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Mark Fisher Memorial

On February 12, 2017, following Mark Fisher's untimely death, at a memorial service at Goldsmiths University of London speakers paid tribute to Mark's life, and confronted the loss of an irreplaceable, galvanizing cultural figure.

Tariq Goddard

We will all remember Mark Fisher.

He took us and the things that interested us seriously because they mattered to him too. His attention to what we watched, read, and listened to endowed us with the intellectual self-confidence to stand up for ourselves and engage with a world that would not have noticed, much less be bothered by, our silence.

Encountering Mark was like joining a band; you shared a sense of purpose before you knew whether you were even going to like each other or not; the thrill of where you might be going rendering the conventional process of getting to know a person obsolete.

Owning up to fear, and overcoming what frightened him, was his dialectical method.

Owning up to fear, and overcoming what frightened him, was his dialectical method. What on one day might be the cause of anxiety or paralysis, would, by the next, be an inconsequence he could humour, laugh at, and then ignore. Because encouraging trust was more important to him than the observation of social niceties, Mark led by example and gave freely of himself and often. People invigorated

him but he lacked the necessary vanity and love of the limelight to become a public figure; trips to Disneyworld with the small family unit he loved and revered, were easily as welcome as the summons to revolutionary war.

Sadly his generosity did not always extend to himself, and Mark had a way of not allowing praise and compliments to really reach him. This was partly due to his distrust of flattery, innate modesty and shyness, but also because his eventual validation entailed a responsibility and a position to live up to.

Never leaving anything in reserve for himself rendered him susceptible to exhaustion, and as the pragmatism of cutting corners and making do was an anathema to him, withdrawal and inertia became a refuge. Mark's fervent integrity and refusal to shy from life's bottomless darkness meant that when robbed of energy, living could become a burden, to a point where he incorrectly identified himself as one.

It is cruelly ironic that a man who had such fair and realistic expectations of others, could not extend them to himself, and though none of us can agree with his decision to end his life, I believe he mistakenly felt that by doing so, he was sparing not himself, but those he loved most, from further suffering.

That his thinking, so full of insight and compassion, could have come to this, was his tragedy and our loss. He will be remembered as intensely as he will be missed, and I am sorry that he is not stood where

I am now, to acknowledge how much he will always mean to us.

We will all remember Mark Fisher.

Jeremy Gilbert

Mark and I were aware of each other and each others work from some time in the mid-1990s, but we only met once in person, I think, before 2009. I've been trying to write down the story of our relationships—intellectual, political and personal—as I recall it, and my many thoughts about that story, and I will put it all online soon. But all that would take far too long to relate here.

What I want to say first and before anything else is thank you to Mark. He thanked me more than once for various things, in private and in public, and I don't think I ever thanked him as much as he deserved. I want to thank him for his friendship, which meant a great deal to me. We would talk about everything, as friends do, we spoke together in public a number of times, our families spent precious time together, we shared ideas and influenced each other very much, and he was the only person with whom I've co-written any substantial work with in recent years. This often felt like the most productive and yet also the most relaxed collaborative relationship that I've ever had. I know that there are several others who can say the same of their relationship with Mark, and it was one of his great gifts, this capacity for creative collaboration.

One of his animating passions was the desire to will into being new publics, new collectivities of thought and praxis

This capacity of Mark's, and his drive to share, to create together, was what enabled him to play such a crucial role bringing people together, to learn, to develop new ideas, to expound them in their own voices. I think that one of his animating passions was the desire to will into being new publics, new collectivities of thought and praxis. From the CCRU days through his time curating the Dissensus forum, to the years when he was the pivotal figure in the music and philosophy blog scenes, to the launch of the Zer0 and Repeater imprints to his final collaborations with Plan C and

many others, Mark was devoted to this cause and indeed everything he did seemed to be contributing to it somehow, even when he was just writing about himself on his personal blog. His own books served as a kind of invitation to a universe of critical thought, issued to a vast public who mostly had been excluded from that world before. His commitment to teaching was inseparable from his commitment to these ideals of public learning, collective research and open discussion of everything.

