIONS TO SUCH AN EXTENT?⁸ THEY TEND TO SITUATE US AS PATRONS, NOT PARTICIPANTS.



WE ASPIRE TO A KIND OF INSTITUTION THAT WOULD SERVE AS SUCH AN AFFECTIVE SITE? PERHAPS IN SCANDINAVIA THEY STILL EXIST. IF SO, WE WONDER HOW MUCH LONGER THE STATE WILL TOLERATE THEM!¹⁰



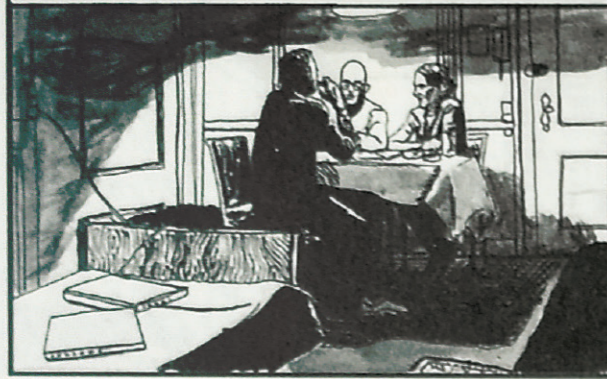
- dozens of faxes to the offices of Copenhagen Kommune urging a stop to eviction proceedings.
*On the same Sunday we left Copenhagen, a week following the riots, police raided three squats in Amsterdam, all of which were found denuded of occupants, who, we suspect, were at the time ensconced in Danish jail cells as a result of the indiscriminate police sweeps**.
**One native informant spoke of an acquaintance, a college professor, who having been arrested at a demonstration, was released (while his less respectable -appearing co-defendants were incarcerated), only to be re-arrested later at his residence, in front—as our native informant emphasized—of his wife and child, after a judge had reviewed his case and determined he should have been remanded to police custody.
7. The quickest route to anomie, is by removing the markers which people use to symbolically orient themselves in urban space—near Ungdomshuset, away from Charlottenborg. The loss of such markers, like the erasure or surveillance of public space itself, is part of a program which Henri Lefebvre might describe as the withdrawal of the "right to the city".
8. Ungdomshuset would fulfill the criteria Victor Turner set out for a liminal site, or what Foucault termed "heterotopia"—a site at the margins that reflects social

- relations from the perspective of a carnivalesque exteriority. One can only infrequently describe institutional art space in similar terms.
9. In other words, one which functions as a node of resistance.
10. With regard to individual artists, the arm's length principle may still be operative. State funding still enables artists to produce critical work without fear of government censure*. Whether this extends to Danish institutions, we aren't qualified to say.
* This may take some of the sting out of being neutralized in terms of political agency by a government too philistine to concern itself with thinking about art or artists, except how their existence might be better rationalized. A lot of artists we know question why they still live in Copenhagen, precisely because one lives in society and not simply an "artworld". We tell them, it's alright, we understand.

Tramps Like Us

Collective Statement: A Day at the Riots or The Social Democratic Carnavalesque

WE CAME TO COPENHAGEN THE WEEK AFTER THE RIOTS^{1,2}. A HOLIDAY MOOD COVERED THE CITY, AS IF THE ILLUSION WHICH ORDINARILY GLOSSES OVER THE EMPTINESS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE³ HAD BEEN DISPELLED. AROUND THE WALKING STREETS, WE NOTICED THIS RIGHT AWAY!⁴



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(Export version)

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Footnotes

1. For a brief history of Ungdomshuset, please go to: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ungdomshuset

2. We were reassured by what we took as a pervasive sympathy for the rioters*. The severity of the government response was viewed as symptomatic, one example of a larger tendency towards the three R's—reification, rationalization, and recuperation.

* That this impression resulted from casual conversation with persons who might not be considered representative of popular sentiment indicates the essentially unscientific character of this assertion**.

** Other native informants later corrected this impression, calling our attention to the negativity of the television coverage, which we, ignorant of the Danish language, had not bothered to watch?. The true public opinion is probably somewhere in between, that is to say, polarized, which is also to say, typically Danish at present***.

*** News coverage outside Denmark also focused on the violence, and uniformly mischaracterized the protesters as "squatters", but were we wrong for detecting in the news readers a subdued note of appreciation for the daring and ingenuity**** of the rioters who skillfully eluded the police, attacking and then melting away into the fabric of urban space/time?

**** Also their vivacity: to the extent that Copenhagen Kommune was forced to loan police vehicles from both Sweden and the Netherlands in an attempt to contain the rioting—a fact which caused the police and municipality some embarrassment*****.

***** How is it that a music venue/activist center could cause such a commotion? This fact should alert us to our own impoverishment within the limits capital sets. Ruminating on such thoughts unearthed Ulrike Meinhof's saying, "to set fire to one car is a crime, to burn a hundred is political action."

3. The glorious oppression of real needs.
4. This insight did not come without a price. Over 700 arrests occurred over the weekend. New terror laws allowed police sweeps to arrest foreigners not carrying their passports, or Danish youth of a certain profile. People were arrested "on their way to the supermarket", as one friend put it*, for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or wearing the wrong clothes.

* Another native informant spoke of an acquaintance, a college professor, who having been arrested at a demonstration, was released (while his less respectable-appearing co-defendants were incarcerated), only to be re-arrested later at his residence, in front—as our native informant emphasized—of his wife and child, after a judge had reviewed his case and determined he should have remained in police custody**.

** This is to say nothing of the private residences and offices subjected to police searches, executed with great robustness, such as the one at the offices of TV TV during which police felt compelled to break down every door they encountered.

5. A convenient and frequently used site for rallies and marches to either assemble or disperse, especially that week, where daily protest marches were being held.

6. Overgaden, an artist-run space in the midst of celebrating its 21st anniversary with a special 3-week exhibition and regular schedule of events examining the nature of the art institution as such, decorously ignored events without. One local artist, while discussing this phenomenon, expressed the opinion that it wasn't that Overgaden had excluded people but instead had confined itself.

7. Like: when considering socially engaged practice, what is the real nature of the art institution in social terms? We cannot deny that art has the potential to generate critical thought and create new audiences. Nevertheless, in many States where institution of the three R's occurred earlier and in a more thoroughgoing manner, the functioning of the art institution has been well policed to guard against its assuming real political agency. This is not to deny that in certain institutions critical voices have operated, but to remark on how brief the tenure of such voices frequently is.

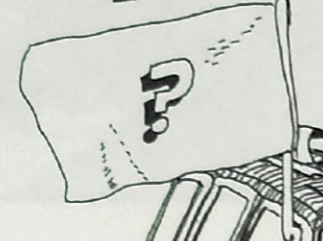
8. Ungdomshuset would fulfill the criteria Victor Turner set out for a liminal site, or what Foucault termed a "heterotopia"—a site at the margins that reflects social relations from the perspective of a carnivalesque exteriority, and from this position endows social interaction with a loaded, symbolic potential.

9. In other words, one which functions as a node of resistance.


10. What is the status of cultural policy in Denmark? Tone Hansen, in "European Cultural Policies 2015" states that the future of cultural policy in Norway (and one can infer Denmark following a similar course) will consist of "More state subsidies invested in art. The funds are to a greater degree employed through means such as the *Forum for Culture and Business*, and directly politically initiated and temporary projects...The arm's length principle has become a two-edged problem for institutions and artists, because, paradoxically independence is offered in return for obeying orders. Rather than letting go its institutions, the State* is more determined in its use of them."

* "Every actual State is corrupt." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

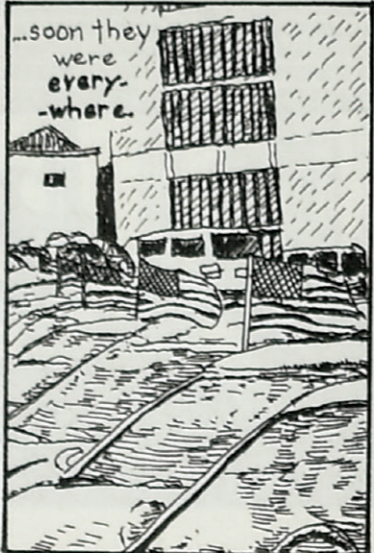
MICHAEL BAERS
-IN-
**A HOME FOR
LOST IDEAS**




After 9/11, people began affixing small American flags to the windows of their cars. The perverse logic of using cars as vehicles (no pun intended) for patriotic display was proved by their ubiquity...



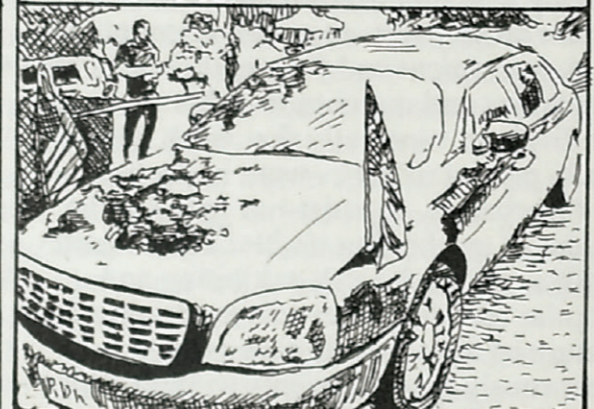
...soon they were every-where.



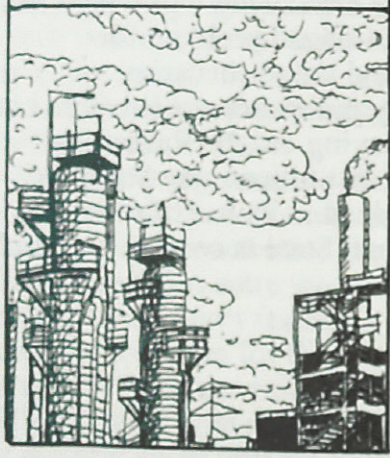
Driving on the freeway was like participating in a parade, surrounded by flapping banners of seemingly identical make.



Whether regarded as hysterical defense or collective—if misplaced—empathy, either interpretation conceals the real reason why people from the Middle East attacked the US.



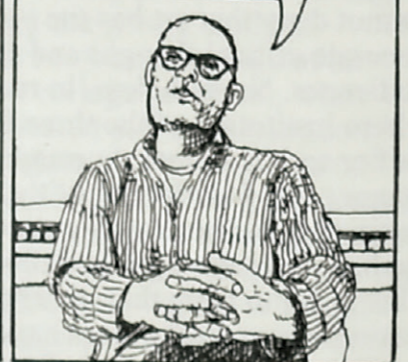
US support of oppressive Arab regimes to guarantee a dependable supply of crude oil...



...oh yeah, and Israel, too. That's not un-important.



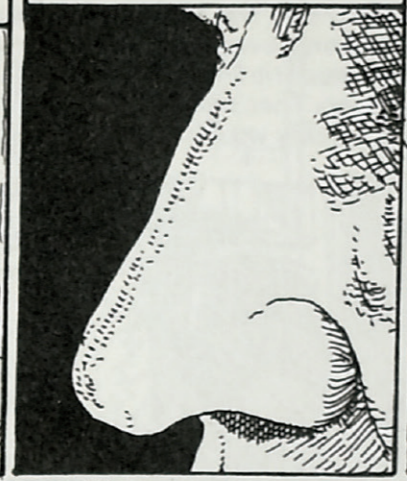
In the months leading up to the Iraqi invasion, car-flags ceased to appear to me as merely perverse. Their affect was more alarming now, sinister even.



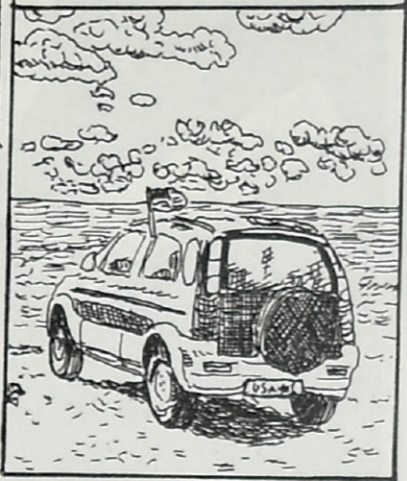
No less for Iraqi civilians, had they seen images of car-flags on television.




America was being led into war by its collective nose...



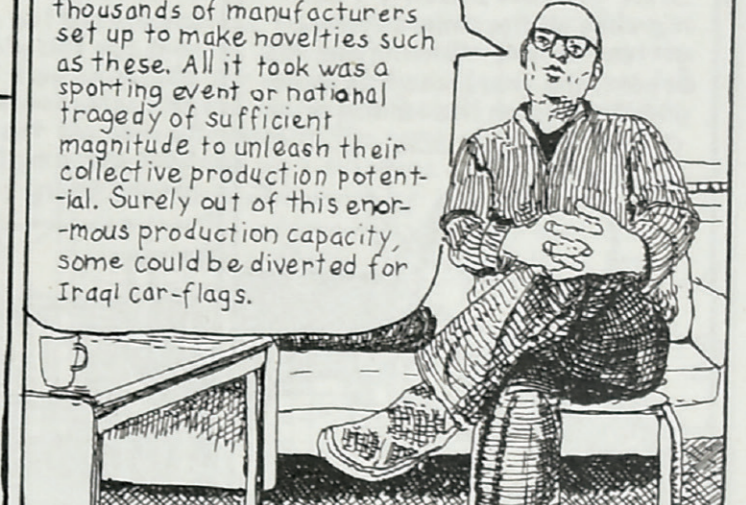
...going along flying a flag jauntily from its car window.



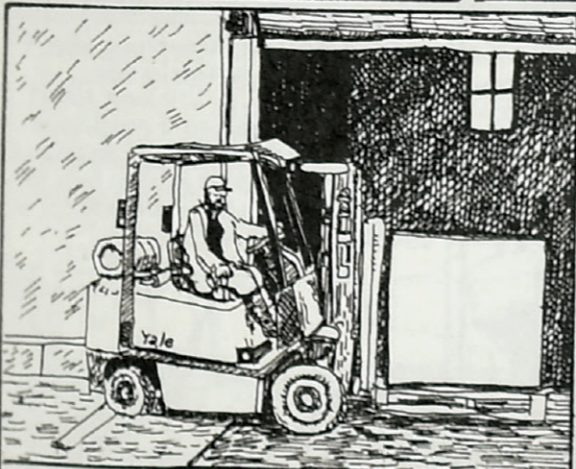
Around this time, I had the idea of manufacturing car-flags bearing the Iraqi flag and distributing them through a gallery.



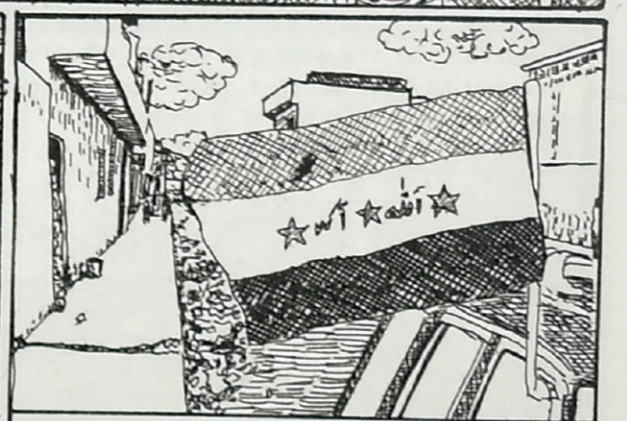
It seemed as if there were thousands of manufacturers set up to make novelties such as these. All it took was a sporting event or national tragedy of sufficient magnitude to unleash their collective production potential. Surely out of this enormous production capacity, some could be diverted for Iraqi car-flags.

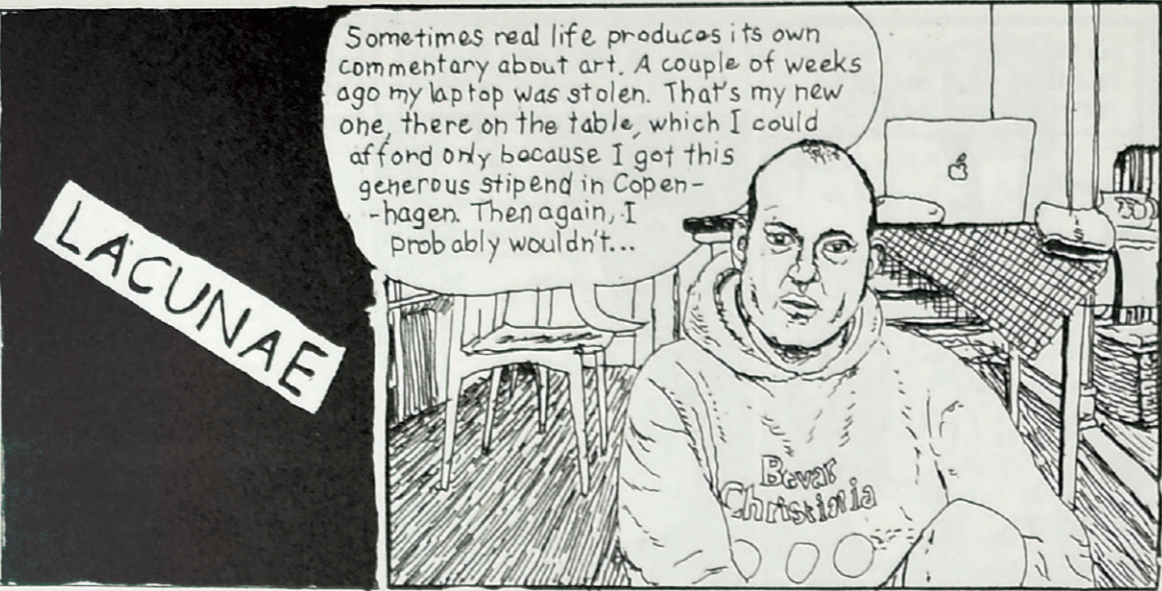


In my fantasy, I imagined the flags, a thousand say, fork-lifted right into the gallery in an oversized cardboard box, on a wood pallette.



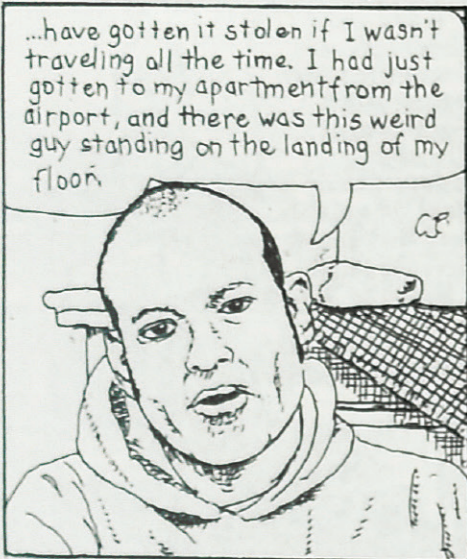
Once distributed, these Iraqi flags could fly against opposing traffic, as if jousting with American flags, or moving alongside, racing one another, actualizing the conflict in concrete terms—or concretely symbolic terms—if one can say that.



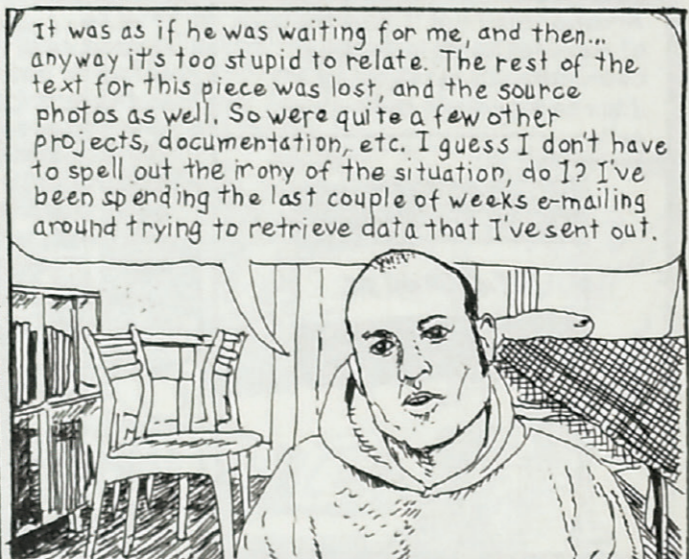


Sometimes real life produces its own commentary about art. A couple of weeks ago my laptop was stolen. That's my new one, there on the table, which I could afford only because I got this generous stipend in Copenhagen. Then again, I probably wouldn't...

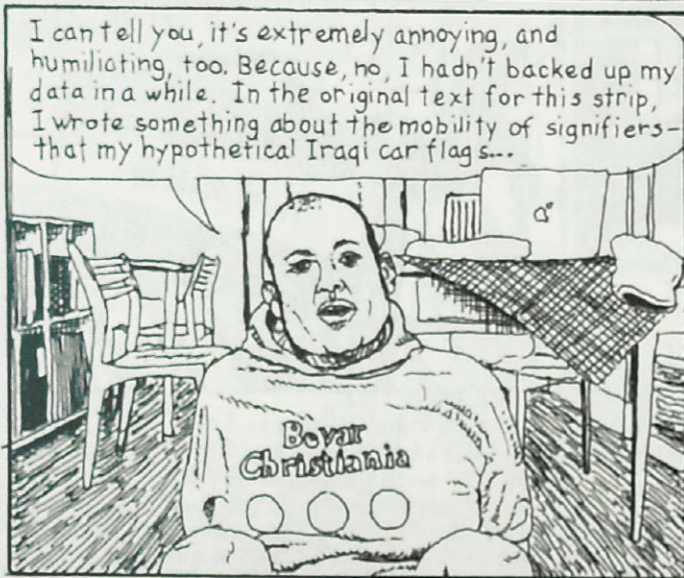
LACUNAE



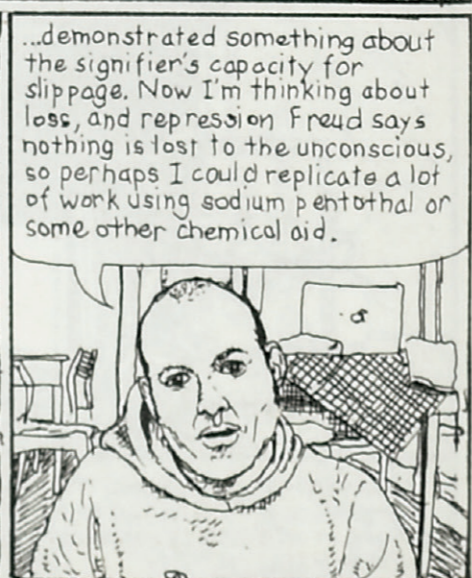
...have gotten it stolen if I wasn't traveling all the time. I had just gotten to my apartment from the airport, and there was this weird guy standing on the landing of my floor.



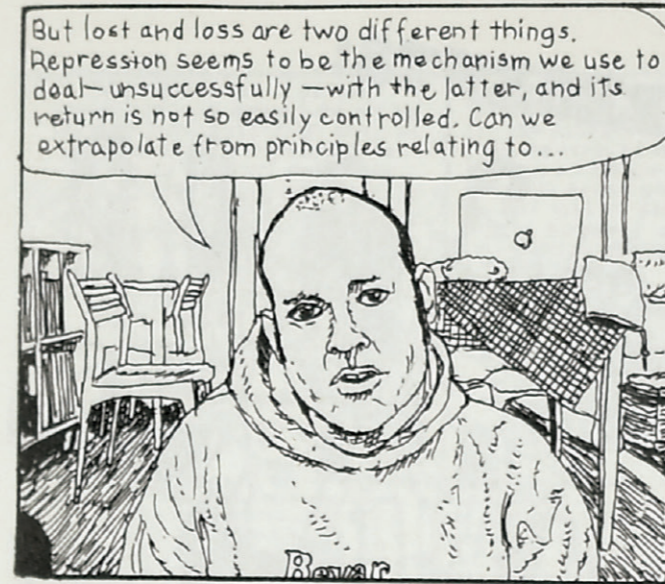
It was as if he was waiting for me, and then... anyway it's too stupid to relate. The rest of the text for this piece was lost, and the source photos as well. So were quite a few other projects, documentation, etc. I guess I don't have to spell out the irony of the situation, do I? I've been spending the last couple of weeks e-mailing around trying to retrieve data that I've sent out.



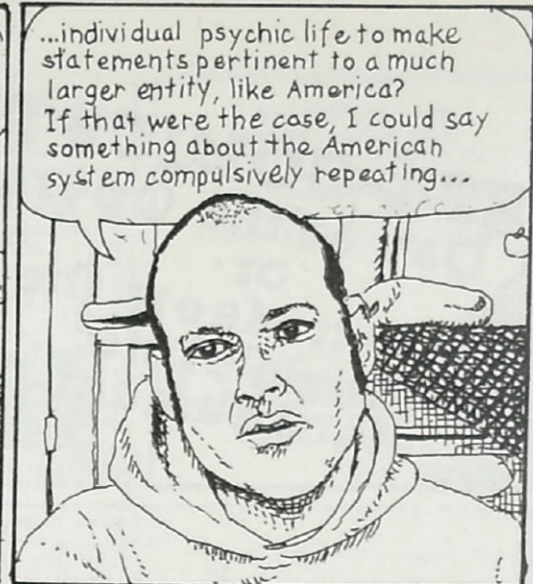
I can tell you, it's extremely annoying, and humiliating, too. Because, no, I hadn't backed up my data in a while. In the original text for this strip, I wrote something about the mobility of signifiers—that my hypothetical Iraqi car flags...



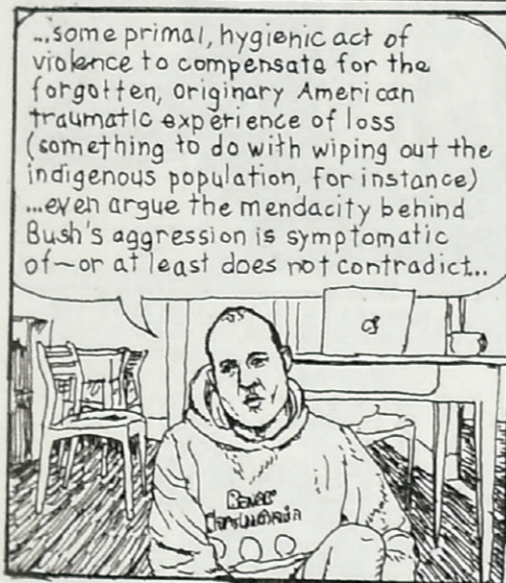
...demonstrated something about the signifier's capacity for slippage. Now I'm thinking about loss, and repression Freud says nothing is lost to the unconscious, so perhaps I could replicate a lot of work using sodium pentothal or some other chemical aid.



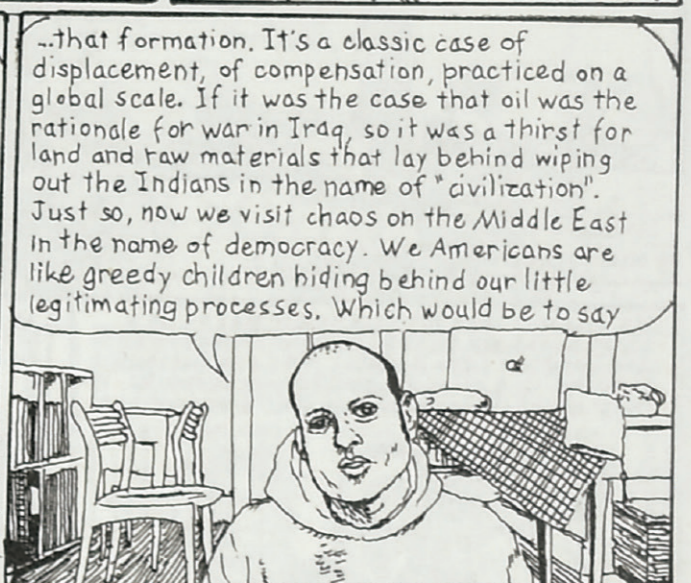
But lost and loss are two different things. Repression seems to be the mechanism we use to deal—unsuccessfully—with the latter, and its return is not so easily controlled. Can we extrapolate from principles relating to...



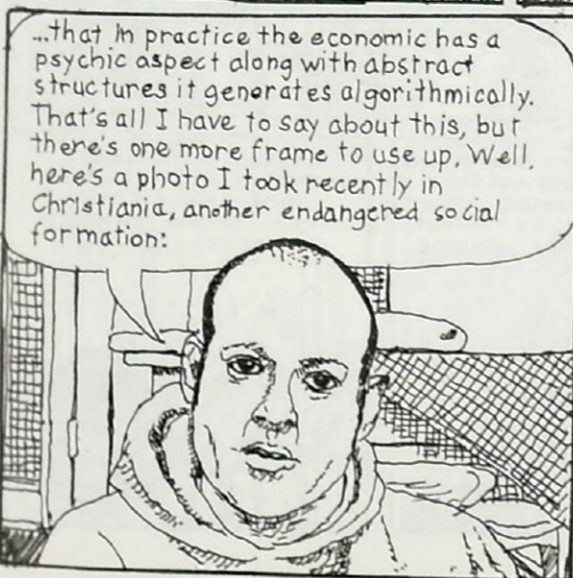
...individual psychic life to make statements pertinent to a much larger entity, like America? If that were the case, I could say something about the American system compulsively repeating...



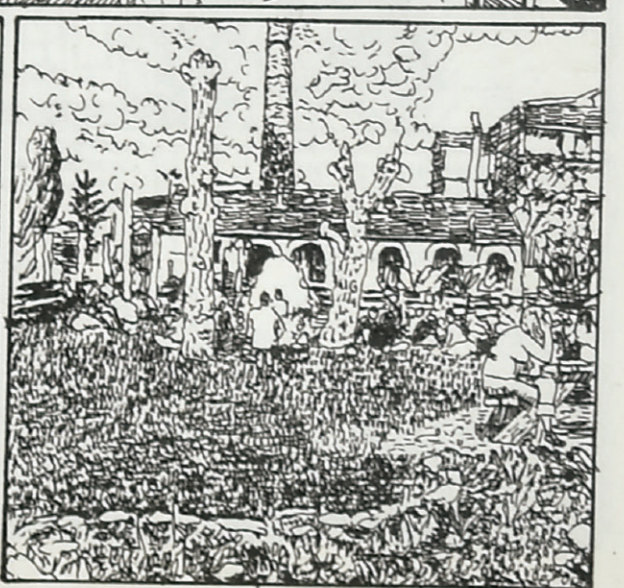
...some primal, hygienic act of violence to compensate for the forgotten, originary American traumatic experience of loss (something to do with wiping out the indigenous population, for instance) ...even argue the mendacity behind Bush's aggression is symptomatic of—or at least does not contradict...



...that formation. It's a classic case of displacement, of compensation, practiced on a global scale. If it was the case that oil was the rationale for war in Iraq, so it was a thirst for land and raw materials that lay behind wiping out the Indians in the name of "civilization". Just so, now we visit chaos on the Middle East in the name of democracy. We Americans are like greedy children hiding behind our little legitimating processes. Which would be to say

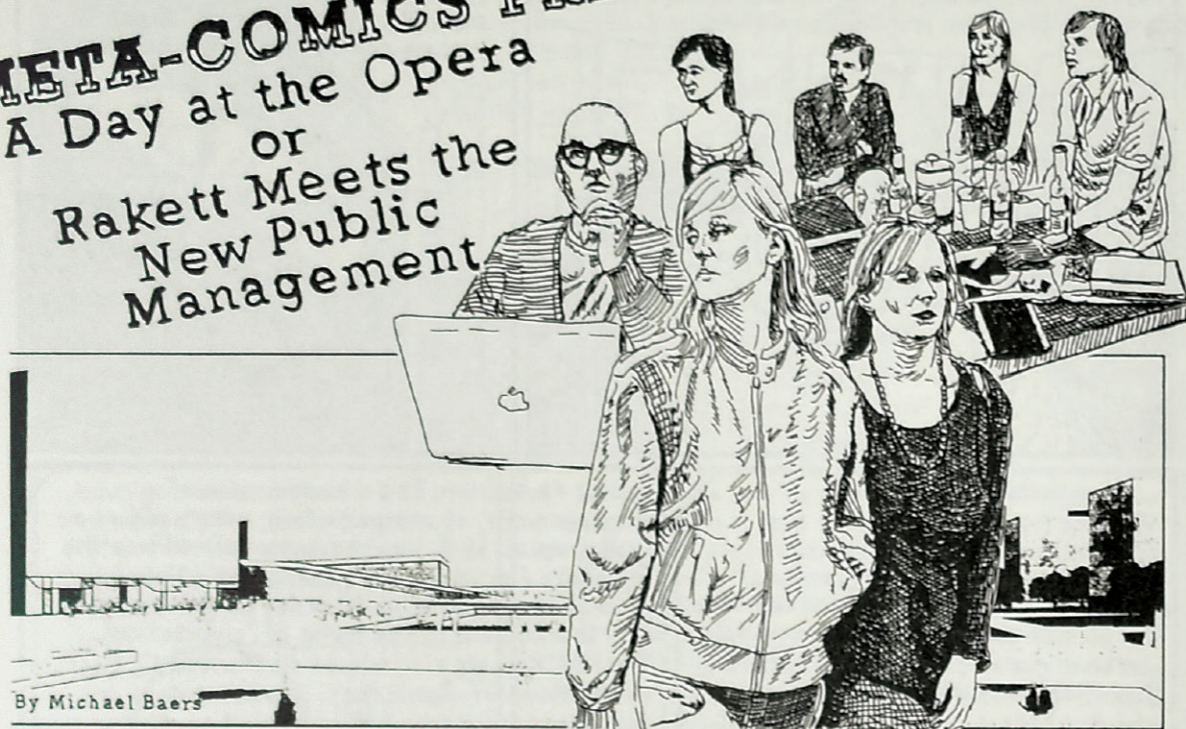


...that in practice the economic has a psychic aspect along with abstract structures it generates algorithmically. That's all I have to say about this, but there's one more frame to use up. Well, here's a photo I took recently in Christiania, another endangered social formation:

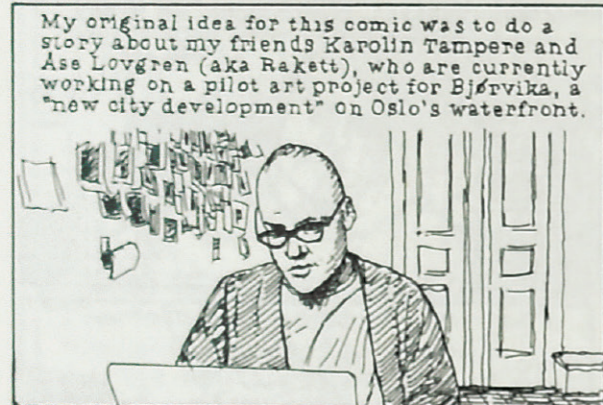


META-COMICS PRESENTS:

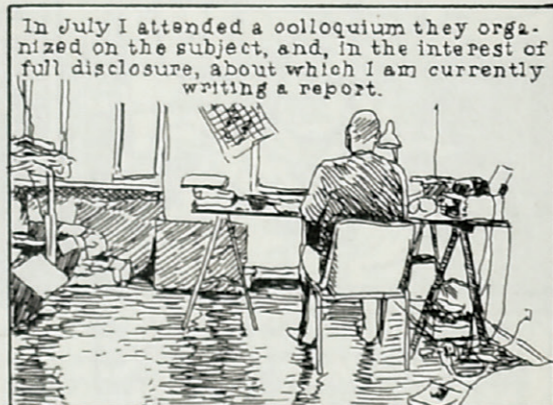
A Day at the Opera or Rakett Meets the New Public Management



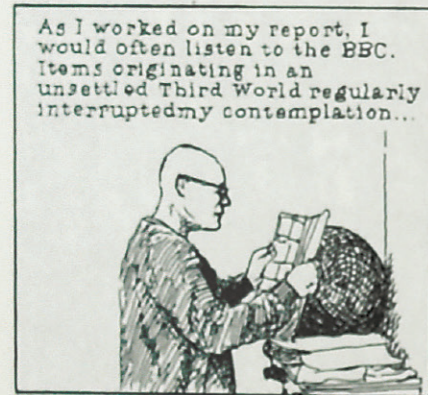
By Michael Baers



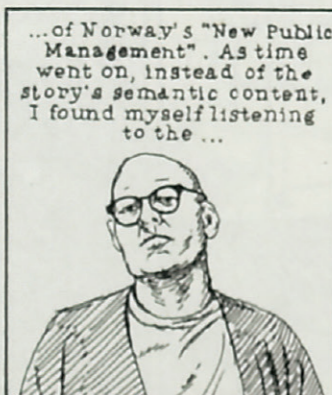
My original idea for this comic was to do a story about my friends Karolin Tampere and Ase Lovgren (aka Rakett), who are currently working on a pilot art project for Bjørvika, a "new city development" on Oslo's waterfront.



