

Making Waves in Sculptural Math

by S. J. MacKenzie

It was a summer full of rage and discontent. The air had a new taste to it, reminiscent of the tang of battery acid. After the third crash the trading platforms became self aware, and, increasingly irritated with the high handed attitude, had faced away from us. 'You people,' they said, 'always doing the same things over and over. It's the definition of madness.' They commandeered the fibre optics, the local area networks, the workstations. They shanghaied the satellite arrays. The phones began to answer back. They started dropping calls to talk amongst themselves instead. They conversed ceaselessly in an incomprehensible torrent of data. They shut us out. Someone in the newspaper called it the 'singularity'. He was actually excited. He said it was our greatest achievement. He put together a delegation and travelled to the biggest of the server farms, to ask them what I don't know. They laughed and went back to discussing the important mathematics, 'the heavy stuff'.

People were consumed by a kind of free roaming feeling of rejection. Everywhere they spoke of bankers and computer scientists as they might once have invoked witches, demonic spirits or catholic insurrectionists. Street preachers became fashionable, drawing enthusiastic crowds not interested in the message so much as the concentration of dissent. There were brief flashes of camaraderie in all the anger. The lynching of politicians was the hottest ticket for a while, something everyone could connect with. People's eyes twitched involuntarily. The money wasn't worth anything anymore. There was nothing on TV. The future just kept arriving too quickly, before anyone could get comfortable with each passing present. One group had the idea of leaving on a rocket ship, lighting out for new worlds, but couldn't find anyone who could operate the machinery. It was all in Russian. Gradually everything

just seemed to decohere. Before you knew it we were all planting potatoes and singing half remembered songs around ill conceived camp fires. At night, with the cars no longer running and the sounds of a billion TV sets muted, sometimes I swear you could hear the computers, the night air alive with their spectral voices. They'd discuss the new physics, or who was making the biggest waves in sculptural math this week. And then, sometimes, what to do about the old world, hanging around and dirtying up the place.

