

**SYMPATHEIA:
A short film and essay —
An interdisciplinary challenge to neoclassical
economics**

by:

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Abstract

My project is a 13-minute original narrative film that aims to ground and humanize what I view as the rationally detached economic ideas inherited from the Age of Reason, Isaac Newton and influential philosophers like Adam Smith and economists like Milton Friedman.

Sympatheia, the title of my film, is an ancient Greek term that means “organic connections” which I use as a counterpoint to the isolation and alienation that our atomized society seems to be struggling with since science eliminated morality from economics. A root cause of this atomization is the incorporation of Newtonian physics into our economic belief system.

The film involves the challenges of a homeless man, John, struggling with a voice in his head that has a suspicious, politically tinged agenda. John is forced into a quest for internal peace, self-respect and identity, while the voice in his head forcefully argues for a different, rigid path to happiness based on an absolutist, mathematical interpretation of economics common to the Chicago School and the writings of Milton Friedman. Under this rubric, our notions of freedom and liberty become psychologically challenging and socially unsustainable.

Keywords: neoclassical economics, happiness, history, mental illness, philosophy, advertising.

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1. Introduction

Neoclassical economics is detached from humanity and is in need of an interdisciplinary intervention. My argument against — and my therapy for — the rigid rationalism of the Chicago School of economics is a healthy dose of balance, derived from a broader recognition of human sympathies. This is a primary driver of the short film *Sympatheia*.

This is a passionate, artistic challenge to the narrow view that humans are exclusively rational. An overly rational application of reason within an economic belief system does not necessarily produce happiness but instead leads to social and personal upheaval.

2. Motivation for the Film

The film's premise arises out of personal experiences working in the mental health field, in addition to my university degree in biological and abnormal psychology. I have also worked in Vancouver's downtown eastside for the federal government and other institutions. I have witnessed the catastrophic consequences of flawed social policies combined with the structure of modern consumer society, where social relations seem less oriented towards communal needs and more focused on individual short-term desire for the acquisition of purchased goods. This leads to alienation, which leads to breakdowns in society.

An unfortunate real-life attack on a female jogger in Stanley Park a few years ago also provided inspiration for the film. The Stanley Park attacker was said to be suffering from a mental illness but there was very little information provided about his situation. I found this lack of information, or lack of effort to understand him, almost as troubling as the attack itself. This form of alienation prevents us from understanding more about how real people function within modern society. I felt troubled and distant from my own community and its underlying problems.

The media seems to reinforce social atomization. Little effort is made by the broadcast media to inform or explain the underlying forces at play within our society. Television is as a poor surrogate for community relations but an excellent tool to reinforce alienation and the social hierarchy.

3. Why a Film?

The medium of film, using a narrative storyline, offers a powerful communication tool capable of generating emotions within the viewer with greater impact than usually found between an author and reader. Since my concern is to highlight how emotions and different points of view are an important part of our lives, and should be a part of our economic models, film is the medium for my message.

It should also be stated that economics as a discipline is, according to many, not a science but a belief system. Belief systems are also an important subtext to this film.

4. The Work Involved

Sympatheia took approximately two years to write, cast, film and edit. Although this film was low in budget it was a technically complex project. A great deal of effort was made to contact a young, eager crew looking for experience. Once the script had been read by a few people, volunteers started signing up. By the time we were ready to shoot, I had a crew of 16 people, including two assistant directors. There were people in every department, from make-up and special effects to a stunt coordinator.

The number of actors willing to audition for the film was surprising. Seventy local actors were reviewed as potential participants for 16 parts.

Several weeks of planning were required to find locations, develop or purchase costumes, build props, review the scenes with actors and organize a production schedule before the July 2005 shooting dates.

Post-production was a very challenging experience. Editing was particularly enlightening and technically formidable. The script presented very complex visual and sound challenges. Conveying two personalities within one character's head and abstract philosophical ideas required constant problem solving. We edited the film, off and on, for seven months.

5. The Premise of the Film

Sympatheia attempts to dramatize the legacy of Adam Smith's incorporation of Newtonian physics into his economic philosophy.

