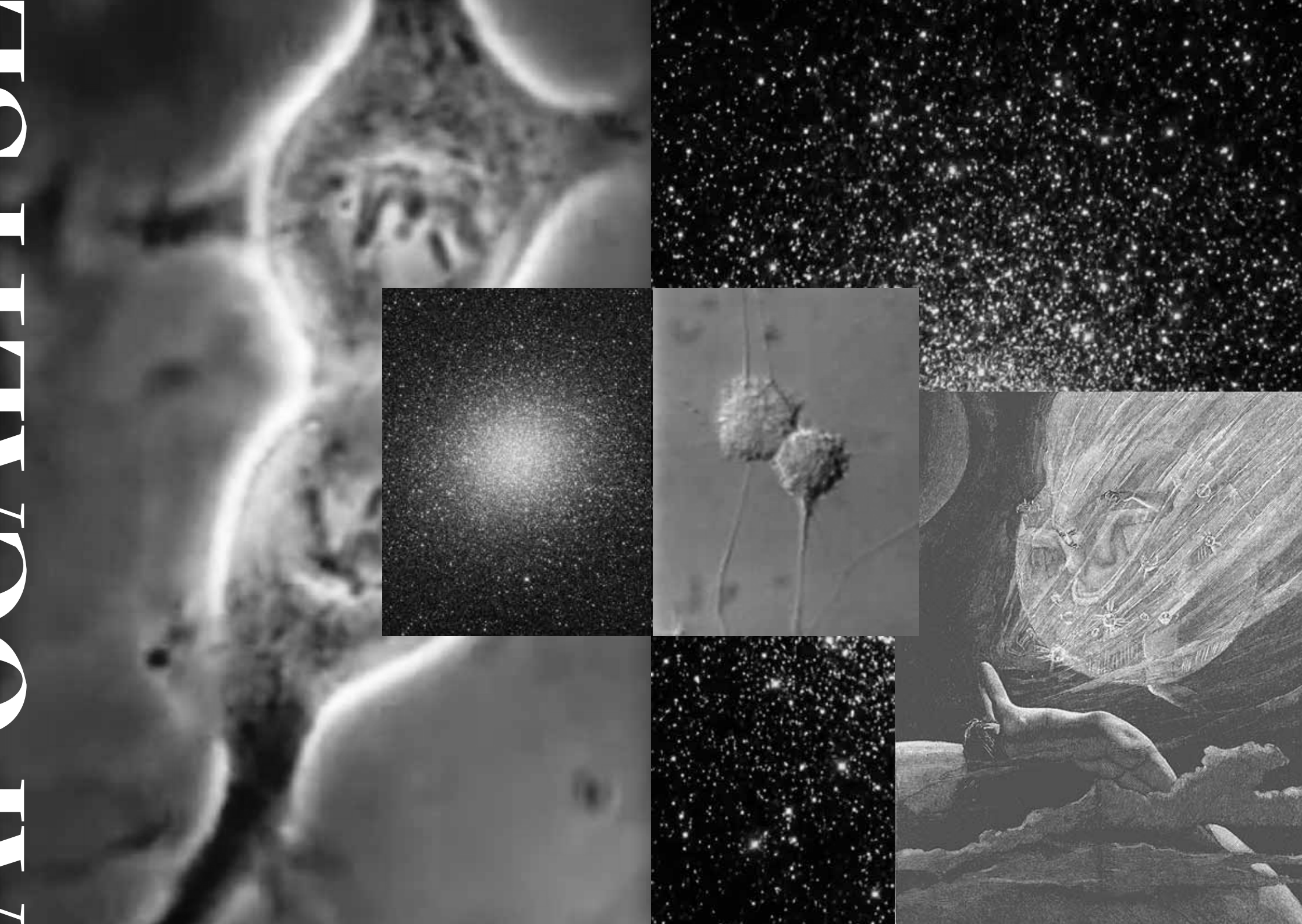


APOCALYPSE



TO TITANO



PART I



This time we stood huddled in a square, facing a Baroque building with statues that Arabesqued and a roof that blended into the sky. The sky was in two halves; the bottom was a deep orange like a Great Fire and the top was slate-grey.

We weren't huddled for any sinister reasons, just tourists at a landmark trying to remember the architecture. An event was taking place inside the building – one of note, not just any old metaphysical event that begins and ends with indeterminate boundaries and a causality of infinite fractal complexity. It was a 'happy' event befitting of that Baroque building: an Opera or a Molière. They may have been wearing masks inside (we couldn't see).

I was transported to Spain, where the newsreaders told me without words about the situation that was unfolding there. Grainy footage of indistinguishable bodies, pale blues and deep browns: the colours of contemporary horror (no blood or limbs, just clinical fields of colour and the snake-that-eats-itself contortions of Sarah Lucas or Francis Bacon).