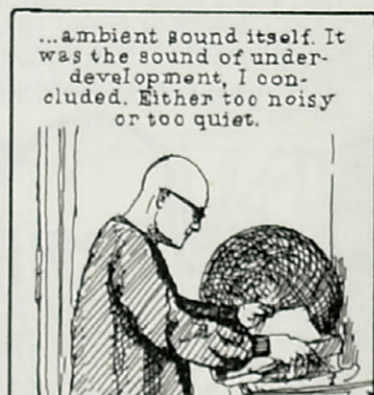
In July I attended a colloquium they organized on the subject, and, in the interest of full disclosure, about which I am currently writing a report.



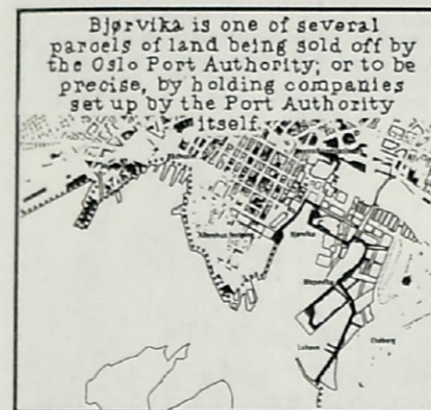
As I worked on my report, I would often listen to the BBC. Items originating in an unsettled Third World regularly interrupted my contemplation...



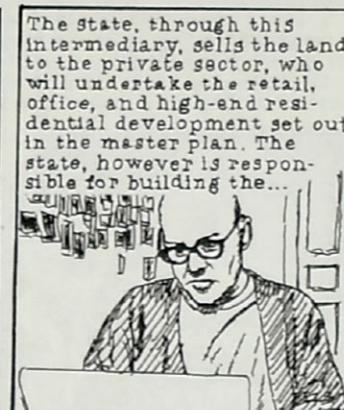
...of Norway's "New Public Management". As time went on, instead of the story's semantic content, I found myself listening to the ...



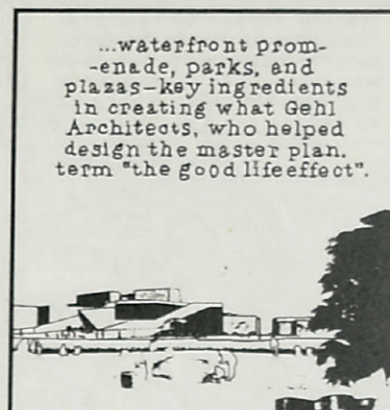
...ambient sound itself. It was the sound of underdevelopment. I concluded. Either too noisy or too quiet.



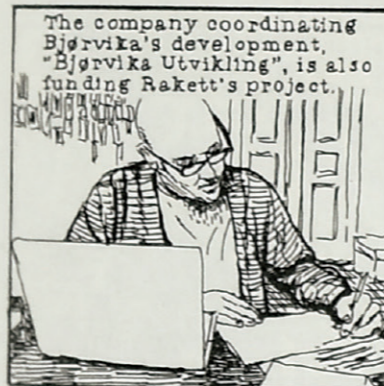
Bjørvika is one of several parcels of land being sold off by the Oslo Port Authority; or to be precise, by holding companies set up by the Port Authority itself.



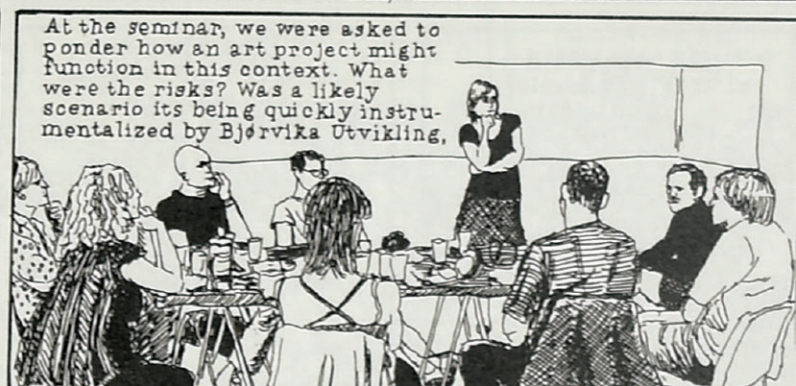
The state, through this intermediary, sells the land to the private sector, who will undertake the retail, office, and high-end residential development set out in the master plan. The state, however is responsible for building the...



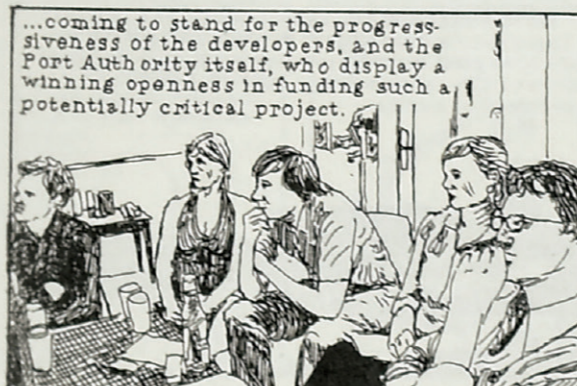
...waterfront promenade, parks, and plazas—key ingredients in creating what Gehl Architects, who helped design the master plan, term "the good lifeeffect".



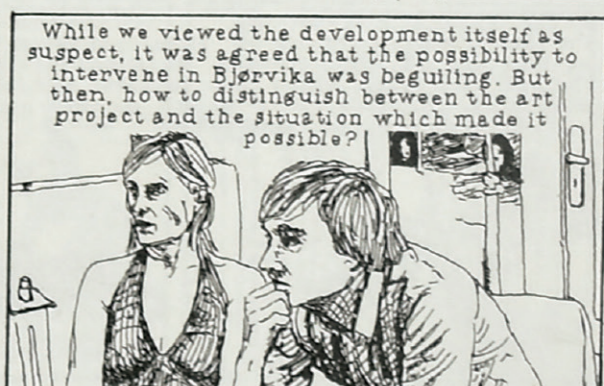
The company coordinating Bjørvika's development, "Bjørvika Utvikling", is also funding Rakett's project.



At the seminar, we were asked to ponder how an art project might function in this context. What were the risks? Was a likely scenario its being quickly instrumentalized by Bjørvika Utvikling,



...coming to stand for the progressiveness of the developers, and the Port Authority itself, who display a winning openness in funding such a potentially critical project.



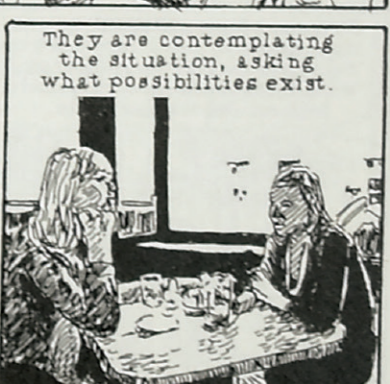
While we viewed the development itself as suspect, it was agreed that the possibility to intervene in Bjørvika was beguiling. But then, how to distinguish between the art project and the situation which made it possible?



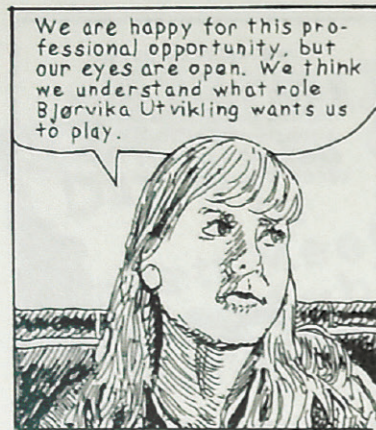
Here is the first scene I shot: Karolin and Ase, having concluded their symposium, sitting in a cafe.



It's a comfortable place where artists regularly congregate.



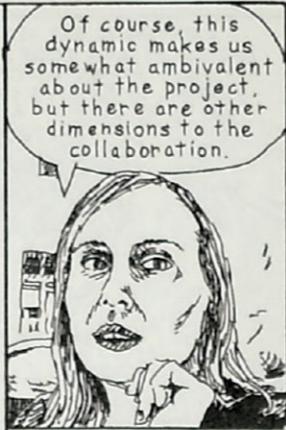
They are contemplating the situation, asking what possibilities exist.



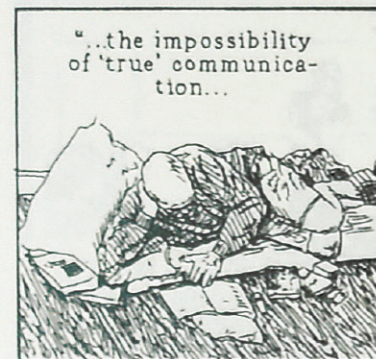
We are happy for this professional opportunity, but our eyes are open. We think we understand what role Björvika Utvikling wants us to play.



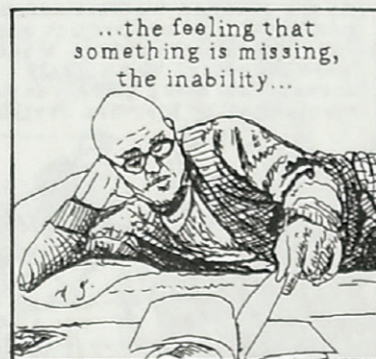
I don't think the project would be interesting for us if we understood it as a binary situation, with Björvika Utvikling on one side and us on the other trying to subvert their instrumentalist agenda.



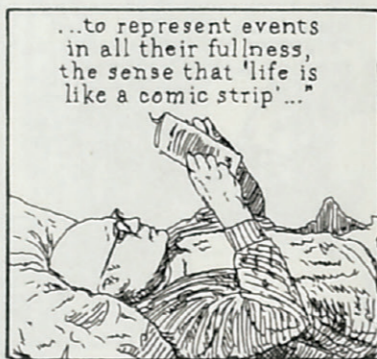
Of course, this dynamic makes us somewhat ambivalent about the project, but there are other dimensions to the collaboration.



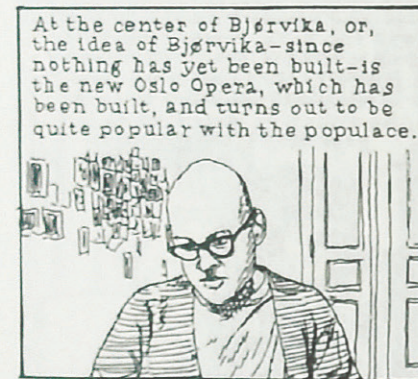
"...the impossibility of 'true' communication..."



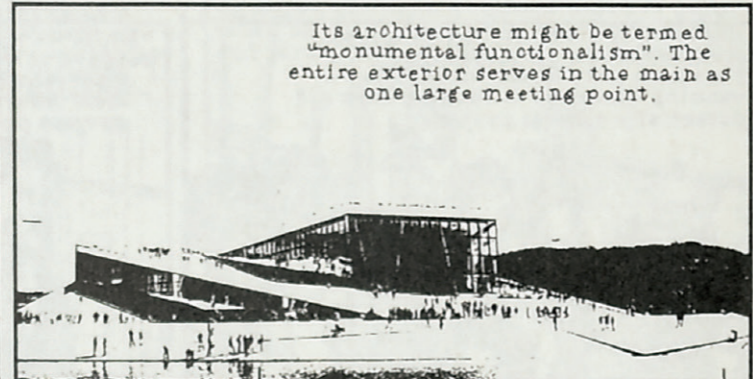
...the feeling that something is missing, the inability..."



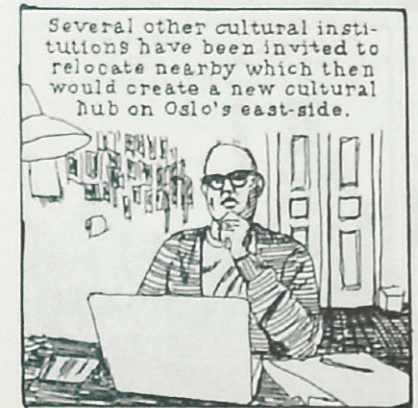
...to represent events in all their fullness, the sense that 'life is like a comic strip'..."



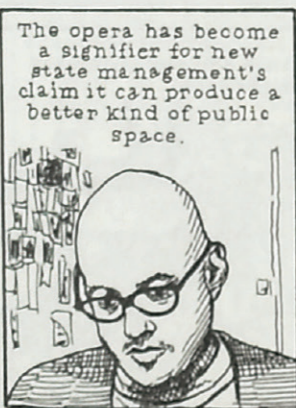
At the center of Björvika, or, the idea of Björvika—since nothing has yet been built—is the new Oslo Opera, which has been built, and turns out to be quite popular with the populace.



Its architecture might be termed "monumental functionalism". The entire exterior serves in the main as one large meeting point.



Several other cultural institutions have been invited to relocate nearby which then would create a new cultural hub on Oslo's east-side.



The opera has become a signifier for new state management's claim it can produce a better kind of public space.



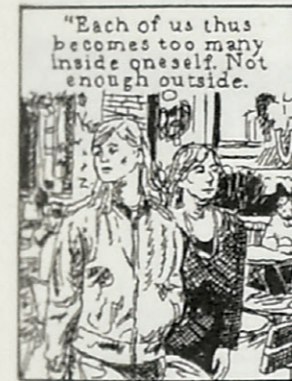
Much to our surprise, we also like the new opera building. But a major obstacle in our efforts to engage with...



...Björvika has been the nagging suspicion we'll feel alienated by whatever eventually gets built there.



What is the nature of our investment if we can't conceive being part of that community?



"Each of us thus becomes too many inside oneself. Not enough outside."



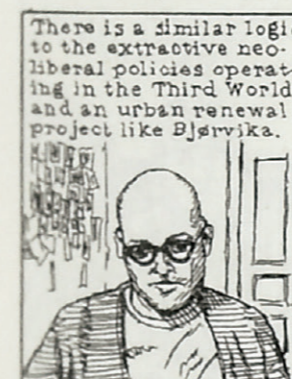
Little by little we are replaced by uninterrupted chains of images, enslaving us one...



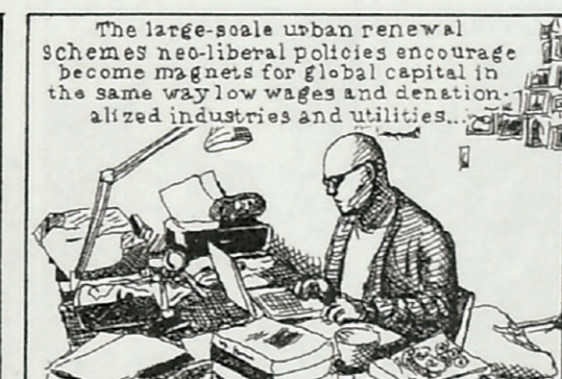
...another...each image at its place as each of us, at are place.



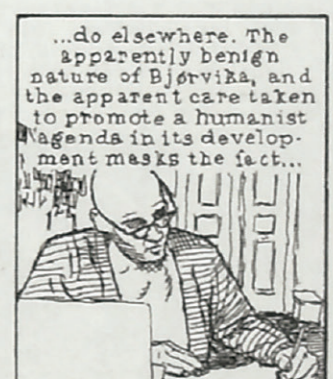
In the chain of events over which we have lost all power..."



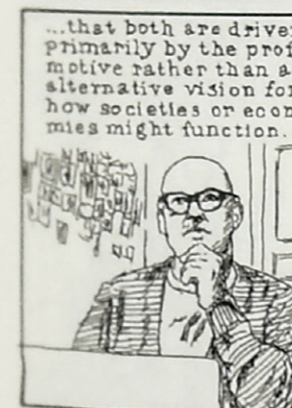
There is a similar logic to the extractive neo-liberal policies operating in the Third World and an urban renewal project like Björvika.



The large-scale urban renewal schemes neo-liberal policies encourage become magnets for global capital in the same way low wages and denationalized industries and utilities...



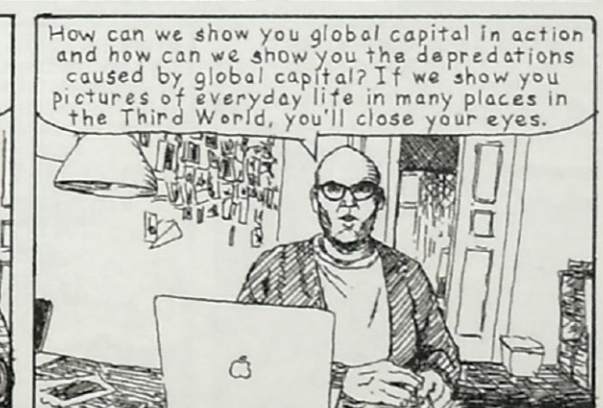
...do elsewhere. The apparently benign nature of Björvika, and the apparent care taken to promote a humanist agenda in its development masks the fact...



...that both are driven primarily by the profit motive rather than an alternative vision for how societies or economies might function.



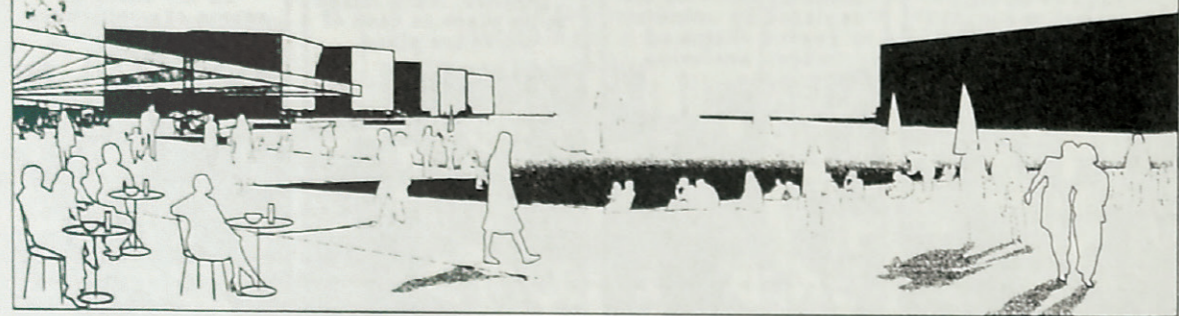
My analysis is not abstruse. My problem, to paraphrase Harun Farocki, is this:



How can we show you global capital in action and how can we show you the deprivations caused by global capital? If we show you pictures of everyday life in many places in the Third World, you'll close your eyes.



"Consider the case of a city—a space which is fashioned, shaped and invested by social activities during a finite historical period. Is this city a work or a product?" — Henri Lefebvre



Social space is a social product. Bjørvika, its function having been rendered obsolete (due to a general decline in industrial activity, the creation of newer port facilities elsewhere, etc.), became a disused place, a place for junkies and the homeless...



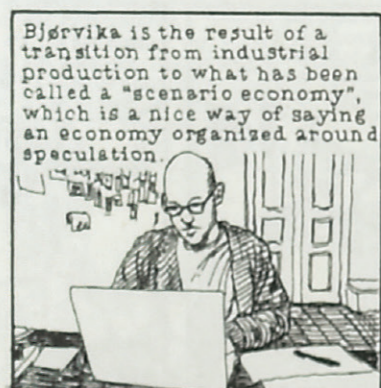
When we walk along the water, the lapping waves sing a post-industrial song.



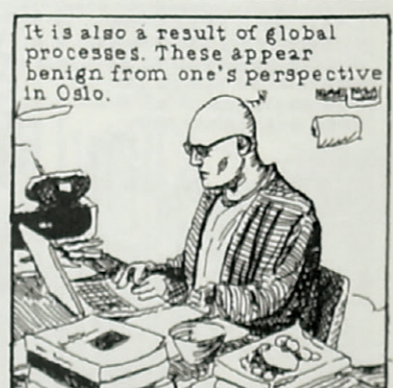
...then it is sold to the private sector. Out of many outcomes, this one was chosen.



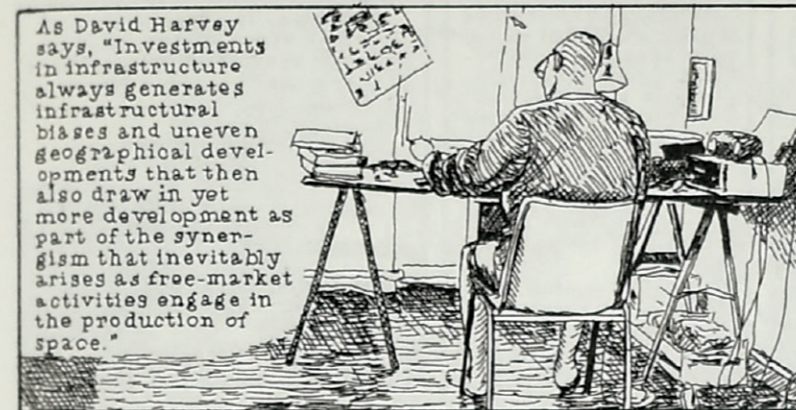
For Oslo's municipality, and the New Public Management, Bjørvika is a "Spatial Fix", a way of using property to keep the economy in forward motion.



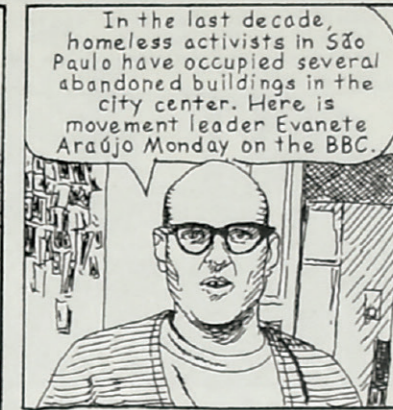
Bjørvika is the result of a transition from industrial production to what has been called a "scenario economy", which is a nice way of saying an economy organized around speculation.



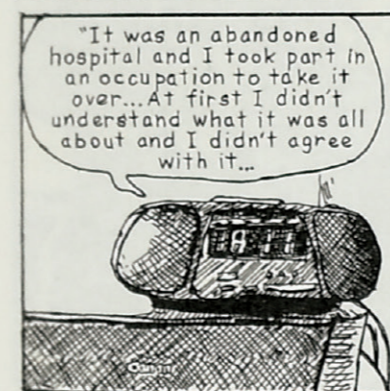
It is also a result of global processes. These appear benign from one's perspective in Oslo.



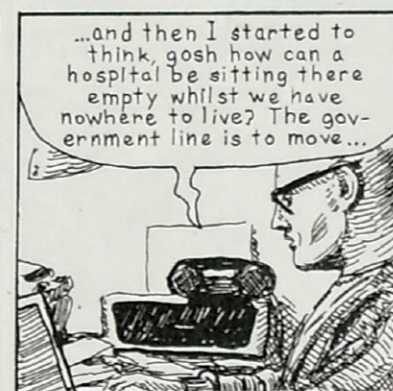
As David Harvey says, "Investments in infrastructure always generates infrastructural biases and uneven geographical developments that then also draw in yet more development as part of the synergism that inevitably arises as free-market activities engage in the production of space."



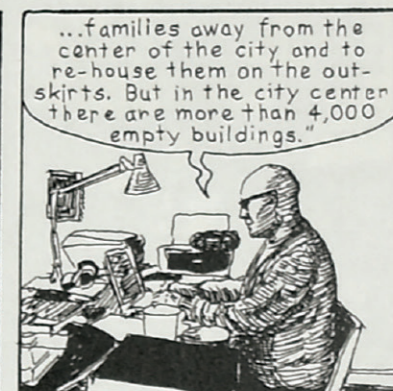
In the last decade, homeless activists in São Paulo have occupied several abandoned buildings in the city center. Here is movement leader Evanete Araújo Monday on the BBC.



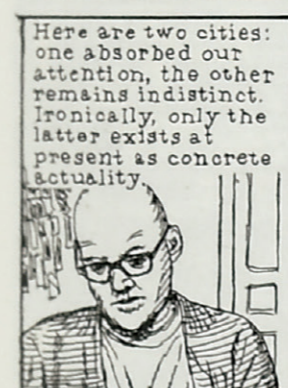
"It was an abandoned hospital and I took part in an occupation to take it over... At first I didn't understand what it was all about and I didn't agree with it..."



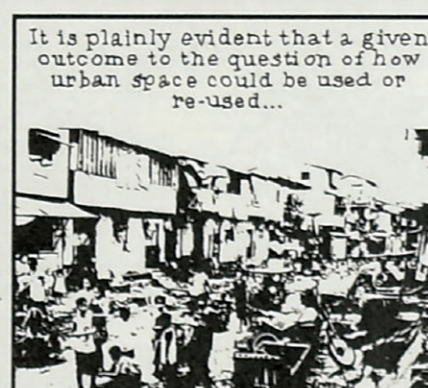
...and then I started to think, gosh how can a hospital be sitting there empty whilst we have nowhere to live? The government line is to move...



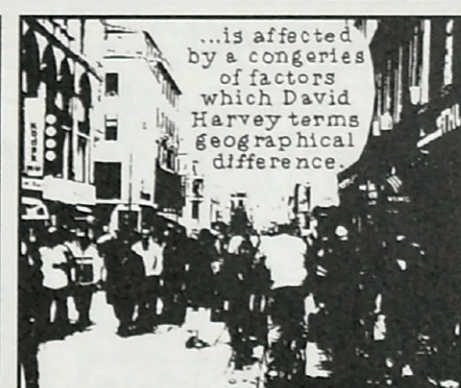
...families away from the center of the city and to re-house them on the outskirts. But in the city center there are more than 4,000 empty buildings."



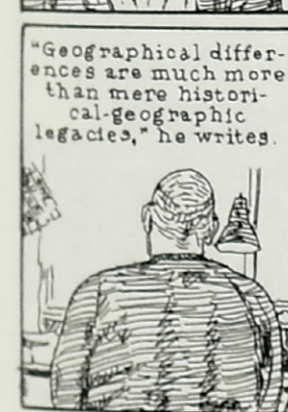
Here are two cities: one absorbed our attention, the other remains indistinct. Ironically, only the latter exists at present as concrete actuality.



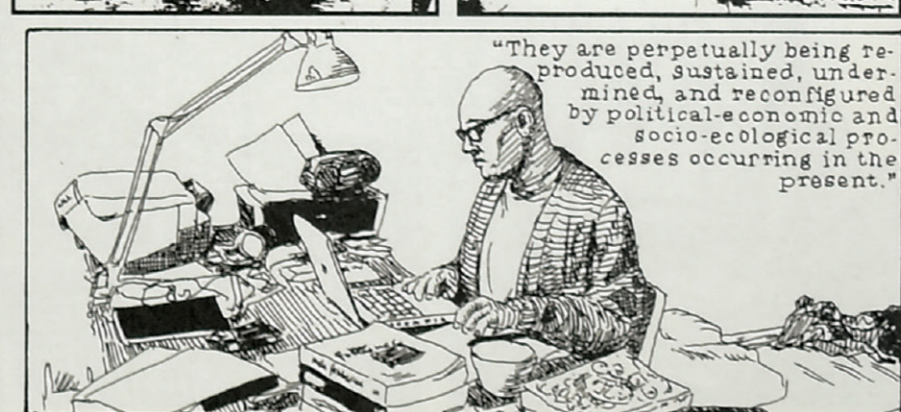
It is plainly evident that a given outcome to the question of how urban space could be used or re-used...



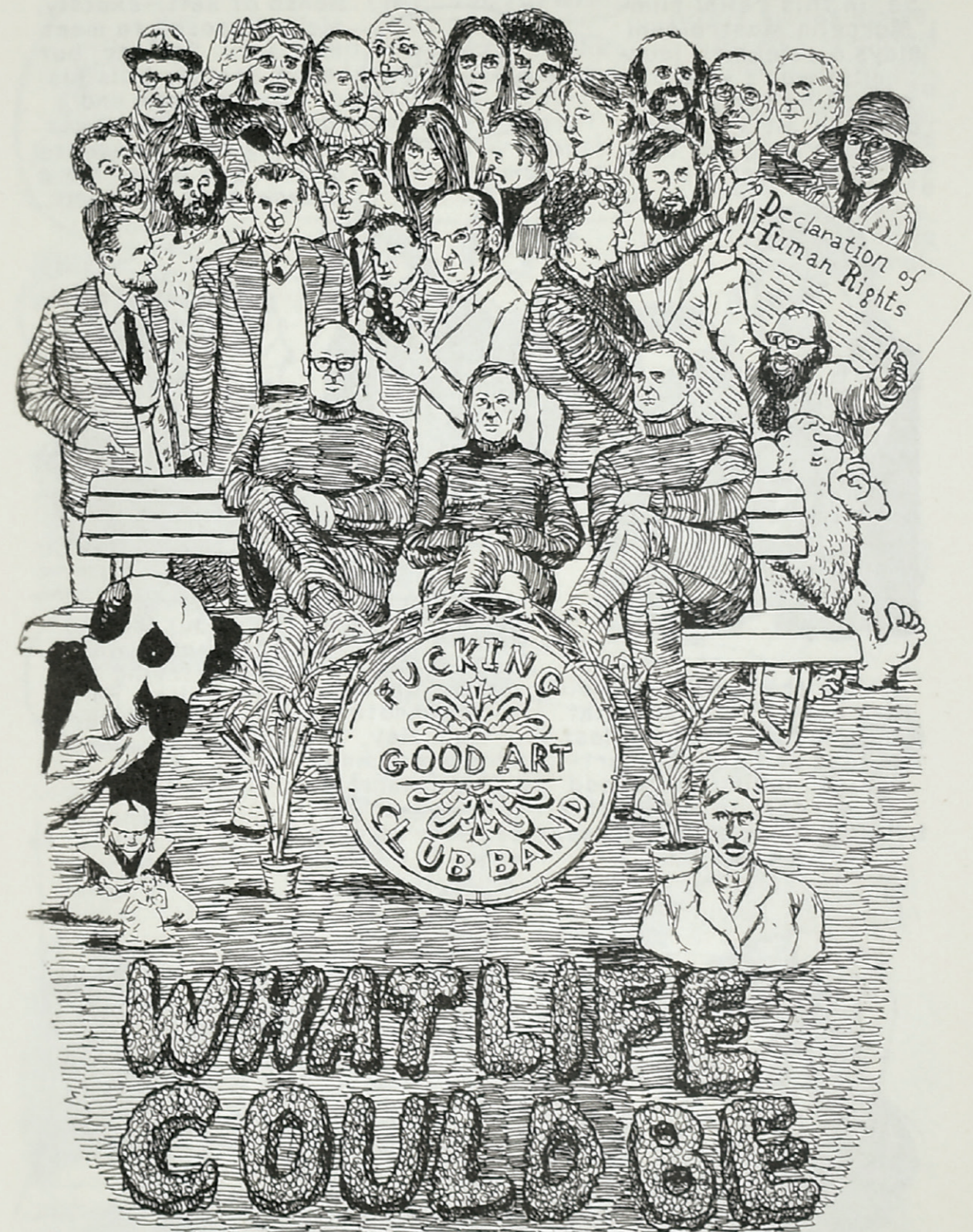
...is affected by a congeries of factors which David Harvey terms geographical difference.



"Geographical differences are much more than mere historical-geographic legacies," he writes.



"They are perpetually being re-produced, sustained, undermined, and reconfigured by political-economic and socio-ecological processes occurring in the present."



Based on a conversation held one afternoon in Cafe El Greco, Zurich, between Fucking Good Art and Michael Baers
 Drawing and Compositing by Michael Baers

So, in this Felini film-
Marcello Mastroianni
plays a celebrity jour-
nalist who's kind of
searching for his own
position. He's a dandy,
a lady's man, but he's
totally lost his...



SENSE
OF SELF?



Sense of self—exactly.
He's supposed to meet
this guru, Steiner, but
then Steiner kills his
two children and
himself. Marcello was
waiting for an answer,
and he was happy for a
chance meet the guru...



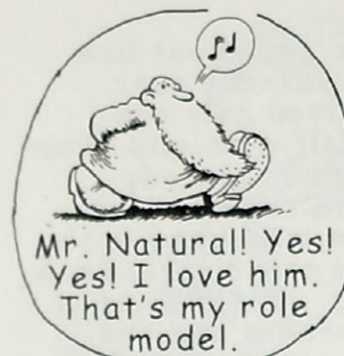
...then the guru lost *his*
idea of self. I think what
happened was that we lost
our idea and belief in art-
making, and Fucking Good
Art is a tool to regain this
belief. We are sort of these
wanderers...

