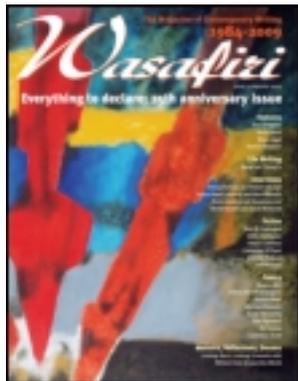


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An Interview with Hari Kunzru

NETWORKS, FINANCE CAPITAL AND THE FATE OF THE NOVEL

Max
Haiven

Hari Kunzru (b. 1969) is a British-born author, journalist and essayist who lives and works in New York. He is the author of four novels and numerous articles which have appeared in publications including Wired, The Guardian, The Washington Post, The Times of India and The London Review of Books. His first novel, The Impressionist, published in 2002, won the Betty Trask Prize, the Somerset Maugham Award and the Pendleton May first novel award and was nominated for many others. His second and third novels, Transmission (2004) and My Revolutions (2007), were both published by Penguin, and Transmission was translated into eighteen languages. His most recent novel, Gods Without Men (2012) has received highly favourable reviews in The New York Times, The Paris Review, The Guardian and Kirkus among others.

Kunzru is also a prolific short story writer and essayist with wide-ranging interests including global politics and economics, contemporary art, film and literature, architecture and urban space, and political and literary theory. He was named Observer Young Travel Writer of the Year in 1999 and has written about places including Japan, Cambodia, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Benin and Honduras. From 1995 to 1997 he was Associate Editor at Wired magazine. He currently sits on the editorial board of Mute, a groundbreaking London-based magazine.

Hari and I spoke near his home in Clinton Hill in Brooklyn in mid-October 2012.

Max Haiven I'd like to begin with a quotation from Douglas Coupland in his review of your latest novel *Gods Without Men* in the *New York Times* (8 Mar. 2012). He places your work alongside authors like Michael Cunningham and David Mitchell within a 'a new literary genre' he calls 'Translit'. He argues that narratives of this type 'span geography without changing psychic place', inserting 'the contemporary reader into other locations and times, while leaving no doubt that its

viewpoint is relentlessly modern and speaks entirely of our extreme present'. He continues 'imagine travelling back to Victorian England — only with vaccinations, a wad of cash and a clean set of ruling-class garb. With Translit we get our very delicious cake, and we get to eat it, too, as we visit multiple pasts safe in the knowledge we'll get off the ride intact, in our bold new perpetual every-era/no-era.' What do you make of that?

Hari Kunzru Obviously there'd be an element of looking gift horses in their mouths if I disagreed with some of his terms. I think he's right to identify two uses of history in the novel. I could characterise one as history-for-romance, a sort of distancing device to heighten some set of situations or ideas, like in more conventional historical novels. But there's another use of history, which is a way of interrogating the present, and I would say that's how I've used history in my own work. Where I part company with Coupland is where he says we're in some sort of post-historical moment; that there's some sort of flattening of affect as well as a flattening of time and everything is available to us. First, I'm quite suspicious of any sort of 'end of history' arguments because I think they're highly ideological and serve to naturalise the present in a way that's not always helpful. And secondly, I think he misidentifies one thing with another. One thing that has definitely changed for the writer, and more generally for our experience of the past, is the availability of archive. The internet essentially gives us this kind of friction-free archival access that we haven't had up to this point, and that certainly makes the past available in a way that perhaps it wasn't before. But I don't think that's the same as the sort of atemporality Coupland is suggesting, an experience of the flattening of time. I think we live in a highly historically specific moment that has its own texture, its own quality and that will in turn be historicised in the future.

So I'm not sure about the 'trans' aspect of his term Translit. Coupland thinks both David Mitchell and I have an

interest in setting up resonances between different bits of story, so *Gods Without Men* connects a series of echoes or rhymes by using different stories which take place in different times. I see this idea about going back in time with a set of vaccinations and a clean set of ruling class clothes as his thing, not mine. I'm actually quite interested in distance in a way, in maybe the opposite. But I'm also interested in how we understand temporality and history as progressive or cyclical.