I became unsure whether I was in Spain or England. This square had the unfamiliarity of a foreign landmark, but I sensed that Catalonia was remote and hostile. I was displaced and uncomfortable, being surrounded by people I didn't know while my friends laughed inside the building, and unable to distinguish between home and elsewhere. Europe pulsed and this anonymous square

felt like the epicentre of its throbs.

I noted a plane. It's always a plane – the bringer of bombs, the unmistakable rumble, the sentient bird that has travelled and can fall.

All noise was sucked from the square and, for a moment, there swelled a sense of awe.





PART II

Another square, another crowd.

The square is where we gather, it's a 'no-place' that is merely context. The scene of the action, with seats encircling the tragedy played out upon a lowered floor.

A tenement block, a modest tower.

This is a domestic building where life is separated from art and attention is accustomed to being dispersed from within its impervious walls. Nothing happy was taking place inside this edifice, and the crowd was comprised of its own fear. **We all wore heavy clothes: wool, muslin and thick cotton covered in dust, with boots and**

overcoats the colour of aerial photographs. Each one of us faced the tower, motionless.

The truth appeared in my head, as it does in dreams, written into the protagonist's mind with an abrupt genesis; a spontaneous mutation. There were people inside that building. One family, cowering. Cowering from us.

Their Gauguin-brown faces were only visible in my mind's eye, but they were covered in terror and each member of the family was an archetype that spoke to the **theatrical origins of this dream, with its overtones of tragedy and the staging that seemed so deliberate: a vista created by the focal point of the tenement block**, hemmed in by the concrete stairs upon which we waited, surrounding the pale square. The father was stoic, the mother was concerned and clutching the crying baby and consoling her other children who dealt with it all in their own individual ways.

I looked down at my gun and felt its weight.

A breeze shivered through the square and ruffled a few hairs and shook coats like damp flags. The noise of the wind was the only noise save the occasional crunch of feet on gravel and the whirr of my own **nervous system.** **They were mostly men with legs cocked and looking sure of themselves that seemed to be waiting for a signal or a decision from someone, none of us knew who, and the women were there** with shawls on

their heads and rifles pointed low.

There was a crisp, wintry, featureless sky that could have been a painted screen since it offered no sense of depth, just an arbitrary transition between this terrible foreground and everything else.

I don't know why they wanted to kill them – this town had turned on **them, and they had been made scapegoats by men** who sat in rooms with no answers and strange beliefs. The moon was missing, and it had been for a long time.

Who knows if other towns had gathered like this, to kill in the name of vengeance or sacrifice or desperation. A lot of regrettable things happen when planets disappear.

The wait continued, and I began to feel a deep sympathy for the family – a sympathy that turned to dread and now spilled over into panic. I noticed a dog barking but I couldn't hear it; the noiseless bugle **shaved my reverie in half and sent sweat to the tips of my fingers. I recalled the family's faces blinking quickly somewhere once.**

Unheard and uncaused, my gun fired.

The shot was like a breath that crept through the square, restoring life to all those men and women, whose guns also fired in a volley of cracks and flashes.

As the dust settled and I felt the crunch of broken glass beneath my feet, the smell of burnt concrete and dried blood filled my nostrils. The tower looked much the same as it had done before and we all looked to the sky, waiting for the moon to return.



As the dust settled
and I felt the
crunch of broken
glass beneath my
feet, the smell of
burnt concrete and
dried blood filled
my nostrils. The
tower looked much
the same as it had
done before and we
all looked to the
sky, waiting for the
moon to return.