But I don't
want the
Judeo-Christ-
ian connota-
tion. Hey,
Crumb also has
this figure!

It's about looking
for what it was
about, trying to
regain belief. Forty
years in the desert.



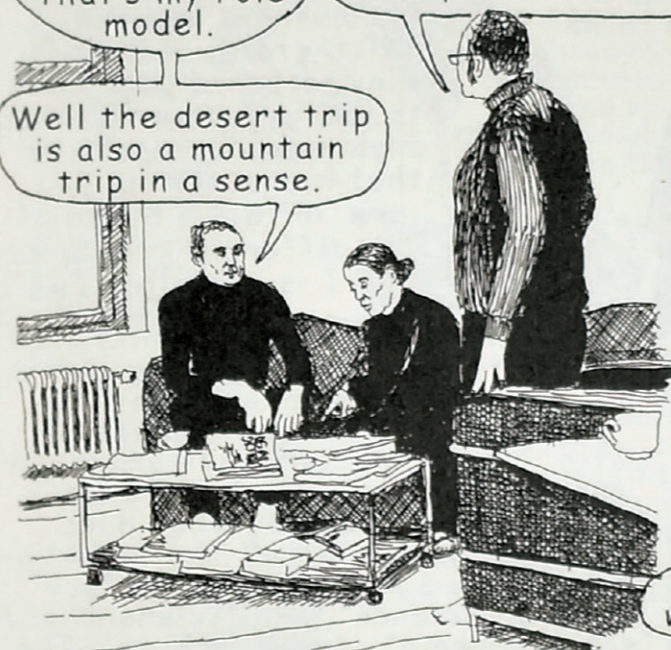
Mr. Natural?



Mr. Natural! Yes!
Yes! I love him.
That's my role
model.

And taking LSD in the
Swiss Alps has become
part of the forty-
years-in-the-desert
thing? We may search
for Albert Hofmann and
end up with Mr. Natural.

Well the desert trip
is also a mountain
trip in a sense.



Switzerland defini-
tely makes sense.
LSD was invented
here, after all.
It's home to
Albert Hofmann,
Monte Verita...the
place Timothy
Leary escaped to
from Algeria.
Switzerland is
central.

Answers to
which questions?

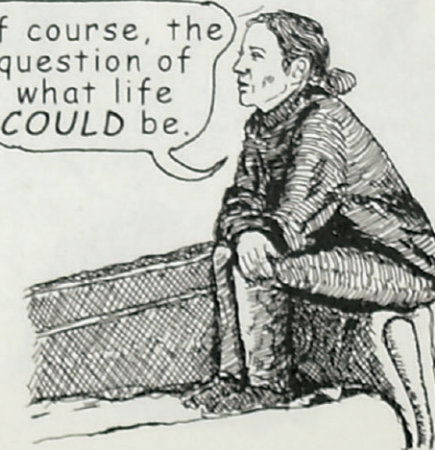


We take the
LSD, and attain
some mind-blow-
ing insights
about the hidden
nature of the
world. A real
"Swiss Trip".

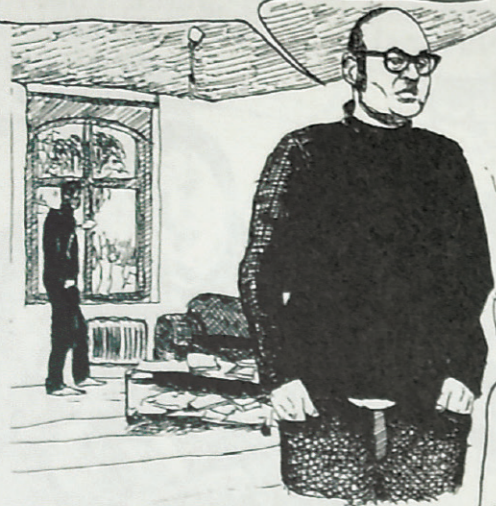
At any rate, it
would be nice if we
tried to push our-
selves to give some
answers. I mean,
how ridiculous they
can be...



Of course, the
question of
what life
COULD be.



But don't we have to ask what life *is* before asking what life could be? They say you create your own reality through consciousness, but at the moment one's consciousness confronts some pretty horrific facts.



Like the gaia theory of the world as one organism. "The largest living creature on Earth."



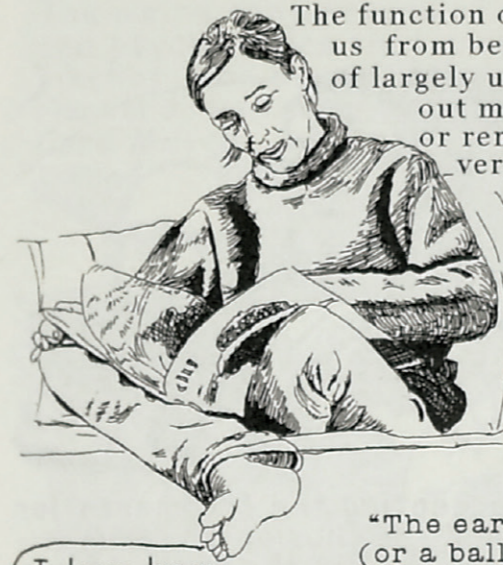
According to Aldous Huxley, the feeling of separation is a biological imperative—the mind filters out the information unnecessary to survival. Let me find the quote:

Actually, they've found out how small this consciousness part actually is. Like, you only consciously 'know' half a second after your unconscious has already reacted. Even the impulse to do something can be measured in the brain before you consciously know you want to do it. This idea of the ego and consciousness and the nation-state; in biology they've found your body is like yogurt-with living organisms. It's not you that has bacteria, you *are*, in fact a bunch of different creatures. I is actually a "we".

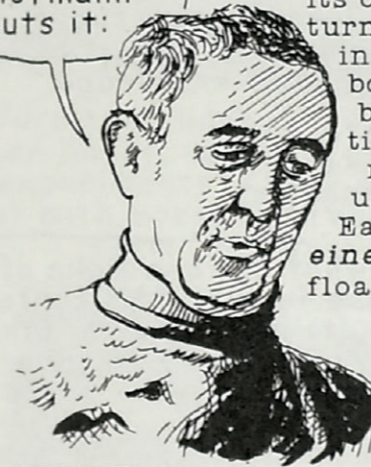
Our conception of individuality—or "separateness"—is an illusion. But a useful one. Remember Heinz von Foerster told us how science, in Latin, "sciencia", has been amazingly successful in the 2000 years since Aristotle, because...what does "sciencia" derive from? The Indo-European word for "sciencia" is "scy", found in "science", and "sciencia" and "schizophrenia", and in "schism". That is, words referring to separation.



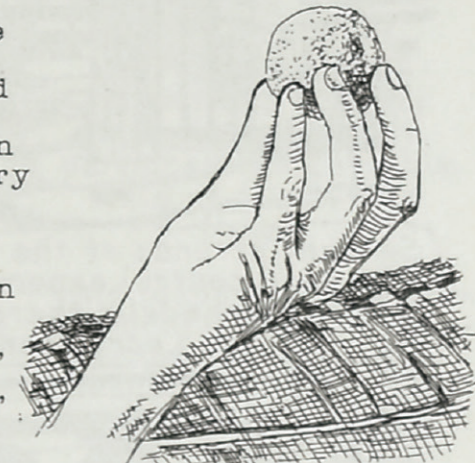
The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful." According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet."



I love how Hofmann puts it:



"The earth is a sphere (or a ball or a bullet) that is rotating around its own axes and turning around the sun in the universe. Every body knows this, because for some time the space research has shown us pictures: Planet Earth, a blue sphere, *eine blaue Kugel*, floating free in space."

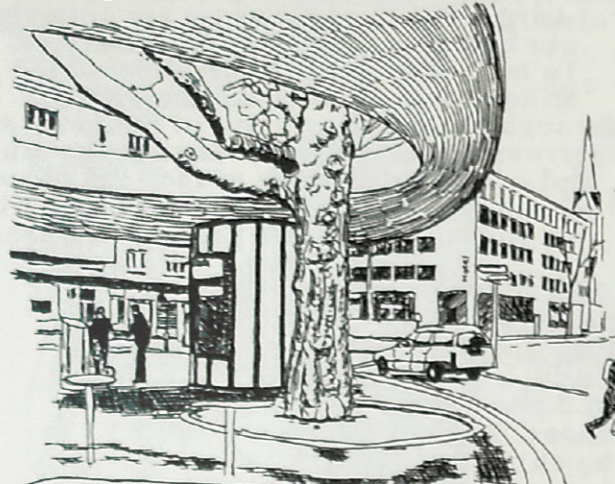


First humans were separated from the Garden of Eden, then they try reconstituting an originary unity with the Tower of Babel. "God confused their languages and scattered them throughout the earth."



It's true, we don't understand each other anymore.

This is a bit like Badiou's idea of philosophy as a space to think through reality. "Accepting the universe of language as the absolute horizon of philosophic thought, in fact amounts to"

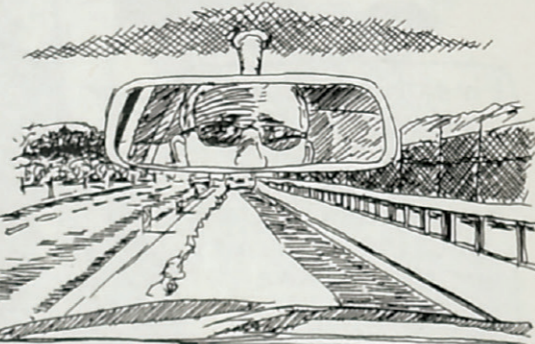


accepting the fragmentation and the illusion of communication, for the truth of our world is that there are as many languages as there are communities, activities or kinds of knowledge."

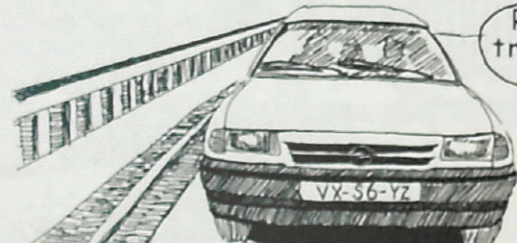
So many strands of the story to investigate: the CIA mind control experiments, the beatniks, the whole psychedelic therapy scene in Los Angeles ...or the Leary scene on the East Coast.



And what can one make of a person like former OSS captain and multi-millionaire uranium merchant Al Hubbard,



criss-crossing the US turning on millionaires and government officials?



A psychedelic Johnny Appleseed.

Road movies and drug trips are metaphors for one another.



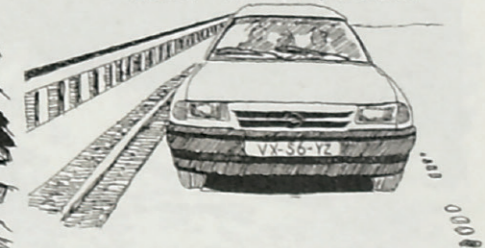
The weird conjuncture of power, money, and psychedelics that crop up. Like, Mary Pinchot, who hung out with Leary at Harvard, was married to CIA bureaucrat Cord Meyer...



...and was fucking President Kennedy, perhaps even gave him acid at the White House.

Turn the channel and you find novelist Ken Kesey, given drugs in CIA-funded experiments. Kesey soon was hanging out with Stewart Brand, who coined the term "personal computer".

This leads you to Myron Stoloroff and the Foundation for Advanced Research in Palo Alto, who in the sixties began using LSD to develop computer user-interfaces.



Turn the channel again. There's Leary hanging out with the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, hippie drug smugglers from Laguna Beach, CA. With acid chemist and alleged CIA asset Ronald Stark, they produced millions of hits of LSD for the black market. No one knows real Stark's story. He died before he could tell it himself.





They all point to a different use, and that's interesting when you consider Huxley's original premise was that LSD could do away with separation and give us access to "Mind at Large".

Why did it even begin like this? In the fifties?



Turn the channel. Here's Charles Manson LSD mind-control snuff orgy with west coast and British Satanists in supportin roles. Charles Manson was applying the same techniques as Scientology or MK- Ultra Techniques for breaking down the ego, replacing it with whatever...sex slaves, assassins, bureaucrats.

We're still in Badiou's Babel!

The cold war has something to do with it.

And the ascendance of scientific positivism.

It's weird that one regime contributed to the formation of its opposition. Almost a textbook example of Marx's contention that the bourgeoisie contribute directly to creating the conditions for revolution.

LSD was clearly not initially a threat. You could wipe out people's conditioning with it, use it to cure alcoholics or stop armies..make bloodless war.



At the same time the CIA was funding loads of LSD research, they and the FBI were vigorously persecuting communists, and drug addicts were being treated in similarly repressive ways.

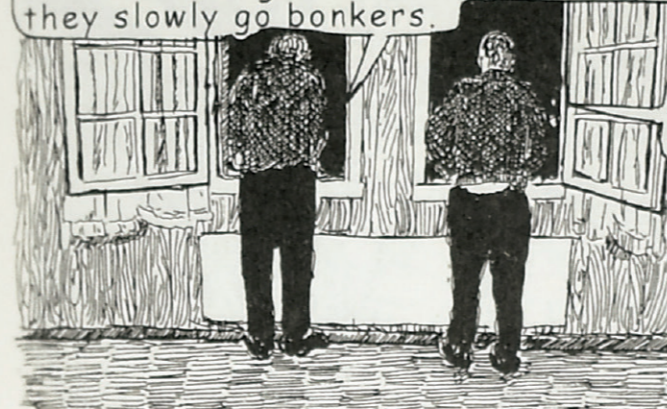
Clearly these stories go on endlessly. But what about "what life could be"? When LSD started becoming a religious sacrament, that's when things got messy. Then it became a threat to the Judeo-Christian order. Lise's boyfriend once told me, "If you want a glimpse of your own mortality, take LSD." No social order wants to cede control of immortality.



We have to really simply things and ask what life could be for us. What life could be if we took LSD?...Hey, that rhymes!



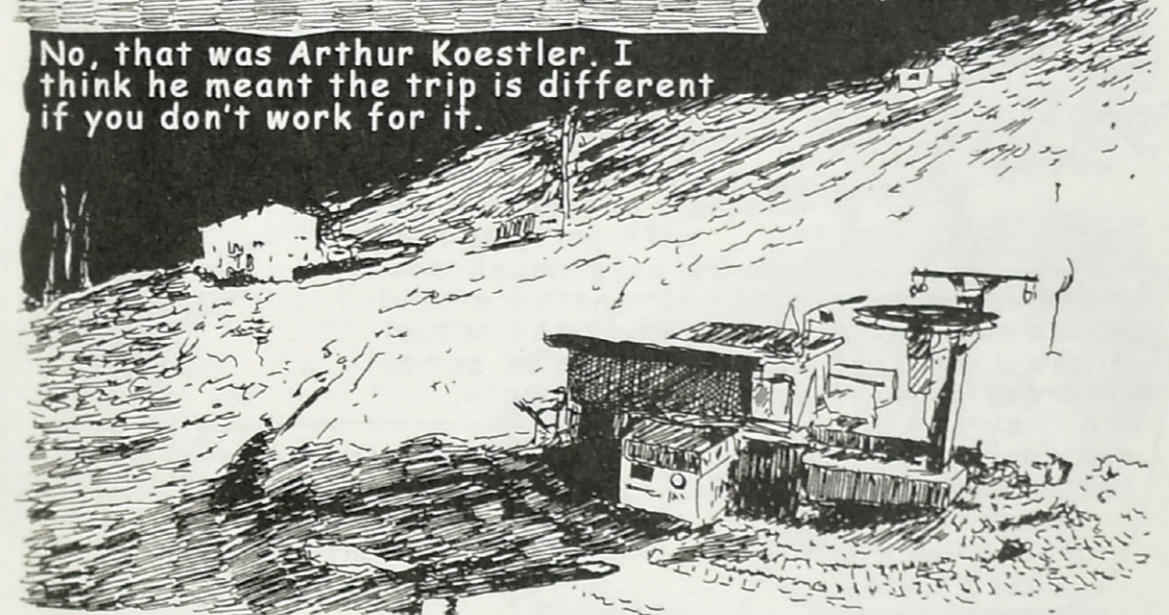
Western man pits the rational against the irrational in a useless and self-defeating contest. It's like, ok, nature, culture. It's this binary we're always fighting with. Societies end up making some sort of arrangement with the forces of nature, or they slowly go bonkers.



The Urnäsch Alt Silvester ritual you told me about where they drive out the evil spirits from the village...this is a working out of this conflict, I think.

What did Huxley say about LSD being like taking a ski-lift up a mountain?

No, that was Arthur Koestler. I think he meant the trip is different if you don't work for it.



Victor Turner, the anthropologist, thought of ritual as a negotiation between states—states of childhood, states of adulthood, one season to another, one year to another. In ritual, meaning is crystallized in fetish objects. Different meanings can even be condensed into a single object...

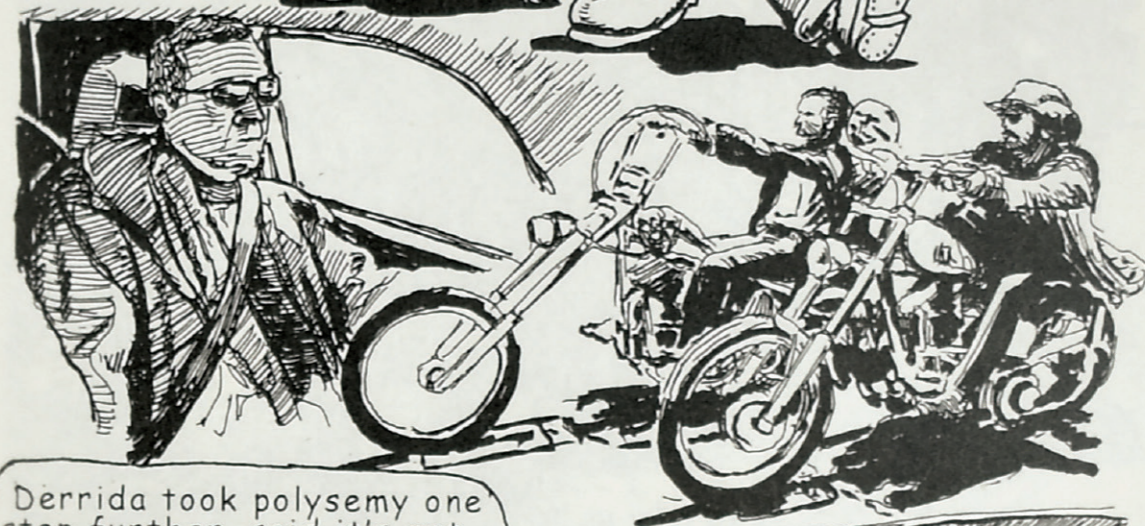
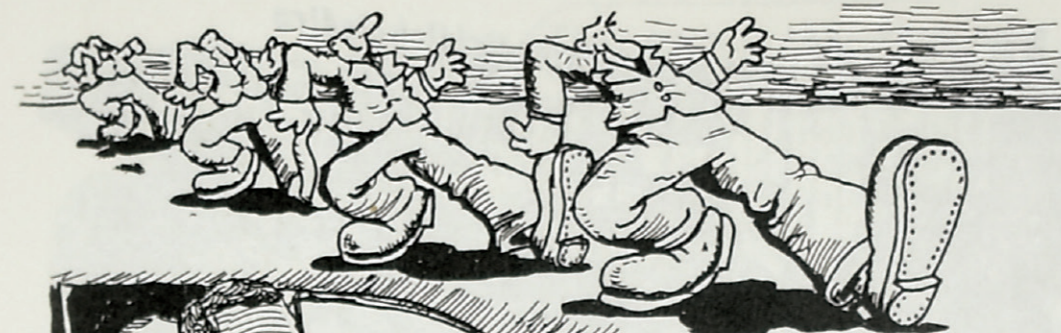


...according to context. So, symbol-objects work on a number of levels: as a concrete object with perhaps real effects—mushrooms, for instance—and also as the actualization of some concepts.



It's just like language: polysemous. The object is like a word. It has different connotations and they don't cancel out each other, they connote according to the syntactical context in which they're used.

Isn't this the same as talking about the interconnectedness of all life?

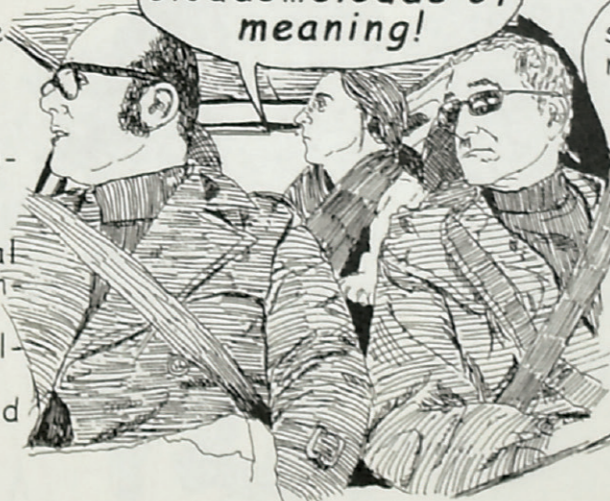


Derrida took polysemy one step further, said it's not only that every word has multiple meanings coexisting within the same linguistic form, but that the component parts of this individual word are in relation to its other possible, absent, combinations.



Where does one word stop and another begin? Where does one form stop and another begin? The earliest culture were concerned with ordering the social and natural worlds. But taxonomies always imply the possibility of aberrations. So you need an in-between space...

This idea of clouds... clouds of meaning!



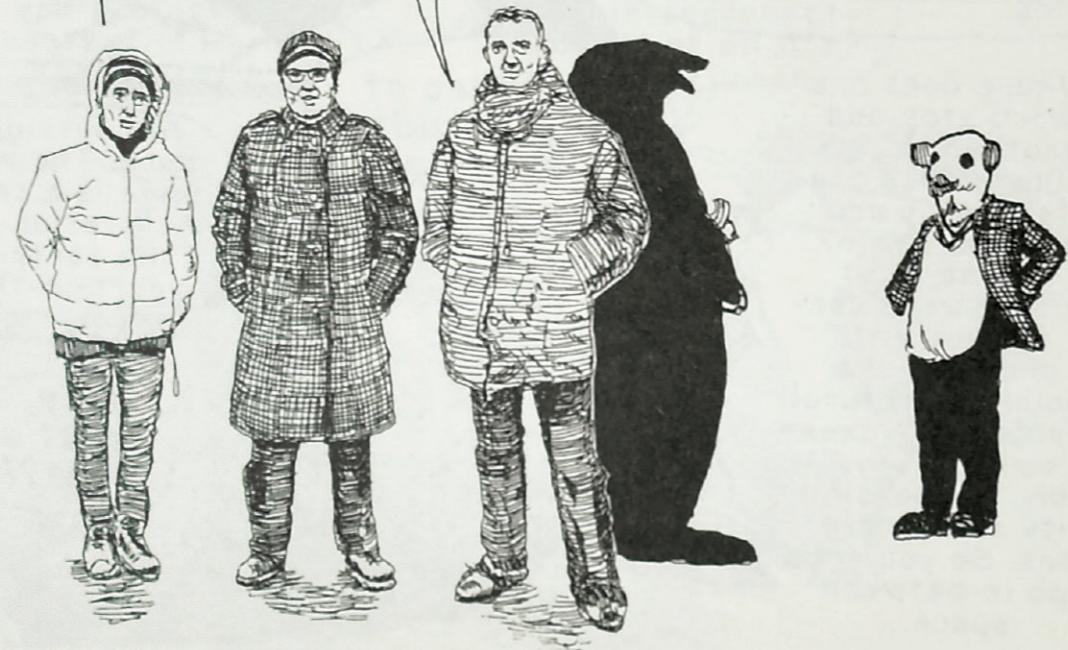
An outside space. The road movie is a crystallization of the forty-years-in-the-desert, right?

Hey, what's that?!



But this is also the forty-years-in-the-desert.

Of course, it's the same thing...I read somewhere, and also saw a picture of this same idea, this transformation. So, father and mother—it's an eastern European thing—they cut a little birch tree in half. It's alive, but they really slit it open.



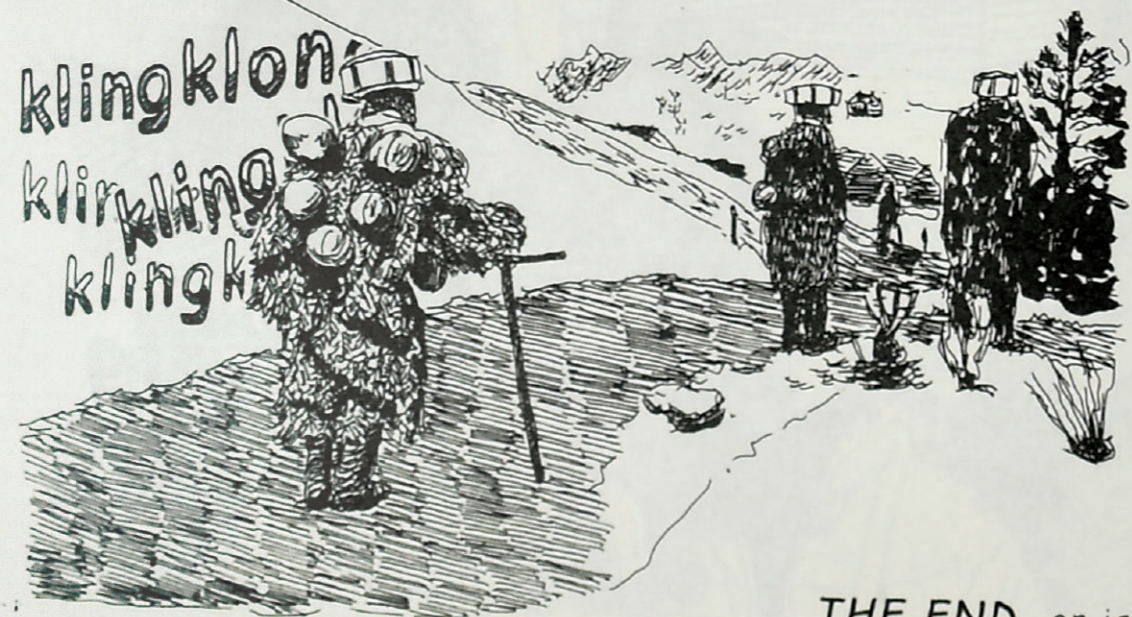
They open it then they pass through a child who is about to pass into the adult state. They just give the kid to each other through this birch tree, then they put the birch tree back together again so it can grow.



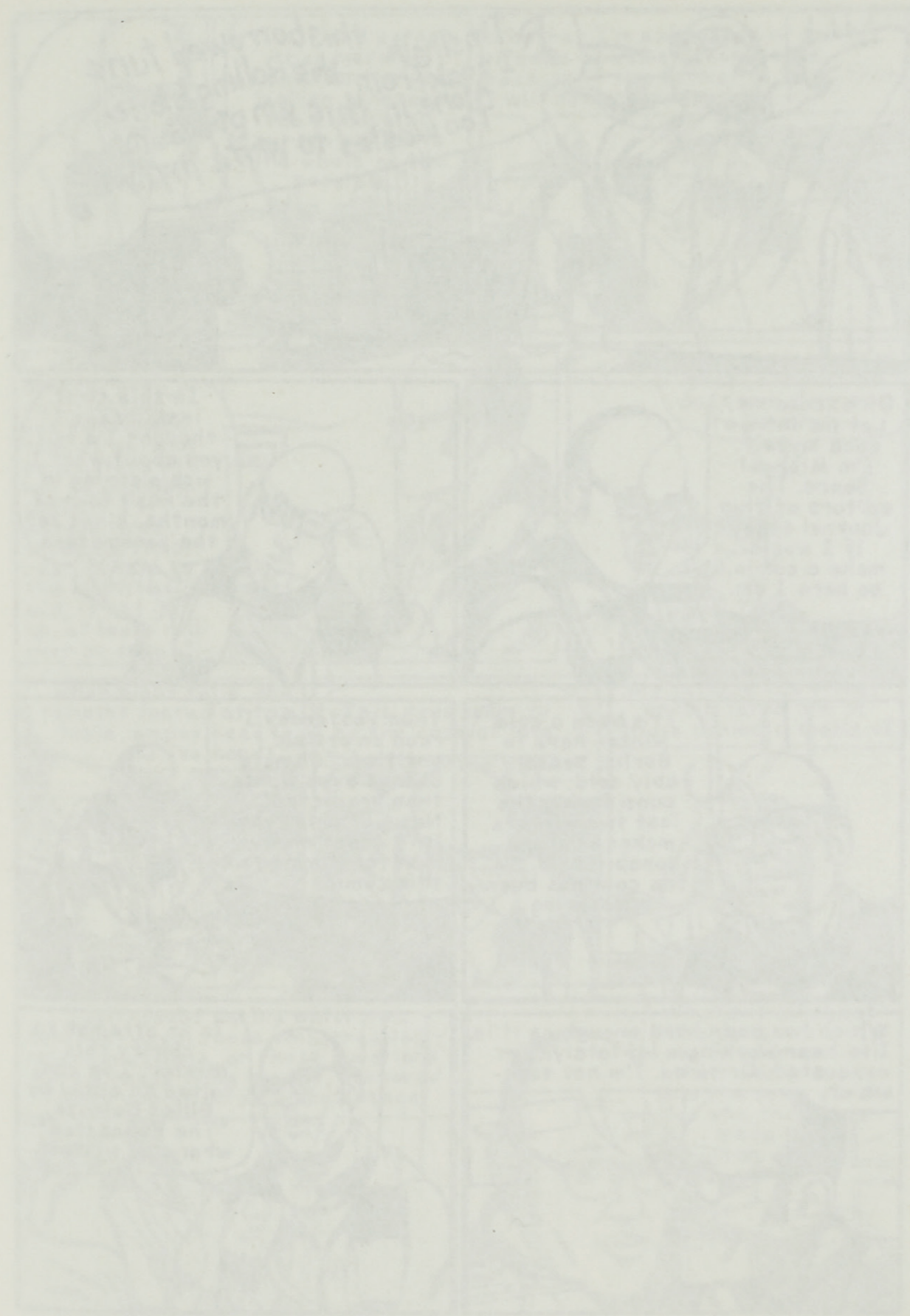
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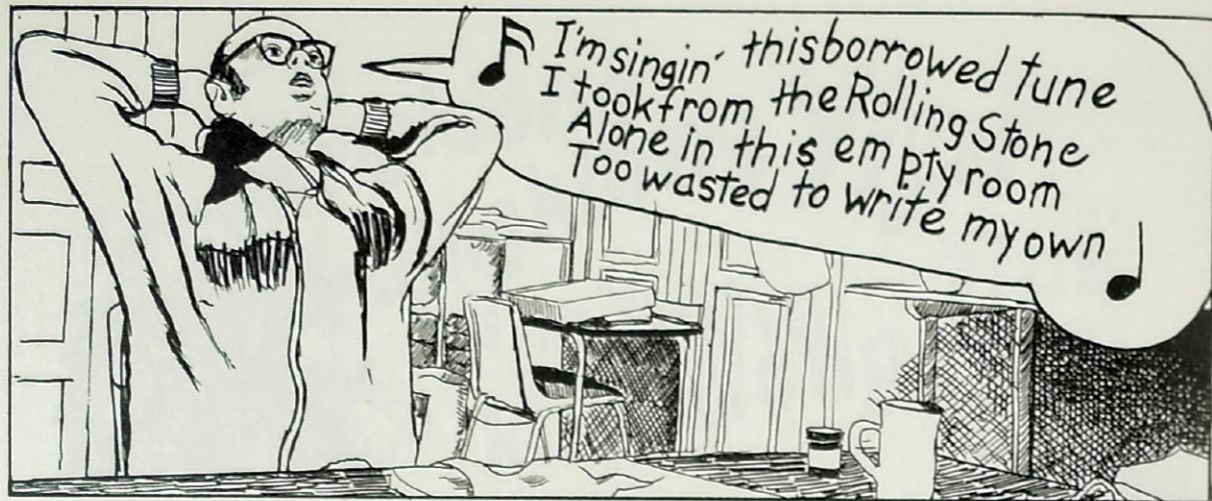


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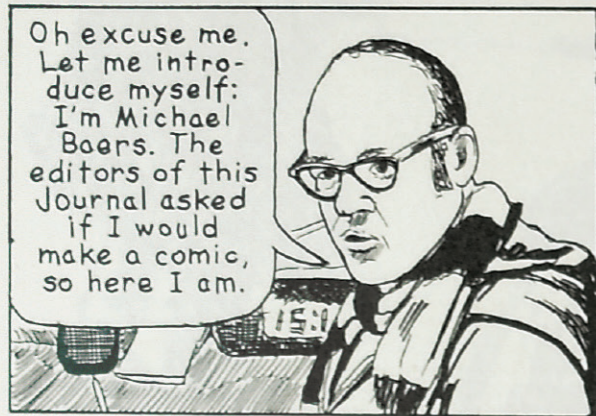


THE END...or is it?





I'm singin' this borrowed tune
I took from the Rolling Stone
Alone in this empty room
Too wasted to write my own



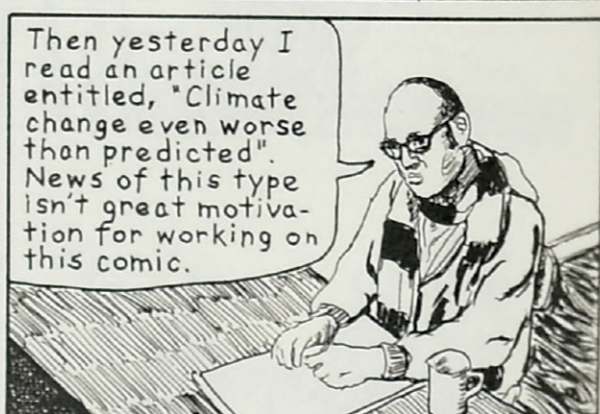
Oh excuse me.
Let me introduce myself:
I'm Michael Boars. The editors of this Journal asked if I would make a comic, so here I am.



