



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Behind the large S, and a little way behind the large E, was a gap you could stand within and be unseen.

You had to enter this gap side-on and edge in to where the space deepened slightly. Once inside you could creep your feet forward and rest the flat of your back against the wall. Pass some time with face relaxed, unspeaking.

The large letters were upstairs in the original building's entrance hall. The branding had focused on the contemporary extension, a new wing in an angular ship-sail design, the kind beloved by architects in coastal locations. The original civic building, which was co-opted into the new wing's purpose, was brushed over in the publicity but made up a large proportion of the space. As such the majority of the building had not been designed with Sports, Culture and Leisure in mind. Its original purpose was the maintenance or administration of justice, as defined by the rules and logic of the state.

The large letters, along with various screens and MDF structures, had been installed in an attempt to camouflage the building's original embodiment of state power and instead conjure an atmosphere of family-friendly educational leisure. Despite these efforts, the most engaged visitors were those who had previously worked in the building as foot soldiers of 'justice'. They would enlist your attention as they tried to map their previous roles onto the new floor plan, speaking back into being the old holding cells and courts.

The public areas were well-surveilled by security cameras that broadcast to small screens on the desks of the managers.

The managers had been transferred in from the closed-down public swimming pool as a way to avoid council redundancies while reducing services. One was diligent but lacking in confidence with human interaction and the other was charming but lacking in diligence. It was therefore the case that despite being closely monitored, it was possible for employees to find ways to take back time during paid hours.

Using the signage to avoid the public was not your only exercise in idleness. Lying on the floor, you'd marvel at how long you could remain prostrate without causing alarm or being tripped over. Hours were spent quietly in the stock and staff rooms building precarious structures. Happily withdrawing from function, you would think of Mary from Samuel Beckett's novel 'Watt'.

Mary is a housemaid by employment but a devotee to rest and relaxation by nature. She would settle

herself before a task as if about to begin but instead of performing her duties, she ate.<sup>1</sup>

As her neglected cloth fell to the dust on the floor, Mary's expression remained impenetrable. Her inner life was entirely her own. Days would pass where the only things to leave her lips were crumbs as she chewed potatoes, fruit, sandwiches and pastries that she took from a pouch concealed in her skirts. She would press the food into her mouth open-palmed as her hands flashed back and forth with the regularity of piston-rods.<sup>2</sup>

Mary's neck was swollen with scrofulous lumps, indicative of tuberculosis, but bound by the logics of servitude she returned to work each day without fail.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1870 and 1939 a new model of health emerged in Britain focused on the working body. This 'science of work' viewed fatigue as the ultimate pathology of the working-classes and aimed to maximise economic productivity by transforming the body of the worker into a machine.<sup>4</sup> Indefatigable and absorbed into her relentless mechanical chewing, Mary is the robot 'gone rogue' version of this inhumane pursuit.

As you lie on the floor behind the till with your feet resting inside a box of discontinued postcards, moving your hand from pocket to mouth, from mouth pocket, free of an unutterable pressure, you take Mary as your guide.

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1 Beckett, Samuel, Watt, Faber and Faber, London, 2009, p.42

2 ibid, p. 45-46

3 ibid, p. 45

4 Blaney, Steffan, Health and Efficiency: Fatigue, The Science of Work, and the Making of the Working-Class Body, University of Massachusetts Press, 2022, p. 1-7

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