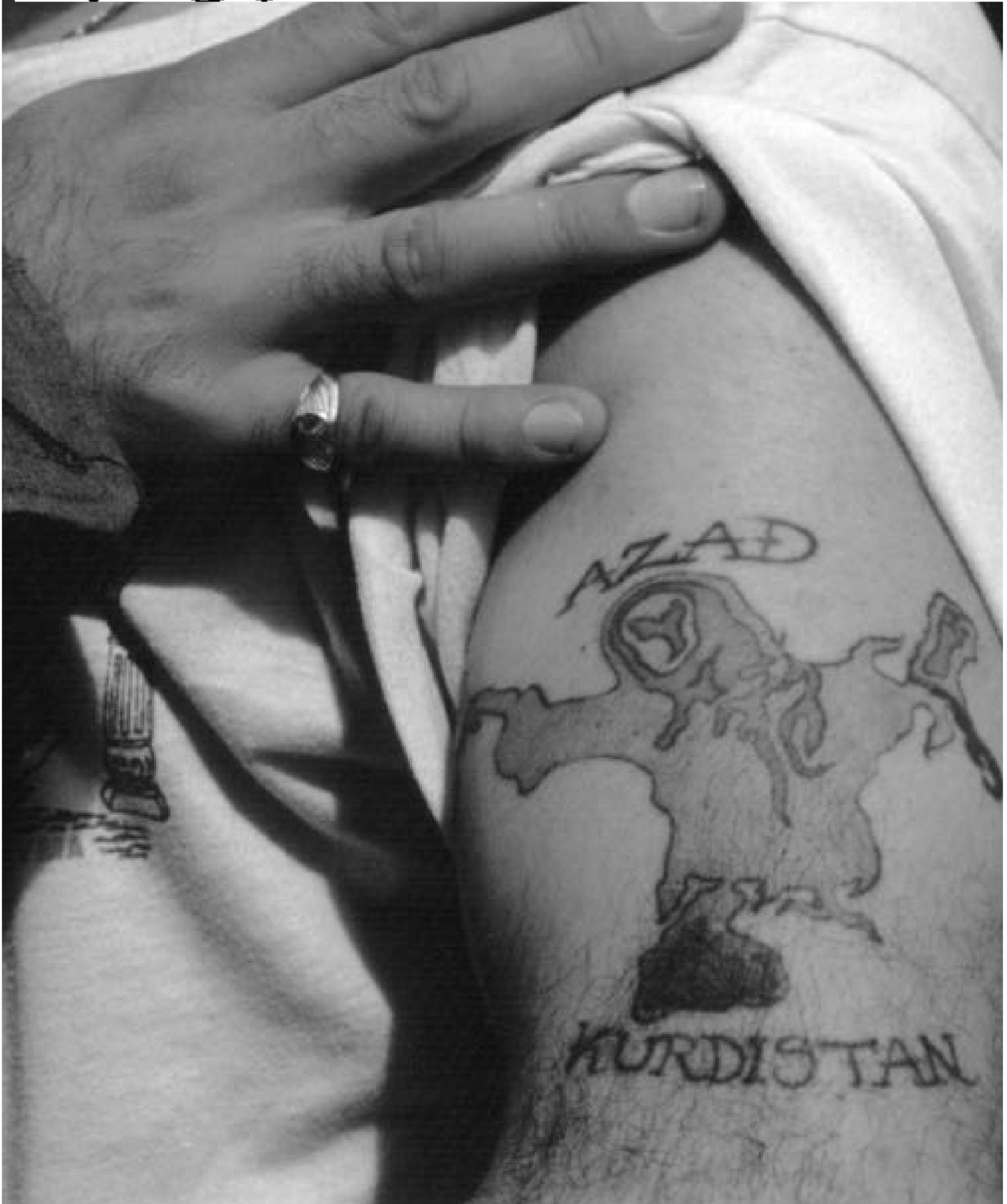


**cross-currents in culture** ● volume 2 • number 4 • autumn 1997 • fre

# VARIANT





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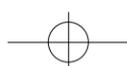
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### volume 2

**1,2,3** Winter 1996, Spring & Summer 1997 from: 1A Shamrock Street, Glasgow G4 include SAE (50p stamp)



# Painted Words

Shane Cullen's *Fragmens Sur Les Institutions Republicaines IV*  
 Peter Suchin  
 CCA Glasgow 6 September to 18 October



SHANE CULLEN *Fragmens Sur Les Institutions Republicaines IV*



Shane Cullen has filled ninety-six eight by four feet boards with approximately thirty-five thousand words of text, the wording meticulously copied from David Beresford's account of the 1981 Irish hunger strike, *Ten Men Dead* (Grafton, 1987).

Cullen's act of textual transcription focusses upon a series of letters produced by Republican prisoners during the period of their politically-motivated refusal of food whilst being held in Long Kesh prison in 1981. These secret communications or "comms" were inscribed in minuscule script upon cigarette papers in order to avoid the texts' detection by the Long Kesh guards. Rolled or crushed into balls and wrapped in cellophane, these tiny pellets of compressed text were then smuggled out of the prison (hidden in the various orifices of the body) and delivered to the IRA leadership.

Since the late 1960's there has been an increase in the use of textual material within the visual arts. One could point to a whole subsection of artworks made entirely of text, including pieces by Ilya Kabakov, Tom Phillips and Robert Smithson. In his book *The Responsibility of Forms* (Basil Blackwell, 1985) Roland Barthes suggests that from a certain perspective painting can be considered to be a kind of writing. Cullen offers an interesting reversal of this observation. Furthermore, it would be productive to compare *Fragmens...* to the visually inventive works of poets such as Mallarme and Apollinaire, rather than keeping one's comparisons strictly within the visual arts as conventionally defined.

*Fragmens...* should also be considered in relation to the increasingly popular gallery practice of installation, each individual painted panel being but one distinct part of a larger work designed to generate a single, coherent ambience rather than be seen as a series of discrete paintings. Around this production of multiple units hovers the ghost of Warhol's mechanically produced, serial works but also that of the 'dumb' copying of the jobbing signwriter.

Cullen claims *Fragmens...* is a piece of social research rather than a means of either celebrating or condemning those parties—of whatever political persuasion—involved in the 1981 hunger strike. One may look again to Barthes for a relevant observation. In his book *Writing Degree Zero* (Hill and Wang, 1967) he notes that "...a history of political modes of writing would...be the best of social phenomenologies." (p. 25). It should go without saying, however, that no work of art is, in the last analysis, politically neutral.

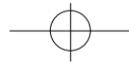
How are we to read *Fragmens...*? What is the relationship between the text employed as 'subject matter' and the surface of the support? Cullen has chosen to paint by hand ninety-six panels of text. The consequences of such a decision are in no way trivial for someone who is to actually take on this task. Nor should we, as viewers or readers, ignore this aspect of Cullen's practice. Cullen has committed himself to a not inconsiderable amount of labour by choosing to make these paintings by hand. Indeed, had Cullen instead decided to utilise methods conventionally employed in the reproduction of writing the resulting objects would not be paintings at all, but merely yet more printed text. What might be termed the 'slow intensity' implicit in Cullen's physical production of *Fragmens...* should be borne in mind when consider-

ing the piece. The painstaking manner of the work production is of considerable importance with respect to its interpretation.

The "comms" were produced as private letters whose general status has, however, now been considerably altered, by their general publication but also through Cullen's decision to use them within his artistic practice. A double transformation has been enacted upon what were initially written and transmitted as clandestine correspondence intended only for a select readership. When first published the "comms" became pieces of public information. No longer 'private messages, they are now historical documents available for consultation by anyone with an inclination to check them out. Cullen's painted version of texts gives their public presentation another twist. The artist would appear to be simply quoting an already available source (Beresford's book), since what is translated into painting is not the "comms" themselves but the version of them provided in *Ten Men Dead*. Not only has Cullen not quoted from the actual letters, but has also included within his transcription from the book Beresford's editorial insertions. The panels have been transcribed in the order that Beresford quotes the "comms" in his book. In both book and upon the painted boards these additions are indicated through the use of square brackets. As Beresford comments in his "Author's Note": "An important foundation to the book as a whole is the huge volume of "comms" given in *Ten Men Dead*. Cullen is able to give only Beresford's selective rendition of the texts. In some sense, then, *Fragmens...* is concerned not so much with the 'first order' textual traces of ten Irish political prisoners but with the subsequent interpretation of a loaded historical moment. There is perhaps some intended commentary here meant on Cullen's part—concerning the apparent impossibility of gaining unmediated access to a specific historical event.

The utilisation of historically very 'heavy' textual material in *Fragmens sur les Institutions Republicaines IV* raises complex questions about politics, art, security and censorship. I will end with a remark from Jacques Derrida's book *The Post Card* (University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 194); it seems strangely pertinent to Cullen's work. "What cannot be said", writes Derrida "above all must not be silenced but written."

This is a revised version of an essay first published in *Circa*, no. 77, Autumn 1996, pp. 26-28, under the title *Measured Words* and reprinted to accompany the CCA exhibition (Collectible no. 3 Sept. 97).



# People in a Landscape

## An analysis by Marshall Anderson

*People In a Landscape—The New Highlanders*, published by *Mainstream* represents the final outcome, in soft-back book form, of an extravagant and excessively indulgent propagandist project staged as part of the first Highland Festival in 1996. This attractive package of photographs by Craig Mackay with an introductory text by Magnus Linklater and supported by interviews with the New Highlanders will, at a penny short of £10, sell well to the many fans of the Scottish Highlands from home and abroad. To understand the book, however, one must turn away from its alluring glossiness for a moment and turn back the pages of history.

It was the Rt. Hon William Ross who, in March 1965, on the occasion of moving the Highland Development Bill through Parliament, said: "For 200 years the Highlander has been the man on Scotland's conscience." The resulting Highlands and Islands Development Act, therefore, was some kind of delayed palliative for the acts of genocide perpetrated by the State in the aftermath of Culloden and the greed-driven desires condoned by the State to reap vast profits from the land by displacing people in favour of sheep. Guilt, however, was a limp excuse for the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) to initiate economic development on a massive scale throughout its lifespan from 1965 to '90.

In the 1960s the Highlands, with a population of 299,000 was perceived as a wilderness zone ripe for colonisation and exploitation. The continuing emigration of its indigenous people had to be replaced by an immigration policy and the apathetic remaining highlanders, psychologically bruised by 200 years of cultural battering, had to be shown how to improve and regenerate their valuable resources by entrepreneurial Englishmen and women who would be offered generous cash incentives to settle and develop industries. Between 1965 and 1988 an estimated total of £422,176 in financial assistance was handed out by HIDB creating thousands of new jobs. This figure, taken from the Highlands and Islands—*A Generation of Progress*, edited by Alistair Hetherington and published by "Aberdeen University Press" (1990) does not take into consideration concealed costs such as administration and further investments via other government agencies, nor does it take into account the alleged millions lost in such schemes as the aluminium smelter at Invergordon and the Wiggins Teape pulp mill at Corpach.

One of the more outspoken critics of Highland development is Iain Thomson whose comments in *A Generation of Progress* reveal the kind of philosophy and attitude that was prevalent at the time: "A labour force was also at hand—as one propaganda leaflet put it 'most locals are used to handling small boats.'" Thomson's "propaganda leaflets" were not so readily available on the home front. HIDB's advertising campaign concentrated south of Hadrian's Wall. Thomson continues with respect to fish farming: "Yet deep down some felt that another valuable resource had been plucked from under their noses by entrepreneurial outsiders enjoying privileged contacts and considerable support from the taxpayer." Any rancour was probably best swallowed and the tongue best clenched between angry teeth, for, as Hetherington says in his introductory essay: "The Highlands and Islands are providing food, holidays, timber and craft products for the whole of the UK, as well as strategic bases for offshore oil and the Royal Navy, Army and RAF." This statement is now out of date: instead of reading "the whole of the UK," it should read the whole of Europe.

With this in mind a further concentrated series of investments by various government agencies combined with detailed commissions, reports and feasibility studies focused on this region. Some of the ensuing schemes were, unfortunately, destined to become expensive failures as exemplified by Highland Craftpoint engineered by David Pirnie who had con-

ducted a year-long feasibility study in 1978 endorsing the idea that training was required to raise standards within an industry that was turning over £500,000 per year. During 79/80 Highland Craftpoint gobbled £61,345 in funding from the Scottish Development Agency and £123,230 from HIDB. A gravy train had been set in motion that would continue to nourish a generation of bureaucrats. This level of funding (85/86 SDA—£147,600, HIDB—£533,187) was not sustainable and in an attempt to broaden its remit and spread its expenditure to the whole of Scotland the agency dropped its Highland tag in 87 becoming Craftpoint. Scotland's craftworkers were truly astonished when Ian Lang, then Secretary of State, pulled the plug on it in 1990, for Craftpoint had provided a valuable resource and training facility through well-equipped workshops and a specialist library. Craftpoint's closure indicated that governments are quite prepared to sacrifice investments on a disproportionate scale in order to drive yet another non-sustainable vision.

Ian Lang recognised the link between arts, crafts and tourism so he initiated the Scottish Tourism Coordinating Group who promised in their Development Strategy to meet "the prime objective of increasing arts tourism in Scotland" for it had been identified that "Arts and cultural tourists spend more per trip than average tourists, partly because they stay longer." More, obviously, had to be done to encourage these big spenders to come and buy 'art product'. This philosophy has, in part, encouraged a culture of commercialism within the Highland and Islands arts community with the majority of artists working in traditional ways and aspiring to sell their work to a burgeoning middle-class home market, and tourists. Any commentary upon Highland life is accordingly historic—leading to Romantic imagery. There appears to be no radical polemic and no debate around the development of art and its conceptual language and how this may reflect upon current issues.

Against this backdrop of top heavy investment and a squandering of public resources condoned by a concentrated political will and strong-arm cultural muscle, the notion of an Inverness Festival was discussed at committee level and chaired by Lady Cowan, the wife of Sir Robert Cowan the fifth and final chairman of HIDB. Lady Cowan and her team of stalwarts representing various vested interests believed it was their duty to import Culture. In themselves the Festival Committee had little clout but the concept was taken up and driven forward on the crest of yet another feasibility study, commissioned this time from Burntisland-based Bonar Keenlyside Ltd. Surprisingly this document convinced no one for everyone was already convinced that such an event was more than possible. The feasibility study therefore further constituted a flagrant waste of public money.

A year long festival-cum-celebration called Hi Lite, marking the end of the HIDB appeared to have no real budget to mount events but did have a lot of cash to produce an extraordinary mountain of 1.5 million print units announcing events that would mostly have gone on regardless of its umbrella tactic to incorporate everything within its logo. In 1995 the first Highland Festival with Ian Ritchie in the post as Director trumpeted into view being propped up by £19,225 from the Scottish Arts Council and £10,000 from the Scottish Tourist Board.

There was a confusing array of philosophies and expectations at play with regard to the Festival itself and also underpinning the planning of its events. These are best illustrated by a 24 hour project which finally culminated in its quasi catalogue, *People In A Landscape*.

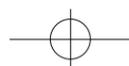
In order to establish itself, in part at least, as a people's festival a project based, I am told on a community photographic project in Glasgow, and called 24 Hours in the Life of the Highlands and Islands was

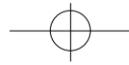
planned to focus on Saturday 30th March with an intention "to involve everyone." "The notion of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland of experience, skill, age or status" was the project's Client Group in a 6-page brief. Rhetoric herein was strongly advocating a "To encourage anyone who has an interest to 'have a go' within the stated 24 hour period" continued with the statement of intent: "To promote selected fruits of the whole experience book" thereby contradicting its democratic suggestion that elitist values would be maintained through a selection team of four cities: Harriet Buchan, Richard Demarco, and Magnus Linklater, the latter further to write the introduction to the book/catalogue. Outset then, this adventurous large scale project was flawed as it sought to make an open invitation emphasising the notion that anyone could while maintaining an overriding belief in principles of selection. With its top-heavy level and the inclusion of media personalities like Robbie Coltrane whose job it was to set in motion) the event was destined to become an extravagant waste of money, swallowing resources.

On the next day, Sunday, everyone who something was requested to deliver it to 16 collection points. It was then felt necessary to co-ordinate the four judges plus Gordon Brown, Director/owner of Brown's Gallery, round the places in one of their selection of which works they deemed enough to be framed and exhibited in six different venues throughout the Highlands. It was told they got a ridiculously cheap helicopter—£600. But to date no figures are provided on other costs such as insurance and expenses, accommodation and the like. Brown, Director/owner of Brown's Gallery awarded the contract to frame the works £16,000. Such was the enormity of the condensed 'time frame' that Brown's farm of the work to his close friend, Craig Mackay, Pictli, up in Brora.

The gravy train mentality and an uncontrolled lust to spend money was evidently being in an area where the precedent to do so had obviously set from the halcyon days of Highland Fundamentally such extravagances stick in the mind of ordinary Scots whose personal backgrounds scarred by memories of stringent economic poverty. Alastair MacDonald, the new Director of Highland Festival, says he was "appalled" by the 24 Hour Project's budget but sentiments by saying that the management done well to raise so much cash through Surely such a statement further endorses wastage. Money was spent for the sake of MacDonald, however, decided to pull in the project he had inherited from his predecessor Ritchie, dismissed from the post for his public performance. MacDonald cut the book 40% to £17,000 but was obliged to proceed planned outline.

Photographer, Craig Mackay, whose effort for the work was £5,000, has produced an excellent portraits to accompany Marietta interviews with those Highland residents from the 24 Hour Project. There is another contradiction here: if the people were selected to appear in the book on the strength of the much of it produced by semi-professionals obviously taking longer than 24 hours to bring at disingenuous desires to muscle in (an opportunity), why is it the artwork has been reduced to such a small visual fragment? The photography to become the major ill component? Surely the cult of the personality



CRAIG MACKAY *Sorcha Monk*

tographer's ego have been allowed to overwhelm the original concept of the book, "highlighting the beauty, quality and diversity of talent and character of the whole area." Obviously the artwork in itself was not strong enough to endorse the project and not therefore strong enough to sell the Highlands and Islands, so personalities were called upon to do both. Consequently the book has become a showcase for the photographic mastery of Craig Mackay who has treated his task with a wide variety of techniques employing medium and large format cameras loaded with film stock donated by Fuji. This simple book has been spoiled, however, by over-indulgent designing. Photographic overlays have been done unnecessarily, again emphasising that money has been further wasted designing for the sake of designing.

Alastair MacDonald is of the opinion that *People In A Landscape* is informative because it shows what life is really like in the Highlands. The somewhat anodyne introductory text by Magnus Linklater typifies the viewpoint of an outsider who has been hired to give an uncontroversial impression supporting the State's ideal image which is fed to potential settlers, tourists and developers. The truth is underplayed and any opportunity to reveal what life is really like is lost. There are social ailments in the Highlands and Islands community, such as Anglophobia, that are taboo and not accorded space here. Linklater only hints at community unrest and ignores the kind of social problems that arise from the type of colonisation programme that continually gathers momentum throughout the region. Children not born into Highland and Islands communities have a hard time settling into schools where historically bullying has gone unchecked. As communities expand urban ills pervade. Alcohol and other drug use is more prevalent among the young and domestic theft, once unknown, is becoming more commonplace. Currently the Highlands and Islands are being sold on the quality of life, the scenery and the friendliness of the people, but the more the region becomes populated the more these alluring assets are tainted and eroded.

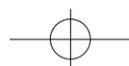
Linklater's text begins on a note of incredulity: "It is hard to put a finger on it, to explain just what has happened over the past 20 or 30 years to transform the picture", but as I have shown, and it is no secret, the investment since 1965 has been disproportionate per capita. The one-time editor of the *Scotsman* does go on to pull the kind of statistics out of his hat that he should have access to. He informs us that the current population is 373,000 and that the number "who were born in England has increased over the past decade from 9.5% to 11.9% of the total population while the proportion of Scots has dropped from 86.4% to 83.9%. That is an influx of nearly 11,000 English people." In order to allay fears and accusations that these "white settlers" are taking a livelihood out of the mouths of locals, Linklater informs us that "if anything, the incomers are creating work not grabbing other people's." This may be due to the following factors: incomers from the south have money to invest in the purchase and development of land and property thereby creating work in the building and tourism sectors. Many of these properties are small hotels, guest houses and B & Bs. When many of these amenities appear on the market they are invariably bought by the English who have similarly moved into the arts and crafts industry, opening galleries and shops which sell locally produced products to the rising population of middle-class New Highlanders and, of course, tourists.

Linklater does not try to assess just when an incomer becomes recognised statistically as a native but if the New Highlanders are considered to be locals then it follows that if they employ themselves before employing more indigenous natives they cannot be accused of grabbing other people's work. If there is any discrimination in the jobs market Linklater ducks the question and continues on a more mundane level best suited to his current role as chairman of the Scottish Arts Council.

