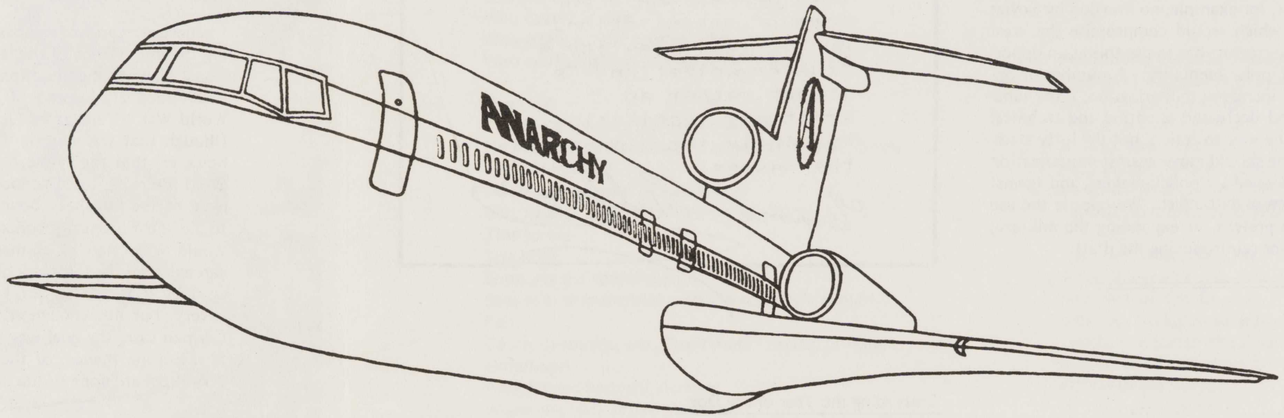
the search for Urban Walden



With a revolution on the inside, we are hiding. Moving in our own circles. Away from the worlds going on. Why are we separate from the eyes on the street, love at a glance. Ay, but the potential that elapses, is missed like faces out an old spinster's window.

From my bar stool the world comes to me. Faces hang puffed in darkness. I am in control. Closing my eyes I see orange laser-beams and nuclear clouds ascending. I begin to absorb myself in a good video game. Hunched over and secluded, I reach to put another coin in the slot located conveniently near my pocket. It's the new game called Power Trip. I like this one because when I hold down the button my machine guns never stop firing at the anonymous menace. When in doubt I shoot lest I lose my quarter and the world.

Don't mind the maggots. I dodge down the street looking for a paper, but there ain't no stands. They're all in the conveniently located malls -- there's no Joe's diner either, where I used to have my $1.35 2 E's, H, T, and C. Now the whole main city district is really only subsidized for the right sort of people.

In fact, this city's (Atlanta) status as a convention capital never trickles down, as most visitors are provided for by an isolated convention district almost entirely contained within malls and multiple-causeway complexes. Conventions move in and out without a trace, the hotel's connected to the theatre, to the night club, to the main hall and the finest shopping in town. Oh, it's got that feel, you'll say it's definitely Atlanta.

Outside, I pour another quarter into a machine. I can't help it. This game is called Battlezone. I like it because it's like real war except you don't get hurt. The idea is neat because by the time I get into the army I won't even blink in the face of enemy squadrons.

There are so many unemployed blackmen out on the street. I'm staring at my map. A man comes up to me and asks "Can I show you where to go?" In a flash I figure: a pick-up, begging, or a hassle. So I say "I'm just going, that way." Walking away, the young man turns back at me and says "Remember to keep praying." With acknowledgement I told him "Yea." That's when I started thinking about urban Walden. A hope, a rallying point for life outside the malls.

Currently the corporate racist tendencies of metroville have created their own isolated indoor kingdom. This popular centralizing formula, which is of course a nation-wide trend, snuffs out the plurality and originality of the older-style urban area. So hurry to the latest pre-fab consumer district in your area. The multi-impulse joint, nothing will stop me before I run out of quarters. Shit, I wish I played Missile Command instead of that last game of Vietnam.

