WRITING AS OCCUPATION

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> thickening of thought and narrative loops, even

Neil Chapman and David Stent



At first glance it appears that there are three sections but,

If, in accordance with the severity of the situation, you in a moment, things will unfold to reveal further

resort to writing, make sure to figure in the numbers using complexity, sections within sections and SO

the same system. The semblance of sense is beginning to More importantly, there are transitions. The initial one

peel and crack, leaving only the slimmest chance of tactical

takes place as you, reader, find yourself in the company of

advancement and a degraded sense of whatever narrative someone who appears to be an insurgent sheltering in a

structure had been committed to. In whatever case, the building that, you

realise, now is

writing will hold forth at the point where its fuel is printworks with dark stained benches, cabinets containing

exhausted and its collapse will come in line with gravity.

tins of ink. stacks printing of paper,

Within a certain horizon, light itself becomes trapped, presses and other equipment associated with such places.

invisible. All this is due to go critical. Your position is old and be SO it can

reinforced, against hope, mainly through the maintenance assumed that the scene is set in prior times, the 19th

Century, the protagonist

is

The

technology

of air space, securing coelomic retention - pressing insides Communard standing

beneath a window in the interior where no view is

onto the walls - in order to vacate all but the essentials. To

sustain the shell. A bricolage practice, then, rearranging

to be had onto the street. The window is high, but

objects under a dry-point vault, turning each into a singular

the view is obscured further by grime on the glass. brick. With its armour plating, the building has become a

A battle is taking place outside. Before going any

blind sleeper, lids locked by mucous, the soft globes

further let it be noted that this character in profile

rotating wildly beneath. In as much as the dreamer's eyes

is imagined to some extent on the basis of a painting flit, watchful in the shuttered darkness, so the writers

from roughly the same era, a postcard representation remain active in the blockaded building. Sealed off as they

showing a young man in profile, in an outfit cobbled are, there's still the possibility of sound leaking in and out;

together from articles of civilian clothes intended to









approximate battledress. There is a sense of peace in insistent type-percussion, erratic, unschooled, amid the

the interior that contrasts oddly with the infraction

pressures of all sound twisting around this hard cell, like

unfolding in such close proximity. He is catching his

currents spitting around a river pebble. In this we have breath. And more is implied, a pensive evaluation.

been inexpertly circumscribed and our established Here I am, he says to himself in a tone betraying

beachhead is connective: a ligature that undermines his surprise that he should have survived thus far. Shadowy

something of the gesture of the 'retreat'. Yet the nature of figures run in the street, their shouts are

the barricades, their material qualities and mode of use,

difficult to decipher, further invoking this place as an

seems crucial. What do they repel? The approach of sand unexpected but welcome sanctuary. In fact, what we

dunes, perhaps... a house entrenched in a hollow, having are describing is already the second section. An early

always to be dug out from fresh, wind-laden deposits—sentence or two, while not providing a description

whatever slides down the slopes in bread-crust drifts, as

of the insurgent's entry into this space, hints at that

grains find their way inside on the body, consumed in the

event. If in a manner of speaking the second scene

food. The first prison is the hollow but the defence of the has come first it is because of a better legibility of

house becomes another entrapment, one that possesses those sentences. And the clarity plays its part in your

qualities of protection... that of an adopted sanctum, tendency to glance back to see what must surely have

keeping oceanic dunes at bay and preserving living space as been missed when reading the passage at the start.

 $\hbox{much as possible. And here we are being forced to occupy You skipped over it too quickly. Note that these first}$

a bubble space within the act of work. Think of Sisyphus, sentences imply a different kind of atmosphere, and

his boulder chewed down to dust, moving at night when that there were two characters to begin with. The

the moisture in the earth makes everything easier to later scenario (Communard standing listening to the

manipulate. All this is an extension of some island fantasy, noise of a battle taking place outside, which he was

with endless dunes creating relentless repeatable defences; a part of and will re-join in due course) has settled

a dry flood that would necessarily require water bags to into a literary form, not least on account of the pre-

secure it against storms. And so the last cell within the modern painting with its implied narrative. The

complex of barricades becomes the apotheosis of the earlier scenario, on the other hand, can be seen now

occupying intensity. It takes on a significance that even as more filmic, an action movie with two fighters

