

# System Overload: Neil Roberts, Punk Anarchism and *The Maintenance of Silence*

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*New Zealanders can be forgiven a sense of disbelief when they woke up on Saturday to see coils of barbed-wire staked in double lanes around the sportsground in Palmerston North, and police squads guarding every intersection.*

*But the real shock came shortly before 2pm when 2500 anti-apartheid protestors came face-to-face with Red Squad – and stopped in their tracks, appalled and afraid.*

*Orwell's spectre of tomorrow, God help us, is here today!*

*It stood there at the intersection of Cuba and David Streets, unflinching, cold, remorseless.<sup>1</sup>*

Like this Australian observer, many in New Zealand in the early 1980s feared that Orwell's 1984 was rapidly approaching. In the winter of 1981, massive protests against the Springbok rugby tour brought out the riot police – with backup from the military. On the day of the match in Palmerston North, a demonstration leader told the protesters: 'I'd like to welcome all of you from out of town to the city of Palmerston North which is a city under siege. We've got 1500 cops here, we've got long batons, short batons, we've got dogs, we've got barbed wire, we've got the air force overhead and the army at the ground. Which will make any South Africans in this town feel pretty much at home, because it's very much like Johannesburg.'<sup>2</sup> As the marchers passed the Red Squad, they chanted 'two, four, six, eight, police are pawns of the fascist state'.<sup>3</sup>

Less than three weeks later Prime Minister Robert Muldoon released a report from the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) that named 15 'radicals' involved in the anti-tour protest movement, including eight allegedly belonging to 'subversive organisations' (the Workers' Communist League and the Communist Party of New Zealand).<sup>4</sup> Such use of domestic intelligence by the Muldoon government was not new. Police and SIS had in fact conducted surveillance and undercover operations against the Halt All Racist Tours organisation (HART) and communists active in the trade union movement.<sup>5</sup> In 1977, the Security Intelligence Service Amendment

Act consolidated the powers of the state to spy on those it deemed security threats. Twenty thousand demonstrators marched against the passage of the bill to no avail, and even a government MP warned that 'New Zealand was well on the way to becoming a police state'.<sup>6</sup>

To its opponents, a major symbol of the state's creeping fascism was the Wanganui Computer.<sup>7</sup> Commissioned in 1976 and operated by the police, it was a centralised national database on individuals. Information held by the police was pooled with that from the justice and land transport departments and could be accessed by authorities 24 hours a day.

At 12:35 a.m. on 18 November 1982, 22-year-old Neil Ian Roberts detonated six sticks of gelignite outside the entrance to the computer centre. A large explosion occurred, and Roberts was killed instantly. Guards behind three rows of bullet-proof glass were knocked to the ground but not hurt. Even though the foyer of the building was extensively damaged, police claimed that normal operation of the computer system continued unimpeded.<sup>8</sup>

Roberts was a punk anarchist. Shortly before the bombing he had spray-painted 'We Have Maintained a Silence Closely Resembling Stupidity' in a nearby public toilet (The statement is an excerpt from the Revolutionary Proclamation of the Junta Tuitiva, La Paz, 1809, and is used as the epigraph to Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*<sup>9</sup>). He had also painted the anarchy-is-order symbol (A circled by an O) and the words 'anarchy peace thinking'. Evidence pointed to the act being intentional suicide; in a gruesome detail, a piece of his breast bearing the tattooed inscription 'this punk won't see 23 – no future' was found amongst the debris.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1980s, organised anarchist political activity in New Zealand was at a low ebb, with most leftwing activism outside the Marxist parties concentrated in the anti-apartheid and anti-nuclear campaigns.<sup>11</sup> Only a tiny smattering of anarchist groups survived. Inheritors of the tradition of coordinated political protest from the days of the Vietnam War and of the collective ethos of the hippie counter-culture, they engaged in activities like promoting non-violent tactics of direct action within the peace movement.

