

PROLOGUE:

Welcome, and thank you for attending this presentation of Triple Canopy's briefing on the activities of the International Necronautical Society. Please turn off all data-transmission devices, audio recorders, and cameras. Please note that what follows is a draft copy of an internal report, and has not been approved for production, circulation, reception, or publication.

In summary: I will argue that we find ourselves in a perilous situation: Each of us has been turned into a medium of transmission, doomed to convey no other message than that quality of our being—a condition that is not only generally accepted but, having in certain circles achieved an aesthetic aspect, relished. For certain prevalent and profitable systems of exchange, such as art and finance, this situation is ideal. And yet it has also made us—especially those of us who consider ourselves to be producers and consumers of culture, and for whom ideas and trends are a common currency—vulnerable to the International Necronautical Society.

I will provide an explanation as best I can, but be warned: Our knowledge of the INS's activities is fragmentary at best, and our understanding of its intentions, and even its tactics, is limited. What follows is a sketch, which I hope will be filled in as we gather intelligence in Berlin and elsewhere. If you have intelligence to share, please approach me (discretely) following the presentation.

1.

In the winter of 2008, Triple Canopy invited the International Necronautical Society to present the aerial reconnaissance work that Anthony Auerbach, Chief of Propaganda (Archiving and Epistemological Critique), had been conducting in Berlin. Several of us had for some time been interested in the group, which poses as a semi-fictitious avant-garde network, and were acquainted with its research into the ontological status of death and its public presentations, which take the form public interrogations of notable intellectuals, briefings on the history of transmission and encryption, etc. General Secretary Tom McCarthy had recently published a critically acclaimed novel, *Remainder*, and, to be honest, while we didn't quite understand the INS's work, there was an aura to the group that we found appealing.

And so Auerbach and INS Head Philosopher Simon Critchley sat together behind a table in the back room of a Brooklyn bar called Freddy's on the evening of February 24. An audience of fifty people—members of what you in Berlin refer to as “the creative industries”—were gathered. Auerbach and Critchley proceeded to introduce the INS. And from there the details become hazy. None of the Triple Canopy editors in attendance can recall the specifics of the INS presentation. We have scant evidence that the briefing even took place. And yet, while no record of the event exists, the recollections of those who claim to have been in attendance suggest that Auerbach and Critchley said something like this:

Death is a type of space, which we intend to map, enter, colonise and, eventually, inhabit. The INS works to chart the space of death, to trace it in the fault lines that cross art, literature, philosophy; to tune in to its frequencies in the air; to pinpoint its irruptions in the urban fabric; and ultimately to construct a “craft.” The INS’s central concerns are marking and erasure, transit and transmission, cryptography and death. The INS spreads itself as both fiction and actuality, often blurring the two. Working between the lines and in open view, the INS inhabits and appropriates a variety of art forms and cultural “moments,” from the defunct avant-gardes of the last century to the political, corporate and conspiratorial organisations they mimicked.

The audience listened intently, or confusedly, or absent-mindedly, or didn’t listen at all, as, I assume, Auerbach went on to describe his aerial reconnaissance work. Again, it is impossible to reconstruct his remarks in full. Some months later, however, an anonymous source sent us a file with excerpts of a low-quality recording of portions the event; we suspect that he was at the time an INS agent, and was in attendance that evening, but may have since renounced his allegiances to the group.

This is Auerbach speaking:

AUDIO #3:

– “An aerial photograph is not a map—or is not yet a map. Aerial photography merely piles material at the threshold of knowledge.”

– “Aerial surveying proper covers operations in unexplored and partly explored regions where maps do not already exist or where they are not to be relied on. It provides an almost inexhaustible store of information. That information—the photographic material—demands from each branch of knowledge a specific modus of interpretation.”

– “This is the site of a monument which announces that on that on this site stood the Revolutionsdenkmal, a monument to a revolution that never happened, erected in 1926 and razed in 1935.”

In the weeks and months that followed that first encounter with the INS, we became suspicious that we had somehow been manipulated, and that some other force, one alien to ourselves, had been at work that night. I tried to remember the presentation and explain it to others, but found myself incapable of parsing Auerbach and Critchley’s various statements—incapable, even, of explaining what the International Necronautical Society is, or does, or even what “necronautical” means, or how the INS might navigate death, much less construct “a craft that will convey us into death in such a way that we may, if not live, then at least persist,” as stated in its first manifesto. I sensed that I had somehow received orders that night, and was now carrying them with me, but that they had seeped into my being and were operating at a subliminal level, where I could neither access nor articulate them, much less discern their purpose. I felt that I was being surveilled, and that each step I took thrust me further down a path that had been determined for me in advance, but that I would not be able to recognize until I had reached its terminus.