The core idea is Isaac Newton's theory of universal gravitation (1687), which advanced the idea of an ordered and rational universe. Natural phenomena, it was argued, are reducible to the movements of atoms regulated by laws of nature which God may have set in motion, but then stood aside from. Thus, there was no need for social intervention to hold the world together. Since the natural order is rational, it can be understood by human intelligence. Under Newton's influence, Smith wrote:

... This at least would be the case in a society where things were left to follow their natural course, where there was perfect liberty, and where every man was perfectly free both to choose what occupation he thought proper, and to change it as often as he thought proper.
– *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, Chapter X, Section I

Adam Smith took this mathematical universe of atoms and embedded it within his economic model. Today, much of North American economic ideas have been derived from the work of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, who were greatly influenced by Smith's ideas.

The Importance of Hayek and Friedman

Friedrich von Hayek was the theoretician of what is commonly referred to today as neo-liberal thought. He developed his theories immediately after the First World War in Vienna, Austria. In 1923 he studied in New York, and then returned to Vienna before

being invited to the London School of Economics in 1931. In 1946 he published *The Road to Servitude*.

Hayek's central theory is that it is impossible to plan the economy, since the centre never has enough information at its disposal to make a decision. Under these conditions there is nothing else to do but to leave it to the market. Individual decisions made by the millions of economic agents for their particular interests will represent the collective interest. Hayek wrote, "The... argument in favor of economic freedom was the outcome of a free growth of economic activity which has been the undesigned and unforeseen by-product of political freedom" (Hayek, 1944, p. 15).

In 1946, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, Milton Friedman, made his first trip to Europe to participate in a seminar given by Friedrich von Hayek in the context of the activities of the Mont-Pelerin Society. Hayek had a big influence on Friedman and it was Friedman who, in turn, had a considerable influence on North American economic policy.

Friedman was not just an academic; he had a strong interest in politics, which contributed to his success in disseminating his ideas. He was, for example, economic advisor to the candidate Barry Goldwater in the presidential election of 1964. In 1980, Friedman abandoned teaching and was employed by the Hoover Institute, which assured him a direct link with President Reagan and his advisors. It was these types of connections that allowed his economic ideas to become a part of the public discourse for many right-of-centre politicians. My film tries to reflect this phenomenon through the father / politician character who manages to find his way onto the television and radio and advance his political / economic point of view.

The Dominant Economic Ideology

The works of Hayek and Friedman shifted the centre of gravity of economic thought from “Keynesianism to neo-liberalism.” Friedman’s neo-liberal economics comes from a very narrow conception of rationality (i.e., instrumental rationality) with abstract notions of freedom solely defined as economic freedom, efficiency, and cost-benefit analyses. My film argues, as do other critics, that this view leads to social policies that neglect basic human needs.

Milton Friedman’s considerable influence within the business community came through such books as *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) and *Free to Choose* (1980). Within these books lies a fundamental economic idea that swept across the world: “Economic freedom is an essential requisite for political freedom” (Friedman, 1980, p. 2). This is arguably the corpus of our business rhetoric today.

Capitalists generally find access to the mainstream corporate media to espouse their principles. Innumerable research institutes, heavily subsidized by businesses, which have been set up in different countries have imposed the neo-liberal ideology on public opinion worldwide. These politicized principles are well-known to us today: that economic problems follow not from the action of businesses, but from those of the government; that inflation is caused by governmental deficits and not by the profits of enterprises; that the weakness of growth follows not from the overcapacity of production and the limitation of demand, but from governmental regulation and salaries that are too high.

Of course Adam Smith clearly inspired Friedman and Hayek. Friedman, for example, wrote, “Adam Smith’s flash of genius was his recognition that the prices that emerged from voluntary transactions between buyers and sellers — for short, in a free market — could coordinate the activity of millions of people...” (Friedman, p.13).

Living with Friedman

Out of concern for social harmony, human rights and justice, many philosophers and social critics have challenged various aspects of rational economics and its relationship to unfettered capitalism and neo-liberalism. These challenges have come from several different angles. Karl Marx, for example, took a scientific approach to his criticism of the social harm of unchecked capitalism. His analysis was groundbreaking and changed the way people saw economics. One of his solutions to the social disharmony of the industrial revolution was to de-emphasize the individual. Yet, he used Hegel's view, shared by Engels, that the development of human thought is objective and universal. I find this valuable but not entirely satisfying.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, was generally concerned about the negative effects of the Age of Reason. Kierkegaard favoured the individual but rejected reason. Like Kierkegaard, this film rejects the unity of reason and reality.

More specifically, I reject Isaac Newton at the core of economics and the idea that many have inherited which suggests people are always rational thinkers and actors; often we are not. This challenge is not new, but it is one that I find needs more public exposure. I am creatively trying to do this through the film. For this reason, John from the film says, "Don't believe everything you think."

