'THE OUTSIDERS':
ALEXANDER TROCCHI AND KENNETH WHITE
AN ESSAY BY GAVIN BOWD

Alexander Trocchi (1925-1984) and **Kenneth White** (b. 1936) are two Scottish writers not usually mentioned in the same breath. For some, Trocchi is a notorious literary junkie, White a Celtic guru with a head full of Zen. But they are writers who belong roughly to the same generation, who were for a period close and involved in the same cultural 'underground'. They both bear the hallmarks of 'exile', having spent most of their lives and enjoyed most of their fame outside Scotland. They have both made recent 'comebacks' in their native land. Trocchi and White are united by revolt against restrictive categories like 'literature' and 'nation', and seek to organise creators with a view to changing the order of things.

This essay explores the similarities and differences between Trocchi and White's itineraries. As well as looking at their personae and literary work, it examines critically the ambitions and achievements of the cultural organisations that they were involved in, from the Situationist International to Project Sigma to the Institut International de Géopoétique. The question inevitably arises of to what extent these two resolute cosmopolitans relate to the Scottish intellectual tradition.

Trocchi and White are 'outsiders'. This is placed in inverted commas in order to display its artifice, how much it is cultivated by themselves. It is also to cast doubt on their marginality. Such solitary heroes can be placed in a genealogy of avant-garde movements, from Dada to the present—what Greil Marcus has called the 'secret history of the twentieth century'. The fame of both writers belongs to specific moments. And doubts may be cast on the genuinely subversive force of their thought.

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A SCOT VIEW ESSAY

This series of essays aims to print, or reprint, essays that make an independent contribution to an understanding of the cultural condition of Scotland (and so also the United Kingdoms) as we move towards the restoration of a Scottish parliament in Edinburgh.
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"Lift up your sicht and tak gude advertence"
Robert Henrysoun

This series of essays aims to print, or reprint, essays that make an independent contribution to an understanding of the cultural condition of Scotland (and so also the United Kingdoms) as we move towards the restoration of a Scottish parliament in Edinburgh. All cultures are dependent upon political conditions and that must include the economic pressures on both culture and politics.

The General Editor of the *Scot View essay series* is Duncan Glen.

For all his inadequacy and megalomania there was something warming about him.
Jeff Nuttall on Alexander Trocchi

The whole of Nietzschean philosophy (to quote only one example) is an ego-trip but, as Nietzsche says himself, before dismissing any one man's theory and practice as being 'exclusive' (e.g. not decided in committee, not immediately translateable into systematic terms), you've got to consider whether or not it *opens up perspectives*, reveals a *field of energies*. It is better, in short, to have an ego (not a *fixed* ego, but a *multiple* ego—like a flight of migratory birds) with perpectives than no perspectives at all, only, say, a monotonous marking-time,an 'objective' discourse that ends up by numbing the brain, and what the Ch'an men call 'dragging your corpse around'.
Kenneth White, *Feathered Egg*

Trocchi and Project Sigma

As a student of literature and philosophy at the University of Glasgow, Alexander Trocchi already bore the hallmarks of doomed genius. Although widely expected to obtain a First Class degree, Trocchi apparently miscalculated a dose of drugs, which meant that he was incapacitated during a crucial paper. Despite this setback, his teachers, convinced of his intellectual gifts, awarded him a travelling scholarship. This award enabled him to reach Paris, where he became active in the Parisian cultural scene.

Trocchi became editor of the review *Merlin*, whose first issue appeared in May 1952. The contents of the first issue show the personalities and preoccupations of the review: a story by the relatively unknown Samuel Beckett, one by Trocchi himself, 'The Meeting', a poem by Christopher Logue, and an essay on existentialism by A.J. Ayer. *Merlin* was an ex-patriot magazine, but one imbued with internationalism, and naturally the Parisian scene of which it was part. The concerns of Trocchi and his collaborators were dated by the Cold War, then at its height. *Merlin* rejected the manichean distinctions of that period which, in their view, was pushing America towards barbarism.

In his editorial for the second issue of *Merlin*, Trocchi wrote: 'all categories are utilitarian; when they cease to be regarded as such, they become obnoxious.'[1] '*Merlin*,' he promised, 'will hit at all clots of rigid categories in criticism and life, and all that is unintelligently partisan.'[2] In the following issue, Trocchi struck out at the snares of language, which engendered rigid and uncompromising attitudes. His literary magazine 'must proceed by hitting at fixed categories, by persuading men to analyse their own attitudes, to suspend their responses, to think critically, and then, in the historical context, to act.'[3] *Merlin* rejected 'metaphysics' masquerading as truth, and the words which underpinned the threat of nuclear annihilation. Literature offered a source of resistance to the dogmatic categories of public discourse: 'The poetic habit of mind is an archaic one. The poet is situated beyond the problematical in a personal cosmos whose vital centre he is and which grows away from him on all sides into the warm flanks of mystery (. . .) The cosmos which contains it is, figuratively, the shadow of the poet himself; it is the colour, the complex vibration of his own emotions. It is a private expressional cosmos.'[4]

In *Merlin*, we see the 'outsider' stance cultivated by Trocchi: the valorisation of a more authentic inner space; the subversive potential of culture; but also the refusal of all categories that impose false separations in human life. With such an attitude, Trocchi would find, in fifties Paris, affinities with the Lettrist then Situationist Internationals.

The Lettrist and Situationist Internationals placed themselves in a tradition of avant-garde attempts to transcend the distinction between culture and politics. Their major precursors were Dada and Surrealism. Dada had been founded by exiled artists in Switzerland during the First World War. In their activities, centred around the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, the Dadaists took culture as the starting-point for the wider assault on a society which had produced the barbarism of the trenches. Under the nonsensical banner of 'Dada', derision was poured on the essence of 'art', 'authorship' and 'meaning'.

The young founders of the Surrealist movement wished to go beyond the destructiveness of Dada. In revolt against existing society, André Breton, Louis Aragon and their comrades sought a more authentic 'surreality'. Combining Arthur Rimbaud's *changer la vie* with the Marxist imperative to transform the world, these Surrealists were for a revolution of everyday life in which art and

literature would play a liberating role. In the ceremony of automatic writing, a collective event often laced with drugs and free love, the shackles of rationality would give way to the pleasure principle. Surrealist experimentation did not limit itself to the creation of artworks: the aimless drifting down the streets and arcades of Paris revealed by chance *le merveilleux*. The Surrealists' ambition was to overcome separations between inner and outer worlds, between art and daily life. They were also vigorously anti-nationalist. Surrealism was to be at the service of world Revolution. France's colonial adventure in Morocco in 1926 would push Breton and Aragon towards the French Communist Party.

Contradictions erupted, however. The exploration of inner life, the bohemian revolt against convention, and the bourgeois origins of the Surrealists, were hardly compatible with a Communist movement increasingly under the influence of Joseph Stalin. Leninist discipline chafed with the papal authority which Breton exerted over the Surrealists, with his many expulsions and denunciations in the interests of avant-garde purity. Aragon would choose the Party, and abandon Surrealism for Socialist Realism and a national poetry of resistance to Fascism. Breton would become a friend of Leon Trotsky and spend the war in the USA.

After the Second World War, the Surrealists would be supplanted by young avant-garde groups denouncing its numerous betrayals. Breton was reproached his Trotskyism and his growing fascination with the occult. Surrealism was accused of degenerating into a specifically artistic movement, with its own comfortable niche in galleries and museums. The publication of a history of Surrealism by Maurice Nadeau seemed to mark its reduction into an object of academic study.

Post-war avant-garde groups, such as the Revolutionary Surrealist Group, COBRA and the Lettrists (1952-1957) then Situationists (1957-1972), sought to rekindle the spirit of Dada and Surrealism, to supersede the distinction between culture and politics in a general revolution of everyday life.

For these avant-garde artists and revolutionaries, existing society was a 'spectacle', characterised by passivity, voyeurism, and the postponement of satisfaction. Commodification had extended beyond the boundaries of the workplace to colonise the workers' leisure time. The powerless observed their rulers, and drew knowledge of the world through images chosen by others.

Film idols and advertising posters were the alienated projections of desire, packaged and sold to the consumer. The division of labour, the privatisation of leisure, and representative democracy constructed an overbearing panoply of social separations.

Despite its charge of subjectivity and pleasure, art was part of the spectacle: the cult of genius and the reverential contemplation of works of art served to repress the creativity of the spectator. At best, art was, as Marx had described it, the heart of the heartless world, a utopian impulse necessarily mutilated by alienated social relations. The revolutionary theory of the Situationists and their precursors proposed the suppression of the proletariat and the realisation of art through the self-negation of art and the last international assault by the proletariat on the commodified world. Communism finally realised would be the totality of everyday life transformed into a work of art, with the result that art would cease to exist as a specialised activity. For Raoul Vaneigem, 'the work of art to come is the construction of a passionate life.'[5] Revolution would be the 'poetry of acts', not the reified poetry of words on a page.

Conventional art became the object of various forms of assault. If the Dadaists had freed words from syntactical structures, the Lettrists freed letters from their surroundings as the final act of chiselling away at traditional poetry. Guy Debord scandalised Parisian cinema-goers with a film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, consisting of alternating blank and black screens, accompanied by an incoherent and intermittent soundtrack. Asger Jorn practised collage and the painting over of kitsch pictures found in Parisian flea-markets. This was an example of *détournement.*: 'The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. '[6]

As the Situationists did not believe that 'revolution' should be limited to the mere seizure of power, they were interested in the urban spaces in which people had to live. A main theme of their activities was psychogeography: 'The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'. A psychogeographical 'method' was the *dérive*: 'A mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences. ' Aimless drifting through the city streets was wasted time that the commodity economy could not recuperate, and which redrew the official maps of the city of the spectacle. Situationists imagined cities given over to play. They were partisans of unitary urbanism: 'The theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behaviour.' In his 'Description de la zone jaune' (1960), the Dutch architect Constant imagined a city suspended in air, where labyrinths and moving walls aimed to end separations between zones of play and inhabitation. Ivan Chtcheglov declared that 'the Hacienda must be built', the 'Hacienda' being the ideal experimental space.

