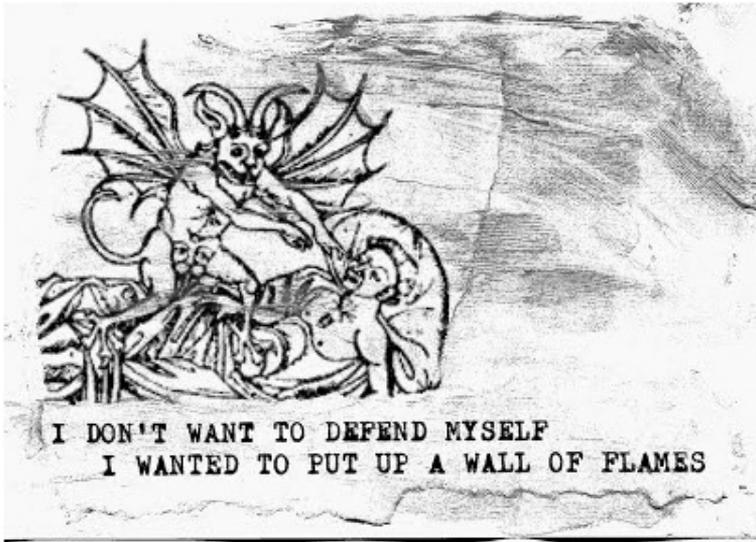


## SEAN BONNEY

### Letter on Work and Harmony

I've been getting up early every morning, opening the curtains and going back to bed. There have been rumours of anti-unemployed hit squads going around, and I don't want some fucker with a payslip lobbing things through my window. Especially not when I'm asleep. Though I don't expect to be able to fool them for long - my recent research involves an intense study of certain individual notes played on Cecil Taylor's 1966 album *Unit Structures*, and so obviously, once I've managed to isolate them, I have to listen to these notes over and over again, at very high volume. Someone from the Jobcentre is bound to hear them eventually and then, even though I'm not claiming benefits, my number will, as they say, be up. Taylor seems to claim, in the poem printed on the back of the album, that each note contains within it the compressed data of specific historical trajectories, and that the combinations of notes form a kind of chain gang, a kind of musical analysis of bourgeois history as a network of cultural and economic unfreedom. Obviously, I've had to filter this idea through my own position: a stereotypical amalgam of unwork, sarcasm, hunger and a spiteful radius of pure fear. I guess that radius could be taken as the negation of each of Taylor's notes, but I'm not sure: it is, at least, representative of each of the perfectly circular hours I am expected to be able to sell so as to carry on being able to live. Labour power, yeh. All of that disgusting 19th Century horseshit. The type of shit that Taylor appears to be contesting with each note that he plays. As if each note could, magnetically, pull everything that any specific hour absolutely is not right into the centre of that hour, producing a kind of negative half-life where the time-zones selected by the Jobcentre as representative of the entirety of human life are damaged irrevocably. That's nothing to be celebrated, though. There's no reason to think that each work-hour will not expand infinitely, or equally, that it might close down permanently, with us inside it, carrying out some

interminable task. What that task is could be anything, it doesn't matter, because the basic mechanism is always the same, and it involves injecting some kind of innovative emulsion into each of those hours transforming each one into a bright, exciting and endlessly identical disk of bituminous resin. Obviously, what is truly foul is what that resin actually contains, and what it consists of. It's complicated. The content of each hour is fixed, yeh, but at the same time absolutely evacuated. Where does it go? Well, it materialises elsewhere, usually in the form of a set of right-wing gangsters who would try and sell those work-hours back to you in the form of, well, CDs, DVDs, food, etc. Everything, really, including the notes that Cecil Taylor plays. Locked up in cut-price CDs, or over-priced concert tickets for the Royal Festival Hall, each note he plays becomes a gated community which we are locked outside of, and the aforementioned right-wing gangsters - no matter that they are incapable of understanding Taylor's music, and in any case are indifferent to it - are happily and obliviously locked inside. Eating all of the food on the planet, which, obviously enough includes you and me. That is, every day we are eaten, bones and all, only to be re-formed in our sleep, and the next day the same process happens all over again. Prometheus, yeh? Hang on a minute, there's something happening on the street outside, I'm just gonna have to check what it is. One of those stupid parades that happens every six months or so, I imagine. One of those insipid celebrations of our absolute invisibility. Christ, I feel like I'm being crushed, like in one of those medieval woodcuts, or one of those fantastic B Movies they used to show on the TV late at night years ago. Parades. The undead. Chain gangs. BANG. "Britain keeps plunging back in time as yet another plank of the welfare state is removed" BANG our bosses emerge from future time zones and occupy our bodies which have in any case long been mummified into stock indices and spot values BANG rogue fucking planets BANG I take the fact that Iain Duncan-Smith continues to be alive as a personal insult, ok BANG every morning he is still alive BANG BANG BANG. I think I might be getting off the point. In any case, somewhere or other I read an interview with Cecil Taylor, and he said he didn't play notes, he played alphabets. That changes things. Fuck workfare.



