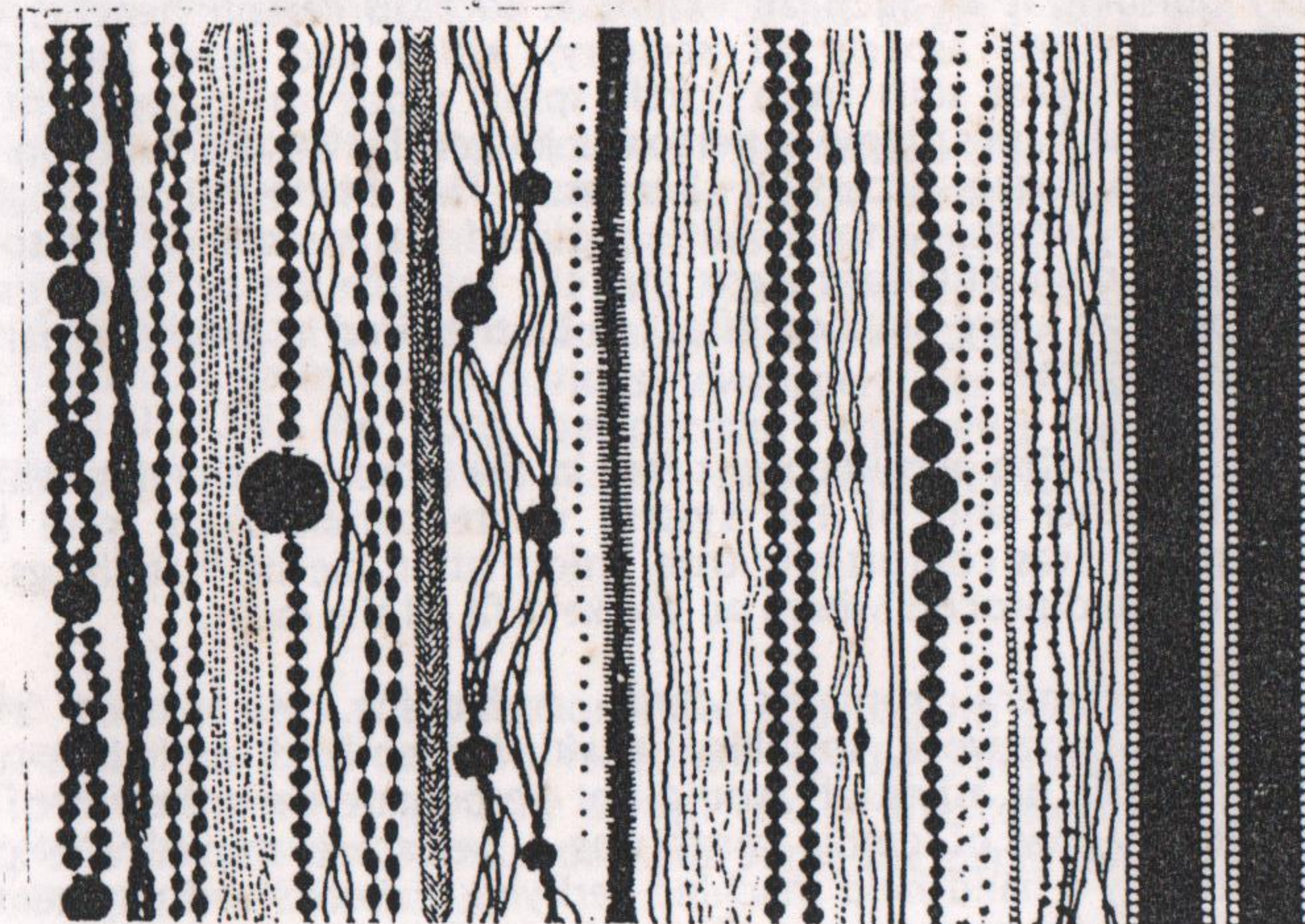


SLEEPING



SICKNESS

ONE

'I' knew that this world was increasingly being remoulded by information. What was considered as the limits of the system were being transgressed in an organic process that developed new practices through attempting to overcome the limitations of the old practices. Yet to admit to such thoughts was heretical. 'I' had to suppress them to keep his standing in the party. For them, the old method was the only method since, logically, it attacked the root of the system, and since, logically, the new system (if it could be called such a thing) was only the old system in its dying stages. All that was needed was the final push in the right direction. But whilst 'I' was well versed in keeping up such appearances he was also well equipped in navigating what he secretly saw as the new system : that is the information sphere. For him, this didn't involve reading a few Gibson novels and a few glossy periodicals, or 'nerdifying' himself by drooling over an internet set or cyber cafe.