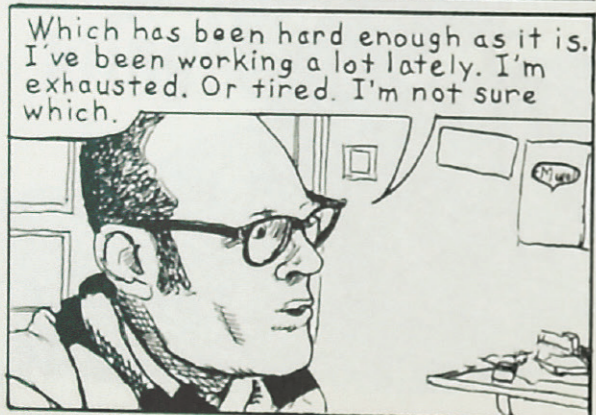
In this first installment I thought I'd tell you about what I was planning in the next four of months, kinda set the parameters.



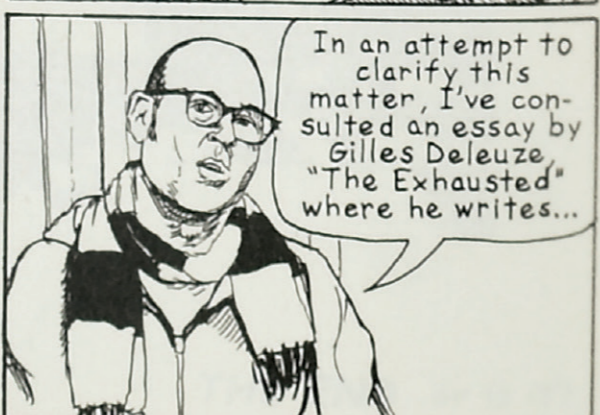
It's been a cold winter here in Berlin, seasonably cold, which considering the last two winters makes it unseasonably cold. So the cold has been reassuring.



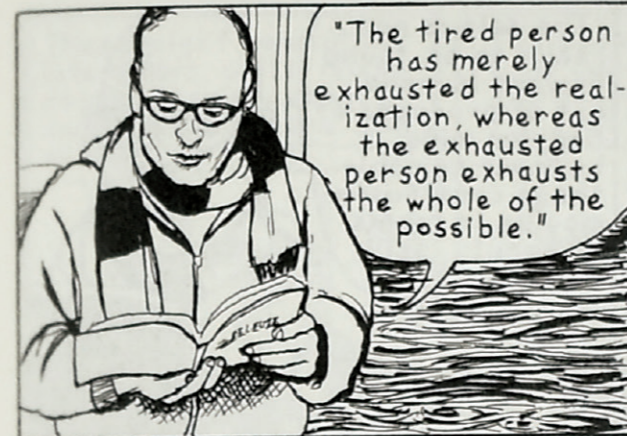
Then yesterday I read an article entitled, "Climate change even worse than predicted". News of this type isn't great motivation for working on this comic.



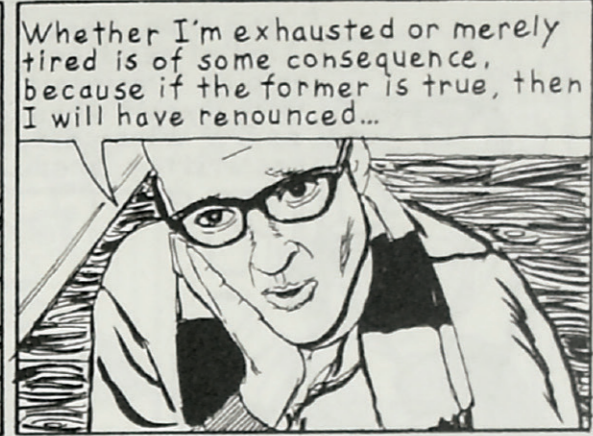
Which has been hard enough as it is. I've been working a lot lately. I'm exhausted. Or tired. I'm not sure which.



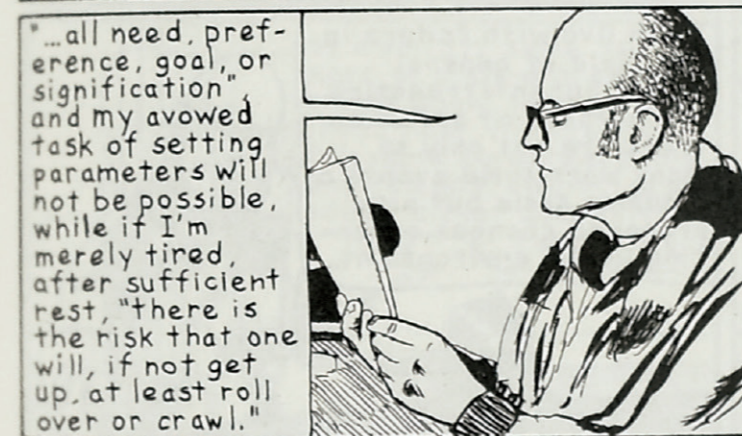
In an attempt to clarify this matter, I've consulted an essay by Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted" where he writes...



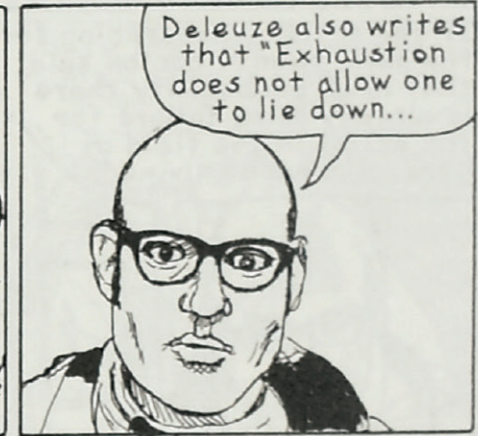
"The tired person has merely exhausted the realization, whereas the exhausted person exhausts the whole of the possible."



Whether I'm exhausted or merely tired is of some consequence, because if the former is true, then I will have renounced...



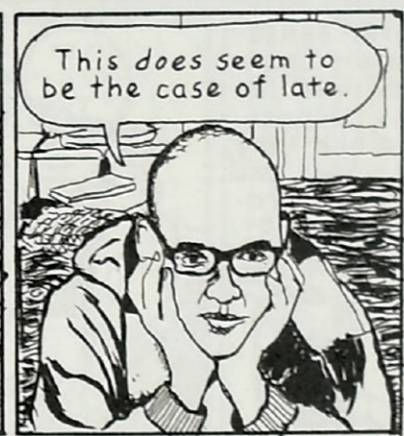
"...all need, preference, goal, or signification" and my avowed task of setting parameters will not be possible, while if I'm merely tired, after sufficient rest, "there is the risk that one will, if not get up, at least roll over or crawl."



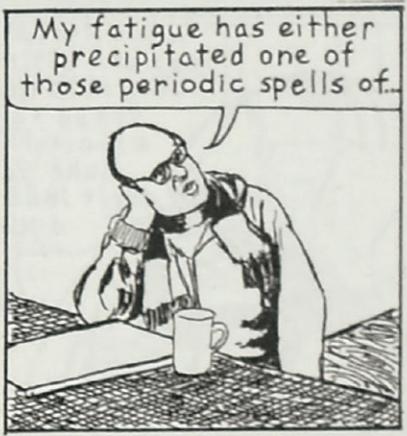
Deleuze also writes that "Exhaustion does not allow one to lie down..."



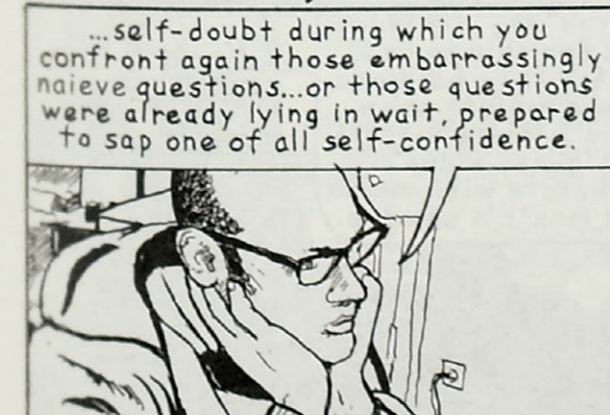
"...when night falls, one remains seated at the table, empty head in captive hands."



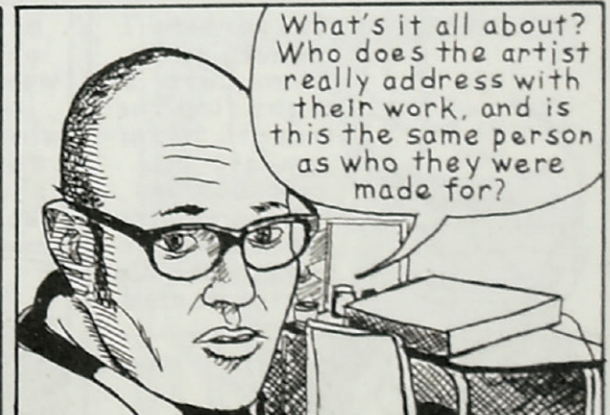
This does seem to be the case of late.



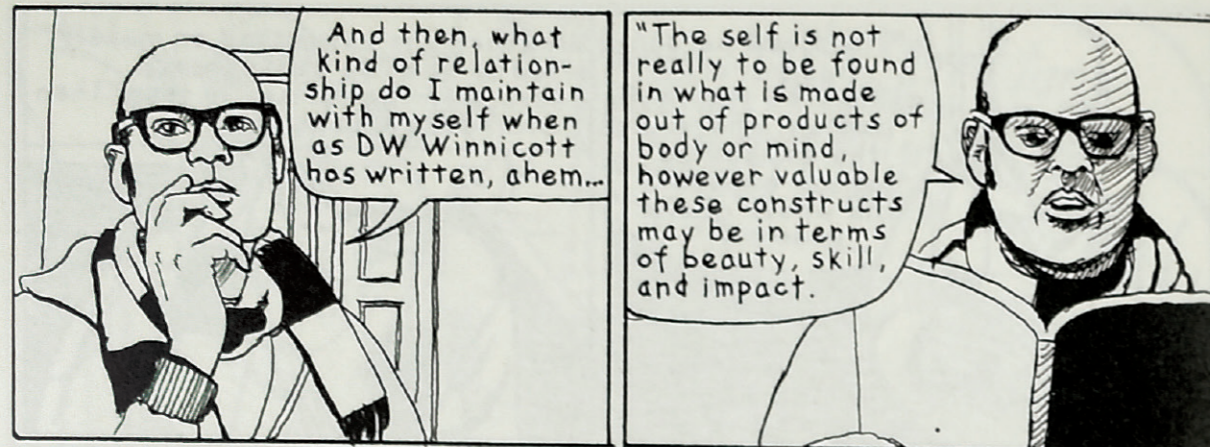
My fatigue has either precipitated one of those periodic spells of...



"...self-doubt during which you confront again those embarrassingly naive questions...or those questions were already lying in wait, prepared to sap one of all self-confidence."

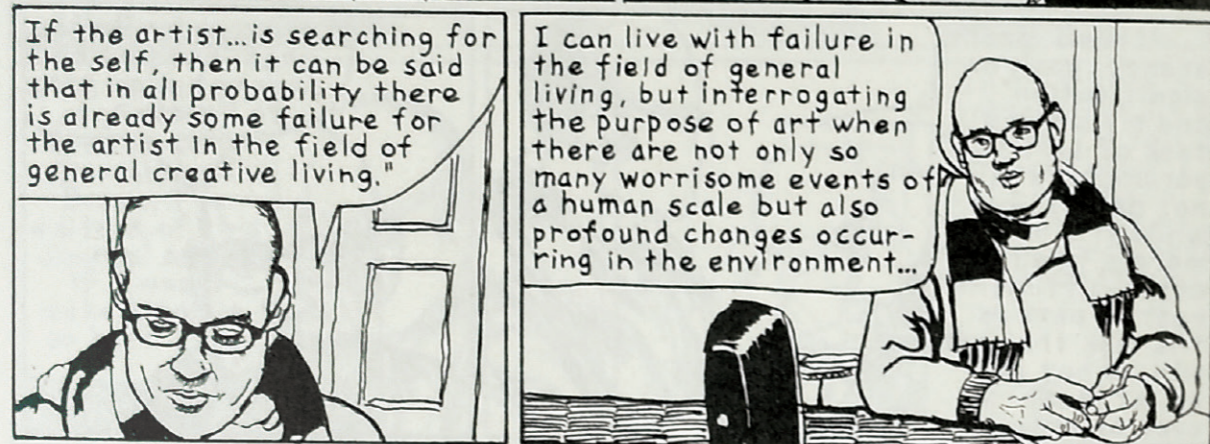


What's it all about? Who does the artist really address with their work, and is this the same person as who they were made for?



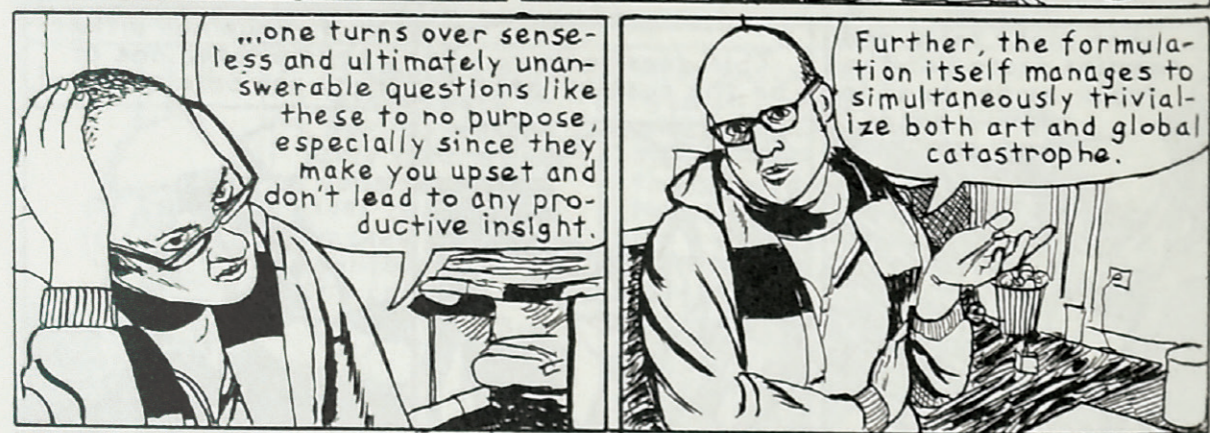
And then, what kind of relationship do I maintain with myself when as DW Winnicott has written, ahem...

"The self is not really to be found in what is made out of products of body or mind, however valuable these constructs may be in terms of beauty, skill, and impact."



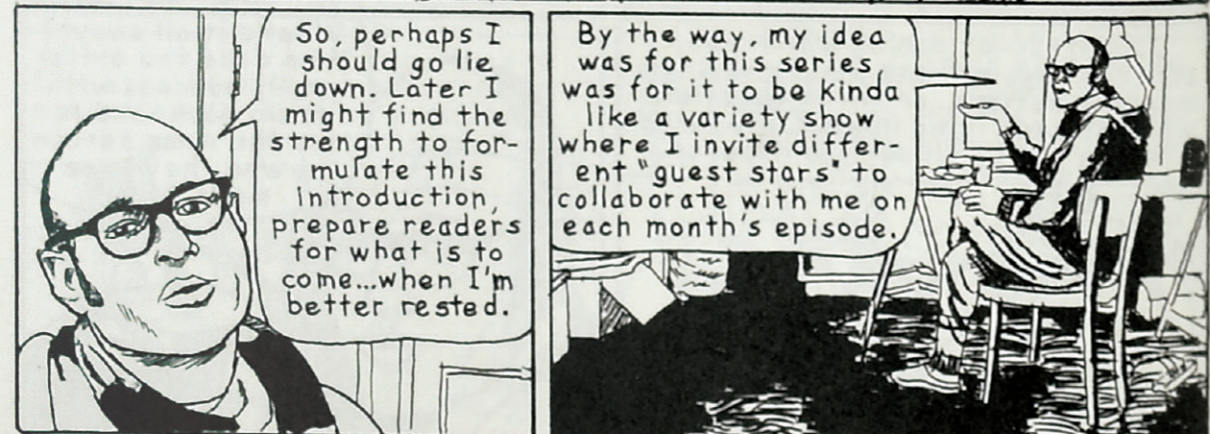
If the artist...is searching for the self, then it can be said that in all probability there is already some failure for the artist in the field of general creative living."

I can live with failure in the field of general living, but interrogating the purpose of art when there are not only so many worrisome events of a human scale but also profound changes occurring in the environment...



...one turns over senseless and ultimately unanswerable questions like these to no purpose, especially since they make you upset and don't lead to any productive insight.

Further, the formulation itself manages to simultaneously trivialize both art and global catastrophe.



So, perhaps I should go lie down. Later I might find the strength to formulate this introduction, prepare readers for what is to come...when I'm better rested.

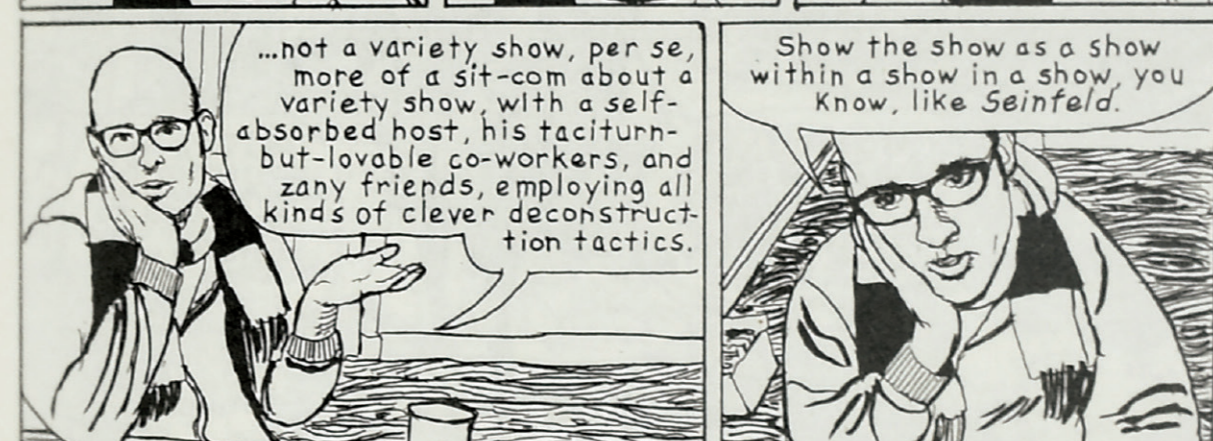
By the way, my idea was for this series was for it to be kinda like a variety show where I invite different "guest stars" to collaborate with me on each month's episode.



These might consist of interviews, skits, micro-documentaries, song-and-dance numbers, and so on.

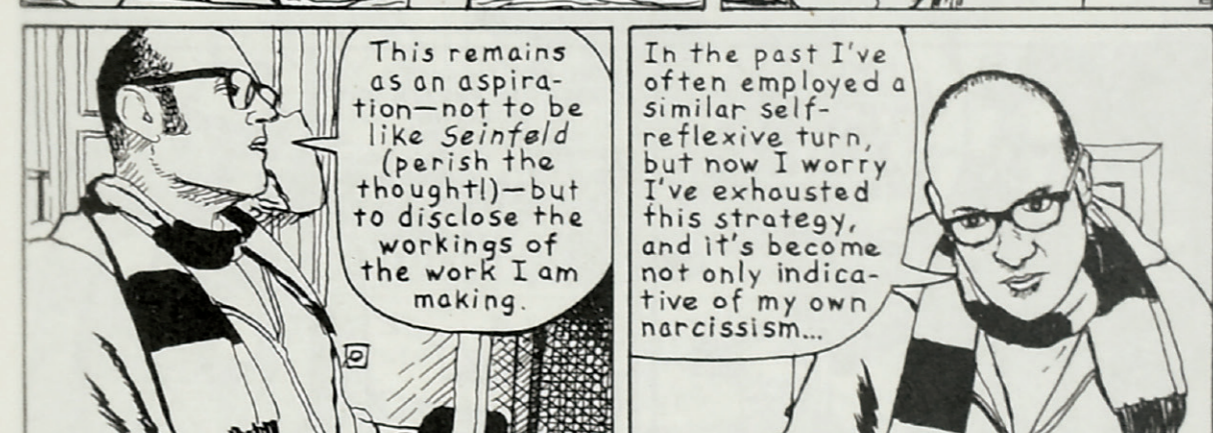
It's kind of up to my collaborators to propose ideas, you know?

But since the variety show concept is slightly antiquated, I've considered modifying it with a self-reflexive element...



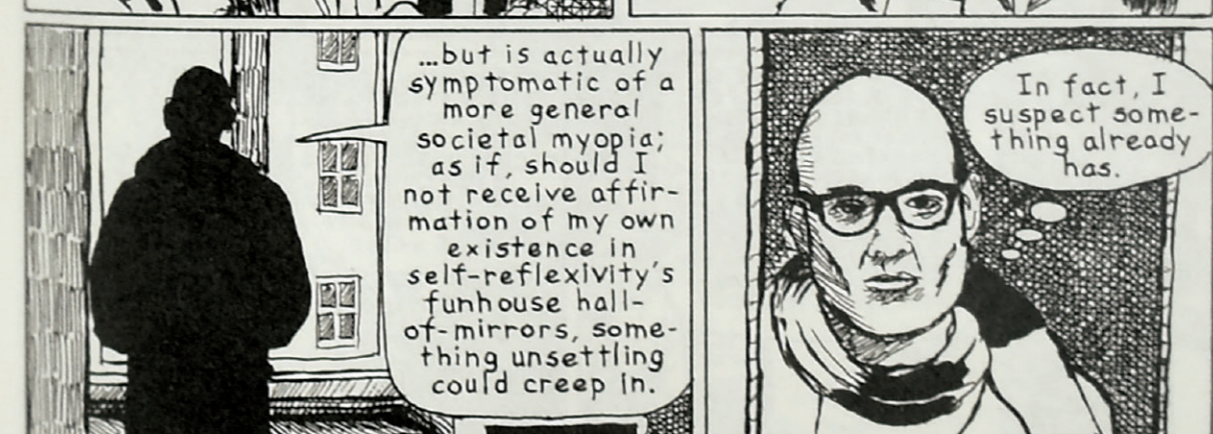
...not a variety show, per se, more of a sit-com about a variety show, with a self-absorbed host, his taciturn-but-lovable co-workers, and zany friends, employing all kinds of clever deconstruction tactics.

Show the show as a show within a show in a show, you know, like *Seinfeld*.



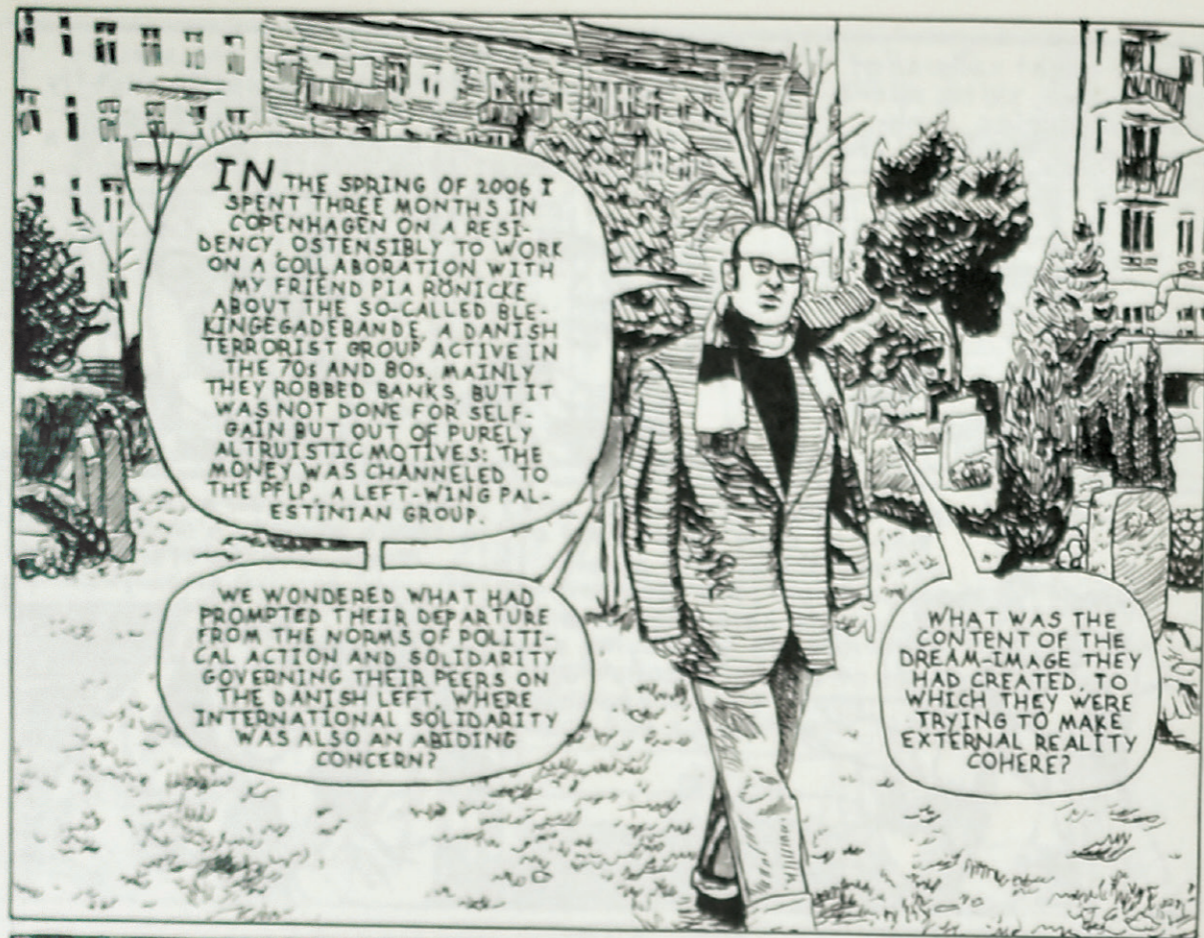
This remains as an aspiration—not to be like *Seinfeld* (perish the thought!)—but to disclose the workings of the work I am making.

In the past I've often employed a similar self-reflexive turn, but now I worry I've exhausted this strategy, and it's become not only indicative of my own narcissism...



...but is actually symptomatic of a more general societal myopia; as if, should I not receive affirmation of my own existence in self-reflexivity's funhouse hall-of-mirrors, something unsettling could creep in.

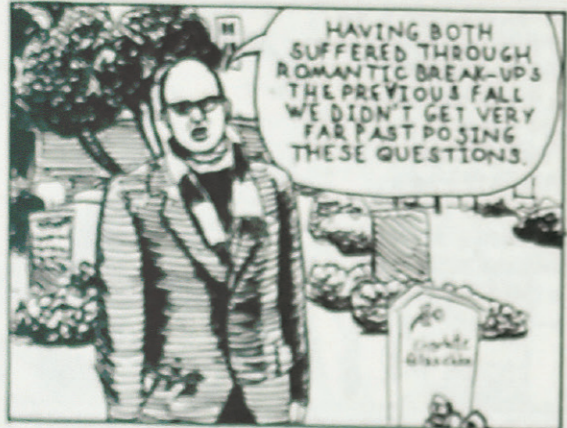
In fact, I suspect something already has.



IN THE SPRING OF 2006 I SPENT THREE MONTHS IN COPENHAGEN ON A RESIDENCY OSTENSIBLY TO WORK ON A COLLABORATION WITH MY FRIEND PIA RÖNICKÉ ABOUT THE SO-CALLED BLEKINGEGADEBANDE, A DANISH TERRORIST GROUP ACTIVE IN THE 70s AND 80s, MAINLY THEY ROBBED BANKS, BUT IT WAS NOT DONE FOR SELF-GAIN BUT OUT OF PURELY ALTRUISTIC MOTIVES: THE MONEY WAS CHANNELLED TO THE PFLP, A LEFT-WING PALESTINIAN GROUP.

WE WONDERED WHAT HAD PROMPTED THEIR DEPARTURE FROM THE NORMS OF POLITICAL ACTION AND SOLIDARITY GOVERNING THEIR PEERS ON THE DANISH LEFT, WHERE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WAS ALSO AN ABIDING CONCERN?

WHAT WAS THE CONTENT OF THE DREAM-IMAGE THEY HAD CREATED, TO WHICH THEY WERE TRYING TO MAKE EXTERNAL REALITY COHERE?



HAVING BOTH SUFFERED THROUGH ROMANTIC BREAK-UPS THE PREVIOUS FALL WE DIDN'T GET VERY FAR PAST POSING THESE QUESTIONS.



WE MET IN CAFÉS UNDER THE PRETENSE OF WORKING, MOANED, TRIED INTERMITTENTLY TO TURN THIS WHINGING INTO MATERIAL FOR OUR PROJECT WENT HOME, LISTENED TO CAT POWER, WEEKS WENT BY LIKE THIS.



ONE DAY OUR FRIEND OLOF OLSSON HELPED US STAGE A PHOTO-SHOOT OF PIA AND I STAKING OUT THE COPENHAGEN BANK THE BANDEN HAD CASSED FOR A PERIOD WITHOUT ROBBING, PERHAPS BECAUSE IT LAY ONLY A FEW BLOCKS AWAY FROM THEIR HIDEOUT.



WE PLANNED TO USE THIS MATERIAL TO STAGE A CONVERSATION BASED ON THE RECORDINGS WE HAD MADE OF OUR WHINGING. HERE'S WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE SAID:



I'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT THIS IMAGE THING AND IN THINKING ABOUT IT I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO YOU STOP TRYING TO MATCH IT, OR MAKE IMAGES OF OTHER PEOPLE—OR ALTERNATELY, HOW IT'S POSSIBLE NOT TO CREATE THESE IMAGES... EXPECTATIONS?



HOW TO AVOID BECOMING SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH BY COMPROMISING YOURSELF THROUGH THE OTHER'S IMAGE OF HOW THINGS SHOULD BE?

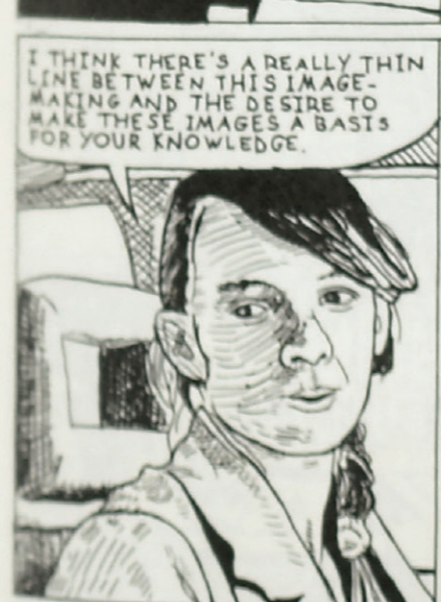


YOU BUILD UP THESE IMAGES, MAYBE IT'S LIKE A TAPE MACHINE THAT CAN'T ERASE. SOMETHING GETS IMPRINTED.



TRANSFORMATION MUST BE POSSIBLE WITHIN IMAGE-MAKING. THE IMAGE HAS THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION, BUT SOMETIMES IT GETS FROZEN.

YOU GET STUCK IN ONE HABIT OF SIGNIFICATION.



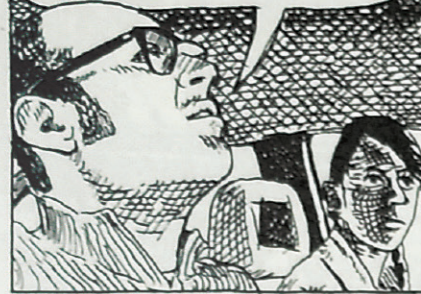
I THINK THERE'S A REALLY THIN LINE BETWEEN THIS IMAGE-MAKING AND THE DESIRE TO MAKE THESE IMAGES A BASIS FOR YOUR KNOWLEDGE.



BUT HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO POLITICAL STRUGGLE? IS POLITICAL STRUGGLE A LOVE RELATIONSHIP?

I DON'T KNOW.

DESIRE IS ABOUT FIXING AN IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT IN LIFE. IT'S UTOPIA TO CREATE A ROMANTIC IDEAL OR A POLITICAL PROGRAM—HOW THINGS SHOULD BE. YOU CAN'T CREATE A TOPOS AND A...AND AN IDEAL THAT'S ALSO NOT A REFLECTION OF THE PERSON WHO CREATES IT...



YOU'VE DEALT WITH UTOPIAS IN YOUR WORK.

I THINK IT'S SORT OF A FORTH-AND-BACK MOVEMENT, BECAUSE THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE UTOPIA IS ALSO, AGAIN, THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IT.

YEAH?

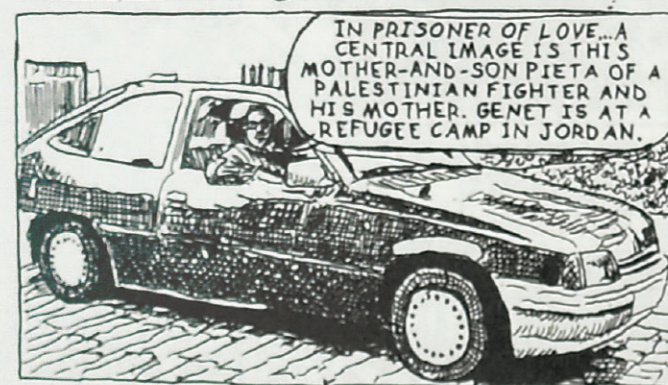
BECAUSE IT APPEARS IN INTERVALS. THE IDEAL STATE IS A STATE THAT IS ALWAYS EXTREMELY UNSTABLE.



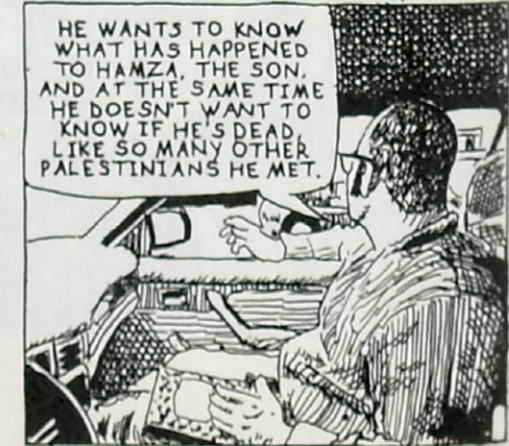
WE MIGHT HAVE THESE IDEAS OF HOW IT IS AND HOW IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE, BUT THE IDEAL STATE IS MOMENTARY. IT ALWAYS HAPPENS IN A TRANSITION.