(Louise Michel)

## Letter Against Ritual

So I guess by now you'll have recovered from the voodoo routines at St Paul's. Guess it's nice that we won't have to pronounce the syllables Margaret Thatcher again. It all seems very distant now, like when you've been up for four nights, finally get some sleep, and then you're sitting there drinking a cup of coffee trying to remember what the hell you've been up to. You still know that feeling? You'd better. Anyway, the thing I remember most clearly is Glenda Jackson's speech in parliament, when all the rest of them were wittering on about Thatcher and God and the entire fucking cosmos and there was Jackson laying out a few home truths. But really, it's a measure of the weirdness of those few days how fearless that speech seemed: and, obviously, a measure of the weirdness that it actually was some kind of act of bravery. Tho the best bit was

when the anonymous Tory MP started wailing “I can’t stand it” in the middle of it. Like, that’s right, motherfucker. Anyway, so I listened to Jackson’s speech on YouTube a few times, and then I went and checked her voting record in parliament - bit of a letdown, yeh. Abstained on the workfare vote, yeh. So that’s her, she can fuck off. She made a much better speech back in 1966, I think it was, playing Charlotte Corday in the film of Peter Weiss’ “Marat-Sade” - I guess you remember it, she’s up at the top of a ladder, going off her head, and screaming something along the lines of “what is this city, what is this thing they’re dragging through the streets?”. Christ, if she’d done that in parliament, I might have rethought my relationship with electoral politics. Well, maybe not. But seriously, what was that thing they were dragging through the streets on April 17<sup>th</sup>, or whatever day it was. Through that silenced, terrified city. I thought of Thatcher as some kind of rancid projectile, and they were firing her back into time, and the reverberations from wherever it was she landed, probably some time in around 1946, were clearly a more-or-less successful attempt to erase everything that wasn’t in a dull, harmonic agreement with whatever it is those razorhead vampire suckworms in parliament are actually trying to do with us. Firing us into some kind of future constructed on absolute fear. Or that future is a victorious vacuum, a hellish rotating disc of gratuitous blades, and they are speaking to you, those blades, and what they are saying is this: “one day you will be unemployed, one day you will be homeless, one day you will become one of the invisible, and monsters will suck whatever flesh remains on your cancelled bones”. They’re not kidding. And the grotesque and craggy rhythms of those monsters are already in our throats, right now. In our throats, our mouths, the cracked centre of our language, fascist syllables, sharp barking. You know I’m not exaggerating. What they’re planning is nothing small. We’re talking about thousands of years, their claws extending into the past and into the future. A geometrical city of forced dogs, glycerin waves, gelignite. And what a strange, negative expression of the scandalous joy we were all feeling, at the death-parties, pissed out of our heads in Brixton, in Trafalgar Square, all of those site of ancient disturbances suddenly blasted wide apart. A pack of Victorian ghosts. Nights of bleeding and electricity. Boiling gin and police-lines. White phosphorous. Memories. It was like we were a blister on the law. Inmates. Fancy-dress jacobins. Jesters. And yes. Every single one of us was well aware that we hadn’t won anything, that her legacy “still