Linklater continues by making an assessment of the remarkable cultural renaissance throughout the Highlands and Islands saying: "The evidence suggests that this is essentially a native phenomenon from which everyone, including outsiders, have benefited." He states quite correctly that "the arts have thrived on the back of economic improvement, drawing on a deep well of tradition." The resurgence of interest in history and language is not just a native one for the New Highlanders have "acquired a genuine devotion to their adopted homeland." Having then laid the foundation Linklater proceeds by describing the tide of entries that flowed into the 24 Hour Project. Craig Mackay suggested to me that the greater majority came from incomers and this is borne out in *People In A Landscape*. Out of 39 profiles the majority are of new Highlanders. The "native phenomenon" may be a psychological response based on a perceived threat from the army of incomers which threatens to subsume the locals altogether. The majority of people working in the Highland and Islands service sector now speak with English accents. Only in the Gaidhealtachd, where Gaelic is the first language and where Gaelic is a prerequisite of any job, can the influx of foreign "white settlers" be checked and the local workforce protected fully. Linklater devotes a paragraph to the Feisean Movement, a purely Gaelic expression bent upon strengthening the true native culture. There is a sense that this door is closed to non-Gaelic speaking Highland and Islanders but is not entirely locked. Anyone can participate as long as they speak Gaelic and indeed many New Highlanders do endeavour to learn the native language. There is a suggestion in this book, however, that such open events as the 24 Hour Project and its follow-up attract the participation of new Highlanders while the truer native renaissance is more exclusive.

Through the 24 Hour Project the first Highland Festival had set a crude precedent that its second Director, Alastair MacDonald, a theatre designer, would have to follow. Vociferously critical of the 24 Hour Project and its extravagances, MacDonald gained the help of his brother-in-law, Gordon Davidson, whose personal photo-montage technique was applied on a grand scale to create the *Big Picture/An Dealabh Mòr*. The result of this £60,000 public relations exercise can be seen touring the Highlands and Islands later this year after the installation has appeared at the Edinburgh Festival. I doubt if it will have much impact outside of its area of origin for it comprises of 25 photo-montages from 14 separate areas where the community created paste-ups were over-seen by one, or sometimes two, locally-based artists. All of the colour photos used are pertinent to the localised human experience. The project's selling point is perhaps its scale: 8-foot high, free standing letters spelling out *An MOR* and *The BIG* were covered on one face with laser copies of the photo-montages, stood in a circle redolent of Neolithic stones. This was accompanied by "a specially commissioned soundscape by Andy Thornburn", a musician who lives in Eventon, Easter Ross.

The success of the 24 Hour Project and the *Big Picture* lies in the indelible mock-utopian Highland image that both large scale community actions offer to future (and present) settlers, tourists and developers alike. Developers, who are neither Highlanders nor Islanders, require the confidence that such a rosy community image instils. The improvements they provide to roads and public services, including shopping malls, are not for the indigenous population alone (who are left to pay the bill through taxes and tolls) but for the greater majority of incomers and tourists. This small paperback volume of *People In A Landscape* is, therefore, representative of a greater picture, and one that demands more incisive scrutiny.



# Maclovio Roja

## An Exercise In Social Sculpture

David Hard

Electricity was needed to operate an electric saw but there were no power points around, only the wires that ran along the ground at the edge of the dirt road pirating electricity from nearby power lines. To Marc Antonio it was no problem. He located a taped over junction, uncoupled it and attached the wires to the leads for the saw. Water was needed but there were no water pipes, taps or standpipes. A water truck was called and a barrel filled up. There were no paved roads, drains or sewage system. This is Maclovio Rojas, an illegal squatter settlement of almost 1,000 households on a dusty hillside surrounded by treeless, desert hills some seven miles from Tijuana, Mexico. This is not an unusual place—settlements like it are a well documented phenomena in Latin America. Barrios, favelas and colonias, built of the ubiquitous packing case, wooden pallets and corrugated iron, cluster around many cities as the poor, the unemployed and migrant workers strive to share in the scraps of urban consumer culture. Tijuana, one of the fastest growing Mexican cities situated, as it is, hard against the US border, has expanded explosively in the last ten years with numerous squatter settlements eventually becoming regulated suburban areas. Not so Maclovio where the government wants to clear the land so that the vast adjacent Hyundai container plant can expand. The elected leader of the community, Hortensia Mendoza, who has been imprisoned three times on account of her opposition to government action, says: "The only way I leave is dead."

The plight of the people of Maclovio has attracted much support from sympathetic organisations, trade unions, including university and teaching unions, across the border in San Diego; and funds have been gathered to enable things like a school and community centre to be built. One group, the Border Arts Workshop (BAW), has been organising art projects

BAW has gained international recognition for its work including exhibiting at recent Venice and Sydney Bienales. Last year, surfing on the Internet, writer, musician and member of the group, Manuel Mancillas, came across a reference to Maclovio Rojas. What interested him was that he knew of another place of the same name near San Quintin, in Baja California. It had taken the name of Maclovio from that of the 24 year-old leader of the farm workers union who had been killed on a contract allegedly issued by local farm bosses. BAW decided to make a visit to this other Maclovio Rojas. Along with artist Michael Schnorr, a founding member of BAW, a visit was paid to meet the leaders of the community. A protest march to Mexicali, the state capital 120 miles away, was to take place and BAW was invited to make a film of it. It was at this point that BAW decided to commit itself to working with the people of Maclovio.

IN-SITE 97 is a bi-national collaborative project of art institutions in Mexico and the USA "focused on artistic investigation and activation of public space in the transnational context of Tijuana/San Diego. The heart of IN-SITE 97 is a probing of places of meeting and interchange in this unique juncture of two cities and two nations...through an exhibition of approximately 40 new works created during residencies in the region by artists (from) throughout the Americas and a sustained rhythm of community engagement programs spearheaded by artists from San Diego and Tijuana." Laurie Anderson opened the projects with a performance entitled 'The Speed of Darkness' on September 26th and a programme of events will continue until the end of November. Other artists making work include Vito Acconci, David Avalos, Judith Barry, Helen Escobedo and Allan Sekula. BAW had exhibited in IN-SITE 94 and a submission, for their Maclovio proposal, was again selected for funding. The title of the project is 'Twin Plant: Forms of Resistance: Corridors of Power'. Under NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) multinationals can set up plants at the border as long as one is in the USA and one is in Mexico. In effect, while the US plant might employ 50 people the Mexican one employs several hundreds. With wages in Mexico for factory workers running at a tenth of those in the US, the economic advantages are obvious. Samsung and Coca Cola sit alongside Hyundai and the people of Maclovio, many of whom work in these plants, are also fighting for union recognition, improved health and safety conditions in the 'maquiladoras' (literally machine shops) and wage increases.

Householders across the USA, for security and convenience, are in the process of fitting automatic, aluminium, double garage doors replacing their old wooden ones which have, in turn, become a major item in the construction of squatter homes. In January of this year, on one day's trawl around builders' yards in San Diego, we picked up eleven of them. These and succeeding collections of garage doors, re-cycled play equipment and other goods have been taken across the border as 'art materials' under the aegis of IN-SITE 97 thus avoiding duty and the interest of an often difficult customs post. The garage doors, measuring 16' x 8' were to be at the core of the art project for they were to be used to construct buildings which, after the exhibitions, could be used by the community as it felt fit. As Josef Beuys would have described it, this was 'Social Sculpture' in action. Any contribution to community development, to expanding facilities and developing the infrastructure of Maclovio, might just help to prevent the forcible eviction of the people. 1997 is the tenth year of their occupation and, under the Mexican constitution, that would normally result in their ownership of the land. The government counters that this will not be the case, so the stand-off con-

tinues.

Manual's surfing not only revealed the Maclovio, but also its links to the Zapatista Liberation Army and its charismatic and leader Sub-Commandante Marcos. Many who live in Maclovio are from the south including Chiapas, the centre of the insurrection. The seventy year hegemony in Mexico of PRI party is beginning to show some cracks. In the elections including gaining the powerful state of Mexico City. This has not been without a hundred members of the opposition party killed since 1989. Marcos conducts his revolution the Internet and by fax, as well as by military means, attempting to complete the revolution by Zapata and Pancho Villa. In Maclovio the name has been named after them and their photographs and painted images (along with that of Che Guevara) graffitied on the walls of the community centre. Marcos exhorted every community in Mexico to liberate the centre as a forum for democratic conversation, to discuss and agree on a civil, peaceful, popular national organisation in the struggle for justice." He has called these meetings places of 'Aguascalientes' (hot springs) after the Mexican town which hosted Zapata's first democratic congress. The construction of an 'Aguascalientes' building is central to BAW's project in Maclovio.

Working with the elected leaders of the community a group of young people was formed to do the planning and execution of the project. For other voluntary work in and for the community they would each receive, in return, a plot of land. In time, they could build their own houses. The group proposed to construct buildings to house their work of installations, photography, video and art and to paint murals.

Unlike Britain, in Chicano and Afro-Latino neighbourhoods throughout the USA, political painting remains a thriving art practice. I visited BAW, in 1984, I documented its work. The Chicano people of Barrio Logan in San Diego, where the soaring Coronado Bridge had been built in the 1930s and the city council was planning to demolish sites on the land under the bridge. Many homes had been demolished to make way for the bridge but the people weren't having any of it. They simply occupied the land and eventually turned it into a park. Now it is well-known as Coronado Park in which every bridge support is painted with murals of Chicano history, symbols and icons.

This involvement in direct action/ political art has been a common characteristic of my visits to BAW. It may be the people and artists I mix with who are so soon deeply involved in politics in a way that I have never equalled in my experience of life in Britain. I often ruminated on why this should be so. My host, Michael Schnorr, had a pile of books on the issues of 'The Nation'. This is a high quality, literary magazine and reading through it, I began, I think, to discern what could be done for this. The US government, whether Democratic or Republican, is essentially conservative and is supported by a much smaller percentage of the population than is the case in Britain. The level of government intervention seems high compared with which our politicians have been guilty of many peccadilloes. Business corruption and organised crime emasculate large sectors of life and work. The FBI are regularly shown to have served up the basic principles of human rights. The history of US intervention in Latin America and elsewhere in ill-fated places across the world is strewn with the consequences. In the face of this what can



Hortensia Mendoza pointing out the Hyundai plant adjacent to Maclovio.

since 1984 addressing the biggest political issue in the area, that of the border itself. Every day at the US border-crossing bus-loads of illegal Mexican immigrants can be seen being deported. In 1993 the US government decided on a huge increase in the Border Patrol Service and to build a border fence. For this they used redundant metal landing strips from the Gulf War, placed on edge, and concreted into the ground. The fence goes 'Christo-like' right down the beach and into the Pacific Ocean. At this point it becomes a row of six-inch diameter steel columns set apart such that a child or thin adult can squeeze through. When I visited it the US side of the beach was deserted save for a 'legal' Mexican family picnicking up against the fence, with relatives on the other side. The US is experimenting with new fence constructions and with the aim of covering the whole 2,000 odd miles of the border.



Above: Zapata

Below top: Children at work.

Below centre:

March to Mexicali to protest

Below Bottom:

PRD opposition posters in Maclovio

Americans do about it? Artists and writers do what they can do best—make critical art about it and write for magazines like 'The Nation'.

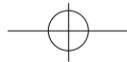
In Mexico mural painting remains, for obvious historical reasons, the main and most familiar public art form and one that can

involve large groups of people in its execution. It was natural therefore that it should be one of the means whereby the people of Maclovio could become involved in contributing to the buildings to be constructed. BAW led painting workshops involving people of all ages, including the very young and old. A Women's Centre was built and murals were painted on the exterior walls. A dozen or so garage doors were painted using themes relating to the community's struggle for survival and were erected to form part of the boundary fence marking out the alfresco area of the 'Aguascalientes'. A large stage area with a backdrop was painted and, when I left, the main building was halfway to completion. This would house part of the exhibitions.

I visited Maclovio in January of this year with members of BAW and returned to work for five weeks during July and August. The other members of the group are three young Chicano women, Bernice Badillo and sisters Lorenza and Rebecca Rivero. Their commitment to the project was impressive. Whether it was digging holes in the iron-hard ground for posts, mixing concrete for foundations, moving heavy loads, priming surfaces or drawing and painting murals, for eight to ten hours a day, they just got on and did it. In temperatures sometimes reaching 100 degrees and little shelter from the searing heat and hot wind that constantly blew, the conditions were, to say the least, trying. Several other artists visited for short periods leading and directing parts of the mural painting. Among these were Ken Wolverton and Chrissie Orr who live in New Mexico. They were well-known in Scotland in the 70s and 80s for their work with Edinburgh Theatre Workshop, on Arran and in France and Germany.

Much of the kind of work that is going on in Maclovio is familiar to many artists who have worked in similar projects here. The difference, I suppose, lies in the direct political action that is at the heart of the Maclovio project. Here there is a chance that art practice could contribute to social and political change. Here the 'local' is pre-eminent. In her recent, excellent book, 'The Lure of the Local', Lucy Lippard writes: "The potential of an activist art practice that raises consciousness about land, history, culture and place and is a catalyst for social change cannot be underestimated, even though this promise has yet to be fulfilled." Here Lippard, whose writings often display an inspired optimism, is rightly cautious not to claim too much for activist art. No great, wide-ranging social or political change can be discerned from the activities of artists working in this field. However, at the point of the 'local,' change has and continues to take place. The very engagement of people in collaborative art practice changes the perceptions of individuals to such an extent that their life can become transformed. This is a well-attested fact. It is happening in Maclovio right now. Recently BAW received a letter from the 'US—Mexico Fund for Culture' stating that it had been awarded a grant of \$18,000 to continue its work in Maclovio.





# Three steps deconstructionist

Deconstruction has been around for a long time. It is the buzzword which encapsulates a legacy of shared opinions and assumptions about our culture. Nobody any longer needs to be told what it means, deconstruction is a daily activity, to ask what deconstruction is, as Derrida told us, is to make unreasonable demands of the deconstructive project, is to posit essence where there is deferral, to look for truth where there is a play of meanings.

Contemporary art practice is unimaginable without deconstruction. So called Neo-conceptualist art is a distillation of deconstructive method, and the status afforded neo-conceptualists within state institutions such as the Tate gallery is a testament to the growing status of deconstruction as a now recognised method. Artists who use deconstructive methods such as Douglas Gordon and Christine Borland, and their recognition through the Turner prize, point to the common acceptability of this practice.

Not only is its influence widespread within art practice but also within art education. Since the mid 80's its position has grown within the UK's art institutions, through the status afforded to it as the legitimate opposition to the dominant conservative hierarchies. Glasgow School of Art, The Slade and Goldsmiths are names synonymous with the 'infiltration' of deconstructive theory and indeed the high status of these institutions now is testament to certain victories in its history. Students who were the first generation to absorb deconstructive theory are now working within those institutions, Borland and Gordon now lecture and work on assessment periodically within the Glasgow School of Art. It is not an exaggeration to speak of a second generation of deconstructionists, and of deconstruction as a now institutionally recognised practice. One could even claim that it is impossible to make art in the 90's without a firm grasp of the basic tenets of deconstructive method.

As the method reaches maturity, however, we are at a transitional point in time where deconstruction is no longer the opposition but the dominant practice. It is possible at this point to conceive of an entire generation of young artists who are engaged in deconstruction, without being aware of the theoretical concerns upon which their method is based. A generation for whom, deconstruction needs no justification or critique. The danger here is that deconstruction becomes a style, a routine or system, an unquestioning and self reflexive exercise: What is at stake is the redundancy of the method itself. It is at this point that we are forced to question what claims are being made in the name of deconstruction. A revision is due, or it would be, if only deconstruction could or would allow such a revision to take place. In many ways deconstructive practice has placed itself beyond criticism and as a result has become reduced to a set of formula and truisms

which inevitably compromise or undermine its entire project. As such the need to chart possible grounds from which such a critique might occur is urgent.

The ubiquity of deconstructive method can be shown by looking at the common connections between a number of artists work. There could be said to be a basic model or schema which artists use which is both rigid and homogeneous—a "three step guide" to making a deconstructive artwork which is commonly used and accepted. The following discussion centres around three artworks by three artists, and is an attempt to, through their work, situate a critique of deconstruction.

## Three artworks three artists

Christine Borland *L'homme Double*  
Lisson Gallery, London

Jeremy Deller *The Uses of Literacy*  
CCA, Glasgow

Kerri Scharlin *Diary*  
Wooster Gardens, New York

These three artists have each been situated in previous writings within the frame of reference of deconstruction, and their work has been critiqued using the deconstructive vocabulary. Whether this influence is within the artists' work or within the reading of their work is of little consequence. The following model could equally well be applied to many of their contemporaries whose work exists through 'deconstructive readings'.

The schema or 'deconstructive equation' proposed here has been culled from a number of secondary sources most specifically *Against Deconstruction* by John. M. Ellis. As any supporters of deconstructive theory will know the following attempt to characterise a method for deconstructive practise in art, runs counter to, the spirit of deconstruction itself. The argument being that deconstruction is 'descriptive and analytical, not prescriptive or programmatic' (1). I would argue however that the use of deconstruction in art has become programmatic, and at that this point it is necessary to clarify what the terms of that programme are. The following schema is intended, not to reduce each artists' work to a single reading, but to show the ways in which their work is already based upon an existant theoretical model.

## The deconstructive equation: one method in three stages

Before a deconstructive project can be initiated 'the artist' (author) must be removed to divest the creative act of the illusion of authenticity, and to question the status of the artist as metaphysical originator of meaning. Any possibility of the artist 'making a statement' or of 'self expression' must be denied. The artists role

is shifted then towards that of curator and thus the use of other people to make the behalf of the artist. The artist formulates and supervises its execution. The artwork is usually working through of the elements that has set in motion and the presentation of

The first step is to find a dominant term could be a respected tradition of representation, create identity, a metaphysical assertion, or truth. e.g. The artist, objectivity, the original.

The second step is to set it up against e.g. the non-artist, subjectivity, the fake. This is a traditional binary opposition between two terms set up: Good/evil, form/content, inside/outside, objectivity/subjectivity.

These first two steps are essentially those that used in traditional metaphysics however the third steps that characterises the deconstructive method.

The third step is to swap the order of the terms to reverse the supremacy of the first term within the opposition, to show that they are mutually dependent on the other for their meaning. This is usually achieved by placing the second term within the same opposition as the first term, from which it is necessarily dependent. Thus in *Glas*, Derrida, set Hegel and Gertrude side and let the two texts infect and disrupt each other. And in Duchamp, the ready made is placed within the context of the gallery.

Thus the authority, and autonomy, of the site is deconstructed. The two terms are mutually dependent on each other for their meaning. The possibility of any 'originary' meaning or true presense is rendered 'problematic'. It becomes relative.

Within a successful work, the two terms are set against each other out in a mutual self referencing opposition. Traditional oppositions are destabilised: good/evil, black/white, male/female, original/fake. What comes is a destabilised text (or work) which is placed within the equation which it has set up. The work will ambiguously float between meanings: 'undecided', 'unfixed'. The unfixing of the work is claimed, is the unfixing of the metaphysical position, the destabilising of hierarchy. The work of hierarchy has been seen by many critics as a politicised project, it follows then that the deconstructive method has been variously described as: 'radical', 'subversive', 'strategic' and 'critical'.

## Applying the method: 3 Examples 1. Jeremy Deller *The uses of literacy*

*The uses of literacy* is a work by Deller which is a collage of its source the 'artwork' of fans of Manic Street Preachers. In the deconstructive schema the work is placed within his first term 'art' and his second term 'preacher'.

The work is a collation of drawings, photographs,



# S in the demise of unction

## Ewan Morrison

dedications to the Manic Street Preachers which the artist has 'curated' and also includes documentation of the artist's correspondences to fans. The Manic Street Preachers are themselves of little importance to the artwork and are no more than a ruse, for Deller's highly effective deconstruction of 'personal expression'. Deller does not express himself, but sets the mechanism in motion that will deconstruct personal expression by itself. By choosing to curate the works of other 'amateur' artists he has already set up an opposition to the notion of the professional artist, and has reversed the hierarchical order of the terms by placing the amateur art within the gallery.

By showing amateur drawings and poems by fans of the band, Deller on the one hand deconstructs the idea of the authenticity of the professional artist. This device doubles back on itself when the 'authenticity' of the pop culture which is opposed to high art turns out to be little more than imitative: Most of the fans drawings are copies taken from the pages of magazines and fanzines. This act of copying undermines the authenticity of the sentiments expressed. This is cross referenced by the fact that the Manic Street Preachers are themselves the self proclaimed "fans band"—their own originality is placed in question. In the work all 'personal expression' refers back to something else, is rendered relative, and hence inauthentic.

The bookshelf of one fan is also exhibited, showing a predictable assortment of the tomes of teenage enlightenment, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Ecce Homo*, *Nausea*. The angst of the suffering existential hero, is viewed in the light of adolescent hero worship. The philosophy of individualism is laid bare. The expressive is suddenly seen as being a fallacy. The artist, the human subject, is no more original than a posturing pop star.