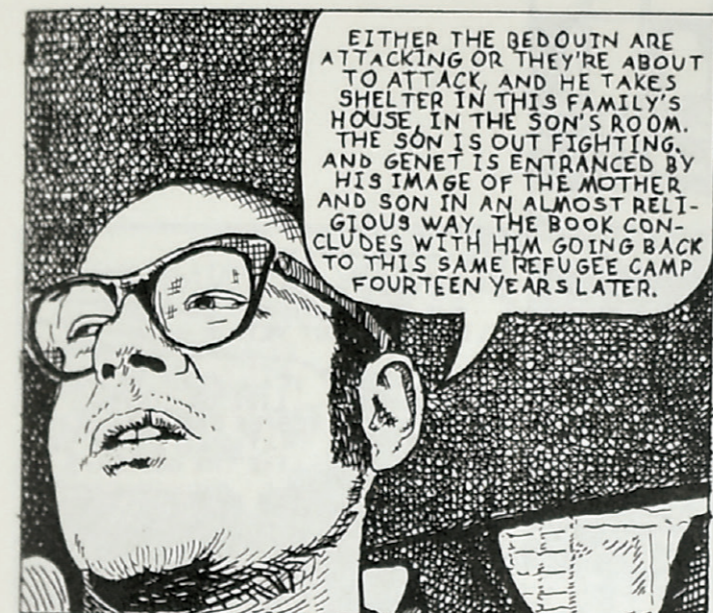
I THINK THE MOVEMENT FROM THESE DIFFERENT AREAS IS WHERE THE IDEAL STATE APPEARS, BUT WE WANT TO FREEZE IT. WE WANT TO FREEZE IT AND MAKE IT SOMETHING, BUT IT NO LONGER EXISTS THEN.



IN PRISONER OF LOVE, A CENTRAL IMAGE IS THIS MOTHER-AND-SON PIETA OF A PALESTINIAN FIGHTER AND HIS MOTHER. GENET IS AT A REFUGEE CAMP IN JORDAN.



HE WANTS TO KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HAMZA, THE SON, AND AT THE SAME TIME HE DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW IF HE'S DEAD, LIKE SO MANY OTHER PALESTINIANS HE MET.



EITHER THE BEDOUIN ARE ATTACKING OR THEY'RE ABOUT TO ATTACK, AND HE TAKES SHELTER IN THIS FAMILY'S HOUSE, IN THE SON'S ROOM. THE SON IS OUT FIGHTING, AND GENET IS ENTRANCED BY HIS IMAGE OF THE MOTHER AND SON IN AN ALMOST RELIGIOUS WAY. THE BOOK CONCLUDES WITH HIM GOING BACK TO THIS SAME REFUGEE CAMP FOURTEEN YEARS LATER.



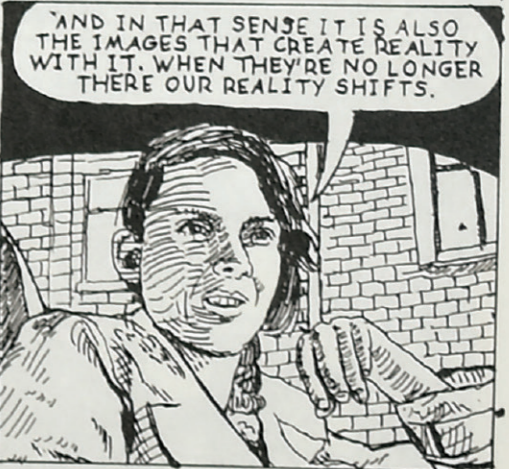
BUT WHEN HE MEETS THE MOTHER, HE DISCOVERS HAMZA IS SAFE, MARRIED AND IN GERMANY. BUT THE ACCOUNT STILL RETAINS THIS DREAM QUALITY DESPITE HIS INTENTIONS TO GO BACK SO THAT HE COULD SAY "THIS HAPPENED."



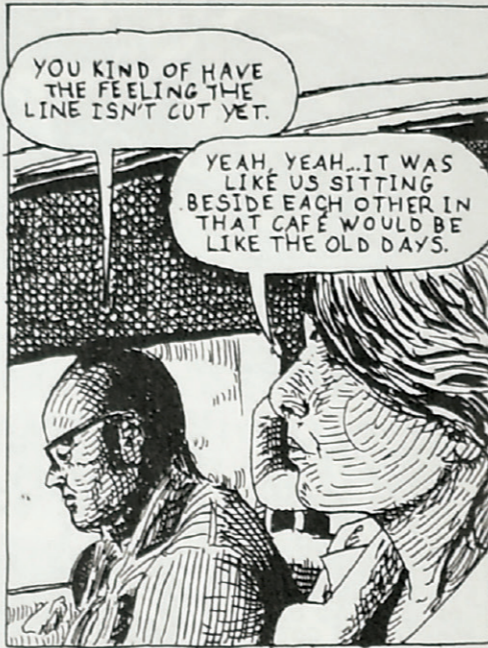
THEY ACTUALIZE SOMETHING THAT IS FIRST A MENTAL CONSTRUCTION. GENET ALSO HAS THIS GREAT STORY OF PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS PLAYING WITH AN INVISIBLE DECK OF CARDS SINCE GAMBLING IS FORBIDDEN.



I THINK WHEN YOU REACH THE POINT OF GIVING UP IMAGES, THERE'S A WHOLE WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES THAT DISAPPEAR. BECAUSE IMAGES ARE ALSO ABOUT ACHIEVEMENTS—DREAM PROJECTIONS.

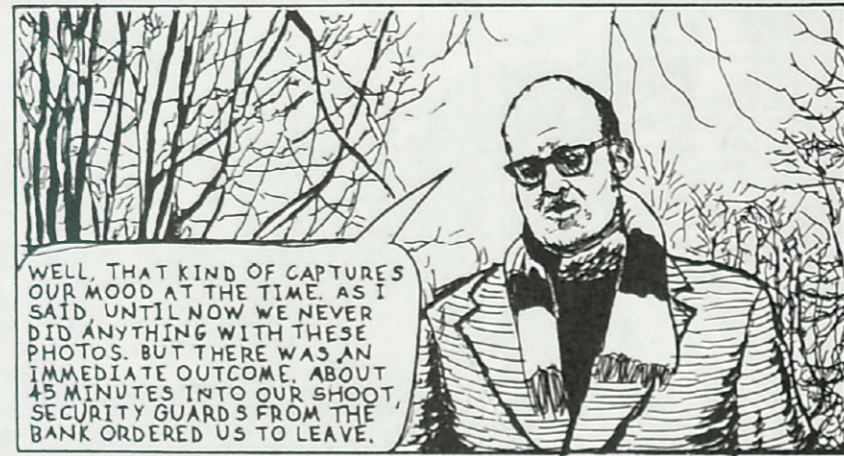


AND IN THAT SENSE IT IS ALSO THE IMAGES THAT CREATE REALITY WITH IT. WHEN THEY'RE NO LONGER THERE OUR REALITY SHIFTS.

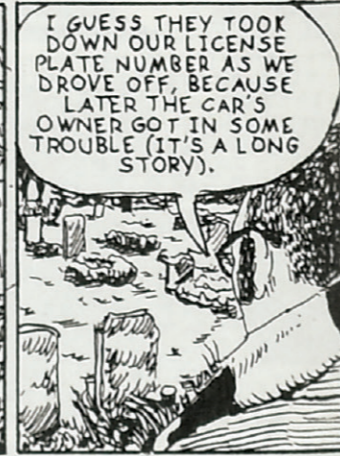


YOU KIND OF HAVE THE FEELING THE LINE ISN'T CUT YET.

YEAH, YEAH...IT WAS LIKE US SITTING BESIDE EACH OTHER IN THAT CAFE WOULD BE LIKE THE OLD DAYS.



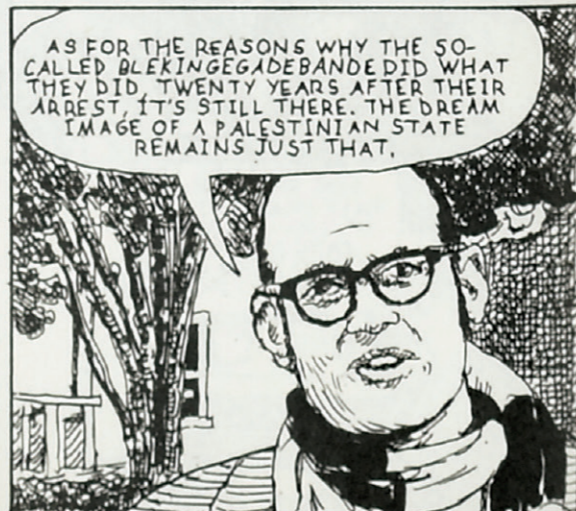
WELL, THAT KIND OF CAPTURES OUR MOOD AT THE TIME. AS I SAID, UNTIL NOW WE NEVER DID ANYTHING WITH THESE PHOTOS. BUT THERE WAS AN IMMEDIATE OUTCOME. ABOUT 45 MINUTES INTO OUR SHOOT, SECURITY GUARDS FROM THE BANK ORDERED US TO LEAVE.



I GUESS THEY TOOK DOWN OUR LICENSE PLATE NUMBER AS WE DROVE OFF, BECAUSE LATER THE CAR'S OWNER GOT IN SOME TROUBLE (IT'S A LONG STORY).



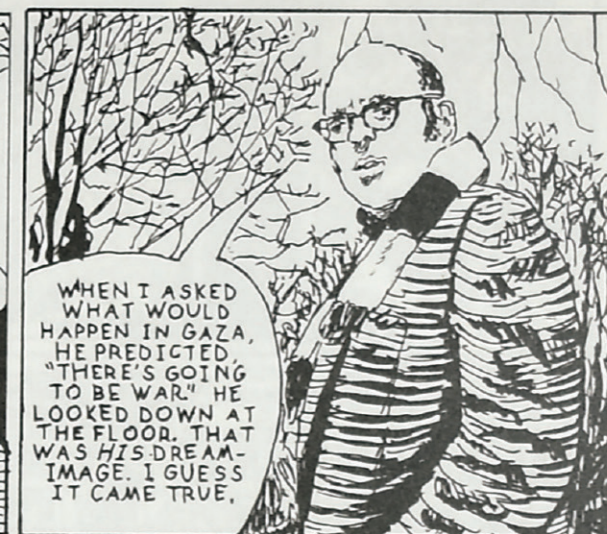
PIA WAS ALSO CONTACTED AND TOLD THAT 'ANOTHER TIME WE SHOULD RECONSIDER DOING SUCH AN ACT IN PUBLIC.'



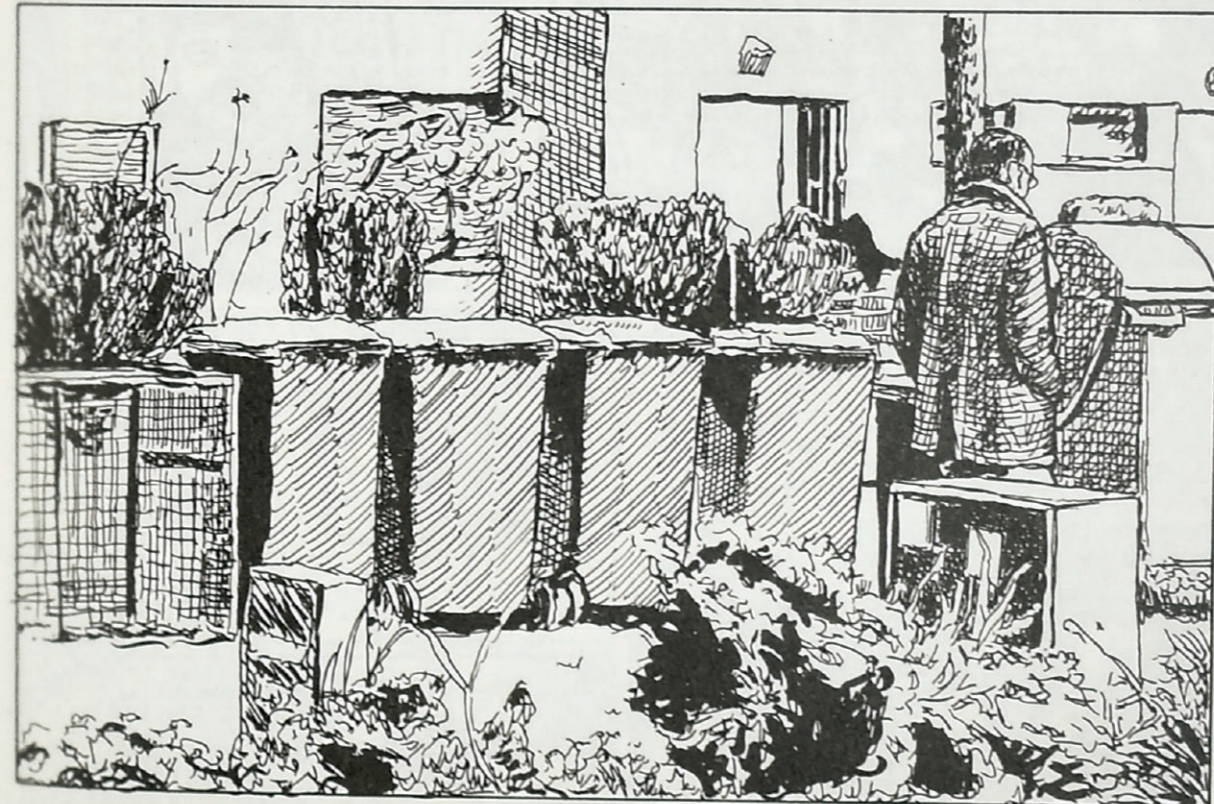
AS FOR THE REASONS WHY THE SO-CALLED BLEKINGEGABEBANDE DID WHAT THEY DID, TWENTY YEARS AFTER THEIR ARREST, IT'S STILL THERE. THE DREAM IMAGE OF A PALESTINIAN STATE REMAINS JUST THAT.



I CAN RELATE ONE FURTHER STORY. LAST FALL THERE WAS A PALESTINIAN ARTIST FROM RAMALLAH IN RESIDENCE AT THE ACADEMY WHERE I TEACH. WE SOMETIMES DISCUSSED THE SITUATION THERE.



WHEN I ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IN GAZA, HE PREDICTED, 'THERE'S GOING TO BE WAR.' HE LOOKED DOWN AT THE FLOOR. THAT WAS HIS DREAM-IMAGE. I GUESS IT CAME TRUE.



I HAVE TRAVELED TO BUCHAREST TO MEET WITH STEFAN TIRON AND ALEXANDRA CROITORU, MEMBERS OF A COLLECTIVE DEDICATED TO RESEARCHING STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING A GLOBAL CATAclySM IN THE 2ND WORLD CONTEXT. THEY HAVE BEEN KIND ENOUGH TO SHOW ME THE RESULTS OF THEIR RESEARCH. SUITABLY, WE BEGAN OUR TOUR IN ONE OF BUCHAREST'S LAST SURVIVING PARTISAN-STYLE ARCADES.



THE SVAlBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT ON THE NORWEGIAN ISLAND OF SPITSBERGEN IS A HIGHLY SECURE FACILITY WITH AN ENCYCLOPEDIA COLLECTION OF SEEDS—ALL THE GENETIC MATERIAL NECESSARY FOR SURVIVORS OF A CATAclySMIC DISASTER TO RESTART AGRARIAN SOCIETY.

WELL, TO BEGIN WITH, WE HAVE NO GOVERNMENT SPONSORED "HIGHLY SECURE FACILITIES" AND IT'S UNLIKELY OUR CURRENT GOVERNMENT WILL INITIATE SUCH A PROGRAM.



WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IN BUCHAREST IF A DISASTER OCCURRED OF SUCH MAGNITUDE THAT THE NORMAL FUNCTIONING OF SOCIETY CEASED?

OF COURSE, A GREAT DEAL DEPENDS ON THE DISASTER'S LOCAL EFFECTS. THERE ARE SOME SITUATIONS ONE CAN'T ANTICIPATE. THEREFORE, OUR RESEARCH COVERS A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT CONTINGENCIES...



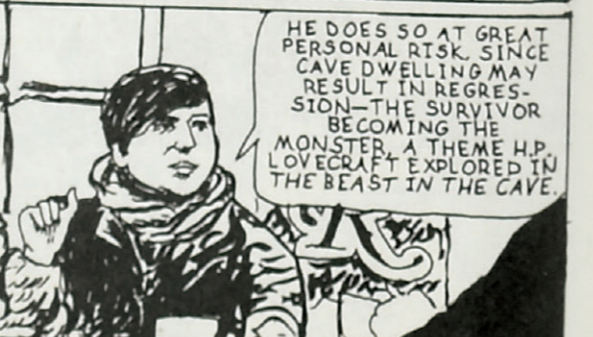
OUR PURPOSE IS TO FORMULATE STRATEGIES FOR BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG TERM: TO MAXIMIZE SURVIVAL OPTIONS IN THE SHORT-TERM, AND DEVELOP A LOW-COST ALTERNATIVE TO THE SVAlBARD MODEL FOR THE LONG-TERM.



THE COLLAPSE OF THE OIL INDUSTRY AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE, NUCLEAR WAR, THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING. THESE ARE JUST A FEW SCENARIOS WE ARE PLANNING FOR.



FOR INSTANCE, OUR COLLEAGUE MIRCEA NICOLAE IS NOW STUDYING HOW HUMANS RESPOND TO LIFE UNDERGROUND AND INVESTIGATING TECHNIQUES FOR USING CAVES AS LONG-TERM STORAGE FACILITIES.



HE DOES SO AT GREAT PERSONAL RISK, SINCE CAVE DWELLING MAY RESULT IN REGRESSION—THE SURVIVOR BECOMING THE MONSTER, A THEME H.P. LOVECRAFT EXPLORED IN THE BEAST IN THE CAVE.

IN ROMANIA THERE IS A LONG TRADITION OF USING MOUNTAIN CAVES TO ESCAPE INVADERS. OUR FOREFATHERS WOULD FLEE TO THESE REDOUBTS, LEAVING POISONED WELLS AND DESTROYED FARMS BEHIND. IF IT COMES TO THAT, WE WILL PROUDLY PERPETUATE THE ROMANIAN CAVE-DWELLING TRADITION.



WHAT WE ENVISION FOR THE FUTURE IS BASED ON OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST, AND LIKEWISE, MEMORIES OF THE PAST HAVE THE CAPACITY TO SPEAK TO US ABOUT THE FUTURE. WALTER BENJAMIN THOUGHT OF IMAGES FROM THE PAST AS CONTAINING A MESSAGE FOR THE PRESENT—THE DIALECTICAL IMAGE. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR TOMORROW'S CATAclySM IS MORE UNCERTAIN, WITH SO MANY UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS. TO QUOTE DONALD RUMSFELD, HOW DOES ONE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE WHEN ONE ISN'T CERTAIN WHAT ONE IS PLANNING FOR?



THE SVAlBARD FACILITY IS BUILT TO REMAIN SECURE POTENTIALLY FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, LIKE A CONCRETE REALIZATION OF THE BUDDHIST "LOST GUTRAS" WHICH HAVE THE SECRET OF THEIR DISCOVERY CODED IN THEIR COMPOSITION, OR THE LONG NOW FOUNDATION'S 10,000-YEAR CLOCK, DESIGNED OUT OF COMPONENTS THAT REQUIRE MINIMAL MAINTENANCE.

SOME OF OUR PLANS ENVISION A SIMILAR TIME SPAN, BUT WE ANTICIPATE THAT WITH THE COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION, DATABASES BECOMING SCRAMBLED OR LOST WILL ENSURE THE SAFETY OF AT LEAST SOME OF OUR PROVISIONS.



WE DON'T WISH TO BECOME A THREAT TO FUTURE SURVIVORS BY CREATING A SITUATION WHERE YESTERDAY'S PYRAMID BUILDERS BECOME TOMORROW'S TOMB RAIDERS.

HOW WILL YOU KEEP THEM SAFE OTHER THAN BY, IN A SENSE, LOSING THEM?

WE HAVE A DEEP MISTRUST FOR SO-CALLED INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR PRESERVING FOOD, PREFERRING METHODS TRADITIONALLY USED IN TIMES OF FAMINE, HARSH WINTERS, AND INVASION.



THESE METHODS WERE REVIVED BY THE URBAN POPULATION DURING THE DARKEST YEARS OF THE CEAUȘESCU REGIME.

OF COURSE, IF THE PREDICTIONS IN LORD NICHOLAS STERN'S REPORT ON GLOBAL WARMING ARE CORRECT, OUR LONG-TERM PLANS MIGHT BE POINTLESS, SINCE HE BELIEVES SOUTHERN EUROPE WILL NO LONGER SUSTAIN LARGE-SCALE HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.





BUCHAREST IS SITED ON THE DAMBOVITA RIVER, ON THE ROMANIAN PLAIN, OVER THE YEARS IT HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO INVASIONS, COUNTER-INVASIONS, OCCUPATIONS, NATURAL DISASTERS. MUCH OF THE HISTORIC CITY CENTER WAS DESTROYED IN 1861 BY A MASSIVE FIRE, AND AGAIN IN 1977 BY A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE, NOT TO MENTION CEAUȘESCU AND HIS BUILDING MANIA.

BUCHAREST HAS NO NATURAL DEFENSES, CONTRIBUTING TO ITS UNSTABLE ENVIRONMENT. WE EVEN HAD AN INVASION OF CLUB-WIELDING GOAL MINERS IN THE EARLY 90S.

IN OUR RESEARCH WE IDENTIFY AREAS UNLIKELY TO UNDERGO RAPID CHANGE AND ZONES WITHIN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT THAT MIGHT BE EXPLOITED FOR ACQUIRING SUPPLIES OR BUILDING STOREHOUSES AND DEFENSIVE INSTALLATIONS.

THIS AREA, THE LIPSCANI DISTRICT, IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE KIND OF PLACE TO AVOID. YOU CAN SEE THE INITIAL EFFORTS AT URBAN RENEWAL WHICH BEGAN IN 2005.

BEFORE THAT MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS WERE SQUATTED OR ABANDONED.

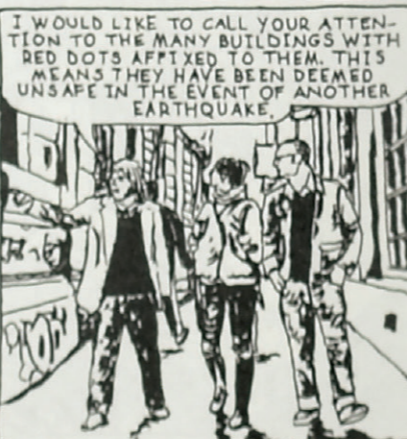
ONCE RENOVATIONS ARE COMPLETE, I'M SURE IT WILL BE VERY NICE.

WHY?

IT MAY LOOK CHARMING, BUT FOR OUR PURPOSES, IT'S PROBLEMATIC.



SEE ALL THESE CELLARS? IN MANY WAYS THEY'RE PERFECT FOR HIDING FOOD AND SUPPLIES, BUT HOW CAN WE PREDICT THAT A CAREFULLY HIDDEN SUPPLY CACHE WILL NOT BE DISCOVERED DURING RENOVATIONS? THE MORE CHANCES FOR DISRUPTION, THE LESS ATTRACTIVE A SITE IS FOR OUR PURPOSES.



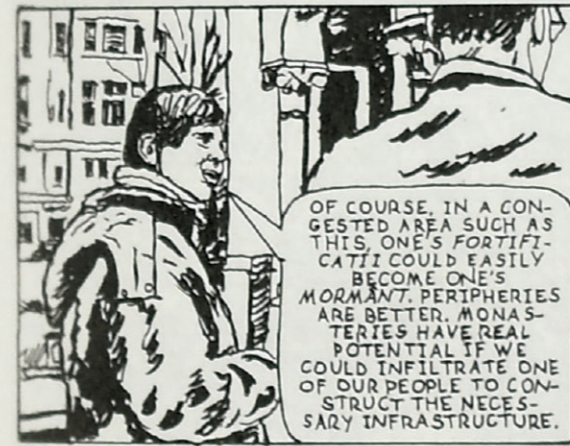
I WOULD LIKE TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE MANY BUILDINGS WITH RED DOTS AFFIXED TO THEM. THIS MEANS THEY HAVE BEEN DEEMED UNSAFE IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER EARTHQUAKE.



LOCATING A SUPPLY CACHE THERE WOULD BE THE HEIGHT OF FOOLISHNESS. WHAT IF THE BUILDING COLLAPSED? IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC SITUATION, WE MIGHT NOT HAVE ACCESS TO BACKHOES OR TRACTORS.



HERE WE HAVE A TYPICAL ORTHODOX CHURCH. SEE HOW STURDY THE WALLS ARE? WE HAVE MADE A CAREFUL STUDY OF ROMANIAN CHURCH CONSTRUCTION TO EVALUATE THEIR USEFULNESS. THEY OFFER SEVERAL ADVANTAGES: THEY ARE EASILY DEFENDED, AND OFTEN HAVE CRYPTS UNDERGROUND.

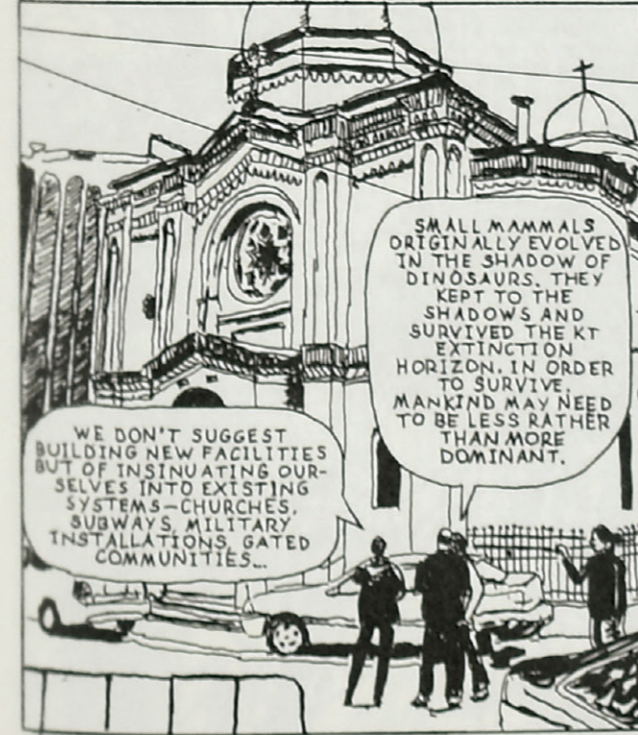


OF COURSE, IN A CONGESTED AREA SUCH AS THIS, ONE'S FORTIFICATION COULD EASILY BECOME ONE'S MORMANT. PERIPHERIES ARE BETTER. MONASTERIES HAVE REAL POTENTIAL IF WE COULD INFILTRATE ONE OF OUR PEOPLE TO CONSTRUCT THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN EXACTLY?

MUCH OF OUR SHORT-TERM CONTINGENCY PLANNING IS BASED ON THE IDEA OF PARASITISM.



SMALL MAMMALS ORIGINALLY EVOLVED IN THE SHADOW OF DINOSAURS. THEY KEPT TO THE SHADOWS AND SURVIVED THE KT EXTINCTION HORIZON. IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, MANKIND MAY NEED TO BE LESS RATHER THAN MORE DOMINANT.

WE DON'T SUGGEST BUILDING NEW FACILITIES BUT OF INSINUATING OURSELVES INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS—CHURCHES, SUBWAYS, MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, GATED COMMUNITIES...



ONE ADVANTAGE OF LIVING IN AN ENDEMICALLY CORRUPT SOCIETY IS THE EASY ACCESS TO PLACES ONE SHOULDN'T BE. TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE, FOR INSTANCE, IS ONLY A BRIBE AWAY.



THE BENEFIT OF SUCH SITES IS THAT THEY'RE BUILT FOR PERMANENCE. MIRCEA NICOLAE HAS NOTED FREEWAY OVER-PASSES OFFER A WEALTH OF STASHING SPACES.



SUCH PLACES OFFER A MAXIMUM OF DISCRETION AND SECURITY—DUE TO THE NOXIOUS EXHAUST FUMES AND HIGH-SPEED TRAFFIC, EVEN THE SCRAP METAL SCAVENGERS AVOID GOING HERE. BY TAKING THE ADDITIONAL PRECAUTION OF WORKING AT NIGHT, THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING DISCOVERED IS RELATIVELY LIMITED.



LIKEWISE IN THE METRO, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BEGIN MAPPING THE DIFFERENT TUNNELS AND SERVICE CORRIDORS BY BRIBING THE ORDINARILY VIGILANT GUARDS.



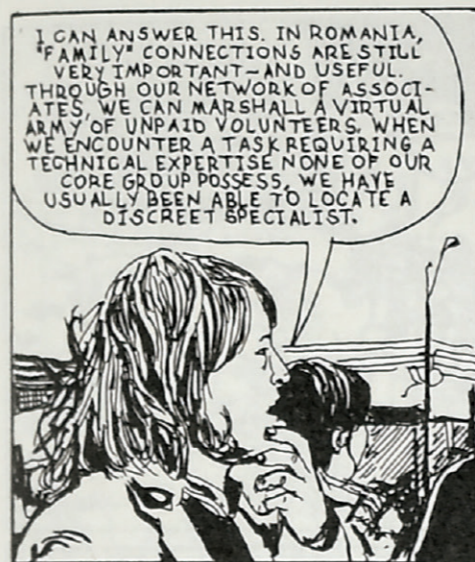
HOW WILL YOU CREATE YOUR PARASITIC INVAGINATIONS? THERE ARE MANY STORAGE AREAS ALREADY IN PLACE. WE PROPOSE PARTITIONING THESE SPACES WITH FALSE WALLS.



WE HAVE ALSO DISCOVERED ROOMS THAT DATE FROM THE INITIAL METRO CONSTRUCTION BUT ARE NO LONGER IN USE. WE SUGGEST CONCEALING THEIR ENTRANCE, AND MARK THEIR LOCATION WITH OUR QR CODING SYSTEM, JUST LIKE HANSEL AND GRETEL WITH THEIR BREADCRUMBS.



I'M FASCINATED BY YOUR INGENUITY. HOW CAN YOU ACCOMPLISH ALL THIS? YOU DON'T ANY FINANCIAL BACKING I'M AWARE OF. IT MUST BE EXPENSIVE AND TIME CONSUMING.



I CAN ANSWER THIS. IN ROMANIA, "FAMILY" CONNECTIONS ARE STILL VERY IMPORTANT—AND USEFUL. THROUGH OUR NETWORK OF ASSOCIATES, WE CAN MARSHALL A VIRTUAL ARMY OF UNPAID VOLUNTEERS. WHEN WE ENCOUNTER A TASK REQUIRING A TECHNICAL EXPERTISE NONE OF OUR CORE GROUP POSSESS, WE HAVE USUALLY BEEN ABLE TO LOCATE A DISCREET SPECIALIST.



WE'VE BEEN DRIVING FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE HOURS ON THIS TERRIBLE ROAD. NOTHING BUT TRASH, STRAY DOGS, AND METAL SCAVENGERS. I FEEL LIKE WE'RE MILES AWAY. ACTUALLY, WE'RE NOT FAR FROM THE CENTER.



THIS IS JUST OFF THE RING ROAD NORTH OF BUCHAREST WHERE THE BUILDING OF GATED COMMUNITIES IS BEING CONCENTRATED. WE'RE IN THE MIDST OF CONDUCTING AN EXTENSIVE STUDY ON HOW TO USE THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT FOR THE POST-CONVERGENCE CHALLENGES.



THIS IS A FORMER AGRICULTURAL AREA DOTTED WITH VILLAGES. EVENTUALLY, MOST OF THE FIELDS WILL BE FILLED WITH HOUSES. AND IN THE DISTANCE YOU CAN SEE THE NEW SHOPPING MALLS.



THE FUTURE'S NOT HERE, IT'S OVER THERE. THE FUTURE IS HERE. I HOPE NOT. OR IT MAY BE HERE, JUST NOT IN THE WAY ADVERTISING AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS BILLBOARD INTENDED. SO, HOW DOES THIS AREA FIT INTO YOUR SCHEME?

IN THE EVENT OF A CATACLYSM, OUR ASSOCIATES WILL HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO CONVERGE ON THE SHOPPING MALLS, STRIPPING THEM OF EVERYTHING USEFUL. THESE GOODS WILL END UP IN THE GATED COMMUNITIES, STORED IN SUB-BASEMENTS, UNDER LAWNS, BENEATH SWIMMING POOLS...



WE ADVISE USING THE SHOPPING MALLS AS FORTIFICATIONS, LEAVING THE GATED COMMUNITIES TO ALL APPEARANCES DESERTED AS STOREHOUSES. THIS WILL NOT BE THE CASE.



FITTINGLY OR NOT, WE HAVE CONCLUDED OUR TOUR IN A TYPICAL ROMANIAN CEMETERY.



EXACT. YOU CAN SEE MANY OF THE GRAVESTONES ARE FAMILY VAULTS, BUILT FOR MULTIPLE GENERATIONS OF THE DEAD TO BE INTRODUCED. BREAKING IN ISN'T DIFFICULT.



WHY?

ONE ADVANTAGE WITH CEMETERIES IS IT'S VERY EASY TO BUILD AN ANTECHAMBER BENEATH A TOMB. EVEN NETWORK DIFFERENT TOMBS TOGETHER VIA TUNNELS. ORDINARILY NO ONE GOES INSIDE A VAULT—A FURTHER ADVANTAGE.



AND YOUR AVERAGE CEMETERY STAFF'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SACRILEGIOUS IS EASILY MODIFIED WITH THE RIGHT FINANCIAL INCENTIVE.



THE FAMILY NAMES ON THE DIFFERENT VAULTS ARE ALSO IDEAL FOR DEPLOYING IN CODES SPREAD VIA GRAFFITI AND TAGS.



ANCIENT BURIALS SITES USUALLY INCLUDE FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES THE DEAD MAY NEED IN THE AFTERLIFE. I GUESS THERE IS A CERTAIN IRONY IN USING THE DEAD TO PERPETUATE THE LIVING. IT'S A CLEVER INVERSION.