Punk anarchism was something different, the political dimension of a defiant youth subculture that had emerged in reaction to hard times. Tony Boraman observes: 'Punk could be seen as an angry working-class counter-cultural response to the mid-1970s recession, the nationwide mood of decline and the conservative authoritarian backlash against the liberalism of the 1960s . . . by the late 1970s, a very loose community of anarchist punks emerged . . . made up of scores of unemployed youth'<sup>12</sup> (A participant in the movement, Sam Buchanan, contests the view that it was predominantly working-class, arguing that 'it was really all over the class spectrum'<sup>13</sup>). When punk adopted an anarchist stance, it was thus a 'blacker, darker, more

negative approach to things' in comparison to the anarchism of the early years of the decade.<sup>14</sup>

Contributing to the mood of despair amongst disaffected youth was the growing threat of nuclear annihilation. As Reagan ordered the production of the neutron bomb, American warships with missile warheads capable of destroying 192 cities were officially welcomed into New Zealand harbours.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, unemployment was at a level unseen since the Great Depression. Nevertheless, Muldoon's National government was re-elected in 1978 and 1981.

An anarchist punk magazine, *Fascism and Boredom*, appeared in 1982. A riotous montage of fragmented photographs, graphics and text, it made reference to the neutron bomb and contained, under the heading 'Joys of Destruction', the comment: 'Can we get justice without violence? NO!'<sup>16</sup> As one commentator writes: 'Punk is often dismissed as negative and nihilistic, but in the early 80s it was a child of its time: not only a protest against the stifling and boring cultural conformity in Aotearoa, but also an understandably pessimistic reaction to the state of the kiwi society at the time.'<sup>17</sup>

For Sam Buchanan, 'punk was just part of this whole sort of bleakness that was infecting society with unemployment and so forth, and it was a reaction to it that to many people was wholly positive'. Citing the 'fresh, exciting kind of grassroots music' it produced ('it was what really created the whole idea of New Zealand music, as opposed to let's copy what's going on overseas') and the 'incredibly friendly' punk gigs held in local halls, he notes that a number of participants have since credited the movement with saving their lives. While there was some drug use, particularly marijuana, Buchanan contends: 'It wasn't really a big part of the scene . . . . One often heard stories of punks from New Zealand who'd go to Australia and end up junkies, where drugs were much more available.'<sup>18</sup> There was interest in existentialist literature and comic book art: another of those involved at the time, Loren Squires, recalls: 'There was a nihilist element to it, and if you weren't being nihilist, you could be existentialist . . . . I'd read Camus' *The Outsider* but some of my friends had read more: Camus, Nietzsche, English anarchist underground art stuff.'<sup>19</sup>

Neil Roberts was a part of this loose community. From a well-off Auckland family, he was a former forklift operator and assistant chef who had startled his friends by turning punk.<sup>20</sup> Squires, who was an acquaintance, describes him as 'an enthusiastic and vibrant person . . . quite an eccentric character, he was a punk, but went bare feet, and always wore these heavy yellow sort of sou'wester trousers, yellow plastic trousers, they were a bit beaten up and a bit grubby'.<sup>21</sup> Janis Freegard, who also knew him at this time, recalls black trousers and torn shirts, shaved eyebrows, black eye-liner

under his eyes, safety pins in his ears: 'He'd shave off his hair, or he'd have green hair, or there was one time when he'd shaved it all off apart from one triangle that he'd dyed green.' He had made himself a badge reading 'drug-takers against the bomb'. Freegard, too, found him a cheerful person: 'He didn't seem despairing or depressed at all . . . he was really kind of friendly and chatty.'<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Sam Buchanan, who first met him at a war games convention, says that 'he came across as an extremely friendly, warm, downright pleasant human being'.<sup>23</sup>

In Buchanan's view, Roberts was 'definitely highly intelligent'. He is reputed to have become an anarchist after having found a copy of a book by Bakunin on his parents' bookshelf; a friend reported that 'he had this old tattered book on anarchy (by 19th century Russian anarchist Bakunin) which he was reading all the time'.<sup>24</sup> Buchanan believes that he would have been reading serious politics: 'He wasn't dipping into punk fanzines or . . . getting this shallow view of anarchism through punk music and so forth, which was not always shallow but frequently was . . . There were of course punks who adopted the symbols and had a very half-formed idea of what anarchism was. He wasn't one of those.'<sup>25</sup>

Roberts had been involved in the anti-Springbok tour movement and spoke of the 'raw deals' he had been given by the police.<sup>26</sup> He had convictions for possession of cannabis and obstruction of the police; after the bombing Police Minister Ben Couch declared that Roberts was 'a known protestor and was believed to have taken part in this year's violent Waitangi Day protest'.<sup>27</sup> He drifted around the country, took to living in a house bus, and travelled to Taranaki. 'The second-to-last time I saw Neil,' Freegard recalls: 'He'd come up from Stratford, where he'd been staying. He'd changed his name to Null. He wasn't working or getting the dole and owned nothing but the clothes he was wearing. His black dog, Umbrella, was with him, hungry but uncomplaining. Neil was living off cold pies & doughnuts he took from factory canteens at night.'<sup>28</sup> Buchanan remembers Roberts selling off 'ridiculously cheap' or giving away all his possessions, such as his boxes of toy soldiers.<sup>29</sup>