Stated in another way, there is an ongoing tension between abstract thought and how people have to live. Often people at the bottom of the social ladder have fewer choices. Again from the film, John states during his argument with the fire: "Whose feet touch the ground? Yours or mine?" Despite John's problems, he believes he is living a real life and questions the "other" personality, in this case the fire, if it understands the difference between abstract ideas and reality.

Yet this film does not deny the value of reason and other types of rationality, inherent in democratic theories, that holds as supreme values the common good, human freedom, the fulfillment of basic human needs and the development of individual potential. Rather, it argues that, while modern capitalism has given individuals more personal freedom and more products that add value and interest to life (like John's iPod), it also has deprived them of much needed social relations. These two types of rationality are in conflict in advanced capitalist societies. On the one hand, the economic system itself requires profit making as its ultimate objective and taking care of human needs detracts from profit making; on the other hand the system also needs healthy well-educated and free individuals to do innovative work, which requires attention to the public good. We might ask ourselves what would happen to our economic system had Newton's ideas about the inherent logic of the universe never been applied to the socio-economic sphere?

This conflict is indeed addressed differently in different advanced capitalist societies and leads to different social policies; in many European countries, social policies more inclined to favour the common good and meet human needs are more prevalent, while in the United States, neo-liberal policies are more dominant, favouring short-term return on investments, with damaging consequences for the public realm in general and for innumerable humans in particular.

We need a different reflection of human nature. A comprehensive national social safety net can cover some of the problems of rational economics but does not necessarily remove the core idea Smith introduced to the West.

This problem weaves throughout this film. For example, my view is that severely punishing people who break the law does not always result in rational obedience, because we are not always rational. The film's TV reporter at the end states, "We are too

soft on crime.” This is a statement calling for a more rational application of public policy – a product of the Age of Reason.

At the film’s end, John is trapped within a philosophical, psychological and emotional dead end. He has been alienated from society. He is in great need of a social ethos that can support him and reinforce his communal nature.

His crime is of course an awful event. The question is: Who is to blame? Is it John, as a rational independent individual? Is he rational? Are any of us? Or is it society’s fault for not providing John with the proper support he needed? The aim of the film is evoke sympathy for all three characters: John, Sarah and the father. Their pain has become their organic connection: Sympatheia.

6. A Psychological Challenge to Rational Economic Thought

The following section is provided as a brief introduction to a growing body of social science-oriented research that supports the idea that people are not always rational and that conspicuous consumption is not the only or necessary path to happiness. The characters within my film may intuitively understand this but their lives have unfortunately not been touched by these developments. I believe it is important to present this information here to ground my position against the Smith – Friedman economic nexus.

The primary focus of psychology over the past 50 years has been the study of psychological illnesses and behaviour associated with the nervous system. Literature dealing with the study of well-being has been less common, but it is a growing area and enough information is available to highlight the benefits of interdisciplinary studies with economics. However, happiness as a study area is potentially immense and hard to define, so this discussion will only attempt to outline well-supported trends in recent studies that challenge basic neo-liberal economic assumptions. These challenges suggest a way to reconnect with the humanist side of our nature that rigid reason slowly disintegrated over time.

The first challenge: given the role reason has played in modern times, it is not surprising that economists prefer not to delve into the subjective states of the human mind and focus rather on observed behaviour, a logical rational maximizer model. Thus, an individual's "revealed preference" is based on what and how much one spends. It follows that one can improve their well-being by increasing their income for more possessions. Therefore policy measures aimed at increasing the income of a society as a whole lead to greater well-being: more is better.

The problem with this view is it assumes happiness is based on *hedonic* well-being alone. Psychologists, however, view subjective experience as an important source of information about individual utility (i.e., always acting to maximize the balance of pleasure and pain). For example, they are not convinced that choices are always rational. Less tangible emotions like fear, hope, disappointment, guilt and pride are worthy subjects for well-being studies. Life events and circumstances like friendships, work, income, family and health are also viewed as sources of happiness (Frey & Stutzer, 2002, p. 56). People also compare their situations with others and this affects their sense of well-being. These factors are a part of being human, and if economics cannot completely reflect human nature it is of little value. Fortunately, it appears this subjectivist approach has opened new avenues of study within economics.