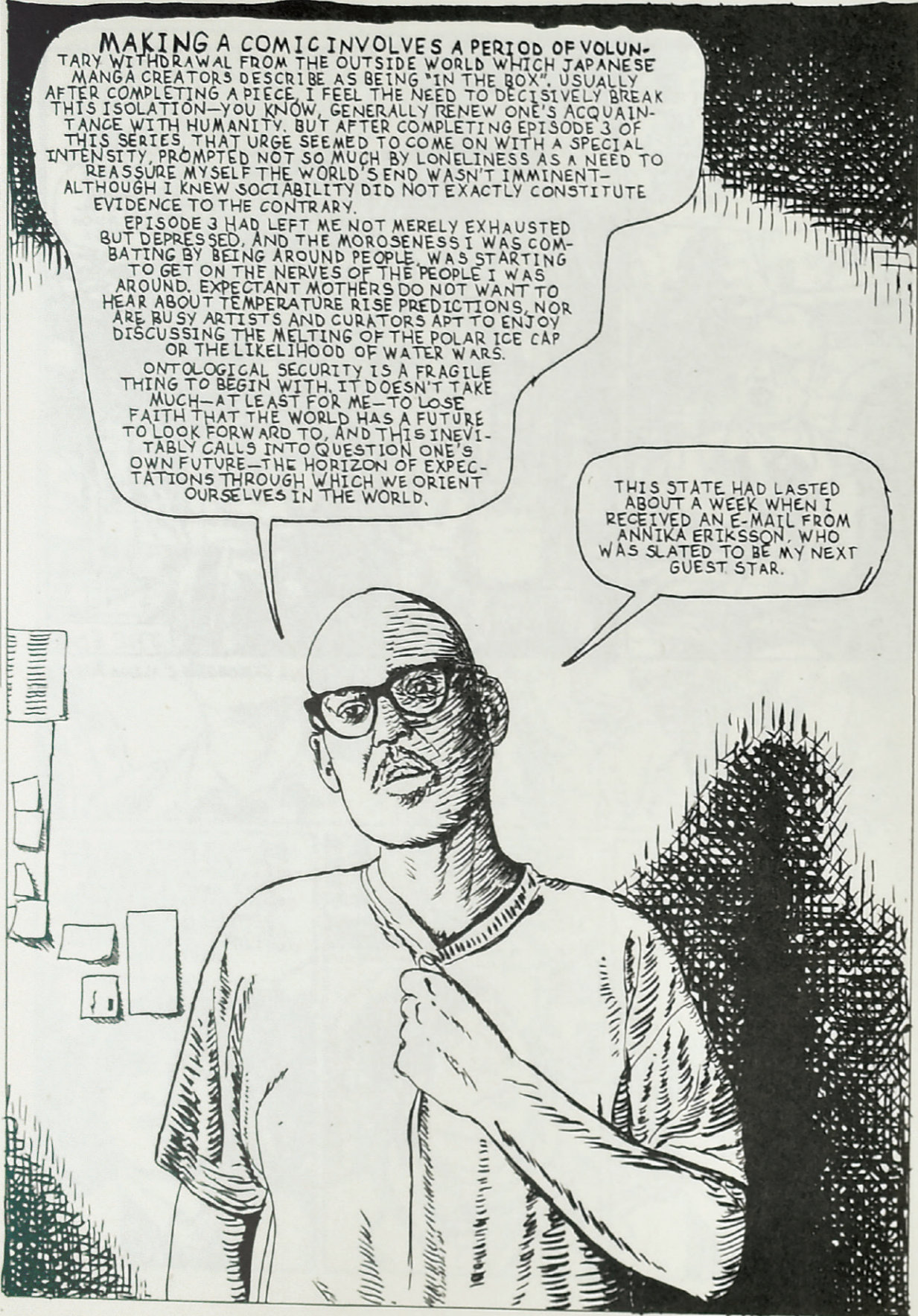
WE ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH CLEVERNESS SO MUCH AS EFFICACY.



A RAT ISN'T CONCERNED WITH AESTHETICS OR SOPHISTICATED. IT WANTS TO SURVIVE.

THE END

PHOTOGRAPHY BY IRINA GHEORGHE & ALINA POPA



MAKING A COMIC INVOLVES A PERIOD OF VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD WHICH JAPANESE MANGA CREATORS DESCRIBE AS BEING "IN THE BOX". USUALLY AFTER COMPLETING A PIECE, I FEEL THE NEED TO DECISIVELY BREAK THIS ISOLATION—YOU KNOW, GENERALLY RENEW ONE'S ACQUAINTANCE WITH HUMANITY. BUT AFTER COMPLETING EPISODE 3 OF THIS SERIES, THAT URGE SEEMED TO COME ON WITH A SPECIAL INTENSITY, PROMPTED NOT SO MUCH BY LONELINESS AS A NEED TO REASSURE MYSELF THE WORLD'S END WASN'T IMMINENT—ALTHOUGH I KNEW SOCIABILITY DID NOT EXACTLY CONSTITUTE EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY.

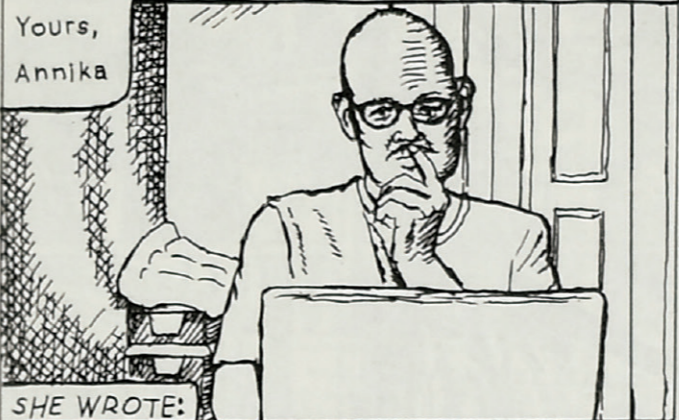
EPISODE 3 HAD LEFT ME NOT MERELY EXHAUSTED BUT DEPRESSED, AND THE MOROSENESS I WAS COMBATING BY BEING AROUND PEOPLE, WAS STARTING TO GET ON THE NERVES OF THE PEOPLE I WAS AROUND. EXPECTANT MOTHERS DO NOT WANT TO HEAR ABOUT TEMPERATURE RISE PREDICTIONS, NOR ARE BUSY ARTISTS AND CURATORS APT TO ENJOY DISCUSSING THE MELTING OF THE POLAR ICE CAP OR THE LIKELIHOOD OF WATER WARS.

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY IS A FRAGILE THING TO BEGIN WITH. IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH—AT LEAST FOR ME—TO LOSE FAITH THAT THE WORLD HAS A FUTURE TO LOOK FORWARD TO, AND THIS INEVITABLY CALLS INTO QUESTION ONE'S OWN FUTURE—THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS THROUGH WHICH WE ORIENT OURSELVES IN THE WORLD.

THIS STATE HAD LASTED ABOUT A WEEK WHEN I RECEIVED AN E-MAIL FROM ANNIKA ERIKSSON, WHO WAS SLATED TO BE MY NEXT GUEST STAR.

I've been thinking about how to structure our collaboration and I've decided to send you to the Folkets Park in Malmö. Just go there and see what you think. You go to Copenhagen all the time, so it's no problem for you, isn't it? Here's a Google map.

Yours,
Annika

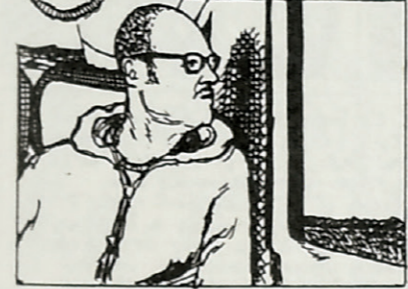


SHE WROTE:

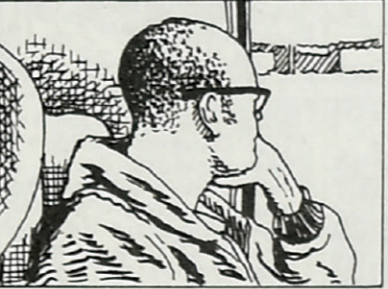
I WAS TRAVELING TO DENMARK IN A COUPLE OF DAYS AND ARRANGED TO LEAVE A DAY EARLY.



I DIDN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT FOLKETS PARK. I IMAGINED A QUIET, REFLECTIVE PLACE WHERE EARNEST YOUNG PEOPLE TALKED...



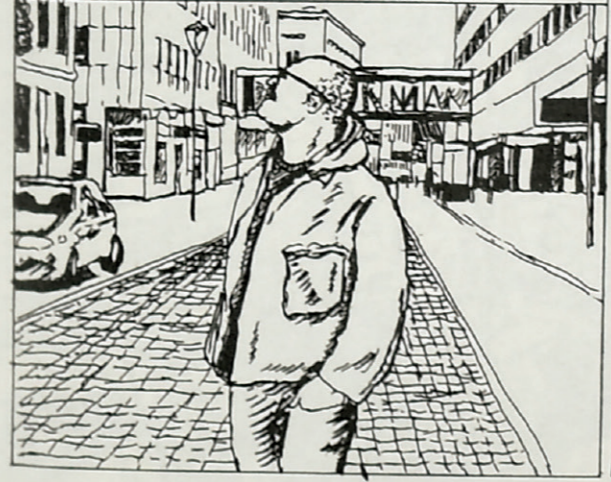
... UNDER THE TREES WHILE PENSIONERS PLAY CHESS ON PARK BENCHES. BUT I WAS PREPARED TO RE-EVALUATE, AND TOWARDS THAT END HAD DONE NO PRIOR RESEARCH TO BE AS OPEN TO SENSE IMPRESSIONS AS POSSIBLE.



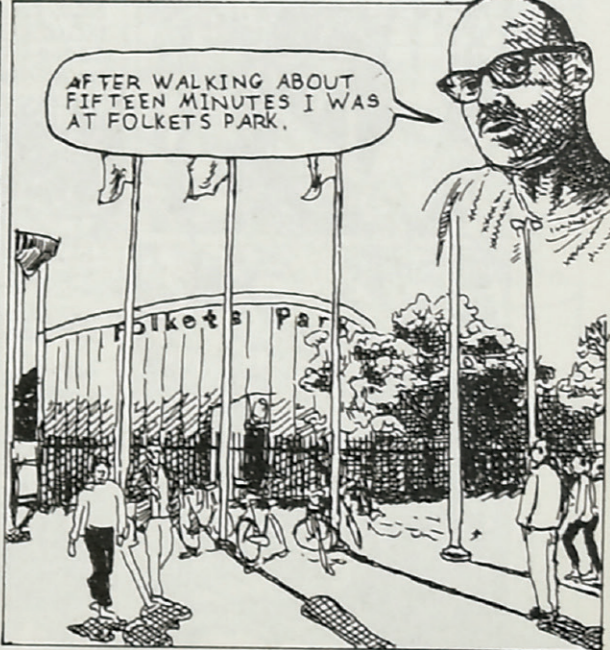
AS I STEPPED OFF THE TRAIN, I EXPERIENCED A FAMILIAR FEELING. MALMÖ'S ORIGINAL NAME, MALMHAUG, MEANS "GRAVEL PILE" AND THIS GOES SOME WAY TOWARDS EXPLAINING THE CITY'S ALLURE.

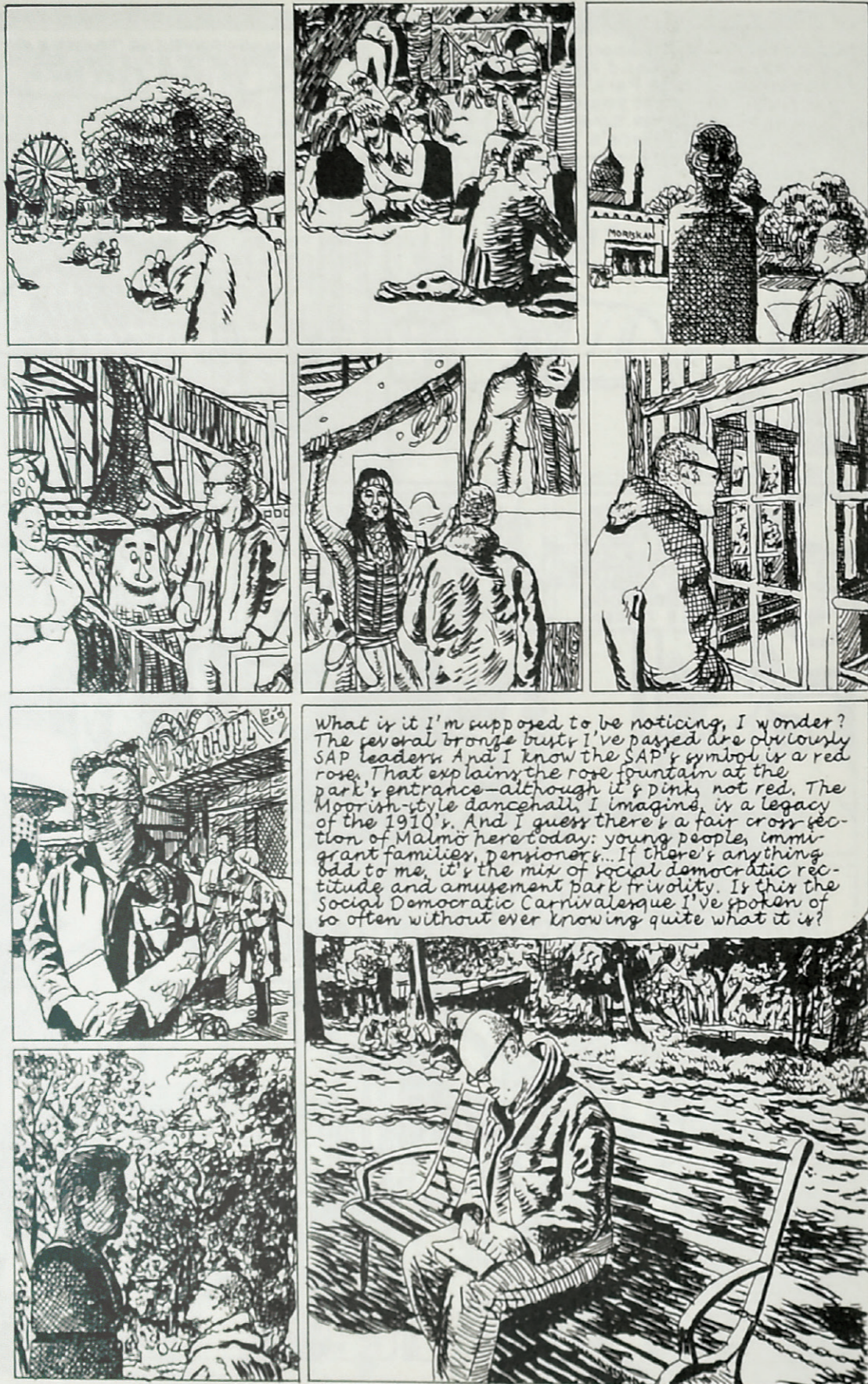


THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT MALMÖ... I'M IMMEDIATELY OVERTAKEN BY A KIND OF SWEDISH LETHARGY, A PERPETUAL SUNDAY AFTERNOON OF DESERTED STREETS AND INNER LISTLESSNESS. THERE IS NOTHING TO DO AND NOTHING ONE FEELS LIKE DOING. KNOWING THIS, I HAD SOME MISGIVINGS ABOUT ANNIKA'S ASSIGNMENT.

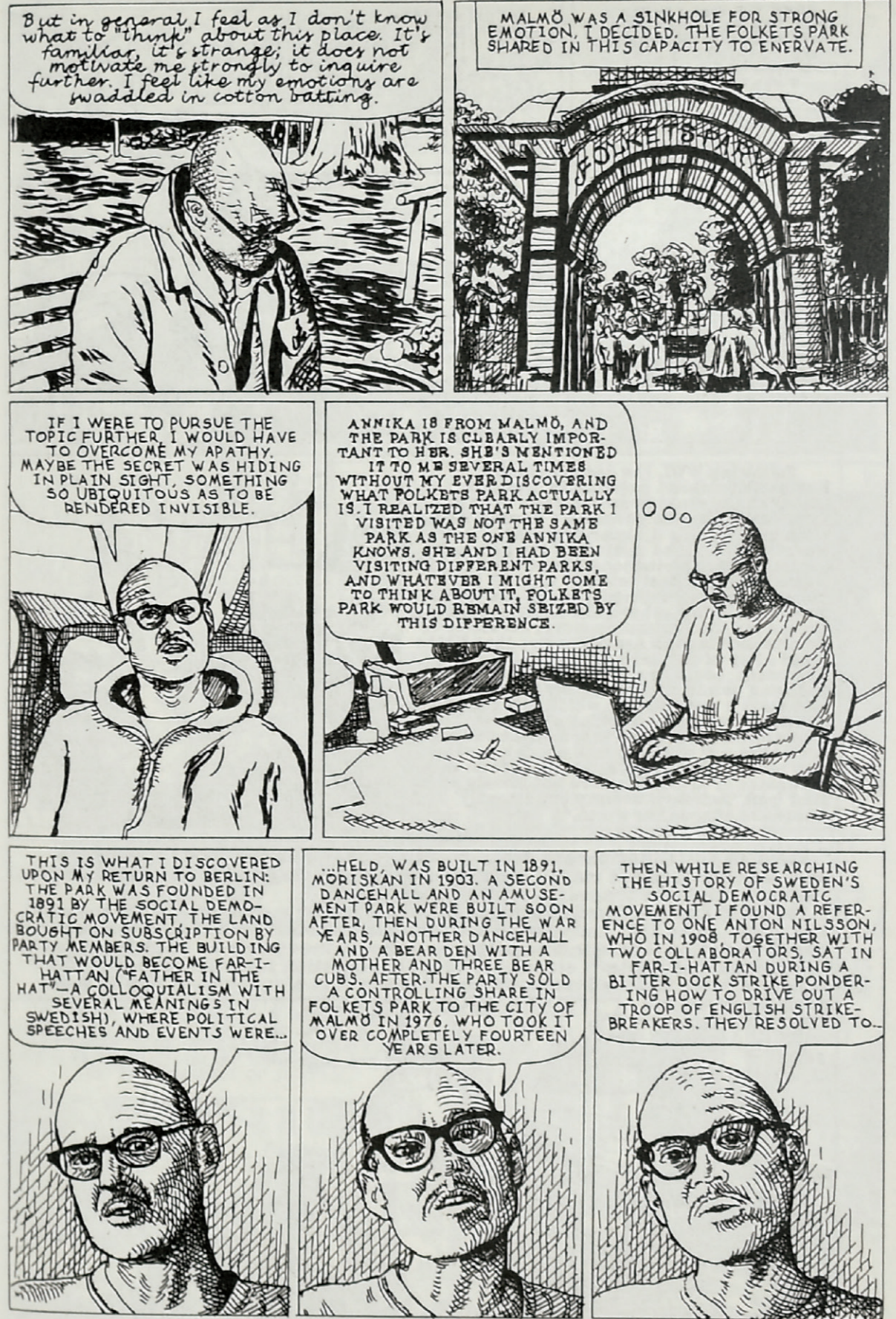


AFTER WALKING ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES I WAS AT FOLKETS PARK.





What is it I'm supposed to be noticing, I wonder? The several bronze busts I've passed are obviously SAP leaders. And I know the SAP's symbol is a red rose. That explains the rose fountain at the park's entrance—although it's pink, not red. The Moorish-style dancehall, I imagine, is a legacy of the 1910's. And I guess there's a fair cross-section of Malmö here today: young people, immigrant families, pensioners... If there's anything odd to me, it's the mix of social democratic rectitude and amusement park frivolity. Is this the Social Democratic Carnivalesque I've spoken of so often without ever knowing quite what it is?



But in general, I feel as I don't know what to "think" about this place. It's familiar, it's strange; it does not motivate me strongly to inquire further. I feel like my emotions are swaddled in cotton batting.

MALMÖ WAS A SINKHOLE FOR STRONG EMOTION, I DECIDED. THE FOLKETS PARK SHARED IN THIS CAPACITY TO ENERVATE.

IF I WERE TO PURSUE THE TOPIC FURTHER, I WOULD HAVE TO OVERCOME MY APATHY. MAYBE THE SECRET WAS HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT, SOMETHING SO UBIQUITOUS AS TO BE RENDERED INVISIBLE.

ANNIKA IS FROM MALMÖ, AND THE PARK IS CLEARLY IMPORTANT TO HER. SHE'S MENTIONED IT TO ME SEVERAL TIMES WITHOUT MY EVER DISCOVERING WHAT FOLKETS PARK ACTUALLY IS. I REALIZED THAT THE PARK I VISITED WAS NOT THE SAME PARK AS THE ONE ANNIKA KNOWS. SHE AND I HAD BEEN VISITING DIFFERENT PARKS, AND WHATEVER I MIGHT COME TO THINK ABOUT IT, FOLKETS PARK WOULD REMAIN SEIZED BY THIS DIFFERENCE.

THIS IS WHAT I DISCOVERED UPON MY RETURN TO BERLIN: THE PARK WAS FOUNDED IN 1891 BY THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT. THE LAND BOUGHT ON SUBSCRIPTION BY PARTY MEMBERS. THE BUILDING THAT WOULD BECOME FAR-I-HATTAN ("FATHER IN THE HAT"—A COLLOQUIALISM WITH SEVERAL MEANINGS IN SWEDISH), WHERE POLITICAL SPEECHES AND EVENTS WERE...

...HELD, WAS BUILT IN 1891. MORISKAN IN 1903. A SECOND DANCEHALL AND AN AMUSEMENT PARK WERE BUILT SOON AFTER. THEN DURING THE WAR YEARS, ANOTHER DANCEHALL AND A BEAR DEN WITH A MOTHER AND THREE BEAR CUBS. AFTER THE PARTY SOLD A CONTROLLING SHARE IN FOLKETS PARK TO THE CITY OF MALMÖ IN 1976, WHO TOOK IT OVER COMPLETELY FOURTEEN YEARS LATER.

THEN WHILE RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF SWEDEN'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT, I FOUND A REFERENCE TO ONE ANTON NILSSON, WHO IN 1908, TOGETHER WITH TWO COLLABORATORS, SAT IN FAR-I-HATTAN DURING A BITTER DOCK STRIKE PONDERING HOW TO DRIVE OUT A TROOP OF ENGLISH STRIKE-BREAKERS. THEY RESOLVED TO...

...BOMB THE ENGLISHMEN'S SHIP, THE AMALTHEA (WHICH THEY THOUGHT UNOCCUPIED) CARRIED OUT THIS MISSION IN WHICH ONE MAN DIED AND TWENTY THREE WERE INJURED, WERE QUICKLY APPREHENDED AND CONVICTED, ONLY TO BE FREED A DECADE LATER FOLLOWING MASSIVE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS.



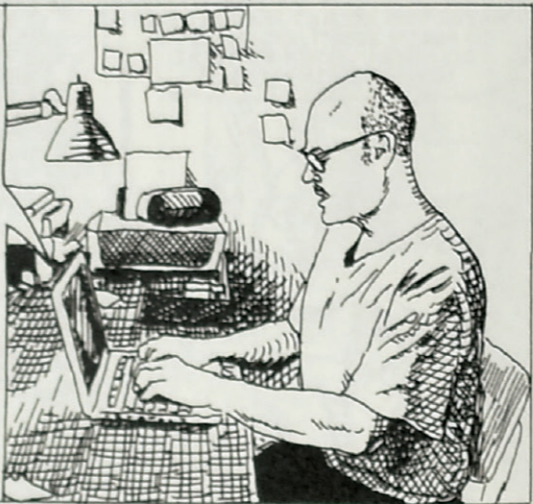
ANTON NILSSON, THE ACTUAL BOMB-PLANTER, AVERTED EXECUTION IN TIME TO TAKE PART IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, RETURNING TO SWEDEN FOLLOWING LENIN'S DEATH (THUS AVOIDING STALIN'S PURGES). NILSSON WAS A FREQUENT PATRON OF FAR-I-HATTAN, BECOMING KNOWN AS THE "AMALTHEA MAN". HE LIVED TO 101.

I WOULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED SO MANY SCANDINAVIAN TERRORISTS POPPING UP IN THIS SERIES!

MEANWHILE I BEGAN TO BE MORE CURIOUS ABOUT THE NATURE OF SWEDISH SOCIALISM.

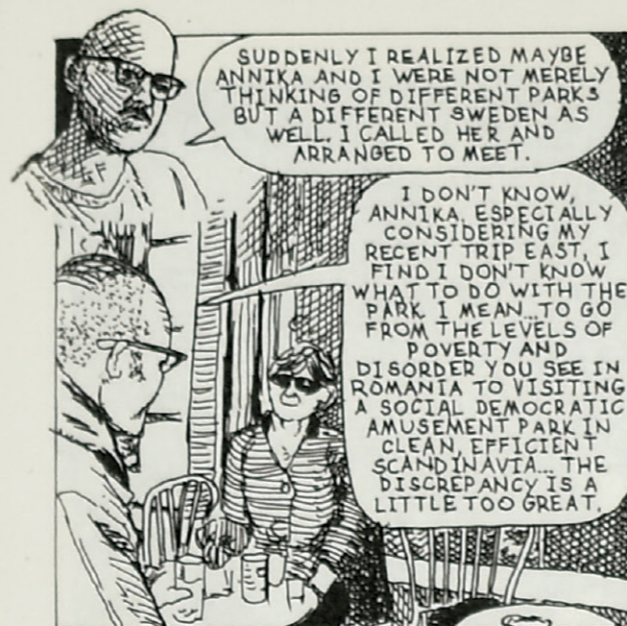


Following WWI, the decision facing European Socialist movements, Sweden among them, could be boiled down to this: some activists, like Germany's Eduard Bernstein or Sweden's Hjalmar Branting, thought Marxist theory had misjudged the nature of capitalism's exploitation of the worker, and it was in society's best interest to work for incremental improvements under the capitalist system, while others like Rosa Luxemburg argued for the continuing moral necessity of revolution. Hannah Arendt writes that "[t]he Blind Alley of the German Socialist movement could be analyzed correctly from opposing points of view—either from the of Bernstein's revisionism, which recognized the emancipation of the working classes within capitalist society as an accomplished fact and demanded a stop to the talk about a revolution nobody thought of anyhow; or from the viewpoint of those who were not merely alienated from bourgeois society but actually wanted to change the world."



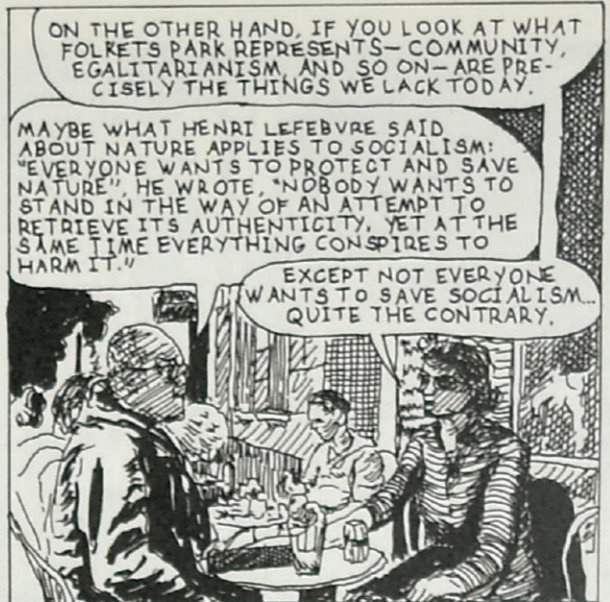
Swedish social democrats decided against changing the world. I have decided this does not make Swedish history non-tragic—the normal interpretation. I think the tragedy was merely deferred.

Yet by and large, Sweden continues to be a better model than most societies. The question to ask, I suspect, does not revolve around whether a society based on rational humanistic principles should inevitably be stultifying to the individual—the western classical liberal explanation for why Sweden is, for lack of a more nuanced word, boring. Rather, it is a question of how to make such a society fun.



SUDDENLY I REALIZED MAYBE ANNIKA AND I WERE NOT MERELY THINKING OF DIFFERENT PARKS BUT A DIFFERENT SWEDEN AS WELL. I CALLED HER AND ARRANGED TO MEET.

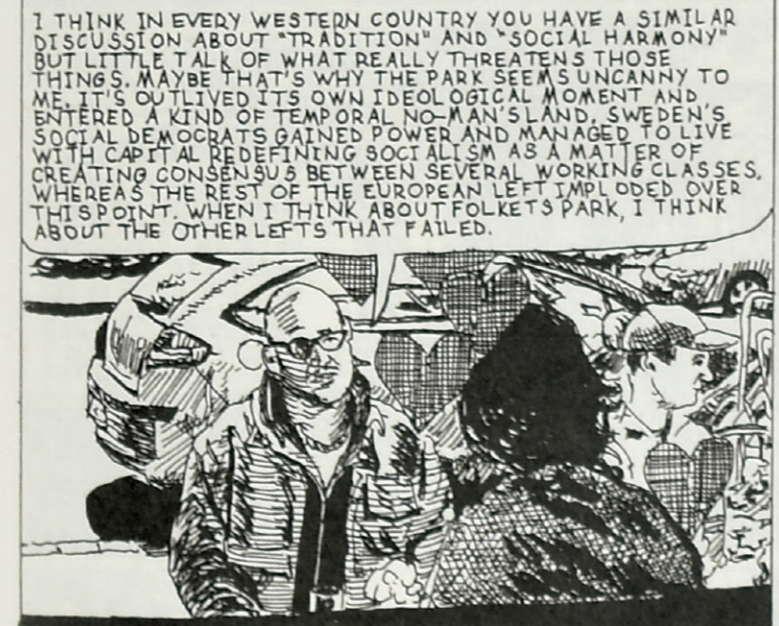
I DON'T KNOW, ANNIKA, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING MY RECENT TRIP EAST, I FIND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THE PARK I MEAN, TO GO FROM THE LEVELS OF POVERTY AND DISORDER YOU SEE IN ROMANIA TO VISITING A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AMUSEMENT PARK IN CLEAN EFFICIENT SCANDINAVIA. THE DISCREPANCY IS A LITTLE TOO GREAT.



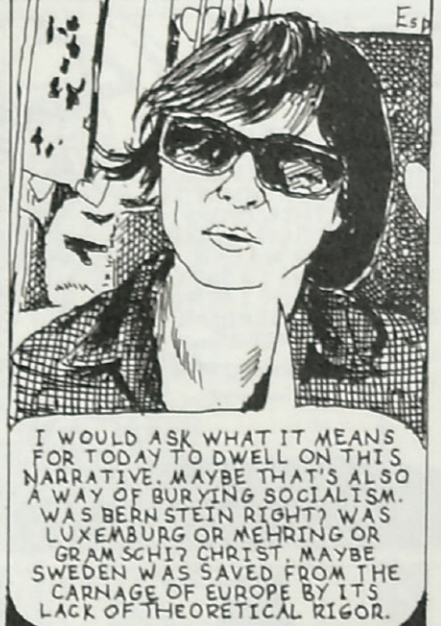
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU LOOK AT WHAT FOLKETS PARK REPRESENTS—COMMUNITY, EGALITARIANISM, AND SO ON—ARE PRECISELY THE THINGS WE LACK TODAY.

MAYBE WHAT HENRI LEFEBVRE SAID ABOUT NATURE APPLIES TO SOCIALISM: "EVERYONE WANTS TO PROTECT AND SAVE NATURE", HE WROTE, "NOBODY WANTS TO STAND IN THE WAY OF AN ATTEMPT TO RETRIEVE ITS AUTHENTICITY, YET AT THE SAME TIME EVERYTHING CONSPIRES TO HARM IT."

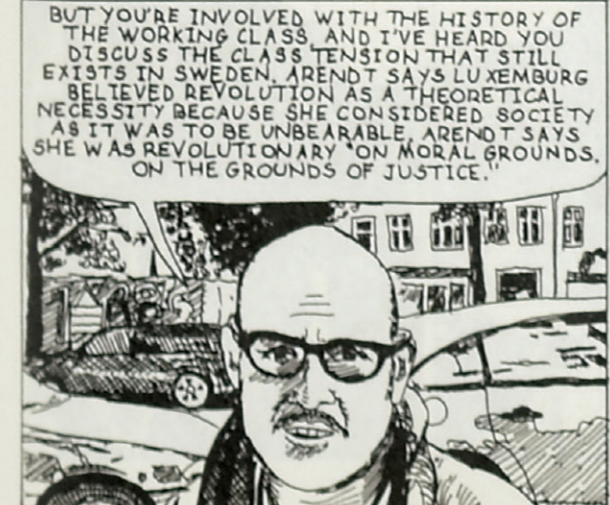
EXCEPT NOT EVERYONE WANTS TO SAVE SOCIALISM. QUITE THE CONTRARY.



I THINK IN EVERY WESTERN COUNTRY YOU HAVE A SIMILAR DISCUSSION ABOUT "TRADITION" AND "SOCIAL HARMONY" BUT LITTLE TALK OF WHAT REALLY THREATENS THOSE THINGS. MAYBE THAT'S WHY THE PARK SEEMS UNCANNY TO ME. IT'S OUTLIVED ITS OWN IDEOLOGICAL MOMENT AND ENTERED A KIND OF TEMPORAL NO-MAN'S-LAND. SWEDEN'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATS GAINED POWER AND MANAGED TO LIVE WITH CAPITAL REDEFINING SOCIALISM AS A MATTER OF CREATING CONSENSUS BETWEEN SEVERAL WORKING CLASSES, WHEREAS THE REST OF THE EUROPEAN LEFT IMPLoded OVER THIS POINT. WHEN I THINK ABOUT FOLKETS PARK, I THINK ABOUT THE OTHER LEFTS THAT FAILED.



I WOULD ASK WHAT IT MEANS FOR TODAY TO DWELL ON THIS NARRATIVE. MAYBE THAT'S ALSO A WAY OF BURYING SOCIALISM. WAS BERNSTEIN RIGHT? WAS LUXEMBURG OR MEHRING OR GRAM SCHI? CHRIST, MAYBE SWEDEN WAS SAVED FROM THE CARNAGE OF EUROPE BY ITS LACK OF THEORETICAL RIGOR.