It was clear in hindsight that his action had been planned for some time: 'It was no spontaneous or sudden decision.'<sup>30</sup> Freegard recalls: 'He often talked about blowing something up, and the timing of it would change, and the location would change, like he talked about blowing up the Beehive at one point, he talked about blowing up the Auckland Central Police Station, and I wasn't quite sure how serious he was about it . . . But he was always talking about blowing himself up in the process.'<sup>31</sup> The eventual choice of the Wanganui Computer Centre, was, Buchanan believes: 'very considered, and very much a political target. There was no, right, I'm going to go out and take people with me, or the terrorist methodology of I am out to create

fear. There was no attempt to create fear in the minds of any ordinary person. It was aimed at a specialist arm of the state.<sup>32</sup>

Roberts would have been motivated both by personal animosity to the police and by general anti-police sentiment in the punk community.<sup>33</sup> But it was the Computer Centre's function within a system of state surveillance that Buchanan believes would have been the principal motivating factor: 'At the time it was very much a symbol of increasing state pressure. In hindsight, it almost looks naive to see what was a fairly basic database as a sort of a symbol of state tyranny, given the levels of surveillance and information handling that now exist. At the time it was very much regarded as a symbol and a functioning part of the increasing surveillance of the state, this being in the Muldoon era and post-1981, the Springbok Tour.'<sup>34</sup>

Fellow punks were very much aware of the significance of Roberts's self-sacrificial act of sabotage. One said: 'It was not an act of cowardice . . . it was making a statement with his life.'<sup>35</sup> Squires comments: 'It was martyrdom . . . I had no idea he would do anything like that, but when he did it, it was like yeah, you know, that made sense.'<sup>36</sup> Roberts thus joined the ranks of Camus' rebels: 'If an individual actually consents to die, and, when the occasion arises, accepts death as a consequence of his rebellion, he demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny.'<sup>37</sup>

Within New Zealand society as a whole, however, the act was not interpreted politically. The punk community did not claim it publicly. As Buchanan comments: 'There wasn't really a cohesive movement to make that sort of claim.'<sup>38</sup> Generally, the New Zealand media characterised the bombing as the misguided gesture of a misfit. This dismissal disturbed filmmaker William Keddell when he determined to make a short film about the event.

Returning to New Zealand in 1982 after ten years in London – where he graduated BA (Hons) from the Chelsea School of Art and was involved in film projects – Keddell was shocked by the change the country had undergone: 'When I came back nobody seemed to have noticed that New Zealand had become a police state.' He cites the harassment from the police Merata Mita was undergoing while making her documentary about the Springbok tour protests. When the bombing occurred, Keddell was angered by the media reaction to 'what was clearly a politically motivated suicide': 'The "misguided youth" stuff just swept the real issues under the carpet. The Wanganui Computer was worth protesting about. It represented a profound and sad change in New Zealand.'<sup>39</sup>

For his project Keddell received funding from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (augmented by a tax write-off scheme) and later a completion grant from the New Zealand Film Commission. Keddell relates: 'I got a

knock on the door from some plainclothes Auckland cops when the Arts Council grant for the film was announced in the *NZ Herald*. They asked me some basic questions, but when they realized I was not trying to incite a rebellion they left me alone.<sup>40</sup> Titled *The Maintenance of Silence*, the film was shot on 16mm in Auckland, Taranaki and Wanganui during 1984.<sup>41</sup>

With a running time of 22 minutes, it was completed and released in 1985. It played as a short in the Auckland and Wellington Film Festivals (accompanying Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise*) and had a three-week season at the Capitol Cinema in Auckland. Television New Zealand initially rejected it: 'We . . . regret that we have little or no interest in screening it in New Zealand, at the present time.'<sup>42</sup> However, it was later broadcast in both New Zealand (1987) and Australia, and was distributed on video by the New Zealand Film Commission. It was also exhibited in New Zealand, Canada and the United States as part of a touring programme of experimental shorts and documentaries organised by Martin Rumsby, while Keddell himself arranged screenings in the UK.<sup>43</sup>