lived on”, and whatever other sanctimonious spittle was being coughed up by liberal shitheads in the Guardian and on Facebook. That wasn’t the point. It was horrible. Deliberately so. Like the plague-feast in Nosferatu. I loved it. I had two bottles of champagne, a handful of pills and a massive cigar, it was great. I walked home and I wanted to spray-paint “Never Work” on the wall of every Jobcentre I passed. That’s right, I’m a sentimental motherfucker when I’m out of my head. But no, already that foul, virtuous fear was sinking back into me, taking possession of my every step. I was thinking about Blanqui, right at the end of his life, sitting in his prison cell, knowing full well that what he was writing he was going to be writing for ever, that he would always be wearing the clothes he was wearing, that he would always be sitting there, that his circumstances would never, ever change. How he couldn’t tell the difference between his prison cell and the entire cluster of universes. How the stars were nothing but apocalypse routines, the constellations negative barricades. I was thinking about the work-ethic, how it’s evoked obsessively, like an enemy ritual, some kind of barbaric, aristocratic superstition. About zero-hours contracts, anti-magnetic nebulae sucking the working day inside out. Negative-hours. Gruel shovelled into all the spinning pits of past and future centuries, spellbound in absolute gravity, an invisibility blocking every pavement I was walking down. I wanted to cry. In fact I think I did. Actually, no. I was laughing my head off. A grotesque, medieval cackle. No despair, just defiance and contempt. Ancient disturbances. Ghost towns and marching bands. Invisible factories. Nostalgia crackling into pain and pure noise. No sleep. No dreams. An endless, undifferentiated regime of ersatz work. All of us boiled down into some stupid, Tory alarm clock. A ringing so loud we can no longer even hear it. But whatever. It seems pretty obvious we should adopt the Thatcher death-day as some kind of workers holiday. Actually, scratch that, let’s just celebrate it every day, for ever and ever, like a ring of plague-sores, botulism and roses. A barbaric carnival of rotten gold and infinite vowels. Sorcery. Rabies. You know what I mean? I hope so. Anyway, things have been pretty quiet since then. I’ve been thinking about paying you a visit. Oh shit.



YOU WON'T GO TO HEAVEN  
YOU WON'T GO TO HELL  
YOU'LL REMAIN IN YOUR GRAVE  
WITH THE STENCH & THE SMELL

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(LARRY BURTON)



...SPELLED AND THEY BECOME SUDDENLY AWARE OF  
THEIR ENVIRONMENT. THIS DISCOVERY AROUSES  
IN THEM AN IMMENSE ANGER AND AN UNCONTROLLABLE  
DESIRE FOR REVENGE. THEY HURL THEMSELVES ON  
THEIR MASTERS KILL HIM, THEN GO OFF IN SEARCH  
OF THEIR GRAVES )))

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## Letter Against the Firmament

I haven't written to you for a while, I know. There's not been much to write about, to be honest, apart from the recurrence of a few elementary social equations. Here's just one, to be going on with - (1) the forced removal of the homeless and benefit claimants from commercial zones (2) the subliminal encouragement of suicide for everyone with less than twenty pounds in their pocket (3) random police checks, arbitrary incarceration, racial profiling. If you take any one of those elements, or any one combination of same, and turn it inside out, the results will be all too simple: one royal birth, one state funeral, pageants, olympic panegyrics, etc etc etc, all expressed via the square root of silence, fast acquiescence and bewilderment. I thought, this morning, that I might be able to put all this together for you, as some kind of wondrous mathematics, a monumental calculus, but I can't get it to fit. It keeps coming out more like an oracular scattering of starling bones, of meat and shrieking larks, an extrasolar dog world made up of three parts rat nationalism divided by the given names of every human being who has died in police custody since the riots. Their names, all paid for with the collective revenue the government has collected from the manufacture, sale and distribution of third degree burns, multiple organ failure, and tiny droplets of phosphoric acid. And that's just the piss-stained surface, yeh. Pretty simple. Manage to boil it down into an infinitely dense, attractively coloured pill and you too can imagine that all of this is just a golden swarm of dragonflies and pretty moths, and not merely an injection of rabies into the group mind of every well-meaning liberal in this entire town. And you ask me why I don't write poetry. As if a metaphor could actually be a working hypothesis, and not just a cluster of more-or-less decorative alibis. I can't do it. I haven't slept since Thatcher. Curses on the midnight hag.

I think I'm becoming slightly unwell. I've developed a real fear of the upstairs neighbours. Every morning they emit a foul stench of bitumen and bitter, moral superiority as they stomp through the corridor on their way to work. A while ago I told you I rarely leave the house, now I can't, they've spun a web of 9 to 5 self-worth across the door, a claim on the law, moebus claws.