What concerned 'I' was the shadow that all data carried. He didn't make a scene of his interest, only pursuing it to such an extent as to reap certain benefits of his study. Primarily this concerned aspects of security, which had now become a priority following the party's gear shift from 'circle spirit' mode to 'party spirit' mode. But security was only the basics. Now a person is judged by the information collected on them and stored on certain accessible databases. This enabled those smart enough to work the system to become actors. All it required was certain efforts to be made at certain points in certain situations such that the information gathered on the person (actor) concerned had a pre-planned effect to be triggered in future scenarios when the information was retrieved.

For now 'I' was exploiting another weak link in the process - working within the slack generated at the other end of the system where commodities were handed out. Information is power was contortedly true. Information meant that things could occur as a smooth, facilitated process where all the keys fit all the locks.

'I' unpacked the camera from its dense cushioning. He placed aside all the documentation and paperwork, sprinkled it with lighter fluid, and then supervised its burning to a small pile of ashes. 'I' would not perpetuate the mistakes of others, and operating in the shadow of credit cards was a perfect example. The plastic paper receipts generated by a hand held machine verifying a credit card payment were often discarded by the credit card owner. The information that could be extracted from these 'flimsies' (as they were known) was more than adequate : card number, name, expiry date and an exact signature of the card holder. This enabled you to mail-order for goods asking them to be directed to another location, preferably a PO Box. It was a hit and miss operation, and on this occasion it happened to be a hit. 'I' satisfied himself that the paperwork had been reduced to ashes and then set about filing off the serial numbers from the camera and lens attachment.

TWO

'C' moved nervously down the packed street. Shoppers bustled for position in the various lanes of flow amongst the brightly packed shop fronts. However, in this part of town most people knew what they wanted and were oblivious to the consumer persuasion that could only interest the pickling minds of an academic post marxist desperately scrambling for their latest source of wage. Poverty was obvious, and survival was instinctive; that was all that needed to be said.

'C' couldn't find a suitable phone box with total enclosure. There were many three sided boxes as well as Mercury points offering no privacy whatsoever. 'C' settled for a three sided box and checked the scene for any obvious observers. However, an assessment of the scene was not possible due to the sheer volume and number of varying velocities of the crowd. He fished the device out of his pocket and snapped it

over the phone. Quickly he dialled the number, via his device, and waited for the pick-up tone. Instantly he began his hurried conversation.

Across the street, from a high vantage point, the Special Branch officer sat with a bank of monitoring equipment and telescopic apparatus. When he saw his target produce the device from his pocket and place it over the phone he knew he had trouble. His fears were confirmed when he realised that he couldn't monitor the number that the target was dialling. No-one had indicated to him that such technology was available to the hardcore left communist milieu. As a panic measure he scrambled to his telescope and focussed on his target. It was a last chance but he needed to know the number his target was dialling, as well as intercepting the message. One out of the two would have to suffice. Circumstance would have it that the target had his back to the view permitted to the agent, consequently obscuring any chance that the agent had of physically seeing the number being dialled.

By the time the agent had assembled his high-powered rifle the target was well into their conversation. This mission had suddenly swung from one of total control to one of total chaos. He took aim at the broad expanse of his target's back and gently squeezed his trigger.

The panel of perspex glass exploded into thousands of blunted shards that instantly stacked themselves into a carpet on the square metre that formed the floor of the telephone box. 'C' lay slumped on top of it, pushed into contortions through the power of the shot and the constriction of the still intact two sides of the telephone box. Great gushes of blood began to flow randomly amidst the stacked glass chips. For a brief instant it was possible to make out various newspaper titles on the phone box floor. WORLD REVOLUTION, the word 'perspectives', the word 'headache'. But quickly the blood obscured this opportunity and the panic that was forever under the surface took over.

