

Excerpts from *Edmonton: Our Sodom, Our Utopia*

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Les interventionnistes d'Edmonton ont commencé à occuper le mail d'Edmonton Ouest au moment du début des "heures de magasinage de Noël" de 1995. Réclamant la libération immédiate de nos désirs de façon autonome et spontanée, les insurgés ont manifesté leur victoire sur les produits de consommation en faisant du pillage et en se livrant à de violentes bagarres dans le mail. La population d'Edmonton a finalement pris la relève dans toutes les usines, les bureaux et les lieux de consommation et déclaré que la loi provinciale était désuète. Edmonton : Our Sodom, Our Utopia contient des archives de documents ayant circulé lors de la prise de pouvoir d'Edmonton (communiqués, télégrammes, ordres du jour, lettres ouvertes, etc.). Edmonton est ainsi devenue la ville révolutionnaire de l'Extrême Nord dans laquelle chaque jour est un congé public.

THE DOCUMENTS OF DECEMBER

1. Communiqués

3 December 1995

Edmonton

Edmontonians,

On the first of this month, synchronous with the inception of "Christmas Shopping Hours", the retail workers of the two Hudson's Bay Company outlets in West Edmonton Mall began the occupation which quickly spread to the other department stores, to the small shops, the fast food outlets, the restaurants, the bars, the amusement park, the skating rink, the waterpark, the submarine rides, the cinema theatres, the hotel, the janitorial services, information services and to all other commodity fixtures of the world's largest shopping centre.

THE IN(TER)VENTIONISTS OF EDMONTON

call for the immediate occupation of all houses of consumption, factories, offices and places of education and for the formation of in(ter)ventionist councils.

Edmontonians, reproduce and spread this appeal as quickly as possible

6 December 1995

Edmonton

Edmontonians,

A few days ago we the Edmontonians began the riots which have made any commerce at West Edmonton Mall now a strict impossibility. We have turned the perfected symbol of the controlled environment, of life under glass, into the living reality of spontaneity. Today we continue to destroy the merchandise, smash the mirrors, to loot and to riot. We will not halt until we have flattened this mammoth tourist attraction which has so long humiliated us with its spectacularity and triviality.

Edmontonians, people who destroy commodities show their human superiority over commodities. They stop submitting to the arbitrary forms that distortedly reflect their real needs. Looting is a natural response to the unnatural and inhuman society of commodity abundance. Let us continue towards the absolute negation of controlled behavior as implied by spectacle-commodity society.

Reproduce and spread this appeal by all means you make available.

2. Telegrams

10 DECEMBER 1995/OWNERS OF WEST EDMONTON MALL/WE THE EDMONTONIANS NOW RELEASE YOU FROM YOUR POSITIONS AS ABSOLUTE DICTATORS OF OUR DESIRES AND ENVIRONMENTS STOP LEAVE THE CITY AT ONCE OR ELSE FACE THE CERTAIN WRATH OF THE THOUSANDS OF AUTONOMOUS EDMONTONIANS WHO HAVE TURNED THE ANTI-SPONTANEOUS PSEUDO-WORLD OF YOUR MALL INTO THE PLAYGROUND OF OUR REAL IDEAS AND AIMS STOP WE HAVE ACTIVELY DEMONSTRATED THAT WE THE EDMONTONIANS DIRECTLY OPPOSE SPECTACLE-COMMODITY SOCIETY THROUGH THE DESTRUCTION OF ITS ABSOLUTE PARADIGM AND LARGER THAN LIFE SYMBOL STOP UNDER THE HEAT LAMP WARMTH OF YOUR FAKE BEACH WE HAVE FOUND THE BRICKS TO THROW THROUGH YOUR GLASS ROOFS STOP LONG LIVE THE INTERVENTION STOP LONG LIVE THE ULTIMATE GESTURE OF OUR RESISTANCE AGAINST THE COMMODITY STOP DOWN WITH FETOR OF PASSIVITY STOP LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE'S CONSCIOUS CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTS STOP LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY FULFILLMENT OF