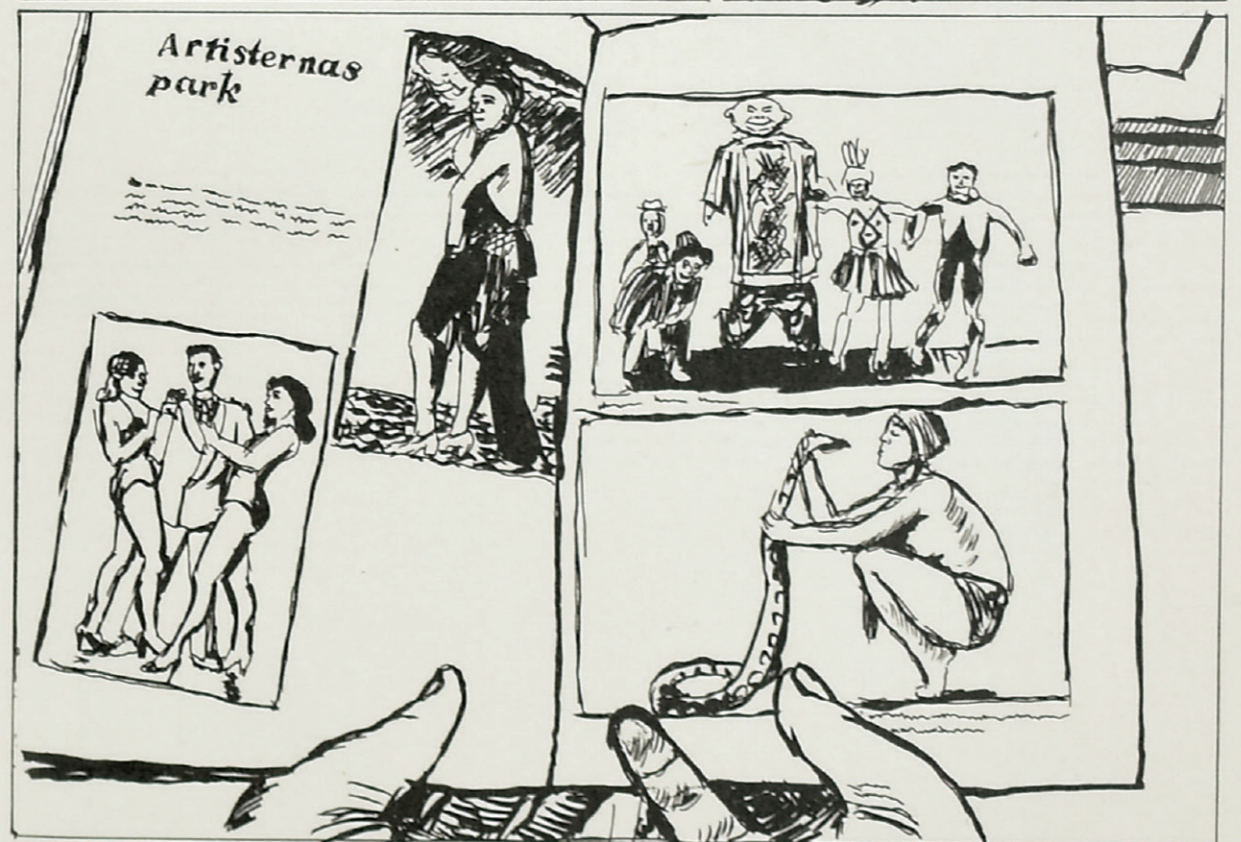
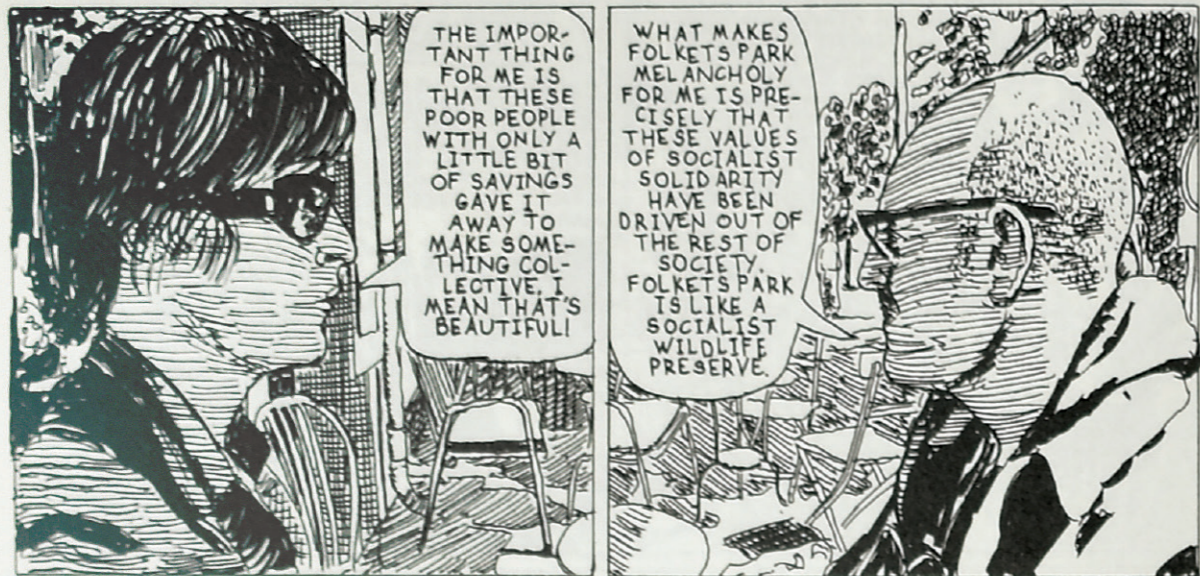


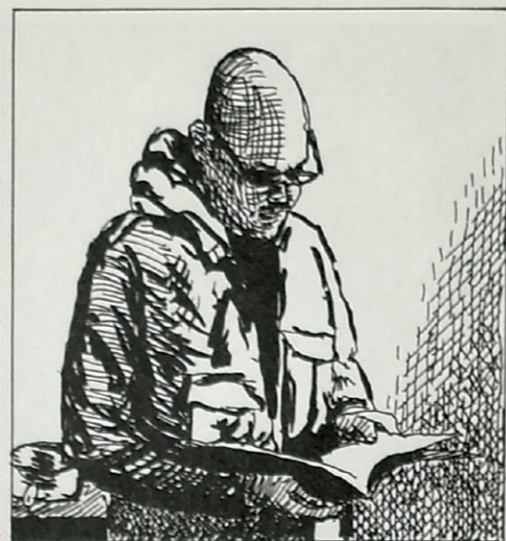
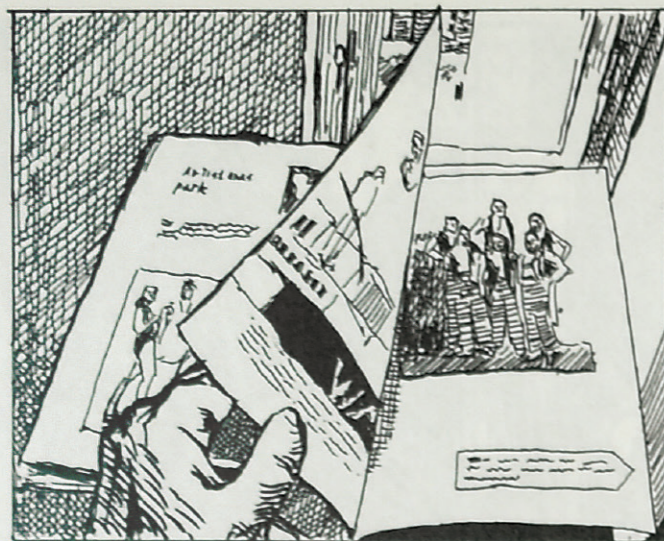
BUT YOU'RE INVOLVED WITH THE HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS, AND I'VE HEARD YOU DISCUSS THE CLASS TENSION THAT STILL EXISTS IN SWEDEN. ARENDT SAYS LUXEMBURG BELIEVED REVOLUTION AS A THEORETICAL NECESSITY BECAUSE SHE CONSIDERED SOCIETY AS IT WAS TO BE UNBEARABLE. ARENDT SAYS SHE WAS REVOLUTIONARY "ON MORAL GROUNDS, ON THE GROUNDS OF JUSTICE."



BUT WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH FOLKETS PARK?

DON'T YOU THINK FOLKETS PARK IS TOUCHED BY THIS WHOLE DEBATE ABOUT THE RIGHT COURSE FOR SOCIALISM? THAT THAT STRUGGLE IS PRESENT HERE, TOO?



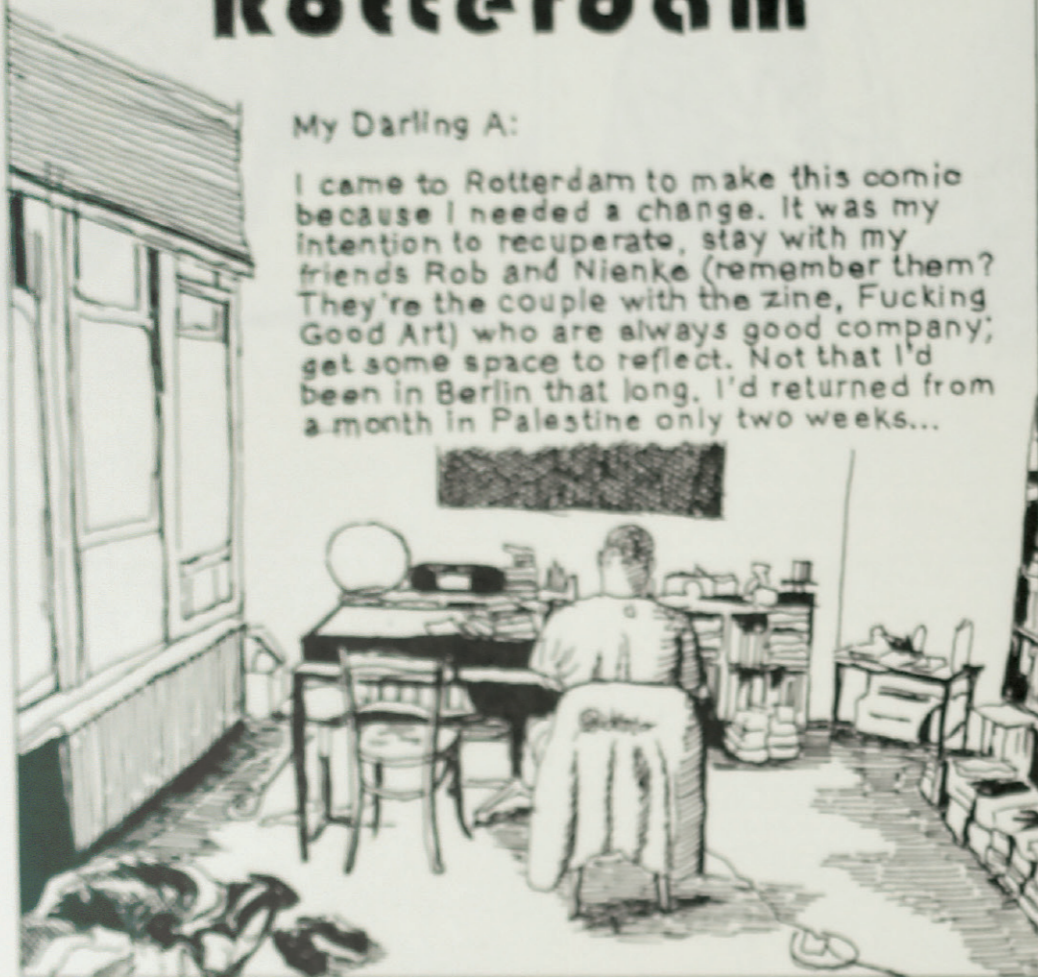


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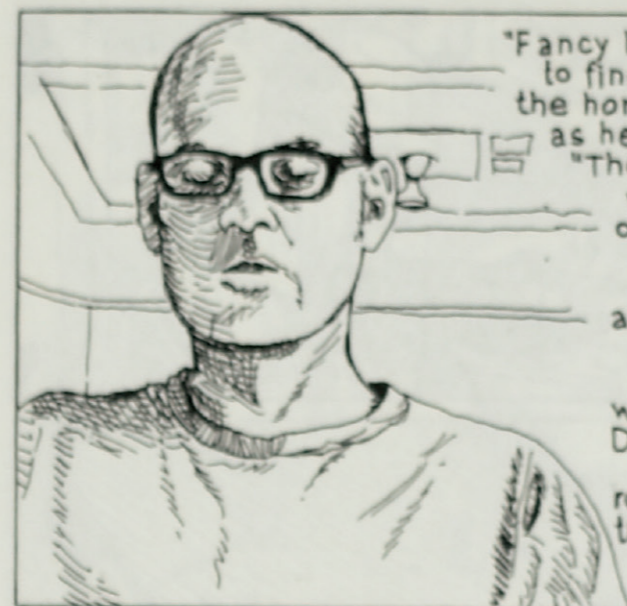
Michael Baers -in- Rotterdam

My Darling A:

I came to Rotterdam to make this comic because I needed a change. It was my intention to recuperate, stay with my friends Rob and Nienke (remember them? They're the couple with the zine, Fucking Good Art) who are always good company; get some space to reflect. Not that I'd been in Berlin that long. I'd returned from a month in Palestine only two weeks...

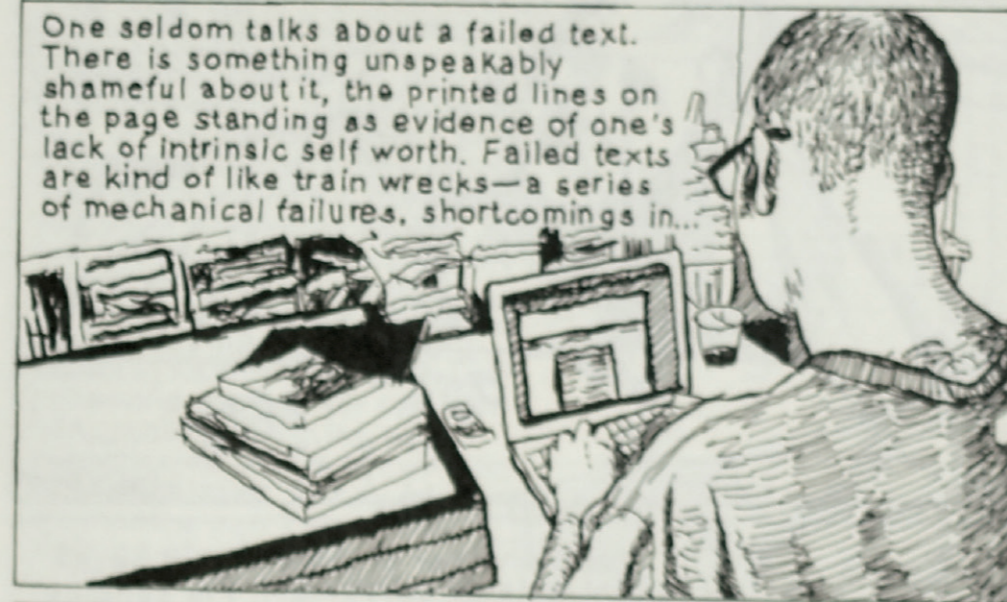


previous. But since my return, I'd spent all my time editing the 85 pages worth of e-mails I'd mailed from the West Bank in time to translate them for an October deadline, only to realize, shortly after concluding the 4th draft, that the text still wasn't publishable, and maybe in fact, I had written it for a different audience and for different reasons than those intended.



"Fancy having gone so far only to find that what lies beyond the horizon is just as ordinary as here!" wrote Jean Genet. "Then the writer of memoir wants to show what no one else has ever seen in that ordinariness. For we're conceited and like to make people think the journey we made yesterday was worth writing up today." During my two weeks in Berlin I'd come to realize the discomfiting truth of this statement.

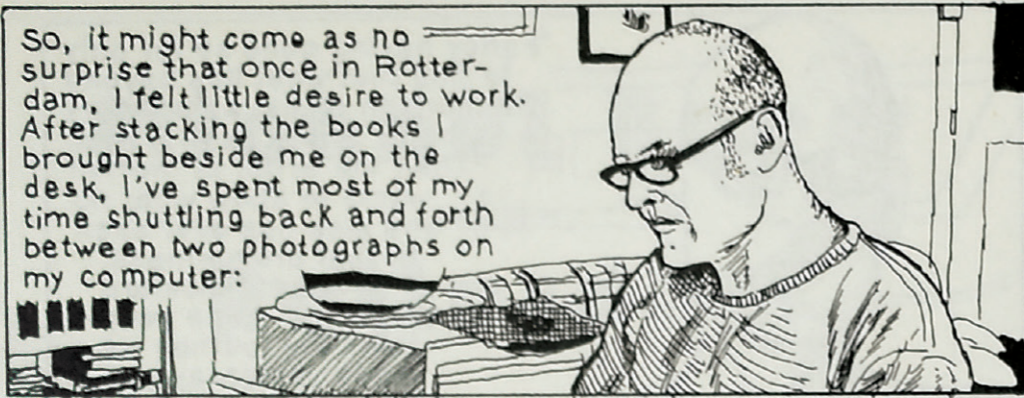
One seldom talks about a failed text. There is something unspeakably shameful about it, the printed lines on the page standing as evidence of one's lack of intrinsic self worth. Failed texts are kind of like train wrecks—a series of mechanical failures, shortcomings in...



...judgment, and sheer bad luck culminating in disaster. This text, this particular disaster, was actually comprised of two previous ones: the Australian dancer who a week before my return to Berlin had abruptly broken off our affair, and my encounter with the occupied West Bank. My memory of each warped and melted into one another, converging in a flammable cocktail of anxiety, infuriation, and disappointment. This had not resulted, unfortunately, in an interesting text.



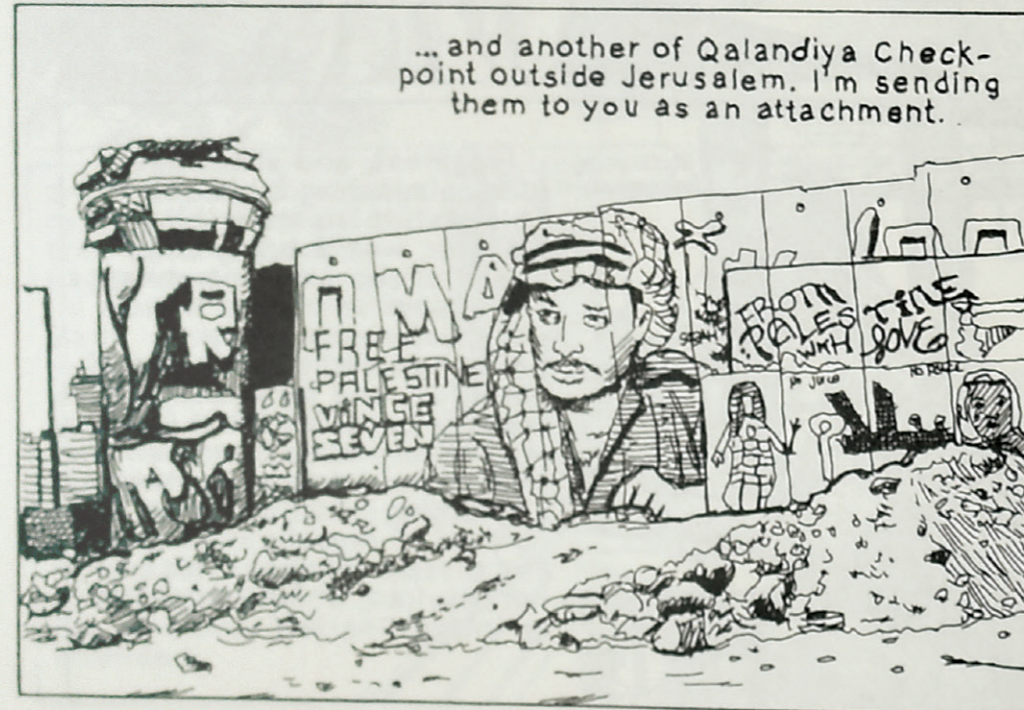
So, it might come as no surprise that once in Rotterdam, I felt little desire to work. After stacking the books I brought beside me on the desk, I've spent most of my time shuttling back and forth between two photographs on my computer:



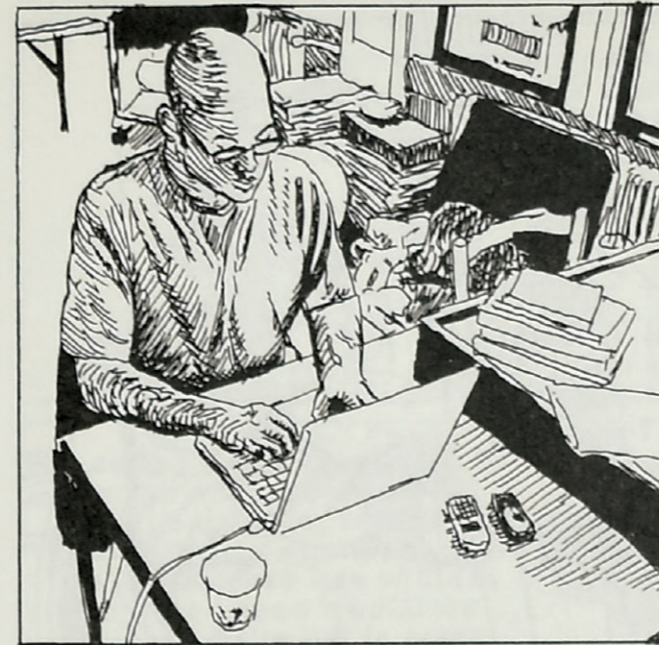
... one of C taken in Berlin...



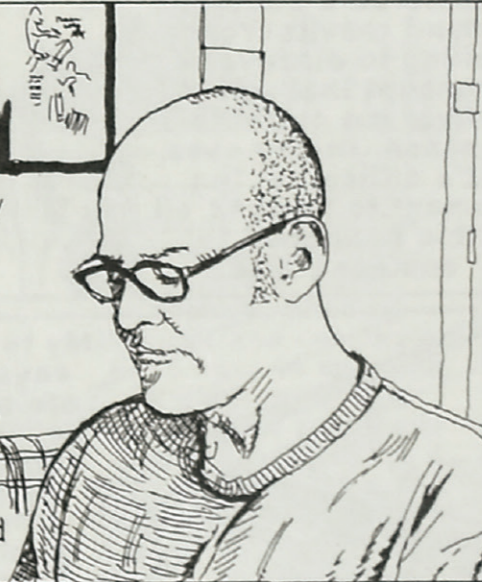
... and another of Qalandiya Checkpoint outside Jerusalem. I'm sending them to you as an attachment.



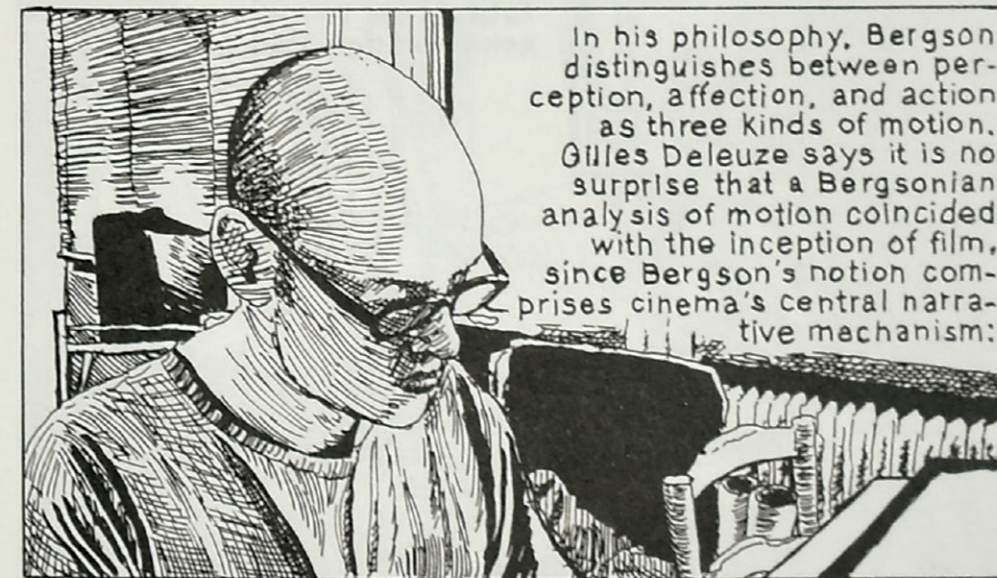
I was disgusted and disappointed with myself: disappointed by the end of the affair, disgusted by my failure with the text. I was also disappointed and disgusted by having shut myself away my first two weeks back in Berlin, insuring it would make the city feel like a stopover, somewhere I happened to be living temporarily, which in any case is true at the...



...moment. This set in motion a vicious circle, the recollection of one set of failures and disappointments calling forth the memory of more remote events in an ever-widening arc of psychic destruction. My dismal love life, my future economic prospects, career, social life, mental and physical health...each became a subject for rumination, until everything had been coated with a brown film of self-loathing. Funny how six months ago I was complaining about being exhausted; now I'm exhausted and depressed.



In his philosophy, Bergson distinguishes between perception, affection, and action as three kinds of motion. Gilles Deleuze says it is no surprise that a Bergsonian analysis of motion coincided with the inception of film, since Bergson's notion comprises cinema's central narrative mechanism:

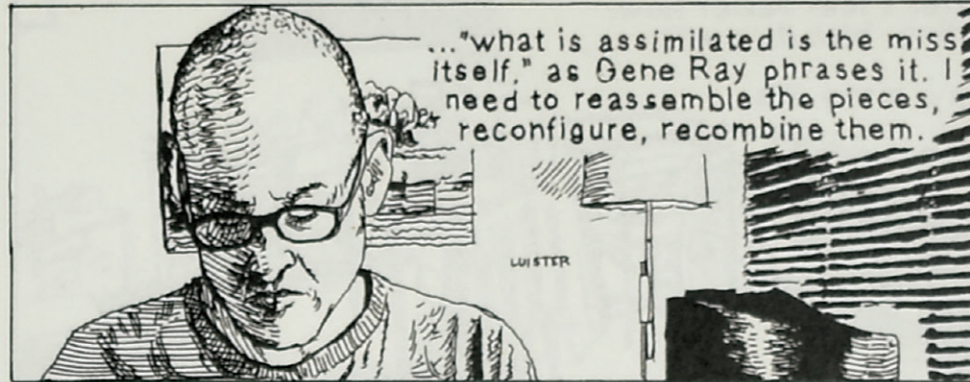


...the hero first perceives a problem, is affected by it, and resolves to take action. "This all came to an end with the Second World War," writes Deleuze. "Suddenly people no longer really believed it was possible to react to situations... So we get Italian neorealism representing people placed in situations that cannot advance through reactions, through actions." This resembles my current situation. My deplorable state of mind results from failing to discover a concept that would deliver me out of this impasse. In any case, it's difficult at the moment to pretend all this happened to someone else.

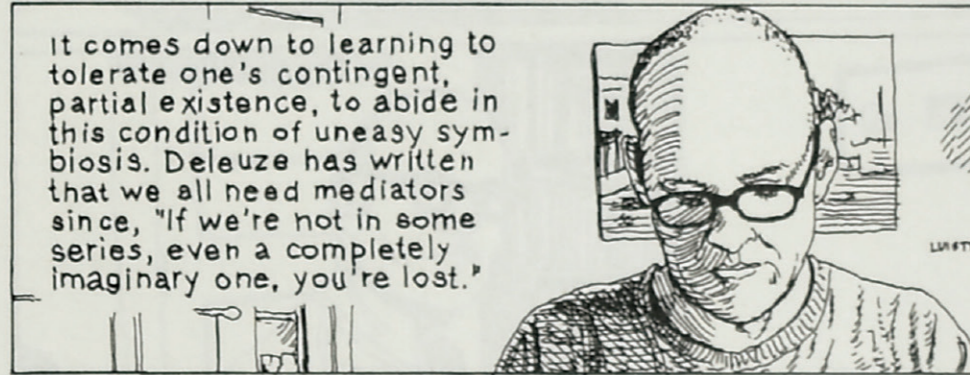


My recent failures were, as Lacan says, appointments "to which we are always called with a real that eludes us." In the aftermath, something tells me I shouldn't try to "pick up the pieces" or "pull myself together". These metaphors are part of the problem. They keep me trying to reconstitute a lost totality rather than acknowledge that in trauma...

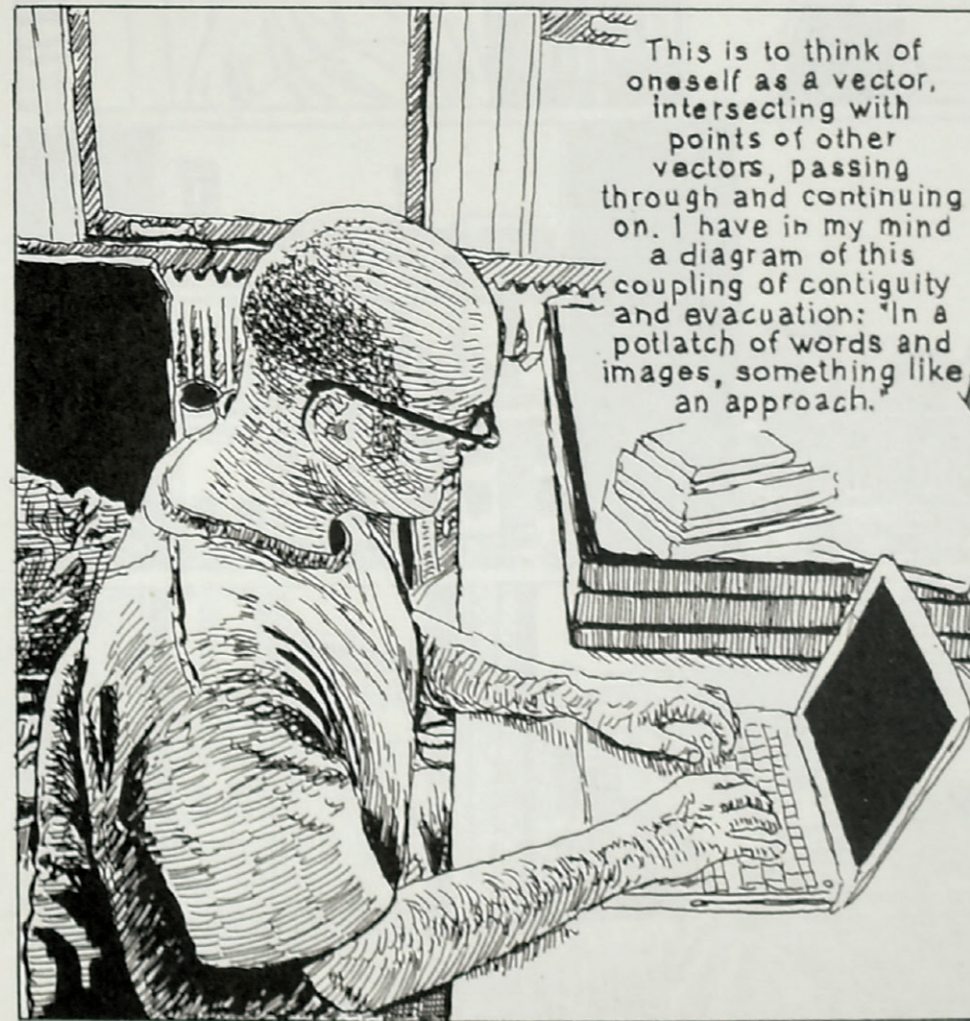
... "what is assimilated is the miss itself," as Gene Ray phrases it. I need to reassemble the pieces, reconfigure, recombine them.