THREE

'J' had received the message over the telephone. He had had his pen in place and noted down the necessary information. A repetition of the information was not considered, and 'J' was left wondering at the abrupt end of the communication. He committed the necessary information to memory and burnt the paper evidence to an almost nonexistent stream of carbon flakes.

Nervously he stepped into the chemists store and made his way to the prominent display of supplements. He recalled his instructions and scoured the shelves in front of him. Eventually he found the single bottle of Creatine Monohydrate supplement. He picked this up and approached the sales assistant. The dialogue went as planned

"Is this what you require for your needs"

"Yes, I need to boost my stamina levels"

Carefully the bottle was wrapped in a paper bag and passed to 'J'. He tendered the exact amount of money (as instructed), took the package, and left the shop. Without making it too obvious he fingered the contents of the bag through its thin paper membrane... alongside the bottle of pills he could feel the prominent shape of the 3.5 inch floppy disk.

'I' had completed the eradication of the serial numbers and was fondling the expensive equipment in his gloved hands. The 'progression' of its technical capabilities brought a smile to the young communists face. This one offered predictive autofocussing which claimed that the light signal it bounced towards its photographic target could not only indicate its distance away from the lens, but also the speed at which it was moving - thus predicting the perfect focal length for the picture when the shutter was finally released. But the truth of the matter was less amusing - all over the country people were putting their 2 year old auto focus SLRs into their cupboards and buying these

new predictive auto focus gimmicks. It was moments like this, away from the all pervasive glare of the party, that 'I' could contemplate the intrusion of consumerism on the human spirit.

'I's concentration was suddenly broken when he realised that his target had just entered the chemist's shop. He spun the camera onto the tripod and positioned the viewfinder on the doorway of the chemists. After a brief moment his target emerged clutching a paper carrier bag, trying not to make it too obvious he was feeling at the contents at what he had just purchased. 'I' snapped the shutter release shut and the motor drive powered the wind mechanism on instantaneously. He reeled off about 10 shots in a 20 second spell and afforded himself a smile as he thought about the total irrelevancy of this predictive auto focussing.

'J' didn't hear the barely perceptible clicking of the camera shutter that was pointing out from the upstairs of a derelict shop directly opposite the chemists store. In fact his excitement had made him impervious to all suspicious occurrences that he would normally detect, including the black transit van with mirrored windows that he was now walking past.

Inside the van a panic was escalating in epidemic proportions. The M.I.5 agent sitting in the front seat had tried to put the cursings of his partner to the back of his mind and concentrate on making the decision that could possibly make or break his career. The department had received the last minute tip off that would put them in the frame in front of their rivals from Special Branch. All they had to do was to follow their suspect from the chemists and to terminate him/her in the comfort of their own living room. The agents partner had decided to nip out and attempt to appease the black hole that was his gut : a cheeseburger at MacDonalds was the preferred option. They had argued feverishly about the danger of such an act and had decided that if the worst came to the worst then the single agent remaining in the van would tail the suspect and complete the kill.

This worst case scenario had arrived only to be even worse! He was about to rev up the engine of the van and make the tail when he spotted the glimmer of light in the window opposite the chemists. Experience told him that it was a reflection from a prying camera lens and so the agent was presented with a monolithic dilemma. Though he didn't know the exact nature of his mission he knew he had to prevent a transaction from being made. But this transaction was not significant because of the physical nature of the transaction itself, but more so significant because of the willingness of the 2 parties to make such a transaction. Thus if it was made widely known that such a transaction was to be made (even if it never actually was) then this would be classes as a grave failure on the agent's part.