Through their art the fans yearning for real experience is apparent, but their reliance on copying reveals the poverty of their own imaginations and the impossibility of transcendence. Their idols are a copy, of a copy of a copy, and their acts of self expression are copies also. However while 'authenticity' may be discredited, the feelings aroused by the yearning for authenticity, cannot be discounted. Unlike many deconstructive artists there is the possibility that Deller appreciates the dilemma of his subjects. What Derrida termed:

"The saddened, nostalgic guilty response which dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign." (2)

Deller exhibits the fans longing for authentic experience without participating in it. A gesture which can be read as either one of empathy or of detached condescension. This is not however just a formal exercise in pure method, the sense of homage in the work by the fans and perhaps even by the artist imbues the deconstructive act with a sense of loss. An ironic nostalgia

for the very things that the work itself undoes.

### 2. Kerri Scharlin

In *Diary* American artist Kerri Scharlin takes the persona of the artist as her first term and the celebrity as the second. As with Deller, Scharlin has employed other people to make the work for her. In this instance Hollywood scriptwriters have been hired to write a fictionalised account of a trip she made to LA, and professional actresses to act out the role of herself: 'the artist'. The scripts are exhibited, along with the video taped auditions by the actresses.

Scharlin's work like Deller's sets up an opposition between the 'real' and the 'fake', between the individuality of the artist, and fabricated identity of the celebrity. The persona of the artist is split up into representations which have been transformed, misinterpreted and reinterpreted through an impersonal communications industry, (TV script writing, casting and acting). The original persona of the artist is lost, and we can only begin to doubt whether or not it ever existed.

The two terms, artist and celebrity, are reversed, both are thrown into question. This seems at once a critique of the status of artist as celebrity, and at the same time a complete undermining of any possibility of a true artistic statement. Traditionally we conceive of the integrity of the artist as being compromised by the media. Scharlin has reversed this hierarchy and so deliberately constructed an exercise in complicity which destroys any notion of true, original meaning, and hence of integrity. There can be no compromise because there is no authenticity. One can read the work as a critique of the commercialisation of contemporary art practice, only at one's own expense as Scharlin undermines the possibility of a valid artistic project or an un-mediated critical space. The ambivalence of the gesture sits uncomfortably as the difference between corporate media and contemporary art is abolished with so slick a slight of hand. If any irony is intended it is lost as Scharlin's use of deconstruction is so well honed that she undermines the possibility of any artistic project other than deconstruction itself.

Scharlin's deconstruction ends up lapsing into what Hal Foster termed "the duplicity of cynical reason" where a radical critique of the role of the artist is seen to be taking place, while the status of art is re-instated as "deconstructive art". With Scharlin there is no sense of the problem posed by deconstruction, the loss of critical perspective. Instead there is the professional illustration of deconstruction as a positive project in itself. Ambivalence as a message. Duplicity as the truth of our time.

### 3. Christine Borland

Christine Borland's *L'Homme Double*, is commonly perceived to be a deconstructive artwork. An artwork which questions the nature of representation, truth

and presence, an artwork which focuses on "the forms and machineries of interpretation themselves." (3) In *L'Homme Double*, Borland too has contracted other 'professionals' to make the physical elements of the work for her. She employed six sculptors from different technical backgrounds to make portrait busts of Nazi scientist Josef Mengele, from a pair of photographs and a set of contradictory descriptions. The resulting sculptural busts were displayed alongside the documentation and letters of invitation.

Borland has used 'the original' as her first term, and taken 'the reconstruction' as her second. She has set the notion original and authentic identity against interpretation, and set expression through material in sculpture, against the notion of objective reconstruction.

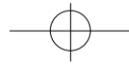
In deconstructive procedure the terms are reversible, thus we can also read from Borland's work the notion that objectivity cannot completely divest itself of creativity, that its objectivity is in fact infected with vestiges of creative interpretation, and is therefore flawed. The six busts do not and cannot show Mengele as he really was.

The form has resonances with the content as we find that the notion of 'copies from an original' has associations with cloning, and the scientific experiments which Mengele was involved in during his life. The fact that each copy is different, goes some way towards, poetically, disproving some of the so called 'scientific' theories upon which Mengele's experiments were based. Metaphorically, each bust is a failed clone. An injection of difference at the heat of a fascist closed system.

*L'Homme Double* throws up the heartening thought that although the author is dead, and there is no such thing as innate creativity or self expression, we are all in some way different—there is something which escapes systems of understanding—and herein lies our freedom.

As the death of the author gave rise to the birth of the reader, so too the death of the artist gave rise to the birth of the viewer. That 'something' which escapes in this deconstruction of identity, is none other than the viewer's subjectivity—the possible multiplicity of interpretation, the sheer benevolent magnitude of pluralism. As Borland has said in interview, she hopes that the work "asks a million questions about the human condition."

Thus the death of the author is conflated with a critique of hierarchical power structures. A typical deconstructive side shift which associates self expression and representation (metaphorically) with fascist structures. All attempts at tying down meaning are seen as logocentric, and thus inherently hierarchical and oppressive. This destruction of the singular truth through the multiplicity of interpretation takes on



### Three steps in the demise of deconstruction *continued*

political meaning in the context of the political persuasion of those who in this instance sought to enforce their truth.

*L'Homme Double* can be read as an anti-fascist work. According to deconstructive theory it could and should also be able to be read as a pro-fascist work: as both left and right and neither left nor right. But how can we interpret the role of deconstructive ambiguity in the context of an issue as important as fascism? In reading *L'homme Double* we can say that the work problematises a politics of binary opposition, or conversely that it is irresponsibly ambivalent in its politics. What could it possibly mean to say that both readings in this case are equally valid? Does Borland's work here not point to a problem within deconstructive theory? Borland's work is interesting here in that there is something questionable in her use of deconstructive method. In addressing such a loaded subject as cloning and fascism, Borland has 'cheated' the ways in which the artwork can be interpreted. She has not allowed the deconstructive equation to operate unhindered. She has stacked the odds against a particular set of readings which she does not want viewers to make.

As has already been pointed out by David Barret (4) Borland has given her own game away in her letters to the invited sculptors by stating "this information and these photographs can be interpreted as freely as you wish". The work would have been more academically correct in deconstructive terms if 'objectivity' had been required: allowing the incongruous and contradictory interruption of multiple objectivities to deconstruct the notion of singular and universal objectivity.

Borland's attempts to rig the results are an attempt to smooth over the ethical issues which surround the work. She has made each of the sculptors come up with a different Mengele. In so doing they 'un-do' the presence of the real person, they disperse Mengele through representations of Mengele. The work shows that there is no such thing as 'real' or true identity, true identity is equated with fascism, with the search for the defining Aryan specimen. Instead of fixed identity, we have the free play of interpretations. The work, through its method, shows that deferral of identity can be used as a weapon against those who would define and confine meaning, enforce a single truth.

It is interesting here to speculate on Borland's intent in her 'cheated' use of deconstruction. Could it be that she never wanted to risk the possibility of her sculptors delivering similar busts and hence creating a singular objective representation of Mengele? If she had, as in previous work, employed exclusively forensic sculptors, this might have been the end result. She had instead stacked the odds in favour of multiple interpretations. Had she not done this the work would have had very different associations. The deconstructive equation could have yielded something approximating a single true image of Mengele. Thus identity would be fixed, Mengele's bust would become a representation of 'evil' and we would end up reading the man's ethics from his physiognomy. This is exactly what Mengele himself did.

We can only assume that Borland was aware of the dangers of this possible outcome. Her 'cheating' is then understandable. This cheating with deconstructive method however throws up some very important questions about the assumptions that exponents of deconstructive practice hold on the implicit politics of deconstruction.

#### Deconstruction and the problem of value judgement

In his book, *Against Deconstruction* John.M. Ellis points out what he sees as the "heavy emphasis on moral terminology" in deconstructive discourse.

Deconstruction is described as "disturbing", "disruptive", it "unmasks", "subverts", "dismantles", "exposes" and "challenges". (5)

This observation seems at first seems inaccurate. Are not these words deliberately used within deconstructive discourse precisely to question the moral certainties of any one fixed position. Is not the whole deconstructive enterprise based upon throwing the certitude of the oppositions good/bad, right/wrong, into question, of rendering them 'problematic'? Are words such as 'subverts' and 'challenges' not used precisely because they are ambiguous enough to avoid being fixed to one position.

But Ellis' point has validity. These particular words are both emotive and imply a politics, they have a history, a tone. It is undeniable that there is a set of value judgements behind the choice of these words. But where could this 'moral tone' possibly come from if there is no possible ground for 'moral codes' within deconstruction? From what ground is the 'subversion' or the 'challenge' coming from? Certainly not from the left or the right, or from a humanist base.

"The main weight of Derrida's idea lies very much in their being an antidote to logocentrism. Its positive aspect derives from the thing that it sets itself up against." (6)

Deconstruction cannot claim to have a grounded position, however it is often assumed by its exponents that the hierarchies it undoes tend to be rigid right wing authoritative structures. There is an inference then that deconstruction is inherently radical and inherently of value to the left. In doing deconstruction one undoes the opponent through subjecting them to the destabilising influence of relativism, one un-does the right through being pluralist.

It is from this use of relativism, that the (implicit) moral tone that Ellis pinpointed arises. Deconstruction expounds the questioning of all fixed values. Multiplicity, ambiguity, and ambivalence, were initially used as tools, but when they solidify into a project and become self justifying exercises the project of deconstruction then inevitably becomes relativism for its own sake.

There is however a name for relativism elevated to the status of a moral imperative. It is otherwise known as liberalism. It becomes apparent then that the 'subversive', 'challenging' nature of deconstruction arises from nothing more radical than liberal pluralism.

The deconstructive dictum that all interpretation is misinterpretation, that meaning cannot be tied down, fits very comfortably with the liberal belief that 'every interpretation is valid'. The now commonly accepted claim that meaning is relative, and that there are 'as many interpretations of a work as there are viewers' inevitably results in a situation where value judgements become entirely relative, and tolerance of plurality, acceptance and encouragement of other readings, becomes elevated to the status of a moral imperative.

The danger here is that under the sheer magnitude of multiple interpretations, every reading becomes equally valid. Not only can no singular reading be seen as any more valid than any other, but any singular reading becomes criticised for its lack of pluralism, its 'closure'. Inevitably under such conditions any value judgement at all becomes impossible. This problem with deconstructive reading is the same contradiction

which lies at the heart of liberalism. Liberalism expounds a moral relativism which:

"...gives a special support to toleration as a moral attitude to codes which diverge from one's own. Paradoxically however, if that were accepted as a universal (and universally morally approvable) attitude, it would contradict the relativism which disallows any authoritative principles." (7)

Herein lies the contradiction which upsets deconstruction. There is an implicit agenda behind the use of the deconstructive vocabulary—an agenda which cannot admit to itself without undermining the entire deconstructive project. As soon as it can be shown that deconstruction operates from a fixed position, or requires grounded values, that cannot by definition be deconstructed then deconstruction collapses. Deconstruction then is caught in the same impasse as liberalism: The inability to tolerate any system that has fixed values, the inability to tolerate anything other than itself, the inability to confront its own groundlessness and its inevitable expounding of its groundlessness as its positive aspect.

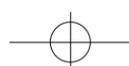
Relativism can be useful as a tool for destabilising hierarchies and established power structures, but when it becomes a self-justifying project in itself, an end in itself, its lack of any founding values makes its operation questionable. Deconstruction, as we know, is not tied to a project, and can be used to undermine the left as well as the right. It is after all just as easy to deconstruct moral codes as it is oppressive hierarchical structures.

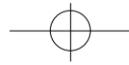
By inference a leftist bias is read into *L'Homme Double*, simply by the fact that it sets itself up against the right. There is however no guarantee of this reading of the work, and as with all deconstructive method it could easily have doubled back on itself.

As an experiment in deconstruction, *L'Homme Double* could have gone terribly wrong. Without the request to the sculptors to interpret "as freely as you wish", we may have seen six heads of Mengele, which were horribly similar. Given the possibility of the sculptors doing their own research on a larger archive, we may have ended up with something approximating the real presence of a real person. If this had been the case then, the results would have been very different, and the 'uncommon handsomeness' of Mengele captured in sculptural form could have had disastrous implications. We could have had: the fetishism of pure (Aryan) form, the nostalgic longing for origin and essence read through national identity, worse still, the reading of individual character traits through facial structure (a now condemned pseudo science once practised by Mengele himself). Even more questionable would be the opening up of a very specific moment of history, to a multiplicity of interpretations, in short to revisionism, with all of its attendant right wing connotations. Can we question that the Nazi's were wrong? What does it mean to deconstruct the opposition right/wrong in the context of fascism.

In rigging the results, Borland has exposed her own distrust of deconstructive method and revealed her own leftist agenda. As such she points out that there is something dangerously missing in deconstructive method proper.

Borland wants it both ways. She wants to give the impression of remaining open to interpretation, and at the same time she wants the moral certainty of ensuring that no-one reads the work as a valorisation of fascism. This contradiction is unresolvable. This is not to accuse Borland of misunderstanding deconstructive





method. On the contrary her loading of the odds in favour of a particular reading pinpoints a need for 'correction' in deconstructive theory. A correction which nonetheless undermines the theory entirely. Her courage or foolhardiness in tackling such a loaded subject pinpoints the blind spot at which deconstruction ceases to function effectively. That blind spot is: its inability to deal with ethical questions.

It is around the issue of ethics that Deconstruction derails itself, or rather it is around the issue of ethics that deconstruction always retracts, backtracks and obfuscates its own movements. For, to acknowledge the existence of ethics at all would undermine the anti-ontological impulse of deconstruction. How can a set of grounded values possibly exist, if all values are in play. When we start to deconstruct question of ethics, we find ourselves really getting into trouble—A relativist ethics—how could this be possible? If we accept, and expound, relativism in ethics then we can draw the inevitable Nietzschean conclusion that moral values are determined by those with power and that this is both inevitable and acceptable.

Attacks on deconstruction are usually dismissed as being either 'reductive' or 'distorting'. The accusation being that the critic has reduced deconstruction to an ontological statement, to a set of truisms or claims to truth. The common reaction being 'to ask what is...of deconstruction' is to perpetuate a system based upon the notion of presence. To attempt a critique from outside of the terrain of deconstruction leads immediately to the above accusations—deconstruction just does not recognise the legitimacy of conventional logic.

To attempt a critique of deconstruction from within, is equally impossible as any attempt to tie down meaning, to formulate a critical position is just not recognised as a legitimate practice.

There is however a third and ironic position, and that the irresponsible or 'cheated' use of deconstructive method, by artists can actually point to a weakness within deconstructive theory. That is that deconstructive theory is based upon certain criteria which it will not and cannot admit to. To do deconstruction, to cheat at it, to make the mechanisms too apparent, and the results too foregone, is to expose certain assumptions that we harbour about the implicit politics and ethics of deconstruction.

Deller, Scharlin and Borland each separately beg questions of deconstructive method.

They here represent three very different interpretations of deconstructive method, which, respectively, could be termed playful, illustrative and ethical.

Deller's works pushes the playfulness of intertextuality to its limit, without making any grandiose claims to its own importance. As Derrida is often portrayed as a joker, so too Deller's work is challenging through its playfulness. This is both its success and its limit. Perhaps deconstructive practice can go no further than to admit to Deller's form of tragi-comic humility. Deller's form of playful popular deconstruction carries

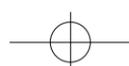
with it the nostalgia for the myths of creativity that deconstruction itself tears down. By placing deconstruction within popular culture he shows the ways in which deconstruction is a negative force, a destroyer of cultural values, a leveller. His work in some way measures the human cost of what is lost when we deconstruct our own culture.

Scherlin's work is at the forefront of American deconstructive art, but is deconstruction gone text book. It seems consciously constructed to illustrate deconstructive method, to even teach the viewer 'how to do deconstruction'. Scherlin's work announces deconstruction as an art methodology which illustrates theory, and goes to great lengths to get it to get its message across (it is done professionally and expensively—all scriptwriters and actresses were paid for their work as 'makers' of her work). As such it is based upon a misreading; it does not take deconstruction as a tool *to*, but as a message *to be* expressed. As soon as deconstruction becomes 'the truth of our time' then it becomes redundant. Her work shows the degree to which artists and critics have come to accept deconstruction not as a tool, but as a set of truisms, almost a belief system. If this is the case then Scharlin's work signals the demise of deconstruction as a critical tool, and the solidifying of deconstruction into a form of liberal pluralism.

In pushing deconstruction into direct confrontation with important ethical issues and 'cheating' with the viewer's reading of the work Christine Borland is forcing us to question, the appropriateness of deconstructive method in such contexts. It could be that by overstepping the mark, by going into terrain where 'openness to interpretation' is not enough, Borland has exposed the fact that there are certain boundaries which deconstruction cannot cross, certain issues which it cannot address, certain questions it cannot ask without completely undermining itself. Ethical deconstruction? A contradiction in terms.

#### Notes

- (1) *Just be yourself. Logocentrism and difference in performance theory.* Philip Auslander.
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) *Against Deconstruction* John.M.Ellis. (A text concerning the impact of deconstructive criticism on literary theory in the USA.)
- (4) *The woman in possession* Make 76. June July 97.
- (5) David Barret. Review. Christine Borland Lisson Gallery. Freize magazine. Issue 35.
- (6) *Against Deconstruction* John M. Ellis.
- (7) *The Oxford Companion to philosophy*



# Me, Myself and I

## Leigh French

"Our general culture is... permeated with ideas about the individual nature of creativity, how genius will always overcome social obstacles, that art is an inexplicable, almost magical sphere to be venerated but not analysed. These myths are produced in ideologies of art history and are then dispersed throughout the channels of TV documentaries, popular art books, biographic romances about artists' lives..."

*Arts History and Hegemony*, Jon Bird, Block, Issue 12, 1986/7, available in *The Block Reader In Visual Culture* (Routledge)

STOPSTOP is a Glasgow based publication of "contemporary art and writing" and as an artists' initiated project. It is being developed by Caroline Woodley and Chris Evans. It consists of work from 33 artists, some work specifically made for the context of the book, photo, text based works and the documentation of work existing elsewhere. The writing consists of 7 short pieces, including fiction, articles and an interview, predominantly from artist/writers. The artists - run/ membership-driven spaces: Transmission Gallery, Glasgow; the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh; Wilkes, Glasgow; Three Month Gallery, Liverpool, are either directly represented through this writing or associated via accreditation. A number of the artists and writers in the publication are, or were, directly involved in the curating and running of these spaces.

The book appears to be propelled out of the interest generated by the recent Live/Life exhibition at Musée d' Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1997, more particularly, the accompanying catalogues. The catalogues took the form of two books. They acted as both an index of UK based artists' run spaces and arts publications that participated in the show, and, through artists' pages, catalogued the spotlighted younger generation of artists individually invited to show by Live/Life's curators Laurence Bossé and Hans Ulrich Obrist. This overview of contemporary practice in the UK, while being well researched and inclusive of particular styles of artists' led/driven initiatives, had at its heart a specific curatorial focus most conspicuous through those individuals invited to exhibit. This exhibition was not an objective overview of artist led activity in the UK displayed in Paris, though it might have been presented as such, but more, part of a display of the internationalism of the market place, its stars and accompanying curators.

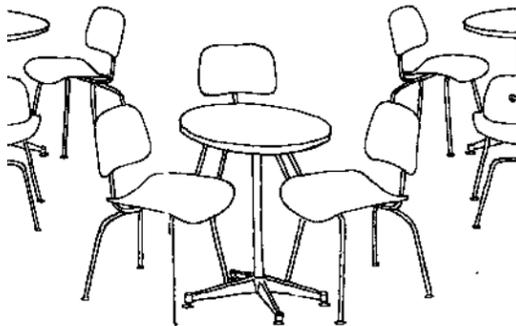
STOPSTOP is not a census of broad artistic activity. It is described in the introduction as "an exhibition in a book". It is produced by specific artists about and concerning themselves and their (self)interests. In some ways STOPSTOP documents activity and loose or temporary associations; in other ways it is the catalyst for activity and these associations. In this sense, while it may include the recording of artists' led activities outwith the book project itself, other artist run projects and spaces, thereby associating itself with such activity, it is predominantly engaged in circulating a specific set of values and meanings of and for itself.

The differences between the participants within STOPSTOP are displaced. As with other *festivals*, slack associations are formed in a pact of visibility. A neat simplicity of apparent interdependence and communication is constructed. This disinterested togetherness, however, is an illusion. Behind the benign facade paranoid careerism and information retention is epidemic in what passes, and is accepted as, an everyday condition of existence. Here a sense of identity is implicitly reinforced by the hidden agenda of macho self-reliance and aggression. This exists in, and is directly effected by, a false economy induced by a public funding system desiring an apparent market structure.