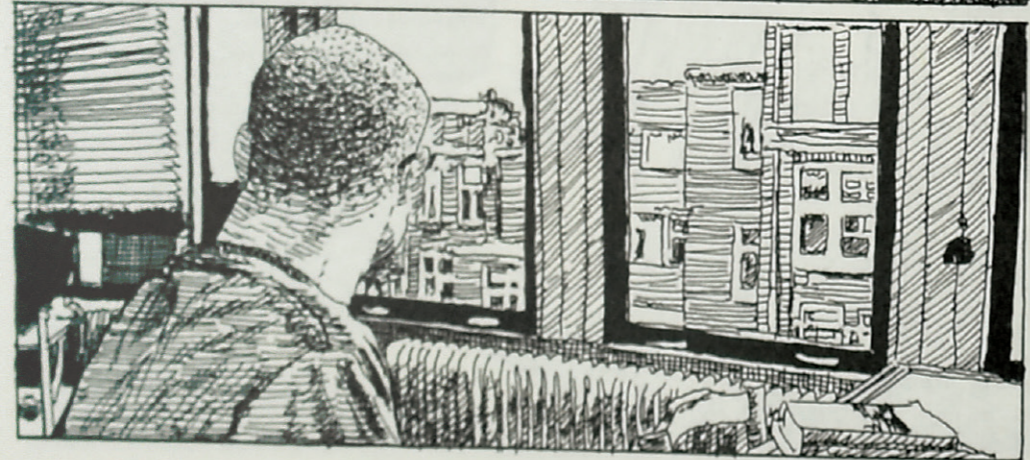
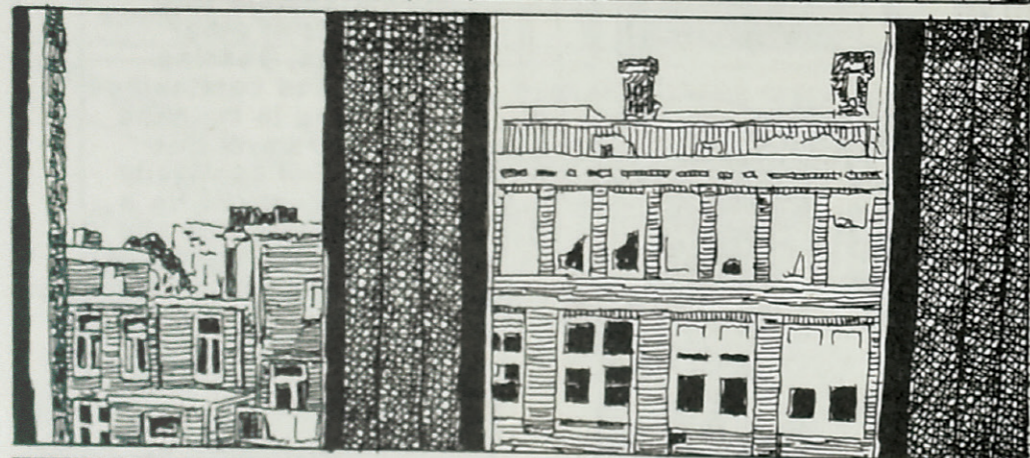
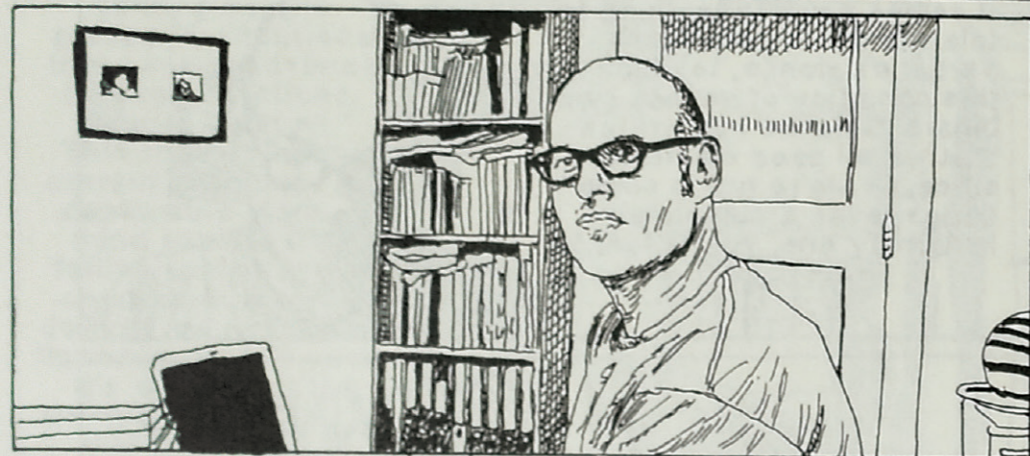
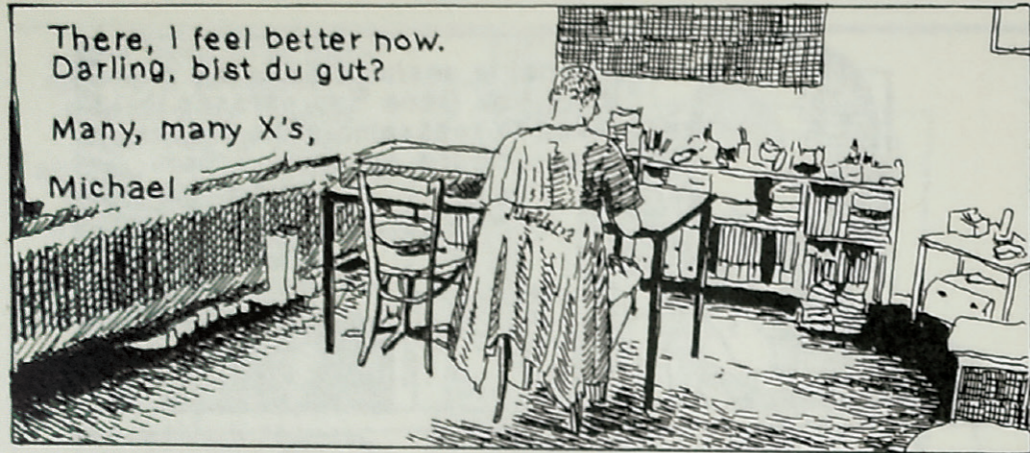


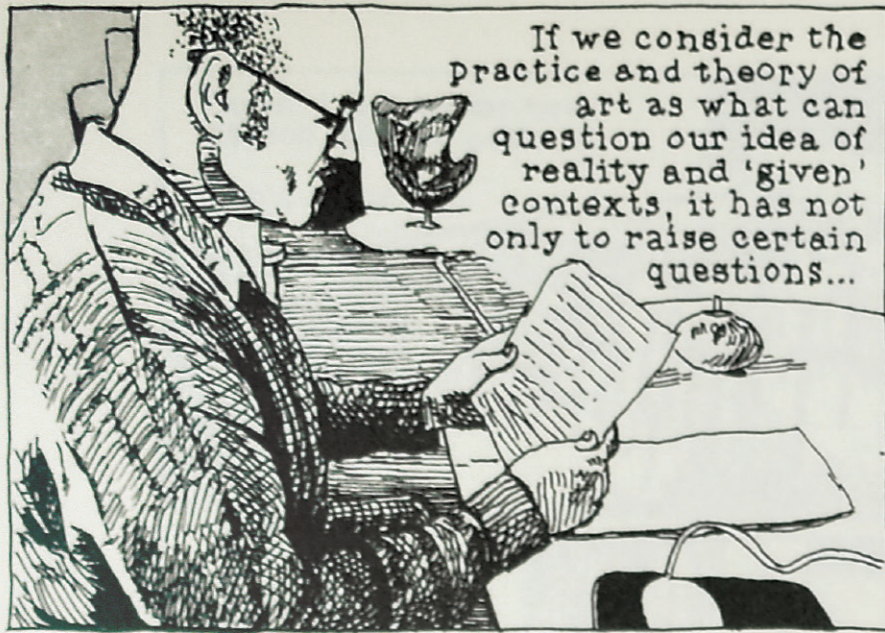
It comes down to learning to tolerate one's contingent, partial existence, to abide in this condition of uneasy symbiosis. Deleuze has written that we all need mediators since, "If we're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost."



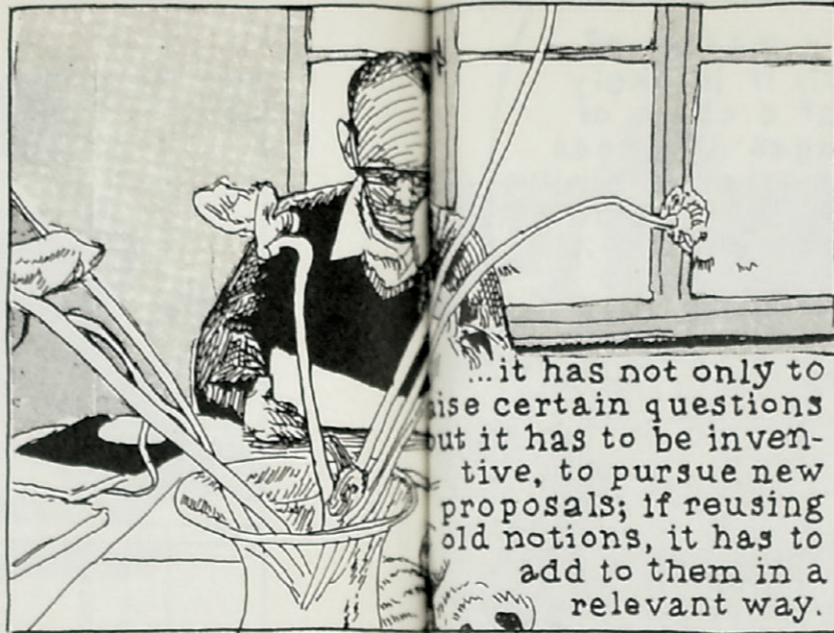
This is to think of oneself as a vector, intersecting with points of other vectors, passing through and continuing on. I have in my mind a diagram of this coupling of contiguity and evacuation: "In a potlatch of words and images, something like an approach."



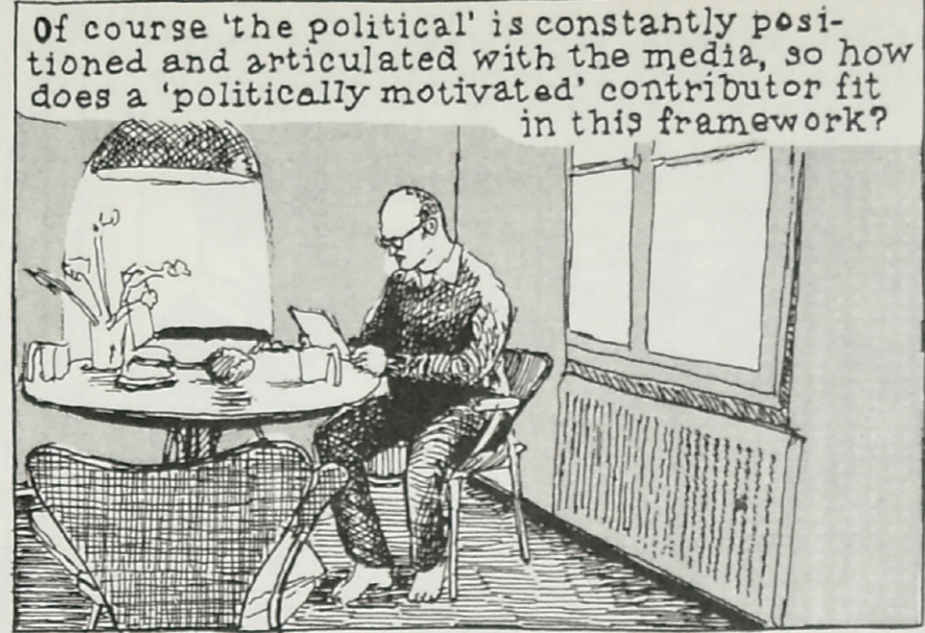




If we consider the practice and theory of art as what can question our idea of reality and 'given' contexts, it has not only to raise certain questions...



...it has not only to raise certain questions but it has to be inventive, to pursue new proposals; if reusing old notions, it has to add to them in a relevant way.



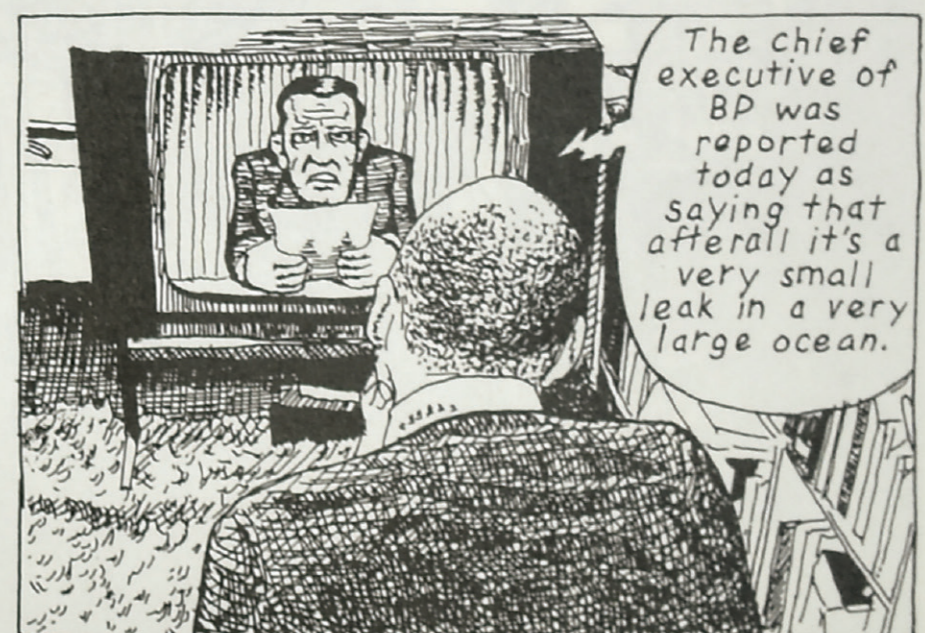
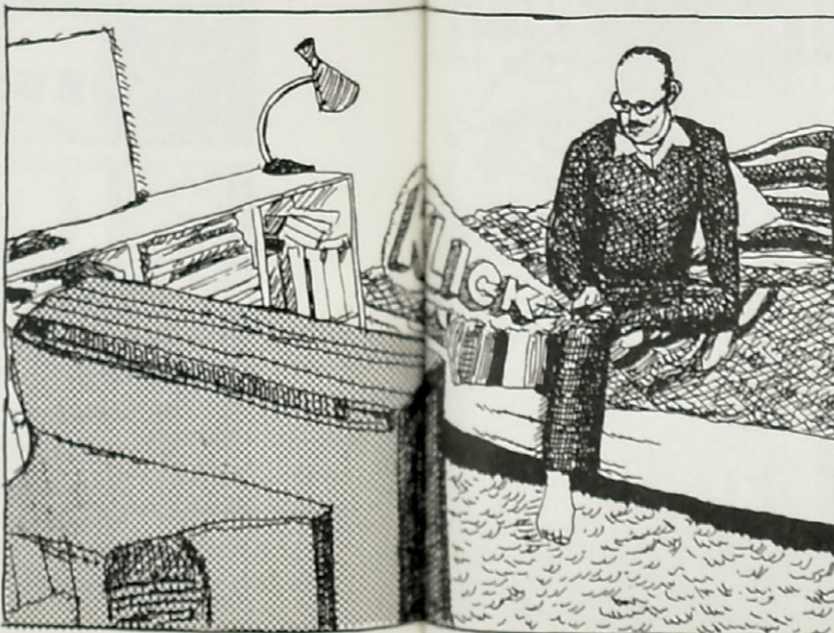
Of course 'the political' is constantly positioned and articulated with the media, so how does a 'politically motivated' contributor fit in this framework?



What is the media's relationship to the construction of a local reality, how does it relate to ideas of truth, fact, and history, and what are its possibilities for engaging with new communities?



...What we gather from Marshall McLuhan's analyses a few decades ago is that the medium which actually carries the content is essentially devoid of any content.

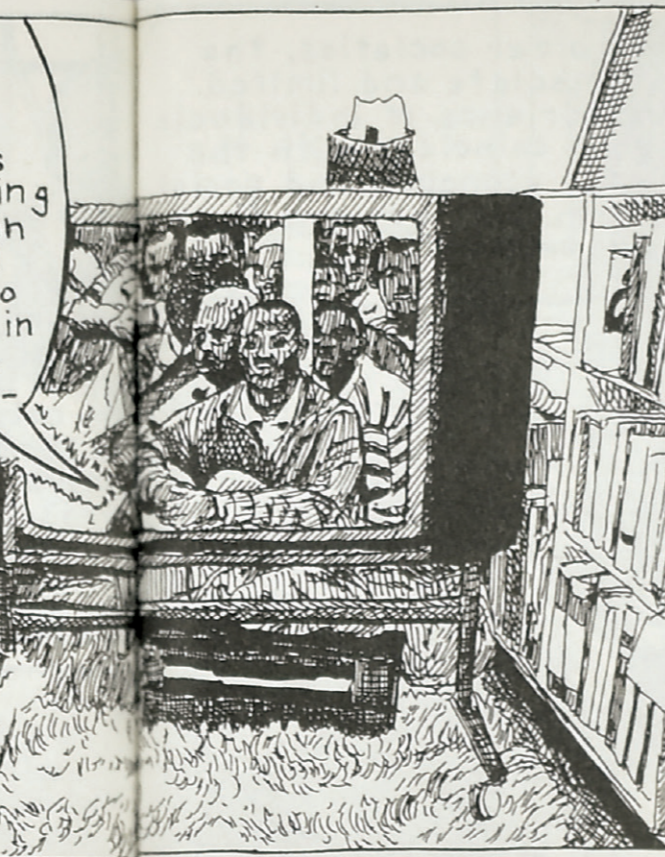


The chief executive of BP was reported today as saying that after all it's a very small leak in a very large ocean.

Little captain. What does it *do*, this little captain? It communicates...to us. What's it communicate, this little captain? It communicates English virtue...by *living*, not by dying.



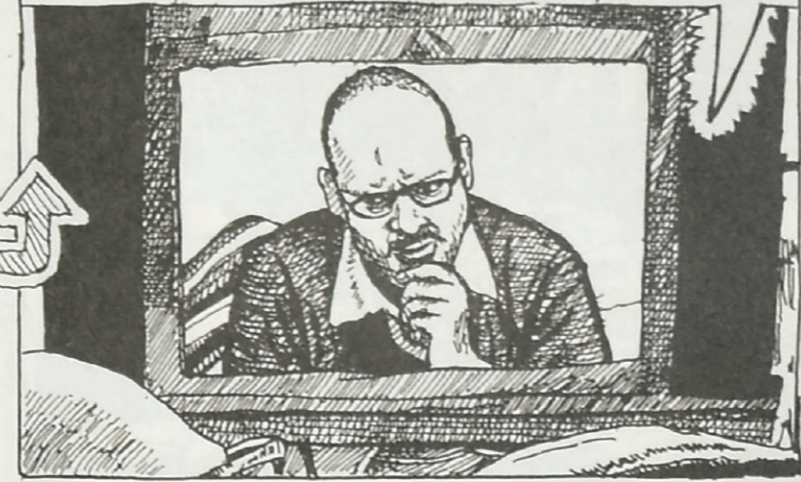
As a matter of fact, it is likely that a chain of images arranges memories, chaining them in a certain order which will get everybody to find one's place in the chain again, that is, to rediscover one's own image.



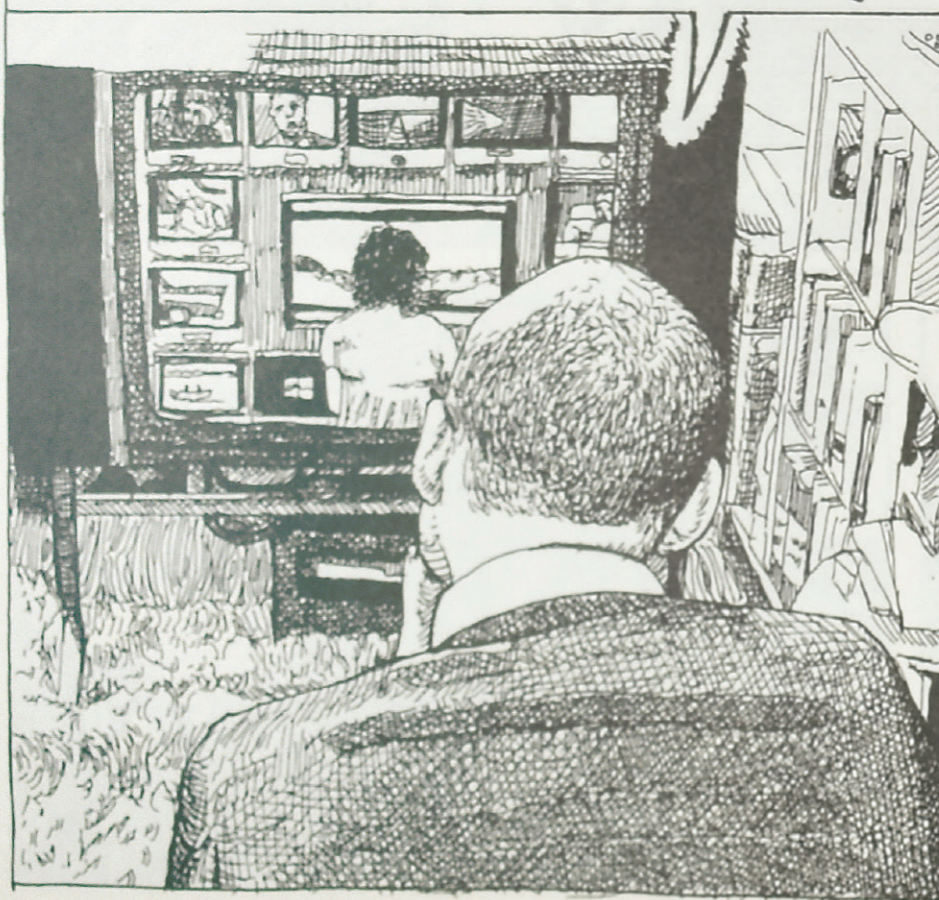
As a matter of fact, it is likely that one constructs one's image with the other's. Friend or enemy, you produce and consume your image with mine.



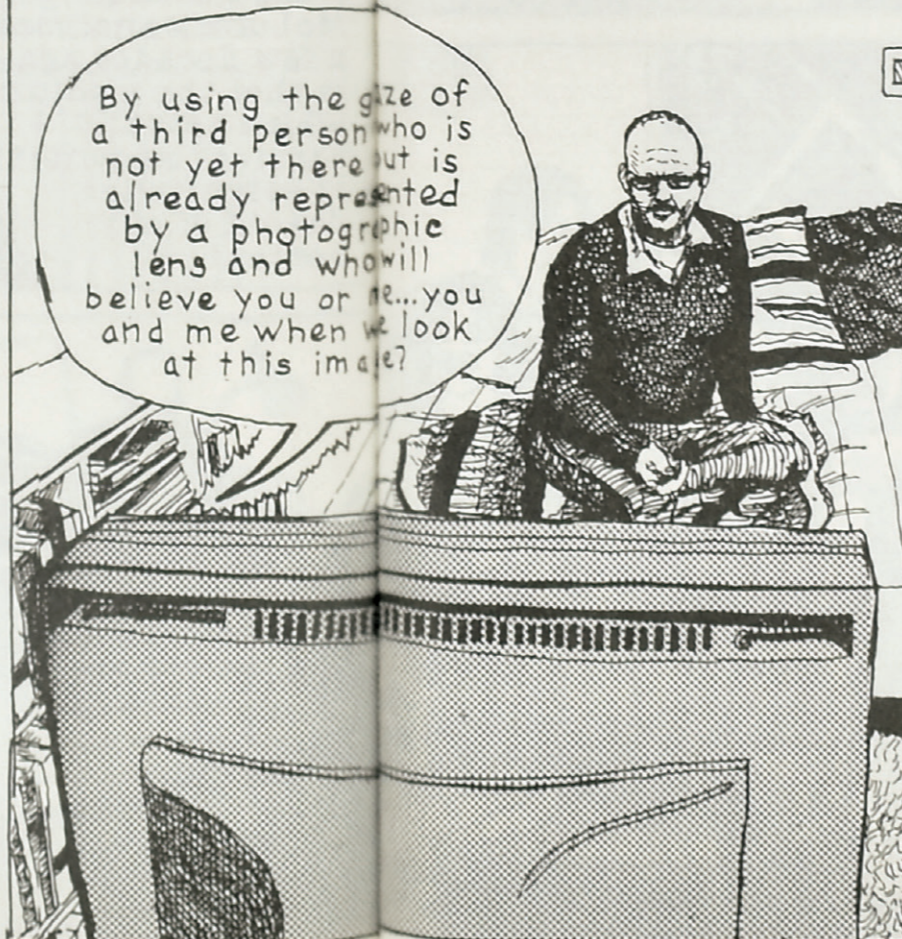
And now thinking of what we are doing here. Nobody knows how to answer, or answers are crooked. We don't do much better, anyway.



Ok, but then: how does one find one's own image in the other's disorder? With the agreement or disagreement of the other? And then: how to construct one's own image?



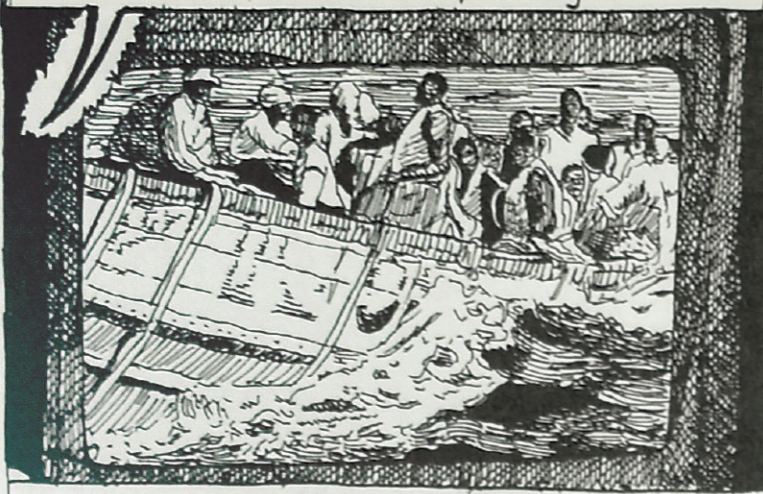
By using the gaze of a third person who is not yet there but is already represented by a photographic lens and who will believe you or me...you and me when we look at this image?



One must find the time to have the time to see things simply; not to be scared anymore to say that it's things that are complicated and that anxiety is simple.



But any daily image is also part of a vague and complicated system where the whole world enters and leaves at each moment. Any image.



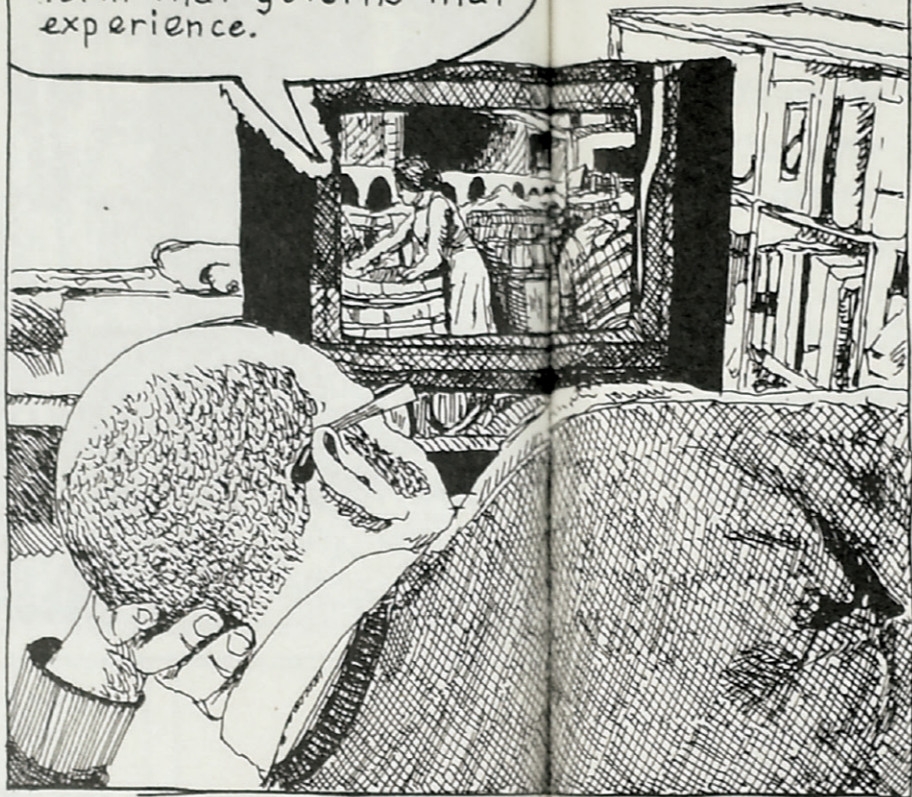
The problem of figuration that concerns us will only become visible in the passage from market to monopoly capitalism.



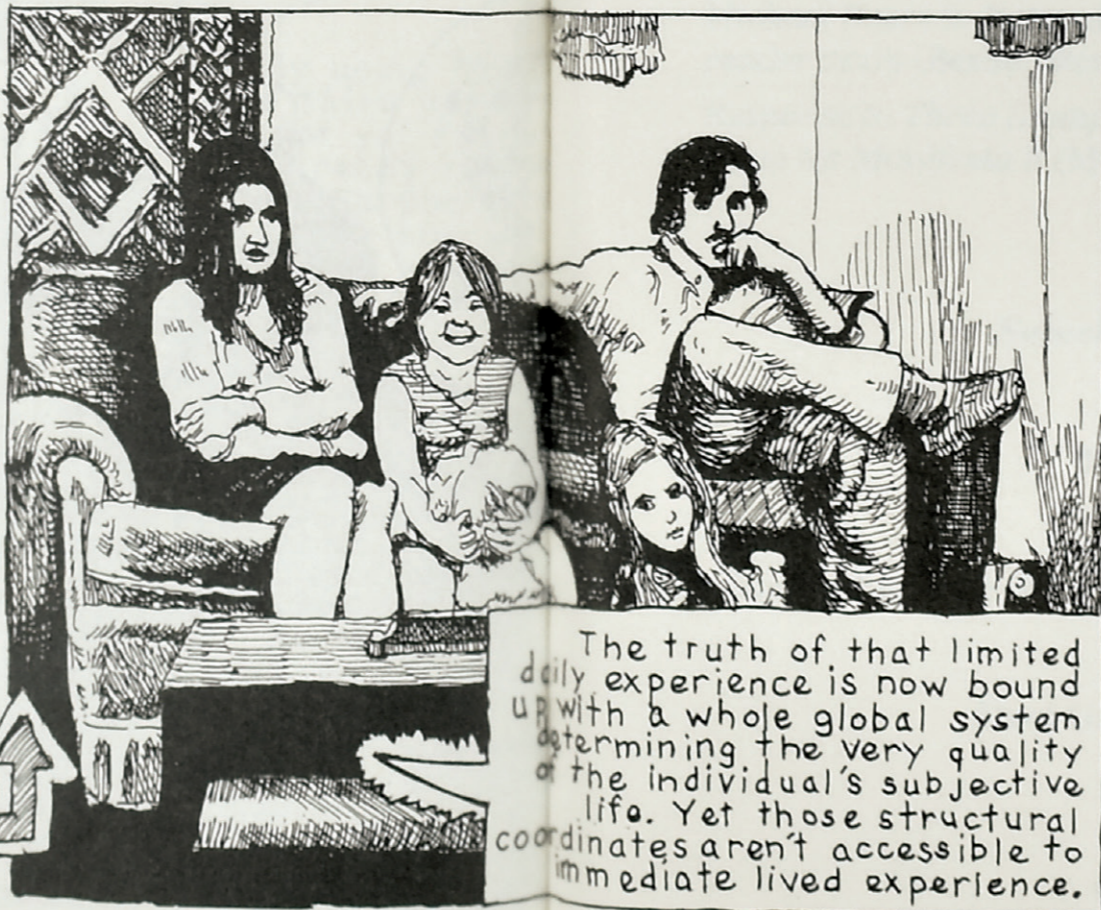
It may be conveyed by way of a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure.



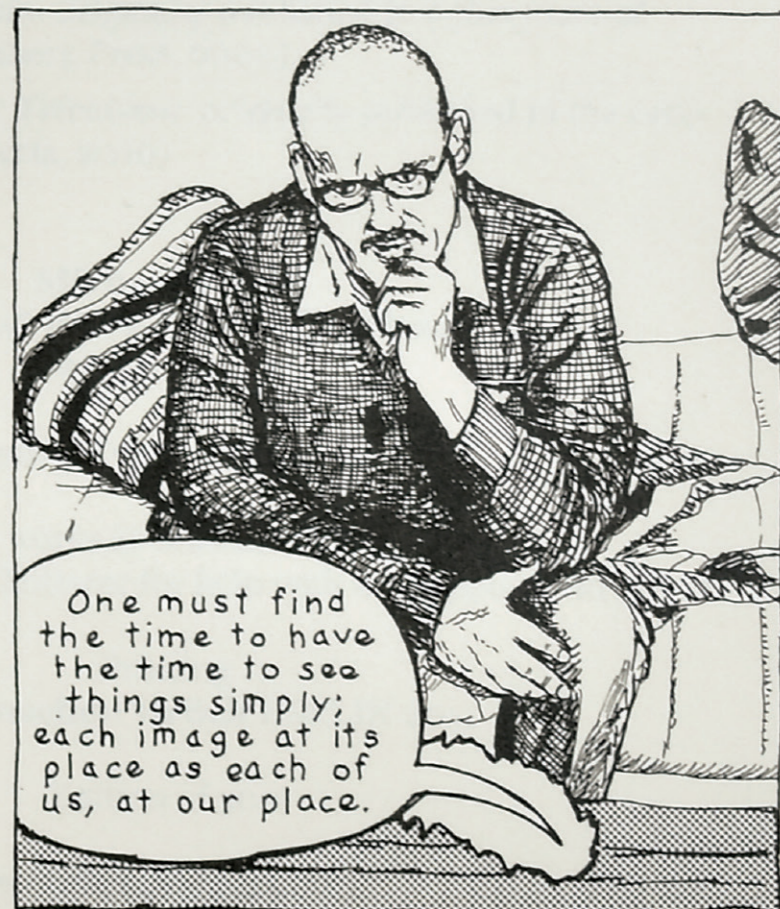
In older societies, the immediate and limited experience of individuals still coincides with the true economic and social form that governs that experience.



But soon these two levels drift apart.



The truth of that limited daily experience is now bound up with a whole global system determining the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates aren't accessible to immediate lived experience.



One must find the time to have the time to see things simply; each image at its place as each of us, at our place.

CREDITS

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Michael Baers in Rotterdam: originally published in *e-flux journal reader 2009* (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2009)

Response to Three Essays: Television: originally published in the catalogue for *Manifesta 8* (Murcia, 2010)

Michael Baers
Selected Work for Publications
2005 - 2010

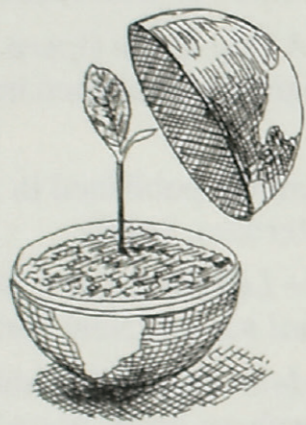
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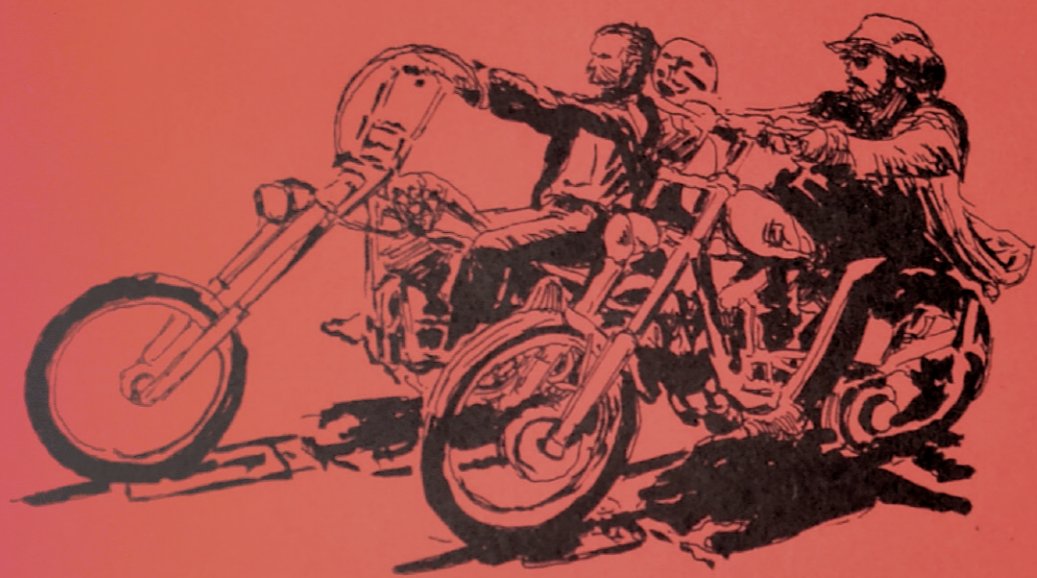
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