I'm trapped. I keep the curtains closed. Don't answer the phone. Panic when the mail's delivered. I don't know if this is normal behaviour, if anyone else feels the city as a network of claws and teeth, an idiot's hospital, a system of closed cameras and traffic. I'm probably beginning to smell. In fact I know I am: a thick cloud of inaudible noises from upstairs, dank growlings from somewhere outside the ring of the city. I feel I'm being menaced by judges. Who the hell are they. What are they doing inside me. I can't hear their voices, but each chain of wordforms solidifies inside my throat, inside my mouth, inside my own voice. It is no articulate sound. It is as if every verb had coagulated into a noun, and the nouns themselves transformed into something subterranean, blind and telescopic. I don't know if I can even see. I think I injected my eyes with gold one night, or at least the idea of gold, some kind of abstraction, and ever since then I've only sensed the city, as a wave of obsolete vibrations and omens. The gold itself some kind of anachronism, a dull rock rolling backwards into whatever remains of historic time. Each time-unit manufactured by a sweatshop suicide somewhere on the other side of the planet. The entire history of London, from its origins as an occultist trading post right up to some point in the not so distant future when it will be inevitably sucked into the spinning guts of Kronos and, well. All of that manufactured by sweatshop suicides, the kind of people my upstairs neighbours will insist over and over again simply do not exist. But what do they know? Each evening I hear them, walking around, stomp-stomp-stomping, tap-tap-tapping out their version of social reality on their floor, on my ceiling. It's terrible. And since I can't even leave the flat anymore, the ceiling might as well be the whole of the sky, and they're tapping out new and brutal constellations. Here's the sign of the surveillance camera. Here's the medusa. Here's the spear of Hades. Here's the austerity smirk. Here's the budget. A whole new set of stars. Astrology completely rewritten. It's like they're the sun and the moon, or the entire firmament, a whole set of modernized, streamlined firmaments. What fucking asswipes.

the wealthier homes  
have occupied my voice  
can say nothing now, yes

my language has cracked  
is a slow, creaking fire  
deadens my eyes, in  
high, contorted concern  
fuses to protein and rent

I know. I'd been hoping to spare you any further musings I might have had on the nature of Iain Duncan-Smith, that talking claw. But perhaps we're at a point now where we need to define him, to recite and describe, occupy his constellations. Because to recite the stations of the being of Iain Duncan-Smith, as if they were a string of joy-beads, and they are, would be to recite the history of the law, if we take that law to be something as simple as a mouth is, and each noise, each syllable that emits from that mouth is only ever and never more than the sound of animals eating each other, a gap in the senses where the invisible universe goes to die, and we become like ghosts or insomniacs stumbling through the city, we become the music of Iain Duncan-Smith, his origin in the chaos of animals and plants, of rocks and metals and the countless earths, where over and again he breaks children's teeth with gravel-stones, covers them with ashes. Because to classify those stations, the cancer-ladder of the dreams of Iain Duncan-Smith might, at a push, be to consume him, and to define those stations, those marks on the hide of Iain-Duncan Smith, might be to trap him, to press granite to the roof of his mouth, the stations of the law. And at this point, obviously, I really wish I could think of something to say that was hopeful, that was useful, that was not simply a net of rats blocking the force of the sun, till it crawls on its fists and knees, screaming like a motherfucker, sarcastic and wrathful, boiling the mountains as if they were scars, laughing, laughing like a crucifixion, modular and bleached. Bleached with the guts of Iain Duncan-Smith, of each of the modest number of words he actually understands, such as grovel and stingray and throat, chlamydia, wart. And those five words are the entirety of the senses of Iain Duncan-Smith, the gates to his city, his recitation of the germs of the law, a clock that never strikes and never stops, where we are not counted, wiped from the knots of statistics, comparable to fine gold, receptacles of song, shrieking gulls. It's all I can bear to listen to, that shrieking. It blocks out

the stars, the malevolent alphabet he's been proposing.