'outer spaces' do not possess. The keep of Kafka's castle is tumbling through a door, which gives itself to them

the inner sanctum that may not be the most securely as an escape route, miraculously, just when it looked

defended but that which presents the impenetrable heights

like their luck was out. Such scenarios make good of seclusion and inaccessibility. It is the site to which the

drama on the screen. The two Communards fire off

breached barricade always points, even if inscribed as a some final shots then barricade themselves inside,

clumsy 'X' on floorboards. It serves to locate the core of the but before they can even take a breath, they have to

occupation - not necessarily the centre spot, cross-

referenced and measured, but the self-selecting heart of the turn their attention to the dangers that might reside act of retreat. And where would that be here, you ask, other

inside, because it is not yet clear if they are safe in the

than within an element of the writing? Distributed old print workshop. For all they know, it could be a

somewhere amongst the reams of text emerging following

barracks for Republican forces. Luckily, it seems not

its seclusion. The occupation becomes ratified - signified

to be so. They can relax. They are safe. They laugh at

even - by its production. And this relates to the way it is

their good fortune. Calm silence pervades the room.

organised. Task rotas, writing drills, handbooks of guided

Now they are able to reflect for a moment... or he

practice. This is the best way for 'writing in retreat' to do its

is able to reflect, because at this point the second

work. It should follow the rigours of prison life, the

of the two soldiers melts away. Or perhaps still

strictures of schoolrooms, asylums, and scrivener's offices,

better to say that the one standing close to the only

lest its energies have no outlet, or fall back on uncontrolled,

light source, the high, barred window, establishes

chaotic leakages that exhaust themselves without concrete

himself more surely as an image, to the detriment

effect in the world. Lest you forget that the gable space is a

of the other as image. There is no regret. He is on

white-washed blank, already in accordance with countless

the right side of a just war. The next transition takes

patterns of quotation. But then, if it is as simple as that, the

place in a more brutal way. Much of what has been

question gets bounced down to the living quarters set in place so far is bracketed, shunted back into

underneath—a shelter spru

underneath—a shelter sprung up on the ground floor,

forgetting while something more urgent rises. The

centred on a rug found leaning like a corpse under the

adversaries out on the street are not Republican

stairwell. A second pop-up screen has sprouted in the

forces opposing a socialist rebellion anymore. They

corner of the workroom. It is an anomaly in itself, stuffed

are zombies. This is a contemporary scene, if not of

in dead space behind the upper bannister; lurid green,

film, then of television. The trouble on the street

contaminating working and sleeping patterns, a node

flips from noisy infraction to menacing quiet. Many

coordinating all the diagrams by which labour is dividing

figures can be seen — or they would be seen if a clear

up the space. You might say that this upper floor is filled

view could be had from inside the building. They

only with prospective content, or perhaps only the means

are not running, nor are they fighting, but standing

by which that could be delivered. But is this redoubt

in loosely arranged groups, feeling their way, with a

offensive or defensive? Can the occupation be usefully

mission as persistent as their movements are slow.

considered a retreat, or is it rather a form of neutrality,

The point of view shifts. While you are still the

sought in order to ensconce a given activity according to

reader, now you're also the one they're after. They

specific terms and conditions? Possessions deposited

may be close by, lurking around at the door, scraping

throughout the space are minor, practical. They are utilities,

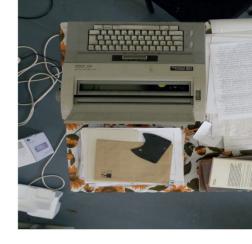
at the window frames, but they won't get in. You are

