



Editorial: For madmen only

ROBERT WRINGHAM invites you to banish
Bad Faith and to embrace motility.

Illustration by Samara Leibner

[Aborigines are] dyed-in-the-wool free. They go where they want, when they want, doing what they want. [...] Walkabout is the perfect metaphor for their lives. When the English came and built fences to keep in their cattle, the aborigines couldn't fathom it. And, ignorant to the principle at work, they were classified as dangerous and antisocial and were driven away to the outback. So I want you to be careful: the ones who build high, strong fences are the ones who survive best. You deny that reality only at the risk of being driven into the outback yourself.

HARUKI MURAKAMI—KAFKA ON THE SHORE

FREEDOM is our natural state of being. We're generally born with the capacity to make our own decisions, to propel ourselves to where we physically want to be. This natural state should be inescapable, but we often convince ourselves otherwise: we've found excuses (careers, bureaucracies, class systems, strange correlations between spiritual belief and how we behave) to distract us from the vast and terrifying wildernesses of absolute freedom and total opportunity. We put together foolproof systems of procrastination to prevent us from truly living and the whole of society has agreed to go along with them.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that our refusal to embrace freedom *makes complete sense*. After all,

why would anyone want to be free? It's hard to deal with. When contemplating how free you truly are, you experience a giddy vertigo unlike anything else: thank heavens for mundane jobs.

Freedom may be natural, but so are earthquakes and knob-rot. In a free state, you must embrace nihilism, yet be self-motivated enough to do things with no orders or job description to guide you. Since nobody else wants to join in with your experience of giddy freedom, you have to go against the grain, defying the expectations of people who care about you, building muscles of resistance to the conventional distractions. It takes great personal energy and courage to live in the free state offered by nature.

Civilisation goes against nature. Jean-Jaques Roussau wrote that all civilisation grows from the erecting of fences: to curb our wanderings. The exception to the rule, according to Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, are the Aborigines of Australia: a native civilisation whose way of life (until their enforced marginalisation) was a perpetual walkabout.

The consolations of freedom barely make up for the hard work of maintaining it, nor do they compensate for the steadfast attitude required to go against the grain. To return to the natural or Aboriginal state, as Hermann Hesse might say, is *for madmen only*.

Those madmen are Escapologists: the people who rise to the challenge of freedom (or, more specifically, of not being unfree), who decide to cease daily pragmatism and, instead, chisel out an unrestricted life, shrugging off the crippling effects of *Bad Faith*.

The consolation of freedom is the exhilaration of escape, the mule-stubborn pleasure of doing it your own way and nobody else's. Above all, it is to experience the liberation of looking over the default requests and saying 'I'd rather not'.

BAD FAITH

Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialist philosopher and, surely, the mascot for this issue of *New Escapologist*, said that this fear of freedom results in *Mauvais Foi* or 'Bad Faith'. Instead of seeking freedom, we convince ourselves that everything is hunky-dory in the world of 'the trap'.

Perhaps, this is the biggest obstacle to overcome on the path to freedom: realising that nothing is actually preventing you from escaping other than imaginary things: etiquette, a perceived lack of time, money, career, social status, expectation, commitments to things that don't really matter.

In a legal sense, Bad Faith is to deliberately betray the spirit of an agreement. Sartre used the term to highlight the gravity of the betrayal when a person denies his or her own complete self. Like it or not, human beings are usually born free. We can overcome the imaginary things that make us feel trapped at the drop of a decision. Bad Faith is the natural enemy of the Escapologist, because it is one of the main powers preventing us from silently walking out of our offices, never to return.

Escape is possible. It is not an idealist fantasy.

To help overcome Bad Faith, it is prudent to consider the worst case scenario of quitting your job in search of pastures new. It is possible for an escape plan to fail and you'll later have to look for another boring job. But who cares? If you have to return to the office, you would still have an extra-long holiday under your belt, along with some stories to tell at the water cooler. On the other hand, you've a very real opportunity to escape. Ask yourself: what precisely are you afraid of and how would you deal with it?

MOTILITY

No more dress codes, clockwatching, or institutional twatspeak. All you have to do is shrug off your *mauvaise foi*, as if it were a no-longer-required evolutionary vestige, and decide to be free.

Possibly the worst thing about holding down a miserable corporate position is the fact that you're obliged to report to a specific place at a specific time. I hated this aspect of work even more than the unrewarding nature of the work itself, the passive-aggressive colleagues and the constantly changing organisational goals. No matter how

liberal the working conditions, I would always resent the fact that I had to work to someone else's schedule: there's no greater infringement on personal liberty than shaping the way in which people behave. Certainly, a degree of cooperation is always required; at some point we'll always have to meet with certain people at certain times in order to make mutually-beneficial decisions, but, in the majority of workplaces, in which people have their own job descriptions, their own projects, their own set of aims, there is simply no reason to have an entire department present at the same time under the same roof.

There's a concept in biology called *motility*. It refers to an organism's ability to move around freely. This is science's analogue to the existentialist observation that human beings are essentially free. A spermatozoon, for example, has motility, in that it will swim, freely, toward its eggy goal. An ocean-dwelling sponge, on the other hand, is almost entirely non-motile, or 'sessile'. It just sits there in the sea, respiring and excreting and watching *True Blood* on Sky tv.

Human beings, like cats or iguanas or toucans or centipedes, are inherently motile. As long

as there's no physical encumbrance, we can run around, jump up and down, or roam the Earth until our energy runs out and we need to recharge. It is within our biological means to move around without restriction. As individuals, however, we would probably vary along a spectrum, from motility to sessility. How motile are you? A practitioner of BASE jumping—a fringe sport characterised by the act of free-falling into natural ravines or from the tops of skyscrapers—is extremely motile. A coma patient, incapable of any physical movement or independent cognition, would be extremely sessile. Needless to say, we are somewhere on the spectrum from one extreme to the other.

So that's the question. How motile are you? One secret of happiness would be to find the

right level of motility for you and to engineer a life that sits precisely around it. An Escapologist would probably be happiest with a fairly high level of motility: to throw off the shackles of traditional commitments and to hone a life of proper freedom. This may not involve leaping from the Chrysler Building in the style of our BASE-jumping friends, but simply freeing yourself of the burdens of debt, material ownership, and working too hard.

We limit our motility by saying we 'must' attend a depressing job or tend to things—Orwell's 'everlasting idiocies'—with no real benefit. You can escape these commitments, but you must want to.

Banish Bad Faith. Embrace motility.

