**THINK TANK**

Things appeared to start well. I had had some success as a commentator on radio. I was busking in a snide comment as a party, a dialogue, an invitation, some green rooms, a talk, some consternation and the terrifying circumstances of being cherry picked by Bernstein, an encounter with Smith and the revenge of the taxidermist. Not a good month for the duplicity of the word.

The setting was not good. Neither was the money at first, although things did get looser afterward. The setting is the first thing to note, as it affected all of us as we arrived by different scandals and diversions, mine the most damply eloquent.

Bernstein had called after the radio show; found me in effect, as I was closing down access routes due to overindulgence on the net and some inappropriate comments to the media and, I suppose, leaking too many ideas that I should have kept to myself.

Bernstein wanted a "think head" which almost came out as “ thick head “which would have closed the conversation had I not had a good knowledge of Brooklyn American and he no knowledge of the acreage below the Thames and above the Home Counties.

He explained the deal; he had radio and media contacts; he had corporations that wanted to "interface" with "think people" and would I "brainstorm" a project. All this on a Thursday afternoon. I had come back from the art class covered in printing ink and sustained only by adrenaline and coffee. Bernstein went further, he had a premises owned by one of "his" people, cheap, affordable and lost in the county are perfect for a think tank situation.

Eventually I interjected a smallish question about what "we" were to think about. "Projects, so many projects" he returned, unstoppable. Well the rent was due on the studio, I needed some more ink for the prints and the boat was still for sale. I, to borrow terminology I was rapidly acquiring, wanted to "walk round the deal". He said he was far too busy for a lunch interface but he would e. me the location and the dates. The project would only be discussed at the location and that we would be joined by “Smith” who by description and later reality would be a shadow in the best sense of the word.

The location was the building, originally a workhouse in the 1800s, now a studio of an emerging artist, Jan. Bernstein owned the pile, rented out to the sculptor whilst he developed the idea of marketing the idea of Manhattan lofts in the middle of the countryside. Flawed but noble, just right for the American entrepreneur landing in England.

We were to arrive and brainstorm and eat and walk and talk and then he would sell the conclusion to the multinational for a fee. We were to get a per diem expenses and warm clothing. At first I thought he said Te Deum but never mind.

I arrived at night as in a movie. It was dark and cold. Unlike a movie I did not have charisma and wit. On arrival I was to ring the bell three times. By this time Bernstein's notes like a vague script, I was a performer. I was letting by a woman whose eyes were like a cold lake. It emerged that she rented the workshop at eastside. Bernstein had bought freehold but let her rent a studio whilst the conversion went ahead. The think tank start-up had interrupted the plan. Apparently the Corporations had atrophied in wealth creation, trade has shown strange new directions, ideas had replaced goods and industry, new money was flowing in strange ways and they want to know why.

Bernstein had made money in a strange series of corporate self-help books. Whether he was a conman with an MBA or an MBA with a good radio voice, I could not tell. He was a wow with the radio presenters and could turbo new-age business talk to the slot and come out with the "and finally" just as the second hand went round to the top of the hour. All this was running through my head as the woman showed me to a room. It was a cube. The ceiling had been taken out. The fireplace on the ground floor replicated by the one ten foot above. In the same way the windows repeated. The plaster had been torn off; the brick repointed. A bleak log burner was at least working, but the volume of the room gave it some job to do.

Across from the fireplace, a small console of equipment tented with polythene over a chrome frame. I explained to Bernstein that I was not techno aware. He had solved the problem by hiring Smith who would set up the equipment and maintain the transmissions. There was some device that could get hold of Bernstein wherever he was and we could hold a conference whenever. I thought I could detect the red disc of an infrared light source on the ceiling of the cube, and so suspected that he could look record as required.

There was a file on the leather couch, and a fax on the cover telling me to digest the brief and wait for call. I had assumed that this would be a tough one, so I had brought the full sailing kit expecting a difficult crossing and not too much galley facility. I stoked up the log burner and looked at the file.

 \* Space Junk\*

The file was a mess. Obviously put together by a sub grad. researcher, it contained a mess of faxes, Xeroxes and some spam from nerds and survivalists. It took me log or three to get through it. Essentially Bernstein had sold himself to a corporation. He was now "I supply", I as in intelligence rather than Internet. The "I" was contracted out to grey matter like myself. Bernstein gets a huge fee +10% sweetener expressed in stock options.

There was no reason to include me: I could spiel; I could tap dance around an idea; I could talk you under the table, but Bernstein wanted ideas about space junk. I logged onto the fireplace with real firewood. Space junk. A suitable easy term for that which is up there and is now out of commission. Corporation A spent millions of dollars to get it up there and now wants to recover it. I seethed at Bernstein: he needed a science buff, someone in fractals or quantum stuff for starters. My only interest in science was the early Asimov and the fifties stuff. I remembered all the early science fiction that I had consumed as a kid; reams of pulp and those "future will provide" stuff that now seems the content of Tomorrow's World.

The logs were going down. There is an awful paradox in thought generation. Sit there and think and you think of nothing; go walkabout and the brain inbox kicks in without to direction and spits a pip of reason just when you do not really expect it.

It was late; about three I suppose. The fire had made me flushed and I needed to evacuate. I got up and the space evacuation came to mind along with the junk there must be some interesting plastic bags floating about. I trod the corridor looking for a toilet. The third door was unlocked and I lit the scene. It appeared to be a storeroom or an old laundry. There was a sink that I used and beyond that a boiler or something. Strange sounds. I peered around the corner. There was a large glass vat over an industrial burner. Inside the vat was a horse’s head the flesh of which detached and floating in a brown scum on the surface. I was frozen, I retched, and I returned to the sink and did a second evacuation.

The next day I sought out the sculptress. I wanted to know what surprises to avoid. She showed me the workshop. There was a ghastly collection of bones, feathers, metal and just junk. An oxy welder, some chain lengths, a gas operated forklift, some bench drills and saws. Enough. She had a curious stare as if one was to be the next occupier of that glass vat. I made it clear that we had to have our own territory. She showed the kitchens and supplies and slid off to the studio. I did not want to see that place again.

Bernstein called to confirm my arrival. I suspected that the console infrared setup was reporting on me so I played it straight. Any ideas? I explained that I had not digested the printed stuff and then realised that that I would have to tap dance at least once during every conversation. "A Teflon net contra rotation" I said in a hurry. "What"? I tried again.

"A reverse orbital Teflon mesh to collect the material as the earth span on orbit”.

I would have to read some more science fiction. He made me feel that my days were numbered. The tap dance would have to be faster. Bernstein grunted; this thing was out of both our hands. He told me to fax an outline and cut some more logs. I would do it by dawn; I would have something about evacuation.