MH Has your approach to time and history changed over the years? An earlier novel like *The Impressionist*, which takes place in India, England and Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, seems like a more traditionally narrative historical fiction. And *My Revolutions* is also about two very particular times told in one narrative voice — that of a radical activist in the 1970s and in the present. But *Gods Without Men* jumps around between different characters and times and in fact plays with history, temporality and casualty between those periods in really interesting ways.

HK I think I've edged my way gradually towards something. I'd say if *The Impressionist* is traditional, then it's a traditional postmodern novel in that it's a book about books, and very much a highly self-conscious response to the canon of literary writing about India. On the surface it's a very picturesque novel, full of elephants and the spice market and all the furniture of the Raj novel. *My Revolutions* tries to pretend it speaks to a particular time in a particular place... it's a New Left novel. But it was my way of trying to address very contemporary questions about political violence, ideological commitment and making change and whether it's possible to use force in support of your politics, by going back to this period before I was born. It interrogates the 1960s nostalgia that I certainly grew up with, which was a huge thing for me growing up in the '80s, in this very conservative moment where the revolution was a long, long way away in psychological or concrete terms. *My Revolutions* was about me trying to imagine being twenty-one in a moment when it seemed that you might be about to have this millennial change. That moment was always very fascinating to me.

Now *Gods Without Men* is a book about God, the way that to be human is to find some liveable way of orienting yourself towards the unknown or the unknowable, whether you decide there is some sense of transcendental meaning or some sort of stable or theoretical story you want to tell, or whether you feel there is some sort of void you're in relation to. I'm interested in the way the structure of religious yearning and mystical experience is very constant, but the contents change. From that theme a certain form became an obvious way of proceeding: to make a lot of parallels; to tell the same story with different kinds of furniture; and to tell it in fragments. All these stories break off and a lot happens in the silences between them. There are lots of gaps and deliberate unknowns. In the novel I break that primary 'contract' with the reader. At the heart of that book there's something that doesn't add up. In general it's a fairly realist, textured book, but there's kind of an impossibility in it, something that drains meaning away... There's also the mythic dimension with the Coyote figure turning up as a character who may or may not be this gnarly meth-dealing human hippie, but may also be the

embodiment of this mythic, motive principle. There's an interrogation of a kind of realist storytelling that I'm interested in, which gradually edged on from my first book.

MH In *Gods Without Men*, you weave together a number of interesting themes including our current moment of financial crisis, the rise of new age spirituality and also, in a certain way, the idea of what the novel itself is. I wonder if these three themes are all ways of interpreting causality and the structure of events, of giving narrative meaning to the chaotic things that happen in life?

HK It seemed important to me to talk about the market in a book about American faith. It's there in the very fabric and language: credit, credo, I believe. What fascinates me is the essential nature of value, especially when you're talking about highly abstracted objects. If everybody believes Google shares are worth 'X' today, that makes it so. Consensus emerges out of the beliefs of actors in the market. We live in a world of increasing volatility and intensity, and I find the type of instruments used in the markets, the emergence of high frequency trading (HFT) and that kind of supra human aspect particularly interesting. So on one level I'm trying to map faith in the market onto other forms of faith and belief, and then there's a political question I want to ask about what markets are for. I identify as someone of the Left, but I think there's a lot of rather crude thinking on the Left about markets, a kind of residual Marxist notion that 'markets' equate directly to capitalism, and capitalism is a bad thing. But twentieth-century experiments with command economies have shown fairly definitively that the worst way to organise soap production is to have a committee in Moscow try and top-down direct where resources should go. The social function of markets is to help us organise production by means of price signals, they are a useful tool.