*The Maintenance of Silence* uses the device of a fictional character, a dapper young man named Eric probing into the facts of the case, to tell its story of the bombing. The protagonist (played by a nonprofessional actor, Tony Drumm), disturbed by being awakened in Auckland at precisely the moment the bomb is detonated in Wanganui, becomes absorbed in pondering the character and fate of Neil Roberts.<sup>44</sup> He contacts a friend of Neil's, Brian, in Auckland, and then travels to Taranaki, where he discusses Neil's last days with Carol, another friend. Finally, he interviews the manager of the cinema where Roberts had gone on the night of the bombing. Interspersed are dramatised re-enactments of the actual events of the fateful night. The film comes to a surreal conclusion with Eric, following a car crash, levitating to a great height over country paddocks, while back in Wanganui a workman paints over Neil's anarchist graffiti message.

In its account of Roberts and the bombing, the film sustains a documentary-like authenticity. Brian is based on, and played by, a close friend of Neil's, Russell Jephson.<sup>45</sup> The scene with Carol was modelled on an interview with another friend of Neil's, Cheryl. Keddell comments: 'Staying with her was very revealing. She took me to visit the dairy farmers where Neil had been working before his final trip to Wanganui.'<sup>46</sup> Jephson and Cheryl were Keddell's 'principal research guides' and, according to him, approved the script.<sup>47</sup> The scene with the cinema manager, played by well known actor Martyn Sanderson, also had a factual basis, as Keddell explains: 'Martyn's script came from a tape-recorded interview of the real Wanganui cinema manager. I played it to Martyn as I showed him the script. He got it down so well that it was eerie.' The scene was filmed on the actual location.<sup>48</sup>

The film also incorporates a re-created scene with a real radio newsreader, Nigel Horrocks ('his script is exactly what they said on the radio news'), as well as excerpts from original radio broadcasts and newspaper stories (television is notably absent). In addition, the cards and letters from Neil to his friends shown on screen and quoted from are genuine. For the explosion itself, Keddell explains that he talked with the detective heading the investigation in Wanganui and was shown all the crime scene photos.<sup>49</sup>

This fidelity to the facts gives *The Maintenance of Silence* a solidity that prevents it from being dismissed as a paranoid nightmare. This is a world of pubs, petrol stations, farms and hamburger bars, as well as a giant computer. The surveillance society creeps up benignly on its citizens in the mundane form of a radio traffic report from the 'Eye in the Sky': we see the plane in the air, and its panoramic view of the motorways below.<sup>50</sup> And the policeman on the beat at night, too, is just keeping an eye on traffic – calling in by radio to the computer centre asking for details on 'DG 2387', with the cop at the keyboard in response identifying the car's owner and asking routinely whether he should run a check on him. Eric's voice-over has a panicked ring to it – 'the Computer Centre, that ominous machine, the state home of files, of personal information on all citizens, information obtainable at any hour' – but the fear of being at the mercy of an omniscient, omnipotent state is here grounded in the depiction of an all-too-familiar social reality.

The detonation of gelignite in a red carry-bag is the individual act of rebellion that says no to the insidious advance of totalitarianism. We see Neil setting the bomb and the subsequent explosion three times in the film, centring our consciousness on the act. The first time, in a complex flurry of images, it is inter-cut with Eric awakening to a flash of light, and with the hands of the police keyboard operator likewise lit up. Then on the computer screen comes the message, over and over: 'System Overload'. The second time, the bombing sequence is preceded by Neil completing his graffiti painting. Then, in a similar montage to the first, it is associated with Eric driving at night, the polaroid photographs he has taken of newspaper clippings, other photographs including a snapshot of a young man who is in fact the real Neil Roberts,<sup>51</sup> and the card Brian showed him, with its message: 'Growing old is nothing to celerbrate [sic]. Neil Nothing.' Eric's voice-over offers a stream of consciousness: 'The never-ending stream of signs. The never-ending stream of déjà vu, the never-ending stream of coincidences, of parallels, parallels. I could only go on.' The shot of the explosion is here held longer, in slow motion, and the fragmentation is followed by a burst of flame. In its final rendition, the bombing is shown as a more integral sequence of events: Neil spray-painting, then exiting the toilet block, walking alongside the computer centre to the lighted entrance, setting his bag down,

leaning over to touch the contact wires, and then silhouetted as the explosion takes place. Intercut this time there are only close-up shots of Eric driving at night, his face illuminated by a red flash.