I want to thank him for all these efforts, the successes of which were spectacular and remain so. And I want to thank him for the other people with whom he brought me into contact in the process. Getting to know Zoe and George was such a special thing. It was through Mark that I met Alex Williams, who became my PhD student and now my co-author and good friend—getting to know him and Nick over these past years has been a great pleasure and privilege, and one I owe entirely to Mark. There are many people here who I only really met or heard of because of him, and of course almost all of us can say the same. It was that scintillating, multi-faceted, multiply-connected productivity that made him so important to all of us personally and such a model of the public intellectual in the internet age. And it was so much fun.

And this is the thing really that I would want to thank him for before all else. The sheer fun of it. The exuberant, excessive thrill of throwing ideas up into the air to see where they would land, of following through the logic of an argument past any point imagined when you started, of eating fish and chips with a mug of tea on a grey September afternoon, of being invited to the house of commons to parlay with senior MPs, of knowing that there was someone who would always have your back in a crisis. Mark was the only person I could get to to stand in for me if I couldn't make some speaking engagement or media appearance, and more than once I filled in for him, speaking or teaching or meeting with someone when he was indisposed. It mattered and was meaningful and sometimes it was very very sad—but most of all, above everything else, it was all enormous fun. So thank you for that, Mark, my friend.

Mark's loss is terrible and the manner of his death was more than tragic, although it is important to

remember that on one level, he was simply killed by an incurable illness no different from any other. Whether it could have been cured, or his death prevented, if mental health services in the UK were not in a state of abject collapse, we will never fully know—but I think we can hazard a guess. And I think it is worth remembering that Mark was always fighting, always fighting, in his way, often in very exposed and vulnerable conditions, for a world and a society in which the appalling degradation of our systems of care and cure were not regarded as inevitable occurrences, as inexorable as the seasons and the tides.

Mark was always fighting, and his loss is a loss not only to us personally and to his family, but to our cause. It marks the site of a battle that we lost, and every lost battle exacts a terrible personal cost. But those of us who are left can only say this—that we will, in our many different ways, keep fighting, and that we will wage this war as long as it takes, down generations, past the lifetime of any of us here if needs be, for the promise of the world and the glimmer of the future which Mark always saw gleaming amidst the rubble of our time. And we can know that his life and his ideas and work and thoughts and love will carry on and be a part of that struggle for many years to come. And our anger at those whose parsimony and greed has contributed this tragedy will always be mixed with our joy at having known him and at knowing him still.

Now, in that spirit, I want to say something about the book that Mark was working on. The book was to have been, I think, his most important by some way, and it had the wonderful, thrilling and typically provocative title of *Acid Communism*. I wanted to say something about what I think Mark understood by ‘acid communism’ as the name for a possible political philosophy, an approach, a programme derived from the best legacies of the counterculture and imagined in a unique way for our century. When thinking about this, I found myself reflecting again upon Mark’s desire always to bring into being new collectivities of creation and resistance. One very important text for both Mark and myself was Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*, in which, among many other things, Derrida imagines what it might mean to try to conjure into existence a new ‘international’, a new community of comrades across borders of

time and space, inspired by the spirit of a certain Marxism and the communist ideal, which could imagine a future beyond limits of the capitalist present. I think that Mark’s work and life can be seen in many ways as a great contribution to this work of conjuring that new international into existence.

The phrase ‘the international’ is best known to many people from the title of the famous international communist anthem, the *Internationale*. Don’t worry, I’m not going to sing it. But I am going to read it, in a way. In fact what I’m going to read is a free translation of the original French text of the song, into prose English, in the philosophical idiom of *Acid Communism*, as I understand it. So here it is—the programme for the Acid Communist International—or perhaps simply the Acid Communist Manifesto. And this is from Mark, with Mark, and for Mark.

We who have nothing can only liberate ourselves, and every moment contains the possibility of a future yet unseen; erupting into the present, re-writing the past. Lack is a shackle, forced upon us by our captors, but every crowd of slaves has the potential to be free.