But when you get into what happens with complex derivatives and technologies like HFT, you get to a point where the basic social role of markets is very unclear. If the point is to say 'Hey there's a demand for coffee in Clinton Hill, let's direct some of our energies towards providing it', that's one thing, but that's not happening in fractions of a second. There's no social utility to HFT unless you buy the argument, proposed by some, that it has improved access to the market and hence made the market more stable. A really interesting Marxist category is socially necessary labour, which is his idea of the origin of value — there's a notion of social utility. We're very shy of that category because it involves someone determining what might be socially useful instead of it emerging in some sort of perfectly untrammelled way out of the functioning of the market itself. But, in HFT we have what looks increasingly like a parasitical double world that is preying on the socially useful functions of markets to hive off profit for the people who have access to and control of the tools.

And then there's also the whole business of emergence. Since the brave days of the early '90s I've been very fascinated with chaos and complexity theory. The first time I saw a Mandelbrot set¹ it led me to James Gleick² and Stuart Kauffman³ and trying to get my head around the idea that complex phenomena can emerge from the interaction of very simple large populations of actors. A market is clearly one



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example and now, with the increasing volatility brought about by new technological instruments for trading, huge changes can emerge and blossom and fade away in seconds. And this is fascinating, beautiful and scary all at once. Just today nine per cent was wiped off Google shares because of a leaked email, or the ‘flash crash’ in 2010 which saw the Dow plunge and then recover almost ten per cent in mere minutes. Now it’s often machines trading against machines, human actors are not the only actors in the market, we have a sort of cyborg situation.

There’s always been a kind of hidden mystical history of traders in the stock market. What interested me was the idea of thinking about this as a sort of research into the nature of existence, that someone interacting all the time with these extraordinarily complex, changing, very beautiful, abstract systems might come to believe they were in some way getting glimpses of the face of God. The one kind of semi-hidden joke in *Gods Without Men* is that it features a computer financial model called ‘Walter’ after Walter Benjamin⁴ who, through his friend, the radical Jewish theologian Gershom Scholem, became very interested in Kabbala and the Kabbalistic notion that the world, which was once whole, has been *zerstreut*, fragmented, scattered, and that it takes the scholar or Kabbalist to sift through and do algorithmic work on those fragments, looking for these sparks which could be put back together again to restore the world to wholeness. This is the project of the hedge fund in the novel, the kind of second agenda. Instead of purely making money, there is this capitalist recuperation of things.

The two central people in the book are Jaz and Lisa. Jaz is a scientifically trained sceptic, who works as a financial architect for an investment bank, who’s very uncomfortable in the face of the infinite and who believes everything should be potentially knowable. But at the same time, when he’s faced with what seems to be these kind of mystical correlations between totally different phenomena in the world, he finds it terrifying and repellent, and finds the lead financial architect Cy Bachman’s obsession with ‘Walter’ the opposite of everything he can handle. Whereas Lisa, his wife, is a figure who wants to believe and has that sort of soft-core new-ageism that seems to be the side effect of having a liberal arts education; the sort of middle-class mysticism where people start off going to a yoga class and before long they’re

telling you about homeopathy. There’s a crude cultural split in this husband and wife relation. Lisa’s response to the undecipherable thing that happens to their missing son while he’s away is to have faith, in Kierkegaardian terms to make the leap into faith. Jaz is unable to do that and he develops a kind of paranoid, over-determined quality to what he sees around him. He knocks his head against it and is more and more troubled, especially by the change in his son.

As you know, the ideology of the market is an economic model of man as a rational actor who is motivated by self-interest. But that liberal individualist notion has great trouble with ideas of community and people who behave in ways which cannot be modelled economically — which we don’t, always. The newish discipline of behavioural finance is an attempt to address this, which is very interesting to me. You can read people like the Nobel Prize winning economist Daniel Kahneman, whose popular book *Thinking Fast and Slow* is an attempt to bring the quantifiable assumptions and tendencies which can be modelled to seemingly non-quantifiable aspects of human behaviour. But it’s about the sovereign individual and the threat posed to that model if you allow in certain ideas about community and the constructed nature of desire. If your wish for an iPod is not an expression of your sovereign free will, but is in some way the product of coercion, then what happens to the Republican Party? I’m very interested in modelling as a way of understanding the world, and that’s essentially what these ‘quants’ are doing with the quantitative approach to trading; you make the model which seems to be an accurate representation of the world for a finite amount of time, because of course the model becomes an actor in the market and then changes the thing that it’s modelling. So these models have a shelf life, you get a better model. In general, I’m very interested in simulation as a way of knowing the world as very characteristic of the present day, and the way certain things are possible to understand intuitively through simulation that wouldn’t be in a top-down way.