Mirroring the obsession in Eric's mind, the film circles round repeatedly to the deed, the protest, the violence, the death. It is as if Neil is Eric's *doppelgänger*, the punk underside to the fastidious young man in black suit and tie who plunges into his unconscious in his desperation to understand the act: 'The explosion – only a dream, I told myself.' This is where, perhaps, those strange images of levitation come in, feet lifting off the ground, and then, again, the body released from gravity rising like a balloon over the lush Taranaki pasture. Camus observes: 'Rebellion is not realistic.'<sup>52</sup>

If the film had stopped with this penultimate scene, it would have left us with a psychological interpretation of Neil Roberts's life and death. However, it bluntly returns us to politics. A man gazes skywards and then gets back to the job in hand – painting over the graffiti in the toilet, erasing the message of revolt. The image freezes.

Eric's melancholy commentary laments: 'By Saturday morning, it was no longer front-page news. Barely two days later, and it was all over – covered, finished, judged and concluded. It was all over. All was quiet. A silence held by a silence.' The voice-over that has been as relentless as the news machine it bitterly complains of finally comes to a halt. The quiet has been shattered but for a moment by the rebel's self-sacrificing act of defiance, and now the silent majority submits once more to the sinister machine encroaching on their liberties. As Camus observed, 'To keep quiet is to allow yourself to believe that you have no opinions, that you want nothing, and in certain cases it amounts to really wanting nothing.'<sup>53</sup>

Although it is possible, now, to interpret *The Maintenance of Silence* as pointed political comment on totalitarian tendencies in New Zealand society, it was not so received at the time. Mainstream media largely ignored it. There was a sympathetic review by Tom McWilliams in the *Listener*, but the emphasis was on the film's aesthetics rather than its politics: 'Anxious images are edited with dream logic and complemented by eerily dislocated music and dramatically heightened natural sound in William Keddell's expressionist film *The Maintenance of Silence*.'<sup>54</sup> Roberts's subcultural associates were disappointed and dismissed it. 'If there is a political point there it's not stated strongly enough,' says Loren Squires, 'I was ashamed that I'd been involved with it.'<sup>55</sup> Sam Buchanan recalls that 'it had this brief mention of punks and seemed to be quite disdainful of them, and it seemed to have a rather odd take on the politics of the event'.<sup>56</sup>

In a cutting critique published in *Alternative Cinema*, John Henderson and Russell Jephson (both of whom, like Squires, appear in the film) contended that 'those who knew Neil are incensed that Keddell should treat

the incident in this way'.<sup>57</sup> The problem was that Keddell was an outsider whose perspective did not mesh with that of the punk, or as Henderson and Jephson preferred to call it, the 'New Wave movement'. Behind the film lay 'a veritable snake-pit of middle-class values and stereotypes'. The reviewers claimed that the film 'turns a violent and unnecessary suicide into an icon for a new consciousness, thus ascribing values of negativity and self-destruction to a movement that in fact espouses the opposite values'. Particular criticism was directed at the characterisation of Eric ('entirely implausible and only sketchily developed'), at the 'frankly, silly' narration that was 'pompously written and presented', and at the 'disjointed and stilted' script.<sup>58</sup>

For Loren Squires, the weakness of the film lay in focusing on Eric, a surrogate for the filmmaker, rather than on Neil Roberts: 'I thought from the day I did the shoot that it wasn't anything about Neil, I thought it was all about Willie . . . . The film was just too much wrapped up in the psychology of this character.' Keddell was 'an alien who came in and kind of plucked out a story that he thought he could use'. Then she relents: 'Don't be too hard on Willie. Nobody else has ever investigated what Neil did in a serious way, as a political statement, and this is as close as it's ever come.'<sup>59</sup>

*With thanks to William Keddell, Loren Squires, Janis Freegard, Sam Buchanan, Toby Boraman, and Martin Rumsby.*