OUR REAL DESIRES STOP THE INTERVENTIONISTS OF
EDMONTON

15 DECEMBER 1995/MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILLORS OF
EDMONTON/WE THE EDMONTONIANS NOW RELEASE YOU FROM
YOUR POSITIONS AS THE REPRESENTATIONS OF INVISIBLE
OPINION CONFIGURATIONS STOP LEAVE THE CITY AT ONCE
OR ELSE BEAR THE TANGIBLE WRATH OF THE THOUSANDS
OF AUTONOMOUS EDMONTONIANS WHO NO LONGER TOLERATE
YOUR DICTATORSHIP OF OUR URBAN ENVIRONMENT STOP WE
THE EDMONTONIANS INFORM YOU THAT WE WILL NOW
DIRECTLY MAKE ALL DECISIONS REGARDING OUR SUBSIS-
TENCE AND SETTINGS THROUGH THE ACTUAL MANOEUVRE OF
PHYSICAL MATTER STOP DOWN WITH THE COMMODITY AND
ITS PARACHUTE OF IDEOLOGY STOP DOWN WITH THE DIC-
TATORSHIP OF CONCRETE AND GLASS BUBBLES STOP DOWN
WITH YOUR MANIA FOR CONSUMER BUNKERS AND SPORTS
FRANCHISES STOP LONG LIVE THE INTERVENTION STOP
THE INTERVENTIONISTS OF EDMONTON

18 DECEMBER 1995/MEMBERS OF THE ALBERTA LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY/WE THE EDMONTONIANS NOW RELEASE YOU FROM
YOUR POSITIONS AS NULLITIES STOP LEAVE THE CITY AT
ONCE OR ELSE BEAR THE VIOLENCE OF THE MYRIADS OF
AUTONOMOUS EDMONTONIANS WHO HAVE MADE YOUR OBSOLES-
CENCE A REALITY STOP EDMONTON HAS NEVER BEEN REP-
RESENTED BY THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AND THEREFORE
SEES FIT TO EXPEL IT FOREVER STOP LONG LIVE THE
GENERAL STRIKE STOP LONG LIVE THE WILL TO CREATE
FREELY THE SITUATIONS AND AMBIANCES OF OUR DESIR-
ING STOP DOWN WITH THE STATE STOP THE INTERVEN-
TIONISTS OF EDMONTON

3. The Revolutionary Use of the Zamboni

Traditionally, the zamboni was used to clear the ice between periods of the hockey game. We propose that it may be employed in the following fashions:

- 1) As a blockade
- 2) As a salad bar
- 3) To alter otherwise ordinary ambiances with its sheer presence
- 4) When filled with substances such as whipped cream, slime moulds, semen, or oil, to coat floors
- 5) To scare bureaucrats
- 6) For fun

4. Agenda Items for Councils

1. What foods should be grown in Edmonton for our subsistence?
2. What is the acceptable maximum number of hours towards providing for our basic needs? What can we do without if it means more free time?
3. Considering the resources we have available (all merchandise in former shops and in our former homes, what we can make ourselves, what we don't mind producing independently), what creations can fulfill our most fantastic desires?
4. Is the abolition of 95% of Edmonton roads favourable if it means a) a condensed Edmonton which can be easily accessed by foot, b) more space to play, c) easier upkeep (frees time and resources), d) cleaner air, e) a new concept of urban living not based on utility, f) many other advantages? If it is not, what percentage of Edmonton roads should be kept open? (At present one third of Edmonton is paved over to accommodate the automobile.)
5. What does the organization of space mean?
6. If we believe that a city should reflect all forms of human experience, what aspects have been neglected? What aspects of our lives do we want to see expressed in the urban environment?
7. What do we desire?