I did not act on these intuitions, nor did I discuss them with anyone else. As planned, the next month Triple Canopy published, in its first issue, an article titled “The State of Authenticity,” by a Canadian academic named Peter Schwenger. We had never met Schwenger, but Auerbach had arranged for him to write this article for us. It purported to examine the INS’s “Declaration on Inauthenticity,” which had been delivered in New York that winter. Schwenger alleged that the presentation was in fact a reenactment of an event that itself had never occurred. “Let us listen to the evidence,” he wrote. “We hear two voices alternately reading a series of numbered theses. It is difficult to distinguish the voices. Indeed, as they explain, they are not individual but ‘dividual.’ They insist ‘the self has no core but is an experience of division, of splitting.’” [PLAY AUDIO OF THIS IF IT EXISTS.]

This resonated with me at the time. Auerbach refused to send us documentation of the event, and in cryptic messages suggested that “unauthorized releases” of unspecified material were forthcoming. I would run into Critchley at art openings and literary parties, where he would would inevitably fail, or refuse, to recognize me, or my presence; it was as if he were staring through me, or through the material of my body, into the void that had opened up as my self divided. Or so I thought at the time, confused as I was.

For a while we had no contact with the INS. Then, toward the end of the year, Tom McCarthy emailed another editor of Triple Canopy, Sam Frank, about another presentation of the “Declaration on Inauthenticity,” which was to take place in January at the Tate Britain. The sequence events that followed has proved impossible to reconstruct; our memories fail us, or betray us. What we know is that, on February 17, 2009, we found ourselves publishing a lengthy account of the Tate declaration—a self-congratulatory dramatic spectacle in which actors playing the roles of McCarthy and Critchley lectured on the history of authenticity, doubling, and performance in and out of art, and reflected on “the experience of failed transcendence.”

3.

Then may the solemn death-bell sound,
Then from thy service thou art free,
The index then may cease its round,
And time be never more for me!

—Goethe, Faust

4.

We recently began to monitor the INS, even as it, we imagined, monitored us. Until recently Auerbach was living in Berlin, more or less; we suspect that his reconnaissance and recruitment efforts have been aided by his partner, an artist named Marlene Haring, whose participation in this year’s Berlin biennial granted him unfettered access to the city’s art scene as well as an apartment owned by Kunstwerke. Auerbach carried out further aerial reconnaissance, cataloguing its many monuments and memorials to ex-

terminated populations and murdered political subversives. We began to wonder if the photographs would not be used to construct a map, and if that map would not be used for a purpose more insidious than a critique of the construction and iconography of cultural memory.

Much of the information we have about the INS—the information we believe to be a veritable representation of the group’s activities—has come from a few informers who are, or were once, INS associates or agents. [NINE POSING AS POTENTIAL RECRUIT, ATTESTING TO ONGOING RECRUITMENT EFFORTS, ETC] Some months ago one such informer passed along an internal INS memo reporting on the group’s surveillance of Berlin. It reads: “INS observers have been installed in high buildings. Local informants and collaborators continue to be recruited. Foreign agents are being mobilised to obtain information and spread INS propaganda under cover of literary, journalistic and artistic enterprises. Technical preparations have been initiated for future interventions in the city.”

Then, this spring, we intercepted a document titled, “INS Inspectorate Berlin: HAU Installation 2011.” The report, produced by Auerbach, takes the form of a proposal to occupy Berlin’s Hebbel am Ufer theater for “the culmination of the investigative phase of the INS Inspectorate.” It is written in the familiar, innocuous language of grant applications, replete with casual theoretical asides, knowing references to participatory art practice, and overall ambiguity—all of which suggest the artist’s own certainty in his allure to the potential patron. The project “will examine and publicise earlier findings as well as providing the occasion for gathering further intelligence,” Auerbach writes. “It will consist of an installation and temporary work site, which will in turn be the venue for a series of public events.