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- 1 Philip Cornford, 'Orwell's Grim Spectre Stalks Manawatu', *Dominion*, 7 August 1981, republished from *Australian*.
  - 2 The scene is recorded in the documentary *Patu!*, dir. Merata Mita, 1983.
  - 3 Cornford, 'Orwell's Grim Spectre'.
  - 4 See *Evening Post* (EP), 25 August 1981; and *Dominion*, 26 August 1981. Muldoon later settled out of court a libel case brought by one of those named, Tama Poata. See Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon*, Auckland, 2000, p.424.
  - 5 See Gustafson, p.194.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, p.195. The MP was Mike Minogue. Many filmgoers found Roger Donaldson's film *Sleeping Dogs* of that year a vivid and chilling portrait of New Zealand as a fascist dictatorship.
  - 7 New Zealand Anarchists, *Vote for Nobody*, 1978, Ephemera B, Anarchism, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington. The pamphlet argued: 'Nobody will prevent the state having more and more control over our private lives'. It attacked Labour for having set up the Wanganui Computer 'to keep tabs on us all' and National for having introduced the SIS Bill 'to give the Security Service more power'.
  - 8 EP, 18 November 1982. For information on the bombing and the anarchist context for it, I am indebted to 'The Death of Neil Roberts and the Bombing of the Wanganui Police Computer', accessed 23 March 2007 at: <http://cw178.tripod.com/neill.htm> ; Toby Boraman, 'The New Left and Anarchism in New Zealand from 1956 to the Early 1980s: An Anarchist Communist Interpretation', PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2006, pp.415-17; and Toby Boraman, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: A History of Anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the Mid-1950s to the Early 1980s*, Christchurch, 2007,

- pp.128–31. Leftwing acts of sabotage, though rare, were not unknown in New Zealand at this time. The US consulate in Christchurch had been fire-bombed during the Vietnam War, while in Wellington during the 1981 Springbok Tour, an explosion brought down a stanchion supporting the overhead wires for the rail system. See Geoff Chapple, *1981: The Tour*, Wellington, 1984, p.239. Later uses of explosive, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, included the Wellington Trades Hall bombing in 1984 and the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland in 1985, both of which resulted in loss of life.
- 9 See Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. Cedric Belfrage, New York, 1973, p.5. Thanks to Sam Buchanan for pointing this out to me.
  - 10 EP, 18 November 1982.
  - 11 Sam Buchanan suggests that the lack of an active anarchist political movement may have contributed to Roberts's decision to commit suicide: 'There were people around, he did know other anarchists, but it must have been a frustrating time in many ways. It would have been nice if things were different, if there had been an active movement to get involved in and to have a more positive outlet for anarchist thinking'. Interview, 6 October 2008.
  - 12 Boraman, *Rabble Rousers*, pp.128–9.
  - 13 Buchanan, interview.
  - 14 Richard Suggate, quoted in Boraman, *Rabble Rousers*, p.129.
  - 15 New Zealand was part of the ANZUS defence alliance with the United States. The implications of the alliance and the activities of the anti-nuclear movement of the time are explored in the documentary *Islands of the Empire*, dirs Alister Barry, Russell Campbell and Rod Prosser, 1985.
  - 16 *Fascism and Boredom*, inscribed 'April '82', Ephemera B, Anarchism, ATL. It also includes a satirical piece on suicide that takes on darker overtones in view of Roberts's action later that year: 'Cliffy the Clown says you can help solve the overpopulation problem this quick, easy way! This year, why not commit suicide!?! Just think how much good you can do for the planet by relieving it of one more human being! Life is just an endless struggle anyway! Why not become a martyr for a noble cause and go out in style!'
  - 17 'The Death of Neil Roberts'.
  - 18 Buchanan, interview. Buchanan recalls: 'The ideal punk show – I went to a few like this – somebody would rent a hall, get their friends along to play, and there was no distinction between the audience and the bands. Some of the audience would get up and play, and then they'd get down to dance, and people would swap over you know. It was very involving, people said this saved them from real depression'.
  - 19 Loren Squires, interview and personal communication, 28 August 2008.
  - 20 David Lomas, 'Friends Talk of Dead Bomber', *Dominion*, 20 November 1982. There is also some suggestion that Roberts had been a university student.
  - 21 Squires, interview.
  - 22 Janis Freegard, interview, 4 October 2008; and Freegard 'No Future', unpublished memoir.
  - 23 Buchanan, interview. Roberts was a keen member of the Auckland War Games Club for about five years, specialising in classical Greek battles. He 'studied many books on old battles; he had also written regularly for the club's magazine'. Lomas, 'Friends'.
  - 24 Richard Mason, quoted in Lomas, 'Friends'.