Go-Go-driving putting my auto through that perameter-beep-that-wasss-uh-close-one-beep. Do the zombie dance. Looking for it out on the street-stepping chest high eyes. Eluding everyone's consciousness. Somehow, Atlanta seems different than up north. Many black men will nod their heads in quick acknowledgement, women smile more often. Strides are being made here towards a biracial system, but the limited sections of progressive inner city are surrounded by an enormous rural town. I see every nod as an anarcho-vote, a stride towards urban Walden. Every new-found presence is enlightenting and another vote.

II. Hug-a-Mugger and Other Direct Actions

The woman began to quicken her step. Now she was sure that man was really following her. Gasping, a glance backward proved that he too had quickened his pace. Tragically, she went for her usual short-cut through a small park. As he gained some ground behind her, she knew she had to run. But it was too late, the awesome figure was right there! In a flash the woman turned and threw herself limp in his arms and said, "Oh my god, I'm so glad you're here. I'm alone and it's dark and I was becoming so frightened. My children are home waiting for me. Would you please walk me home."

The two had coffee thogether that night in her home, and are still friends to this day, with a tragedy avoided. I grant you, this extraordinary reflex and hugging muggers in general is an acutely difficult alternative. But it's something new that worked. This resourceful woman not only saved herself but transmuted insane frustration and hate into fellowship. A single action that may have completely cured one of humanity's cancer cells.

Our eyes move from those who need, back inside to our own excuses. The stepping up of exploitation by the Reagan administration is a call to arms and hugs among the people. City people are going to have to find new ways of cooperating to survive.

Here is a chance to step up independence form government, and keep it that way. At the crossroads of consumption sits a dollar that may turn and fall into a video machine. New solutions may escape us as we attempt to numb away the rat-race. We want a party every day. Me too, but I'm afraid I would isolate myself when I shouldn't be isolated. As the mass-media portray rich people's fun, they're slack on portraying the emotions and magnitude popular suffering, except to sensationalize.

Dishing out coins to panhandlers is an eclipsed solution. It tends to sidestep personal contact. Who wants to support a cause unbeknownst to them? One which may sneer behind your back every time. If you were to give ten dollars when asked for a quarter, the hatred would surely boil. "That bastard throws out tens like gum wrappers." I think we have to help change this by giving some of our time. Sure I'll give you a quarter if you have a second to talk.

A chance to learn lies in the cross-talk. Along with the sharing of respect, which may be all one needs to defend oneself in society. Or you may learn there is someone or some cause more deserving. At least you know who you're helping and will have shared more than your two cents. The transition is easy, I think we can chip away at the fool eyes that avoid over fear of two less video games. Whether up or down, let's build some perspective, for our own consumption.

Personally, I think the rebellion is being marketed. We've got to be more aware of being separated from experience. The night club that has a staring at a video screen; chain food that ain't got no soul; auto traffic that turns us into congested objects. We've got to work to experience life, so we remember what we're trying to save. As well as prevent others from diluting our experience because it is their way of making money. We need clubs where a seat at a couch is all that is needed to begin building a new interaction.

Urban Walden is my personal cry for change. At the Center of the concept are actions for progress. It is a label which serves to spur on new notions for progress. It's a locus of points designed as a cure for domestic helplessness and interpersonal passivity. It is hope for a dedicated action against the forces all around us which by nature try to whittle down our creativity and aggressive sensitivity. The search for urban Walden is a cause: direct action towards freedom. It is a notion which must be discussed and personally defined by each individual so we don't become further confused as to what is an aid and a hindrance in the new age. I mean of the modern technology what can we realistically do to protect ourselves or become acutely aware of to utilize or avoid. Here I close a reckless attempt to stir up new discussions on some same old ideas that are becoming ever harder to see.

R.S. Vigeant