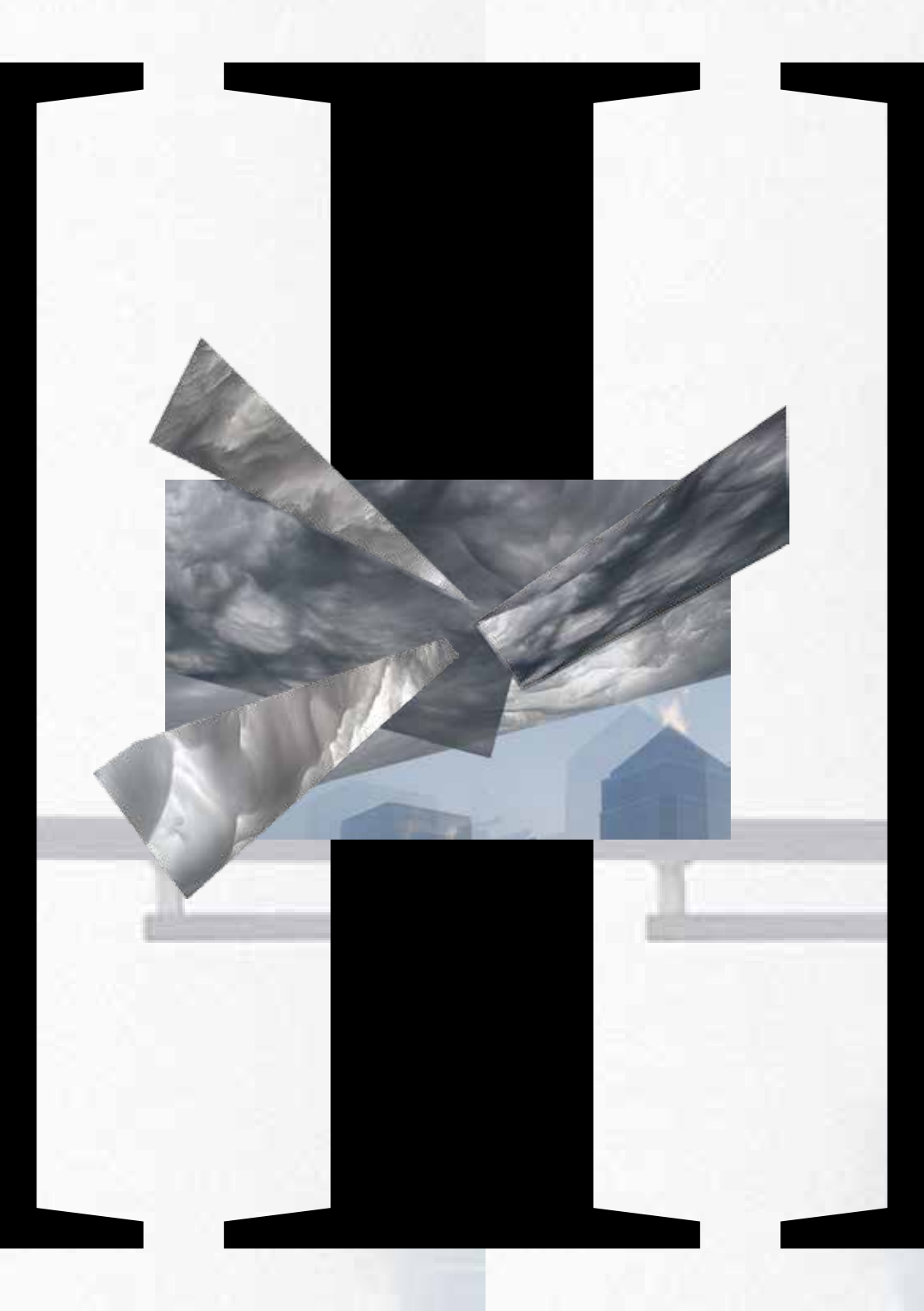


You'll
Find
Few
People
Here

It
Used
To
Be
Silent
Here

I
Ride
These
Boats
All
Day





We met in the garden under the shadow of Canary Wharf. The porch looked like a restaurant, with a deep orange glow and a tiled table that was set with candles and half a dozen flimsy chairs. They'd returned from abroad and this was a fortuitous, chance meeting.

'I didn't know you live near Canary Wharf.'

'We don't.'

I noticed two planes go overhead and took a step inside the house.

We met in the garden under the shadow of Canary Wharf.

We sat and conversed about things we'd done since our last meeting many years ago; tales of other countries, discussions of literature and idle chatter about friends and family. Conversation was light, but it turned to darker subjects after a glance out the window brought the traffic jams into sight. **I only acknowledged the distant rumbles and constant, desperate cacophony of car horns after spying the scene outside. None of us knew what was happening,** and I'm not sure that anybody else did. Their flight didn't seem to be the result of a conscious acknowledgement of a threat, followed by a reasoned response to leave. **It was more like lava flowing down a mountainside or the slow trickle of blood from a nose.** I sharply inhaled and shut the window.

It hadn't even occurred to us to leave and we just discussed evening plans as normal – restaurant? Bar? Who else shall we invite? The lump in my throat was the only evidence of something amiss. **We put on our coats and departed.**

Outside, the air was pale blue and the grass was grey-green – it shimmered with the dullness of polished chrome and the sky seemed warped. The usual soft dome had been replaced by a steep bulge, and clouds gathered at its peak in a violent, abstract tangle.

Canary Wharf vibrated on the horizon, closer than it was. **As we walked it didn't move, but the sky rushed like a hologram, its colours subtly changing with**

each step. London was seething with the heavy air that accompanies thunder and the portentous sounds that signal evening. We arrived at the restaurant too soon and stood smoking on the pavement. Someone's parents waited inside and I counted four planes flying low.