- 25 Buchanan, interview.
- 26 Boraman, *Rabble Rousers*, p.131.
- 27 David Lomas, 'Cheerful Punk's Date with Death,' *Dominion*, 19 November 1982.
- 28 Freegard, 'No Future'.
- 29 Buchanan, interview.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Freegard, interview.
- 32 Buchanan, interview.
- 33 Police were disliked by punks because of their heavy-handed harassment of individuals with a punk appearance, the arrests they made for under-age drinking, political protest actions, etc., and because they refrained from intervening when punks were being beaten up by other groups such as skinheads. Freegard, interview, and Buchanan, interview. Freegard comments: 'The Wanganui Computer would have held all the criminal records of people including Neil, so he would have been quite keen to erase the criminal records but also to have a go at the police'.
- 34 Buchanan, interview.
- 35 Bronwyn Dutton, quoted in Edward Rooney, 'We Remember Neil Roberts . . .', *NZ Truth* (NZT), 21 November 1989. Accessed 23 March 2007 via link at: <http://cw178.tripod.com/neill.htm>
- 36 Squires, interview.
- 37 Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Harmondsworth, 1962, p.21.
- 38 Buchanan, interview. Neil Roberts memorial picnics were subsequently held for many years on 18 November in Wanganui, and there was a 20th anniversary gig in Christchurch in 2002.
- 39 William Keddell, email interview, 12 June 2007.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Two scenes (Eric shaving and the levitation) were shot on 35mm and then transferred to 16mm on a home-made optical printer. William Keddell, email interview, 23 June 2007. A call sheet and newspaper clipping preserved in the file on the film in the Jonathan Dennis Library, New Zealand Film Archive (NZFA), Wellington, indicate that filming was taking place in Auckland in June and in Wanganui and Taranaki in July 1984.
- 42 Hone Ridley, Purchasing Officer, to Keddell, 2 September 1985, quoted in 'Evidence for Alternative Cinema's Submission to the Royal Commission on Broadcasting and Telecommunications – 15th October 1985, Witness – William Keddell', *Alternative Cinema*, Spring/Summer (1985/1986), p.5.
- 43 'Martin in my view is an unsung hero of NZ non-commercial film distribution', says Keddell. 'He turned up in NYC when I was there and showed a programme at which the NZ ambassador was appalled by *Maintenance*. I guess it didn't aid NZ tourism or trade'. Email interview, 12 June 2007.
- 44 Tony Drumm was a former singer with the Screaming Meemees.
- 45 The character was named Russell in the script, Jonathan Dennis Library, NZFA. Keddell says Jephson was 'a great help . . . a very bright and thinking person who confirmed to me that Neil's act was not just a blind nor foolish act'. Email interview, 12 June 2007.
- 46 Keddell, email interview, 12 June 2007. Loren Squires, who played Carol in the film, says that she was not given a script, but wrote her own lines during the one-day shoot based on 'a general outline of what I was meant to be saying or doing'. Interview, 28 August 2008. In the script the character Russell (Brian) says, ' . . . if you want to know more

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- about him go down to Taranaki and see Sheryl [sic]'. There is no subsequent scene with Sheryl.
- 47 Keddell, email, 28 June 2007.
- 48 Keddell, email interviews, 12 June and 23 June 2007. In this scene the authenticity creates a slight clash with the fictional Eric story, which is supposed to take place in the two days following the bombing. The manager says, 'I most certainly do remember, it's a night I won't forget' – hardly something he would say in the immediate aftermath of the event.
- 49 Keddell, email interviews, 12 June and 23 June 2007. He adds: 'Had I wanted to, I could have used those gruesome pictures'.
- 50 Keddell explains simply: 'My brother was for a time the Radio Eye in the Sky for Radio i. That is how I chose the airplane as a device. Sometimes I would fly as his passenger out of Ardmore'. Email interview, 12 June 2007.
- 51 Keddell, email interview, 23 June 2007.
- 52 Camus, p.23.
- 53 Ibid., pp.19–20.
- 54 Tom McWilliams, 'The Maintenance of Silence', *New Zealand Listener*, 12 October 1985, p.40.
- 55 Squires, interview.
- 56 Buchanan, interview.
- 57 John Henderson and Russell Jephson, 'The Maintenance of Silence,' *Alternative Cinema*, Spring/Summer (1985/1986), p.11.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Squires, interview.