But there are coded messages obscured by the legalese and art-theory jargon. For instance:

- “There may be no better cover, nor safer house, than a theatre for the work of the INS, but we don’t know how to act, therefore everything we do is real.”
- “‘We are all necronauts, always, already.’ Hence the INS is not able to make the traditional distinction between players and audience. Who is performing for whom will not be decided by purchasing tickets or taking bows.”
- “The work of the Inspectorate will require numerous staff recruited from the ranks of the public. The same people will perform work for the INS and will address visitors to the installation when it is open to the public, encouraging new recruits.”
- “The prospect of inhabiting HAU reminds us of theatres under occupation: of plays coded with messages in support or in defiance of occupying authorities; of spectacles such as the occupation of the Kroll Opera by the Reichstag following the fire; of all the places that used to be theatres.”

In other words, the theater is everywhere; the HAU is merely the locus of the INS’s activities, the physical instantiation, or crystallization, of a broader effort to DO TK IN RELATION TO BERLIN’S POSITION AT THE CENTER OF THE NEOLIBERAL PROJECT,

TO TURN IT INTO (OR EXPOSE IT AS CONTINUING TO BE) THE WORLD CAPITAL OF DEATH—an effort in which many of you are complicit, whether you know it or not. TK LINE ABOUT HOW THE SPECTACLE OF PERFORMANCE IS MEANT TO DISTRACT FROM THE GROUP’S REAL WORK—THOUGH WE CAN’T QUITE FIGURE OUT WHAT THAT IS, BEYOND INFILTRATION OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR / CREATIVE INDUSTRIES.

The HAU proposal also contained the first direct admission that the INS had manipulated us. It declares that Triple Canopy, among other “cultural or media channels,” have “wittingly or unwittingly spread INS propaganda.” Upon reading this we determined to uncover the INS’s activities and warn the public and, specifically, groups at a high risk of being targeted. We could think of no cover that would be less conspicuous, and offer greater access to the INS’s prime demographic, than a series of innocuous, English-language cultural programs held at a self-described “initiative for art and architecture collaborations.” In short, we hoped to not only watch the watcher, but to conduct a sociological experiment with an ignorant audience of volunteers, testing their susceptibility to the kind of flimsy ideas and vogue propaganda with which the INS would confront them—if they had not already.

INSERTION: names of hip artists the INS has worked with
[THE INS MAKES USE PRECISELY OF OUR COMMUNITY’S POTENTIAL FOR RAPTURE, OUR WILLINGNESS TO SUSPEND DISBELIEF AND THUS LEAVE THE GATES WIDE OPEN FOR INSIDIOUS NECRONAUTICAL IDEOLOGICAL INFILTRATION. INSIDUOUSLY, THE INS IS DEPOSITING THE SEEDS OF PARANOIA AS SO MANY MEANS OF CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE, LIKE THE PARASITE WILL LAY ITS EGGS UNDERNEATH ITS HOST’S SKIN, RUNNING ITS SEED THROUGH ITS HOST’S BLOOD, AND EVENTUALLY TAKING OVER HIS MOTOR FUNCTIONS, USING HIM AS A VESSEL, LIKE ONE WOULD STEER A SUBMARINE.]

Of course, what I’ve presented to you may be evidence of planned INS activities, but it could just as easily be a rouse designed to distract us, to divert our attention. Even as I warn you of the INS, I must also warn of the ease with which the warning itself can be engineered by the enemy to serve his own purposes or, if nothing else, to alienate whomever dares to suggest that something must be done to an audience that would very much prefer to do nothing.

5.

“Back then he had in fact *simulated* this bit of life—for himself!—he no longer knew how it had been possible for him, it was a life in which every order ... that governed it had come from his own person: but he had probably never been a *person* in this game! Now the situation was reversed: he received all orders from outside, and he was a person ... the proof of this was that orders were given to him which clearly revealed that they had been tailored to specific characteristics of his lifestyle.”

—Wolfgang Hilbig, “*Ich*”

6.

Only in recent times has it been possible for an audience like this one to gather in a place like this. The post-WWII political and economic order has engendered conditions that allow people like us to move across borders to enjoy ourselves among like-minded individuals, to exchange a limited set of ideas, to make our various tastes and preferences known to one another. Just as aesthetic and intellectual trends reproduce themselves as we passively receive them and then actively disseminate them, the neoliberal model of society is animated by those of us who naturally reproduce and reinforce its conditions in our daily lives. (The spectacular art you'll witness later tonight is perhaps the epitome of TK: a form of signification that signifies nothing more than its own being in relation to an audience that "gets" it, which is to say "gets" itself.)