No hero is coming to save us. No celebrity, no guru, no perfect politician, no magical leader. It is we who make the world and we who must save it. Nobody can liberate themselves alone—we can only do it together and in everybody’s name. The common good must be the only thing we strive for, and we must work in ways that enhance the potency and creativity of all. It’s for all of us to take back what’s been stolen—our freedom, our futures, our time.

The shadow of the jailhouse still hangs over our whole society—with its rules, its cells, its clocks, its audits and its endless sprawling bureaucratic drills. When any chance comes to escape it we must take it, and in the long run let’s burn these prisons to the ground. We must kill the policeman inside of our heads, freeing our minds so our bodies can follow, becoming-cosmic so we can all become free.

The new rulers of the world—in the City, on Wall St, in Silicon Valley—they live off our labour and our creativity, sucking it like vampires,

liquidating everything, boring us all to death. We want back what's ours because we know how to use it, and because we want to breathe and want to live. We will expand our minds until they break the chains laid on them—learning, loving, yearning to be free.

They hypnotise us with their devices and distract us with their games. The most awful wars are only possible because of this. Don't get sucked into their reality. Use the machines that are useful, but know when to switch off, tune in and drop out. Let there be no war but our war on them—only then will we be able to live in peace.

Comrades, come together. Let this be our only battle, however long it takes. We are the workers, the producers, the creators; the earth belongs to us, and us to it.

And finally. I've talked about anger and joy, and God knows that today we are all confronted with the reality of loss, and with the aching desperate loneliness of being human. At such times, platitudes can do more harm than good. But the fear of them can also hold us back from saying things that wait to be said.

So at the risk of cliché, I want to say that all of the anger and all of the joy and all of the pain that I've referred to is ultimately always grounded in something else—because all of it would be meaningless, unintelligible, aimless and unmotivated, were it not for the love which ultimately animates it all.

I have so many memories of Mark—as we all do. But the one which abides more than any other, is of the smile on his face, as he looked at Zoe and George, on a beach in Felixstowe, and of the love which that smile expressed. It's the love that he had for them, for all his family and friends, for his students and his many interlocutors, for all of us and for the whole world as it is, in all its mess, its imperfection and its pain. Even in his sadness, even when we couldn't reach him or he us, that love was never absent.

And it's that love that persists, and that smile.

I seem to see that smile persisting, shining, even after every body and every building and every stable thing we know has faded, dissolved into dust and

blown on the endless wind out to the stars—the spectral smile of the Cheshire Cat, which is the Buddha smile and the smile of every mother, every lover, every child and every friend who has ever known a moment of plain love; the smile which is not bound to place by time, because the love that it expresses is not bound by the duration of any you or me or here or then or they.

Love endures. In the bonding of the cells which make our tissues, in the warmth which gives rise to all of us, and without which we could not live or grow, in the fact that the care we give each other is carried by every body, every word and every thought. This is real and it endures. I don't mean just that we remember love, or can call to mind our gratitude for it. Love is what we are, what time is; it is the atom's swerve.

Pain can last a long time, and some wounds will take longer than a life to heal. But love endures past all recollection of loss, beyond all anticipation of fear or joy to come. The love that we have all had for Mark and his for us, is in the substance of our being, and will move the currents of our becomings, until everything we have known in the world has changed, and moved, and gone.

And I think any of us who has ever known a moment of surrender, peace or rapture or just the pure easiness of interaction with a friend, can pause, recall and know with a certainty that outlasts words, that from the inhale-exhale of every present moment, to the winds that blow through history, as civilizations rise and fall, through the ebbing and flowing of the universes as they expand and contract, to the endless unfurling of the aeons of the cosmos, love endures.

Justin Barton

What I am going to read is from *Cathedral Oceans* by John Foxx, a piece of writing that Mark really liked.

I feel that to a large extent it was written facing the unknown.

At a fundamental level everything to do with waking ourselves up is about facing the unknown, travelling

into the unknown. Only you have to travel into the unknown in the right direction.

There is a charged, poised serenity about this writing which belongs to the right, love-and-freedom direction of the unknown.

The streets open out into a piazza with a huge fountain at the centre. Worn marble figures tangled in the cascade. People talking, eating, in the open-air restaurants. Just strolling.