Not to place myself in a position outside of this activity but to acknowledge my participation within the field, my frustrations have been in encouraging the

younger generation of Scottish based artists/writers to write on anything other than themselves. By themselves I don't mean any range of interests/concerns or the problematics of 'speaking for others', but anything apart from what may be perceived as directly benefiting their careers in the gaze of a particular market. However, what I see as being restrictive forms the very foundation stones of STOPSTOP.

The general difficulty here is for artists' groups to facilitate social potentially discursive communities while intrinsically operating via a competitive individualism. The resulting representative structure is reduc-



tive: which individual best expresses the gallery's, so-essential-to-public-funding, pluralism—that is, as being representative of a *type* or stand in for a *group* or *movement*. For these reasons I have to challenge both Angela Kingston's Artists Newsletter bubbly editorial of April 97, where she praised the artist/writer activity in Glasgow as being part of an administrative exercise in courting those-in-power, and the support structures that actually encourage sycophancy. I must stress this is not the case for all the texts in STOPSTOP, nor all the artist/writers.

STOPSTOP is but one in a line of recent artists' publications produced in Scotland. In Scotland, as Sarah Munro stresses in her article *Go Left at the Lights*, the number of contemporary showing spaces are limited for a younger generation of artists due to an excluding municipal gallery ideology. This has been compounded in recent years by the growth of the educational structure and the mythologising of Glasgow, (Angela Kingston's editorial being but one example) leading to an increase in the number of young resident practitioners. A great number of these artists often exhibit in artist-run galleries or self initiated pro-



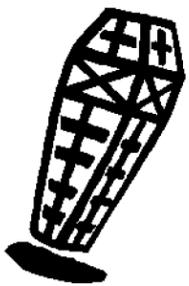
jects in temporary spaces on lit if any, funding. Just as artistic practices have evolved which bypass an ongoing work-ethic—ven, studio-based practice (a leg of conceptualism and prohibitive cost) to ones where work is made for the site or a specific opportunity/event, so now we see the art catalogue/book becoming a familiar site/cause of work and a self-conscious form of display and intentional dissemination.

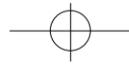
The artists' document has also to be viewed from a UK wide perspective where catalogues exist only for the professionals, produced to accompany shows in those public/commercial spaces sufficiently endowed to afford publications. The catalogue has a symbolic capital all of its own. For those who desire it, it is a marker of success, recognition and acceptance—institution. Compare this with Europe where catalogues are perhaps banally, more often expected documentation of a show. Though this is not to say that the dynamics of the systems are necessarily any different.

Historically, many artists' publications have been tools of empowerment, engagements in the political representation, sites for the questioning of how historical narratives are constructed. In many cases the intentions of this recent rash of publications (often born of a full stop due to an encounter with Scotland's artistic glass ceiling, and wondering where to go next) are actually to cajole the market into recognition, or to bring artists back onto the market as springboards into the sanctified waters. Rather than challenge the homogeneity of the circuit, the exhibition circuit, the form is used to market oneself to those very institutions: An inflated CV operating at a base level of such distribution-equals-exposure with a desire for recognition from a few elevated sites. This often has little to do with the work; the work is best an aside, and everything to do with maximum exposure of the personality, of the name. Implicitly for many of these candidates-for-celebration there is an underlying desire for regulation of their production and their reputation from these institutions; a zeal for packaged stardom which John Beagles goes some way to questioning in his StopStop article *I cannot be asked to spend all my time and money on art, there are more important things*.

STOPSTOP, published by 1/L 83 Hill Street, Glasgow G3 6NZ, pb,138 pages, £4.50

Top:  
GRAHAM RAMSAY  
*200 Watt Ideas*  
Middle:  
RICHARD WRIGHT  
*Detail: I Can't Live With It*  
Right:  
DAVID WILKINSON *No Title*





# Tales of the Great Unwashed

Ian Brotherhoo

—This blessed shop lies on the bright side of the road, Da would say.

Right enough, *The Great Unwashed* does face South, but I could never fathom why this should be held as a promise of health and prosperity for his offspring. But I know that he was never happier than when the light came bright and morning-fresh upon the gantry, telling him that opening time was round again.

But to be able to smile all the time? To offer warmth and welcome to those I knew he privately dismissed as 'bad lots' and 'shitehawks'? Any cynicism I might have harboured regarding his friendliness was swept away in the final years. Heavy smoking robbed him of both legs. He was getting used to the wheelchair when a whole regiment of cancers invaded what remained of him, reducing his once mighty arms to freckled stick-bags. But hospital was not for him, and he insisted on being taken into the shop every day, where he would lie in an old pram by the end of the bar and partake of his beloved stout via a three-foot long straw which was taped to a pint measure glued to the bar.

—Folk like to gather in the sun, he would also say.

That is surely true, but why we have had (all of us, patrons or otherwise) always to make do with second-hand daylight has also embittered me. Most hours of my working life have been spent in sobriety watching others making the most of a smokey, man-made purgatory. Good friends fallen on hard times have now to stay home with their bottles and cans—that they can no longer afford to enjoy the company of their peers has become intolerable, criminal. They get the best deal possible for a fiver, head home, replay the highlights of friendships, resuscitating jokes and conjure faces with only a flickering box or tinny tape to simulate company.

His passing hit me hard. For more than a year there was not a day passed when I didn't lock that office door and weep snottily into folded arms, and even now, the unexpected mention of him summons cold fingers which claw at my chest and nip at my eyes. It's all the worse because I know I'll never be him. Here are knuckles gnarled; eyebrows ridged and heavy scars all over to prove that I was never one to suffer the ignorant or the offensive in silence. I don't think Da ever raised a hand to anyone, but there is no debating who was the stronger, wiser man.

The Great Unwashed sits atop one of the city's drumlins. A drumlin is a glacier's jobby, and the pub is perched on one of the biggest. The road leading down to the city-centre is steep, and from the office I watch locals coming up the hill very slowly, others descending it at thrice the speed, knees buckling under their own momentum.

Being so close to the night-clubs and the exotic eating-houses which cater for the beer-addled of the night, the streets are always busy at dark, but few souls venture up the hill in sobriety without good reason. When they are drunk they get lost, and imagine they are taking short-cuts. They wander about the hill's orange streets, dropping food from greasy wrappers, or evacuating it in garish gushes along the gutter. In the early hours, before the sun has touched the horizon, great flocks of seagulls come swooping in from the coast to see what they can find. I've always liked to watch birds, but these gulls are a menace. They swarm threateningly above the pavements, cawing claims before dropping heavily onto pieces of pakora, fish-batter, filth-encrusted jumbo sausages, hardened vomit and whatever else they can find to cram into their steel-lined gullets. As I sit alone at the bar at the shift's end, I see their shadows reel upon the window, and curse them. Parasites. They invade even my sleep, and will not retreat until the city itself is up and about.

So I go to work this day, baggy-eyed and hateful. An audit is looming, the stock is bad, there has been pilferage of late, the new beers I brought in have not been shifting. And it is Autumn now, that point when, almost without warning, there will be a shifting of clock-hands and we must face another six months in the Twilight Zone. And those effing gulls will bolster their numbers as the sea roughens.

—A late night was it then, asks Joe 'Doghead'

Ryan, but I ignore him.

I watch Frankie, the new barman, as he wipes down the sink-boards. Nice lad. Has he been passing twenties over the bar, or maybe leaving forty-gillers outside by the bins for friends to collect? I can't see it, don't want to, but someone is at it and I'm right in the mood to catch them today.

A metallic clank from the cellar betrays the presence of Halfpint Fraser. He was a friend of the old man's, and is still on the books as cellar-man. He is in his late seventies. I'm still watching Frankie when the steely echo from downstairs becomes a sudden roaring gush beneath which Halfpint's screams can be faintly heard. I race to the head of the stairs. The cellar appears to be filling up with foam. In the midst of the dull kegs, Halfpint lies, bunnet still intact, surrounded by dozens of soaked bread rolls, an angry ejaculation of lager battering onto the ceiling from the keg beside him.

Ten minutes later, Halfpint stands in a puddle of warm lager in the office as I hand him his week's pay and tell him not to come back. A tear or two mingle with the sweet beer as he accepts the notes without a word, then turns sadly for the door. I quell the pang of regret. Business is business. Eighty pints or more lost. Truth be told, it was just the excuse I'd been waiting for.

And that is but the start. The afternoon is dull and unusually warm. We get busy for no reason I can see. There is a large crowd of lads doing a rehearsal for a stag-night, and they've clearly taken up where they left off the night before. Frankie takes objection to the manner of one of them. Threats are exchanged. Joe helps me to escort the lads to the door. Then I get Frankie into the office and tear a strip off him. The customer comes first. You might be a Ned in your own time, but not in here. Da's stock phrases come from nowhere, but I can't say them with that same tone, that understanding. I warn him, and he is ashen when he gets behind the bar.

—You're run-down and that's a fact, says Joe.

—And you're a doctor now? I reply, still fuming. Doghead thrusts stodgy fingers into his waistcoat pocket and draws out a small pinkish pellet.

—Get this down you, he says.

I take the pill from him. The coating crumbles slightly as I roll it between my fingers. There is a faint impression of the letter 'S' upon it.

—Supervitamin pill, and a mighty cure for the stress and the hangovers so it is, says Joe.

There seems no harm. I throw it down with a swally of watered lime juice. Maybe I do need a pick-me-up, but I've never been one for pills and that. I get back into the office and spend the mid-afternoon lull trying to get the papers ready for the accountant. They make no sense. Well, they don't really matter any more. In fact, by five or so they are as good as a joke book, and I leaf slowly through them, laughing aloud at VAT numbers and profit projections.

—So that's perked you up I see, says Joe.

He is well-gone now is Doghead, but I offer him my hand and shake his long and hard.

—Thanks Joe, you're a pal. There's one in the tap for you.

I watch Frankie battering away, pouring three pints at once, chatting to a regular. He hasn't had a break all day. I get behind the bar and help. I feel great. I get him at the till.

—Sorry about earlier son, I say. Go get some grub and take yourself a pint.

He eyes me suspiciously, as I was watching him that morning.

—We all have off-days lad. Don't be taking it personal.

I whistle 'Dirty Old Town' and stay behind the bar until the evening shift come on. I never normally work day-time but I feel strong, keen, even cheerful. Some of the regular boys ask me if my numbers have come up.

—This place is on the bright side of the road, I say, and those of them who don't remember Da look confused.

By seven I'm as happy as I've ever been. It's almost

as if I can feel Da still in the place, the smell of him, the sound of his loaded breathing, the waft of his tobacco. I could never have worked anywhere else, my life could never have been any other way, and I wouldn't want it different anyroad. Every customer is a friend, and even those with stern faces and short manners are my bread and butter and I love them all. I get among them, shaking every hand within reach, embracing those I've known for years but never spoken to. It feels like New Year, the favourite child's eighteenth, a perfect wedding bash all rolled into one. But then there is a pang and I rush back to the office.

It takes but a second to locate Halfpint's phone number, but I have to organise myself before calling. I'm almost in tears as I ask him to come back tomorrow. He is quiet. I beg, apologise, cite Da as our common link. He grunts consent.

Midnight comes. I am not in *The Great Unwashed*. They can close up themselves, and even if they don't they'll take care of it no bother. I'm in the Spring, laughing so hard I can hardly breathe. There is Jacko the Wobbler I haven't seen for twenty years, Sammy the Biter, Mickoleen and sundry others. Someone has been married, they're all suited and well-oiled. It's a lock-in, and it's maybe two or three when I leave, shirt unbuttoned and tie lost.

A cab drops me. There are words with the driver, and I throw a handful of change at him. The chippie is closing, but they have some fritters left, and aye, put that pie in there as well.

I fall at some point going back up the hill to the work. Suddenly cold, I try to work out where my jacket is. I cannot raise my head from the pavement. I start to slide down the hill, back towards the main drag, where I can hear gigantic frogs slapping their way to the West End, and worms like drainpipes wrestling in the gutters. A smell bears down, and it is sheer foulness—burned garlic, bean-filled ash-trays and toenails made of old cheese. The smell becomes a wave of filthy air, and then I know that something is above me. I manage to raise myself and face the sky. A plane-sized gull is hovering high, eyeing me. I bury my face in my arms and cry out as I smell the bastard lower. It lands astride me with feet like deflated dingys. With its beak it flips me over. On the end of this beak there is a splintering of orange bony fingers. It ties my shoelaces together, hooks them over the lower bill, rises from the road and soon we are high above the city.

There is light rain falling as the thing flies backwards across the town. I am upside-down, limp and helpless as landmarks skite by above me. I retch and boak but nothing emerges. The screeching of the traffic on the motorway becomes the laugh of the bird as it drops towards the riverside by the old docks. It stands high above, watching me. It lowers the beak, lifts me up for a second, then lets me drop and tears off my legs with one great snap.

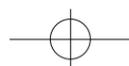
There is no pain. It swallows my legs, raises its head and cries to whatever giant may be about. And then it leaves, heading back to the sea.

So I was released from the jail about mid-day. Charges might be brought. Drunk and Disorderly. Placing people in a state of fear and alarm. I threw up outside the station but there was nothing but bileish spit. A cab got me back to *The Great Unwashed*.

Joe was slumped in the corner by the juke-box, soaked in his own fluids and covered with empty crisp-bags. A dozen or so others, including Frankie, occupied the Snug in various states of slumber, only one being full awake.

—It's yourself, said Sippy Pat.

A far-off gull cried. The juke-box was playing Van the Man's Bright Side of the Road. I walked unsteadily over to the power point, ripped the plug from the socket, then went to the office and sobbed until the accountant arrived.





# r Peace Train



Photograph: JULIA GUEST

The fact that Joe didn't like it struck me as somewhat backing up 'rule number one': that we should all stick together. Alan had joined us by this point, sheets over his head like a pretend messiah. We agreed to discuss it early in the morning, and we called it a night. The distinct impression that this was some late-night spontaneous meeting in the hotel foyer led by organisation junkies easily circulated round by throbbing brain amongst the other assorted hallucinations.

In the morning the plan turned to nothing. Only a couple of people from the German delegation had been actually pushing for it while the French and Swiss delegations had pressed heavily for the convoy sticking together: "Bang on!" I said. Joe, leaning over into my breakfast laughs with me into my ear: "Beware of Germans preaching Stalinism." We are more optimistic than we were after the paranoia of last night. We have very little on our side: solidarity—i.e. staying together and watching over each other; a message of 'peace'—i.e. non provocative action and organisation—i.e. listening to the people who know the territory. The future would rely on instinct, split second reactions in difficult irrational situations. Trying to pretend to be relaxed I have a word about the "decision making procedure" with Julia. "This is luxury, this is clockwork compared to some of the delegations I've been on. I just want to get on with my work."

Most of the delegations attended their respective Embassies to inform the consulates of what we planned to do. Press reports seemed to have mellowed slightly, as in this example from The Turkish Daily News, August 28th: "Foreign Minister, Sermet Atacanli... made it clear that the travellers who were going on to Diyarbakir would not meet with any difficulty and those who are not forbidden by law to enter Turkey would be met with tolerance." We asked Neil Frape, the Vice-Consul for Press and Public affairs, whom we would later become better acquainted with, what he thought of this and what his impression of the climate was. There was very little he could tell us. Owen Jenkins, another Embassy man, had reported the situation in Diyarbakir as being 'very tense', the 'State of Emergency' being of course very much in place. Mr. Frape provided us with a letter on Embassy note paper, which we imagined would somehow help us in a difficult situation. It did strike me as peculiar that a bunch of 'activists' like ourselves should go crawling to the State for help. Well, using the Civil Service for what it is intended—for any prospective

advantage—seemed like a good idea at the time. The photographers amongst us were also worried about getting their material out of the country and were hoping for the old diplomatic bag. Mr. Frape seemed honestly sympathetic: it must be something of an insight into the smooth running of a democracy to work as a press officer in Turkey, where journalists go missing, papers are closed down in the night and lies and corruption go rampantly unchecked.

Earlier that day Joe and Paul had caught something of possible future significance when they filmed an interview with Mr. Imam Gassan Solomon, a South African ANC Member of Parliament (Justice and Foreign Affairs), this is worth quoting at length:

*"We thank the Turkish Government and the Turkish people for their sympathy towards our struggle, but we would also like to offer our assistance to the Turkish Government and the Turkish people to assist in the problem which they have with the people of Kurdistan. And I might as well tell the Turkish people and maybe the rest of the World Community that President Mandela has given an indication that he is going to step down in 1999, that we have a very short time in order to make use of his good offices. And he will be available to assist, and I think he would be the best person to assist, to solve this problem peacefully in Kurdistan."*

Still ill I didn't make it to the visit of The Mothers of The Disappeared the next day. It is some indication of our times that a term such as that will be understood by most readers without further explanation. They meet every Saturday (and are also known as the Saturday Mothers) and are treated with inhuman, disgusting, violent contempt by the police—constant harassment and beatings. This is a perfect indication of how far out of control the slide is in Turkey. The eventual repercussion of 'counter-insurgency' is that young men in uniform are made to turn on old women; women who could easily be their own mothers, who themselves are forced to go begging on the streets for information on other young men and women who could easily be the young cop wiping the blood off his truncheon. Another of the South African MPs put it quite well later on that evening, this was Mr. Ahmed Gara Ebrahim who said: "Attending the Saturday Mothers demonstration in Istanbul today reminded me of the anguish of the Mothers, Sisters, Brothers and Fathers went through in our own liberation struggle. One of the fundamentals of human rights is the right to live and the right to feel secure.

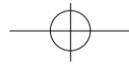
As long as these Mothers, Sisters and Brothers do not know what happened to their relatives and loved ones, basic human rights in Turkey will remain violated.

At breakfast, on the morning we planned to set off, we were visited by top Istanbul secret policeman, who gave out some 'final warnings about any form of protest' to Miranda and Francis D' Souza, who had stomach to listen to him. As we gathered to leave, the Italian barmy army of Communist Party MPs and members began to noisily sing their full repertoire anti-fascist songs, eventually they are weakly told to shut up by one of the Hotel fat boys. Just two buses took us to our first stop. With all the crush I ended up at the big window at the front as we wove out of the vastness of Istanbul and its homicidal traffic. We eventually picked up a bit of a police escort but they knew we were going: Kadaköy. On its outskirts the police presence grew to enormous proportions, armoured vehicles and the extensive apparatus of 'crowd control': they became too many to count. Halting in the middle of all this we got out and walked in more or less single file through the police lines: machine guns into an even more astonishing sight: a massive rally of thousands of Kurds who were risking life, limb and liberty to welcome us and see us off.

The organisers estimated that about 10,000 people who had tried to travel on every conceivable form of transport had been turned back. As we walked in we were hugged and kissed like long lost Sons and Daughters, we shook and held hands and just looked into the eyes of everyone we passed—so many people. In utter emotional dizziness we walked into the hubbub of Kurds. Joe, Paul and Julia snapped into action with their cameras while I mumbled inanities into a tape recorder. Standing on a car bonnet when we looked at someone I got to see the enormity of it: furious speeches were still being pounded out of the P.A. by Union leaders to be met with deafening responses from the crowd. One uncomfortable memory is accidentally looking up at our 'special guests' as Miran kept calling them, who had climbed on top of a van which was acting as a platform for the speakers. They went up there presumably to be cheered. Seeing Bill Kent's fat chubby face and cringing at what buffoon they seemed, taking all that applause with silly paper 'Peace Train' hats on their heads—far better, I thought, to be down here and try to talk to some people. But we had started to be directed towards the seven buses which would take us to Diyarbakir and moved off through the waving crowd and extremely annoyed police.

What the hell was I doing in this country, what the hell did I understand about what it was like to live here? All anyone could do was look people in the eye and show them some respect: we would soon zoom off, but these people were staying; to soon be battered senseless for turning up. At least, I thought, with all its failings, the Peace Train might, in some small way bring some international attention and recognition to the reality of the Kurdish situation. Undoubtedly the Kurds were more than happy to applaud our effort: could not help feeling that we imported something of the class system within the British contingent, which is our problem; but there is something peculiar about a member of an un-elected upper House of Lords, Lord Rea, lecturing a country like Turkey on 'Democracy'.

Up in the mountains, well out of Kadaköy, we stopped at about six in the evening on the pretext of a passport check, although we hadn't left the country: the checkpoint people began to get off—those with video cameras and so forth gathering round any potential disturbance, but we were only delayed for about two hours. Paul later let slip that he had been told



Photograph: JULIA GUEST

### The Musa Anter Peace Train

*continued*

soldier that if he didn't stop filming he would be shot.

The journey was long but our spirits were kept up by Yasmien—the Mother of the Bus—who would perfume us with rose water and at one point when the darkness outside was creeping in, actually went round kissing us all. She also led the singing. Kurdish songs are quite similar to Bulgarian folk songs with that open throat, which becomes so charged with emotion. We also had a Kurdish band on board one of the buses who would start up playing practically anywhere and at any time. Their pounding slapping drums and strange reed instruments sprung into action among the flashing blue lights in several God forsaken service stations, where one could obtain the worst food in the World. Food so bad in fact that Julia and I couldn't eat it for laughing about how we had jumped the massive queue, to get at it first.

