

WRITING AS OCCUPATION



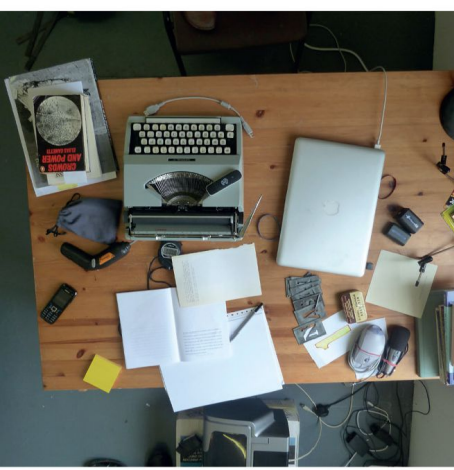
thickening
of thought
and narrative
loops, even

Neil Chapman
and David Stent



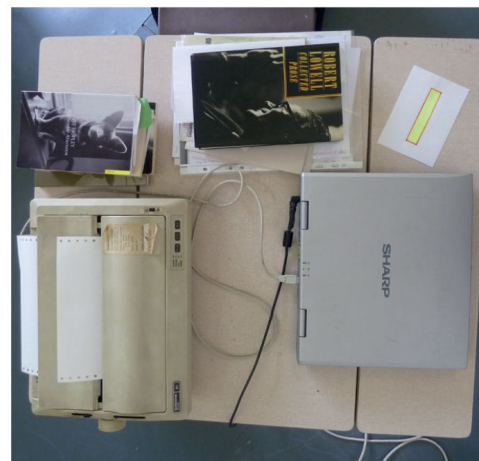
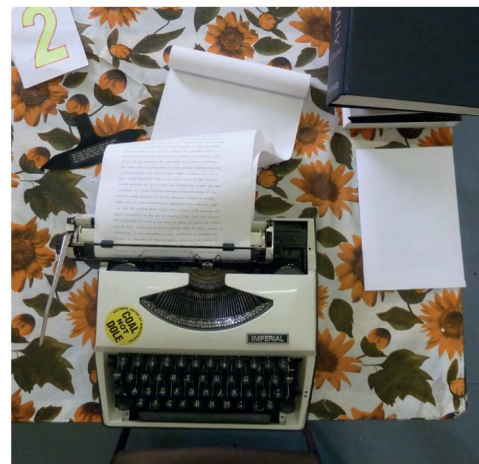
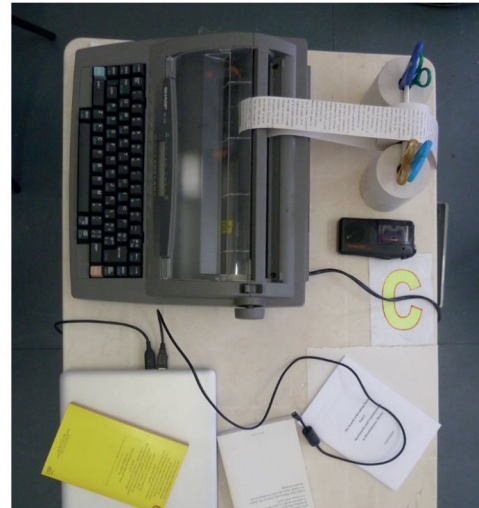
At first glance it appears that there are three sections but, in a moment, things will unfold to reveal further complexity, sections within sections and so on. More importantly, there are transitions. The initial one takes place as you, reader, find yourself in the company of someone who appears to be an insurgent sheltering in a building that, you now realise, is a printworks with dark stained benches, cabinets containing tins of ink, stacks of paper, printing presses and other equipment associated with such places. The technology is old and so it can be assumed that the scene is set in prior times, the 19th Century, the protagonist a Communist standing beneath a window in the interior where no view is to be had onto the street. The window is high, but the view is obscured further by grime on the glass. A battle is taking place outside. Before going any further let it be noted that this character in profile is imagined to some extent on the basis of a painting from roughly the same era, a postcard representation showing a young man in profile, in an outfit cobbled together from articles of civilian clothes intended to

If, in accordance with the severity of the situation, you resort to writing, make sure to figure in the numbers using the same system. The semblance of sense is beginning to peel and crack, leaving only the slimmest chance of tactical advancement and a degraded sense of whatever narrative structure had been committed to. In whatever case, the writing will hold forth at the point where its fuel is exhausted and its collapse will come in line with gravity. Within a certain horizon, light itself becomes trapped, invisible. All this is due to go critical. Your position is reinforced, against hope, mainly through the maintenance of air space, securing coelomic retention – pressing insides onto the walls – in order to vacate all but the essentials. To sustain the shell. A bricolage practice, then, rearranging objects under a dry-point vault, turning each into a singular brick. With its armour plating, the building has become a blind sleeper, lids locked by mucous, the soft globes rotating wildly beneath. In as much as the dreamer's eyes flit, watchful in the shuttered darkness, so the writers remain active in the blockaded building. Sealed off as they are, there's still the possibility of sound leaking in and out;



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.
Here I am, he says to himself in a tone betraying
been inexpertly circumscribed and our established
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.
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 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 is another righteous justice, but now it is the bulwarked by loading depots, curling macadam ramps 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 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 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 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 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 white-characters' 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
could not find incentive, when, in your frustration,
you climbed on the furniture as if it were an assault
course, from the banister in the stairwell onto the
high windowsill. Remember what it felt like to be in
your stocking soles, how you had to grip the window
latch to maintain your balance. Imagine friends and
family making their way back to the house. Past
crowds of zombies. Write about your childhood
acrobatics, give close consideration to the moves
required to get you from your place on the stairs up
onto the windowsill. Linger on the details. Describe
what it feels like, how it's possible to edge along a
bit further, perhaps getting a glimpse outside where
the window is open at the top. It's a game. You're
on a cliff, on a narrow ledge. If you were to lose
your grip now it would be the end. It is hardly a
strategy, but boredom is instrumental. Embrace it. In
the fallow moment in front of the typewriter Jonah's
pebble will be heard rolling. Just as the windowsill
can be described for the way it feels under the foot,
the brain in boredom has a feeling. It is a crumbly
mass, like yeast, like material that might sublimate
without warning, like matter rotted by virus. The
content of your head is addended on both sides
by rocks. When their gravity can be felt, blessed
dullness, then writing begins. Thus, the earlier terms
come round. Stealthily, the thickening of thought and potential activity. And it is a
while it maintains its simple arc, picking up what
it needs from the earlier scenario and curving now
into weightlessness.

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