A beam of light like a slow dream and the voice that becomes music. Dark against the wooden door. The alleyways of Rome and Venice will lead you here. Also certain paths by canals in industrial cities in England, and cobbled courtyards in Paris. You will get to know them. They will dissolve you here. Once you have the frequency, you will always return, always the visitor.

Through the empty mirror, a Victorian marketplace under a cold Lancashire sky. Walking alone in the swirl of your faces.

London vanishes in broken leaves. The weather moves gently though my suit and ripples of twilight hush spread. Raise a hand as if to wave. The cathedral's echo turning into morning light. Birds wings making fast, flickering shadows. Shown on the maps as lights in torn paper. Tiny lights, barely visible against superimposed neon and headlights, among leaves blown into the corners, all blurring out of focus now.

[...]

Through this city you move along wide, ruined avenues, passing through the honeycomb of walls and rooms effortlessly, as in a dream. Down long corridors hung with chandeliers, through tall rooms, over stone bridges spanning the waterways.

[...]

Can you hear me? You swirl slowly in flakes of gold through the red light of sunsets, a glinting parade. The soft roaring of light in my head. I will wait here for you in these gardens, the lake,

the houses. Moving with the dappled shadows, breathing with the breeze. Where no one knows. The glimmer of his reflection moved in a gilt frame near the window. Dusk falling over the square with its trees and fountain below.

[...]

Soft winds across the lake, rain falling like leaves a thousand miles away, years and years away, slow cascade of those empty places. Tides in the lake move in time to the sea. Spirals of dust on the street corner, glittering in the afternoon sun. The cathedral nave leads off into streets, canals, restaurants, corridors, avenues, parks and arcades. A part of it is underwater now, a city beneath the ocean.

He was looking at a picture in a travel guide from 1954. The picture had the quality of an old Technicolor film still. As he examined it, the picture began to change. Its surface slowly fragmented, dissolved, until he could see through it.

Swift transition of time and place.

My hands are open... I am only eyes travelling over the overgrown streets... through the buildings... down stairways, arcades, squares, waterways... foggy, sunlit.

Rainy stars reflected in the speckled mirrors, down the hallways, under the ivy leaves. The taste of rust and rain and there is a cinema I can always step inside and see you moving, turning slowly in old sunlight and I can melt through on the Saturday morning tides of light and I know that time is a great, shambling, many roomed, ramshackle structure. Tall, flaking, endlessly fragmenting.

Myriad avenues. Waterways deeper than I can swim. Warm, revolving and lost. The stairway leads on to bridges, soaring across the river. Smoke on the horizon, blue and gold among the fog of trees. Everything is quiet and the dust on the streets and the stars are slowly flowing through each other.

Tristram Adams

I first came across Mark's writing in 2007, on his K-punk blog (late to the party, I know). His writing hooked me. I would read through the archived posts whilst at work. His blogs were addictive, thrilling, exhilarating—fizzing with feverish energy. His writing was at once vibrant and intense but never dense or turgid. He had, I'd say, a gift for communication—there was, even in obvious one-sitter blogs, a natural ease for writing with pep and elan. A turn of phrase, light yet powerfully elucidating, seemed to come as easy as the many terms he coined—potent in their concision: boring dystopia, semiotic pollution, all done with mirrors, libidinal engineering...acid communism.... Visionary, in a sense.

Mark, initially, was an inspiring writer for me. I expect his writing inspired many, and will no doubt continue to do so. For me, I wanted to write like him, to produce texts that excited like his did. So I started to write atrocious adjectival drivel on the train as I commuted. Nonetheless, I started writing because of K-punk.

Then came a strange and vertiginous period—the world in dolly effect. My position within the open-plan economic incarceration was being made redundant. My partner of six years and I split, we'd just had a small child together. Going back into education wasn't something I thought 'people like me' could do—but I wanted to know more about whatever Mark was writing about.