The aim of these rebels against utility was the construction of 'situations': 'A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambiance and a game of events. ' As incorrigible opponents of the spectacle, the Situationists were for play, involvement and non-postponement of satisfaction. Their peculiar brand of Communism was incompatible with Trotskyism and Stalinism: rejecting puritanism and the cult of work, the Situationists also refused 'activism' and the identification with foreign models. They were for a non-bureaucratic 'council' Communism where separation and hierarchy would be impossible. At the same time, they recognised the importance of a vanguard organisation. The Situationist International, with a tiny group of members in various national sections, with a central council, annual congress and central organ, *L'Internationale situationniste*, was meant to be a non-bureaucratic model for the new social organisation to come.

The debate over the relationship between culture and politics did, however, create violent ructions within the groups, from its foundation onwards. How could the undirected, wasteful activity of play coexist with the end-oriented activity of politics? As Richard Hooker has pointed out: 'it is obvious that if you try to fuse cultural and political activity thus defined, you are dealing with mutually corrosive categories whose antinomical relation cannot be resolved in argument. The only way the cultural and the political can be fused is through activity itself. But that activity must be directed in a very peculiar way. To be both cultural and political it has to be orientated to a specific goal and be without one.'[7] The Situationists were trying to sustain an ultimately unsustainable position. In the early sixties, the artists in the SI were expelled because of their belief that the exploration and subversion of artistic form remained a legitimate creative activity. The architect Constant went so far as to argue that it was utopian

revolution which, as the contented sleep of the proletariat demonstrated, was non-existent. Such 'reformism' was dismissed by the remaining Situationists, among whom Guy Debord was in the ascendant.

By the mid-sixties, emphasis had shifted from the critique of art to the development of a theory of revolution. The SI's activity was agitational and propagandistic, through its journal and notably the *détournement* of comic strips to convey the revolutionary message. The SI achieved public notoriety when, in 1966, some student sympathisers took control of the students' union at the University of Strasbourg. To the scandal of the authorities, media and students alike, the union funds were spent on diffusing a Situationist comic strip, *Le Retour de la Colonne Durutti*, and a pamphlet attacking the university system. Another group of Situationist sympathisers, *Les Enragés*, played a significant role in the disturbances at the Nanterre campus which sparked the great wave of unrest in May-June 1968. Indeed, the May events seemed to confirm the Situationist belief in the possibility of revolution in advanced capitalist society: a spontaneous revolt that took by surprise the 'official' revolutionary party and trade union, which practised occupations and council democracy, put into question working and teaching practices, the consumer society and oppression in private life, whose slogans—'Ne travaillez jamais'; 'Sous le pavé, la plage', 'Jouissez sans entraves'—echoed Situationist propaganda.

Alexander Trocchi came into contact with Guy Debord in 1955 in Paris. Joining the Lettrist International, Trocchi had to break with friends and employers: 'I stopped speaking to them. I was to enter into a closed society, a clandestine group, which was to be my whole world.'[8] Of Debord he said, in 1983: 'I remember long, wonderful psychogeographical walks in London with Guy. He took me to places in London I didn't know, that he sensed, that I'd never have been to if I hadn't been with him. He was a man who could discover a city.'[9] In September 1960, the fourth congress of the Situationist International, in London, passed a resolution concerning the imprisonment of Trocchi on drugs charges. In October of that year, a tract was produced, entitled *Hands Off Alexander Trocchi*. The text reads:

> The conference DECLARES that Trocchi could not have, in any case, traffic in drugs; this is clearly a police provocation by which the Situationists will not allow themselves to be intimidated;

> AFFIRMS that drug taking is without importance;
> APPOINTS Asger Jorn, Jacqueline de Jong and Guy Debord to take immediate action on behalf of Alexander Trocchi and report upon such action to the Situationist international at the earliest moment;
> CALLS in particular upon the cultural authorities of Britain and on all British intellectuals who value liberty to demand the setting free of Alexander Trocchi, who is beyond all doubt England's most intelligent creative artist today.

In November 1962, Trocchi was elected member of the new central council of the SI. In the eighth issue of *L'Internationale situationniste* would be published 'Technique du coup de monde', French version of his 'Insurrection of a Million Minds'. In Autumn 1964, however, Trocchi resigned from the SI. The SI had refused to follow Trocchi in his Sigma project, whose cultural ambition did not meet the demands of the group's radicalised position, and which contained among its associates Colin Wilson, author of *The Outsider*, whose occult dabblings were despised by Debord and his comrades.

If Sigma did not attribute a messianic role to the proletariat, it nevertheless had close affinities with the Situationists: the desire for a collective organisation overthrowing separations between culture and everyday life; the refusal of existing hierarchies; the importance of town-planning and the organisation of space. The mysterious and ambivalent name of the project, 'Sigma', 'all' or 'sum of', echoed Trocchi's earlier revolt against fixed categories in his *Merlin* editorials.

The 'invisible insurrection of a million minds' imagined by Trocchi distinguishes it from previous insurrections such as the 1917 Revolution. The Bolsheviks had carried out a coup d'état which seemed to capture strategic points of the economy and state apparatus, but simply reproduced previous social relations, this time with new rulers: 'the police, victims of convention, contribute to the brilliant enterprise by guarding the old men in the Kremlin.'[10] Instead, Trocchi was for a *coup du monde*, a more generalised critique of everyday life, which would involve a seizure of power in people's minds themselves: 'cultural revolt must seize the grids of expression and the powerhouses of the mind. Intelligence must become self-conscious, realise its own power, and, on a global scale, transcending functions that are no longer appropriate, dare to exercise it. History will not overthrow

national governments: it will outflank them. The cultural revolt is the necessary underpinning, the passionate substructure of a new order of things.'[11] It was necessary to 'seize control of the human process by assuming control of ourselves.'[12] But individual minds needed organisation for effective concerted action: 'the energy of individuals and small groups is dissipated in a hundred and one unconnected activities.'[13] 'It is our contention,' Trocchi writes, 'that there already exists a nucleus of men who, if they will set themselves gradually and tentatively to the task, are capable of imposing a new and seminal idea: the world waits for them to show their hand.'[14]

In his analysis of the contemporary situation, Trocchi saw that 'there is in principle no problem of production in the modern world.'[15] What mattered was distribution, which could be administered justly by an international organisation. With the problem of production now solved, Trocchi turned to the problem of leisure. 'Man,' Trocchi declares, 'has forgotten how to play (...) The form that dominate his working life are carried over into leisure which becomes more and more mechanised.'[16] Contemporary man was the passive consumer of 'entertainment'.

Art, Trocchi claims, is mutilated by museums and brokers. 'Art can have no existential significance for a civilisation which draws a line between life and art and collects artifacts like ancestral bones for reverence. Art must inform the living; we envisage a situation in which life is continually renewed by art, a situation imaginatively and passionately constructed to inspire each individual to respond creatively, to bring to whatever act a creative comportment.'[17] In contrast to stultified art and literature, and the 'zombifying' spectacle of popular entertainment. 'only in jazz, which retains the spontaneity and vitality deriving from its proximity to its beginnings, can we see an art which springs naturally out of a creative ambiance.'[18]

What was to be done so as not to end up as museum-pieces like previous 'anti-art' revolt such as Dada? Artists had to seize control of their own means of expression, bypassing the brokers. The new underground would begin by withdrawing to 'a vacant country house (mill, abbey, church or castle) not too far from the City of London,' where 'we shall foment a kind of cultural "jam session": out of this will evolve the prototype of our spontaneous university. The original building will stand deep within its own grounds, preferably on a river bank. It should be large enough for a pilot-group (astronauts of inner space) to situate itself, orgasm

and genius, and their tools and dream-machines and amazing apparatuses and appurtenances; with outhouses for "workshops" large as could accommodate light industry; the entire site to allow for spontaneous architecture and eventual town planning.'[19]

Such spontaneous universities would spring up outside the capital cities of the world. The Sigma project would be an international organisation, without badge or hierarchy. One of its tactics would be the creation of an international index, 'pool-cosmonaut', that would serve to unite mind with mind and channel the dispersed energy of individuals.

Sigma took its inspiration from Black Mountain College and the Israeli kibbutzes but, in order to survive in capitalist society, it had to be sustainable in capitalist terms. Trocchi therefore envisaged the creation of a company, International Cultural Enterprises Ltd., whose profits would be invested in expansion and research. Its income would derive from commissions obtained by a Sigma Agency for young artists, fees from cultural 'consultancy', and from a 'box-office' selling work by Sigma associates. This 'basic shift in attitude' was described by Trocchi in millenarian terms: 'IT IS HAPPENING. Our problem is to make men conscious of the fact, and to inspire them to participate in it. Man must seize control of his own future: only by doing so can he ever hope to inherit the earth.'[20]

The cultural enterprise imagined by Trocchi never came to fruition, although steps were taken to open a 'box-office' in London. The one concrete achievement of Sigma was its portfolio, a roneo-typed bulletin distributed to those interested, between 1964 and 1966. The Sigma Portfolio was conceived as 'an entirely new dimension in publishing, through which the writer reaches his public immediately, outflanking the traditional trap of publishing-house policy, and by means of which the reader gets it, so to speak, "hot" from the writer's pen, from the photographer's lens, etc.'