because your mouth is bitter  
with executioners salt, perhaps  
when you die, perhaps  
you will flutter through Hades  
invisible, among the scorched dead

may you vanish there, famished  
through the known and unknown worlds

Thanks for your letter. You think I spend too much time going after 'easy targets', do you? Got to admit I chuckled over that one. A while ago, you recall, I admitted to you I make a fetish of the riot form, and in that admission implied I was fully aware of the risks involved, that any plausible poetics would be shattered, like a shop window, flickering and jagged, all of the wire exposed and sending sharp twists and reversible jolts into whatever it was I was trying to explain or talk about. Think about it this way. Imagine that you had a favourite riot, one that you loved. Tottenham. Millbank. Chingford. Walthamstow. I like the last one, but only for sentimental reasons. It's a silly question, but maybe will help you to see what I mean when I use the word "poetics", or "poetry". What was Marx referring to when he was talking about the "poetry of the future", for example? And what use is that in thinking about prosody? Anyway. Loads of people have made maps of clusters of riots, trying to come up with some kind of exegesis based on location and frequency. And quite right too. Think of the micro-vectors sketched out within the actions of any individual rioter, of how those vectors and actions relate to those shared among her or his immediate physical group, and thus the spatio-physical being of that group in relation to their particular town / city, and finally, the superimposition of all of those relations in all of their directions and implications onto an equally detailed charting of the entire landmass understood as chronology and interpretation. Christ, you could include data about the weather-systems on Neptune if you wanted to. What would happen to this map, I've been asking myself, if

we went on to superimpose the positions of riots of the past, the future too if you want to be facetious, onto the complexities we're already faced with. Sudden appearance of the Baltimore Riots of 1968, to take a random example. Or the Copper Riots of 1662. The Opera Riot, Belgium, 1830. The 1850 Squatters Riot, California. Personally, I like the Moscow Plague Riots of 1771, both for their measures of poetry and analogy, and for the thought of them as an element of the extraordinarily minor Walthamstow Riot of 7<sup>th</sup> August 2011. Plague is a bad metaphor, that's its accuracy, it refers to both sides, all sides, in quantitatively different ways. But primarily, it's dirt simple. It runs in both directions. Means both us and them. As in, metaphor as class struggle, also. As decoration for some unspeakable filth, on the one hand, or as working hypothesis on the other. A jagged rip through all pronouns. The thunder of the world, a trembling, a turbine. Cyclical desperation, clusters of walls. The first signs of plague hit Moscow in late 1770, as in a sudden system of forced quarantine and destruction of contaminated houses. Within a few months, a clock of vast scratching, fear and anger. September 15<sup>th</sup> they invaded the Kremlin, smashed up the monastery there. The following day they murdered the Archbishop, that wormfucker, Ambrosius, they killed him, and then torched the quarantined zones. Much burning, yeh, much gunshot and vacuum. And no antidote, no serum. Around 200,000 people died, not including those who were executed. It's a grisly map. Disease as interpretation and anonymity. The plague itself as injection into certain subsets of opinion. Rich people. Plague sores, each basilica split open to various popular songs, calendars folded within them, recorded crackles through forcibly locked houses, through LEDs and meth. Basic surrealism. Aimé Césaire wrote years ago that "poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge". And science itself the great silence at the centre of corporate knowledge, its dialectical warp and synaptic negation. As in a single node of extraction made up, for example, of the precise percentage of the world's population who will never again be called by name, except by cops and executioners. Each one of those names - and we know none of them - is the predominant running metaphor of the entire culture, a net of symptom splinters producing abdominal pain and difficulty breathing, which in turn leads to a sharp increase in arrest