I went to Warwick, where Mark did his PhD. I sat in the Vampires' Castle and asked about CCRU, about Deleuze, about Mark, Nick Land, Zizek. A statesmanlike analytic philosopher explained to me that, no, I would not find these things there. I was deterred. I didn't know what to do. I emailed Mark through his 'kontakt' on K-punk blog. The email was titled 'random email from a confused youth'. I explained how little I enjoyed socializing and my disenchantment with the arts. Mark replied, he told me not to go to Warwick: 'on no account go there'. Later down the line he suggested I come to Goldsmiths, somewhere I thought only upper-middle class people with firsts went to—not my ilk.

I applied and received no acceptance or rejection.

My parents told me to go to the induction day anyway. When I did I met wonderful Jo. She suggested I go to room such-and-such and introduce myself to my peers and the lecturers. I did, I walked into that room thinking what the hell, nothing to lose—if I don't get in I'll never see them again anyway.

He swept an open palm out towards me and beamed. My anxiety dissolved.

When it was my turn to introduce myself I blurted out my interests, neglecting to state my name. Mark, and this was the first time I saw him, smiled his infectious, cheeky, twinkly smile and added '...and this is Tristram, everyone'. He swept an open palm out towards me and beamed. My anxiety dissolved. The rest of the day was serotonin warm.

Months later I volunteered to present a Derrida text in the MA module Mark taught. Rather than a fifteen-minute summary it was a forty-five-minute meander through tenuous and overwrought metaphors. Waves of embarrassment washed over me. I felt nervous to the point of nausea, my face flushed from green to crimson between each paragraph. A traffic light of insecurity. But Mark was kind. After what felt like a crucifixion his first word was 'Superstar'. I wanted to talk more after that. I presented again that term and spoke a lot in other seminars—but it was all because of his encouragement. He helped me get the words out. I attended that module for three consecutive years; I wanted to be with Mark.

As an MA student, growing in confidence, Mark had already changed my life. A hero, you could say—because he saved me from something. I'm indebted to him for how well I've lived since coming here. Not only had Mark made me want to write and made me a better writer, he'd encouraged me to come to Goldsmiths, then given me the confidence to speak.

After two years on the MA I joined the PhD course with Mark as my supervisor. I lost my inhibitions of speaking to him as an idol, I felt less star-struck... and he became more of a friend, a big brother—someone I looked up to and wanted to impress, but someone kind who was always looking out for me, helping. I hung on to his coat-tails.

Telepathy interested Mark—but did he know his own powers of thought transference—of teaching, inspiring and energizing others?

He said, more than once, that he had an affinity with me—he'd guessed, unnervingly correctly, about my own experience with depression. He was deeply sensitive to all he met. Telepathy interested Mark—but did he know his own powers of thought transference—of teaching, inspiring and energizing others?

PhD students are supposed to give something back to their supervisors. It isn't a one-way street. I think I did give a little back at some stage. Hearing Mark say things I'd said back to other students was flattering and validating. It made me proud, naturally, but it also deeply gladdened me—that he could get something, however small or trivial, back from me. Once, when discussing a book, Mark said, almost smirking and winking in confidence, 'well, if you read it then I won't have to'. Supervision—observing from above, almost like telepathy.

I often wanted to buy him gifts, to say thanks for various things and everything. I never did. It always seemed a little inappropriate, and also... pithy. Nonetheless, I'd thought a lot about what I could get or do for him once I'd finished the PhD. This past year I increasingly bought him bottles of water because I didn't want him to get dehydrated. 'Be sure to drink plenty of water,' we joked.

Last year, I was worried about him, I told him how much he'd changed my life. That I could never repay him enough and that if I could help him with anything, in anyway, it'd be the least I could do. I'm lucky I said that, embarrassing as it was, but I should've said more. I should've said how brilliant he was—did he know how powerful his writing was? Or how enthralling and contagious his teaching was? Did he know his power to lift a thought off a page, reanimate it and disseminate its energy? Did he realize the confidence boost—the spring in the step—which just a brief encounter with his enthusiasm and kindness could yield? Did he feel like a superhero? Someone with special powers—someone whose words people, fans, students hung on;

whose actions or mannerisms were discussed at length; whose books and articles were read and re-read and discussed and re-visited by so many—all at once in awe of his intellect and encouraged by his kindness and generosity.