The INS, too, exists primarily in the bodies of those "agents" who instantiate it, whether willfully or obliviously. For this reason, the global art community—one of the crowning achievements of neoliberalism—is at an extraordinary risk of recruitment or activation. Triple Canopy represents the interests of the creative industries in general, and of intellect in service of, if at AN ANGLE/ A TANGENT to, the state. We understand that, just as contemporary capitalism profits from the pursuit of the endlessly deferred dream of authenticity, the INS exploits its remainder, the alienation that results when society is formed as a projection of the underlying desire for the real. Today's Berlin is the locus of that dream (which explains its appeal to Triple Canopy, but also to the INS). As evidence, I cite a recent interview with Javier Peres, proprietor of the Berlin and L.A. Gallery Peres Projects:

Interviewer: I am really glad that people are taking Berlin seriously.

Peres: Berlin, in many ways, is more serious than just about anywhere.

Interviewer: It's more serious than London or New York because seriousness requires levels of authenticity and reality, which haven't existed in either city for decades.

Peres: I can't exactly pinpoint when it started here, but suddenly now there is this place, and Kimchi Princess and all those little cute Mexican places popping up.

7.

Essential questions remain: Does the INS spread itself by capturing the divided self or by proffering another spectacle to be consumed? Does it finally authenticate the self by thrusting it into the space of death, or does it use that space ironically? Is it—to use the group's own cryptic vocabulary—"moving in on your networks" or "moving on in your networks"? The answer to all of these questions is: both; or, I don't know.

It is difficult to discern an overarching critique in INS documents, much less a general purpose in their activities. But a recently intercepted confidential briefing, “INS Inspectorate Berlin: Surveillance Report,” suggests a particular interest in Berlin—the so-called World Capital of Death:

The historical recurrence in Berlin of failed revolutions and empty tombs appears to result from their entwining. The multiplication of Revolutionsdenkmäler [TK DEFINITION] in the city where no revolution succeeded—their replicas, replacements and reminders—suggest how the revolutionary impulse is converted into a cult of death which congeals around monuments, and whose most effective expression is the empty tomb, that is to say, a hungry sarcophagus whose appetite for bodies demands the repeated immolation of victims for the sake of the tomb, not the revolution. In turn, the monument underwrites the (romantic) revolutionary’s fulfillment in martyrdom, not transformation. The revolution, as ideal, is to die for, but may not be achieved. Death sanctifies the ideal and its non-realisation. The cult of death thus secures the idealist project and unites revolutionaries and reactionaries in its rites.

As such, the document seems to suggest, politics is emptied of action, and the spectacle of reflection becomes an end in its own right. As examples, the Inspectorate cites the multitude of monuments dedicated to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who has now been buried and memorialized in absentia more times than any other martyr in history. These include the balcony of the Stadtschloss—formerly the site of royal addresses—where Liebknecht proclaimed the doomed “free German socialist republic” in 1918 (a speech that provoked a violent struggle between leftist factions). The GDR government razed the building in 1952, but preserved the balcony, which was then attached to the nearby Council of State Building, then affixed to the Palace of the Republic, was destroyed in TK YEAR, at which point the balcony was moved into storage; it is to be attached to the reconstructed Stadtschloss, which is scheduled for completion in 2014. There is also the pedestal for a monument to Karl Liebknecht, an eternal placeholder for an unbuilt memorial that was erected on Potsdamer Platz in 1951 to mark the spot where Liebknecht made a speech decrying “imperialist war.” The pedestal was marooned in the Berlin Wall’s “death strip” for thirty years, then was removed so that the square could be redeveloped; in 2003 it was reinstalled in a slightly different place, still bearing the original inscription, still promising a future memorial.

It is a given that, in Berlin, the dead admonish us at every turn; whether embodied by maudlin statues or dignified plaques or blocks of gray concrete, they glower at us from the city’s plazas, reprimand us in its parks, call attention to our extraordinary failings as thinking animals from the facades of its government buildings. They remind us of our capacity for evil, and, perhaps more poignantly, of the ease with which we succumb to the evil of others. But, as one memorial-advocacy group, the Topography of Terror, has said, they also foster “positive remembrance culture.”