I think most people were sleeping when we came into Kurdistan. High Mountains were to the left and right of us with a low mist filling the desert ground of the valley. Higher and higher into the mountains and about eight in the morning we were stopped at a military check point at Gazi Antep<sup>2</sup>, near the Syrian border. Previously we had heard of deportations from Diyarbakir including Musa Anter's widow and daughter, several HADEP party members and our 'special guests'. They had also stopped us entering Ankara and driven away the people who had gathered to meet us, so there was no telling how things would go: from here on in we were in the Emergency Zone, under Martial Law. At the checkpoint, the soldiers start to take off one of the 'Musa Anter Peace Train' banners and set fire to it in front of all our cameras and all of us, obviously in an effort to get some kind of reaction thus 'justifying' some bloodshed. Eventually after they have had their fun they let us proceed.

As the people along the way, in greater and greater numbers, wave us on with peace signs; we could also on occasion see them being harassed by the police. At about ten thirty we are escorted into a large and notorious military compound at Urfa and more or less held under arrest. The organisers and MPs and so forth start to negotiate with the Army while the rest of us wander around the compound trying to find shade from the radioactive sun. It is beginning to look like a dead end, but I arrange a bet with Francis D' Souza of 1,000,000 Turkish Lira that we get to Diyarbakir, just for the sheer hell of it. A few moments previously Francis told Joe she was going to find out if we were free to go out of the compound by slowly walking out the main entrance and seeing what happened. He agreed to film her. No sooner had she set one foot in the open space when the click of machine guns signalled that this was a bad move and she quickly turned back. Inadvertently Paul and I began talking to one of the Turkish soldiers, a huge guy obviously in Special forces or something; he is armed with about ten fragmentation grenades, a powerful machine gun with a

grenade launcher attached. I notice a little Turkish flag on the butt of his automatic hand gun—nice to see a bit of individualism flourishing, but it turns out to be quite common. He looks down at us and quietly asks us why we have come to Turkey: "Why not Bosnia or Palestine or..." "Ireland," I interject. "Yes Ireland" he murmurs, "why don't you go there?" "I've been" I reply. "All we want is peace" Paul tells him, and gradually the conversation tails off. It is a bit tricky talking to a man who is equipped to annihilate all of us without breaking into a sweat.

Mr Solomon informed us that what they were doing here was the oldest trick in the book, he had seen it many times in South Africa. The purpose of this stop was to enable them to set up men and machinery down the way. Eventually after two and a half hours we are let back on the buses and move slowly towards Diyarbakir. An announcement on the bus tannoy tells us that "the Governor of Diyarbakir said the buses could not come in due to a public safety law. He advised the organising committee to turn back but will allow us to proceed into Diyarbakir Province." Joe and Paul are running out of film and batteries. Standing up and looking at the numbers of the Army, Paul turns to Joe: "Looks like we're going to need another two Scousers."

I don't know what time it was—I was asleep; possibly about four—but we abruptly stopped and an urgent call came out for all press to get up the front. The road to Diyarbakir is a mere two lonely lanes, and as far as the eye can see everything is wilderness and the odd animal skull. No cover, no nothing. Our bus was number five so we couldn't see very much till we got to the head of the convoy on foot. Two huge tanks blocked our path, a huge semi-circle of soldiers at a three metre spread surrounded us, fondling their machine guns. We can see what looks like Diyarbakir about a mile away in the distance but all that long way was lined by hundreds of soldiers and more tanks.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone is off the buses now sitting down in front of them and in front of the tanks. Chanting and singing began with "Peace" in Kurdish accompanied by a furious hand clap. Two Kurdish women from within the circle of protesters made a passionate speech to the soldiers, until fraught with emotion one of them threw the bouquet of roses she was carrying up into the air and crashed to her knees weeping. I later found out she was the widow of an MP who was murdered—kicked to death—in Diyarbakir, the flowers were perhaps intended for his grave. People started singing the Kurdish National anthem (a frail but relentlessly determined song and no doubt illegal), and 'Ciao Bella' an old Italian anti-fascist Partisan song, together with chants of "Internationale Solidarité!" The soldiers were beginning to look pretty edgy as people put some of the scattered flowers on the tanks.

There was some confusion as the organisers debat-

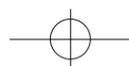
ed with the military what would be the middle of the muddle of press people developed around us. The decision ever was been decided was in Turkish and German, off to the side I eventually found a man who was making an announcement in English. I was understandingly dazed and confused I see we are stopped here, they don't let us go. The peace ...eh...trip. So we decided to turn back. We sit down here for a while and we sing but now it's time to turn back. We are going to Urfa and we'll have a rest there, then we'll decide what we'll do and how we'll do it. Now please everybody get on the buses, thank you." I knew it had been a bit more to it than that, from what I heard up from everyone else but we all slowly drifted towards the buses. The sun was on its way down as a military helicopter landed in the field and took off again after instructions.

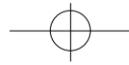
I wandered past the Kurdish band who were playing alongside their bus and tried to take a tape recorder while I gathered a handful of people. I was still curious as to what was happening. I bumped into Miranda, I still had the tape recorder she tried to speak over the noise of the helicopter.

"There's been about 1,000 arrests [in Turkey] because of us going in. HADEP, IHD—a Kurdish organisation of the Peace Train, just now in a coalition with the PKK. I said that, well, it was suggested that the PKK should take some kind of action—because the PKK would be able to do what we could happen was a detention or deportation. A ban. That might cripple solidarity work for the future—with no return to the country; that's the thing to be considered. On the other hand, the Turkish and Kurdish friends: they said that if we die for their political beliefs, so there's no action we take, they take the consequences. The most serious thing which was suggested—course is not a possibility—is that everybody should go to the barricades. There would be no firing, they'd fire into the crowd and there would be mass arrests. That's not an option for a protest. It would be damage to the whole process." I think here express a tone which I think came in due to the look of abject horror on my face. I carried on: "Other suggestions are to go to the front, protest the arrests, then possibly just the back here to the barricades. The problem belongs to a Tribal Warlord. You know that's what we talked about—the Beauty Queen, an MP and a Police Chief and a Mafia guy. Interpol? Well the one who survived has a guerrilla army and this is his territory, his land. So the Germans think it enough to go back to 'something', the Italians want something that's not like the sound of what Miranda was saying. I started to imagine what this place would be like if it came back here in the middle of the night and moved off."



Photograph: JOE COOPER/P&amp;F





Photographs: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

It is becoming obvious, once we can judge the size of the police/military escort we are picking up, that we will not be allowed to stop. The convoy is travelling very fast and through red lights. As we pass various small towns the police and army in large numbers seem to be lining the route. When the buses stop at a junction or a roadblock, riot police immediately run alongside the bus. This is by no means over. We are told to keep our seats by Yasmien. We can barely travel one hundred yards without seeing massive groups of soldiers.

It is about seven thirty, and there is an announcement over the bus tannoy: "everyone who tries to enter Diyarbakir the way we went will probably be killed." To be honest I was quite happy to be run out of country, and I mention this to Andy who is sitting next to me. He tells me that the police escort will probably diminish once we have been put out of the Emergency Zone. Miranda is on the phone to the British Embassy trying to find out what happened to Bruce Kent and the others who flew into Diyarbakir; where—the latest news tells us—about 2,000 people have been arrested and they are using the schools as temporary prisons. At about 11 o'clock another announcement suggests that we try a sit down protest at the next stop: "The purpose of this association is to provide support for the mass of refugees—the mass that wants peace the most—they are the victims of the war and they want peace the most. In Turkey it's one of the most danger-

Most of the police escort must have left us at some time in the night as there are only two or three police cars, but we have also lost the rest of the convoy. We join up again at about ten o'clock. The headlines in the Turkish press are calling us "Peace Terrorists" which causes a bit of laughter on our part. As the day proceeds it looks like the authorities are trying to force us on to the road to Istanbul rather than Ankara, where we plan to hold a press conference and meet up with Embassy officials from each country. The buses are forcibly stopped at the Motorway turn-off for Ankara and we all get out and up front again.

A sit down protest in front of the buses in the middle of the Motorway is already in progress as we arrived with the press gathering. To one side of the buses it is a quiet little wood with birds chirping, on the other side the police are bringing up heavy reinforcements and redirecting the chaos of the traffic. Two water cannon tanks come rolling through all the police cars and a helicopter circles in the sky. A Military General and the First Secretary of the Police Section and the leader of the Jandarma are putting their heads together and barking out the orders, off at the back of the convoy I notice the riot squad vans pulling up and the men getting out with their shields, helmets and batons glistening in the sun. All the delegations get on their mobile phones to their Ambassadors in Ankara. The German Embassy "declined" to attend and told them to "piss off" in

see the exasperation on Benjamin's face as he tried to be 'diplomatic', but through his and the negotiation of the others the situation turned in our favour. I noticed the riot police get back in their vans and we return to our buses. Despite the precarious nature of the situation there is a little man out there who has turned up to sell Turkish doughnuts, and people are buying them.

Although the organisers agreed to abandon our plans to go to Ankara, and we are now proceeding (with our police escort) to Istanbul, this felt like a slight victory in that we had averted a beating and Yasmien knows what else. Yasmien makes an announcement over the bus: "We are always ready to welcome you here even if Turkey isn't. One day we'll welcome you in Kurdistan." She then asks us if we will come back.

At another, uneventful stop later in the afternoon we are able to buy some of the Turkish press. The Interior Minister is stating that we never met with disruption and that anybody could go anywhere in Turkey. According to him the Turkish Authorities "didn't tell us we could not go, it was [us] who didn't want to go." According to the Justice Minister: "nothing happened." And this little nugget: "Anybody who is for peace is able to drive over anybody who is against it." We will never know how many arrests were made in Diyarbakir, nor the horror each individual went through. To my knowledge, no 'International press were in attendance, but we were very close and our information was good. And the many reprisals go un-noticed: it took a potential 'international incident' to draw out Reuters and AP, who turned out the Ankara turn-off. The Kurds would have held the festival in Diyarbakir anyway, it is difficult at this stage to assess what, if anything, we have achieved.

With Andy interpreting I spoke to a Kurdish man who is involved in an organisation which aids refugees, I asked him if he had anything to say to Kurds living in exile in the UK and Scotland in particular:

"We understood oppression would go on during International Peace Day—important for us—it could make a more important demonstration. I want you to come back. The importance of the delegations is that they put pressure on the state. Kurdistan is under fire we're suffering under oppression. Wherever there are Kurds in the World—our solidarity and salvation depends on them. We're expecting help and support from them. Without help from the rest of the world the problem will not be solved. Wherever in the World there are Kurds they can be involved in the struggle—it's international." Looking around, his voice trailed as we ran into a roadblock at a motorway toll.

Here they split the buses up with a mobile roadblock. Mostly it was plain clothes policemen running around and alongside the buses with the Jandarma hanging back in the wings. Standing up at the back is difficult to find out what is happening without eyeballing the cops outside the window, but we watch a guy getting dragged off and beaten up. It looks like people on one of the buses (probably the Italians) are getting off and fighting back, here I think two Swiss MPs were arrested. Some idiot suggested that we get off the bus. Francis D'Souza makes a speech to quieten everybody down, people are understandably becoming increasingly panicky as it becomes evident the police are coming on the buses with a view to arresting people, mostly the Kurds and anyone who reacts. Yasmien was arrested and dragged off at the front of the bus on the pretext of having phone numbers on a napkin. People are ripping up cards and pieces of paper they do not want to be caught with the police move up the aisle of the bus. We had sat Kurdish friends up the back of the bus with us on

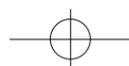
Photograph: JULIA GUEST

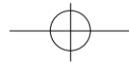


ous things to strive for: peace. Thankyou."

The confusion and paranoia reached a crescendo when they let us stop at a service station for petrol. As far as we knew we would be ran all the way to Istanbul and people were tired, hungry and thirsty, so there was something of a mad scramble. This was complicated by the organisers telling us not to buy anything because this was a fascist place. Somewhere in all this I heard that a Kurdish guy got his arm broke by the police for attempting to get on the bus, I think he was trying to join the convoy, we could also see some kind of disturbance at the Italian bus. Things almost get completely out of hand, but we manage somehow to get back on the road.

German, the Belgian said that "it was all their own fault and they shouldn't have come." One of the South African Ambassadors talked to one of the top Secret Policemen, protesting about being blocked access to his Embassy, the policeman replied that "he didn't care who he was". Things are beginning to look bleak, when our own Ambassador, John Benjamin arrives. He is not what we expected: long curly hair, about five foot two and obviously only wearing a black suit and tie for his job. He immediately asked us if we want to be evacuated out of the situation, an offer we decline. Once appraised of the situation he begins to talk with the Secret Policeman—who refused to give his name to anyone—apparently directing operations. I could





Photographs: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

### The Musa Anter Peace Train

*continued*

outside seat. When they got to us foolishly I caught the eye of the secret policeman and kept staring. He was nervous and asked to see my passport. As I handed it over he mumbled something about Turkey being a democratic country and that he was just doing his job and all that. Meanwhile I could see out the window behind him that his colleagues were kicking the shit out of someone. They started to collect all Peace Train material, plucking paper rosettes off people's lapels. After what seemed like hours the buses carried on (with a heavy escort) and we ended up back in the Hotel MIM.

We decided to contact the Embassy to inform them of what had happened to us. This is a transcription of some of the conversation we all had in one of the hotel rooms with Shane Cambell, the Vice Consul involved with British people in distress. He told us he "was not involved with the political situation."

Miranda Watson: "We've got to explode the myth of what exactly is going on here—where is the rule of law?"

Shane Cambell: "I live here I have an intuitive feel of what the Turk thinks I'm not surprised...This is Turkey."

Francis D'Souza: "Well we've got to inform the group with the European Parliament..."

Cambell: "It seems paradoxical—they want in the EU but..."

D'Souza: "The government are not in control, we need to uncover this—the Turkish Ambassador in London said 'we're not in control.'"

Cambell: "I'm meeting the Prison Governor and the Chief Prosecutor—they're in control."

D'Souza: "But not when disappearances occur, not with forces working by proxy."

Joe Cooper: "Journalists are still in jeopardy..."

Cambell: "If they want to be difficult they can be, if they want to stop stuff they can."

There was not much point in carrying on with our conversation with Mr. Cambell. Rumours were flying around the hotel as indeed were members of the Turkish Secret Service (who all seem to drive Renaults for some peculiar reason). We heard that the police had arrested most of the bus staff, which was a private company. There was no news of Yasmien and the

Swiss MPs are being held "in isolation" at some political prison. Exhausted we drift off to bed.

In the morning we discuss plans for leaving early, but the organisers seem to want us to stay. Francis D'Souza and Andy Keefe flew out because their tickets were booked, while the rest of us will stay for the next few days. We are somewhat trapped in the hotel and seem to have been informed that all press conferences have been banned. We are under complete surveillance with countless weird individuals creeping around the hotel. We learn of the publicity in the European press which is all front page news: the Luxembourg Government have already protested about Turkey's possible inclusion in the EU. It is not making much impact in the UK because of the overwhelming press coverage of "The Death of the Century."

The delegations felt that it was necessary to make an announcement clarifying that the Peace Train was not organised by the Kurds in HADEP who were arrested; as was the assertion of the authorities in their charges against all those arrested, which could easily mean long prison sentences or worse. An announcement of this was planned for three o'clock and we contacted Neil Frape, the press officer at the Embassy. Julia, Joe and Paul also planned to give him their film and tapes.

The announcement, which of course would be viewed as a press conference by the Turkish authorities, took place in the hotel bar, which curiously enough, considering what was about to happen, was decked out in a Mexican style with Wild West type wooden swinging saloon doors. Neil Frape turned up about 3 o'clock and he had heard all about the journey. The representatives from the delegations had assembled themselves on the platform of the bar and began introducing themselves, the biggest applause going to Mr. Soloman from the ANC. Julia was upstairs sorting out her camera equipment when I went up to tell her things had started, I left her to it and walked back into the bar. When she arrived she told me that she thought the place was about to be busted and asked whether she should inform Neil Frape, who by this time had all their film. The police were gathering round the saloon doors, as various delegates intro-

duced themselves. Frape went to leave the bar and back nervously laughing because when he asked them who he was and asked to leave, they said "no." So much for diplomatic status in Turkey. I tried to concentrate on what was being said on the bus and as I went to tell Joe what had happened I heard a scream from the foyer and sounds of a riot. A scuffle. Most people moved to see what was going on. Paul and Alan were up ahead and went into the foyer, leaping over the couches, while Julia, Paul or Alan were there. The scream was Julia. My momentum took me right into the front of the hotel and as I skidded to a halt I realised I was inches away from the glass windows I realised I was inches away from knowing how many riot police, whose buses were blocking the entrance outside. At the revolving door I shouted out "English journalist!", and the rest had been arrested. I quickly turned about half way to the bar saw the riot police blocking for a charge. I shouted for everyone to get to the bar. As I walked backwards the riot police were grabbing their targets and the riot police coming in through the glass revolving door they proceeded to smash to pieces.

I witnessed the bravery of the men of the police: it takes three of them in full riot gear with guns as back up, to arrest an 18 year old, nothing female, Maria from Spain.

They were arresting anyone and those who were arrested and dragging them out through the door and mountain of glass. Most of us got to the bar, myself and Arti just making it. A girl next to me was grabbed by her long hair and she was screaming through the swing doors.

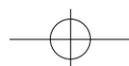
We sat in fear and loathing. I told Joe that there was no sign of Paul, Julia, Alan, Alar seemed only seconds away from them completing finishing off the job. But they had halted and walked the Deputy Police Chief of Istanbul, Caglar, who told us in Turkish that we were arrested and that press conferences were illegal in Turkey. He reminded us that he could do whatever he wanted with us, stating clearly that he had tried anything even remotely resembling a press conference; that would be that.

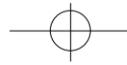
Probably round about that time, outside the hotel one of the ANC ambassadors arrived late and I think Mr Ebrahim : a very large man who had been seen a thing or two in his time. When he was grabbed he turned around to them and said "you arrest me, when you let me out I will personally beat the shit out of you Turkish Ambassador." They let him go.

Mr Caglar left, seemingly satisfied, and we put the pieces together. Paul and Alan went into the bar with big grins on their faces. They had seen Julia and Neil arrested and quickly climbed the stairs to Paul's room. By an amazing coincidence Alan was phoned by BBC Radio Leeds and he went for an interview when everything happened, he had his phone to let them hear all the glass smashing and mayhem. Neil had phoned the Embassy and was in the back of the bus with Julia and all the other some of whom were very badly injured. The British Ambassadors arrived and we quickly filled the rooms.

We huddled up into one of the rooms in the hotel being passed round of all the missing and came to about 25 not counting the day before. The HBB time and sure enough they had found one being violently flung into the riot police. This footage was brutally montaged with scenes of 'terrorists' i.e. piles of machine gun parts what looked like packets of Semtex, with culprits all handcuffed together. They just

Photograph: JULIA GUEST





Photograph: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

things together time after time: Peace train/guns, bombs, terrorists, Peace Train/guns, bombs, terrorists as our stomachs churned. We heard that all manner of things were possibly being planted in our luggage by the police who were wandering about the hotel, but there was no evidence of this. We were told that the authorities had cancelled our reservations at the hotel and that we had about half an hour before we would be removed. I should say that humour kept us going here—at one point I laughed so much I thought I was going insane: but it was black, black humour.

After a thorough inspection we gathered our things and met in the bar with another man from the Embassy who offered us another hotel. On hearing from the organisers that we were all being moved together on a couple of buses we decided to stay with the group. We walked out of the shattered MIM hotel through the gauntlet of two lines of armed police, we had been given instructions not to make any symbols or gestures. Under police escort we were driven to the tourist area and a walled holiday camp in whose driveway we stopped. But they didn't want us and we stood around outside the buses as the police blocked the entrance. It was about midnight. It was here we met a journalist from one of Turkey's better but no doubt soon to be short-lived papers<sup>4</sup>. Arti knew her from a previous visit and told me she was a "mad bastard", and she was right. One minute she was standing outside the gates with the police, then she slinked inside like a cat, then she moved closer and closer, then the quick sprint and she was on the bus with us, completely un-noticed. She stayed a couple of nights with us when we eventually found a hotel, although we got split up from Joe and Miranda in the confusion.

The next day we got information on Julia. The prison was as bad as we imagined it to be. One woman nearly bled to death. The first night must have been appalling: the men and women were split up with the women being constantly tormented and sexually harassed during the night, particularly Maria. They were also left without food and water for most of the time. All those arrested were deported or given "assisted passage" as it is called. Julia was last to leave and spent a day there on her own. At one point they planned to put her into one cell with about 100 prostitutes, but due to the huge Moslem demonstration every Friday, and the huge amounts of arrests, the jail was getting to bursting point and she was moved to an office upstairs. One Spanish Film crew were taken to

the airport with guns pointed to their heads.

