

## My Friend Mark

*Jeremy Gilbert March 2017*

Flicking through some records on a shelf - there's a Roxy Music 12-inch.

It's a silent slice of plastic in a cardboard sleeve.

Scanning through some notes made for a piece not quite written yet - there's a thought I had.

Watching the street from the window, there's a question that I meant to ask. It will never be asked or answered now.

The thought will never be brought out for examination, shown and told and tossed into the air to see what light it catches.

Mark is gone.

This is about Mark Fisher, his work, our relationship, my feelings about it all. I'm writing it mainly for myself. Almost entirely for myself. I know a few people will be interested to read it all. I don't expect many to. People who want to understand something about the changing contexts of Mark's intellectual journey will probably get a lot out of it. But be warned - this is of course more than anything about me, or at least about what I thought of it all.

It is very hard to express the sense of grief I feel at Mark's passing. He and his work meant a lot to a lot of people, I know. I think it meant something quite different to me to what it meant to most of them. I couldn't honestly say that Mark opened my eyes or awakened my political consciousness or taught me anything much that I didn't know already. I couldn't say, as many can, that he showed me that I wasn't alone.

And yet, in a different sense, in a unique sense, in an important sense, he made it so I wasn't alone.

Mark was simply one of very few people so close to my own age, whose background and reference points and priorities and way of thinking were sufficiently similar to mine, that it felt as if we could talk about anything and understand each other instantly. If I'm honest he was probably the only person of whom I could say that, to quite the same extent. He wasn't my best friend, I wasn't his. But he was my friend in a way that nobody else was, and I don't think anybody else ever will be.

A friend is not the same as a lover or family-member...in my own life I tend to have a whole category of people to whom I'm not actually related but who I think of as family. Obviously the love of my life is in a category all of her own - I hope she knows that.

Friendship is a bit different. It's hard to define - whole, dense, endless books of philosophy have been written trying. You know what I mean.

Part of it was that he was was my peer. We were almost the same age and had come through the same set of generational experiences: growing up in the 80s, rave, the end of the wave of Anglophone interest in Francophone philosophy, the long dark night of New Labour, the internet revolution. This has actually been true of almost none of the other people I've worked with politically over the years (and Mark and I always thought of our relationship as a political collaboration). They have been, and still are, almost all a decade or more older or younger than me.

That's partly because Mark and I were both born slap bang in the middle of the godforsaken 'Generation X' - that generational no-person's land, in between the baby-boom and the millennium, that has generated fewer active contributors to Left politics and culture than any before or since.

It's not that he has left me alone, by any means. It's not that there aren't others - several others - whose loss is far far greater. But something has gone that I will never get back.

Anyway, I will start at the beginning.

## **The 90s**

In 1995, Mark Fisher wrote an article for the *New Statesman* denouncing 'Britpop' and the 'indie reactionaries' who advocated for it. The following week, the magazine published a letter from Keith Flett, minor celebrity of the London hard left, condemning Mark's position for its apparent failure to realise that straight white middle-class guitar rock was indeed the true musical expression of British proletarian identity. I wrote a letter in response, defending Mark's analysis, which was published the week after.

A critique of Britpop was an element of the PhD that I was just beginning, and would be the subject of a few early bits of my published writing. Of course, it would be Simon Reynolds who would trash Britpop most publicly, with all of his inimitable acuity, long before I got into print on the subject. But back in '95, Mark's was the first articulate voice I heard raised against this obnoxious phenomenon, and I wanted to cheer it on.

Several years later, I had organised a seminar for the [Signs of the Times](#) group about music and politics; this must have been around 1999. Among the attendees was a person I didn't recognise, a man about my own age, a couple of years older maybe, who seemed to know several people there that I did. His face was animated by a strange, I would have to say unique, mixture of seriousness and impish candour, and his strikingly dyed hair (I can't remember the colour now - it was either blue or black or orange) looked like a statement of something or other that was a little too deliberate not to be slightly embarrassing. This guy greeted me as if we were old friends.

It was Mark Fisher. I didn't actually know who Mark Fisher was, or why he was so happy to see me, until he explained to me that he'd been the author of the article I'd defended on that letters page several years earlier. I was amazed and impressed that he'd retained my name for all that time. But flattered as I was, his manic energy

unnerved me, and when later in the evening he started loudly denouncing one of the speakers (my colleague Ash Sharma) for speaking positively about Qawwali - simply, it seemed, because it's a religious musical form - I decided that I didn't really want to have anything to do with him. I'd already had enough of neurotics for one lifetime.

### CCRU Vs. Cultural Studies

Over the next few years I was vaguely aware of his activities, the growing fame of his blog, his relationship with Simon, etc... but I wasn't that interested, if I'm honest. I did get to know several of his colleagues from the University of Warwick's Cybernetic Culture Research Unit - the existence of which I'd been aware of pretty much from the moment of its founding (for years I treasured a copy of the first issue of Robin Mckay's philosophico-musical fanzine, *Collapse*, which pre-dated both CCRU and the later reinvention of *Collapse* as a sort of adventurous academic journal - I think I eventually gave it to Nick Thoburn for his collection of small-press publications). But I always had a problem with CCRU. Although I admired them all as scholars, I had intense philosophical / political objections to the ideas of their chief mentor Nick Land. I thought his work - beginning with his first book, *The Thirst for Annihilation* - was informed by, and expounding, a set of nihilistic presuppositions which could only tend towards some kind of aristocratic elitism, some kind of right-wing libertarianism, or some quasi-fascist synthesis of the two. Today, looking at where Land has ended up, well...you can [make your own judgement](#).

[I actually wrote the preceding paragraph a few weeks before the latest social media furore over Nick Land's racism and advocacy for 'neoreaction' broke out - so I am a bit worried about seeming to be opportunistically claiming some kind of insight in retrospect. All I can say is that there are plenty of people who can testify that I was denouncing Land as a right-wing libertarian years ago, and that I regarded his politics as sufficiently disgusting to have once stormed out of a restaurant because a friend was defending it. Now, I realise that some people think that his shift from cyber-right libertarianism to outright quasi-fascism marks a big and deplorable change in his thinking, and that somehow being a right-wing libertarian was basically forgivable - a harmless eccentricity like being a fan of Max Stirner... or the Discordians...I want to say now that those people are wrong, but I don't want to detain the reader any further on this subject, so I will explain further in a footnote. So if you want to know why fascism and 'anarcho-capitalism' are never actually far from each other, go to the footnote here.<sup>1</sup>]

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<sup>1</sup> Okay well here it is. There are at least two reasons I can give you as to why right-libertarianism and fascism are never that distant from each other, however far the right-libertarians (or 'anarcho-capitalists', or whatever bullshit name they want to give themselves at any given moment) may think themselves from any form of authoritarianism.

One is pretty simple and sociological: whatever their cosmetic philosophical differences, they are always ultimately serving the same interests. It's no accident that right-libertarians always come from social groups that are already powerful and privileged. If you are in love with power (I don't mean seeking to build collective political power in order to challenge existing distributions. I don't mean enjoying the facts of becoming and persistence and self-transformation in a vitalist, Spinozist, Left-Nietzschean way. I don't mean seeking to

The CCRU - and Mark's work there - drew on a remarkable set of influences. Very specific readings of Deleuze and Guattari (influenced by Land and Manuel DeLanda in particular); Baudrillard, Virillio and other theoretical pessimists; futurism (and a never-convincing disavowal of it); a fascination with H.P. Lovecraft (generally read as if he were some kind of profound thinker of nihilistic philosophical truth, rather than a mildly entertaining exponent of white male bourgeois paranoia fantasies ...of course one could argue that he was both...but I wouldn't....); a love of the intellectual and

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enhance the collective capacity of human and non-human bodies to act. I mean simply being in love with the very fact of power, and especially power over - not with - other bodies, and being libidinally drawn to its sources and the very fact of its exercise), and especially if you are also defending a set of social privileges which you already enjoy - then it doesn't matter if you call your enemies 'fascists': sooner or later you will become one yourself. Ultimately the abolition of social ties for which right-libertarians call can only lead to the further concentration of wealth and power in the hands of those who already hold it.

The other is that at a certain level of abstraction, in fact, the fascist imaginary and the right-libertarian imaginary are the same. Obviously the informing term of right-libertarian ideology is individualism — the belief in the absolute sovereign and originary independence of the individual as the basic unit of human experience. Now, liberals and libertarians like to think of fascists and Stalinists as their polar opposites, because they value the collective. But they are not. They are not opposites, for deeply interconnected reasons:

- Firstly, because in fact the libertarian individualists and the fascists share a particular assumption, which is that there is no form of viable social organisation other than anomic individualism either contained by some minimal arbitrary framework or simply not regulated at all (which is what the individualists want, and the fascists fear), or the total hypostatic unification of the social body into one homogenous whole (which is what the individualists fear, and the fascists want).

They may advocate for different sides of this coin, but both traditions assume that those are the only choices available (they are wrong by the way - all forms of democracy worth the name are precisely expressions of the inherent multiplicity and non-unity of all collectivities and the irreducible divisibility of every singularity, which is the aspect of existence which means that *there is no in-dividual ever* and also no 'community' as such — there are only complex aggregations, productive multiplicities, on multiple scales).

And the reason the fascist and the individualists assume that these are the only available options is that these two imaginary alternatives options are indeed just two sides of a single, individualist coin.