numbers throughout the more opaque boroughs of selected major cities. OK? Now write a “poem”. Directly after the August Riots I went to one of the big public meetings, don’t know why, guess I was feeling a bit confused. Or maybe just bored. The speakers were awful, patronising, professional, you know the type. But there was one woman who spoke, she had nothing to do with the organisation, they’d got her up there for obvious reasons, yeh, and she lived on an estate somewhere and her son had leapt 16 floors from a tower block window. He’d been on curfew and the cops had turned up, without warning, at his flat. To check up or something. Anyway, he leapt 16 floors down, and they told her he’d killed himself, “and I know my boy”, his mother said from top table, “and he wouldn’t have jumped, he wouldn’t have killed himself, not for them, not for anyone, not for the cops”, and her voice cracked a little and then she said “and as for the riots, I thought they were fair enough, and I think there should be more of them, and more, and more”, and then she stopped and there was some applause. Not much. She was off script. A few of us had our fists in the air, nonetheless. Anyway. Here’s a statistic for you, a class metaphor, an elegant little metric foot: not one police officer in the UK has been convicted for a death in police custody since 1969. Get that? That’s how long I’ve been fucking alive. You get that? And I think that’s what she was getting at, at the meeting: every cop, living or dead, is a walking plague-pit. And that includes the nice ones with their bicycles and nasty little apples. Like some kind of particle mould. They are all Simon Harwood. They are all Kevin Hutchinson-Foster. And are running, with crowbars and wheels, year by year, strata by strata, backwards into, well, what they used to call the deep abyss, or perhaps the metamorphosis of commodities. The unity of opposites, anti-constellations cutting through chronology, an injection of three droplets of the weather on Neptune into each malevolently flashing unit of time. Spectrums, butchers. “Poetry”, remember, “is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge”. What do you think that means, “the great silence”. I ask because I’m not quite sure. Hölderlin, in his “Notes on Oedipus”, talks about the moment of “fate”, which, he says, “tragically removes us from our orbit of life, the very-mid point of inner life, to another world, tears us off into the eccentric orbit of the dead”. But he’s not talking about “fate” as in myth, or the

number of fatalities taking place every year in police cells and occupied territories worldwide, or indeed the home of every benefit claimant in this town. He's talking about prosody, about the fault-line that runs through the centre of that prosody, and how that fault-line is where the "poetic" will be found, if its going to be found anywhere. The moment of interruption, a "counter rhythmic interruption", he calls it, where the language folds and stumbles for a second, like a cardiac splinter or a tectonic shake. Again, a cracked metaphor, an abstraction or a counter-earth. Actually it's an entire cluster of metaphors, and each one of those metaphors twist in any number of directions, so that "counter-rhythmic interruption" refers, at the same time, to a band of masked-up rioters ripping up Oxford St., and to the sudden interruption inflicted by a cop's baton, a police cell and the malevolent syntax of a judge's sentence. We live in these cracks, these fault-lines. Who was it, maybe Raoul Vaneigem, who wrote something about how we are trapped between two worlds, one that we do not accept, and one that does not exist. It's exactly right. One way I've been thinking about it is this: the calendar, as map, has been split down the middle, into two chronologies, two orbits, and they are locked in an endless spinning antagonism, where the dead are what tend to come to life, and the living are, well you get the picture. Obviously, only one of these orbits is visible at any one time and, equally obviously, the opposite is also true. It's as if there were two parallel time tracks, or maybe not so much parallel as actually superimposed on each other. You've got one track, call it antagonistic time, revolutionary time, the time of the dead, whatever, and it's packed with unfinished events: the Paris Commune, Orgreave, the Mau Mau rebellion. There are any number of examples, counter-earths, clusters of ideas and energies and metaphors that refuse to die, but are alive precisely nowhere. And then there is standard time, normative time, a chain of completed triumphs, a net of monuments, dead labour, capital. The TV schedules, basically. And when a sub-rhythmic jolt, call it anything, misalignment of the planets, radioactive catastrophe, even a particularly brutal piece of legislation, brings about a sudden alignment of revolutionary and normative time, meaning that all metaphors - like scurvy - come back to fucking life, creating a buckling in the basic grounding metaphor of the entire culture,

wherein that metaphor, to again misuse Hölderlin, becomes a network of forces, places of intersection, places of divergence, moments when everything is up for grabs. Well, that's the theory. Riot, plague, any number of un-used potentialities we can't even begin to list. Christ, I can't take it. I've been awake for days. My hands are trembling. Plague. The opposite of solidarity. Or rather, solidarity itself: the solidarity of isolation and quarantine, of the bomb-zone or the ghetto. The great silence is full of noises. And that's what I mean when I talk about poetics. A map, a counter-map, actually, a chart of the spatio-temporal rhythm of the riot-form, its prosody and signal-frequency. A map that could show the paths *not* taken. And where to find them, those paths, those antidotes, those counter-plagues. Anyway, I hope that answers your question. It's a very partial account, for sure. There are hundred of other points of access to the metaphor cluster engaged within the riot form: think about the Portland Rum Riots of 1855, for example. Or the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Their trajectories through the varying intensities of official and unofficial chronology, the music of the past re-emerging as a sheet of blazing gin flowing through Chingford. Like that time we marched on Parliament, burned it to the ground. Remember that? It was fantastic.