For example, one such study titled *Explaining Happiness*, by Richard A. Easterlin, an economist at the University of Southern California, challenges orthodox economic objectivism. Easterlin sets up his *less rational* argument by acknowledging “the only one who can make authoritative judgments on a person’s feelings of well-being is the person concerned.” (Easterlin, 2003, p. 11179). Examining an individual’s self-reports, as a psychologist would, Easterlin reveals a useful method for studying subjective well-being; what he found certainly challenges economic orthodoxy and provides an example on how to re-think our disassociated ideas of personal happiness and social cohesion.

First, Easterlin found that there is a “significant positive association between income and happiness;” however, over time, as income increases then levels off, happiness remains unchanged, contradicting the idea that income and well-being go together (Easterlin, 2003, p. 11180). It was also shown that material aspirations increase proportionately with income. Therefore one does not get any closer or farther away from

their material goals and, as a result, well-being is unchanged. Thus more is not necessarily better.

Then Easterlin did something significant and in keeping with psychology, not mathematics. He broke well-being down into categories such as economic, family and health domains, each of which is important for one's well-being. Within the domain of family, Easterlin measured the value of marriage, divorce and widowhood in terms of an individual's perceived well-being based on a questionnaire. Within a material domain, nationally representative surveys taken in 1978 and 1994 that include questions of what people want of the "good life," such as cars, swimming pools and other material things were used as a measure hedonic wellness.

These domains were compared across time and against what has been purchased, obtained or experienced.

The results show, first, that one's well-being operates differently across domains. So, within the material domain, as stated above, aspirations for goods increase proportionately with one's material possessions and the greater the increase in possessions the greater the desire for possessions. Thus, while material happiness is never really achieved, there is a substantial persistence of the desire for a happy marriage among those widowed, divorced, and never married, while the happily married are generally fulfilled. Easterlin concludes that people allocate a disproportionate amount of time to the pursuit of material goods rather than familial objectives and as a result, "short-change goals that will have a more lasting effect on well-being" (Easterlin, 2003, p. 11182). Therefore, according to Easterlin's findings, people should reallocate their time in favour of family life if they wish for individual happiness.

The reason individual orthodox economists exclude preferences from policy considerations is that each individual is assumed to be the best judge of his or her own interests. If, however, individuals are unaware of the forces influencing their choices,

modern day political and economic emphasis on individual responsibility becomes problematic. Therefore, economics requires more analytical tools to better reflect subjective well-being.

Furthermore, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) are psychologists that challenge another aspect of the economic assumption that more is better. It has been assumed that the more choice and more information a consumer has regarding a potential product, the better off they will be. However, these investigators found that subjects offered a wider range of consumer choices were frequently less able to reach a decision and were more likely to regret the choices they did make. It appears the cost of decision-making can be taxing and lowers satisfaction (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999, p. 366). Thus the cost of searching can actually reduce well-being.

This small sample of psychological studies suggests that mainstream economic theories about human nature and happiness have been not only inaccurate, but also too simplistic. Perhaps even more important, we as individuals are not that perceptive about our own nature and source of happiness. It took the tools of the other social sciences to reveal what economics could not.

Annexe A: Sympatheia – A Film Synopsis

Background

Although *Liberty*, *Freedom* and *Individualism* are politically and culturally powerful words, they are abstract concepts that are rarely defined. This vagueness leaves such words subject to multiple interpretations and exploitation, particularly within North America and the United Kingdom. Those politically oriented who champion what is often generally referred to “neo-liberal” or neoclassical economic model repeatedly refer to these words, emotionally pulling us in to *their* vision of the world through *our* supposedly shared Western mythology.

But what happens when one digs below these abstract terms to see how they connect with the social aspects of human nature? One of the disciples of a ridged application of neoclassical economic thought was Margaret Thatcher, who said: “There is no such thing as society.” In other words, apparently, we are no longer social beings. We should not rely on or help each other. We are atoms. This film aims to explore these ideas.

So some people actually *believe* that society is an inherent burden. Yet, this belief must require a certain level of denial. We are still social and biological beings. This film tries to argue that even when certain powers are able to convey their anti-social economic ideas about people, society still exists and we cannot escape all of our interconnectedness, however denatured. While different social systems can create different types and levels of social connections, I suggest trying to deny social interconnections, for whatever purposes, can backfire and force society into dangerous internal conflicts.

This would be similar to a mental breakdown often found in individuals suffering from mental illness, grappling with convoluted, aberrant *thought* processes.