- This is because, in fact, the only form of active sociality which they can imagine is a community unified into a single, totally coherent, hierarchical and homogenous *meta-individual* - this is the Leviathan of Hobbes' imagination, it is the *ein volk* of the Nazis, it is the Borg (which the 90s American liberal imagination thinks is what all forms of effective collectivity must eventually mutate into, which is why it's okay to tell the Eastern Europeans that they must completely destroy all of their social institutions NOW so as to escape communism and achieve 'freedom'.). Hobbes's Leviathan is the book and concept which founds both the liberal and conservative traditions of modern political philosophy, and against which the radical tradition must always define itself.

I've argued all this in my book *Common Ground* - Jason Read has made closely related arguments in his important book *The Politics of Transindividuality*.

cultural legacy of cyberpunk and its dystopian, post-humanist aesthetic; a taste for the darkest, least voluptuous strands of electronic dance music; a fascination with the occult derived from the teenage gothdom of Mark and some of the other CCRU members (1980s chaos magick and the Temple of Psychick Youth always seemed to me to be obvious progenitors, but I've never actually asked any of them if this is correct) – were all part of the mix.

My relationship to this mixture was hard to explain. They were all sources that I was familiar with and had a certain sympathy for but I always thought it was a very limited form of counterculture that they were concocting for themselves - not much fun if you were someone, like me, who'd always preferred Miles Davis to Fields of the Nephilim, or Francois K to Ed Rush. On the other hand, nobody else around was trying to put together elements of cultural practice, rigorous theory and socio-political analysis in such a creative and ambitious way. I wanted to like it, not least because most of the people doing it were obviously very brilliant thinkers. But I couldn't.

I couldn't, not just because of the goth stuff, but because the CCRU, it seemed to me then (and still), had got themselves into a very tight spot, politically. On the one hand, at the very moment when Labour was forming a government for the first time since the 70s, they were making the fiercest efforts anywhere to ward off the comfortable complacency which might easily infect any kind of institutionalised Left. But on the other hand, they were taking positions that - whatever their origin and whatever the putative politics of their authors - were just objectively allied to neoliberalism. There was no getting away from the fact that if you were arguing for the abolition of all forms of community and that only the speed-rush of open markets could really manifest a properly deterritorialising will to exceed the limits of the human, there was no effective difference between your philosophy and that of the right-wing think-tanks or the WTO. The CCRU positions were thrilling, and were couched in such abstract terms that few of their fans seemed able to or willing to confront their political implications<sup>2</sup>. But those implications seemed clear all the same, and they seemed to be based partly on a fundamentally false premise: the idea that somehow it was the institutionalised left - and not the great capitalist machine-vortex-idiot-god to which Land had consecrated his being - which was their immediate enemy.

That premise was summed up by their attitude to Cultural Studies. Mark had actually begun his postgraduate career as a self-identified cultural studies scholar, when his supervisor Sadie Plant was still at the Department of Cultural Studies at Birmingham. He had followed her to Warwick and both had been instrumental in setting up the CCRU, which despite its name always seemed to be more about developing anti-humanist philosophy than about making any considered analysis of the cultural impact of cybernetic technology. But by the end of the 1990s, Mark and the rest of the CCRU, to which he was always central, would use the same sneering tone when

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<sup>2</sup> [This profile of the CCRU](#) by Simon Reynolds, citing Kodwo Eshun heavily, was very accurate and perceptive and featured some highly apposite criticisms of them from Judith Williamson. But Williamson criticized them for their amorality – and it wasn't their amorality as a generic feature that was my problem with them. It was their specific tendency to deploy a set of concepts and assumptions which were constitutively incapable of launching or informing any kind of critique of neoliberalism.

referring to 'Cult Studs' as would hardcore 'Marxist' fans of Adorno.

The term seemed to designate a particular caricature of Cultural Studies which associated it with crass populism, a vapid celebration of consumer culture, and a vaguely idealist lack of intellectual rigour. This was exactly the way it came to be used by Slavoj Žižek, which seems to have been one of the reasons Mark was attracted to his work, despite Žižek being a card-carrying Hegelian, and there being no more hated figure in the Nick Land philosophical pantheon than Hegel (the very epitome of self-righteous, theocratic, humanistic 'state philosophy'). More significantly, it was a caricature of Cultural Studies which had its origins clearly on the political right, in the reactions of elite humanities scholars and outraged conservative columnists to the very existence of this academic heritage from the New Left.

Obviously I hated all this, as I hated Žižek, having made and retained a clear identification with the politics of the New Left and the Cultural Studies tradition several years earlier. Of course there were plenty of other things that CCRU hated more than Cultural Studies or the institutionalised legacy of the New Left: humanism, and humans, for example. But it was the anti-left stuff that bothered me; I thought it was based on a serious misconception about just what was going on in the world (and about the actual theoretical bases for Cultural Studies - but that really is another story). It seemed to me to be a reaction against the fact that Cultural Studies was at the height of its global institutional prestige at just that moment, especially in some of the institutions where they found themselves or their friends working after leaving Warwick (Middlesex and Goldsmiths in particular). I thought they were failing to look past the ordinary frustrations they experienced as junior academics at the start of their careers, at a much larger political picture. I thought that they really didn't get just how precarious the position of Cultural Studies really was, and how central it had been to winning any space in the academy at all for their kind of intellectual experimentalism, how hard-won that space had been in the first place, and how divergent the politics of the New Left and most Cultural Studies were from those of New Labour. Most importantly, their sneering scepticism towards 'Cult Studs' seemed rather oblivious to the extent to which outside in the wider world, there were far more sinister forces at work.

Having said that, I think that the CCRU were reacting against something that needed to be reacted against. What had happened by the early 2000s was that a certain version of post-structuralism and a certain version of Cultural Studies had converged into a particular way of approaching those subjects in Anglophone universities, which often turned them all into little more than a liberal celebration of consumerism and identity politics (more on this term 'identity politics', and what it does and doesn't mean, a bit later). This had in part been accomplished via a very particular reading of the generation of radical philosophers to come out of Paris in the 60s and 70s. The work of thinkers such as Derrida was selectively read for anything that could be used to defend Anglo-American liberalism from both the New Right and from Marxism, while those elements that couldn't were studiously ignored; figures like Guattari, who simply could not be read in that way, were not read at all. At the same time, a particular strand of cultural studies which thought of consumers as creative agents, and that was more aligned with liberal critiques of racism and sexism than with any kind of critique of capitalism, had acquired some traction,

although mainly, again, through the selective misreading of some very interesting classic cultural studies works from the 1980s.

So the CCRU were completely right in a number of their key intuitions. A kind of banal liberal humanism had been smuggled back into the seminar rooms via these routes; a proper reading of Deleuze & Guattari and a confrontation with the enormous implications of the cybernetic revolution were the most obvious remedies. But did we need the dark nihilism and gothic paranoia? On the one hand, it was precisely that which made the CCRU output so intoxicatingly novel, so attractive to those looking for thought and ideas which didn't smell too strongly of the dusty library or the dreary lecture theatre. On the other hand, it was the rejection of ordinary standards of scholarship and argument that seemed to make them willing to buy into some of Land's dodgy fantasies, and apparently indifferent to the extent to which the mainstream tradition of radical thought, especially the work of the New Left, had always shared their concerns, and still did, when it wasn't being misread and misused by liberals.

The fact that this indifference often shaded into hostility always seemed to me to have been based on another fundamental problem with CCRU. Along with Land, their main mentor was Plant, who is often remembered as the blameless 'good mommy' of the CCRU, a victim as much as anyone of Land's increasingly self-destructive narcissism. But I always, always thought there was a major problem with Plant (I know, I know I 'had a problem' with lots of things. Well I did – it was a dark time and the collapse of left publishing culture in the 90s created a lot of space for basically reactionary positions to emerge in glamorous guises, and there was certainly much worse stuff going on in other places than the CCRU. But this isn't about that) .

I had been reading Plant since she the days when was writing for situationist fanzines as a grad student in the late 80s, when I was still a teenager, and it always seemed to me that she was a great polemicist but a rather lazy scholar. She was often reinventing wheels and making historically ill-informed analyses that sounded good but just didn't fit the facts (a habit that continued throughout her published books). By the time they were all at Warwick she seemed to have developed a self-justifying ideology according to which basic scholarship –going and researching a topic to see what other people have said about, reading them properly before commenting on it, and admitting it if it turned out that they had already said what you were planning to say – was an oppressive imposition on the promethean creativity of the writer, rather than a set of safeguards against self-important bullshit.

Plant seemed to communicate this ideology to her students, who often seemed to me to be most defensive / aggressive when confronted with the fact that their positions were either not that original or were based on straight-up ignorance of the fields they were commenting on<sup>3</sup>. Mark elevated it into a whole theory and practice of 'hyperstition': basically a practice of writing fictional theory which makes no claim actually to correspond to any kind of truth because somehow this will magically make

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<sup>3</sup> it was no wonder they hated Derrida, whose philosophical positions they completely misunderstood, because Derrida is the thinker who insists that you read *every footnote* of a writer's work before commenting on it.

it true.

To be clear here – it's not like I ever had any direct run-ins with the CCRU and I would always get on well with all of them as individuals (they would try to dissuade their students from talking to me... I would continue to write them references recommending their promotions...it was that kind of a relationship...). But their tone of sneering dismissal towards Cultural Studies and everything else always seemed to me to be an expression of a basic *disavowal* of the fact that, in truth, the people they were sneering at had already done and said a great deal of what they wanted to do and say. To have acknowledged that fact would have been to break the cardinal rule of never acting like responsible scholars, and would have punctured their belief in the uniqueness of their mission.

