

Mondo Mythopoesis

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IT IS INCREDIBLY difficult to summarise the bizarre developments that have taken place in what can be misrepresented as the ‘underground’ in recent years. The origins of the **London Psychogeographical Association, Association Of Autonomous Astronauts** and other even more bizarre groups, are now obscure. The same can be said about the arguments taking place on private Internet servers such as the **Invisible College**. In line with the slogan “anonymous elitism,” participation in these forums is by invitation only. Those involved are forever covering their tracks and engineering faked feuds and public slanging matches. They use each other’s names, as well as constructing collective identities which may be used by anyone, to foster anonymity.

If there is a precursor to all this activity, then it might be found in Neoism, an equally murky ‘movement’ said to have existed in Europe and North America during the 80’s. Unfortunately, information is not only hard to come by, it is often unreliable. This point is illustrated by an anonymous Invisible college text headlined *Censorship Is A More Popular Form Of Subjectivity Than Imagination*: ‘

The Neoist slogan “it’s always six o’ clock,” for example, was coined by the Montreal Neoists Kiki Bonbon and Reinhardt U. Sevol, who used to beat up anyone who dared to ask them the time. tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE and some East Coast Neoists campaigned for the “friendly fascist” Vermin Supreme in Baltimore. With support from the graphic design entrepreneur John Berndt, the Groupe Absence advocates radical free trade capitalism, while the godfather of Monty Cantsin, Dr. Al Ackerman, lifted the Neoist slogan “Total Freedom” from his fellow science fiction writer and drinking buddy Lafayette Ron Hubbard. Of course, these anecdotes are not exactly “authentic”..

All I can present here is a vortex of free associations, a chaotic overview of phenomena that are extremely difficult to categorise. How is one to describe hundreds of anonymous cultural ‘terrorists’ whose activities have coalesced into an autonomous literary genre? Imagine a ‘heroic bloodshed’ movie with rumours instead of bullets. Outside the UK, many people have been told that the person co-ordinating all this activity is Grant Mitchell, in ‘reality’ a character from the popular British soap opera East Enders. Another tale slanders those engaged in ‘avant-bardism’ as recuperators who are infiltrating the revolutionary ‘movement’ to ‘intoxicate’ radicals with crazy theories. It goes without saying that claims of this type simply play into the hands of psychogeographers and autonomous astronauts. Indeed, it is widely believed that the individuals slandering the ‘avant-bard’ are actually working hand in glove with them, in a bid to further publicise their activities!

Rebels and bohemians traverse cities scattering

signs, staging enigmas, leaving coded messages, usurping the territorial claims of priests and kings by transforming the social perception of specific urban sites. Both the London Psychogeographical Association and the Manchester Area Psychogeographic use their newsletters to publicise regular gatherings that interested parties may attend. On these trips, anything or nothing at all may happen. These are possible appointments and sometimes only one intrepid psychogeographer attends. Other events are huge gatherings of urban tribes bent on emotionally remapping the cities in which they dwell. Psychogeographers pass each other like ships in the night, show up late or not at all.

A concrete example of all this activity is the Radio Blissett broadcasts from Bologna, which began in 1994 and ran for a year and a half. Radio Blissett was a late night psychogeographical show in which every participant used the name Luther Blissett. Patrols were sent out into the city, where they were able to maintain contact with the studio via mobile phones. The patrols reported back on where they were and what they could see. They received suggestions about possible activities from listeners and proceeded accordingly. People called in requesting that the patrols do this or that, perhaps something as minor as buying a pizza and taking it to a specific address. The patrols drifted around the city, meeting up with listeners and incorporating the situations they encountered into the show.

In 1995, an autonomous Radio Blissett show began on a left-wing radio station in Rome. The Bolognese programme was broadcast midweek, the new one was aired on Saturday night when the streets were crowded, and there were more opportunities to create confusion. Actions included mass demonstrations with leaflets being handed out against proper nouns, there were also collective psychic attacks on Bourgeois notions of identity. During a massive psycho-sexual be-in, thirty people decided they wanted to have full sex. They wrapped themselves in a huge cellophane sheet and began to caress each other. As the petting got heavier, the cops broke up the shag-in. On 17 June 1995, a listener called the show and exhorted its audience to occupy a number 30 night bus. A merry band of psychogeographers boarded the bus with ghetto blasters blaring Radio Blissett. A police block stopped the bus in Piazza Ungheria. The illegal ravers moved onto a 29 bus, which in its turn was stopped by the Old Bill in Guido d’Arezzo. The psychogeographers refused to surrender and when the filth assaulted them, they fought back. A cop fired shots into the air. The riot and shoot out were broadcast live via mobile phone. Ten Luther Blissetts were arrested and charged with participation in a seditious rally.

These activities, like everything else, are a self-conscious construction. As such, the notions they utilise—including ‘psychogeography’, ‘Luther Blissett’ and ‘fucking in the streets’—should not be viewed as arbitrary, but as self-contained signs. Everything done with

these signs immediately effects what they are supposed to represent. ‘Originally,’ both these modes of activity and the accompanying theorisation of them, were simply fancies circulated in ephemeral forms, private systems of symbols shared among a number of international players. One popular psychogeographical game was to ornament these symbols by enshrining them within an allegorical form, creating fables that could only be deciphered by insiders. At some point, perhaps through forgetfulness, this insider knowledge was lost, and those playing this game had to continually reinvent it. Increasingly fantastic interpretations were made of these symbols, until ‘avant-bardism’ became an ‘art’ of systematic contradiction, a self-refuting perpetuum mobile. In their sublime solemnity, such activities have had an extraordinary impact on those unenlightened by critical thoroughness.

Moving on, the Association Of Autonomous Astronauts launched itself with picnics in different parts of Europe. In Windsor Great Park, just outside London, the consumption of food and drink was accompanied by a mass release of gas filled balloons bearing the triple ‘A’ logo. By way of contrast, events staged by the Workshop For A Non-Linear Architecture are usually sparked by chance encounters and remain unplanned as they unfold. Although these activities have been misrepresented as ‘anarchist’ or even ‘avant-garde’ by the press, it should go without saying that such strategic failures of the understanding fail to do justice to the omnidirectional attack of psychogeographical activity. Those involved in ‘avant-bardism’ sometimes adopt positions that might be mistaken for ‘occultism’ or ‘anarchism,’ but they do so solely as a means of dissolving these categories by pushing their internal contradictions to a ‘logical’ ‘extreme.’

The ‘avant-bard’ has no programme, it simply utilises practical methods to explore our ‘world’ of proliferating margins. Using maps of the Outer Hebrides, the Neoist Alliance spent one bracing winter day traversing Holbeach Marsh on the Wash. Here, the managed environment of fields and dikes ends at the sea walls. Nevertheless, even on the salt marshes uncovered by the tide, the influence of human domestication prevails—prior to reclamation, the sea lapped several miles further inland. The London Psychogeographical Association celebrated one solstice with a gathering at the Callanish standing stones on the Isle of Lewis. Despite the fact that nature has been rendered inorganic by the onslaughts of capitalism, with any meaningful distinction between the town and the countryside abolished, psychogeographers still see mysterious ley lines everywhere. Whether ley lines actually exist is irrelevant, as the widespread dissemination of astrological materials demonstrates, belief in mysterious ‘phenomena’ adversely effects the behaviour of millions. The satirical deconstruction of these beliefs is merely one achievement of the ‘avant-bard.’