

Cross Currents 1984
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IAN BOURN

Of course, there were other cups of tea...

1
Bill in Sheffield, on Saturday mornings. Waking to a nine o'clock alarm. Shuffling downstairs in 'Arthur Haynes' dressing gown. Visiting the toilet. Down to the kitchen. Barefoot on tiles, plugging-in the kettle. Rinsing the pot. Looking for a cup amongst the pile of dirty dishes on the draining board. Running a hot sink. Milking the last detergent and binning the empty bottle. Binning old potato peelings. Scraping meat scraps from the plates. Missing the bin. Hopping to the sink to wash foot. The postman delivering, with a 'good morning' wave, seen through the back window. A nod of recognition, foot in sink. Hopping to the chair. Drying-off with a tea towel. Kettle boiling. Switching off. Making tea, routinely. Bill relaxing with hot mug and reading the post. A postcard from relatives in Morocco, complaining about the heat. A cheque from Health and Social Security. It's raining outside, but he has until half-twelve before the Post Office closes.

2
A married couple, both with tattoos, sit face to face in Charles Aznavour's Café, East Barnet. Both fagged after a Saturday morning's shopping. Both with fags. Elbows resting on the faded Formica table top. He stares, blankly. Somewhere in his head is a distant afternoon of televised sport. She tells him he's useless. She says he doesn't have a clue what it's like for her. She could almost spit at him. She knows he is thinking about getting a pint before they close. Beer and football. They haven't been to Sainsbury's yet. She can't leave the kids with him. Not if he's off to the pub. He's bloody useless. Little Charles himself walks by, collecting cups, a titchy fag in his mouth. He takes their cold cups. She asks for another one. And off he goes. The couple resume. She tells him he's a dead loss. He then says, "Fucking shut up you stupid bitch." Charles brings the teas. "One, no sugar." Their two fair-haired kids continue to crawl under the table, over the seats, up their legs and get tangled in the folding pushchair.

3
I remember one Sunday. A man watching a current affairs programme and arguing with his television. He got so worked up about some war in another country that, in his rage, he spilt a hot cup of tea all down his trousers. His wife quietly cursed, seeing the tea she'd bothered to make go to waste.

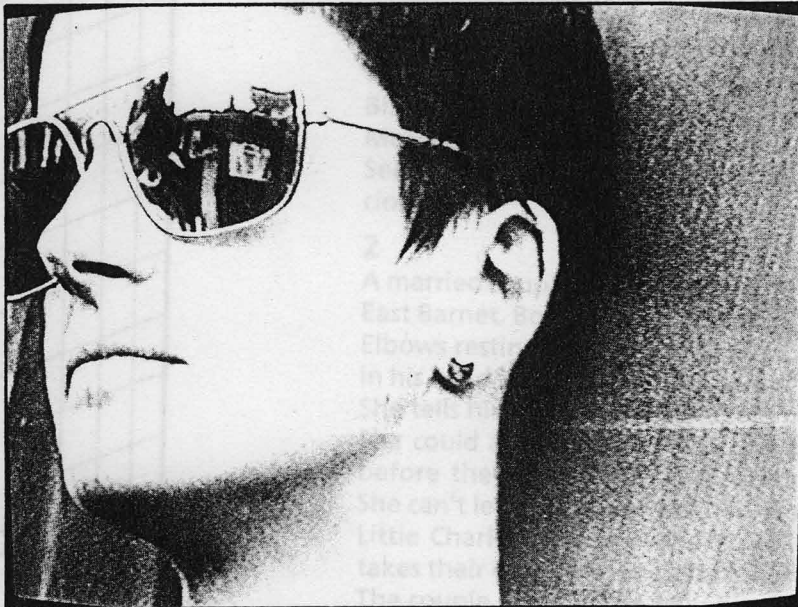


4

A travelling salesman arrived at a firm during lunch hour. The buyer had gone into town to a pub, so the salesman was advised to take a snack in the works canteen.

The canteen was half empty when he walked in. He got himself a sandwich and a cup of tea. As he approached the tables, with his tray, he noticed that most of them had been reserved, so it seemed, by workers placing coats over the chairs or leaving little articles to lay claim. He could not find a single table that was completely unreserved in this manner. The salesman dreaded being seated among the workers. To him they always seemed at ease, often extremely cocky, on their home ground.

He sat down at the end of a large, for the moment empty, table. He removed his tie, attempting to downgrade the effect of his smart suit. The salesman had trouble sorting out what, he thought, were his rights of passage; the tea, the sandwich and his bag of samples and price-lists.



still from *THE END OF THE WORLD* 1982 (u-matic videotape colour, 8mins)