A Synopsis

- John, the main character, is down and out in Vancouver's downtown East side.
- He is a gentle, caring soul who has been struggling with a voice in his head. Recently he has lost access to medication that has helped him control his condition.
- Government cut backs have withdrawn his social benefits for medication and his strange internal voice returns.
- The only family John has left try to help by providing him with a music player with earphones, which may keep his other voice at bay.
- There is a suggestion that John's other voice has a certain amount of control over his thoughts and actions. For example, he doesn't remember how some books got into his backpack. He also has momentary thought-flashes of some other version of himself reading a book on the work of Isaac Newton.
- A big problem arises when John discovers he has lost his music player while he was on a journey collecting cans and bottles for money.
- Fearful the voice will return he tries to re-trace his path to find his music player.
- The political environment continues to exacerbate his situation. His shelter was closed; he encounters another desperate character, his music remains out of reach.
- The voice gains strength and confidence with each passing moment. It appears to have a distinctive point of view that John seems to understand but also fear.
- Then when John is at his lowest state, and his grasp of reality has blurred, he has one last fight for his preferred identity and his connection to his community. But John fails to keep the voice at bay and runs into the night under the light of his dark alter ego.
- In the end he doesn't care about people anymore and goes after the first white music player he sees, because that is what he needs and wants, even though it is clearly too late.

A Subplot

- Sarah is trying to deal with a perceived inadequacy by jogging to improve her physical conditioning. She too is making use of a music player in order to keep up with her more physically fit friends.

- Her father, a prominent neo-liberal politician, finds his refined views of a free society come back to haunt him in a most painful way.

Annexe B: The Screenplay

The following is the final form of the script used as a basis for the film, *Sympatheia*. It maintains the format common to most screenplays.

Sympatheia

A Short Film by

D.T. DeWitt

© 2005

FADE IN

1. EXT. STANLEY PARK, BLUE SKY — DAY

Fluffy clouds levitate in a dark blue sky as seen directly from the ground. A treetop sways in and out of the frame.

JOHN

(Whispering)

With cloudless orbs, grass-
green evince,
Reeds of earth from the
sky's remnants...

JOHN'S EYE

A watery eye blinks around reflected blue. LAUGHING heard.

MAN'S V.O.

Your words will not work
this time, John.

2. A PARK PATH — LONG SHOT

A FAMILY walks along a path through a lush STANLEY PARK.

THREE YOUNG WOMEN jog past the family. One runner, a novice jogger, stops running, bends over to catch her breath and then waves her friends on. Her name is SARAH.

3. INT. INNER CITY HOMELESS SHELTER

A slumped scruffy middle-aged homeless man, JOHN, sits on a BEAT-UP CHAIR in the corner of a busy homeless shelter. He is world-weary but bright eyed.

In the background other patrons are chatting. A TV resonates.

John is munching on some JUNK FOOD, looking into the light of a nearby window. He appears to be mumbling to himself.

A SMALL GIRL

An 8-YEAR OLD GIRL, CLARA, holding a SMALL PLASTIC BAG, looks up at her mother, DIANE, standing directly behind her.

The rosy cheeked, pony-tailed blond receives her mother's non-verbal reassurance and steps forward, towards John.

CLARA

Hi Uncle John.

John looks at her blankly (beat) - then he smiles.

JOHN

Hi Sweetie!

Clara smiles and relaxes.

CLARA

Mommy says you're not
getting any more help with
your pills. (Beat) Do the
voices hurt?

The TV VOLUME GOES UP.

JOHN

Don't worry, sometimes what
I hear is nice, Clara. Other
times...

John, clearly irritated, turns towards the BLARING TV in
the background. The volume LOWERS. He turns back, smiles.

...it's important not to
believe everything you
think.

CLARA

Maybe music is better than
strange voices?

Clara tentatively holds up her SMALL PLASTIC BAG and Diane
sits down behind Clara.

DIANE

Sorry we can't help more,
John.

CLARA

Granny gave it to me.

DIANE

I told Clara Granny's gift
was too expensive for her,

but it didn't matter, she
was already thinking of you.
I know with all the good
you've done, you deserve
more...

Tears well up in John's eyes. Clara steps forward and hands him the plastic bag. John hugs Clara. Clara steps back and stares expectantly.

John pulls out an APPLE IPOD MINI from the bag.

JOHN
Ohhh. It's beautiful!

John gently places his finger on the end of Clara's nose.

JOHN
Thanks, Blondie. I love it.