In the pages of the portfolio can be found an impressive array of figures of the sixties 'underground'. The first issue was *The Moving Times*, a poster broadsheet originally intended for display in the London Underground. It contains an essay by Kenneth White, a satirical piece by Trocchi, 'The Barbecue', on the use of electroshock treatment on social deviants, and a piece by William Burroughs, 'Martin's Folly'. The sixth issue contains an important paper by R.D. Laing—who, incidentally, had been an exact contemporary of Trocchi at the University of Glasgow— 'Practice

and theory—the present situation.' For Laing, 'we, the therapists, are in a world in which the inner is already split from the outer, and before the inner can become outer, and the outer become inner, we have to discover our "inner" world.' Laing praises Burroughs and Trocchi for evoking in their novels 'man cut off from his own mind, cut off equally from his own body—a half-crazed creature in a mad world.' In issue 11, Joan Littlewood presents her project for a 'leisuredome'. In subsequent issues, there can be found a reappraisal of existentialism by Colin Wilson, a remarkable essay by Michael McClure on revolt as expression of 'meat-spirit', the first of White's Jargon Papers, and poetry by Robert Creeley. The twenty-eighth and last portfolio is fitting for the moving times and Trocchi's predilections: a piece on the 'experimental workshops' of Timothy Leary's Castalia Foundation.

By 1968, the Sigma project had petered out, with the exception of the Sigma Centre in Amsterdam, which would be active until the mid-seventies—testimony to the vibrancy of the anarchist underground in Holland, where the 'Provos' and Situationists had a genuine public impact. After Sigma, Trocchi's life and career entered a steep decline: literary and film projects unfinished or never started, the devastating effects of drugs on him and his family.

To what extent can the Sigma project be branded a failure? In *Bomb Culture*, Jeff Nuttall describes in disparaging terms an attempt to withdraw from the city for a cultural 'jam-session'. At Braziers Park, near Oxford, in summer 1964, Trocchi and his like-minded companions indulged in personal sniping, heavy drinking and intimidating their gentle Quaker hosts. Trocchi was incapacitated by drugs. According to Nuttall: 'These people *dreaded* meeting one another. Deeply they *dreaded* it [. . .] At mid-day we fled from one another with colossal relief.'[21] Indeed, Trocchi's drug dependency is fingered by Nuttall as a major cause of Sigma's failure. For Trocchi's publisher, John Calder, Sigma was 'an excuse to avoid getting on with a sequel to *Cain's Book*'.[22] Calder deems heroin responsible for Trocchi's failure to become 'the outstanding writer of his generation'.[23]

The demise of Sigma is addressed by Trocchi in his own unpublished history of the project. He writes of Sigma's success in attracting 'many thousands' of creative men and women, and confidently declares: 'in so far as we are sigmen we are nothing all men shall not one day become'.[24] However, likening himself to the subject of the painting 'Stag at Bay', Trocchi attacks those who

chose to 'exploit sigmatical techniques for immediate gain'. 'They', whom Trocchi does not name, 'felt bound to justify their lack of integrity and what was born simply as an unworthy impulse grew quickly into a consistently malicious smear-campaign'.[25] He is bitterly aware of having been taken advantage of: 'I often saw my own flat turned into a kind of Grand Central Station [. . .] when it came to the bit they were not able to give; they had earned.'[26] These ambitious young people were still oppressed by their conditioning. Trocchi himself does not pretend to be selfless: 'I, like others, am fundamentally an egotist.' The question is how to harmoniously organise individual impulses: 'A resilient fabric of relative interwoven ego-optics, in good faith and goodwill recognised for what they are, is the necessary fundament of any possible future society for humankind.'[27] But, in the wake of the break-up of Sigma, Trocchi does not conclude with an answer: 'it is the problem of really effective communication which, in the day-to-day confrontation with reactionary forces, continues to baffle us.'[28]

In defence of Trocchi against John Calder, it can be said that Sigma, far from demonstrating his 'failure' as a literary figure, was another example of him living up to his self-description as 'international cultural entrepreneur' and 'contemporary pamphleteer'. Indeed, in *Cain's Book*, he wants to break out of the limits of the literary persona: 'I told her that the great urgency for literature was that it should once and for all accomplish its dying, that it wasn't that writing shouldn't be written, but that a man should annihilate prescriptions of all past form in his own soul, refuse to consider what he wrote in terms of literature, judge it solely in terms of his living'; 'I'm all the time aware it's reality and not literature I'm engaged in.'[29] The theory of Trocchi's proposed 'metacategorical revolt' also undermines Nuttall's appraisal of the Sigma project. In Sigma Portfolio no.18, Philip Green and Alexander Trocchi declare: 'Against compartmented art, situationist culture would encourage a kind of universal practice which would include and transcend every employable element. Without in the least threatening the individual, it will tend naturally to collective production, and anonymous production certainly in the sense that individual works by individual artists will not be stocked as merchandise, in the sense that the situationist culture in general will not be dominated by the hysterical need to "leave traces". ' As Howard Slater has pointed out, Nuttall 'deals largely in terms of personalities without coming

to terms with more applicable tactics that would lead to a thorough negation of society.'[30] Both Calder and Nuttall, by portraying Trocchi as failed leader and writer, ignore the fact that 'Sigma was to have been active in the relocation of creativity as multi-disciplinary and non-privileged, removing the mystification of genius that is the denial of imaginative potential in all people.'[31]

Nevertheless, if Sigma was a notable, if brief, point of confluence for important currents of the mid-sixties underground, it did not succeed in breaking down barriers between disciplines, or those between art and 'life'. Indeed, Sigma comes across as one of many cultural enterprises of its period, an entirely understandable attempt at intellectual self-promotion. When Trocchi boasts, in the portfolio, that 'sigma is nothing other than the individual poets all over the world in the process of realising their power', it is to his artistic comrades that he is referring. Such an exercise in self-promotion can be seen to carry the seeds of 'ego-optical' disharmony.

As an explicitly 'un-political' cultural intervention, Sigma, bifurcating from the Situationist development of a revolutionary theory, showed blindness and naiveté about the structures thwarting its grand design. There is no thought as to how any mythic retreat to form an artistic community outwith the city walls will overcome divisions between artists or re-connect with wider society. The plan to exploit the commercial value of art seems to perpetuate the system that has such supposedly baleful effects on popular culture. In the light of the persistent plagues of mass unemployment, famine and communal strife, talk of production as no longer a problem appears dated and misguided. To believe that the U.N. could administer the fair distribution of wealth does not confront the brute fact of economic and communal interests. With the 'proletariat' absent from Trocchi's vocabulary, the shock troops of the invisible insurrection vary from being a core of 'sigmen' to potentially everyone: another millenarian myth. Project Sigma contains within it weaknesses that are echoed, as we will see, by its next of kin, from the Situationists to Kenneth White's Institut International de Géopoétique.

Trocchi and White

After graduating with a First in French and German from the University of Glasgow, Kenneth White was awarded a scholarship to write a doctoral thesis on 'Surrealism and politics'. White was soon side-tracked by his interests in the contemporary avant-garde. He would begin to have a minor impact on the Parisian scene. After students of his helped publish a first collection, *Wild Coal*, Mercure de France would publish a bilingual edition, *En toute candeur*, accompanied by a long autobiographical essay. The first parts of what would become *Incandescent Limbo*, an account of drifting across the French capital, appeared in various French reviews, and won the approval of André Breton.

It was not, however, in Paris that White became a friend and collaborator of Trocchi. White recalls: 'I came back to Scotland—to Glasgow—in 1963, after five years in Paris. Pretty soon I started up the Jargon Group, devoted to "cultural revolution" (no reference to Mao), doing talks, organizing readings, publishing pamphlets (the Jargon Papers). I also worked a bit with Bill MacArthur's *Cleft* (Edinburgh) that brought together in its pages people like Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Gary Snyder, Andrei Vosnesensky. . .In the summer of '64, down at my place (Gourgounel) in the Ardèche, I received a letter from one Alexander Trocchi in which he told me that, although he hadn't got an explicit OK from me, since I was away in "foreign parts", he'd gone ahead printing a piece of mine in his new broadsheet, *The Moving Times*: "Both Burroughs and myself have counted you amongst our allies for at least a year now.". Trocchi also enclosed the first number of *Potlatch*, saying: "I assure you that Sigma, whatever it is and eventually will be, is at your disposal henceforth.". Back in Glasgow, I sent Trocchi the Jargon Papers, which were reprinted by Sigma and distributed along its network. In correspondence, Trocchi was saying we should meet, in order to get on ahead together for fun then projects. I went down to London in December of that year.'[32]

In the first chapter of his 'way-book', *Travels in the Drifting Dawn* (published in French under the title *Dérives*), 'London Underground', White evokes Trocchi and his milieu. The Bayswater flat of 'Joe Tirelli' is a meeting-place for all sorts of vagabonds, poets and marginals. Among the 'guests' is a San

Franciscan poet, just back from Nepal to work with Trocchi on a book on Himalayan grass. Trocchi cuts an extravagant figure, wearing an emerald necklace and a fez. He boasts that the (presumably) Sigma 'dossier' will be the hottest thing to hit Britain since Boadicea. Trocchi/Tirelli seems to brim with madcap and derisory projects for making money, including the production of psychedelic toilet paper.

Drugs have a central place in the Trocchi household: some smuggled Mexican grass, hidden in a teddy bear; drugs hidden under a taxi seat. Paranoia grips the occupants of the flat. If Trocchi chides one of his acquaintances for bringing illicit gear, he nevertheless shoots up in front of them.