THE CANADA POST STRIKE THAT LASTED FOREVER

1. Open Letter From Canada Post Workers of Edmonton

Edmontonians,

The mailbox is a mouth which you approach daily to see if it gives tongue to your hope. Your Canada Post worker knows this better than anyone. Your Canada Post worker knows your expectant faces,

unabashedly desperate, so we also know your disappointed faces after we have stuffed your mailboxes with the slick paradises of advertising flyers, resembling a multitude of Platonic souls which have left their deceptive bodies to decay in far-off supermarkets and shopping malls. Mailboxes don't have tongues any longer, yet are stuffed full with false teeth, wrenching orthodontics, bite-palates to curb grinding, artificial lisp-simulators and other new toxins. Since your Canada Post Workers are every bit opposed to this situation as you are, we refuse to let it continue.

So for the last time, we refuse to pick up or deliver mail! With every envelope we are all endlessly mediated through a wrangling of indifferent institutions. The hyperrationality of Canada Post as a system has doomed forever the possibility of rational communication in individual letters. Until we have perfected the utopia of communication to send the pluperfect love letter without destroying the message through the medium, we will all communicate in the chance literature we read, in a thousand metonymic situations and through the telepathy of found objects.

Yours sincerely,

CANADA POST WORKERS OF EDMONTON

P.S. However, Canada Post will continue to function as a super-efficient, unbelievably fast way of sending and receiving marijuana.

2. Inscribed On the East Gates

YOU NOW ENTER EDMONTON, REVOLUTIONARY CITY OF THE FAR NORTH, CHIMERICAL CITY OF LABYRINTHS, CITY OF KALEIDOSCOPIC CHANGES. NO MAP WILL OFFER DIRECTIONS; PAPER REPRESENTATIONS ARE USELESS FOR YOUR PURPOSES IN THESE CONVOLUTIONS. IN EDMONTON, MAPS DO NOT REPRESENT, BUT EQUATE. EDMONTON ETCHES ELATION ON YOUR HEART AND SIGNS YOUR MEMORY IN TRIPPLICATE.

CITY OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS, CITY OF THE 10:45 PM SUN, EDMONTON DISTINGUISHED ITSELF THROUGH A HISTORY OF OPPRESSION. THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY ESTABLISHED ITS POST HERE IN 1795 AND FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS CLAIMED EDMONTON FOR COLONIAL CAPITALISM. IN DECEMBER 1995 THE EDMONTONIANS CHOSE RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY AND EXILED

EXPLOITERS FROM THE LAND. FROM THAT DAY ONWARD, EDMONTON CREATES ITSELF WITHOUT CEASING, ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT DOUBLE WISH FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND EQUALITY.

LET THE TRAVELLER BEWARE, ALL THOSE WHO ENTER HERE FOLLOW THE PATH TO UNFAMILIAR ECSTASIES, WHOSE JOY WILL REMAIN UNCAPTURED.

3. Notice to the Newcomer, Posted on Disused Canada Post Mailboxes

How To Send and Receive Mail In Edmonton

First, replace all traditional concepts of "postal service". Any messages going out of Edmonton may be posted at the mailbox outside the east gates. No Canada Post service operates within the Edmonton boundary.

Edmonton is both civilized and nomadic. There are no fixed addresses in our fluctuating universe.

However, take note of Edmonton's myriad of mailboxes. You may find them clipped on lantern-holders, strung up on hairy yurts, hung on doors, stuck to horses, pinned upon garlanded archways, jammed under stone stepways, nailed to the spot on lavatory walls where you would expect, in the lavatories of your cities, sanitary napkin disposals. Any Edmontonian may put in or take out mail at any of these mailboxes. No mailbox is private. Edmontonians may also change the locations of mailboxes, remove some or construct more.