The agent knew that photographic evidence would constitute towards such a greater evidence and decided to terminate this evidence as quickly as possible and then to return and (hopefully) pick up the scent of the trail of his suspect. He threw open the door of the van and rushed towards the rear of the disused shop, barely concealing the revolver tucked inside his bulky leather jacket. He battered his way through a couple of half open doors chancing on an approach of pure speed and aggression, gambling that his target would be totally unprepared for this type of attack. In this respect he was right. On entering the small room he had no problem in picking out his target: 'I' was framed in the light of the window, still crouching over his camera in the act of rewinding the film. The agent fired a single shot that didn't even give the target time to register he was about to die. It was a case of business to be done and the agent felt no disgust or pity towards the unfortunate recipient of his detoured mission. The projectile entered his neck, passed through his throat, and then straight out the other side, dragging a swirl of skin, blood and a large chunk of oesophagus. 'I' slumped dead on the spot. The agent picked up the camera, opened the film door and pulled out the

film. He bolted from the scene whilst simultaneously concealing his weapon and cramming the film into an inside pocket of his leather jacket.

He winced at the bright light outdoors and sprinted towards the Transit. Leaning against the door was his partner, stuffing the remains of a cheeseburger into his mouth.

The agent indicated for his partner to get in the van, not caring for the stare that his partner was directing towards his blood splattered Chinos. Once inside he gunned the engine into gear, turned a sharp 180, and headed down the road to find his quarry. On taking the sharp turn left he realised the extent and the proximity of the heaving metropolis. The van stopped dead and the agent slumped himself over the wheel, oblivious to the crescendo of horns building up behind him.

FOUR

'J' turned into his street. He lived on an estate on the perimeters of the shopping nucleus of the city. After picking up the disk he had vanished into the molten flow of the shoppers and made his way towards an area where the crowds eventually thinned enabling him to complete the journey to his living area with a brisk pace.

He had been instructed by the party to operate this weeks mailout, with the precursor that there was some sensitive information to be sent out this week... thus the contrived and secretive nature of the telephone call and the chemists shop. 'J' was new to the party and he felt at last part of the team when he had been elected to undertake this task. He looked forward to the days when he could use his degree in political theory to help write articles for the party's theoretical journal.

Though he did not know all members of the party in the local area (for instance he did not know the woman in the chemists shop - that is assuming she was a party member) he did know that there had been some intense debate occurring at such a theoretical density and intensity that he had been feeling way out of his depth. Maybe some of this would reveal itself with a bit more clarity when he printed the files on this disk and mailed them out to the various addresses.

He turned the key in his lock, opened the door and took a step inside... Before closing the door he scanned the scene outside of his house : nothing struck him as being out of the ordinary... the only visible sign of life was a motor cyclist complete with full black leathers crouching alongside his propped up bike with a large open box of what appeared to be socket spanners. 'J' closed the door of his flat and fired up his micro.

The motorcyclist removed the set of spanner sockets and their holding tray from the box, revealing a panel of buttons and small monitor with a dead screen. He flipped up a small aerial and the screen jumped into life. It took him a matter of seconds to hack into the microcomputers operating system and he waited to confirm that the disk he would be reading was the required disk.

'J' opened up the A drive on his micro and stuck the pointer to the first file. The details of the file quickly filled the screen... it was a letter to a person/group who went under the name of Communist Headache. He pulled an envelope from the desk drawer and scrawled the address on it, whilst simultaneously sending the contents of the file to his printer. The screech of the dot matrix printer spitting out the document disguised the noise of the front door being opened. 'J' took the printed file and decided to examine it before putting it into its envelope. As he sat back in his armchair the door to the living room was flung open. 'J' leapt from his armchair only to be thrust back down by a leather clad figure. Suddenly he felt the barrel of a gun being pushed into his midriff. The interplay of the light through the crack in the curtains with the various reflective surfaces made such a situation that the assailants face could vaguely be seen through the smoked visor of the motorcycle helmet. 'J' struggled for air as he placed

the face behind the visor. All he could whisper was "Comrade" before he blacked out with fear.

EPILOGUE

The computer screen flickered into life. The operator was immediately greeted with the request for an entry level password. The phrase PARTY SPIRIT was typed in carefully. This gave him some limited access to certain files. He scrolled down the list and selected the file he required : ON THE CONVERGENCE OF THE CWO AND THE ICC - It's possibilities and outcomes.