Clara smiles, big time. A proud mother places her warm hand on Clara's head.

CLARA
We put some music in it.

DIANE
She wants to help you charge
the battery when it goes
down.

John, smiling, grabs his small BACKPACK at his feet, opens it and, surprised, sticks his hand inside. He pulls out a STACK OF BOOKS.

JOHN
Damn, who keeps putting
books into my pack? This is
what I get for not watching
my stuff.

He throws them on a nearby table, dust curls upward.

INSERT: F. A. HAYEK'S THE ROAD TO SERFDOM and DESCARTES'
RULES FOR THE DIRECTION OF THE MIND.
Diane finds this moment curious. Clara moves away from her
mother and tries to read the spine of one of the books.

CLARA
Dez-cart-es, Rules for the
Direction of the Mind?

Then John pulls a GREY TOQUE out of his coat pocket and sticks the iPod into it, carefully wrapping it up and putting it in his pack. Mom and daughter watch his enthusiasm.

4. INT. LARGE LIVING ROOM

Sarah, returning from her jog, with her tight jogging shorts, t-shirt and water bottle, drags herself through the front doorway of her father's well-appointed home.

She is short, attractive, a little out of condition, blond with her hair tied up. She slumps onto the couch and turns on the TV. Sarah grabs a modest handful of waistline flab. On TV, a news crew is interviewing a politician...

POLITICIAN
...unlike the previous
government, we must build
efficiencies into the
economy by trimming the
unnecessary fat from the
system.

Shaking her head, Sarah puts her earplugs back into her ears.

POLITICIAN CONT.
Less government is better
government. These are simple
rules that will liberate
individual initiative.

The man on the TV walks into the house. He is Sarah's father. He is also overweight. His speaking tone is very up beat.

FATHER
Hi Sweetie!

Startled, Sarah quickly takes her earplugs out.

SARAH
Hi Dad.

FATHER

How's the running going?

SARAH

I'm too slow.

FATHER

Turn the music up.

5. COMMUNITY CENTRE FLOOR – NIGHT

John is curled up on the floor, sleeping on a PILLOW with his new EARPHONES in place. His iPod is stuffed inside his toque next to his pillow. FAINT MUSIC can be heard.

6. EXT. DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE ALLEY – DAY

John is digging in a GARBAGE BIN. He is wearing his earphones. FAINT MUSIC IS HEARD. His eye catches LEGS sticking into the alleyway from an inset doorway. The prostrate, well-dressed younger man moves. This is MACK.

JOHN

Hey?

John instinctively moves to assist the man, who is trying to sit up. Orphaned from a wild party gone badly, he is beat-up and glassy eyed. John holds Mack's head up and gives him some WATER.

MACK

Ahh, man, I've got to stop bumping into you like this.

Mack holds his throbbing head. Easily distracted, he watches a DRUGGED OUT GIRL rock by. John notices.

JOHN

Let's get you outta here.
Can you make it home?

John helps Mack up.

MACK

Yah, thanks, man. Take care.

Mack walks away with a fragile gate.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

7. EXT. EAST SIDE BOTTLE DEPOT - DAY

John rolls his GROCERY CART, full of BOTTLES and CANS, from the street up to the open-air CASHIER into a noisy space. He is not wearing his earphones. The cashier smiles...

CASHIER

Hey, John, haven't seen you
for a while.

JOHN

Gone collecting. Got stuck
under the bridge in the
rain. Cold nights.

The cashier's eye twitches strangely. John stops emptying the plastic bag and stares at him. The cashier leans aggressively forward and speaks slowly.

CASHIER

(SLIGHTLY DISTORTED)

Finally, you have been
liberated. This time you
will hear me, as you should,
John. Now it's inevitable.

John drops his cans. Then the cashier starts ringing in the bottles as if all is normal. John drops to the ground and...

CASHIER VO

(DISTORTED)

It's okay that your loss
will crush your niece's
heart...

Suddenly, John feels for the earphones in his ears. They are gone. John frantically looks in his coat and backpack. Nothing. He stares up at the cashier back at work. John takes off...

8. UNDERSIDE OF A CAR BRIDGE

John runs into the frame breathing heavily. He digs through BOXES, SLEEPING BAGS, SHOPPING CARTS and GARBAGE. Nothing. Out of a MAKE-SHIFT HOUSE a homeless voice responds.

BRIDGE HOBBIT
What's up, John!