I started writing because of his writing. I returned to education because of his advice and friendly welcome. I found my voice amplified through his support and encouragement. But I'm nothing special, not the exception but the norm. Someone once told me that an MA is life changing. Yet I'd wager that it isn't so much the institution, the course content or the degree certificate but the people who change lives. Mark changed many, mine included. We've been so lucky to know someone so extraordinary and kind.

I adored Mark.

I miss him.

Robin Mackay

In speaking in memory of Mark I can only speak for myself. But I feel a responsibility to speak openly, just in case my feelings, my questions, and my pain, are not merely my own. Because that's the risk Mark chose to take: wagering on the potential of shared experience and shared understanding, sometimes at the cost of a self-exposure that was perilous for him, where others would have retreated into safety; he remained true to his own thought despite his personal fragility; indeed, in exposing and examining that fragility, he transformed it into a discursive force to be reckoned with.

A life, each unique life, is a problem. Like an equation from a schoolboy's examination nightmare, it contains an overwhelming constellation of variables, inherited from the cascade of environments within which a life crystallizes—terrestrial, political, national, cultural, social, familial, biological, neurochemical. Without them, a life would not even coalesce: they provide the complex field of tensions that produces a life together with its world.

Sometimes abiding within that field of conflicting forces which, inherited from elsewhere, have shaped the bounds of our life and our world, can

be unbearable. It can feel like the problem they've bequeathed you is as hellishly inescapable as a prison cell: you continually try to find a solution, but there's always a remainder. Of course, if there weren't, there would be nothing left to work with; but sometimes knowing that isn't enough to attenuate the distress.

An effective therapeutic discourse requires a political genealogy of the origins of unhappiness

And then to believe that the problem is *in you* and entirely within your power to solve; to feel that your distress is your personal responsibility, and to then judge it against others' apparent happiness and adequacy—in other words, to buy into the model of the autonomous, self-determining, competitive individual, the fiction of capitalist subjectivity—renders this predicament all the more agonising. From his blog to much of his recent work, this is precisely where Mark focussed his efforts. We have to look outside the supposed 'individual', to the social, class, macro- and micro-political environments in which it takes shape, in order to understand the personal, and personal distress, in its true dimensions; an effective therapeutic discourse requires a political genealogy of the origins of unhappiness. And Mark's work in this direction offered not just comfort and hope, but understanding and a fierce will to throw off guilt, responsibility, and shame, and instead to think and to join and to fight.

Although it's secondary to the immediate sense of loss, and to our profound sympathy for Mark's family, who have lost a son, a husband, a brother, a dad, I think that many of us, Mark's friends, colleagues, and students, and especially those of us who have shared Mark's struggle with depression, find ourselves disturbed by the apparent disparity between this analysis and the fact that his own suffering, in the end, isolated and overwhelmed him.

Of course there's no essential paradox in the fact that someone can fight valiantly, bring aid to others, and still, ultimately, be defeated. But I think it's crucial that we don't repress our disquiet, our bewilderment, and that we address it as carefully as possible, together. In his work, Mark achieved a

great deal, but demanded even more of himself. I have to ask, even though I'm afraid to: what did he succeed in doing, was it worth the struggle, what are we to think about his work now, where did it go wrong, what does it mean for us to carry on...all painful questions.

Sometimes it seemed like Mark had found within his own life experience, examined with honesty, humility, and humour, and with forensic precision, some kernels of common truth that could be shared. And sometimes it seemed he was liable to project his own mood, whether vibrantly optimistic or bleak and despairing, onto a political, planetary, or even cosmic scale. But perhaps that division isn't quite so clear: what happened in Mark's work, I think, ever since he started writing his blog, was a continual process of calibration that becomes necessary when one attempts to breach the barrier between one's writing and one's life. And he succeeded in doing that. He refused to retreat into any ivory tower. Having suffered the blows of authority, he had no interest in becoming a detached, professional author. And his refusal of the all-too-easy dignity of a distance between his life and his thinking made him a teacher who freely gave the gift of his own sensitivity and vulnerability to others who, like him, didn't necessarily come equipped with an automatic entitlement to the world of ideas, a resilience to the institutional demands attached to it, or a mastery of the 'correct' references.