MH It seems that this approach allows you to take apart and work thorough some very difficult themes in contemporary culture. One of them is the idea of precarity, in the more conventional sense of precarious workers and work in the so-called ‘new economy’, which is increasingly part-time, temporary, deskilled and reliant on global flows. I’m thinking here of a character like Arjun in *Transmission*, who is a software designer working for an Indian firm that basically rents him out as a temporary labourer in America. And this idea of precarity also opens out onto some other themes you address in that novel and others — the increasing precariousness and uncertainty of life and existence under the global capitalist system as it now stands. Is this theme informed by your relationship with *Mute* magazine, which has really been at the forefront of unpacking precarity in a non-fiction mode?

HK Yeah, I have to say that *Mute* has been one of the most important intellectual contexts for my work in that there’s a group of people around there who’ve done a lot of very serious connecting together of different areas. I have only intermittently ever had any kind of institutional affiliation or secure group identity. My dominant experience is of floating through the world as a freelancer, which is a sort of upscale

precarity that was very fetishised in the '90s — one of the comedic terms floating around was the 'flexexecutive'.

Transmission is a comic novel about the emergence of a global class system based on freedom of movement. At the top end there is a kind of friction-free first-class lounge... every hotel room looks more or less much the same and has the same ten things in the mini-bar — the world that the character Guy Swift, the young CEO of his own branding company, is in. At the bottom end there are people for whom movement is either impossible or involuntary and for whom crossing borders is hugely troubling and traumatic. And in the middle are people like Arjun, who is a precarious worker in the sense that he's outsourced, without the benefits and security that a generation or two ago it was considered normal to have. He's highly mobile and has enough skills to get himself from one place to another and be welcomed as a migrant, but he's not high enough up the food chain to be in control of his destiny.

It brings us back to the logic of the market and especially the financialisation of almost everything. As capital looks at new sources of value, it has to bust open things that were previously unavailable to it. It requires a workforce that is highly mobile, highly motivated (ie highly insecure) and that will flow towards whatever site and configure itself in whatever way is useful to the controllers of capital. It seems to me there is a terrible poverty in the model of a free economic agent making his sovereign decisions entrepreneurially as he goes through the world and succeeding by the sweat of his brow. And that's really mirrored by a kind of character psychology that you find in a lot of well-regarded fiction which treats its characters as if they are these kinds of agents. It's not something I've really unpicked in non-fiction yet, but I would like to write about the way a certain mainstream bourgeois novelistic character psychology just accepts the terms and conditions given by this ideological picture of the economic individual. It's another hope I have for fiction that, by presenting people as enmeshed in networks and social structures, you can actually get past this kind of character psychology which is no longer fit for purpose.

MH I wanted to ask you about the ways you work with the theme of race and racism in your novels. *The Impressionist* looks at the early twentieth century, British imperialist complexities of race, often in extremely sophisticated but also very humorous ways. As you said, in *Transmission* you're dealing with themes of race and mobility and globalisation. And in *Gods Without Men* you delve into this as well, in the very intimate and difficult tensions in Jaz and Lisa's marriage, and also in the very funny but telling episode that takes place in a US Marine training camp in the Mojave desert, where Iraqi-Americans are hired to act as Iraqi villagers in war games.