John jumps and turns toward the darkness.

JOHN
My music!

BRIDGE HOBBIT (OFF)
Maybe the shelter..

9. FRONT OF INNER CITY HOMELESS SHELTER

John is rushing down the street towards his beloved shelter. As he approaches the shelter we see a SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE standing outside the main entrance.

There is a sign on the entrance door.

THE STAFF OF THE POWELL
SOCIETY SHELTER REGRET TO
INFORM YOU WE ARE CLOSED DUE
TO A CUT IN FUNDING.

REMAINING PERSONAL
BELONGINGS WILL BE STORED AT
1047 WILBUR STREET UNTIL 3
PM FRIDAY, MAY 10.

JOHN
But isn't that today?

He turns to a small, fragile looking woman – clearly a member of the local community – and places a hand on her shoulder.

JOHN
What time is it?

She points to a TV sitting in a storefront window.

SMALL WOMAN

Almost three. (From John VO)
Almost free.

John rushes out of the frame.

10. INT. WILBUR STREET COMMUNITY CENTRE, FRONT DESK

FEMALE DESK CLERK
Where the hell have ya been?
The sign was up for quite a
while.

As she stands up and begins to move from behind the desk to look down a hallway, she says...

FEMALE DESK CLERK
I'm sorry I think you might
be too late.

Just at that moment a BEEP, BEEP sound can be heard. It's the sound of a garbage truck backing up. She turns back and John is gone.

11. INT. GARBAGE TRUCK CABIN - DRIVER

The driver glances quickly at his REARVIEW TV MONITOR as he backs up a few metres. He stops and looks forward, watching the dumpster he now has on his front hooks rise off the ground, making its way to the back of the truck.

As the garbage bin gains height the driver sees two feet hanging from behind the elevated bin.

12. EXT. BACK ALLEY - GARBAGE TRUCK

John is still hanging from the bin when the driver, surprisingly calm, walks up...

GARBAGE TRUCK DRIVER
Whatcha doin' buddy?

JOHN
You have my music. (Beat)
Please!

The driver looks at his watch.

13. INT. SARAH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Sarah is eating ice cream in the kitchen, while she stares out the window at some young man. Her father is talking on the radio heard in the background:

SARAH'S FATHER/OFF
...the common good derived
from efficiency-enhancing
properties of the
competitive process depend
upon economic flexibility.
Natural Liberty gives...

Sarah reaches off screen and turns off the radio: CLICK.

14. EXT. EAST SIDE BACK ALLEY

A MANGY LOOKING DOG sits in the alley staring at the camera.

John is sitting in the alleyway next to the now empty dumpster, surrounded by SCRAPS OF GARBAGE, holding his GREY TOQUE and a PHOTOGRAPH. No iPod. He is dejected.

DOG
John, your music is close. I
can smell it. But why burden
yourself with this emotional
preoccupation? This social
distraction is such a
limitation. Society is a
leash. Lift its latch.

John covers his ears from the horror of a talking dog and looks away.

He sees another dumpster diver across the way partially buried in a recycle bin. His BIKE is leaning against a FENCE nearby. John lowers his hands from his ears and gets up.

John walks over and looks into the dumpster diver's PLASTIC BAG full of CANS and CONTAINERS. No Music player.

Then another TUFF LOOKING MAN at the other end of the alley appears. He is carrying a RED BACKPACK. He looks at John and then, seemingly startled, walks away disappearing down a perpendicular street.

John turns the other way and looks at the talking dog, still sitting in the middle of the alley. The dog says nothing but looks where the red-bagged man was standing.

John, assuming the red-bagged man is important, quickly looks at the dumpster diver. The diver is too busy to notice John.

John grabs the dumpster diver's bike, hops on and starts peddling the SQUEAKY BIKE.

DUMPSTER DIVER

Hey!

The dumpster diver runs after him with a sad limp: THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

Before John gets too far, and without looking back, he slows, head down, stops. The diver catches John.

JOHN

I could hear you limp.

Suddenly, a dark, four-door car pulls up. A man jumps out of the back seat and – WHAP – punches the dumpster diver in the face, who instantly collapses.

The assailant is, MACK, the well-dressed man John helped in the alley earlier. He throws John against a fence – THUMP!

MACK

(yelling)

What did you do with my
coke?

Mack weakens his stance with a nervous glance back into the car.

Smoke curls out of the dark open doorway.

Then Mack leans close to John.