Mark transformed the traditional working-class virtue of 'knowing your place' into an adamant, defiant methodology

Mark's own reference points were as unique as he was. By some he was accused of overintellectualising what was only entertainment; by others of dumbing down the theorists whose work he remixed effortlessly, entertainingly, inventively, with references drawn from pop culture. But for Mark this wasn't some kind of intellectual game: he used to say, *I can't help it: I can only think through popular culture*. He always said he learned about theoretical writing not from school but from reading record reviews in the NME. And that's how he worked, faithful to the peculiar collection of cultural touchstones—TV shows, books, comics, films, music—that he'd grown up

with, continued to seek out and discover, and which he inhabited as his true homeland, into which theory was shipped only to be reprocessed and exported in new, synthetic forms. Pulp philosophy. In this sense, it could be said that Mark transformed the traditional working-class virtue of ‘knowing your place’ into an adamant, defiant methodology. He knew where he came from and he demonstrated incontrovertibly that that place mattered. And it worked both ways: I remember listening to a Wu-Tang Clan album with him and saying, this is such an amazing creation, people like us can never do something like this, and he said, *Well, we’re not from the street, we’re from the living room. We’ll do something else.* And he did.

In short, I can’t think of another writer who sought with such determination the integrity of life and thought, and for whom it was so absolutely necessary to do so. He dug inside himself for the abstract keys to decode the world, and he drew on every theoretical resource that world had to offer in order to decipher his own predicament.

But a life is not just a symptom, a crystallization of environmental conditions, a key to unlock something else. It’s also a singular presence to be cherished, and which we become all too aware of when it’s suddenly gone. A life is a reservoir of potential for unknown futures: future conversations, future works, future memories—and the loss of those futures is what we’re grieving.

I remember once Mark recounting how a therapist had told him that each of us is to be valued for what we *are*, quite apart from what we *do*—to which Mark retorted, outraged, that you only *are* what you *do*, what you *produce*. Mark’s vehement polemics were always entertaining, and I enjoyed this one; I also recognised the manically productivist credo instilled during the intense years we spent together during the 90s as part of the CCRU.

But valuing the part of us that is of no measurable utility, and believing that others can value it, is maybe a pragmatic condition for any kind of sustainable production. The primary support of a life is an organic body that needs care and occasional respite from demanding the impossible. As Bifo wrote in his tribute to Mark, ‘happiness is not something of the intellectual mind, but of the corporeal mind’;

and inversely, ‘the deep nucleus of depression consists in [a] physical contraction’—one, I would add, whose corrosive effects may eventually be elucidated by intellectual analysis, but will not be healed by it, in the real, urgent time of the body that they demotivate and immobilize.

At the heart of Mark’s work I sometimes glimpsed what I think is a crucial question: How to challenge the primacy of the human—how to despise all of the constraints and exclusions, the shutting down of possibilities, the dogmatic control, entailed by the sanctity of what’s held to be ‘properly human’ in this or any other historical period—how to be an anti-humanist then, and to imagine instead new forms of life—while also maintaining, *right now*, solidarity with and compassion for actually-existing humans, already compromised, weakened, and isolated by those constraints. To either espouse an imperious, stern theoretical antihumanism, or to make heartfelt calls for practical compassion, was not enough. To integrate the two was more difficult than it seemed. But Mark took on the task, a task that required great resolution and rendered him vulnerable to attacks from safer, more ‘pure’ theoretical positions; it was a task that required inventiveness, sensitivity, and a constant circumspect movement between the conceptual and the affective, the political and the personal. What he had begun to construct, I think, was not just a body of theory, but a collective program of self-help in which the self is precisely what’s in question: a humanitarian antihumanism.

Maintaining compassion for actually-existing humans also means finding compassion and care for oneself. Balancing the infinite demands of thought with those of its finite vessel isn’t easy: neither is safe so long as the other is in view. Again, Mark took the difficult path, because, being Mark, he couldn’t do otherwise; and he did so with absolute truth to himself. I respected that unstinting integrity, even when I didn’t agree with him, or when, I’m sorry to say, I didn’t share his hope. But I understood all too well how much energy it took, what impossibly high standards he held himself up to, and how the weight of what he experienced as the crushing inadequacy of his own performance of self could still sap his energy and shake his conviction, despite the increasingly positive reception of his work.