He knew much of this file off by heart. The department had brought in the top think tanks to crack this problem. After years of fruitless work the first major breakthroughs had been made when a set of mathematicians was introduced to the project. Their brief was to uncover what was keeping the 2 groups apart (the actual outcome of their possible theoretical unity and its practical ramifications had been mapped out by a series of extended role play simulations - the results of these experiments were highly classified data in the same league as the infamous 'Thinking Red' files - these were the results of a counterinsurgency role play game where the 'red' was played by US agent Bissell who used all his knowledge of the vulnerabilities of the US security system (because it was his job to know such things!)).

The mathematicians initially set out constructing a theoretically projecting formula based on the claimed theoretical inheritance of each group. Each concept or cult figure was given numerical values based upon their significance within general history and the weight that either the CWO or ICC gave to the concept/figure/event. For instance there was Marx and his various ideas and interjections, the Internationals and their fractions, the Dutch and Italian lefts, and other lesser known figures. The pairs of formulae for the CWO/ICC had somehow to be moulded together and their correlation and their variance calculated. This would enable the similarities within each group to be mapped out and the department could then assume that it would be these similarities that would be emphasised if either group strove towards a theoretical convergence.

However, the second major breakthrough occurred when it appeared that the results gained from this modelling, though rational enough on their own, were not giving any indication of the actual activity of both the CWO and the ICC. It took a brilliant mind to switch the thinking over to a new concept. What had been considered as the only way forward - that is that the two groups would try to build upon their similarities and create a position of strength - was suddenly seen as a dead end. What the two groups were actually doing were concentrating on what kept them apart and eliminating their differences in a style that made high level chess akin to noughts and crosses. By the time that the numbers team had cottoned on to this (they created a pair of Bessel functions from the original data and instantly recognised the 'outliers' - or differences in interpretation and/or weighting) the intensity of the activity had been explosive.

It would appear that the department had cracked the code just in time... the activity of the ICC in particular had become feverish, and once the department had understood the actual principles of what was happening they could ignore the smokescreen that the intensity of the activity gave out. By the time the department moved in it was close to critical mass - there had been swamp theory, circle and party spirits, parasitism, gravitational pull theory, sleeping sickness theory,...

The operator moved on to the next file. This required password clearance for the next level. He typed in COMMUNIST HEADACHE. This level contained just one file which revealed itself on the screen.

Much of the data here was actually only partial. The hardcore facts were stored in files in higher levels of the security hierarchy. It hinted at an internal battle between various fractions within MI5 and Special Branch. It would appear that both departments cracked the codes at roughly the same time - but the implausibility of such an occurrence seemed to suggest a degree of foul play and double agency.

Both departments realised that the ICC were going for the final, big play with the Communist Headache project, and so the fulfilment of the project had to be subverted at all costs. The crossfire between the two departments - each bidding to claim the scalp and so enhance the chances of their own future survival - caused further mayhem. The trail of blood, burnt bodies, incinerated computers and torched vehicles seemed totally random due to the nature of the four way tussle and the covertness that each group acted under with respect to each other. It had even been suggested that a member had held good standing in all four groups operating under a variety of excellent disguises...

It had emerged that at the centre of the drama there had existed a periodical called Communist Headache. This had been presented as an original publication but it was actually a virus created by the ICC that cleverly encompassed all that the ICC rallied against. Its rejection by the CWO would pave the way for a greater acceptance between the two communist parties, and so on to their final unification in the embrace of the party spirit.

The CWO had decided to reject Communist Headache for the incoherent rubbish it was without realising the virus like nature of the whole package. It was this letter of rejection, imprinted on a standard 3.5 inch disk, that had created the trail of bloodshed as it was passed between various CWO members to be finally accepted and sent to the ICC (who were hiding behind the Communist Headache box number). This transaction was never completed.

The mopping up of the operation was well orchestrated. Reading the frequent list of obituaries in the Times Educational Supplement was not something many people did, and so no-one pieced together the string of deaths of teachers in the Sheffield area. A canoeing accident on a schools trip, a mad gunman entering a school and managing only to kill two members of staff before taking his own life. Such things were meat and drink for the department to set up.

For now, capitalist humanity was safe to progress.

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