Now, on the one hand this ideology of anti-scholarship certainly had a kind of liberating potency, in particular in giving Mark and his blog-followers the confidence to write outside of academic norms. Mark's whole blogging career probably wouldn't have been possible without it. At its best it served to free up the inventive mind and the talented writer from the dead weight of institutionalized expectations. That was the aim of it, and its great liberating potential.

But the trouble was that this was also a position which effectively glamourized bad scholarship, making a virtue of the habits of just not really reading properly and caricaturing your opponents anyway. And if this sounds familiar then it should – this is also exactly the attitude exhibited by Zizek throughout most of his career, and the reason that so few people now take him seriously, and was the key reason why I think Mark was initially attracted to him after the effective end of the CCRU.

Despite all these differences, when CCRU alumni Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman came to work at UEL (in both cases I had argued for them strongly in departmental appointment meetings, but I think they would have been appointed anyway), we had enough common interests and common friends to form friendships and healthy working relationships. Indeed, both of them produced amazingly impressive works of erudite original theory which seemed to belie any assumption that CCRU could *only* produce casual polemic. The same should be said of the very high standard of scholarly work which Robin's 'Urbanomic' imprint would go on to disseminate in the 2010s. And the fact that so many of them did ultimately complete their PhDs would also seem to show that Plant was a capable and responsible academic mentor when she was required to be.

It was Mark specifically, I think, whose work was to be most directly enabled and constrained at the same time by the CCRU's anti-scholarship schtick. In fact to be fair I think he himself was always as responsible for codifying and amplifying it as much as anyone; he probably encouraged it in Plant as much as she did in him. I guess it was an expression of the tortured ambivalence towards academic institutions and any form of 'official' culture which was always part of his makeup, and which derived in part from his perpetual sense of himself as a working-class outsider in a middle-class world.

Meanwhile over the course of the 2000s his reputation was growing, and I couldn't help but admire the passion and rigour of his music writing in particular, when I

happened to come across it. At the same time his political perspective seemed to shift, moving away from the nihilist libertarian anti-humanism of Land towards a more classical, but nonetheless compelling Marxian critique of contemporary neoliberal culture.

One more thing to say about the legacy of Land. The attempt to separate out what was exciting and inspiring about his ideas from their potentially right-libertarian consequences was one of the key impulses animating the whole field of debates on the politics of 'accelerationism' a few years later. I always thought, a bit rightly, mostly wrongly, that this was a dead-end. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with the idea that radical politics should be technophilic, future-oriented and should even welcome capitalism's capacity to disrupt old hierarchies and established social forms. The problem was the notion that there was anything new in this idea at all. There wasn't. In fact this was pretty much the normative position of most self-identified leftists since the mid 19th century. Just to pick a few names at random...Karl Marx, William Morris, W.E.B. DuBois, V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Herbert Morrison, Eugene Debs, Nye Bevan, Fidel Castro, Raymond Williams, Doreen Massey, Hilary Wainwright, Ernesto Laclau, Donna Haraway, Shulamith Firestone could all be found to have supported such a position in some way or another.

Most of the young scholars and bloggers attracted to 'accelerationism' in the 2000s and early 2010s seemed to me to be reacting in a very understandable way against the highly frustrating attachment to localism and primitivism which had become typical of 'activist' culture in the late 90s (what Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek would come to name 'folk politics'). Obviously I was sympathetic; I'd been making my own critiques of 'the activist imaginary' for years. But the idea that the route out of that particular cul-de-sac lay via Land's version of cyber-sociopathy, or even some left appropriation of it, seems to me to have been based on historical ignorance more than anything else.

Still, despite the evident accuracy of this observation on one level, on a more important one there was no denying the sheer libidinal magnetism of the positions which Land had inspired, the fierce power of his dark rhetorical sorcery; and it was Mark who was able to mediate that energy for a largely left-wing readership far more productively than anyone else. It's no accident at all that it was two of his most devoted blog-comrades, the selfsame Alex and Nick, who would go on to develop the only really politically substantial intervention to emerge from the 'accelerationist' milieu: their instant-classic book *Inventing the Future*. I think they had to make a crucial break with the whole Landian accelerationist orientation in order to get there; but it would be wrong to imply they could necessarily have got to the same place if they had started anywhere else. And it was Mark who was the one absolutely indispensable, pivotal figure in creating the network of bloggers, artists and academics within which they were able to begin, continue and complete their journey towards a really mature and important position.

### **The Hardcore Continuum**

In 2009, a debate was raging between music bloggers, including Mark, about the

validity of Simon Reynolds' concept of 'the hardcore continuum' as a way of understanding the relationships between various London-originated dance music forms from the early 90s onwards. Steve and I decided to invite a number of them to come and take part in a debate on the subject. It was one quite close to my heart - in the early 90s I'd danced at some of the raves and clubs that by then had acquired a legendary status with the younger members of that scene, and I felt a strong sense of loyalty to Simon and his (utterly correct, I thought) account of its evolution.

The 2009 hardcore continuum seminar was not just a tremendous intellectual thrill (which it was - you can read a full report [here](#)). For me personally, it was one of those co-incidental points at which whole life courses seem to turn. It was the first time I met Alex, who would go on to become my doctoral student, the author with Nick of *Inventing the Future*, and after finishing his brilliant PhD, my good friend and co-author (we're finishing the book soon, honest). Alex would never have ended up there, or doing a PhD, or writing with Nick or with me, if it hadn't been for Mark and for the blogging scene to which he was central. And that was the first time since the *Signs of the Times* seminar that I met Mark Fisher. Remembering the incident of years before, I had asked Ash if he minded us inviting that Fisher bloke to the seminar; but Ash had met Mark several times since, and reassured me that he seemed to have calmed down.

In truth he seemed like a different person. And yet not. He seemed like the person who had written that article in 1995 and who had been conscientious, open-hearted and generous enough to have remembered my name for those subsequent years until our first actual meeting; the out-of-control abruptness that had so turned me off during that *Signs of the Times* seminar was gone.

Well, it wasn't entirely. Mark never suffered fools gladly, if they seemed to be in any position of authority, and more than once in the years that followed I would put my hand on his arm to calm him down when some fellow panellist or audience member at a talk or seminar had wound him up the wrong way. But something had changed. And it was something which made possible a rapport between us that would last until the final time we spoke, a few weeks before his death.

What it was that had changed is no great secret, and I think there were three main elements to it. And I think that understanding them is the key to understanding Mark's trajectory.

## **New Friends**

1) Firstly, his growing fame and fan-base, and more importantly his growing community of interlocutors on the philosophy and music blog scenes - meant that he no longer felt frustrated by the lack of an outlet or an audience or a community of co-thinkers adequate to his ideas. I should qualify the latter point here. In fact Mark always had a fantastic network of close friends and allies. I was continually amazed by, and envious of, the intensely supportive friendships which the various CCRU participants and associates seemed to share with each other. But the blog scene allowed these incredibly productive relationships to produce more publicly, more instantaneously, and in a manner more open to outside connection and intervention, than had ever been possible before. All of which was encouraging and enlightening

for Mark, and the for marvellous, polymathic group-mind in which the machinic body-brain 'k-punk'<sup>4</sup> (the name of his blog and the name by which many came to know him) became an indispensable hub.

Anyway - however strong his network of friends had always been, it was still stronger now, and included blogging colleagues like Alex, Nina Power and Owen Hatherley who were coming from quite different places theoretically and who were intuitively much more political than most of Mark's earlier interlocutors - or at least political in a more easily recognisable way. I think that one of his most important friendships here was with someone who didn't blog much: Alberto Toscano. Alberto was Nina's partner at the time and he and Mark spent a lot of time together, and I know that their conversations had a great effect on Mark. In fact he told me once - and he was less than half joking - that much of *Capitalist Realism* was derived from those conversations with Alberto.

### Capitalist Realism

2) What else had changed is that Mark had been through the experience of which *Capitalist Realism* is both the narrative tale and the result. It's a cliché I know, but that book is, as much as anything, a *Bildungsroman*. It tells the story of Mark's experience of working in a Further Education college (for international readers that means teaching 16-18 year olds in their last phase of school before university - so that's senior high, for Americans), during the peak years of the New Labour attempt to neoliberalize British public education, and the awakening of his political consciousness, and his class consciousness, as a result. The book hadn't actually come out when we met that day, but Mark was at the height of his Lacanian Marxist phase - influenced in theory a bit by Badiou, or at least by the Badiou-fixation of the philosophy-blog scene at the time, but essentially just by Žižek - of which it would be the key outcome.

He never lost his fluency with his earlier philosophical sources, but this later set of influences did give him a much crisper, clearer framework with which to make sense of his experiences, compared to the hypercomplex gothic materialism that he had brought with him out of CCRU. At the same time, the latter still informed all his thinking subtly, flavouring all his work with that incredible sensitivity to the complex

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<sup>4</sup> You know, I realise now that I never got around to asking him what 'k-Punk' meant. I'm sure Steve knows. I had always assumed that the K stood for ketamine, as in 'k-hole'. By reputation, the CCRU crew had a penchant for amphetamines, MDMA and ketamine: drugs which all enable a radical engineering of the psyche-body-world interface but without encouraging any of the tediously traditional mysticism of the classical psychedelics. 'Punk' was more-or-less self-explanatory. Being into Deleuze & Guattari, self-transformation and anti-individualism, yet being totally anti-hippy, was pretty much the defining affective-intellectual position of the CCRU as seen from the outside. From that vantage point, this never looked like a sustainable position to me. You can't have that cake and eat it - you're either for the revolution which the hippies were trying to be part of, or you're against it. And Deleuze & Guattari were definitely for it. And if you're against it then you might as well go and join UKIP or vote for Trump, or at least Rand Paul and Peter Thiel. Eventually, of course, Mark completely came round to this view. More on that later.

everyday interaction between psychic, emotional, political and physical elements of life which became its defining feature.

