

Peter

The Body Politic

### week 3

Don't let yourself  
be defeated  
by the thousands of things that can defeat you...

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My street in Bristol is directly opposite the main motorway into the city. From the front door I can see traffic day and night, From my room I can hear the traffic. I am now able to tell if it is raining outside by listening to the traffic.

During the past seven days I spoke to the woman I love via the telephone. I had a conversation with a friend around a table in her kitchen. Mostly, I have listened to hundreds of hours of talk from men and women in London, in Hong Kong, in Washington, in New York.

A listener. A radio listener. During my journey to Warren Street tube station last week, I turned the radio on underground, searching for words in the vortex of sound, tiny clues that could give me access to the live press conference in the city above. The BBC had spoken to a man who felt he could no longer keep silent. They listened and at this moment, as I travelled beneath the city, the Chairman was resigning.

In Bristol, in darkness, I walk the streets. Uphill, to a spot I accidentally discovered one day. It is by the side of a busy road, just at the bend of a corner. From there, the city is opened up in a view of astonishing complexity. There are no symbols on maps, or plaques by the road, to forewarn you. You trip up on the city as you turn the corner. I walked there to stop and look and listen. I turned the radio off and listened. A train passed below. With the train carriages illuminated below I sensed a perfection here; a hundred understandings of what a city at night should feel like were confirmed.

On my walk to work this week I thought of how it is possible to move in one's mind from ambition to defeat in a moment. I am always late, always reluctant to spend another day with a phone in my hand. I slide into defeat whenever I think of the necessity of my being at this job every day, only to make money to pursue that that I love; to perform, to share ideas and stories. I thought of John Berger's comment in *A Painter of our Time*; "this working is always the same. At 9 o'clock in the morning you are full of plans and ability and truth. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon you are a failure."

At times like these the words that encompass my life are:

I've made mistakes  
I've made mistakes.

I am not alone in Bristol. I belong to a group of six ex-Dartington students who moved here independently of each other but find ourselves with each other in these streets and kitchens. Each of

us struggles alone and together; with money, time. Essentially we struggle with the trap we find ourselves in – how to exist as artists in this time. We know of Monet having bread stolen for him, we know of Kafka writing on the bus back from his work, and it will stop raining, but this week we hold each other knowing each other's minds.

At the end of my street there is a community centre. I enter it. People from the neighbourhood are encouraged to hire rooms to talk. An urban neighbourhood, but what other generalities exist outside of it, exist on the page? Black? I am not black, I live there. Poor? My landlord, whom I live with, is wealthy. Dirty? Frightening? I have seen moments of beauty and generosity just as much here as anywhere.

I see a drawing on a board. It is of my street. The council plan to erect a fence in between my street and the motorway. No more ~~cars~~. No more knowing the weather.

traffic.