All I want to say here, at the risk of inappropriateness and of exposing my own bewilderment, is that for me these are all questions that require that I hold fast to the acuteness of this pain, and find in it an impetus to continue, in a way that will have to be informed both by his life and his work, and by his death and the solution he chose—if it can really be called a choice, I don't think it can.

Mark wrote about the spectre, 'understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing'. Even though I didn't see him enough, a realisation that comes too late: I assumed he'd always be here, that one day there would be time, that we would maybe work together again—haunted by a future that will now never arrive—the spectre of Mark Fisher was always with me. So many times his incredible perceptiveness and insight have sent me back to films or songs or books that I thought I knew, and intensified them, made me see more in them than I could have ever made out with my own eyes or ears. I've written whole essays based on short conversations I'd had with Mark ten years previously, remembering not just his exact words but the gestures, the tone, the mordant humour that accompanied them. He became a part of me, as he became a part of so many.

And over the past few weeks as I went back to the projects we'd been involved in together, and picked up their loose threads, now indelibly marked by his absence, at the same time I felt that spectre at my side again, I felt his passion, his humour, his enthusiasm for experimenting and constructing; I was drawn once again into the complex of references, concepts, emotions, visions, that whirled around him like a conceptual tornado. Sometimes over the last few weeks it's felt like a force of nature has been abruptly cancelled. But sometimes I felt the wind blowing again.

What is the Fisher-Function? How did it make itself real, and how can we continue to realise it?

So I've been trying to think of what remains after the physical body's gone, when the singularity of a life can no longer rely on that frail support and needs other carriers. I try to think about it in a way I think

he'd appreciate: in terms of an abstract, impersonal force acting in the present tense. The spectre isn't a matter of pretending he's still here in person—as if the notion of a 'person' wasn't precisely what was at issue—or of commemoration or superstition, but—to use a word of his own invention—a question of hyperstition: *What is the Fisher-Function?* How did it make itself real, and how can we continue to realise it? Many of us naturally feel a need to ensure this is a moment when the force he brought into our world is redoubled rather than depleted. And to do so, to continue his work and our own, we have to try to understand his life, and the consequences of his death, at once horrifying and awakening, as a part of the Fisher-Function. And I don't simply mean the intellectual contributions that we can appreciate, extend, take forward into the future; I also mean what we need to learn in terms of looking after ourselves and each other, *right now*.

The last conversation I had with Mark was about depression. In fact, I was asking for his advice. And the week before his death, I'd been terribly depressed and had thought every day of calling him. But I didn't. My impression was that he'd largely overcome his difficulties, that he was enjoying a welcome and well-deserved success, and that probably he wouldn't want to hear me moaning about my bleak outlook. To think that we were stuck in the same impenetrable fog, with our backs to each other, is a terrible confirmation of the isolating nature of the forces he tried to diagram for us. Those that propel the descent of a life into the cramped cell of individual, suffering subjecthood.

But whether or not he was able to believe it himself, Mark really did triumph: for himself, for the readers he inspired, for others who, like him, weren't automatically endowed by their social background with the capital and confidence to feel like ideas belonged to them by right. For others whose joyful passions and cultural experience he intensified and amplified by putting them into words. In the unreasonable demands he dared to make. This life brought us joy, love, laughter, hope, understanding. We're still gauging, in the wake of his loss, the full extent of his success.

In an email Mark wrote to me last year he talked about the need to feel like one can find time to do

one's own work, about finding the space to pursue what really matters. While acknowledging that life will always place obstructions in the way, he seemed to be saying to me that he finally felt, after a long struggle, that he was about to arrive, that the spectre of a future that truly belonged to him might finally come to be realised. Characteristically he included me in this too: he didn't say 'I', he said 'we'. Then he says: 'but I think the next few years are crucial.'

I think they are, and I think we need to keep that spectre by our side.