My own relationship to his work in that phase was strange, I have to say. *Capitalist Realism* is a wonderful polemic and a moving personal statement, but conceptually, there isn't much in it that's actually very new, especially if you work in the classic tradition of British Cultural Studies, as I do. When it became an underground hit, my undergraduate students found it hard to see what the fuss was about - they'd been being taught most of what the book had to say since the beginning of their first years of study. *Capitalist Realism* is not really a work of philosophy or criticism or straight political analysis. What it is best described as is, in fact, simply a classic work of cultural studies (despite the fact that its main theoretical inspiration is the work of Slavoj Žižek).

Obviously, given the history that I've already related, I found this a little frustrating. The book's titular concept is a straight-up synonym for bourgeois ideology as theorised by those classic Cultural Studies sources, Althusser and Gramsci. 'There is no alternative, this is the only possible reality'... it's not a new observation that the function of ideology is to try to make us think that, and it isn't a specific feature of advanced neoliberalism. Gramsci and Althusser both emphasised that *all* ideology presents itself this way.

But Mark never read Gramsci and, even more strangely, even at the height of his Marx-Lacan-Zižek phase, never seemed interested in how very Althusserian most of his analysis was; this is strange because Althusser was the original Lacano-Marxist. A lot of the arguments the book makes about the functioning of neoliberal institutions had already been made previously by Cultural Studies or social policy scholars such as John Clarke and Janet Newman or Alan O'Shea. Indeed some of them had been rehearsed in a book called *Cultural Capitalism* that I edited with Tim Bewes several years earlier.

I could go on. But this list of possible antecedents in fact completely misses the point. *Capitalist Realism* was not intended to be an original scholarly work. It is a work that belongs in the great tradition of the classic pamphleteers and essayists of previous centuries, whose primary concern was not to expound new concepts and carefully guard their originality, but to effect a direct change in the affective disposition and cognitive outlook of the reader which would have definite political implications. And this is exactly the effect that Mark's writing did have on tens of thousands of readers around the world. Maybe hundreds of thousands. The intensity of his own experience enabled a unique capacity in him to resonate with the experiences of others.

Even more crucially, I think, it was precisely this journey from Nietzschean neoliberalism via Lacano-Marxism and his experiences working in FE, and back to something like a classic version of Cultural Studies, that enabled him to write in a way which was so relatable to thousands of readers with so many different backgrounds and political trajectories. Working in FE, Mark had experienced the front-line of the neoliberal assault on public institutions in a way that those of with safe university jobs had never had to - although the same forces were coming our way, just more slowly and from a greater distance (as some of us had already been

warning for years...). His Landian phase had given him an insight into the affective mechanisms of neoliberalism which again, the rest of us could only really comment on from the outside. And his struggles with depression had given him so deep a feeling for its affective politics that he was able to turn his insights into it into a kind of poetry.

It was this poetry, this immediacy of insight, this ability to convey a whole conjunctural analysis in an original turn of phrase or an amusing metaphor, which was Mark's unique talent. It was one which didn't just occur spontaneously - he had honed it and cultivated it over many years of talking, writing, teaching students from all backgrounds and at all levels, from FE to post-doctoral. It was the result of tens of thousands of hours of practice, repetition and revision. It drew on the best bits of all of his influences, however disparate, somehow synthesising them into a unique and pliable alloy. It was tremendously exciting, and it was what enabled in him a remarkable generosity, a capacity to give to so many thousands of readers and listeners a degree of insight and a level of life-changing clarity which most academics could never offer or aspire to. *Capitalist Realism* remains the most perfect expression of that power.

### **Love and Happiness**

3) And the other thing that had changed, in between our first and second meetings, was his getting together with Zoe.

Well, to be honest, this is all conjecture on my part, because I didn't know him or her at all during the intervening period. But still...it's another horrible cliché, I know, but if you'd asked me, on that day in 2009, what seemed to have changed in the guy, I'd have said straight up that a certain desperate coldness seemed to have given way to warmth and ease, in a way which 9 times out of 10, means a person has found someone to share their life with. (Yes, in principle I regret the fact that we are all trapped by familial-bourgeois-individualist models of intimacy as much as the next schizoanalytic radical...in principle...but we are where we are).

I'm sure it was all the other stuff I've mentioned as well. CCRU veterans had had good reasons to feel bitter towards the university as an institution, having always had problems with the administration at Warwick. But nothing will correct your bitterness towards universities like having to spend a couple of years teaching in a neoliberal high school; on his good days, at any academic event or simply teaching students, Mark looked happy just to be there. Friendships with people like Nina obviously had a transformatory effect. And the warmth of his relationships with colleagues and friends from his earliest days at Warwick is well attested. But marriage and imminent fatherhood, I think, had as big an effect on him as anything else ever did. I don't mean Zoe made him human There was just this channel we could relate through that hadn't been there before, and I had a deep intuition that it had something to do with him feeling safe and loved, even before I met her.

We got to know Zoe and their son George in 2011, on two wonderful weekend visits to their home in Felixstowe (homes - they moved in between the two visits). My partner Jo and I loved being with Zoe, the kids did too and we all loved George - there was an easiness between all of us immediately which is very hard to find in

everyday life. So I don't know why we never saw them all together again until Alex's wedding in the summer of 2016. We kept assuming we would. Many readers will be familiar with this phenomenon, and many others will not, but the way that months and years can slip by when you're mid-career with two small children is extraordinary. There are lots of people we've hardly seen during the same period, I'm sorry to say - in fact I don't think we've visited anyone outside London except my sister for that whole time. Still, I've been poring over old emails from Mark trying to work out what was going on, and it's clear enough. There simply wasn't another period between the beginning of 2012 and December 2016 when either Jo or Mark or I weren't struggling to finish a book, or Mark was not mired in one of his long periods of depression, or suffering from debilitating physical ill-health.

Mark and I had stayed in touch after the hardcore continuum seminar, at which we had found ourselves in completely, mutually-intensifying agreement, and had started planning further events together almost as soon as it was over. Tim Lawrence and I got him some work at UEL the following academic year, joining the large network of people who seemed to be constantly concerned with trying to help him keep body and soul together. He was utterly broke, eking out a living for himself and his young family from sessional teaching at universities and FE colleges and from freelance writing, living in Felixstowe and commuting to London several times a week. We began a series of intense conversations (the hallmark of so many of the memories of Mark that have already been circulated since his passing - those intense, wonderful, all-ranging, hilarious conversations about everything), sometimes on the phone, sometimes in person. He very quickly began to refer to 'our project', 'our network', which seemed entirely natural - without any formal declaration, we had come to think of ourselves as collaborators.

Of course, this was a hallmark of his relationships with so many people. Any Deleuzo-Spinozan knows - especially if they've read the work of John Protevi - that the most important thing in life is a capacity for 'joyous affect', and that joyous affect is precisely and only the capacity to form productive relationships between bodies (and 'bodies' can include brains, institutions, hands, people, plants, microchips etc.). When Mark was on form, his capacity for such joyous affect and its productive connectivity was extraordinary.

But he often wasn't on form, which is partly why so few of his projected collaborations ever came to fruition. I always had the impression that his inability to care for himself physically was deeply linked with his weakening capacity to stave off the depression. This wasn't his fault or anyone else's - apart from anything else, I, as well as many others, can attest that however well you have looked after yourself before, you will almost certainly look after yourself less well during the early years of parenthood. And he had never looked after himself at all - the most erratic sleep and diet of anyone I knew, no exercise. He was hospitalised for physical reasons at least twice that I remember while we were close. During one particularly harrowing cancer scare, Steve Goodman and I had to cover his classes at Goldsmiths for two weeks - despite both of us having full-time jobs at UEL - because he couldn't afford to lose the pay which he otherwise would have done (I think Steve was still at UEL then although I could be misremembering).

And when Mark was depressed, his state was an object lesson in the Spinozan-Deleuzian idea of negative affect. From that perspective, negative affect is simultaneously a reduction in the body's capacity to act and a lessening of its ability to form productive connections. When it got bad, the sense that he was slipping out of reach, receding into a tunnel where no-one else could follow, was genuinely corporeal: his voice sounded far-away; it felt like you were watching him through the wrong end of a telescope. The last time he came out of a depression - assisted, I think, by his artistic collaboration with Justin Barton - the sense of relief was overwhelming. We started to make plans to get together, although we never did.

### **Strategic Collaborations**

I loved *Capitalist Realism* when it came out at the end of 2009. I've explained my ambivalences about it only as a means of qualifying the fact that of course, like all his friends and admirers, I was utterly delighted to see it become the phenomenon that it did. We all hoped that it would lead to some more stable income for him. We were pleased not just for him, but for the possible upsurge in wider political consciousness that the book's success seemed to index.

And of course, and this was Mark all over, it would never have been enough just for that book to be a success. The book was merely the first salvo of a whole planned assault on British political culture. The new imprint which Mark launched with Tariq Goddard (well, that Tariq launched with Mark, to be fair), initially publishing in book form a series of essays by key allies of Mark's from the blog scene, really opened up a whole new discursive space for the imaginative left in Britain, a space which had effectively shut down when Geoffrey Robinson bought the *New Statesman* in the second half of the 1990s.