You may think that this rules out the possibility of addressing mail to someone in particular. But our arrangement does not in fact preclude the agreement between friends to leave mail at certain times at certain mailboxes. Of course, communication can always be intercepted, but such intervention does not mark a failure, but is an integral part of the game.

Many Edmontonians write open letters. Some bear no salutation, while others are addressed in the common form: "Whoever You Are". Some letters are written to invented personalities, to literary characters, to dead acquaintances or even to animals. Some letters circumscribe their possible recipients a little. For example: "To a dog-angel, llama-girl, cloud-manna," as has been seen on one rare occasion. "To anyone who has ever broken glass with a cry". "To the deep eye of my contentment". "To all tightrope-walkers".

One receives not necessarily what one is looking for, but what one needs. There is one of the senses of the gnostic causalities. In this open situation Edmontonians hope to invite what are called by some "coincidences" and by others "hidden causes". Edmontonians seek the other passage to the significant, the passage through association and memory and the novel, not mere replication. Between an action done for no reason and an action done to fulfill a parallel or metonymic need hang more chances for the interpreter, more opportunities for the secret sign, more impetus for the cathartic game of all games. Simply put, the open mailbox increases the possibilities of what one finds therein. Edmontonians wish to amplify life in every way.

4. Found in a Mailbox On The High Level Bridge

OUT OF THE BLOODBATH, INTO UTOPIA

Every day in the city death strikes and we go on living as though we were immortal. Millions of heartbeats fall without our encouragement, millions of breaths yield oxygen without our grace and the promise of the next moment is forever fulfilled. In our plans we are limitless; in our hope, endlessly recursive. Heaven is open to us for abseiling and high-diving, but the rest of our activities we do in our own city. Like the suitcase and the portable phonograph which have always shown their awareness of the vertical axis, we too have handles on our bodies that point us out of the stationary present into endless space. It is a fact that at any moment we may die, but one which we are incapable of constantly keeping before us. Thus, we do not construe ourselves merely as secret gods. We are more than gods, for once becoming immortal we are granted what no god is: to die.

We build the city according to hope, according to the highest desires, according to curiosity. We dream the real city. We construct what is actually wished-for, that which for too long has been dismissed as impossibly utopian. We *are* utopian even though, according to common usage, "utopian" is the last thing people living in an actual utopia would be. The adjective is reserved for those whose hope is unattainable. Or, unattained. The imagined utopias we read about are closed, complete in their attainment and therefore not utopian. But we are in the strange position of living in a utopian utopia. Our utopia is as much about the upset of unattained hope and the generation of new hope as it is about attain-

ment and the completion of hope.

Utopias are impossible, according to argument. For inherent in the very idea of utopia is the elimination of death. Yet what is more impossible than a possible utopia where death has been eliminated is an actual utopia where death has not been eliminated. By definition this should not be, yet we live it, we Edmontonians. Our time is pluperfect and still we die.

5. Found In A Mailbox In the Philosophy Fun Fair/ Vorticist Pool Hall

FIRST WE DECLARED EVERY DAY A PUBLIC HOLIDAY

Tell us, what is killing you? Sunshine in picnic baskets and road maps folded over and over backwards may have delighted you for a day. Perhaps you cocked your camera at just the right moment and the spines of swordfishes showed up radiating from your beloved's eyes. Perhaps there were days hoarded and then nibbled despite your starvation. Perhaps you knew in your heart this would be the last excursion there—and even if it wasn't, every butterfly-winged moment of enjoyment still carried with it the caterpillar legs of labour.

The holiday is always filled with that dolourous dread of its end. Even in the most carefree hours of relaxation, one always knows most acutely the temporary nature of the situation. One knows relaxation at all only in terms of suffocating work. So is not the best part of the holiday those weeks before, when the apportioned segment of holiday time remains totally intact, unblemished by accidents and hassles? Isn't the realization, "Yes, this is the best time of my life" a fundamentally devastating one, one that ultimately pushes the truly best time backwards, to anticipation?