HK Yes, another simulation... I grew up in a place at a time when the category of race was being quite violently contested. 1980s Britain was in deep trouble about that stuff and I lived in the London suburbs where racism was, quite weirdly, a major part of most people's make-up, given that it was a fairly economically privileged place. I grew up with this racial terminology being applied to me and I couldn't understand, as a kid, why it seemed so important to do a lot of taxonomy and interrogation about 'What are you?', 'You are mixed race',

'You're some sort of blend', 'There's some sort of impurity and some sort of complexity to your identity'. It was never 'Oh, my dad was a migrant and that's my story.' It was a point when biological racism hadn't purely given in to cultural racism, the terrain on which it all takes place now. I mean, the British National Party these days won't touch notions of biological inferiority, they'll always talk about 'culture'. In a way they've taken a lot of social-democrat European terminology on board and turned it on its head. But biology was still a category when I was a kid in the 1980s and the postcolonial history was still contested.

As I've got older a lot has moved on, but I've always had a sense that identity is complex and shifting; it's constructed and something that you sort of put together for yourself out of whatever place you're given or whatever social hand you're dealt. This idea strikes me as an important one for tolerance.

People often have a very violent nostalgia for an imagined past of unity and wholeness, which can be pretty scary. So satire and humour is a useful way of undercutting the pomposity of the would-be Arthurian knight with eternal Englishness on his shield who bashes the Other with his sword. I've always been very aware that it's not a question that white people are racist and everyone else is having a hard time. There's a kind of *La Ronde* of racism in that everyone's taking it from somebody and dishing it out to somebody else.

Post-9/11 there's been a really interesting new fault line that's opened up around Islam and ideas of the Enlightenment; all sorts of people seem to have discovered they're defenders of the Enlightenment and the champions of reason. You know, I'm an atheist and I'm very hostile to dogmatic religious explanations that close down interpretations of the world and are fundamentally intolerant. But at the same time I can't get behind this righteous Enlightenment secularism that is being retailed by — mysteriously — a lot of privileged white guys.

It's a very funny road to tread, because you end up with some very strange bedfellows on both sides. I've ended up on pro-free-speech platforms in the UK with libertarians who are quite far to the Right. And years ago the actor Corin Redgrave got a bunch of us together to be part of the Guantanamo Human Rights Commissions, very early on after 9/11 when people were starting to be disappeared and there was no public platform to talk about it. And I then ended up on panels with young, bearded Muslim activists who were the sort who were absolutely down on the idea of human rights and felt it was a discourse that allowed people in charge to insult and oppress them.

So the old biological race stuff is still around but now we're into really peculiar territory about culture, difference and the opposition between faith and reason. And not being a person of faith doesn't mean that, in some straightforward way, I align myself with the self-defined 'champions of reason', because there's a kind of instrumental, technocratic quality to what they're proposing, which has its troubling side as well.

MH This recalls the situation at the Jaipur Literary Festival in 2011 where you got in some trouble...

HK That's exactly in the middle of that particular fault line. I'm all for, on the one side, defending Rushdie. We had seven

court cases brought against us, some of which are still running. I haven't actually been formally charged with anything. There are a lot of speech laws in India that can potentially close down debate on the grounds of sedition or blasphemy. Oddly enough, we were reading passages from *The Satanic Verses* about doubt, and that was deemed (by some people who weren't present) as inherently blasphemous or at least tending to disturb the peace in some way. Muslim religious leaders in India, as elsewhere, are expert at marshalling offence. You see it in a depressingly predictable way — the dumb movie about Islam which that Coptic Christian guy in California put together earlier this year that essentially kicked off riots all over the place.

There's also a conspiracy theory version of what I did among certain people in India. I am technically a high-caste Hindu, and the other guys who read are also technically high-caste Hindus, though actually none of us are practising, and I've never even performed my sacred thread ceremony or had any formal induction. The difficulty in India is that Muslims are marginalised in many ways. They tend to be at the bottom of the socio-economic heap. Historically that's why a lot of people low down in the Hindu caste system became Muslim, because the Muslim belief in the Ummah and the brotherhood of all men is incredibly attractive, it has a lot in common with the sort of Left internationalism that I feel good about. And the Jaipur Literary Festival is also a very privileged space of elite India, with global celebrities like Oprah wandering around. So, within this supposedly safe space, to sort of loftily insult Islam is perceived partly in class terms.