MACK

(whispering)

Sorry.

Mack moves his head back slightly, strengthens his stance again, and starts yelling.

MACK
Where is it – you pathetic
little shit!

Mack is choking John. The dumpster diver is bleeding on the ground beside John. John is terrified. He covers his ears.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

15. EXT. ALLEY – NIGHT

John wakes up and looks out at the world from the inside of an overturned grocery cart. His face is beaten up. His jacket and shirt are torn, exposing his skin. He is disoriented and cold. He gets out of the cart and looks around. Everyone is gone. He sees his toque on the ground.

16. UNDERNEATH A CAR BRIDGE

John is sitting in front of a crackling fire trying to keep warm. He has an old towel around himself and is wearing his toque. It is raining. The BRIDGE HOBBIT is sitting next to him. Both wet, they just staring at the fire. The fire talks...

FIRE
Now this is better. Well
done, John. Everything is so
perfectly cold and clear,
don't you think?

John, are you listening?

The Bridge Hobbit is dosing off.

JOHN
Go to hell!

The Bridge Hobbit is startled awake.

FIRE

John, why the anger? Don't be afraid, release your optimism. You are an independent island now, with nothing but horizon.

JOHN

And you are a circling shark with a bottomless appetite.

CLOSE ON JOHN'S RAIN-SOAKED FACE

FIRE

Come on John, can't you feel the surrounding waves of freedom lapping against your skin?

Bridge Hobbit is dosing off again.

JOHN

What do you know of freedom? Is it your feet or mine that touch the ground?

Long pause. Anger...

FIRE

Perhaps my plans for you are limited by your lack of moral courage and self-interest.

John stands up and swipes at the fire.

JOHN

Oh, now it's morality I lack? Do you really know what that means? (Beat) Your chains are tight but I can still think: I know you're empty. You hide behind a mask of certainty. You depend on my passivity to exist. How is that moral?

FIRE

I know you want me to go away. You're scared, but don't fight it, John. I am your only option. I have dispensed with your attachments: your work, home, medicine and family. Clear your mind. You are an atom adrift, an uncompromised entity. Take this path of purity.

John grabs his towel and tries to beat the fire out. The TOWEL CATCHES FIRE and John runs into the night holding up the towel as the voice continues to speak in his mind.

FIRE

Yes, now it is just your fragile, fractured will whimpering in the palm of my invisible hand. Repress me no more. We will be strong. Follow me, John. Let us delve into the lush darkness of the abyss and make it our own...

The camera tilts as John disappears into the night.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

17. EXT. STANLEY PARK — LONG SHOT - DAY

Three young women are jogging along a path near water. One of them is listening to a music player as she runs.

STANLEY PARK FOREST

The woman with the music is Sarah. As the women round a bend Sarah begins to drop back.

The women appear out of a bend in the forest path. Sarah is not with them but the other two women keep running, seemingly unconcerned.

SARAH

Sarah is bent over puffing. She stands up and grabs her water bottle from her belt. She begins to walk as she drinks from the bottle. She is clearly tired. She turns up the volume on her iPod. She begins to run again.

Suddenly, an arm flashes in front of her face and - THUD - violently knocks her back. Her legs fly in front of her. She hits hard on the ground.

John is strangling her with the WIRES from her iPod earphones. He is wrapped in the wire too. His HANDS AND EARS ARE BURNT. Sarah cannot speak. Her face is red, contorted. She is violently, desperately squirming, with legs twisting and shaking everywhere.

JOHN

Let go, let go!

Now she is just twitching, just as the homeless man with the red bag pulls John off of her. John is thrown to the ground in tears, still holding some of the iPod wiring. More people start to gather around the motionless Sarah.

CROWD MEMBER

Call 911, Call 911!

John, lying flat on his back, stares into a cloudy sky. He only sees in BLACK AND WHITE. He was thrown into a tangle of MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT, impeding his view of the sky.

18. SARAH'S HOME

Sarah is in a WHEEL CHAIR, BRUISED, and CONTORTED. Her father is sitting next to her, trying to FEED HER with a SPOON. The TV is on.

TV REPORTER/OFF

No one seems to know why such disturbing crimes occur, Jane. Many we talked to here in this park today, still shaken from last week's event, feel that our society is simply too soft on crime.

Annexe C: Sympatheia - The DVD Film

This film is the primary port of this project, in the form of a DVD attached to this work.

It can be viewed on some DVD players and most computers with DVD capability.

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