We could do very little for Julia but we were helped by Sanar Yurdatan, a Turkish composer and activist, who was also arrested in the hotel. I was interviewing him just after Caglar had made his creepy announcement. As I tried to hide my tape recorder, he just casually stood up with the policeman hovering over him and said: "excuse me but I have to leave, they probably want me as an interpreter or something." He has been arrested many times before.

For the remaining few days we were instructed by the organisers to do nothing, "just act like tourists." The Turkish press had come over to us and our work was finished, anything else could easily become counter productive. We were reunited with Julia at the airport and got the hell out of the country. This has obviously been a personal account. This is the last entry in my notebook:

As tears well up in your eyes there is a fleeting moment when, if you are as short sighted as I am, the tears make a lens and you can see with perfect clarity, but it is difficult to speak. Looking through tears and emotion—compassion—one sees clearly: but only perhaps if the eyes you meet can feel; feel what you feel and see. The Turkish authorities, the National Security Council, the small group of men who run the country have lost all humanity, and I mean all. With the Mothers of the Disappeared they profess willingness to look them in the eye and still brutalise them. The sacrifice the Mothers of the Disappeared make and will make this Saturday is for peace.

Is the struggle for peace in Kurdistan about land? The possession of land? The Kurds are not a possessive people. Astonishingly they bear no enmity towards their Brothers the Turks—this is not a sectarian struggle. They are not separatists either: how could they become separate from Turkey which has only existed in its present 'unchangeable' form since the 1920s.

I have in my pocket some little stones, stolen from the road to Diyarbakir, which mean something to me, but I have given most of them away. Will the Turkish NSC prevail? As Ramos Horta<sup>5</sup> said: "The Kurdistan region is one of the most important in the world with possibly the largest oil reserves in the world...but empires built on armies and oppression will not prevail."

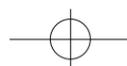
One point on the Peace Train. The accusation was made in the Turkish press that the Peace Train was a

front for the PKK, and a tactic to cause redeployment of large numbers of armed forces, while the PKK regrouped. This does not stand up to any analysis. the NSC knew this, why did they then so enthusiastically and overwhelmingly fall for it. Am I smarter than the head of Turkish Intelligence? Seven buses of minor political activists, teachers, students, MPs are (it must be said) a few idiots somehow needed, with 20,000, 30,000 police, Jandarma, army, secret police, special forces, tank crews, riot police etc.—to follow, obstruct, intimidate, arrest, brutalise and attack the And they do this to avoid bad publicity; they arrest MPs and Ambassadors of a European delegation as a sign of good faith towards their prospective joining the European Union? This is one simple lunacy amongst many and one cannot help feeling that Turkey needs new leadership. The Kurds seem to be asking for little more than I brought back in my pocket—a handful of stony arid land, they probably don't even want the oil.

Peace in Kurdistan is far off. It may require a solution for the whole Middle-East. Ramos Horta described Kurdistan as "possibly the most strategic region in the world."

## Notes

- 1 God bless them: and all Italian Communists. But times we cursed them mightily, they are obviously used to fighting with armed police.
- 2 I would really have to question my accuracy as to place names. The following is as near as I can get.
- 3 It transpires that this was not Diyarbakir but a place called Severik, about 40 or 50 km away.
- 4 I won't mention her name.
- 5 Winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, Horta had spoken at a rally in Brussels Station the day before we left: he is from East Timor.



# When Figures Become Facts

## Leigh Fren

The Dearing Report is the Government commissioned white paper to advise them on the 'development of Higher Education'. Cutting through the rhetoric of inclusive Higher Education and the cultivated society, the accent of the commission was on finding ways in which the financing of Higher Education could no longer count as Government 'public spending' (as the present 50:50 loan and grant system does). The underlying reason for this has been largely ignored, or accepted, by most reporting on the subject. In rationalising the financing of Higher Education as 'private spending' it is removed from the Government's books and is one way of cutting public expenditure: a necessity in meeting the convergence criteria for monetary union.

From the Report's findings it would appear difficult to simply re-categorise the financing of Higher Education from 'public' to 'private' spending if public money or public agencies are involved. Ultimately, the complete privatisation of the financing of Higher education lies down this slippery route. This would mean students paying for their education via a private loans system, with private money and the private collection of such debt. For the private sector to buy the debt from the Government in the first place the system would have to promise enough of a financial return. Students and parents would not only end up paying for education they would also be paying for the private market's profits. In the short term, however, the Higher Education financial 'shortfall' (a cut of some 40% over the last 20 years) to patch up the neglected, decaying system will have to be sought from somewhere. This 'shortfall' is compounded with the white noise coming from Government over wanting to expand the 'sector' of Higher Education. The difficulty of course is that the Government has made pledges not to increase public spending and, it would appear, would like to see the financing of Higher Education struck from its books altogether. Effectively the financial shortfall and costs of expansion are being pushed onto the already impoverished Universities/Colleges and *all* students/parents. This can only be seen as a continuation of the Tory buck passing in the total privatisation of the state.

One strong recommendation of the Dearing report is the introduction of a £1,000 'Tuition Fee' (being around 25% of the 'present' average cost of Higher education tuition) levied on 'graduates in work'. This fee would be a flat rate, for all students across all subjects taken, through an "income contingent mechanism", that is, it would be paid in relation to what a graduate is earning once in work. It recommends that such a system be put in place by 1998/99. However, money could not be collected by this method until the income of those 'graduates in work' is assessed at the end of that financial year. For full time courses this could be 4 or 5 years on from the implementation of such a scheme, when the first round of students graduate and complete that first year of work, and then only those earning above a 'threshold' would be additionally taxed for the payment of fees.

Although the Dearing Report recommends that a Central Agency be established to administer the 'Tuition Fees', it is feared the Colleges/Universities would play a major role in administering the scheme with no extra funding being available for them to do so. Under-resourcing is already recognised as the major problem within Higher Education, this would only exacerbate it. Not only that, but the exact destination for all this money is unclear to say the least. This scheme also does nothing to tackle the immediate financial crisis.

Recently, at the Labour Party's conference, David Blunkett presented such student fee repayment proposals. As similar events in Australia are testament, the scheme in reality is the thin end of the wedge leading to the total privatisation of Higher Education. Far from encouraging more participation in Higher Education, the additional burden of debt will deter

many potential students from less financially well-off backgrounds entering Higher Education. For those who do go through education this additional debt will have major implications in gaining other forms of credit, e.g. mortgages. The Government's excuse for this method of funding is that those going through Higher Education have better earning potential and should therefore consider education as a financial investment, as a return on what they have purchased, a continuation of the Conservative's vocational education rhetoric. With racial and sexual inequalities in employment, pay and promotional opportunities the proposed system will present a disproportionately greater burden on women and people from ethnic minorities. As the larger percentage of higher earners have gone through Higher Education there is already a mechanism in place to pay for the Higher Education system, income tax. Raising income tax for those earning the most and able to contribute more to society

seems to have been lost in the fear of releasing the scorn of Labour's genie-in-the-bottle, 'middle England'.

Although the Scottish Parliament, when established in 2000, will have tax varying powers, it is questionable if it will have the ability to legislate, or challenge legislation, on the financing of Higher Education. The Dearing Report recommends that "the proportion of a student/parental contribution should not be increased without an independent review and an affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament" (which I take to mean House of Commons and House of Lords). If the objective is to see the removal of Higher Education financing from the Government's 'public spending', it will be interesting to see what exchanges occur between it and the proportionally representative Scottish Parliament on the principles of *free* education.

What follow are replies from a number of Scottish based colleges and universities holding visual arts/media related invited to respond to the issue of tuition fees.

This £1,000 tuition contribution is much talked about but I must say that I am far from clear about it. It certainly begs some questions and I do wonder about the vigour of its proper consideration. So my response is brief and in the form of some of the questions that it raises in my mind. The questions are not set in any priority.

1 What is it going to cost to collect this money and who does it? Is it done centrally, or by the institution? If it is the institution, then it is yet another administrative burden.

2 Where does the money go?

3 It seems to further shift the emphasis from education as a process to education as a means of production.

4 Can this tuition contribution be seen as a barrier to Higher Education efforts to increase awareness and recruit from areas of low, Higher Education aspirations and expectations.

Clearly how to fund Higher Education is a major issue at this time and not just in the UK. The proposed tuition contribution does not, for me, offer signs that a more fundamental and long term look at this question is being fully investigated or discussed. Globally there are a range of differing funding models to regard and learn from.

**Ken Mitchell, Deputy Convenor,  
School of Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art**

We view the imposition of yearly £1,000 tuition fees as a retrograde step. Students at Scottish Universities can already expect to graduate with debts of £4—5000. Fees can only add to the disincentive effects of such debts.

If people enter education in order to make themselves more employable they will, and our survey evidence has already shown this to be the case, begin to reconsider that decision if the debt they incur outweighs any financial benefit that arises from holding a degree. This is to the loss of society as a whole and there is no need for this as higher earning students contribute extra already through a system of progressive taxation.

Unfortunately, the effects are likely to be exacerbated by the Government's further plans to abolish the student grant in favour of a loan system. Glasgow University Student Representative Council and the majority of University Student Associations in Scotland are opposed to this, unlike NUS Scotland. We are generally concerned that the four year honours degree will suffer because many students will be required to pay an additional £1,000.

We are generally concerned that the focus has exclu-

sively been on tuition fees and consider the abolition of the grant to be as, if not more, important.

**Jonathan Wright, Senior Vice-President,  
Student Representative Council, University of  
Glasgow**

Many students are already struggling to get by financially and there can be no doubt that many are damaged academically because of the time and effort they put in to that struggle. Some try to use their 'part-time' job as an excuse, but most of those who say they are in difficulty often really are, both ways. At Glasgow Caledonian University we are proud of the fact that a relatively high proportion of our students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and succeed, often as the first graduates in their families, but these are precisely the people who have financial problems now, and who will be further discouraged by any direct tax on learning.

From the viewpoint of the institutions, budget cuts put pressure on us to retain the increased numbers of students we are expected to recruit, especially in the high fee areas which are also the most difficult to recruit for.

It has been proposed that even the £1,000 per student will not come to us, but be spent on administration, so there is yet doubly-downward pressure on the quality that we can offer and that our poor students can achieve.

I can therefore envisage a time when only a small minority can afford, and value, what the rest cannot afford and don't value anyway because what can be obtained is also impoverished.

**Professor W T Scott, Head of Dept. of Language  
and Media, Glasgow Caledonian University**

Glasgow Caledonian University welcomes many of the conclusions and recommendations of the Dearing Report—in particular its commitments to maximum flexibility and the widest possible access, its emphasis on quality and standards and the parity of importance it attaches to teaching and learning alongside research. We also endorse the focus on work experience and student placements as part of all educational programmes.

We also welcome the Report's call for urgent action to tackle the funding crisis currently facing universities and colleges. In the evidence we gave to the Inquiry we made clear that we do not support either income-contingent loans being applied to fees or the introduction of top-up fees. We accept, however, that graduate contribution may be the only realistic solution to guarantee the provision of high quality educa-

tion into the millennium. We will be keeping an eye on the funding proposals to ensure they do not hinder our efforts in wider access.

**W J Laurie, Acting Principal,  
Napier University, Edinburgh**

It is the view of Napier's Students' Association that student contributions to tuition fees are contrary to the Government's stated aim of increasing participation in Higher Education.

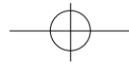
There is a great fear that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would be penalised and deterring the Higher Education sector by this means. Places at Universities in Britain could be on academic ability but on ability to pay. This would result in a two-tier system in Britain, much like the "Ivy League" in the US.

At present students face severe financial difficulties. The current system of grants and loans does not provide a level of income support or access to any kind of income support or currently live on, or below, the poverty line. The introduction of fees will greatly increase the number of students being denied qualification areas of life, such as the arts and media, being denied talented contributors.

The present Government campaigned on a platform of opposing the introduction of fees, and they should have stuck to this position. It is interesting to note that at a February rally in Edinburgh against student hardship, a notable Labour junior minister, and a (subsequently successful) Labour candidate spoke out against fees that a Labour government was the best way to meet this threat.

Napier Students' Association are fundamentally opposed to fees, and have been and will be using every means at their disposal to oppose the introduction. We have written to various organisations and will be active participants in the NUS Day of Action on November 1st.

**Bill MacDonald, President, Napier**

Left: FELICE BEATO *View of the Kutcherry, Lucknow ca. 1858*Below: DINESH KHANNA *Untitled 1997*Bottom left: ABDUL KALAM AZAD *Untitled 1997*

## review

# Divine Façades Views of Indian architecture

Impressions Gallery, York, 15th August—5th October

In a year that has seen the hand over of Hong Kong to the Chinese people, Indian history celebrates its first fifty years of Independence from British rule. The events of 1947 have been marked in many ways across the world. The horrors of Partition that divided the country by religion and ethnicity created a multitude of sub-cultures that launched a discourse into the role of public spaces and ownership issues.

*Divine Façades* aims to critique the effect of the last fifty years through the use of space within constructed environments. For a civilisation revelling in a cultural history that stretches over four thousand years, fifty years is a diminutive yet significant space in time. This visual arts project consists of archive photographs from the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) and three views of Indian architecture from contemporary artists Abul Kalam Azad, Dinesh Khanna and Ram Rahman. Part one of the exhibition titled *The Orientalist Gaze* consists of twenty pictures from the CCA. Photographers Felice Beato, Samuel Bourne and John Murray amongst others travelled North India at the turn of the century recording images to send back to Britain to be seen by armchair travellers such as Queen Victoria. The photographs are almost completely devoid of people, creating a vision of the 'empire'



without referring to those who lived there. The reproductions have been produced from original negatives stored in the archives of the CCA.

In contrast to the seeming serenity of the archive prints, Ram Rahman's *After Ayodhya contested space* exposes modern India's continuing conflicts. The series of photographs were made during a normal journey around Delhi charting the many ruined mosques and the new temples which have sprung up next to them. Some of these new temples have not been given permission to be built on public land and most are facing litigation, yet officials are reluctant to approach these temples as they fear the Tantric powers of the babas that worship Bhairon, a strong aspect of Shiva there.

*Divine Façades* was originally titled *The Babri Mosque* with reference to 6th December 1992 when 20,000 people gathered at Ayodhya to tear down the mosque, reinforcing by example the extreme cultural value placed on public spaces. The photographs have a documentary element to them, witnessing the long term effects of Colonialism. One photograph describes a desolate graveyard of British statues and other figures from the Raj, including King George V which was planned to be dismantled in order to construct a statue of Gandhi in time for the celebrations of Independence. Rahman's photographs address the people who inhabit the public spaces around Delhi and their continued struggle to live and worship within the consequences of Colonialism. The consumption of space often leads to conflict, however these photographs do not deliberately seek out sites of conflict as they "are all around us in India today. And more than just places of religious ritual, it is all space—of freedom of thought, belief, artistic creativity—which is contested space."<sup>(1)</sup>

Dinesh Khanna's portfolio presents a physical form of architecture photographed almost to the point of abstraction. These pictures are very painterly in their construction with an aesthetic use of colour. According to Khanna old buildings "store old stories. If we break these buildings—the stories die with them."<sup>(2)</sup> It seems to be Khanna's quest to document the old architectural landscape of urban India before many of these beautiful buildings are torn down and replaced with ugly modern structures.

All four corners of India have been covered by Khanna recording the scenery and revisiting towns to note the changes. A real sense of personality can be seen within these prints through the charting of a family history, a cultural awareness through the choice of materials and ultimately the decoration which represents a status in society. All this is lost with the destruction of these buildings that Khanna photographs, the heritage and a way of life unique to that particular society. Khanna's photographs raise questions about personal identity and personal political history.

One of Khanna's projects was to photograph in Ayodhya and Varanasi at 'disputed' sites and places of conflict where a new style of architecture is evolving in the form of barbed wire, iron fences and police tents. This is a sign of the times which Khanna touches on briefly to raise more questions about public ownership.

Throughout these prints there is a very strong commentary concerning the complexity of architecture and the links with culture and society, yet the most overwhelming element to these photographs is the sheer beauty of composition and colour which captures an essence of the Indian experience which is absent from the other photographs in this exhibition.

The most experimental use of photography is apparent in the work by Abul Kalam Azad. The photographs are large-scale, printed with the entire nega-



tive exposed. Some of the principal characters are out of focus, others with their heads chopped out of the frame. These snapshots have a childlike quality to them which is reiterated by scratches and pencil marks over the top of the prints. This results in an interruption to the reality, a re-reading of history as a parody of the human experience often misrepresented in beautiful pictures by tourist boards and Colonial photographs.

Azad places the people he photographs in the foreground and the buildings sit almost insignificantly in the background. They gaze out of the photographs give an identity to the human beings who live and work around these architectural structures. The buildings themselves, represent the growth of civilisation just as they do all over the world, yet ordinary people are constantly absent from this representation of history. Azad redresses this by creating a common illustrative discourse of history by comparing overpowering architecture with incidents of everyday life.

The use of photography in this exhibition is an ideal medium to express the many different views on issues confronted by each artist. The fact that the exhibition begins with Colonial photographs, an expression by a medium monopolised by the West is an interesting irony and sets the scene for the rest of the exhibition.

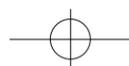
The agendas create a discourse within a historic context and it is one which will not conclude at the end of the celebrations. The children born after midnight that had "the genuine gifts of conjuration and sorcery, the art which required no artifice"<sup>(3)</sup> have played out over half their lives. It has been fifty years since that ideological time after midnight on August 15th 1947 and it is now a time for reflection, to understand the reality of contemporary Indian life. This exhibition would seem to be a part of that introspection and is touring around Britain, from York to London, Edinburgh and Nottingham. However, I would be interested to see how it would be received if it were shown in Delhi, in the mists of where many of these questions seek to be answered.

Michelle McGuire

1 Ram Rahman. *Divine Façades Views of Indian Architecture*. Catalogue. Impressions Gallery. 1997

2 Dinesh Khanna. *Divine Façades Views of Indian Architecture*. Catalogue. Impressions Gallery. 1997

3 Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children*. Picador. 1982



# Stephen Willats: Art, Ethnography and Social Change

Two recent exhibitions, one in London, *Street Talk*, the other in Middlesbrough, *Between You and Me*, reveal the breadth as well as the coherence and consistency of Stephen Willats' work, developed over the last 30 years. At the same time the contrast between the white cube space of the Victoria Miro Gallery, in Cork Street, home of London's art scene, and the municipal Middlesbrough Art Gallery, in a city wrestling with the traumatic changes wrought by de-industrialisation and its aftermath, points to the problems faced by artists trying to develop new practices outside traditional relationships and ideology.

Despite the differences in visual appearance between the work in London and Middlesbrough, both exhibitions are framed by a critique of dominant art practice, of the artist as sole producer of the work, and of the artist/spectator relationship. The idea that art is made by a lone genius, a remnant of late 19th century ideology, has retained credence throughout this century. Despite some collaborative projects, many developed by feminist artists in order to consciously undermine the male creator syndrome, both popular mythology and dominant art ideology has maintained this credo.

Willats' work, by contrast, is produced with other people, sometimes in a specific environment inhabited by the participants, as in *The Transformer* in Middlesbrough, sometimes in the broader context of the city, as in the work at Victoria Miro's—Oxford Street and the underground system from Bond Street. While the artist obviously has a conception of what he is trying to accomplish, the role of the collaborators—in choosing specific imagery or objects to photograph, in reinterpreting their environment—powerfully grounds the work in everyday experience. These collaborations with different groups and individuals give each work a strong sense of identity, which no one person—artist or otherwise—could achieve.

Likewise, despite attempts to change the power relations between artist and spectator by Conceptual

of digital technology's ability to offer different, but controlled routes through the material.

This is the second area in which Stephen Willats' work has made inroads into dominant practice and ideas. All his pieces demand an active and broad response. Sometimes this is built into the work, as in *Freezone* shown at the London exhibition. Here the work lies dormant until activated by spectator/participants. Two computer screens, two sets of words as thesaurus and a single tall tower marked with significant sites down Oxford Street, form the quiescent architecture of the work (Fig. 1). It comes to 'life' when two participants, working through the scenes visualised on the screens, try to come to an agreement in describing them, and in so doing, progress down the street from Marble Arch to Oxford Circus. This process is signified by the tower lighting up along the significant places. This is not just the product of two or three controlled possibilities, but a multiplicity of choices, which, as you proceed, tells you something of your own unconscious preconceptions and attitudes to society, as well as those of your partner.