tactical tools for *elevating surfaces*... for dirtying writing

safe for the moment. Stay quiet, they may even forget

paper, blocking out light, screening off zones, subdividing

your presence and wander off in search of easier pray,











then you will be able to leave the barricaded place to thought. The enclosing vessel is positioned in a residential collect supplies. Steel yourself for the forthcoming passage. A route home for drunks; redevelopment for retail, exit. The violence to be meted out on these bodies bulwarked by loading depots, curling macadam ramps another righteous justice, but now it is the emerging like mung sprouts; a car park on every side; violence of a video game. Though you have a gun trolleys of commercial waste; terraced backyards. The space it's better not to use it. Any loud report will bring is confused in many respects, equidistant to the precinct more of these reanimated corpses lumbering out of and the ring road. In any case, the task is not to break away the nearby woods. Large numbers are where their from the world completely, by any means, but to establish a advantage resides. Better to use a machete, better trading station (...Elmina, Melaka, Macau...), a mollusc on still a crossbow. Increasingly, the narrative is more the underside. The only way to establish purchase (let alone fully yours as you stoke the aggression necessary to a monopoly) is to begin papering all interior surfaces, even get you past these adversaries. Consider with disgust the nested internal barricades. Writing is pinned up the condition of the zombie brain, rotted by virus, everywhere you look, establishing the scope of a panorama the way it remains able only to direct basic functions of viable possibilities, reinforcing not only the barriers of of the body while rendering monomania all that's left the enclosure but increasing its warmth. As a setting for of thought. Other writings come to mind where the trade, the sea-grey floor gets curtailed by geometric whitecharacters' psyches are described approaching that of foam walls. This sea is dead calm, pushing out to the the zombie, passages on Jonah for instance in the furthest corners. Its containment suggests that all this is biblical story, where the Prophet appears in sullen ingrowing, a nail settling into the flesh. Amidst all this, mood, the interior of his head having become like texts hang on the walls like so many captured specimens, the desert where he is to be found sitting, waiting, wing patterns being slowly drained in variable light. A in the shade of a large plant, his mind emptied, all range of photographic prints also fade selectively, laden except for a smooth pebble that rolls in the cranial with stubborn coherence, suggesting they can be rescued. It cavity of his skull as he lingers with his resentful is growing cold. Could all this circumambience produce thoughts. Without warning the scene changes again. heat? Might we succeed in keeping out the elements, or It reverts. Events are organised once more around a maintain the viability of circulating airs whilst remaining window providing light for an interior but through reliant on the outer casing (of the world) for sustenance? which no view can be had — this time due to frosted As you write you think of a pearl being compressed in the glass. You are a writer, holed up here, waiting, alone, tray of an oyster. Its occupation takes shape under a like Jonah. But your mood is not resentment. It is mucoid tongue, a hard grain slowly extrapolating, writing boredom. There is work to complete. You cannot out, increasing in mass, to become the smoky white muster the energy. If you were to move out of the manifestation of a sphere... yet you're unsure if the direct sunlight it would be easier (take a tip from formation is not some kind of waste product, an accretion

of matter that begins as an itch, an irritation, only to Jonah, he had that much sense at least). Memories become an obstacle, a voided (indeed occupied) volume of childhood return, interminable days when you within the oyster's overall form. The pearl is a ball of shot could not find incentive, when, in your frustration, (a self-inflicted wound) that the oyster no longer controls, you climbed on the furniture as if it were an assault unable to tell whether it is benign or malignant, and which course, from the banister in the stairwell onto the has been barricaded from within. It is an intervention that high windowsill. Remember what it felt like to be in ensures that the pearl becomes absolutely unknown, and your stocking soles, how you had to grip the window unknowable, to the rest of the flesh. It is a buried thought. latch to maintain your balance. Imagine friends and As you write you consider that the pearl of this occupation family making their way back to the house. Past is still less clearly defined. It becomes prominent by about your childhood crowds of zombies. Write suggesting ways for shadows to be organised, for glints acrobatics, give close consideration to the moves between interior and exterior experience to be modulated required to get you from your place on the stairs up in service of a form of concentration... You drift into another onto the windowsill. Linger on the details. Describe image, this time of a section of forest grown impossibly what it feels like, how it's possible to edge along a convoluted, combining countless capillaries of leaf, branch, bit further, perhaps getting a glimpse outside where trunk, root, mycelial mesh and soil ferment... such that it the window is open at the top. It's a game. You're presents a reductive, all-too-solid delineation of the on a cliff, on a narrow ledge. If you were to lose multitude. As such, it is encountered as a congealed mass. your grip now it would be the end. It is hardly a lumpen singularity becomes And this strategy, but boredom is instrumental. Embrace it. In apprehended at once, that could be turned in the mind like the fallow moment in front of the typewriter Jonah's a piece of timber. It both leads and blocks the way, pebble will be heard rolling. Just as the windowsill suggesting nothing other than endless alternative routes. can be described for the way it feels under the foot, The forest therefore becomes its own clearing, the brain in boredom has a feeling. It is a crumbly permeating openness is implied in its solidity. You think mass, like yeast, like material that might sublimate back to the pearl, the autogenous bullet, and overlay a without warning, like matter rotted by virus. The picture of the massing movements of crowds, shoals, content of your head is addended on both sides sweeping into different types of 'solid' form with the free by rocks. When their gravity can be felt, blessed modulation of creative force. Yes, this occupation is a dullness, then writing begins. Thus, the earlier terms thickening of thought and potential activity. And it is a come round. Stealthily, the narrative loops, even form of waiting that provides an antechamber for writing while it maintains its simple arc, picking up what yet to emerge, that does not yet know what it is or might it needs from the earlier scenario and curving now have the power to become. into weightlessness.

Inside cover Foreword Charlotte Cullinan

- MEANTIME: a necessary making-with Helen Frosi
- 3 History(s) of MEANTIME Sarah Bowden
- 2 1 The Political Economy of
 Artistic Experimentation:
 MEANTIME, Money & Me
 Kate Lepper
- 26 Writing as Occupation
 (thickening of thought and
 narrative loops, even)
 Neil Chapman and David Stent
- The Impossible Other Martin Wooster