The success of the whole Zer0 books project, especially in its initial phase, was tremendously inspiring, and looking back now, I think it really was the beginning of something. It coincided with the student protests of the same period and in various ways it marked the emergence into young maturity of a new generation. Whatever their problems, the millennials have turned out at least to be capable of imagining once again what it might mean to have an active political left. As I mentioned at the start, Mark and I both belonged to 'Generation X', whose defining political characteristic, I think, was the total demoralisation that came from growing up in the wake of Thatcherism. It was no accident that during this period we both found ourselves collaborating with groups of much younger people, who made up the bulk of the audience for Mark's writing, or even that Mark found himself married to someone much younger than himself.

We were both thoroughly energised by these developments, and I have a very fond memory of being at one of the 2011 student protests with Mark, Nick Thoburn, Nina, and Alberto, running away from the police as Nick and I (a bit more practiced than the rest) picked a route through the lines trying to avoid the coming kettle, only to run into Steve, wandering the streets in his own nomadic way. Mark and Dan Hancox wrote with verve about the music that we heard on that protest - it seemed really possible that some kind of political radicalisation of grime, dubstep and even 'UK funky' might be imminently possible. But it wasn't to be.

It was also during 2011 that Mark and I began our own formal collaboration - a pamphlet (I say 'pamphlet' - it was nearly 15,000 words...) for *Compass*, which would try to intervene in actual current Labour Party debates, [putting forward a political programme and strategy informed by our shared thinking](#). At the time 'Blue Labour' thinking was ascendant in the party (and it seems to making a comeback now, as Blairites like [Chukka Umunna](#) try to jump from their own sinking ship onto the nearest one at hand). Blue Labour advocates argued that the way forward for Labour was to break with Blairism, but by simply reversing its polarities completely. Where the New Right had once sought to marry social conservatism with neoliberal economics, New Labour and other Third Way projects (the governments of Clinton and Schröder, for example) had intensified neoliberalism while embracing social liberalism (legalising gay marriage, enabling more women to enter the labour market, etc.). Blue Labour wanted to turn this on its head, adopting a socially conservative stance, and a social democratic economic programme, presenting itself as the defender of families and communities from the corrosive effects of capitalism. They pointed to the growing evidence that a large body of working class opinion simply didn't much like contemporary culture and wanted to go back to some point in the past.

We argued that these aims were both impossible and undesirable and that they misunderstood what people wanted. They didn't want to go back to some unspecified golden age; they were in fact nostalgic for the very sense of modernity as such, for the years after the war when there actually seemed to be a future worth looking forward to in which they would have a place. We argued that the questions of community and social authority with which Blue Labour was preoccupied could only be addressed from a radically democratic perspective. And so we also argued that a 21st century socialism would have to recover some of the radical democratic legacy of the New Left. For various reasons (well, I've already explained the reasons), it took years to get the pamphlet together, and the impact was pretty minimal when it finally came out, in late 2014 - by which time it was too late to have much influence on the Miliband leadership and too soon to have any on Corbyn's. Still, I remain immensely proud of it.

I say that the pamphlet didn't have much impact, but I'm not sure really. I like to think it helped paved the way for the very positive reception which *Inventing the Future* received in some circles, and for the embrace of some deliberately future-oriented policies by the current Labour leadership, but that's probably all delusional. What is true is that the other main piece of writing that Mark and I did together, a [conversation on 'capitalist realism and neoliberal hegemony'](#) led to us being invited in to the House of Commons for discussions with senior Labour M.P. Jon Trickett. This was a real pleasure – Trickett is one of the few real intellectuals in the Parliamentary Labour Party, a working class libertarian socialist in the [ILP](#) tradition, and I've learned a lot from his unique grasp of political sociology.

Zer0 and Repeater, the imprint which succeeded it, have gone on to disseminate a huge amount of fantastic work, opening up the space for an emergent new public which is really the critical and intellectual wing of the same broad movement which brought Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party and Sanders so close to the White House. For years I kept promising Mark that I would put together a collection of my own shorter pieces, commentaries for open Democracy and blog posts, first

for the one imprint and then for the other. ( I wish I'd managed it sooner - it was still on my to-do list for this year.) He was always keen to encourage me to keep writing for this wider audience that he'd done so much to establish - I was always trying to encourage him to engage more directly with the mainstream Left. We shared an intuition that the different networks we had access to could make up the kernel of a whole new left public, if we could get the alignments right while keeping the energy creative.

In fact, I think it's that effort to establish a new radical public which will be remembered as Mark's animating objective, and his successes in doing so which will be remembered as his greatest and most important achievement. It's a common thread in his endeavours from the days of the CCRU, through his curatorship of the 'Dissensus' internet forum (an early incubator of the blog scene, which I think was launched in the early 2000s), up to his last activities of recent years. His books, I think were as much as anything adverts for the very idea of critical thought, aimed mainly at an audience that had had no prior access to cultural studies or radical philosophy - invitations to a mass of often isolated and oppressed individuals to come and join a great community of liberated thinking. There were times, in the early days of Zer0, when he seemed somewhat oblivious to the fact that other people had been making similar efforts for a long time, with varying degrees of success -but his attitude when encountering other projects was always one of generous enthusiasm. Mark's commitment to the creation of a new public I think marks him out as belonging to the great tradition of radical intellectuals who do not confine their activities to the academy, and it is a work which those of us who wish to honour his legacy might do well to think about how we can carry on.

### **The Vampire Castle**

In November 2013 Mark produced probably his most notorious and perhaps his single most significant blog post. 'Exiting the Vampire Castle', published on his blog, on the North Star website and on open Democracy, announced Mark's final departure from the twittersphere, which like so many others he had come to find exhausting, enervating and depressing. Specifically it attacked what he saw as the moralism, bad faith and implicit apoliticality of a particular formation within which the culture of 'calling out' in the name of specific forms of identity politics had overwhelmed any sense of possible solidarity amongst political radicals. To be clear here - this was Mark's view. I really didn't participate in those domains to which he was referring, and never had any basis on which to judge his analysis. What I was in a position to judge was the quality of responses to it, few of which left me inclined to doubt his arguments.

'The Vampire Castle' was Mark's name for a particular left-twitter formation in which this kind of culture seemed to have become so dominant that it was simply a negative force, parasitic on the potentially creative energy of anyone who strayed into its domain. Here, Mark was drawing partly on his odd personal typology / pathology / demonology of trolls and 'gray vampires' which he saw as populating the virtual and institutional spheres. It's worth noting that 'the vampire castle' is an imaginary construction which seems to resemble quite closely what Nick Land and some of his recent alt-right collaborators have termed 'the cathedral', which is their

name for the nexus of universities, liberal media and 'political correctness' which they see as occupying an oppressive position in contemporary mediated culture. It's therefore perhaps understandable that many critics of Mark's essay read it as an allied exercise in 'political correctness'-bashing. And indeed, it is true that both the alt-right and Mark, like all radicals, have always had some common enemies, in the shape of that complacent liberalism which ultimately cannot make - and has no interest in making - any substantial critique of contemporary capitalism or the forms of class exploitation which it facilitates. The fact that some people read Mark's essay as an exercise in paleo-Marxist anti-feminism was therefore understandable. But it wasn't forgivable - nobody who actually read it with any attention at all could make that mistake.

Unsurprisingly, this essay proved incredibly divisive. Mark got support from prominent public figures, from Bev Skeggs to Doug Henwood. He also got attacked by very prominent figures who I don't think I want to name here. Alex and I, and no doubt others, found ourselves having to defend ourselves for having anything to do with Mark, as he was declared *persona non grata* by certain self-identified activists and identity-politics legislators.

Several of his friends, I know, including me, had already expressed to Mark the view that although the ideas expressed in this essay were substantially correct, it was naive to expect them not to be misunderstood under the circumstances. For myself, I thought that his critique was one that would be better made, and would eventually be made, by people who were not middle aged straight white men. But taking on board this advice would have required the two qualities which Mark most lacked, for better and for worse: patience and pragmatic cynicism. Enormous patience would have been required to just sit on his hands and wait it out until a new generation of feminist, queer and anti-racist movement radical arose to make the critique themselves. A certain pragmatic cynicism would have been necessary for him to be able to bite his tongue when he himself came under occasional attack as a supposed representative of gender-indifferent Marxism. It would have been foolish for anyone really to expect him to be able to exhibit either of these qualities. His lack of them - his total lack of pretence, of self-distancing reflex or of capacity for self-protecting dissimulation - these were all both conditions and effects of that raw openness to the world which made his thought and his means of conveying it so vital.

I remember seeing Nina a few weeks later at a *Radical Philosophy* party, and talking to her about the piece and the reactions to it. I explained to her that I thought that a lot of the negative reaction was coming from people who simply had no idea about the debates that had taken place around 'identity politics' in the late 80s and early 90s, debates whose legacy informed much of Mark's argument, and that of many of his supporters. She suggested I should write something about this, that very few people around had the right generational perspective to be able to do so. I never got around to it, but I wish I had. So - this bit is for Nina, as well as for Mark.

I think this is important because for all of its problems, this essay of Mark's marked the point at which many of the different strands of his thinking converged on an incredibly powerful critique. Nietzschean anti-moralism, typical of the CCRU and of many others who has studied at Warwick under the direct or indirect influence of Nietzsche scholar Keith Ansell-Pearson (who was himself a mentor to Nick Land, I

think, although clearly not responsible for Land's subsequent trajectory) was a key element of the analysis. So was class-struggle Marxism. So was Zizeko-Lacanianism. But so also was a critique of identity politics which was strongly in the tradition of mainstream Cultural Studies. In all honesty I think it was the fact of these multiple strands being brought together so powerfully, the real compatibilities between them being realised, that enraged his critics as much as anything.

But the first thing that made people angry about it was his defence of Russell Brand. This was at the height of Brandmania (I can't remember if it was before or after Brand, as he inevitably eventually would, praised *Capitalist Realism* on his youtube channel). There was no doubt that Brand was a complex and problematic figure, in the process of transitioning from a rather conventional male sex symbol into some kind of radical public intellectual, and that his very public sexual history made many people understandably uncomfortable. Personally I thought his world-historic significance was being wildly over-stated, not least by Mark and many others who had simply not been very interested in politics the last time a left-wing celebrity had enjoyed a brief period in the spotlight. But there was nonetheless something very interesting about him.

Brand had had a widely-publicised exchange with BBC anchorman Jeremy Paxman in which it seemed to many that his critique of the general crisis of liberal democracy had gone way over Paxman's head while being expressed in a highly accessible demotic vernacular. There's no question that the encounter seemed deeply significant - Brand's working-class mannerisms being used to express a position that was self-evidently more sophisticated than Paxman's patrician Oxbridge brain could wrap itself around. (Mark and I would actually co-write [a brief statement about this exchange](#) ).

Hailed by many as a radical hero, Brand and his supporters were then 'called out' by others because of Brand's problematic sexual history, his public promiscuity being interpreted as a symptom of implicit misogyny. But the key issue for Mark turned on reactions to Brand's response. Brand had not responded by denouncing his critics or defending his actions, but by admitting that he probably needed to work on raising his feminist consciousness and would welcome any assistance in the pursuit of that end. Mark thought that was a good enough response that people shouldn't keep attacking him for it and should celebrate the implicit class politics of the event.

If this had been all there was to it then maybe that would have been the end. But Mark went much further, articulating a critical position in relation to the entire culture of 'calling out' and what he called 'identitarianism'. This was widely interpreted as an attack on any form of political expression not defined by a dogmatically 'Marxist' focus on class as the only significant political relationship.

Now, whether there were actually serious problems with Mark's actual argument in this essay, I remain open-minded about. What I am absolutely clear about is that not one of the multitude of attacks on it that I read actually engaged with the argument that Mark actually made. All of them took on a caricatured position which dismissed the significance of race, gender and sexuality as political issues and which insisted that only class was an important political issue. Let me be clear now. Absolutely no disinterested and informed reading of Mark's essay could have constructed him as

taking that position. You might disagree with the position he took. But in order to do so with any clarity or rigour, you would have to be able to give a reasonable account of what that argument actually was. *Not - a - single - one* -of the responses I read to this article did anything of the kind.

Was this just because all of the critics were stupid? I don't think so at all. But I think most of them were quite ignorant of the intellectual, political and historical background to Mark's arguments, mistakenly imagining that they were arguing with some sort of cartoon 'Trot'. So let me explain a bit about that background.

A key element of Mark's argument was a critique of what he called 'identitarianism'. He was using this term pretty much as a precise synonym for what in the late 80s and early 90s was referred to as 'identity politics'. Now it is crucial to be clear here exactly what 'identity politics' designates according to this usage. It does *not* simply mean 'feminism, anti-racism and LGBTQ politics'. It does not mean that at all. What it refers to is a very specific set of ways of addressing issues of gender, race and sexuality which emerged in the English-speaking world in the mid to late 1980s, especially in the US, and which actively distanced themselves from the movement-based forms of collective struggle which preceded them in the women's liberation, gay liberation and black power movements.

This form of 'identity politics' was widely perceived by critics on the left as tending to be both reductive and essentialising in its implications, insisting that any attempt to find common ground and common interests between people belonging to specific social categories must fail or must prove oppressive to one group or other. The logical conclusion was a politics which ultimately abjured not just class struggle, but any notion that the way to address systematic forms of oppression, on the basis of race, gender or sexuality, was through collective struggle, self-emancipation and consciousness-raising.

What tended to replace that notion was increasingly a privatised form of politics which focussed on identity categories as the basis for particular sorts of claims that could be made on the state, the community or other individuals only by specific individuals, on the basis of their membership of some specific oppressed categories or groups, but not on any kind of collective demands that all of the inhabitants of those categories might be able to make either together, or even with others outside of that category.

On a broader level, from the point of view of this kind of identity politics, feminism, anti-racism and non-heteronormative forms of sexuality tend to be seen as private, personal existential projects, which can be pursued freely provided nobody gets in the way, rather than as collective efforts to transform social power relations. It is in this way that such forms of identity politics ultimately rely on and reproduce the basic philosophical structures of liberalism, which treats the defence of private personal rights as the key form of all politics and which rejects all forms of collectivity as ultimately implicitly oppressive.

Here is a very crucial point to understand. Both Judith Butler's early forays into queer theory and Kimberle Crenshaw's articulation of the theory of intersectionality were specifically intended, at least in part, as *critiques* of this form of essentialist,

individualist identity politics. Heroes of Cultural Studies such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have always argued against it as disabling and politically regressive in its implications. If you didn't understand that that's what they were saying, then you weren't paying attention.

Now, whether you agree that such forms of 'identity politics' ever really existed, or that the people Mark was criticising were guilty of taking any such position, is not really the point. The point is that this was the basis of his argument - his perception that certain people were practicing such a politics. So either you demonstrate that he was wrong that anyone was practicing this kind of politics, or you make an argument as to why there would be nothing wrong with it if they were.

None of his critics did this. All of them, one way or another, read him as explicitly trying to claim that class was a more important issue than gender, race and sexuality. Which he just didn't. In doing so, they really seemed to prove correct the wider arguments of the essay, which was that the identity-politics social-media sphere seemed to have become saturated by a kind of moralism which was more interested in identifying enemies than in actually engaging with what anybody had to say.

Of course, Mark didn't spell much of this out, because that was never really his style. He preferred to use his own unique vocabulary of theoretical jargon and Mark-unique metaphors and neologisms to make his point as affectingly and economically as possible. But I think in some ways, the Vampire Castle episode marked a kind of limit-point for that approach - the issues at stake were too serious, the audience too broad and the theoretical underpinning too dense for that to be a type of intervention that wouldn't backfire. If he'd written a 20,000 word essay with full footnotes and references, then he might have been able actually to win over a lot of the people he was criticising. As it was, the polemic worked for those who already agreed with him, but mystified and enraged many who didn't.

I think that's why this was possibly his last really significant blog-post, and why in the years that followed he tried to concentrate more and more on his books. He kept blogging after that, but in a way there wasn't much point once he'd left twitter - the blog became a way of communicating with the readers of his books more than a place where he worked on them in public. He was moving onto a new phase, and one which, if it had been allowed to reach fruition, might well have been his most productive of all, with his increasing interest in the question of what consciousness-raising as a political and cultural practice could actually mean.

I'll come on to this in a moment. But a further note on the politics of identity politics seems appropriate. If you're reading this and thinking that the language of intersectionality and privilege often seems to get used these days in exactly the same way that I'm describing 'identity politics' then you are right. I will say two things about this that might be useful.

The first is that this is inevitably what will happen to any form of liberation politics, under conditions of liberal/neoliberal hegemony, if it is not accompanied by some rigorous critique of liberalism (whether that critique takes the form of worked out anti-individualist philosophical position, or is informed by a specific attention to issues of

class, or, preferably, both). Liberalism as a hegemonic ideology will find ways to re-articulate the elements even of a powerfully anti-liberal concept like 'intersectionality', turning them back into some new version of itself, unless people are doing rigorous political and conceptual work to prevent this from happening.

The second is that properly getting your head around the ways in which this happens and how to stop it is not easy, and there is simply no substitute for going and doing some hard reading and thinking about it. Go actually read Krenshaw and Butler for a start. Read it properly - not the wikipedia articles, not just some guy's blog.

If you find it hard, which you might, and maybe should, then go find a group or a class where people can help you with it. If you find it hard to concentrate for long enough because you can't get the same buzz from reading long books with long words that you can get from living on your Facebook feed, then you should know that this exactly what our enemies want from you, and you need to work on that by whatever means work for you (coffee, yoga, triathlon, weed, or just hours and hours of patient practise - whatever works for you). Go do some work, with others, to fix it - because if you never read a longer book than *Capitalist Realism*, then you have not understood what *Capitalist Realism* was really about.

That work is part of what it takes to fight a ruling ideology -and that isn't something you can do just by throwing around buzzwords on twitter. That was Mark's point - and it was the reason he himself retired from social media and cut back on blogging in his final years. At the same time, these points also highlight the limitations of the type of work for which he was most famous: as he himself was always the first to acknowledge.

## Hauntology

Mark's second book was a collection of some of his best essays from k-punk, many of them actually pre-dating the material in *Capitalist Realism*. The connecting strand which runs through *Ghosts of My Life* is the concept - or 'punct' - as he punningly called it - of 'hauntology'. This is a term coined by Jacques Derrida in his book *Spectres of Marx*, a mash-up of 'haunt' and 'ontology', which works better as a pun in French, because 'haunt' and 'ont' are pronounced almost identically.

The term appears in Derrida's discussion of the nature of 'spectrality', which is a term sitting alongside others in the Derridean lexicon - trace, *différance*, *arche-writing*, etc - designating a certain condition which is neither that of being nor non-being, presence nor absence, materiality nor ideality, and which somehow precedes the possibility of any such distinctions. *Spectres of Marx* is also the book where Derrida develops his most elaborated take on Walter Benjamin's concept of messianic time (which is a kind of concept of time as non-linear and the future as infinite - that's as well as I can explain it for now), as well as developing some of his earlier thoughts on the inherently 'spectral' nature of filmic and photographic media.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida's attention to these issues gives rise to some very interesting reflections on the nature of temporality, and it was these which Mark drew on most directly in his deployment of the term 'hauntology'. For Mark, this term came to refer to a sensibility and an aesthetic which was preoccupied with the presence of

the past in the present, and which Mark specifically diagnosed in terms of an implicit sense of longing / nostalgia / melancholy for the loss of possible futures.

The most immediate expressions of this sensibility were a handful of purveyors of wistful electronic music: Belbury Poly often being cited as the exemplary instance. Rather in the style of some of his 80s music-press mentors (take another bow, Simon Reynolds), the result was a critical discourse which was frankly more compelling to many of us than was the kind-of-interesting music that it was referring to (not that the *Burial* album wasn't brilliant). It was odd for me to see Mark using this term from *Spectres of Marx*, because back in the 90s it had been a key text for me, at a time when Derrida has been top of the list in the CCRU's *index librorum prohibitorum*.

Most of the short chapters making up *Ghosts of My Life* are critical responses to particular texts, albums or films; the only programmatic, extended piece of theorisation in the book being the introductory essay. But this marked a key phase in the development of his thinking and, it was the point at which I finally got what all this suggestive critical commentary was for. Moving on from both the accelerationist nihilism of the CCRU and from Žižek's relentless pessimism, Mark was increasingly attracted by the flickers of buried hopes which he saw gleaming amidst the rubble of postmodern culture. It was no longer a question of moving forward with directionless velocity or shaking one's fist at an implacable present, but of going - as Simon Reynolds put it to me once in an email - 'back to the future'. And this was the point at which our thinking really started to converge.

The introduction to *Ghosts of My Life* is one of Mark's most impressive pieces of sustained analytical writing, combining cultural criticism, socio-political analysis and speculative philosophy. One of the key sources which it cites is Franco Berardi's essay on 'the slow cancellation of the future', and I think it was this theme which allowed Mark finally to combine his tendencies towards futurism and pessimism with a growing awareness of the rich possibilities that had been shut down by the installation of neoliberal hegemony. That was never a term Mark used himself, although I used it in an essay which he also quotes in that brilliant introductory essay, marking a real point of convergence in our thinking, around the idea that neoliberalism had to be conceived as a counter-revolution against a set of revolutionary possibilities which emerged in the 60s and 70s. More on this shortly.

Mark's last published book, which is also his longest, and came out just a few weeks before his death, is *The Weird and the Eerie*. This is a work made up of critical essays on novels and films, exploring the question of how to understand the phenomenological nature of its two titular categories, and how they are deployed in a range of interesting fictions. As far as I understand it, Mark's interest in the particular question of the weird and the eerie derived in part from his collaboration with photographer and writer Justin Barton (a collaboration which included at least two important audio essays and gallery installations), in part from a seminar at Goldsmiths on Lovecraft and 'the weird' in the early 2000s. The book is a timely reminder that the vast bulk of Mark's output - and what paid his rent for years - was criticism, mostly in the music, art and film press. For Cultural Studies, the value of such criticism is always to provide a particular kind of data which other sorts of

empirical, social scientific research cannot, and this was always the use to which Mark was putting his critical skill, even in his most speculative, textual and philosophical exercises. The point of identifying the failure or success of current cultural forms in generating anything genuinely new is ultimately always to find out something about the current situation which is producing such effects. So Mark's critical readings remain invaluable resources, even when he himself makes no explicit link between them and wider social issues.

## Acid Communism

Mark's work took a far more explicitly political turn again in his ongoing collaboration with radical affinity group [Plan C](#)<sup>5</sup>, and in the work he was doing towards, finally, a really substantial original book, to be published by Verso with the title *Acid Communism: on post-capitalist desire*. In [his recently published appreciation of Mark's career](#), Simon Reynolds points out that this was a surprising title given Mark's historic punk-glam, cyber-goth antipathy to the legacy of the 60s. I was very glad that Simon said this, because I have to confess I'd been somewhat taken aback myself when Mark had told me the book's title some time late in 2015, explaining that a lot of it would be about the legacy of the counterculture. I can only assume I had some influence on this turn in Mark's thinking; which I suppose was already quite clearly registered in the wholly positive attitude to the New Left legacy which we expressed in *Reclaim Modernity*, and which Mark obviously had no problem with.

At a seminar at UEL around 2011, while Mark was still at the height of his Zizek/Marx/Lacan phase, I had challenged him for what I termed his 'hippyphobia' (a term I made up for his benefit), arguing that hippyphobia was itself a symptom of 'capitalist realism', in its rejection of utopianism and in its belief that the 'failure' of the counterculture was inevitable. I argued that the capture of some elements of the counterculture by neoliberalism / new-age etc, and the neutralisation of others, had to be seen as a symptom of political defeat rather than a sign of the inevitable intrinsic degeneracy of those movements. This is an argument I've made in various places before, itself being derived from the ideas of people like Stuart Hall, Maurizio Lazzarato and Hardt & Negri - I don't claim any great originality for it. I think I added, for good measure, that Jerry Garcia had never advertised car insurance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I should point out that while Mark, as their website explains, 'joined Plan C', collaborating with them actively and occasionally participating in their consciousness-raising group, he also never stopped being a committed member of the Labour Party and highly critical of any form of purist activism which refused to engage with the political mainstream. But despite his theoretical commitment to such a position, I think he did find it ultimately easier and more rewarding to work with a small group of highly conscious thinkers and activists than trying to muddle along in the always-compromised world of mass party politics; so the highly innovative and non-dogmatic libertarian-communist context of Plan C provided a welcome context in which he was able to do that, especially when he wasn't at his best.

<sup>6</sup> or margarine: see these links if you don't know what I'm talking about

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Cvrz-Ynor4>;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mSE-ly\\_tFY&spfreload=10](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mSE-ly_tFY&spfreload=10). Okay okay if you still don't understand my point here – it was that although Mark in those days, like most of his blog-

We all laughed, but Mark took the points on board fully, as he always would when confronted with a serious argument. That was one of the most fantastic things about him, as a colleague, an interlocutor and as a friend - he was always open to challenge, revision, new thinking and surprise directions. If a line of reasoning was leading nowhere he would be the first to tell you. If it was leading somewhere he could often see quicker than you could where it might go .

But still - I was taken aback when he told me that this was the whole central theme of the book he was working on. There had never been a moment when he had turned to me, or phoned or emailed me, and said 'hey Jem - you know, you were right about this counterculture stuff - it was really important, and I'm going to do a whole book about it'. I wasn't 100% sure he even remembered that I was interested in it, or that there had been a time when his own comments about hippies, the counterculture or '1968' had been always uniformly hostile.

In the draft introduction to *Acid Communism*, which a mutual friend sent to me after Mark died, and in some of his most recent writing, he's making explicit positive references to psychedelic culture - defined not in pharmacological terms but by a general commitment to materialist experiments with consciousness-expansion - and to disco. These are things I've written about and been involved with, especially through my friendships and collaborations with Tim Lawrence and Ewan Pearson and the various projects that have emanated from them - since the last century. But it would have been impossible to imagine the K-punk of 2008 or earlier having anything good to say about them. So there remains something disconcerting for me about encountering a Mark who was so positive about their utopian implications. To be perfectly honest, for all I know, there was someone else he was talking to who was as in this stuff as I am. I suppose now I will never know - and there is no reason why anyone else should care.

But I suppose I am being precious, disingenuous and coy in saying all that. Of course Mark knew perfectly well how allied with my thinking, how utterly perfect from my point of view, a book called *Acid Communism* would be. As I've said already, and it was always true, within a matter of weeks after that meeting in 2009, we had begun to talk to each other as if everything we did was part of some shared project, some mutual body of thought, assuming that any apparent superficial disagreement was just a way of having multiple angles on the same topic.

And of course that wasn't the only thing moving him in that direction. Teaching courses designed by me and Tim at UEL had an effect in itself, of course - he was always diligent about reading all the course materials, and I remember the impact on both of us of reading a collection of Ellen Willis' writings that Tim had included on a first-year reading list. And there were several other key influences on his thinking

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scene-comrades, still seemed committed to the historic British music-press nostrum that 'punk' was radical and pure while 'hippies' were degenerate, actual lived history had produced a situation in which punk icons Iggy Pop and John Lydon had ended up doing shitty TV commercials, whereas hated hippy degenerates The Grateful Dead had spent their entire career defying the commodification of music by actively encouraging free bootlegging of their concerts.

about these issues. One was John Medhurst's book *That Option No Longer Exists*, which shows how the possibility of a genuinely democratic socialism was eliminated from the British political agenda in the mid-1970s. Eden Medina's book on the Chilean CyberSyn project (using early computer technology to make possible a national system of democratic economic planning), which was taken up by Alex and Nick in the formation of their ideas, again brought home to all of us the extent to which neoliberalism had to be seen as a counter-revolution against the democratic promise of the 60s.

So the development of this historical-analytic position obviously wasn't the work of any one person, and my own thinking about it was always, every step of the way, in a dialogue with Mark more than with anyone else. For example, at some point in between the hardcore continuum seminar in 2009 and maybe some time in 2012, I had started saying to people - especially Mark - that I thought the only way to understand the history of music culture in recent decades was to see the 1970s as the key decade (well really the period 1969-76, or arguably 1964-84), during which an enormous global creative output had been facilitated by the fact that this was the last time when there was a genuine possibility, world-wide, that anti-capitalist forces might triumph, and after which there had been a slow, inevitable decline in creativity which only another revolutionary upsurge would ever be able to correct.

This certainly had an effect on him, but it was itself just a consequence of me trying to make sense of some of his and Tim's and Simon Reynolds' various observations and studies, and to fit them into a wider cultural-political history. Mark was excited, of course, when I said I might try to write a book on this theme. It's so sad, so enervatingly final, to reflect that even if I do, he will never be here to share it with.

The work Mark was doing for *Acid Communism*, which seems to have had its clearest public expression in some of the talks and writings he produced while [engaging with Plan C](#), certainly does seem to have been going somewhere very interesting indeed. In particular he was exploring connections between the idea of 'consciousness-raising' in the political sense - be it class consciousness or the other forms of collective political consciousness promoted by women's liberation, gay liberation and black power - and the consciousness-expansion promoted by the psychedelic and anti-psychiatry movements in the 50s, 60s and 70s (if you want a good introduction to some of that history then check out [this book](#)).

This was a key link that I had never thought to make myself. I've written about about the affective specificities of radical politics. I've written about the forms of 'disaffected' disposition (my phrase) that permeate our culture, that Mark was starting to theorise in terms of the 'depletion of consciousness' (his, better phrase). I'm increasingly interested in the theorisation of collective interests. I've had a line that I've used in seminars and lectures for a few years now about how the Black Panthers, Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation represented the highest development of political consciousness in human history (partly because of the total and yet totally democratic rejection of individualism in all cases). But this specific conceptual move of theorising all those dynamics in terms the 'raising' or 'depleting' of consciousness, and linking this directly to the psychedelic project of 'consciousness-expansion', was a unique stroke of genius on Mark's part, which I

thought held enormous promise, and still does.

It is such a shame that he will never now be able to complete that work. I sincerely hope that what he did manage to complete will find its way into publication. I am sure that others among us will do our best to carry on his line of thinking, as well, and to encourage others to do as Mark would have done.

### **Disappointment and Despair**

Did Mark's increasingly intolerable depressions have anything to do with external circumstances at all? It's impossible to say, and it seems somewhat unlikely. Certainly they seem to have had almost nothing to do with his day-to-day circumstances.

The most awful and tragic aspect of his death is that his personal circumstances were happier and more comfortable than they had ever been before - he had a permanent full-time position at Goldsmiths, George was happy and thriving and Zoe had embarked on a career as a schoolteacher, for which she seemed admirably suited. His reputation was higher than ever and his first big book for Verso was coming along nicely. The network he himself had done more than anything to bring into being - including people like myself, Nick and Alex - was gaining more influence on the mainstream Left than I had ever thought probable. Perhaps this just proves that his problems were neurochemical, physical, or related to wholly unresolved issues whose origins we will never know.

Whether the collapse of his hopes that we might be entering a new era of progressive politics - in the year of Brexit and Trump - contributed to his depression is very hard to say. Certainly this is what at least one mutual friend, who knew Mark for much longer than I did, told me he thought on the day that the awful news broke.

What I can say is that I was never more fearful for Mark than I was around the moment of the Vampire Castles episode, and not because he was depressed at that time. Whether he was in the grip of a clinical manic episode, or whether he was just on a high from the success of his book and the thrill of watching Russell Brand best Paxman in an interview, I really wasn't clear. What I was sure about was that the pronouncements he was making on Facebook about the certain imminence of revolution were at best highly optimistic.

I was very conscious that Mark had been actively identifying with and participating in Left politics for a much shorter time than I had, and was easily excited by developments which a more seasoned observer might recognise as just typical periodic upticks. His expectations were so high at that moment, and I'd had enough experience of his emotional fragility, that I was terrified of what consequences a series of serious disappointments might have. Was the emotional roller-coaster of the Syriza defeat, Corbyn's election as Labour leader, the Brexit vote and Trump's election all just too much for him? I don't know. I do know that I was very afraid, from late 2013 onwards, that such ups and downs might turn out to be so.

I guess all we can say is that it couldn't help. But in the last face-to-face conversation I had with Mark, in late October 2016, when all we really talked about was his

depression, it didn't seem that those were the major factors. There seemed to be something bio-chemical going on with him, something that was resistant to any ordinary intervention, something that was making him increasingly hard to reach in any way. My sense was that his poor physical health was leaving him increasingly unable to muster the sheer physical energy required to fight the depression, while the depression was making it increasingly unlikely that he would ever be able to do anything to remedy his poor physical health.

I've no doubt that I will remember that conversation for the rest of my life. At the end of it he seemed somewhat lifted, and he texted me the next day saying that he'd had his best day for a while and was hopeful that the depression might be drawing to a close. We tried to make a plan to meet up. He wanted us to start working on some kind of follow-up to *Reclaim Modernity*. We never managed it.

The conversation itself had been heartbreaking. He told me that he was feeling that all his achievements to date had been worthless, and that he was simply missing out and being left behind as the rest of us got stuck into a whole new and exciting political cycle. I did my best to reassure him that none of this was true. But what seemed to cheer him up most was when I told him that I often felt exactly the same, and I thought most people did on bad days.

This is always the great mystery for the non-depressive talking to the depressive. They seem to feel that their pain, or their crippling lack of affect, is unimaginably greater than ours - but is it? More than once I've had the same conversation with a depressed friend who seemed genuinely surprised when I posited that most people don't really feel all that happy most of the time.

This is what we can never really know - does the depressive really feel something qualitatively different from the everyday ennui, lethargy and disappointment which most of us experience at least once per hour on every normal day, or are they just deluded as to how happy they and everyone else can really expect to feel most of the time? I don't know. I do know that Mark's symptoms only ever sounded slightly more intense than my worst days of self-loathing and affective torpor; but I also know that getting locked into a cycle of such days that I couldn't break after months would take me to a place I can't imagine, and don't want to.

The question obviously presents itself, however futile it may now seem, as to what could have been done to save him, and the people whose lives have been crashed onto the rocks by his passing. At the very moving memorial service held at Goldsmiths, where I and several others gave eulogies which can all be read [here](#), what struck me most was the incredible consistency between the accounts we offered of Mark and his pathologies. This was no cinematic ending, at which the mystery of personality is revealed, as we all realise how utterly divergent our experiences of the departed character were. In fact it sounded like all of us, despite the very different relationships we had to Mark, were talking about exactly the same person.

I had several times in recent years begged Mark to try to get some exercise, feeling sure that his corporeal state and emotional state were deeply interconnected and that this would have helped him more than anything. But I had also, secretly, self-

doubtfully suspected that this might just be me projecting my own Spinozist theories and personal preoccupations onto Mark's quite different situation. In fact it turned out that more than one of his closest friends had thought exactly the same thing, suspecting that if his physical deterioration could have been arrested then his emotional condition might have been saved. It felt poignantly tragic to observe that if we'd been having that conversation 6 months earlier then maybe we could have worked together to help him.

All I can say about that really is that if you or anyone you know is suffering from clinical depression then for God's sake try to find a way to get some exercise, or persuade them to, because more than one person I know, who was never sporty in their life, has told me that it's ultimately the only thing that helps. [I actually have a whole theory that we live in an exercise-deprived society, in which millions of us (including me) dose ourselves with caffeine, sugar, nicotine, etc etc because our working lives don't permit the time or space for our bodies to generate the endorphins and dopamine through exercise that our brains require to function effectively, and that this ought to be a massive political issue. I will write a book about this one day I hope. I once told Mark I would. ...]

I hesitate to write all this in case anybody feels that it is anyone's fault that Mark wasn't helped. Nothing could be further from the truth than that. If it is anyone's fault, or anything's, then it is the fault of the medical system which completely failed to respond to Zoe's pleas for help during Mark's final weeks, and of those who have starved mental health services of appropriate funds for years.

But in all honesty I doubt that, even if they were much better funded, the types of therapy currently available in the UK could really have helped him all that much. What Mark needed - what I think he always knew he needed, which was one reason he was so attracted to the work of Deleuze & Guattari - would have been something like schizoanalysis: some kind of wholistic but incredibly resource-intensive synthesis of group therapy, occupational therapy and radical politics which would probably have required him not to have to work for long stretches and probably would have required a whole community of friends to have been actively involved in his therapy for months at a time.

We don't currently live in a world in which such things are possible, except for the very rich. I doubt we will see any such world come into being in our lifetimes (although we should remember, as we struggle for it patiently, that we now live in a world which is in many ways one which our ancestors could themselves only have dreamed of - the Chartists, the communards and the jacobins - and that their successors suffered decades of disappoint and frustration just as we, the legatees of the counterculture and the New Lefts, are likely to have go on enduring for some considerable time to come. Such is life.). But one thing that we might try to do is to think about how we could construct networks of mutual care and creativity which might serve some of those functions, if too many of us are not to suffer in the struggles which are to come. I don't know exactly what forms such endeavours could take - maybe they already take specific forms for some of us (parties, galleries, affinity groups, schools). But the necessity to keep thinking about it and keep doing things about it should not be lost on us at this time.

Because much of Marks' work amounted to the expression of a single message: there is no private cure for your problems. That unease you feel, whether it's just a lingering anxiety or a deep full-blown depression, is not something that can be cured by way of individualised therapies or just pursuing a successful career. It can only be addressed by knowing it for what it is and by building relationships around it and despite it which are more potent than the forces which produce it. It can only be treated in struggle.

I suppose I would say this - the critique of individualism has always been my overriding philosophical obsession - but it was an absolutely central feature of Mark's thinking. You are not an individual (and this is the putative title of yet another book that I promised Mark I would one day write). You are never alone. Even when you think you are, you aren't - and social relations will define your 'interior' life just as much as any aspect of your being. Connect, engage, relate, create, not because these are nice things that humans and other nice creatures do, but because they are what life is, what becoming is, and they are what Capital does not want you to do.