The coherence and consistency of Willats' work is also exemplified by *Freezone*. Its intellectual origins go back to *Meta Filter*, made in 1973-4 and recently bought by the Museum of Modern Art, in Paris. This was an early use of a computer to allow two participants to work through a set of images about people's everyday lives by collaborative agreement. But the differences between this piece of over 20 years ago and today's *Freezone* (apart from the flares of 1973 replaced by today's fashion!), are instructive. While the figures used in *Meta Filter* were models in environments orchestrated and photographed by the artist, the images in *Freezone*, along with sounds of the street and notations of weather conditions etc. were taken by a group of people walking down Oxford Street, each given a brief as to which element of the environment to concentrate on. This greater use of collaborative production gives the piece an identity, a strong sense

of place and time, but without the character of individual expression. For those who took part in the construction of the imagery and notations, the recognition on the computer screen of a footprint on the pavement, the grating round a tree, a bench on which to rest (I was asked to note the ground), is a reminder of how the work was made.

The third piece, *In Taking a Walk* is, like the other two, without human figure, yet hurries everywhere. The urban street, shop signs, pieces of rubbish on the pavement, a scene where any green or natural growth is full of significance, evoking a strong sense of the experience of walking down an empty, rundown city street. It is perhaps the most evocative, despite the absence, of late 20th century urban life.

No specific answers are given in any of the works, for Willats' work has never been just a record of a kind of society, one in which today's minor counter-cultural propositions have become the norm where collaboration has replaced competition. It is a real democracy is at work, and where art is not just a product from objecthood to be fulfilled. In this way his work is a challenge about artistic function: does art play in the laboratory and what role could it play in a different, more socially engaged society?

In *The Art Museum* published for the Middlesbrough exhibition, Willats has brought together some of his work to address these issues. The text from 1988 expresses his intentions:

"I consider the act of making art to be a fundamental, basic to human survival...within every individual...lies the transformer and...the initiation of change...is essential to each individual...expression of self-organisation, their self identity. But we do not see...the...transformer...latent within everyone...recognise its social inhibition—for the recognition of self-organisation...is implicit in the normal conventions of what we are led to call normality."

Willats' work is structured through the participation of people have to change the meaning of objects from expressions of social power to tools of change, through self activity and action.

"In the concept of counter consciousness the object's status as an icon is replaced with



Above: Fig 1  
Right: Fig 2

artists of the 1970s, the inequality of this relationship still persists, the active/passive opposition between maker and viewer underpinning much art practice. Even work which opposes this redundant method—for example that which questions gender identity, or racial stereotypes—while challenging the spectator's preconceptions as well as societal norms, rarely activates or proposes a situation in which the spectator becomes participant. Even where this does take place, as in some work produced through computer programmes and digital technology, the interaction is often undermined by the authority of the artist who retains overall control of the technology. The apparent autonomy given to the spectator is not real, but simply a product



of place and time, but without the character of individual expression. For those who took part in the construction of the imagery and notations, the recognition on the computer screen of a footprint on the pavement, the grating round a tree, a bench on which to rest (I was asked to note the ground), is a reminder of how the work was made.

The second piece in the London show, *Going Home*, (Fig. 2) was made by eight people with cine cameras boarding a tube train at Bond Street and recording specific aspects of the journey, such as people and objects, signs in the environment, spaces. Although this is a flat wall-mounted piece of four panels, its construction from a series of snapshots taken from the

Right and far right: *The Transformation: The Book of Questions*

# Jane Kelly

tion of the object functioning as an agent or tool, that is integral to our relationships, to the making of society. In my work the transformer is presented as a symbolic person for the audience, not just any person, but an actual person who has made transformations from the object-based determinism of our contemporary culture to a counter consciousness of self-organisation based on people....[T]he transformer expresses via those objects a corresponding change in his or her own consciousness, assigning to the object a new, self-given function which is other than its predetermined role."

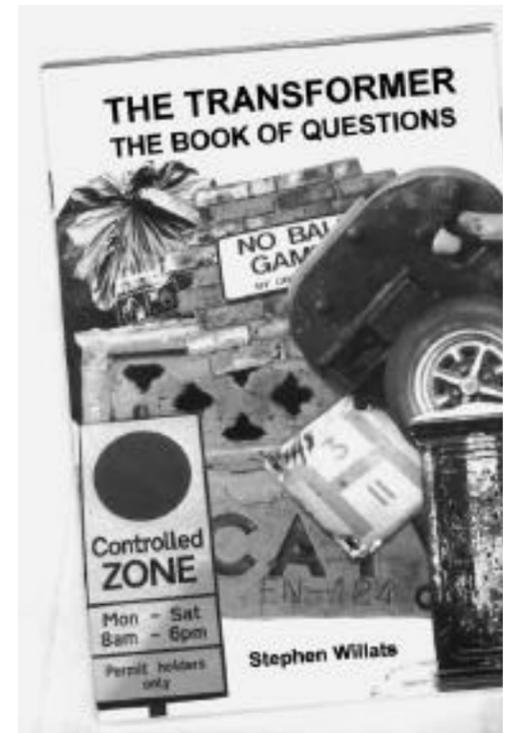
Questioning the social function of art has been a prevailing concern of Willats' work. His book *Art and Social Function*, of 1977, looked at three projects, including *Meta Filter*, as well as *West London Social Resource Project* and *Edinburgh Project*, both of which developed artwork with groups of people in communities, while his more recent book, *Between Buildings and People*, 1996, pursues the theme of the relationships between people and their environment, showing how people individualise their surroundings, while at the same time being prescribed by them.

Of course the theme of social function is one which has preoccupied 20th century artists, from the Dadaists to today's heirs of that tradition. The history of these debates is well known, from the Berlin Dadaists and Russian Constructivists grappling in revolutionary situations with the question of art for a new society where the working class might rule, to the disputes between Brecht, Benjamin and Lukacs on questions of the appropriate forms of a new proletarian or revolutionary art, to the feminist experiments of the 1970s, and Conceptualists of the same decade: art in the 20th century has been preoccupied with finding a role for itself. Sometimes it has accepted the role designated by capitalism that everything within its grasp become a commodity in a marketplace; at other times art and culture have been able to carve out a temporary hiding place where experiments in prefigurative activities have taken place.

The election of the 'new' Labour Government, while it has inherited not just the economic and social wasteland that is late 20th century Britain, but also much of the Tories' political baggage, has also opened up a space for the question of the role and function of culture in the broadest and art in the narrower sense. Hence some of the questions redolent of the 1970s are again on the agenda. The question of art's function, of spectatorship and audience, of creating a situation for art's production which can avoid the worst excesses of commodification, the appropriate forms and techniques for a late 20th century, computerised and digital culture, all these questions are being asked again, sometimes, unfortunately in ignorance of their history, not just in the 1970s, but in the 1920s and '30s too.

Partly because of this ignorance and partly because of postmodernism's ability to confuse and relativise ideas, (including ignoring history), today's debates on these questions are often frustratingly unclear.

These ideas are also, of course, rather unfashionable. Since the defeats of the 1980s, both in Britain and globally, under Thatcher and Reagan, the 'S' word, as Judith Williamson so aptly put it in *The Guardian* recently, 'Socialism', is unspoken and unspeakable. Yet there is a clear change of mood in Britain, evident in much popular as well as artistic culture, which says that the 'S' word should be heard again, even if New Labour, is not the party to speak it. It also means that the work of an artist like Willats, has come under the spotlight again—though he continued to work on his preoccupying themes throughout the 1980s!



The work on show in Middlesbrough is more closely linked to his projects developed within specific communities with their residents. Best known are pieces such as *Brentford Towers* 1986, where the residents of the West London tower block revealed the strength of their ideas on how they would like to change their environment, and had in many cases actually done so, despite the authoritarian nature of their surroundings. Although this type of work is associated with council estates and tower-block living, he has in fact worked in a variety of situations, on waste ground such as *The Lurky Place*, in West London, 1981 and *Taking the Short Cut* made in Roydon, Essex, 1994, in residential areas such as Perivale in West London, *From a Coded World*, 1977, and both here and in other European cities. But what unites all his work is his refusal to countenance anything but the urban and the everyday.

The centrepiece of the Middlesbrough show is 'The Transformer', made specifically for the exhibition and linking together the gallery with sites around it such as a community centre, a library, a cafe. Participants are asked to make a walk around a small, concise area of the city, mostly made up of narrow terraced streets, with a project book, *The Book of Questions*. Constructed from images and words in collaboration with people from the area, it provides a series of photographed objects and signs in the locality—mundane and ordinary things such as a door knocker, a goal post painted roughly on a brick wall—along with short statements and questions. The participant is asked to respond to these images and words on a response sheet. Having completed the circuit, the drawings and texts are brought back to the gallery to be pinned on a noticeboard, thus becoming part of the exhibition, providing examples of others' interpretations and reconstructions of the environment.

There is much in this work, and other pieces in the Middlesbrough show that relates to ethnography and anthropology. In *The Artist as Ethnographer* Hal Foster examines the way in which avant-garde art has increasingly broadened its scope to include such areas under the impact of social movements and cultural theory. Citing civil rights campaigns and feminism as well as the influence of psychoanalysis, and the writings of Gramsci, Althusser, Lacan, Foucault, Said, Spivak and Bhabba, Foster says: "Thus did art pass into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey."

In tracing the path taken by some contemporary North American and European art through the field of anthropology, he warns of several pitfalls which are apposite in discussing Willats' work. Foster questions whether perhaps the museum as patron may inoculate itself by incorporating potential criticism of its role into the institution; although at the same time:

"...in order to remap the museum or to reconfigure its audience, [site-specific work] must operate within it."

Foster also warns of the dangers facing artists who seek new ways of relating to spectators/participants. Noting that much work based on aspects of anthropology, suffers from that discipline's imperialist and colo-

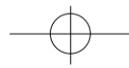
nial origins as the study of 'others' (other societies, other cultures, other artifacts, other peoples, 'primitives'), he notes the danger of the artist either standing 'in' the identity of the community or being asked to stand 'for' this identity: "to represent it institutionally. Such an identification is less than useful, but he is even more critical of its opposite: "Far worse ... is a murderous disidentification from the other."

Foster begins the essay with a discussion of Walter Benjamin's 1934 essay *The Artist as Producer*, where he calls on the tendentious artist to go beyond a place "beside the proletariat" which he attacks as "that of benefactor, an ideological patron", to intervene instead, like a worker, into the means of production: change the technique of traditional artistic production to become a revolutionary worker—but against bourgeois culture. This position seeks to overcome the identification warned against by Foster, the artist is not in the same position as the worker, but must develop an equally critical approach to her artistic means of production, while directing her work in the interests of the working class.

Stephen Willats' work goes some way towards this goal identified by Benjamin, although in this period of quiescence, unlike the 1930s when Benjamin was writing, it is necessarily more restricted in its aims. In *The Transformer* the artist does not just "let the community speak for itself." The ideas framing the work, the choice of sites, the imagery, are coordinated, in negotiation, by the artist. These negotiations are multifaceted and include individuals in the area where the project takes place, the gallery and its curators, the city and elected representatives. But the work is developed through local community involvement and it changes and develops with the responses of participants to the questions asked during the walk.

It also opens up the gallery/museum to useful work. The inaccessible and elitist museum is rejected while the work done before and during the duration of the project, both by the artist and his collaborators by the spectator/participant, changes the way those involved see their world.

Finally the most radical aspect of this and much of Willats' other work, is the way that it quietly but consistently asks us to move from observer/spectator to participant, raising our awareness of the way societal influences every aspect of our lives—from the macroeconomic level experienced at work to human relationships at home, from the press and media to the everyday objects we take for granted—all of which express repressive and authoritarian culture. His work also undermines those twin pillars of refusal to engage with the possibility of change: the totalising and selfless picture of ideology constructed by Althusser in late 1960s as well as the extreme relativism of most postmodern writings since. For Willats' work is precisely about that, about change.



# Limitec Axis

When AXIS—Visual Arts Information Service, a company with charitable status, based in Leeds Metropolitan university, came into being in 1991 it declared that “the database should be free to artists.” With a view to achieving a totally comprehensive register its literature stated that “entry will be open to all professional visual artists, crafts people and photographers.” When I spoke to Yvonne Deane, the Chief Executive, in '92 she appeared to espouse socialist and democratic ideals underlining that the service would be free to artists and artists would “receive reproduction fees” through copyright agreements. Computer terminals would be sited in public places (libraries, galleries, museums) implying anyone could freely access AXIS at any time. It all sounded too good to be true, so much so that over 90% of artists questioned wanted their work to be included.

At the time of writing (Aug '97) there are two AXIS terminals in Scotland paid for by Lottery cash (£7,450) sited in Bridge House, the home of Hi Arts in Inverness, and in Glasgow's CCA. Both facilities are by appointment only although in Bridge House this is not a hard-and-fast rule. The receptionist told me about 20 people have come in to use the PC since it was installed about a year ago. She blames poor publicity for this and says users are normally artists wanting to view their own files.

In Glasgow the PC is less publicly sited in the main office so they are strict about making an appointment. Whereas in Inverness access is available 5 days a week, in the CCA time is restricted to between 2 pm and 6 pm on Wednesdays and Fridays. Understandably only 42 people have used the PC between April '97 and now. Chris Lord, CCA's marketing manager, blamed staffing problems for this. CCA has applied for Lottery money to improve its overall computer facilities and plans to move AXIS into the more accessible foyer.

For reasons best known to itself SAC originally set itself up in opposition to AXIS and spent approx. £40,000 developing its own IVAC electronic register which boasted 236 artists' files. IVAC had, from the outset, been a dubious, ill-considered project which allegedly ran with a software package that had been rejected by AXIS. SAC hired a consultant in Broughty Ferry to redesign it and make it workable. Artists' slides were collected in Edinburgh then carried to Broughty Ferry for scanning at an estimated cost of £25 per slide. At the same time Boots in Dundee was advertising this facility for 50p per slide.

SAC had borne the costs of registering the 236 invited artists and when it abandoned IVAC officially in August '95 it agreed to hand over an £88,000 three-year package to AXIS, to cover the costs of bringing another 723 Scottish artists on board, plus the costs of establishing another 4 AXIS points in Scotland. The first of these are scheduled to come on stream in September this year: Gracefield Arts Centre in Dumfries and Art In Partnership in Edinburgh.

Rebecca Coggins of Gracefield told me that their AXIS facility was already in place and that it was located in their resource room but in order to monitor usage the service will be by appointment. AXIS will

control the advertising of this facility. Gracefield were asked to nominate 40 local artists, their fees paid by SAC.

A spokesperson for Art In Partnership, a private public art agency in Edinburgh's Cowgate, said it was now more likely to come on stream in October '97 because they were still trying to finalise the package with AXIS. They too have applied for Lottery funding to purchase the necessary hardware. The PC will be sited in their studio gallery and will be advertised by AXIS. The facility will be available by appointment only from 9 to 5, five days a week.

Up to now 426 Scottish artists (236 being transferred from IVAC) are registered on the AXIS database. AXIS has decided to operate in partnership with various organisations and its current Chief Executive, Kate Hainsworth, believes this system to be the most effective way to progress. Up to now artists have been nominated and paid for through these partnerships. SAC has borne the brunt of these fees by paying £35 per artist. Local Enterprise Companies in Argyll, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland have paid the same with 39 artist in total nominated by arts centres in their respective areas.

In future artists will be invited to apply for self-funded registration at a cost of between £50 and £60. This scheme is being introduced “as part of a wider strategy to develop more comprehensive representation of artists.” However, to qualify for self-funded registration artists will have to meet the following criteria set by AXIS's board of directors, a mix of professional artists, arts professionals and business advisors.

## Criteria

The Artist must normally conform with 3 of the following criteria including the first or with four of the following criteria not including number one.

- Had a degree or other appropriate qualification in a relevant field
- Had:
  - at least 2 public exhibitions or
  - at least 2 public performances or
  - at least 2 public installations or
  - at least 1 public exhibition and 1 public performance or
  - at least 1 public exhibition and 1 public installation or
  - at least 1 public performance and 1 public installation
 but not including a degree show
- Received at least one prize, award, bursary of professional practice
- Received at least one public body or corporate commission or at least 6 private commissions
- Been engaged by contractual agreement in an artist's placement scheme
- Had work purchased for at least one public or private collection
- Had work available for sale through one or more

commercial galleries or agents within years

- Obtained membership of at least one association or society
- Had work reviewed or featured in an magazine or newspaper

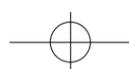
These Criteria and their application will be reviewed at least annually by the AXIS Board.

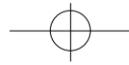
Kate Hainsworth insists that AXIS pro inclusive policy but within that 'Sunday I art club amateurs, are excluded. When I ] for 'Outsider Artists', i.e. self-taught, cor ative amateurs, she said that there was no someone like that could not meet their re for self-funded registration. Her response that AXIS's method of filtering applicatio ciously ill thought through and out-mode ous that AXIS has not fulfilled its origina provide a free service to all professional v crafts people and photographers. Further espouses elitist principles that contradict which suggested AXIS would be an educ inform the public about contemporary ar the UK as well as providing a service for ers and researchers.

Instead of setting up an open access v would be available 24 hours a day, 7 days ally, AXIS has run with a system of CD-F laboriously up dated every 3 months. Hai believes that this control mechanism can sibility if CD-Roms are marketed comme insists that AXIS will persist with the sys most recent information states the AXIS which up to now has been used for limite exhibitions, is currently under review and details will be available in Autumn 1997.

The CD-Rom software is very user-frie programme begins by offering a form to then 3 choices: Search Artwork Informat Artist Information, Finish Searching Reg first offers a range of artwork types from to Woodwork. By highlighting Bookart on on Number of Hits—10. One can then vi i.e. artist who exhibits 3 images of work p The second choice allows one to scroll th artists' names. By highlighting a name th offers 1 Hit and permits one to view the f number of glitches which would suggest cross-reference system is less than rigoro For some reason 10% of artists on the re; text only entry. Other options such as ger Disability and Cultural Identity assist one artists.

Scotland is divided into 29 Local Auth of which have no Hits. Edinburgh and G over 90 each. Highland has only 58 and there are more artists working througou than that. Neighbouring areas fare no be stage the register is woefully inadequate.





# Marshall Anderson

research by this method is impossible.

It is, however, possible to have a print-out of a CV for £1.50. Anyone requesting a copy of an artist's CV and Contact Sheets via AXIS is charged £2.75. The artist receives no copyright payment and AXIS says it has a "licence agreement with each artist", defining how it can, and cannot, distribute digital and printed images of the artist's work free of charge at access points and gives the artist's consent to AXIS, providing reference quality illustrated print-outs of images free of charge or at "cost to the artist".

Here we can see how the artist has signed away any rights of reproduction to his/her work. This shift within AXIS, from a 1991 philosophy that fully protected and honoured the artist's right to financially benefit from AXIS, has in 1997 moved to one which regards the artist as an unpaid supplier of data that is sold to drive a so-called private business supported by State Money.

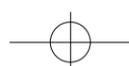
All things considered, it is not difficult to comprehend the logic of continuing with an awkward marketing tool like a CD-Rom, the continual updating of which is expensive and cumbersome. It appears that AXIS want to control access to their database and, rather than make it an integrated public service, operate it for a social and cultural elite. This is borne out by their insistence that they control the advertising of the service while further insisting that it be available by appointment only.

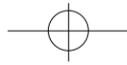
At the present time AXIS is being sold to artists as a professional service that will benefit their careers through making their files accessible to those who have the power to launch and assist careers through commissions and exhibitions etc. It is AXIS' vain hope that they can advance their standing and credibility by becoming an absolute necessity for artists and researchers and commissioners alike. Successful

artists have no need to register and knowledgeable researchers and commissioners will use other more reliable contacts.

As an example of how AXIS is grabbing at loose straws in its marketing campaign I quote from an open letter dated 4th August '97 and addressed, "Dear Artists...Your chances of getting work through us are therefore increased with each new entry." This singular argument for joining a fairly exclusive club is not an attractive one. There are no added incentives, such as a totally free and totally accessible service for everyone in the community to use. The letter continues, "We want new artists to feel welcomed to AXIS. How can we do this?" and then invites artists to attend a forum in Leeds on 20th August to air their opinions. They can also do this by completing a questionnaire. The letter ends on a revealing note—"PS. If you would like to be involved in the forum, we can offer you a free update of your CV and new images of your artwork worth £29.38."

Kate Hainsworth told me she is confident of achieving a fully comprehensive register by the millennium. I would suggest that in 28 months from now AXIS will be little further forward after absorbing much more money and that many artist, artists-run organisations, groups and galleries will have empowered themselves by setting up their own *free* web-sites.





# The Birthplace of B

A short one hundred and fifty years ago Kennington Common, later to be renamed Kennington Park, was host to a historic gathering which can now be seen as the birth of modern British democracy. In reaction to this gathering, the great Chartist rally of the 10th of April 1848, the common was forcibly enclosed and the Victorian Park was built to occupy the site.