The Inspectorate argues, however, that far from bringing the tragedies of the past to bear on the present, Berlin’s many memorials “authorize forgetting and encode era-

sure.” No one minds the event when it transpires; it acquires political status only in retrospect. Along these lines, the Inspectorate goes so far as to malign the term “Holocaust,” which, in its opinion, “lends an unwarranted dignity to the fate of those done in by the Nazis. Making them into sacrificial victims and in turn aligning the Greek with the Christian model of sacrifice promises a bounty of redemption—as if they ‘died for our sins’—which more than justifies the sacrifice of prime real estate and the investment in authenticity announced by the employment of celebrity artists and architects to design the monuments.”

But have not memorials played a significant role in allowing Germany to emerge from the morass of a century of war, atrocities, and repression, as they have in so many other countries? The question of what is being memorialized, by whom, for whom—not to mention the question of who has the right to memorialize the memory of others—is an important one, but perhaps less important than acknowledging the necessity of forgetting. We must come to a consensus: the bodies of the dead will be consigned to these tombs, whether or not they are buried there.

For the work of forgetting to be done systematically, it must be encoded in the very fabric of our daily lives. The scale and scope of that work, in Berlin and elsewhere, has allowed for the emergence of a global economy and culture linking free societies and their governments. By questioning the value of our Gedenkdemos, or memory demonstrations, the INS seems to be opposing the very regime which has facilitated the lifestyles enjoyed by those gathered here today, and the aesthetic pleasures that are its complements. What is confusing, and sinister, about the INS is that the group masks itself as one of those pleasures—as an art project.

If the INS is an art project, then so was the Stasi: it, too, **maniacally** collected data, surveilled every inch of Berlin, recruited agents who produced information about other agents, who produced information about other agents. Some have compared the Stasi to the writers of fiction it cultivated: the agency was intent on forging an authentic representation of reality, but one in which the characters could be manipulated, the setting altered at will, the TK THIRD ITEM. (Here I think it is worth considering the writers cultivated by the Stasi: not realists but inward-looking fabulists and linguistically-oriented deconstructionists, writers who shunned the mundane political sphere and created work from the semiotic stuff as a spycraft: language games, codes, arcane knowledge. Many of these writers claim that they came to think of the Stasi as an alternative public sphere, a black market for ideas, the only forum for discussing the GDR as it really existed.) As the Stasi recruited more and more agents and accumulated vast amounts of information, its own purposes became less and less apparent, as did its boundaries. “The only ones who aren’t with the Stasi,” said the writer Rainer Schedlinski, “are the ones who are with it.”

According to historian Timothy Garton Ash, the result of all this work was fatal: “The regime drowned in a sea of trivial information (‘at 2 AM the subject looked out of the window and at 3:30 he was still restlessly pacing up and down his study’).”

Every anti-regime graffiti found on a wall was photographed and filed. Every street rumor was registered by diligent agents and circulated throughout the upper levels of the secret bureaucracy. In the former Stasi headquarters in Leipzig I was shown a few hundred numbered glass jars and told that this was the “Stasi library of suspect smells.” It had been assembled by removing unwashed underwear and socks from dissidents’ laundry hampers. Torn bits and pieces were then placed in jars to preserve “specific body odors,” as one preserves cucumbers and jams. With the help of trained dogs, the distinctive smells would serve later to identify distributors of illegal leaflets. “The Stasi had a complete smell-collection of the Leipzig opposition,” a former dissident told me.

7.

I wish I could tell you what the INS wants—what it wants from you. Lacking such clarity, I have provided in this report an outline of the group’s activities and the threat it poses, as well as an inducement to remain vigilant. As it stands, I fear that the INS is dangerous precisely because it has no discernible goals beyond, seemingly, disrupting the very sort of experience you have gathered here to enjoy—if only by disingenuously simulating it. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that the INS will ultimately find that this space of death it intends to “map, enter, colonize and, eventually, inhabit” is but a specter, a horizon constantly receding behind the reams of data it hoards and the specious theories it concocts.

I leave you with a quotation recalled by the poet Reiner Kunze. After being interrogated by a Stasi officer for thirty hours, he was told: “I forbid you to write lines of poetry with double meanings. We have experts who decode everything!”