White's description is intercut with passages expressing the intellectual spirit of the sigmen. One passage refers to a seventeenth-century sect which believed that, through the synthesis of the sciences, it had discovered the absolute truth of the universe: Europe was now heavy with child. A long, mock-prophesy gathers together companions of the new movement: Dada, Charlie Parker, Hyperborean wild swans, Joyce, Lawrence, Miller, American Indians. There is talk of chaos and creation, sex and revolution, and of an 'ecstatic materialism'. In what is perhaps an implicit rejection of drug-taking, White speaks of a 'Mexico of the mind'.

This particular chapter of the 'way-book' ends with a negative description of British everyday life. In a stilted conversation with a lady on the train to Glasgow, the Orient is banalised into a choice between China and Ceylon tea. To say that the hills are beautiful is mere *politesse*. A reference to golf balls at Largs makes repressed sexuality come out in a rash. Glasgow, remarks a drunken *gallus besom*, looks like Belsen.

White's essay in *The Moving Times* is entitled 'The Real Climate', and is reprinted from an Edinburgh magazine *Cleft*. The essay is a presentation of his poetic persona. White writes: 'In my person, the world finds itself, and the generations. From the depression into the winter I have travelled and in midwinter now I write, where all things are, trying to take the big view, at the centre of reality, the source, not hanging on the tip of a detail. (. . .) Birchwood and iron-ribbed concourse are stations on the one same line. I refuse nothing, and I transform everything from the core.' White portrays himself as a barbaric outsider with a poetics to match: 'I am no gentleman poet. Mine is the poetry of joyance and pain, sudden and naked language, however long the process

in the dark and the confusion and skill of the throes, the reality is sudden and naked. My poetry is like the prose of a seagull.'

White's outward movement leads him to reject all fixity: 'if we see things as shape rather than state, as process rather than essence, our notion of reality changes and our living.' He finds a model in the Romantic poet, who 'is not only an emotive poet, he is a poet in movement.' 'The brain,' White declares, 'is not a storehouse, but a retort, a furnace, where things meet in activity.'

Poetry is not meant to be a strictly literary activity. According to White, 'poetry is nothing I say, if it is not a coming to life'. Poetry is a more authentic art of living, accessible to worthy minds: 'I call a poet a man with an active shape of mind; poetry is for me something natural, and being natural, necessary. When more people have come full circle, this natural necessity will come to be recognised.' White the outsider is prepared to have companions: 'I want men with some life-force in them, living men, not improved human products, or processed persons. '

This emphasis on the 'life-force' is repeated in the first of White's *Jargon Papers*, published in December 1964 as the twenty-third Sigma Portfolio. He writes: 'For Nietzsche, philosophy was the expression of an extraordinary high soul-state; I'd say the same for poetry—poetry, philosophy, it doesn't matter what you call it. The best writing is both: not poetic philosophy, not philosophical poetry, but something else. It's time we got rid of all the false categories. and realised that art (don't like the word at all) if it is to be of any importance to us is the expression of a man living his life (his life and the greater life—not just the simulacrum a lousy society foists upon him). The only categories worth bothering about are degrees of being.' Poetry is thus an art of authentic living, but one which escapes the limits of the lyrical 'I': 'Poetry is always more than merely human. My own predilection is for a pre-humanist or post-humanist world where what is alive in me is in contact with what is forceful and alive in the universe—forces, life much other than personal.'

There can be found here a close meeting of minds between Trocchi and White. Both are engaged in 'metacategorical revolt', united in the belief that artistic creativity should be judged in terms of 'living reality'. Process, fluidity, nomadism colour their vocabulary. While both resolutely assert their subjectivity, both proclaim a belief in some intersubjective project where, at least a core of 'men', and perhaps more, will seize control of their 'reality'.

White shares Trocchi's distaste for the university system. In 1963, White returned to the University of Glasgow to take up a post as Lecturer in French. While there, White distributed Sigma literature and the papers of the 'Jargon Group' which he set up. The first paper gives us a taste of its activities: 'Jargon sessions take place every fortnight at the Chaplaincy centre (see blue and black posters). The programme has included so far: Nietzsche, Whitman, Autopsy of the Modern, Bert Brecht, Taoism; it will continue with: The Outsider in Germany, Poetry and Revolution 1917, The Beat Poets of America, D.H. Lawrence, American Negro Poets, Jean-Paul Satre (*sic*), Henry Thoreau, etc. . .Jargon itself?—not so much sweete jargonying as "that jargon which only derelicts, angels and outcasts employ"(Henry Miller: *Nexus*).' For the Jargon Group, White takes as model the teacher/student relationship in Zen Buddhist monasteries: 'the way itself is not intellectual, not sophisticated. And it does not lead to intellectual truth, but to something simple and marvellous which is existential, not intellectual, and which cannot be much talked about but rather experienced.'

Such a fruitful relationship was certainly not to be found in Trocchi and White's alma mater. In 'The Phoney University', White looks back in anger at his two years teaching at the euphemistically named 'University of Z'. 'Goliath,' writes White, 'that unfortunate philistine, is the paragon of socio-cultural excellence when compared with the average Z graduate after close on twenty years in the educational penitentiary.' The education system produces 'hordes of blank and bewildered ephemerids armed with a degree and ready to assume their functions in society. What society?—The intellectually bankrupt, spiritless and mildly brutish society of Britain, where they will be at home, with wife and car, and job, etc., etc., till death releases them.' They are merely 'fodder for whom living remains a sickening movement between Earning money (that's where the degree comes in) and Entertainment.'[33] The university is but a degree-factory, sweetened by 'the phoney club-life of the University, with its general corbobbolation of nonentity.' The victim of the system 'has merely been drilled to pass tests, to fulfil functions of the most mechanical kind.'[34] The students 'want to be sheep'. As for the teachers, 'even those who see the necessity of change and wish to act feel perhaps that they cannot afford to, because of previously contracted responsibilities and obligations, in particular, the family.' The teacher 'is not required to be a personality, what is

demanded of him is merely that he fulfil his function. The insistence on team-work and the team-spirit is symptom of this.'[35] Inspired by Nietzsche and the Surrealists, White concludes: 'We need new groupments which can, beyond the deadness, introduce the life-thing. These groupments will be composed of men who lack the modesty which seems to be becoming the supreme socio-moral value. They will not be modest enough to wait till institutional society moves, nor "realistic" enough. They will be and act on their own, moving wherever possible into association with others like them.'[36]

Linked to this violent assault on the university is a common disdain for work. In *Young Adam*, Trocchi's narrator describes thus the man, Daniel Goon, who will be hanged for the murder the former has committed: 'As a representative of the industrious working classes, he was in a sense my enemy. I dislike people who make a virtue of work.'[37] The heroine of *Helen and Desire* prefers Oriental languor and passivity to the western work-ethic. Edwin Morgan remarks: 'She sees the non-postponement of satisfactions as logical, even though she knows desire is infinite.'[38] In *Cain's Book*, Necchi/Trocchi tells his father, an unemployed musician: 'The trouble with you, dad, is that you've always been ashamed of being unemployed, and so you never learned to enjoy your leisure.'[39]

With White, it is in activities like the Jargon Group rather than in the classroom, that White can best deploy his 'personality'. In *Incandescent Limbo*, language teaching is a drudgery that pays the rent and fills the stomach. If there is work of value, it is that on yourself, in mystical self-transformation, as in 'Report to Erigena':

> 'Labour' suddenly seems exactly right
> hard slogging, no facility
> like learning the basis of a grammar
> working your way into unknown logic
>
> it's earth in labour makes for diamond
>
> here on this nameless shore, knowing the work
> who are the workers? who the travellers?
> reality works--wonders? travel-travail[40]

It has to be pointed out that, for Trocchi, White and the Situationists, among many other rebels, 'work' is defined in masculine terms: the child-rearing and household work traditionally done by women do not enter into their critique. Such indifference is demonstrated in 'London Underground' when Trocchi and his sigmen return to his Bayswater flat, expecting his wife to have made the dinner. She turfs them out and they take refuge in a nearby café.

There is also something tediously negative about Trocchi and White's scathing comments about work, education, culture, daily life and popular entertainment. Despite their humble backgrounds, there is little appreciation of increased material prosperity, with the opportunities for 'earning' and 'entertainment' that they bring. Fans of jazz's spontaneity, both men seem ignorant of and outflanked by arguably the most subversive, democratic—and commodified—cultural form since the fifties: rock 'n' roll. To this day, Kenneth White continues to complain about the 'cacaphony' of pop music and young people wearing personal stereos on the beach. Meanwhile, the Situationist/ Sigmatic imperative of DIY revolt and *détournement* served as inspirations for punk and the underground techno scene.

Trocchi and White's assaults on the work ethic and education have inevitable implications for their attitudes towards Scottish culture. In many ways, Trocchi was outside contemporary Scottish culture. In Paris, he had supplanted Alan Riddell as *Merlin* editor, and had moved the magazine away from supporting the Scottish Renaissance poets. Andrew Murray Scott writes: 'at a time when Scottish writers were defensive against Anglicisation, overtly nationalist and keen to honour MacDiarmid's legacy, Trocchi was regarded as an outsider, not a member of the "Milne's Bar" club, refusing to be categorised even as a "novelist".'[41] It was hardly surprising that this self-proclaimed international cultural entrepreneur and 'cosmonaut of inner space', speaking in an Americanised drawl and proudly wearing the stigmata of a heroin addiction, would attract the vitriol of MacDiarmid, for whom the problem of identity was solved. Trocchi, in his eyes, was little more than 'cosmopolitan scum'.

Trocchi tried to build bridges with MacDiarmid, writing in a letter of 'our common revolt against the smug philistinism of many of our countrymen.'[42] Nevertheless, Trocchi is very much an exile from contemporary Scotland. The Scotland of *Young Adam* is a morbid, monochrome industrial landscape, populated by

priggish, prurient Presbyterians. In *Cain's Book*, Scotland exists as a memory trace of family and sexual initiation. It is a place that Trocchi would rarely return to. It is London, not Edinburgh, that the imagined Sigma Centre would recharge. And the invisible insurrection would dissolve nationality along with other restrictive categories. Such indifference to 'Scotland' would be reciprocated, with Trocchi neglected and forgotten until the nineties.

As for Kenneth White, 'Scotland' is not rejected out of hand but drawn on in the creation of his persona. In *En toute candeur*, White valorises the Celts' 'naturalism' and 'anarchism': their refusal of hierarchy and of separation between mind and matter. The Celts, he remarks, are the descendants of barbaric nomads, the Scythians. White identifies with extravagant Scots like Michael Scot, wandering polymaths and polyglots. The 'Celtic' culture connects up with like-minded cultures across the world: echoes come from the Orient and the Eskimos. Scotland's ancient name, Alba, links it to an idea, that of 'white world', a trans-national, trans-human idea of man-in-the-cosmos.

White's use of 'Scotland' is illustrated in the chapter of *L'Esprit nomade* devoted to MacDiarmid. For White, MacDiarmid is a 'super-personal, if not super-human being'.[43] He is a 'Transcendental Scot' for whom 'Scotland' is the provisional label for a high idea. 'What interests him above all is the development of the mind. He far prefers the smallest spiritual realisation to the solution of any political problem.'[44] MacDiarmid engages in an outward movement, from Lallans to Gaelic culture to a 'genuine mystical experience of illumination'[45] which finds its objective correlative in the desolate landscapes of the far north of Scotland. MacDiarmid is a practitioner of 'ecstatic materialism', a 'cosmopoetic individualist'. He has no dewy-eyed fondness for the proletariat: 'the Communism of MacDiarmid is a solitary Communism'.[46] MacDiarmid is interested in his relationship to the cosmos, which stimulates an interest in Oriental culture. White quotes approvingly such works as 'On a Raised Beach', whose poetics is suitably complex, plural and non-methodical, and thus congruent with the 'chaosmos'. Beyond the walls erected by Scottish Nationalism and Communist internationalism, the stony limit of MacDiarmid's transcendence is the mystical attainment of the 'diamond body'. (It must be said in passing that such a presentation of MacDiarmid hides his attachment, till the grave, to the Communist Party and hatred of the English.)

Trocchi and White therefore place themselves, and are placed, outside any movement of writers for Scottish independence. However, both have affinities with an important figure of Scottish culture, Patrick Geddes. Like them, Geddes was no friend of what he called the academic 'freemasonry of mediocrity', and was a wandering Scot with an international perspective. Geddes was engaged in a 'metacategorical revolt' of great ambition, seeking to break down barriers between disciplines, and especially between the arts and sciences. His desire for integration into a natural unity meant bringing into relation Place, Work and Folk. Geddes was active in town-planning, believing that good architecture produced good living. Trocchi's 'psychogeography', White's 'geopoetics' and Geddes's 'thinking-machines' can be seen as part of a Scottish tradition which links the perceptual to the conceptual and privileges, for example, geometry over algebra.

In the non-theoretical (if such a distinction can be provisionally made) works of Trocchi and White there are close similarities of persona and form, but also important differences of mindscape.

Both Trocchi and White are 'outsiders', mystics, radical subjectivities that have come to self-consciousness against their social conditioning. *Young Adam*, *Helen and Desire* and *Cain's Book* are first-person narratives, the narrators being personalities beyond the pale of conventional morality. Self-consciousness is of prime importance to Trocchi: 'for a long time now I have felt that writing which is not ostensibly self-conscious is in a vital way inauthentic for our time'[47]; 'in a man I expect self-consciousness, judging him less than a man if he is not.'[48] In the process of becoming self-conscious, he has kicked against society: 'I have unlearned. I have become a stranger.'[49]

White, too, is a solitary hero, dying to his social self in order to reach the 'white world', a more authentic reality of man-in-the-cosmos. As in 'North':

> Way up north
> where the great wind blows
> he is walking
>
> way up north
> where the dawn-light breaks
> he is walking

White is the 'wandering Jew', the Hyperborean superman. He is an utterly egotistical enemy of the ego.

In addition to the primacy of the 'I', metacategorical revolt creates similarities of form. *Cain's Book* blurs distinctions between autobiography, fiction and polemic, and does not have any recognisable plot-line. White's way-books are not collections of short stories, but rather patchworks of evocations of places, marginal personalities and quotations from his intellectual companions. White's poetics is informed by the fragmented impression of *carnet de voyage*. His poems are broken up with prose and quotations from various writers and discourses. Such a complex, open-ended, 'chaotic' form is intended to correspond with his world-view.

In terms of mindscape, however, there are differences which help us understand their individual itineraries. Trocchi's characters are certainly nomadic. In *Young Adam*, the narrator likes to work on a barge because: 'You are not tied up in one place then as you are if you take a job in town, and sometimes, if you can forget how ludicrously small the distances are, you get the impression that you are travelling.'[51] The narrator of *Cain's Book* works on the scows on the Hudson River. His milieu has echoes of that of White's hero, Henry Thoreau: 'A chair, a table, a single bed, a coal stove, a dresser, a cupboard, a man in a little wooden shack, two miles from the nearest land.'[52] The infinite desire of Helen leads her to embark on a picaresque voyage across the globe.

There are limits. however, to the 'outward movement' of Trocchi. He is a 'cosmonaut of inner space', and the spaces his narrators inhabit reflect this: the claustrophobic atmosphere of the barges; the pungent tents and boudoirs of *Helen and Desire*. In *Cain's Book*, Trocchi/Necchi remembers, as a child, climbing into a big box and closing the lid behind him in order to feel 'the heat of my own presence'.[53] The scow is attached to tugs; the barge only travels between the Clyde and the Forth; Helen is always guest and/or captive.

There is a fear of complete detachment. In *Cain's Book*, the narrator is never far from New York, which is, after all, the source of the drug he depends on. When, one evening, his scow risks breaking its tie to the tug, he remembers: 'I became aware of the Atlantic, big, black and endless, and wished to hell I'd had a fix.'[54] At the end of a series of degradations at the hands of men,

In Trocchi's work, a sense of being in abeyance slips from languor to listlessness to morbidity. In *Young Adam*, the motor barge moves slowly through water smooth and scum-laden, under the dirty lens of the sky. It is a landscape of impending doom. Towards the end of *Cain's Book*, Trocchi is filled with a sense of failure and fatalism: 'It is as though I have been writing hesitantly, against the tide, with the growing suspicion that what I have written is in some criminal sense against history, that in the end it can lead me only to the hangman.'[55] Trocchi therefore seeks occasional mystical remission: 'The problem has always been to fuse the fragments of eternity, more precisely to attain from time to time the absolute serenity of timelessness.'[56] The cruelty of history encourages Trocchi to abandon any invisible insurrection, or redemption in art, for the annihilation offered by heroin.

White, too, is in revolt against history, but his nomadism is more robust--imaginatively, at least. In his mindscape, White leaves the 'motorway of history' for non-human spaces. He privileges harsh, barren mountainsides, deserts of rock, arctic ice. To Trocchi's scows, White prefers St. Brandon, voyaging across the Atlantic Ocean in search of 'white martyrdom'.[57] The coast he walks combines chaos, cosmos and cosmopolitanism: the jagged rock-formations and never-ending breaking of the waves; contact with the non-human; reception of the flotsam and jetsam of other cultures.

What Trocchi means by 'cosmos' is 'personal cosmos': his sigmatic project is a humanist one, aiming to reunite men with their authentic selves. White, however, has a 'post-humanist' perspective: to renew contact between 'man' and the 'earth'. For White, history is a nightmare, but it is one from which we are able to wake: this is the ambition of his 'geopoetics'.

White soon parted company with Trocchi. He recalls: 'I'd liked the tone of Trocchi's texts: the Potlatch letters, and others in that vein. There was a spaciousness about them. Here was a live mind, in a large context—completely outside the limited context of most of what is commonly called literature. This was the first thing. Then, being involved in something of the same myself, with similar coordinates and analogous movement (with differences—I didn't share all his references), I could only feel sympathy for his drive towards "a tactical revaluation of the human process" and a strategy of outmanoeuvring the "structural prisons of the zombies". But when I saw the context he was actually living and working in from close up, I felt a lot of distance—not antagonism,

just humorous distance. It was a heavy drug scene first of all. The surroundings too were physically depressing. And the people around Trocchi seemed mainly vague-minded hangers-on. I couldn't see that scene going anywhere but downhill. Alex was aware of what I was thinking, and there was some tension on his part. When I left London, I felt that was more or less the end of that conjunction. When, some time later, I got a call to participate in a big Albert Hall poetry jamboree, I didn't go. I knew I was out in something else.'

From May 68 to Geopoetics

In 'Villa Formose', White declares: 'I had no faith at all in the movement of May.' This is hardly true if we consider White's writings and activities at that time. White was then lecteur at the Pau campus of the University of Bordeaux. As in Glasgow, White founded a group, Feuillage, with its own magazine and headquarters, the Villa Formose. Such a group was to contribute towards the creation of a 'living university'. As White wrote, in the first issue, in January 1968: 'The aim of Feuillage will be to indicate as much of the totality as it can and at the same time to encourage subjectivity. It is the encounter of subjectivity and totality that alone gives reality.'

When the fire lit at Nanterre spread to the Latin Quarter and on to the campuses and factories of France, White was involved enthusiastically in the movement, demonstrating and distributing tracts. In June, as the movement subsided, the Pau authorities decided not to renew White's contract. According to his version of events, recounted later in *The Feathered Egg*, 'when the Spring came, and the Events, they suddenly saw me as a threat to their social existence—and if the reaction before was a kind of constipated criticism, now it was sheer hysteria.'[58]

In his writings immediately after the fact, White certainly takes the May events as an inspiration. In 'Towards a creative university', he writes: 'In May, the margin widened, and became a movement.'[59] 'The task of revolutionary work now is to accumulate, intensify and extend those marginal forces—the task of revolutionary, creative teaching.'[60] In another essay, White describes the phenomenon of May as 'a progressive movement against Progress, a cultural movement against Culture, a political movement against Politics, and a barbarian movement against what André Breton calls the Barbary of Civilisation.' There could be seen in the May uprising ' the beginnings of an existential revolt, making for a proto-revolutionary situation which Europe, the modern world, needs, and has for a long time needed.' The challenge to the Utopian situation of May was that it 'had to operate the political junction and it had to do so existentially, i.e. without falling into any of the old political ruts.' The problem, however, was that 'in France and the Europe, the world of 1968, there was no political form in which the existentialist negation could find expression.' The movement from mass insurrection to

return to work and Gaullist landslide was 'a kind of social equivalent of Rimbaud's existence.'

Despite this season in hell, White nevertheless holds out the fragile possibility of some conjunction of the cultural and the political. He writes: 'there is probably no such thing as a cultural revolution—a revolution is political, or it is not at all. But there can be a cultural movement which, working to its political head, can bring about a revolution. This cultural movement exists, and it has had, up to now, its most thorough and radical spokesman in Nietzsche.' Within the general framework of alienation it was possible for the individual 'to cultivate and individual plenitude of life and values such as friendship, love, imagination, art—and it is this plenitude and these values which the poet, the Hyperborean, to use Nietzsche's word, pushes to the limit, thereby creating another revolutionary force, but which is poetical-cultural, rather than social-political. There is the poet and there is the militant. But in May, there was a junction. The poets militated and the militants were poetic (the militant-militant and the poet-poet being, as it were, out of the running). That is, perhaps, why the movement "failed", but that was its essence, and it is a sign for the future. Progress, real human progress, will develop from this point.'

The movement of May embodying 'Marx and Freud meeting as it were in Fourier with his critique of civilisation', it was time to rediscover this Utopian thinker. In 1969, Jonathan Cape published White's translations of selected poems by André Breton and the Surrealist's *Ode to Charles Fourier*. In his preface to this ode, White presents Fourier as a precursor to those contemporary critics of everyday life, Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre. White mentions Fourier's plans for 'phalansteries', his passion for town-planning, and the extravagant theory of interpersonal and cosmic harmony through the joining of twelve passions in the 'white light' of 'uniteism'. White then turns to the prospects for contemporary change: 'for the last years, we have been witnessing the betrayal of the last great revolutionary movement, that of Socialism.' Nevertheless, 'there may still be enough fluctuant life-energy and moral-intellectual fire around to make for a new revolutionary climate, one that will not express itself perhaps in a sudden upheaval, but by a quiet, underground movement, by growth rather than revolt.' Referring to the opening sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*, White writes: 'the ghost, whatever may have been its subsequent mishaps within society, is

still there. And with it are the ghosts of all the other revolutionary ideas and movements that the world has known. For, however different they may be on the surface and however much they may even apparently be inter-antagonistic, they all stem from the one human urge towards liberty and joyance. In this perspective, Marx, Christ and Nietzsche, to mention only three (and three of the most apparently incompatible—though all meeting in Fourier) are, fundamentally, one. (. . .) The next revolutionary wave, if its is to achieve sufficient power and breadth, must be a synthesis of all previous ideas, and must unite, into one cohering mass, all the "ghosts". The task is greater and more fundamental than, though analogous to, the one faced by the Renaissance: regrounding, reintegration, reorientation.' 'What remains,' concludes White, 'is the idea of that white incandescence, and the uniteist world it signifies.'

As the May movement subsided, and the French Left thought of the strategy needed to dislodge the Right, the answer was nothing other than 'whiteism'. As for Britain, White held out little hope. In 1970, in an 'Open Letter to all Hyperboreans', published in Amsterdam, White criticises the parlous state of British poetry. British poetry had to renew contact with the 'north-western circumpolar cultural and psycho-mental complex'. But White was scarcely optimistic about that happening. Having last published creative work in Britain in 1968, with *The Most Difficult Area*, White would be unpublished there until 1989. During this long 'exile', White would be resolutely French and his fortunes would be determined by developments in the intellectual life of that country.

It was around this time that White came into real contact with the Situationist milieu. He recalls: 'I didn't really know about Situationism as such until after 1968, when the collected edition of the *Internationale situationniste* texts had appeared in Amsterdam. At that time I was working with a magazine in Amsterdam, *Raster*, that was kind of post-Provo and brought together a lot of radical ideas and a lot of live writing. It was in a critical article on the regular contributors to *Raster* that I was myself described as a "Situationist". I'd been in Paris, sure, when the IS was started up or shortly after—I arrived in Paris in October 59. But I had no contact with them. As with Trocchi, it was a case of similar background and analogous movement, but again with differences. The Situationists started out from Surrealism. During those four years of mine in Paris (1959-1963),

I was deeply into Surrealism—all its ins and outs, which means a lot more than the futile "Surrealism" that had been practised in Britain. But I was also involved in the theory and practice of anarchism, socialism, communism. And in the whole history of radical movements in Europe, from the Brothers of the Free Spirit to the Dukhobors, passing through the homines intelligentiae . . .The Situationists had something of the same background. I was interested in a lot of their thinking and practice. But at the same time I felt I was already engaged in a wider drift. Psychogeography is a case in point. It interested me. I'd practised something like it myself, both in Glasgow and Paris. But for me it was by now too strictly, too restrictedly urban. What I was later to work out as geopoetics has more scope and is more deeply grounded. And then there's the question of general strategy. Situationism was to swing between Guy Debord's strict revolutionism and Raoul Vaneigem's creative spontaneity. It lived out these contradictions for ten tears, till they led to scission and cessation. I continued, in the "wider drift" I evoked.'

The ebb of the 'revolutionary' tide indeed had consequences for the Situationist International. May 68 had been the SI's finest hour, and with that moment passed, Debord and his comrades believed that the SI had to be dissolved. May 68 had been followed by a leap in the circulation of *L'Internationale situationniste*. But a result of this success was the emergence of the 'pro-situ', the passive consumer of a spurious 'situationism'. Dissolution was a palliative to such creeping recuperation by the 'spectacle'. Other reasons for the SI's demise were financial problems (including *détournement* of funds) and communication difficulties. There were violent conflicts of personality, exacerbated by the SI's culture of expulsion and insult. Of some seventy people who passed through its ranks, sixty-six resigned or were expelled. In 1983, Trocchi told Greil Marcus: 'Guy thought the world was going to collapse on its own and we were going to take over. I wanted to do that—to take over the world. But you can't take over the world by excluding people from it! Guy wouldn't even *mention* the names of the people I was involved with—Timothy Leary, Ronnie Laing. I remember the last letter he sent me: "Your name sticks in the minds of decent men." He was like Lenin; he was an absolutist, constantly kicking people out—until he was the only one left. And exclusions were total. It meant ostracism, cutting people. Ultimately, it leads to shooting people—that's where it would have led, if Guy had ever "taken

over". And I couldn't shoot anyone.'[61] At the time of the SI's dissolution, in 1972, there were only two members remaining: Debord and Sanguinetti. Raoul Vaneigem remarked bitterly that the SI had failed to be a model for the new society. The SI—like Sigma before it—had shown its 'inability to harmonise intersubjective agreements and disagreements'.[62]

From the early seventies there was a powerful shift against Communism in France. In 1973, the Maoist Gauche prolétarienne was dissolved: the masses among whom these revolutionary intellectuals had chosen to swim revealed themselves to be uninterested in Revolution. In 1972, the signature of a Common Programme between the Socialist and Communist Parties marginalised the far Left, and filled with dread anti-Stalinist *soixante-huitards*. The brute reality of Mao's Cultural Revolution, then of Year Zero in Cambodia, and the boat-people crisis in Vietnam, became the occasion for public soul-searching by young ex-Maoist 'New Philosophers'. In 1974, the publication of a French translation of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was the opportunity for a massive attack on Marxist influence in French intellectual life.

Marxism, along with psychoanalysis and structuralism, were accused of being totalising, deterministic ideologies. Belief in 'progress', 'reason' had bequeathed Terror and genocide. New Philosophers such as Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann traced a Satanic genealogy that stretched from the Enlightenment to Hegel to Marx through to Stalin. Communism and Fascism were collapsed together under the label 'totalitarian'.

Against the 'master thinkers', against 'totality' and 'grand narratives of history', were opposed Nietzsche and nomadism. Sadie Plant sums up well the spirit of such intellectuals: 'gleeful sidestepping of convention and categorisation reappear throughout poststructuralist writing as a vital form of resistance to the ordered codes of discourse. Transcribing the situationist *dérive* from the city street to the domain of theory, Lyotard used the aimless playfulness of locomotion without a goal to describe the sort of drifting thought with which dialectical criticism can be abandoned, disallowing the arrogance of the theorist who judges, reflects and represents the world, and provides the only honest form of intellectual practice.'[63] Deleuze and Guattari championed the 'imaginary' against the 'symbolic'. They and Michel Foucault, among others, examined with Nietzschean suspicion the articulation of power and knowledge found in the work of the

analyst, the doctor or the theoretician. Resistance and radical change were to come from 'molecular' struggles by those outside mainstream society: the messianism of the proletariat was replaced by a multiplicity of struggles. One of the most important works of this period was Gilles Deleuze's *La Pensée nomade*, which can be read as a manifesto for post-68 radicalism. 'The nomad,' summarises Plant, 'bears a disruptive power and raises the spectre of individuals, social groups and forms of action which derive their strength from their very elusiveness. The outlaw, the mad and the disenfranchised; the unemployed, the dispossessed, and all those whose desires and behaviour are refused by the conventions of the established order, begin to constitute an unidentifiable "class", threatening not because of the place it assumes within capitalist society, but by virtue of its refusal of any place.'[64]

The new intellectual climate was propitious for Kenneth White, whose work (as well as that of Trocchi) was coloured by references to Nietzsche and nomadism. After being lecturer at the University of Paris VII, where he led a seminar entitled 'Orient-Occident', White embarked on two years of drifting across Europe then South-East Asia. From 1976 onwards, White's work began to be published frequently in France, beginning with a translation of *Incandescent Limbo*. Such works were received with considerable acclaim. In 1979, White successfully defended a Thèse de Doctorat d'Etat on 'le nomadisme intellectuel'. That same year, he adopted French nationality. White, who had abandoned his Glasgow PhD fifteen years previously, was now 'at home'.

Instrumental in the take-off of White's career in France was Michel Le Bris, of the publishing house Grasset. Le Bris's itinerary is typical of the 68 generation. Originally from the west of Brittany, Le Bris became active in the sixties Parisian cultural scene, founding *Le Magazine littéraire* in 1967 before becoming the director of *La Cause du peuple*, the journal of La Gauche prolétarienne. From 1972 onwards, Le Bris became interested in the struggles of marginal regions such as the Languedoc and his native Brittany. During this period, he founded and directed, with Jean-Paul Sartre, a collection 'La France sauvage' published by Gallimard. In essays and novels such as *Bretagne, renaissance d'un peuple* (1974) and *Hommes d'Oc* (1975), Le Bris criticises Marxism and the gauchiste adventure, and writes in favour of the 'spiritual' and of 'romantic' revolt. Le Bris subsequently became a promoter of travel-writing, republishing texts by Victor Hugo and

Robert Louis Stevenson, founding a review *Gulliver*, and the annual travel-writing festival at Saint-Malo, *Etonnants voyageurs*. Le Bris's interest in travel-writing has a political charge: he is asserting the freedom of the subject against determinisms such as Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism. Kenneth White, whom he publishes with Grasset—the publishing house of the New Philosphers—is a contemporary example of the radical nomadic subjectivity that Le Bris champions.

In the eighties, White was consecrated by the establishment. In 1983, White was elected to the Chair of Twentieth-century Poetics at the Sorbonne. In the same year, he received the Prix Médicis étranger for his Canadian way-book, *La Route bleue*. Other prestigious awards followed: the Grand Prix de rayonnement de l'Académie francaise, in 1985, then being made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, in 1986.

In White's oeuvre since the early eighties, there has been the virtual abandonment of verse poetry and 'way-books'. The bulk of his work has been essay-writing on themes of 'nomadism' and 'geopoetics'. Explorations and proselytising have been accompanied by the eventual foundation of the Institut International de Géopoétique.

White's essays are shorn of the residues of revolutionary humanism that could be found immediately after May 68. In *L'Esprit nomade*, White writes: 'Nietzsche acknowledged the death of God. Foucault announced the death of Man. The nomad is one who, without lamentation, sets off in this extreme situation and who, avoiding the domain of sub-gods and supermen, crossing the neutral ground, ventures forth into a new force-field, along unheard-of beaches (. . .) The nomad is also the one who leaves the motorway of history, as well as the pathogenic cities that line it, and who plunges into a landscape where there are occasionally no more paths, tracks, even traces.' Nomadism means leaving behind fixed identities and established frames of reference, becoming something 'other in a multidimensional, polytopian space.'[65]

One inevitable casualty of the nomad's outward movement is the twentieth century's greatest philosophy of history: 'We are now well out of the alternative proposed by Marxism'.[66] Instead, White is engaged in what he calls a *dérive anarcho-nihiliste et géopoétique*. As companions in this *dérive*, White finds the 'geoanarchists' Reclus and Kropotkin, and Russian nihilists of the late nineteenth century. Predictably, Albert Camus is championed

for is critique of totality and revolution in *The Rebel*.

For the first time in his theoretical work White acknowledges the importance of the Situationists. He does, however insist on distinguishing between the 'white' Situationist, Raoul Vaneigem—a 'Fourierist-Surrealist' proponent of poetry—and the 'black' Situationist, Guy Debord—a 'people's commissar' enamoured with class struggle and revolutionary discipline. White recognises the origins of the *dérive* with the Surrealists, but accuses them of not breaking out of initiatic schemas and a crude dialectic of spirit and matter. The Situationists, however, interest White for apparently passing, in the *dérive*, from the historical dialectic to psychogeography. This break with the past is furthered by Lyotard in his *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*. 'The aim,' interprets White, 'is no longer the overthrow of an order but the deployment of an energy.'[67]

With the new nomadic spirit it is a question 'not of reviving Genghis Khan or Geronimo, but of maintaining a logic other than that of a history, a logic more geographical, a geopoetic logic.'[68] White refers approvingly to the 'geographies of desire' in the thought of Deleuze, and finds implications for society in Fernand Deligny's psycho-geography, which involves using the landscape to alleviate the sufferings of schizophrenic children. Also joining the nomadic confluence is fractal geometry, with its science of contours, ruptures and discontinuities.

The geopoetic project is developed further in *Le Plateau de l'albatros*. White's ambition is considerable: 'With the geopoetic project we are not dealing with yet another cultural "variety", nor with a literary school, nor with poetry conceived as art of the intimate. We are talking about a movement which concerns the way in which man founds his existence on the earth.'[69] The new 'poetics' would be new coherence, a new alliance of poetry, philosophy and science. While, in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, East and West were caught up in their own forms of despair and disarray, the geopoetic project would aim for a new 'world', which is to say, a new and healthy relationship between the human mind and the earth. This might strike the reader as infuriatingly vague, but White remarks: 'a global definition would be contrary to the current logic of openness.'[70]

This justifies distrust of the political: 'politics is (. . .) always very quick to imprison any thought with its stifling categories'.[71] There however remains the problem of effective collaboration in any common project. White reflects on this in a chapter he

devotes to the Collège de Sociologie. What is at stake, White argues, is how an individual can contribute to collective action 'without sacrificing his individual strength, in an intelligent association which is not founded on race, language, territory, historical tradition or political ideology, and which would thus constitute an islet of density capable of attracting the refugees of a society in the process of disintegration.'[72] The Collège de Sociologie had such ambitions, but was split by conflicts of personality and method. White does not offer an answer, but a question: 'where can we find, today, the bases of a new general language which is psychologically profound, aesthetically compelling and if possible, sociologically effective?'[73]

It can be seen from this how much White fits in with the postmodern current: emphasis on nomadism, drift, anarchy, play of energy, geography; refusal of Marxism, system and teleology. However, White's geopoetics is very much postmodernism 'light', with his rigid binary oppositions Man/Earth and Geography/ History. A postmodernist like Jean Baudrillard has taken theory of the 'spectacle' to nihilistic extremes, claiming that all is in simulation, that there are only copies and no originals. For White, however, images are not necessarily mystificatory: in passages of *Le Plateau de l'albatros* on Bachelard, Pound and Oriental art, he argues for images that offer the 'penetration' of a universe. In White's work there is a sense of an authentic relationship between man and the earth, which was lost under the welter of Christianity, Cartesianism and Communism, among other culprits, but which just might be revived. It is the pursuit of this richer, more authentic 'world' that is the declared ambition of the Institut International de Géopoétique.

The Institut was founded in April 1989. According to White's inaugural text: 'What marks this end of the twentieth century, beyond all the chatterings and secondary discourses, is the return of the fundamental, that is to say, the poetic. Every creation of the mind is, fundamentally, poetic. It is now a question of knowing where we can find the most necessary and fertile poetics and apply it. If, around 1978, I began to talk about 'geopoetics' it is, on the one hand, because the earth (the biosphere) was, obviously, more and more threatened, and we had to address this in a both profound and effective way, and, on the other hand, because it has always appeared to me that the richest poetics came from a contact with the earth, from plunging into the biosphere, from attempting to read the lines of the earth. Since then, the word has

been taken up here and there, in different contexts. The moment has come to concentrate these currents of energy in a unitary field. [. . .] Geopoetics offers a terrain for meeting and reciprocal stimulation, not only between poetry, thought and science, but between the most diverse disciplines, as soon as they are ready to leave often too restricted frameworks and to enter a global space (cosmological, cosmopoetic) by asking themselves the fundamental question: what is it with life on earth, what is it with the world? A whole network can be weaved, a network of energies, desires, competences, intelligences. '

In the pages of the *Cahiers de géopoétique*, there is little consciousness of historical precedents. A small exception is an essay, in the third issue, by Georges Amar on Surrealism and Geopoetics. 'Surrealism,' writes Amar, 'by the privilege it accords the "inner world" seems to be the opposite of geopetics, placed as it is under the sign of the outdoors. However, through the intermediary of myths, it gave (or amplified) an elan to the desire to meet non-western cultures which, for the most part, are much more "geopoetic" than our own.'[74] Surrealism had attempted to reconcile 'inner' and 'outer', but had failed due to a lack of 'space'. The Institut International de Géopoétique is an inheritor of this movement: it aims for 'interest' in the etymological sense: *inter-esse*, being together. 'The aim of geopoetics is to make the earth interesting again. So that the earth, the earth itself, the beings-of-the-earth, away from any symbolic overcoding or functionalist reduction, become the interesting, passionate, marvellous thing.'[75] 'Poetry' would be the authentic communication between man and earth, and in this re-mapping, 'travel is to geopoetics what the dream was to Surrealism.'[76]

Amar is right to point out affinities between Surrealism and geopoetics: the ambition of scope; the interest in non-western culture; the relationship between 'inner' and 'outer'. However, Amar skirts around Surrealism's political ambitions—despite and because of the French Communist Party—and the internal tensions which undermined it, especially the overweaning power of André Breton. Amar does not address the relation of geopoetics to the Surrealist interest in urban space. There is no mention of the Situationist International or of Project Sigma, which form a bridge between Surrealism and Geopoetics, and which carry their own radical charge and inner contradictions. Such blindness, and Amar's emphasis on exoticism and the 'earth', are typical of the contents of the *Cahiers de Géopoétique*.