History is not objective truth. It is a selection of some facts from a mass of evidence to construct a particular view which, inevitably, reflects the ideas of the historian. The history most of us learned in school left out the stories of most of the people who lived and made that history. If the design and artifacts of the Royal Park mean anything they are a symbolic obliteration of such a people's history: an enforced amnesia of what the real importance of this space is all about. A history of life, popular discourse and collective struggle for justice is replaced with a few antique objects and some noble trees.

The significance of Kennington Park goes back to its origins as a common. What is important about this site is not the physical aspects of its layout but the traditions of its usage, a usage which arises from its unique position in South London. It is here that the road from Buckingham Palace to Dover crosses the older road from the City of London to Portsmouth. It was the last common before the centres of power to the North of the river, particularly parliament. It was first recorded as a common on Rocque's 1746 map of London, but it must have been crucial as a public meeting place long before that. The Southbound highways date from pre-Roman times when a fork in a major road was considered to have magical significance.

## Executions

The importance of its position made it a site of power struggles from an early time. From the 17th century, if not before, the South Western corner of the common was selected as the South London site of public execution. In the 18th century the country was still dominated by an aristocracy; but the term gangster would be more appropriate. But by the 17th century the unifying monarchical state had transformed this naked violence into ordered spectacles of horror—public executions.

The first execution recorded is of Sarah Elston, who was burnt alive for murdering her husband in 1678.

"On the day of execution Sarah Elston all dressed in white, with a vast multitude of people attending her. And after very solemn prayers offered on the said occasion, the fire was kindled, and giving two or three lamentable shrieks, she was deprived of both voice and life, and so burnt to ashes."<sup>1</sup>

The most infamous of those terrible spectacles was the execution for treason of nine members of the Manchester Regiment, Jacobites, who were hung, drawn and quartered on Wednesday July the 30th, 1746. Now that Scottish devolution has finally been achieved—with somewhat less bloodshed—we might dedicate the fountain, which stands on the site, to their memory. (The fountain is outside the park perimeter railings to the South West, opposite the Oval Tube Station).

It continued as a place of execution until the early years of the 19th century. The last person to be executed was a fraudster from Camberwell Green, by the name of Badger.

The history books have portrayed executions as popular entertainments; but it only takes a little sensitivity and imagination to realise the trauma that any witness, not already emotionally calloused would feel.

Children were hauled screaming onto the gallows, to be 'wettered' by the sweat of the corpse, as this was supposed to be a cure for scrofulous diseases. It is true that many took the day off work and a 'carnival' atmosphere prevailed along the route that the condemned travelled, but this was a way of resisting the morbid terror that the state was hoping to induce.

The dawn of the 19th century brought about many changes. The rising capitalist class was challenging aristocratic power and the composition of the ruling classes changed. At the same time the population was gradually becoming concentrated in cities. The density of the urban population, with its intense social life, gave rise to new political potentials. Consequently, the state required new forms of

oppression. The Peterloo massacre of 1819, in which 11 were killed and 600 badly injured, taught the ruling class that overt violence could create martyrs and inflame revolt. Their strategy was to sap the vital energies of the new urban population by denying them cultural autonomy. This would be done by 'civilising' them by training them 'to behave', making them outsiders in their own nation.

As in the new colonies, violent conquest was followed by cultural repression. The enclosure of Kennington Common marks a point at which class oppression changed gear; replacing external violence with more cultural and psychological mechanisms of social control.

The Common on the site of the current park had been a meeting place since the early 18th century, if not earlier. It belonged to people communally and it was the South London Speaker's Corner. It seems as if there was a mound at this time, perhaps an ancient Tumulus, from which the orators could stir their thoughts. What were the issues of the day that were broadcast from this site?

## Earlier Times: Methodism

Large crowds were attracted to many brilliant orators. The most famous of these may have been John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who addressed as many as 50,000 people on Kennington common around 1739. This was a church with a stern morality which also stood firm against slavery. Inevitably, anti-establishment and without hierarchy, almost anyone could become a preacher. Methodist preachers could interpret scripture in ways which linked Plebeian magical beliefs with primitive Christian egalitarianism.

Robert Wedderburn was one such preacher who operated in this area. He was born to Rosanna, an African born house slave in Kingston, Jamaica, who was sold by her owner, Robert's father, before he was born. He arrived in England aged 17 in 1778, and was in the Gordon Riots of 1780. In 1786 he fell under the thrall of a Methodist street preacher and experienced an instantaneous conversion. Intoxicated on the power of grace and inspired by Wesley's stance against slavery, he soon obtained a dissenting preacher's license. At the same time he stayed firmly a part of the 'underclass' and its vulgar culture.

By 1813 he had become a follower of Thomas Spence, who linked opposition to slavery with opposition to the enclosures of the commons in England. This talismanic interpretation of scripture led to millenarianism, free thought and political radicalism. Spence was a prolific publisher and distributor of handbills, broadsheets, songs, tracts, pamphlets and periodicals. He also issued token coinage to publicise his views.

## Radicalism

This was a period of intense popular political discourse and self-education amongst the new urban classes. Radical debating organisations became active but were then made illegal and had to operate covertly or on a smaller scale. One of the most famous was the London Corresponding Society, formed in January 1792 by Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker.

Free 'n' easies were one form of social gathering in which radical toasting contests and political sing-songs would alternate with heated debates. The Green Man and Horns, on the corner of Kennington Road and Kennington Park road, was a likely venue. It was later to become known simply as The Horns. More on this later...

The most popular text that arose from these radical undercurrents was written by Thomas Paine, a good friend of William Blake. Blake lived near the Common so Paine would have been familiar with the area. His book 'Rights of Man': "Met with a response that was unique in English publishing history ...Like an underground manifesto, it was passed from hand to hand, even when it became a crime to be found with Rights of Man in one's possession...extracts were printed in pamphlet form."<sup>2</sup>

Tom Paine believed that: "Conquest and tyranny, at some early period, dispossessed man of his rights, and he is now recovering them...Whatever the apparent causes of any riot might be, the real one is always want of happiness. It shows that something is wrong in the system of government that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved."<sup>3</sup>

## Chartism: The World's first national labour movement

From these feverish debates came an agreement on the need

for Republicanism and universal suffrage—for sive democracy. In 1832 a voting Reform Act gave the class the vote but left the working class, who had favoured the bill, still entirely disenfranchised. Political demands, which had been the element of discourse for some time, were drawn up as a 'Charter.' Presented as a new Magna Carta, by 1839 supported by almost every working class group and rapidly became the World's first national labour movement.

The people who supported it were Chartists. An active party with a large passive membership but a movement which deeply affected every aspect of people was an inclusive organisation with popular leadership. Catholic, Protestant and Freethinkers, and who Irish, West Indian and Asian people in the movement. There were also women's groups. Chartist meetings had a carnival like atmosphere, probably something like a temporary free festival. There was a Chartist culture with its own christening and funeral rituals and its own was a counter cultural experience that changed the perception of themselves—they became conscious of class identity.

The main political strategies of Chartism were the petition and the monster rally. The petition was big and had the force of an unofficial referendum. The monster rallies were a show of strength which also gave the movement a direct sense of community. By 1848 Chartism had a head of steam. The petition for the Charter had become huge, by then it had between three and six million signatures. A carriage, bedecked with garlands, was used to transport it. Parliament was to be presented with the petition, for the third time, after a monster rally on Kennington Common on the 10th of April 1848.

## Icon of Modernity

This moment in the struggle for democracy was captured in a historic photograph. William Kilburn, an early photographer, took Daguerreotype plates of the rally from a point from the top of The Horns. These were the photographic representation of a large crowd. It is the cultural importance that photography was to have in the next 100 years it is perhaps not surprising that the negatives of this iconic image are held in the Royal Collection at Windsor castle, which retains a strict copyright.

The fact that the events of the 10th of April 1848 heralded a British Revolution or immediate voting rights has been held up by official historians as the 'failure' of Chartism. But the success of Chartism should be measured in such terms, but rather in the profound effects it had on the millions who took part. The thing historians have found difficult to register is the real democratic culture and sense of social justice that the Charter which remains unrealised to this day.

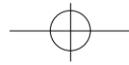
The stand-off on Kennington Common that exposed the arrogant complacency of the British ruling class then on a unique alliance with the waning aristocracy and the burgeoning capitalist 'middle' class, was a newly united ruling block determined to crush the individualise urban popular culture. From then on the uneven but constant pressure to undermine the unity, vigour and autonomy of the new urban labour movement.

## Enclosure of the common

The first step was to symbolically annihilate the land that had become such a focus of the Chartism. The Commons have symbolic roots going back to the Norman conquest. They stand for the right of everyone to have access to the fruits of our Earth: In stark contrast to the predatory individualism promoted by the 'emancipated' imperialist. This individualism was calloused to communalism, unfeeling of the humanity and inhuman to the crowd, and incapable of a non-exploitative relationship with the Earth. This lack of feeling was a necessary precondition for the class of men who were destined to lead the complete exploitation of people across the globe.

The spirit of the commons was the antithesis of the individualising cult of individualism and private ownership: the spirit that had inspired the Diggers in April 1649. "For though you and your ancestors got your money by murder and theft, and you keep it by the same





# ish Democracy

Stefan Szczelkur

us, that have an equal right to the Land with you, by the righteous Law of Creation, yet we shall have no occasion of quarrelling (as you do) about that disturbing devil, called Particular Propriety: For the Earth, with all her Fruits of Corn, cattle, and such like, was made to be a common Store-house of Livelihood to all Mankinds, friend, and foe, without exception.”<sup>4</sup>

The ruling class united in the face of this new threat to their power and the individual diversity of the working classes was erased and replaced with a bland and ugly concept of ‘the masses.’ The image of the masses as an irrational and potentially savage mob can be traced through Carlyle and Dickens to Hollywood—it is a manufactured falsehood.

Soon after the rally a committee of local worthies was set up and soon found support from the Prince of Wales. By 1852 they had already got the requisite bill through Parliament and Kennington Common was ‘enclosed’—its status as an ancient common was reduced to that of a Royal Park. The planting and construction of the park which forms the familiar pattern we know today was largely completed by 1854. This was a symbolic and real colonisation of working class political space.

The Common was occupied, fenced and closely guarded. Not only was the perimeter fenced but so was the grass and the shrubberies. The remaining paths were patrolled by guards administered by H. M. Royal Commissioners. It stayed under the direct control of the Royals until it was taken over by the Metropolitan Board of Works (later to become the London County Council) in 1887.

During the early period of occupation the use of the park was limited to an annual meeting of The Temperance Societies of South London starting in the summer of 1861. It was also used for local schools’ sports. It is not clear what other sorts of public meetings may have been allowed. Park Superintendents filed six monthly reports from 1893 to 1911 but they may have omitted to report on meetings which were spontaneous or political. Certainly we know the park was used during the General Strike of 1926.

This was just the beginning of a period in which the new urban working class culture was attacked, undermined or commercialised in all its forms. The Unions and socialist parties either considered culture a distraction or encouraged their members to follow the middle class programme of ‘rational recreation.’

## Musichall

In the late 19th century this area of South London was a theatre land, with vibrant theatres, assembly rooms, dancehalls and musichalls. In 1889 the London County Council (LCC), later to become the GLC, provided the park with an elegant bandstand and between 1900 and 1950 there were concerts of military bands for a paying seated audience on Sundays, Wednesdays and Bank Holidays. These ‘rational recreations’ were seen to offer a civilising alternative to the ‘vulgar’ musichall culture which hemmed in on all sides.

But the theatres gradually declined because of the gentrification in the area and because of the growing popularity of the new cinemas. The beautiful Kennington Theatre, facing the northwest corner of the park opened in 1898 as the Princess of Wales Theatre. It was one of the most sumptuous in London. In 1921 it was showing ‘cine-variety.’ It closed in 1934, failing to get its licence renewed for the 1935 season—perhaps a victim of the depression. It was finally demolished in the 1950s to make way for Kennington Park House, a block of flats built by the LCC, now run by a Tenants Co-op.

Everywhere it was the same: Working class pastimes were replaced with commercialised forms, ‘rational recreations’ or erased altogether, leaving acres of public housing which had been culturally sterilised. The active, autonomous anarchic culture of the crowd was replaced with an increasingly passive, commodified and privatised ‘popular’ culture of the ‘masses’.

## World Wars

The Horns had been a favourite haunt of Charlie Chaplin’s profligate father. At one time the young Charlie lived in poor lodgings overlooking the north of the park in Kennington Park Place. The park may have been where he and his friends would imitate their musichall heroes and practice their silly walks. In his autobiography he tells us that he met his first girlfriend in the park.

The Horns, a key social centre whose life would have flowed naturally into the park and energised it, was partly destroyed by a bomb in World War II. The remains were demolished in the 1960s and replaced with the formidable dark concrete of the Social Security block designed by Colonel Siefert, architect-in-the-pocket of many notorious 60s developers. Since the original tavern was destroyed, the bawdy spirit of the Horns seems to have migrated north to the White Bear with its theatre club and bohemian/crusty reputation.

In the Second World War the park was the site of communal shallow trench-style air-raid shelters. On the 15th October 1941 these suffered a direct hit and at least 46 bodies were recovered. The chaos of war along with the need to keep up morale meant that no official toll of those dead and missing was taken. From the flimsy evidence in the Lambeth Archives it seems as if the remains of between seven and seventeen or more bodies may have been left unrecovered when the site was levelled around the 19th of October. Many people must have been blown to pieces and the south field of the park is their unmarked grave to this day.

## Lambeth Council

The park had passed from the LCC (by then the GLC) to Lambeth Council in 1971. This was the Conservative led Council which launched John Major on his career. In January 1977 the squatters in St Agnes Place, situated between the old park and the newer extension, precipitated the fall of the Conservative Council in the most dramatic fashion.

Councillor Stimpson, called in a demolition firm to knock down the squatters houses, whilst the squatters were living in them. But he ignored necessary legal procedures and a few of the squatters were able to get a last minute High Court injunction and call a sudden halt to the demolition. The squatters in the area, who were quite numerous at this time, were elated by this victory and spontaneously set off down Brixton Road to march on Lambeth Town hall. Arriving at the Town Hall they knocked on the front door and, to their amazement, someone let them in. Angry squatters then teemed through the hallowed halls of the Council, occupied offices and called vociferously for Stimpson’s resignation. Stimpson’s blundering led to the fall of the Conservative Council and the start of ‘Red Ted’ Knight.

The new Socialist Council started the annual fireworks displays in the Park the following year. By 1984 the park was again being used for political gatherings. The demonstrators on the Anti-Apartheid Rally of that year used the park as an assembly point. In subsequent years the park has hosted many important political gatherings including: Gay Pride (Starting 1986), National Union of Students (1986), Irish Solidarity Movement (1986), Vietnamese Community Event (1989), Anti-Poll Tax march (1990), Kurdistan Rally (1991), Integration Alliance (1993), TUC (1993), Nigerian Rallies (1993), Campaign Against Militarism (1993) and Reclaim the Streets (1997). These events often reflect key moments in the political history of the time and are an important part of the democratic process.

## What’s happening now

In 1996 Lambeth Council set up a Park Management Advisory Committee (MAC). At the inaugural meeting a local estate agent, lawyer and priest took up the key posts and plans for a ‘Victorian Restoration’ of the park were quickly put into motion. The powers of Lambeth Council to give permission for use of the park is to be limited—all future applications are to be

monitored by the MAC. This conservative committee of local residents may have an influence on the park which does not take account of its wider significance and use in the democratic politics of this country.

Claire Asquith, a student of landscape design, was commissioned to produce a public exhibition to promote the restoration programme. This began by dismissing the Common as a place which was “notorious” and whose ditches were “the cemeteries of all dead puppies and kittens of the vicinity” and into which “raw sewage was discharged from adjacent cottages.” She omits to point out that there were many open sewers in London at this time.

She writes of the erection of St. Marks church in 1824, on enclosed common land, as “the salvation of the common.” But the building of the church was the first step in the occupation of the site by the ruling classes. It was the Vicar of St. Marks, the Reverend Charlton Lane, who led the committee for the enclosure of the common. A recent paper from the Church, oddly reminiscent of a tract by Robert Wedderburn, tells us that at that time it “unfortunately became a church for the rich, who alone could afford the price of a pew.”

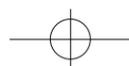
The Victorian monuments that survive in the park do not seem to symbolise or commemorate anything—other than Victoriana. They do not deserve or receive any great respect and have been progressively wrecked and vandalised. The War memorial, however, dating from 1924, has an important function, it is regularly honoured with wreathes and poppies and rarely defaced.

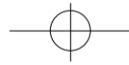
An application has been made for Lottery funding for a major facelift. Anyone wishing to see the plans should contact the Regeneration Department, Lambeth Council.

Friday the 10th of April 1998, the 150th anniversary of the birth of modern British democracy, the anniversary of the most important date of the Chartist movement, the first national labour movement in the World. An important site for anyone who values democracy—at the time of writing there isn’t even a commemorative stone. Kennington Park still needs to be put on the map as a site of International significance.

## Notes

1. H.H. Montgomery, *The History of Kennington*, 1889, p.32
2. Howard Fast, *Thomas Paine*, 1948.
3. *Rights of man* Vol 2, 1792.
4. Gerrard Winstanley, *Declaration from the Poor oppressed People of England to Lords of Manors*. 1649.





# Why is there only one Monopolies Commission?

Early in February 1976 an article written by Colin Simpson appeared in *The Sunday Times Business News* which suggested that Treasury eyebrows had been raised at the use of Government funds to acquire works of art which included a “stack of 120 firebricks.” The story sparked an eruption in the popular Press which would make Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* the best known work of contemporary art in Britain. The populist assault on contemporary art that followed, constituted a Machiavellian manoeuvre designed to favour monetarist policies introduced that January by Chancellor Denis Healy. On the one hand it underlined an area desperately in need of disciplinary cuts in public expenditure. On the other hand, it created a temporary spectacle to divert the healthy, employed sections of the populace from the effects that cuts have on those who rely on the Welfare State. Given that the implication of monetarist policies resulted in a substantial rise in unemployment, it is hardly surprising to find that art scandals played an increasingly important part in tabloid politics following 1976. An important part of the success of such tactical manoeuvres by the Labour Right lay in their capacity to separate any perceived negative effects of monetarist policy (such as rising unemployment) from apparent successes (such as putting a stop to inflation and the public funding of ‘rubbish’ art). The art world provided an ideal scapegoat since it is administered by quasi-autonomous governmental organisations. This means that popular arts supported by arts funding bodies can be seen to benefit from monetarist policy, since they are Governmental organisations. Simultaneously arts councils could be held responsible for unpopular, modern art since they are, after all, (quasi)autonomous. Of course, ending public subsidy would have forced artists to behave, but Governments and Councils knew that this would leave them without their pawns.

Following the Second-World-War, a newly professionalised culturalist intelligentsia had opted for state education as the mechanism by which its culture might be preserved and extended as the centre of resistance to the driving imperatives of an increasingly materialist civilisation. The ideology and lifestyle of culturalist academics and the ‘civilised ruling classes’ who were their associates, were central to the post-war Labour Government’s conception of a new society. Individualism and Socialism were to be developed in tandem by democratising intellectual privilege. Labour Governments had aimed to use collective wealth to invest in a programme of education, and so, in the long run, replace the ‘manual’ industrial economy of low wages and long hours with an ‘intellectual’ post-industrial economy of short hours and high wages (Harold Wilson’s ‘white heat of technology’). In this, Labour culturalists heralded a society not bound together by economic market contracts, but by citizenship. Rational citizens would be educated enough to understand that their high quality of life was dependent on supporting a generous level of public provision, allowing the gradual ascendancy the Labour Party’s vision of democratic socialism while ensuring that existing power structures remained unaltered.

Gaining secure, intellectual employment from public bureaucracies due to improved subsidised opportunity, arts administrators were good examples of what was expected of culturalist ‘citizens.’ As such, British arts administrations generally accepted that the ‘knowledgeable will to form’ had to be publicly legitimated and controlled in order to ensure its social benefits. This sensibility, however, had become increasingly incompatible with much state sponsored art in the mid-seventies. The question arises as to whether or not it was deliberately incompatible. Could the lower instruments of human depravity also be a guarantee of public good? On the 18th of October 1976, COUM Transmissions’ *Prostitution* opened at the ICA, a retrospective guaranteed to dislocate human cultivation and public order. The infamous exhibition, which featured pornography, used tampons and maggot, was met with a furious attack by veteran right-

winger Nicholas Fairbairn in language that echoed the Arts Council’s defence of ‘cultural value.’<sup>1</sup> That Fairbairn should have mimicked some of the Arts Council’s rhetoric while criticising the activities it endorsed should come as no surprise. Fairbairn, like the Arts Council, clearly endorsed the notion of art as the cultural activity of the educated class to which he belonged. However, even such incongruous work could be defended on Fairbairn’s grounds in that it offered the culturalist cognoscenti a brief, well-charted escapade into anarchism. Indeed, this was precisely the ICA’s position.<sup>2</sup> