

The catastrophe – a preliminary concept

Notes towards an installed disaster

Location:

On the Worcester Boulevard bridge over the Avon. Across Oxford Tce is the Rydges Hotel, which is still standing. On the north side of the bridge is the old City Council Chambers. This brick building still stands only because it is held up by massive steel frames. Diagonally opposite, the Clarendon Tower office building has been demolished. On the south side of the bridge the Robert Falcon Scott statue has been removed, due to earthquake damage. The Empire has been dismantled and will be out of service till further notice.

This is a scene of typical inner city destruction.: ‘Bad time 1st and bad times after’.

Metaphor:

We always had it coming. This is the inevitable conclusion. Through war, or just business as usual, eventually capitalism destroys everything.



There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees on single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.

Walter Benjamin ‘On the concept of history’ 1940

Wreckage upon wreckage is a fact of life in our city. Mind you, too much has been cleared away, history is being sanitised with an amnesiac disinfectant. We need an angel of remembrance: a Metatron, to record our history as we go picking through the wreckage with a stick.

Event:

At the second station of the pilgrimage, the procession will witness an enactment of catastrophe, conveyed mainly in sound. A PA will project the tortured sounds of wood and metal, and the distressed cries of inanimate objects tested beyond their limits by

natural (or market) forces. Facing the wreckage, an angel will be blown backward into the future, projected in huge scale onto the end wall of the Rydges Hotel.



This picture shows the north wall. A similar wall faces south towards the now-demolished Clarendon Tower (visible in the background).

After the performance of the catastrophe, a walk on the bridge throws the audience into an inter-zone of Ballardian dislocation. A barrio of rag-pickers squats on the bridge, a jumble of tents, sheds, tubes, pods, an inverted image of one of the old London bridges, lined with booths, shops and dwellings. Transposed to the antipodes, this roofed bridge should reference the whare and the V-hut, the fale and the waharoa. Under the barrio-bridge psychic emanations of urban poverty appear, projected in the water – or perhaps rubbish floats endlessly by, interspersed with corpse-like bundles. From the huts, strange sounds emanate, echoing the street life of real cities, the sounds of industry, the cries of commerce, sounds of natural processes, an evocation of time.

A walk through the barrio suggests human existence come full circle, from village to city to village again: the past is preserved in the present, pregnant with the future - a Canterbury Tale like Riddley Walker told:

Every 1 knows about Bad Time and what come after.
Bad Time 1st and bad times after. Not many come thru it a live.

There come a man and a woman and a chyld out of a barning town they sheltert in the woodlings and foraging the bes they cud. Starveling wer what they wer doing. Dint have no weapons nor dint know how to make a snare nor nothing. Snow on the groun and a grey sky overing and the black trees rubbing ther branches in the wind. Crows calling 1 to a nother waiting for the 3 of them to drop. The man the woman and the chyld digging thru the snow they wer eating maws and dead leaves which they vomitit them up agen. Freazing col they wer nor dint have nothing to make a fire with to get warm. Starveling they wer and near come to the end of ther strenth.

The chyld said, 'O Im so col Im afeart Im going to dy. If only we had a littl fire to get warm at.'

Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, 1980

The barrio should have many 'littl fires to get warm at', as well as a bar, the more basic the better: planks on a barrel, hot meat on a spit.



Basic requirements:

- PA
- Large projector
- Catastrophe sound performance
- The angel
- Barrio
- Barrio sound environment (recordings and dissemination systems)
- 'Littl fires'
- Water projections
- Food and drink.