In the *Cahiers* can be found multidisciplinary—if not interdisciplinary—attempts at 'remapping' the earth. There is poetry from Kenneth White, Jean-Pierre Morisset, Alain Jouffroy and Hugh MacDiarmid. From mathematicians there is work on fractal geometry and the represenatation of natural phenomena such as coast-lines and forest edges. Anthropologists contribute work on aboriginal art and Chinese geomancy. A specialist of the philosophy of Bachelard, Jean-Jacques Wunenberger, meditates on how the imagination can enable a more authentic inhabitation of space. The psychotherapist, Jack Doron, makes suggestive sketches of a 'geopoetics of the psyche', exploring relationships between 'mindscape' and 'archaic landscape' and its use in treating patients. There is some cross-over between disciplines: an artist writes of combining painting and geography to render more fully a landscape; a cartographer proposes a mapping of the oceans which combines the rational and the sensual. A main feature of the *Cahiers* is the creation of a geopoetic canon: travelling *savants* such as Humboldt, Linné and Chateaubriand, who manage to combine poetry, philosophy and science.

The geopoeticians have a problem as to what on earth the 'earth' is, carpeted as it is with houses, roads and fields. In the *Cahiers*, the landscapes are as primitive, distant and 'non-human' as possible: Lapland, the Amazonian jungle, the prairies and deserts of America.

The *Cahiers* are dominated by Kenneth White. He is director of the review, and his wife is its secretary. White always contributes at least twice to each issue. The other articles also bear his stamp: his works are frequently cited; the essays follow an initiatic schema used by White's essays on figures as diverse and complex as Humboldt, MacDiarmid and Pound: voyage, contact with an exotic 'other', deconditioning, cosmos, complex form, etc. White's collaborators engage in building extensions to a hall of mirrors in which their spiritual guide can recognise himself.

As for the organisation itself, if Project Sigma was very much a transatlantic 'underground' network, the Institut International de Géopoétique is dominantly French, with small outcrops in Yugoslavia, Belgium, Scotland and Quebec. The different *ateliers* of this 'archipelago' vow to follow the traces of Kenneth White: the Belgrade group is working on the translation of White's work into Serbo-Croat; the Aquitaine group has a Kenneth White archive. The Atelier de la Seine has its own Whitean *dérive*: a walk across the countryside, exploring the terrain and gathering

flotsam and jetsam: 'Poetry is replanted among the trees and the rocks, at the edge of the sea or the clearing. '

It would be churlish to dismiss an Institute which has attracted hundreds of members, produces intermittently an interesting, glossy review, and organises colloquia and exhibitions, among other activities. Nevertheless, such an ambitious project must be judged lucidly. As the most significant attempt by White to create the necessary 'groupments' about which he has written for thirty years, the Institute is less an 'archipelago' than a model of France, with the Whitean *métropole* dominating the periphery. For better and for worse, it is White who defines the 'new coherence'. It can be seen as a result of the 'outsider' persona: the self-affirming, solitary Hyperborean is hardly going to engage in collaborative work on equal terms. It is a familiar story, seen with Project Sigma and the SI: the rise of a dominant personality, exacerbated by the emergence of admirers and consumers. It remains to be seen if Kenneth White will become bored with dominance, or if rival personalities will emerge in the Institut.

The geopoetic project is undermined by its facile distinction between geography and history. The geopoeticians are unaware, or do not want to be aware, that many of the barren landscapes that they love are such because of millennia of human exploitation. There is no awareness of how historically-bound the notion of 'Nature' is, of how our relationship to the non-human is mediated by the economy, or of how global capital colonises and disrupts the environment. Nomadism, after all, is highly problematical in a world criss-crossed with national and property boundaries. Yves Lacoste, who insists on the military origins and use of cartography, makes a telling point about real-life nomads: 'Why do the nomads fight? Firstly because the administrations that the new States impose on the Saharan and Sub-Saharan regions, have almost all a phobia of nomads and seek to control them, to "sedentarise" them under the pretext of "development", in order to make them pay taxes, disarm them and settle old accounts between nomads and sedentary people.'[78] In the geopoetic project there is a flight from the reality of an increasingly populated and urbanised world. This contrasts with Sigma and the SI's passionate interest in town-planning and in space as a key to good living.

The geopoetic fetishisation of the 'earth' is accompanied by a fetishisation of 'culture', to the exclusion of the political and the economic. The Surrealists and SI tried and failed to effectively

combine cultural and political activity. Trocchi and Sigma aimed instead for an invisible insurrection that involved artists seizing the mans of expression. The Institut International de Géopoétique has a haughty disdain for the decadence of our world, but its language is shorn of vocabulary of 'revolt', 'insurrection', let alone 'revolution'. In the editorial of the third issue of the *Cahiers de Géopoétique*, White writes: 'Today, at the time of writing these lines, there are efforts to create a new Europe. The politico-economic structures are there. The cultural idea, the poetic culture, not yet.' It is a breathtaking statement: as if the neo-liberal project of European integration was not contested, or if it did not have ramifications for culture and the environment. In such a statement, 'geopoetics' reveals itself as a mere palliative, a *supplément d'ame* to the post-Marxist, postmodern consensus around *la pensée unique*. White and 'outsiders' like him are too comfortable or too disillusioned to believe that political economy could be of any relevance.

It was remarked above that Trocchi and White's interest in 'space' placed them in a Scottish intellectual tradition of which Patrick Geddes is an illustrious representative. It should be said, however, that Geddes transcends Trocchi and White's narrowly cultural perspectives, with his explorations of relations between 'work', 'place' and 'folk'. This makes for a 'geopoetic' project that is more realistic, more demanding and potentially more subversive.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay, we have seen not only the complexities of the 'outsider' personae cultivated by Trocchi and White, but also how their sympathetically megalomaniacal projects have been vitiated by their cultural scope, leading to social ineffectiveness and interpersonal conflict. There is something inevitable about this: Trocchi and White are cultural actors, and their creativity is charged with subjectivity and refusal of 'utility'.

The question remains of how and why Trocchi and White should relate to contemporary Scottish culture. That both were 'rediscovered' at the turn of this decade is perhaps pure coincidence. What is not coincidental is how many have looked upon them: as 'outsiders' they satisfy a need for self-regarding talk about how Scotland has neglected 'her' writers. This does nothing but continue the misunderstanding of Trocchi and White. This is compounded by pigeonholing one as a precursor of the junkie literature of Irvine Welsh et al, and the other as a brainy hippy with a healthy taste for the great outdoors and all things French. It would do these writers more justice to pay attention to their intellectual ambition which even, especially when failing, is interesting. But this also means confronting shibboleths of 'cultural identity'.

Villa Formose

I'd been wandering for years in the fogs of Glasgow
still in its late industrial phase
(gulls wailing over the Clyde's dirty waters
a hundred wastelands)
reading Spengler and Toynbee
Eliot and Thomas de Quincey
who had lived in the Rottenrow
up on the city's old hill
beside Kentigern's cathedral . . .

at the top of another hill
(Gilmorehill, the University quarters)
I'd started up the Jargon Group
doing talks and poetry readings
(in churches, in the philosophy amphitheatre)
publishing pamphlets
that were relayed from London
by Trocchi's para-situationist Sigma Centre
to a band of people all over the world
including Ronald Laing, the 'anti-psychiatrist'
and *Naked Lunch* Burroughs in Tangiers

Pau, at that time, didn't have a university
it had a 'collège litteraire'
linked to Bordeaux
housed in the Villa Formose
near the Allées de Morlaas

while ostensibly and officially
teaching 'English language and literature'
I was in reality delving into
culture-analysis
and the question of expression

I started up the *Groupe Feuillage*
thinking of Whitman
('Always our old feuillage
always the free range and diversity')
talking about a Creative University

ready to begin again from Pau (manok)

the group grew
the little magazine *Feuillage* began to flutter in the breeze
this was the Autumn of '67 and the Winter of '68

when the month of May came
I listened like everybody else to the news from Paris
and read the literature

I had no faith at all in the movement of May
then, as now, I could only believe in some long-term policy
but at least this was a cloud in the face of complacency
so I had to go with it

this meant issuing tracts
organizing meetings
manifesting in various ways

so that, if before
I was poet and outsider
now to those who were convinced they had authority
I became anathema

in June I was told
my contract would not be renewed
some people even thought
I'd been 'invited' to leave the country for good

'The university doesn't need brilliant minds'
declared a Palois professor
(whose conception of British civilization
was London clubs, the Royal family and the Derby)
thereby complimenting me with the left hand
while throwing me out with the right

well, the June air was bright

I raised my eyes to the hills

in Kenneth White, *Memoires pyreneens* (Vallougues: PUP, 1995, pp. 16-20)