It's an act that had an incredibly complex set of consequences and it ultimately culminated with me having to actually leave the country, and a physical invasion of the Festival by street activists led by local Muslim political leaders, who were basically marshalling their forces in support of one or other of the local political parties. After I left, there was a very interesting moment when poor, working-class Muslims were in the crowd at the festival ready to start violence if Salman Rushdie appeared on a video screen. It was very stressful for everybody concerned.

And of course there were wheels within wheels. Rushdie didn't appear because there was a death threat. I was scheduled to stage an interview with him. The Rajasthani Police Intelligence said, 'Three named guys are coming up from Bombay to kill you', so he said at that point he had to withdraw, because it wasn't clear they could supply the sort of security he'd need — it's an open air space. We made the protest, it all kicked off, we left. Salman actually went to Suketu Mehta, who has connections to the Bombay underworld from his non-fiction work in the Maximum City slum in Mumbai and knows guys he can run the names of gangsters past and who will tell him who's who. And they apparently laughed like hell — the names were made up gangster names, the equivalent of 'Lefty One-Eye'. And what transpired was that the Rajasthani Police Intelligence and the chief minister had concocted this death threat as a face-saving way of keeping Rushdie out of their territory in the run-up to a highly contested election in which they needed the Muslim vote. So no one comes out of this very cleanly. And depending who you ask, I'm a grandstanding self-publicist trying to get attention for his shitty book or some sort of hero of the

Enlightenment; I'm someone's stooge or I'm 'born of the West'. You couldn't make a situation up with more moving parts than that, really. And it hasn't quite died down yet, though I think we're mostly out of the woods on the legal stuff.

MH Moving from that context to one that's maybe a little less inflammatory, I wanted to go over your comments as part of the Occupy Writers statement from October 2011, when Occupy Wall Street in New York was in its heyday. You wrote then that 'Writers . . . occupy a precarious place in the current social order. We tend to be freelancers, with variable incomes and little security. Because of this, despite our education and privilege, we have a lot in common with other workers who are forced to operate "paycheck to paycheck". This insecurity is only exacerbated by the collapse of the traditional publishing industry, and its reconfiguration by the internet. Our class interests, as writers, lie with the rest of the 99 per cent, in struggling for a more just distribution of wealth and resources.'

HK It was a funny thing, the Occupy moment . . . Its most lasting effect has been to put the notion of debt into the centre of mainstream political discourse. I think the repercussions of that are still being thought through — debt as an instrument of social control is becoming glaringly obvious. You're unable to get to the position where you could dissent effectively because you're educated and have enough spare time to do something other than feed yourself, without also having incurred major college debt. As European social democracy is murdered slowly by the international bond market, that's the model being put in place in the UK. 1989 was the first year that a completely free UK university education began to come apart and the first year student loans were brought in. I left university with a debt of £500–1,000 and we marched and demonstrated against that, but that wedge is now a lot bigger.

We've already talked about precarity and freelancing. I don't think there is a conspiracy plotting the demise of a sort of quasi-bohemian intellectual class; however, structurally that is what is happening — it is being made increasingly hard for the class I suppose I'm a part of to function. We're being forced into the office, into formal employment. The notion of a critical education is being more or less surgically removed from university curricula as universities are reconfigured as a training ground for financial technicians, engineers and other 'useful' workers. In capitalism, the notion of a critical perspective is not valued and people are being squeezed ever further. I look on the current MFA boom with a sort of horror; there's a group of relatively privileged young people who are being fed the lie that they will have the same class position as their parents because they have read Kant, and that's really not true.