I had to stoop to get inside and the air was thick with smoke. The place was dark and filled with tables of different heights, just a few of them occupied by people with thin hands and tousled hair who probably always sat in the same places so that the décor matched their tops and the staff, who were actors, didn't have to learn too many lines. **The kitchen didn't have any food. That's ok; we're not here to eat.**

I heard a commotion outside and stepped onto the street, which had widened since we entered the restaurant. It was long and straight like an airfield and people stood around looking at the floor or the buildings, but not up. **The sun was shining now – a bright, saturated light that drained the colour out of everything and gave off no heat.** Over the backs of peoples' heads I saw another low-flying plane and thought I glimpsed someone running off to my left.

The plane settled into the concrete ground as if it had always been there – an airborne Cutty Sark – and I found myself standing alone, staring at the rubble.

I looked down at myself **from a** fourth-storey **window and thought** I looked **like a lost child.**



L'HOMME EST PERFECTIBLE





The dreams of apocalypse don't explicitly feature the end of the world and I don't believe they are borne of a serious fear of global annihilation. I'm keenly aware of the many potential eschatological scenarios that might befall us but I maintain a cowardly optimism that amounts to almost total psychological avoidance.

I could never understand Heidegger's 'being-towards-death'; the assertion that the proper approach to an Existentialist life lived in 'good faith' is to live it towards death, in the shadow of it, with complete contented awareness of its inextricable relationship to life. That life implies death is a philosophical platitude; it is not a matter of metaphysical certainty, just a contingency of extant biology. What is 'human' is not an eternal mode of being – a *la Dasein* – but a mutable fabric of diachronic biological and socio-political facts.

This abstract thinking allows me a small sliver of redemptive doubt regarding the fate of humanity, and an even smaller one about my own (virtually) inevitable demise. Of course, the end of the human race is vastly different to one's own death, and it's not at all about its cosmic significance: one's own death could not fail to be more significant to oneself, and the human race's importance is equally reliant

on the perspective of interested parties (i.e. the collective ego). In space, no-one can hear the entire human race scream.

Instead, these 'apocalyptic' dreams carry within them the implication that vast, uncontrollable events, on the scale of the sublime, are unfolding. The promise of annihilation is merely a subsection of that greater menace: brute action, mindless occurrence, the Godless Universe.

Creationists face the Uncanny appearance of design in our world with the appropriate trembling, but they resolve it with the myth of comforting sentence:

a mind that can be pleaded with, reasoned with and understood. In these dreams, the same insentience possessed by tree roots is ascribed to

human society, and it is made clear that we can no more control the direction of global policy, macroeconomics or technological change than we can implore God to redeem sinners, relieve suffering or prevent the Sun from exploding.

This, I believe, is the significance of aeroplanes, monolithic towers and traffic jams. In my dreams they appear as un-designed as a snail's shell and as alien as vegetation. They are archetypal symbols of the city – the most concentrated evidence of human creation – but they appear as arbitrary carbuncles; sinister remnants

of an uncaused process. This is not a fear of chaos, by the way – quite the opposite. It is the uneasy observation of order without orchestration. Sometimes the towers and the aeroplanes carry the whiff of sentience: a desperate illusion, seeking minds in the objects themselves in the absence of a conscious creator.

It's a solipsistic universe too. My fellow humans, en masse, appear mindless. My detachment is total, finding no solace in familiar locations (just the uneasiness of confrontation with distorted realities) and finding only fear in the presence of man-made objects. What a strange mess these cities are, the planes are escaping.

The common structure of these dreams is the juxtaposition of a very present, forceful occurrence (explosions, crashes, gunfire) with a distant, slow and quiet menace. This 'thing' can't be called an event, it is too intangible and indistinct – it is an atmosphere. It's a gestalt that's caused by the re-presentation of familiar things; the most familiar and human things possible (cities, cars, buildings) become organic and unexplained (a touch of the Nausea).

The menace is in the distance, at the edges, glimpsed with the mind's eye. It is too terrible to grasp in toto, but the

very elusiveness of its scale engenders this terror. It is a mutable and intangible situation that coalesces and garners enough gravity to form a semi-tangible thing – we might wonder whether it's a plague or a war but, really, its very inability to be grasped is the totality of its content.

The blast that happens right in front of me is the force of banal reality – it serves to remind me of the interplay between those distant energies and the very tangible actuality of falling buildings, authentic pain, real death. These two dramas resemble the constant oscillation

between prizing hedonism/nihilism (there's panic outside, we'll stay here and eat) and

recognising the occasional need to grope for meaning (staring at the rubble).

Nothing really matters because we're all going to die, but art is important because it helps us to understand. Lumbering global crises suffer personal tragedies, and the inhumanity of the mindless Universe implicates me in its cold unfolding.

PART IV

REFLECTION



DRYAVS