In your far-away cities you manifest this anticipation physically with the purchase of tourist guides. The purpose of the tourist guide book is to set out a morality of consumerism: to portray a city or country as consumable in its entirety. But besides setting out an instructional *ethics of consumption*, the tourist guide says something real about the human situation as experienced by the worker. The guide book is of course an information commodity, the reduction of city to figures and services which can be accessed easily, implemented and forgotten. But in addition, the guide has the symbolic value of consent-giver. The classic tourist guide sanctifies the worker's wish to enjoy, to play, to relax, to do nothing. But

at the same time that it grants this permission, it sets out very strict guidelines as to acceptable dispensing of "free time". Thus, the tourist guide represents the holiday to pluperfection at the same time that it screws honest hope by twisting it entirely towards the commodity, directly and simply.

Is there nothing that corresponds to that secret dwindling hope that one day all cities will be inhabitable at their every point: that they will be material for novel situations, bases for community relations of all kinds and the providers of creative inspiration, ideas and emotions? The shift from holy/secular to leisure/work is not an improvement. We can dwell everywhere only where no such divide exists.

We Edmontonians have declared every day to be a public holiday. True, some days are more festive than others. However, every moment must in itself be ambiguous or incommensurable in the magnitude of its joy and regenerate constantly the hope for different intrigues beyond the pale.

What is the weight of that word "holiday" now? By it we cannot mean leisure or worship or tradition. By it we can only mean the endless possibility for new games, new play, new meaningful connections made in our lived experience. We Edmontonians are players, each and every one of us. Free time is unlimited, game is unrestricted. It is not enough to sit on the boardwalk under an umbrella when crustacean puppets run from their strings and the transforming putty curves around your ideas like a simile.

Perhaps you claim that you too are players. You have your recreation: your thumb-twiddling bonanzas, your eiffels of chairlifts, your face-offs set for a table-top, your criss-crosses and cranium-crinklers, your strategic paintcan explosives, your Turing test romances, your electronic histrionics, your Walden II waterwings, your paddles, your mallets, your rackets. As adults, you do not play to transform your world, your perception...nor to expand it. You play to sort out and set aside. Your compromised play is a clear demarcation, not a complication or clearing. You are not the inventors of games, but their adherents.

Every day there is a new game for us. Our Edmonton is itself a game and we construct it as an integral part of the play. Because our games are in constant flux, so with our city: which is also at once complication and clearing. This alone approaches the heart of play. The game is not indifferent, but nor is it dogmatic. The rules are, as in the Greek, beginnings

(αρχαι) and not tyrants or despots. Rules are helpful in subscribing a realm of concern: to break them is to transcend them, to validate more.

Tell us your kind of holiday and we'll tell you what's killing you.

6. Found In a Mailbox At The Foot of an Inukshuk

WHOEVER YOU ARE:

So you have found Utopia and you are surprised that it is so cold. What did you expect? The South Seas? The fact of the matter is that all ideas about collective action develop in cold climates. For without a collective project, life at this latitude is just a complicated, semi-interactive installation art suicide note. Do you think that Franklin's followers died from eating canned food so that we could do the same? Forget it! We're going to find the Northwest Passage! And this time it isn't in pursuit of faster free trade with the Pacific Rim that compels us down uncharted routes. No, no more imports in deadly little cans or otherwise!

At the frontiers of the imagination the rational economy is dead. Our explorers endured and accomplished all that they did, yet their goal was merely the conversion of goods through a system of equalities! Heroes of Canadian history, you set your sights too low! They set out to colonize and commerce and they failed! Had they been searching for the exploding transformation of the ordinary into the uncanny through a process of coincidental alchemy, they would have founded our utopia centuries before its time!

As it is, our utopia is still in the process of founding and will be as long as it is a utopia. Visitor, whoever you are, help us in our founding. We are Franklin's legacy, carried back to Edmonton by Owen Beattie.