My generation, certainly in Britain, are discovering we won't be as wealthy as our parents and we're having to work harder and longer for less reward under conditions of greater social discipline. That's true across the board. So the class interest of writers absolutely is, or should be, aligned with resisting the financialisation and instrumentalisation of the economy and the drive to greater efficiency that is being imposed.

The notion of debt more generally, in terms of government debt and budget deficits which are being used to drive

austerity agendas, particularly in Europe, are in a certain sense a pure ideological fiction. The money is still there, we are still producing, production hasn't radically disappeared in the last few years. But it's been decided that it is politically possible for people to be forced to accept less of a share and for the pharaohs, the current global elite, to take a level of wealth that is unprecedented in the history of the world, but they seem dissatisfied with any attempts to put the brakes on.

You know, it's really debt and terrorism (and we could possibly add sensationalistic paranoia around paedophilia) which are the tools that have been used to undo the social settlement that had persisted since the end of the Second World War, certainly in Europe and to a lesser extent in the USA, including the notion of what a certain acceptable level of inequality is, what a sort of reasonable level of social provision ought to be and what rights the individual has against the state. The state of exception that was introduced after 9/11 more or less managed to suspend any enforceable notion of civil liberties, here in the USA and elsewhere. The notion that 'we' have to tighten 'our' belts and work harder and accept less reward is being introduced as a way of dismantling the other parts of that settlement that are found unacceptable. The only real question is whether people will be screwed down enough to start resisting in a serious way.

I don't know in a structural way what still exists of Occupy and what doesn't. It was effectively a tactic more than it was or is an organisation. It was fantastically successful in small terms, but it also showed the limits of this sort of horizontal organisation. I've never been somebody who could get with the idea of a vanguardist party.

There was something beautiful and absurd about those camps, and about Occupy Wall Street's General Assemblies in Zuccotti Park. I think I sat through one whole one. I'm not great with committees at the best of times. It was the usual suspects down there, you could name all the types from their different positions, though there were the strange Ron Paul 'End the Fed' [ie Federal Reserve] people, who were new to me.

What's the legacy? I think it was interesting how threatening it was to the social order and that it was put down so thoroughly and effectively and, actually, with a great deal of violence given how positive and non-violent it was. It was

quite shocking to me. Essentially most people down there wouldn't hurt a fly and yet had the crap kicked out of them and were put in jail, some for quite a long time. I hope that that spirit of resistance is continuing, but I don't have any immediate expectations that America will be the place where some kind of new form of organisation is found.

I have friends in Athens who are now dealing with the situation where the cops are unable to keep order and aren't getting paid, so they're outsourcing a lot of what they're doing to paramilitary neofascists like Golden Dawn. There are no cancer drugs in hospitals. This is what austerity actually concretely means — poor people die. There's a social unravelling going on there that's scary. Greece was a totalitarian regime in the '70s. The Catalans are talking about seceding, and there's a chance of them doing that. Elsewhere in Europe the French-speaking Belgians are talking about unravelling the country. That's where we're going to see some real shift, and I don't know whether I feel hopeful about any of that, but certainly in terms of sharpened contradictions, that's where it's going to be. Britain is depressing, but relatively stable compared to some of those other places. Portugal, Spain and Greece are heading in one very scary direction.

Notes

- 1 The Mandelbrot set is a mathematical set of points whose boundary is a distinctive and easily recognisable two-dimensional fractal shape. It has become popular outside mathematics both for its aesthetic appeal and as an example of a complex structure arising from the application of simple rules and is one of the best-known examples of mathematical visualisation.
- 2 American author of *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood* (2011) and *Chaos: Making a New Science* (1987).
- 3 American theoretical biologist and complex systems researcher who studies the origins of life on earth.
- 4 Walter Benjamin (15 July 1892–26 Sept. 1940) was a German literary critic, philosopher, social critic, translator, radio broadcaster and essayist. Combining elements of German idealism or Romanticism, Historical Materialism and Jewish mysticism, Benjamin made enduring and influential contributions to aesthetic theory and Western Marxism, and is associated with the Frankfurt School.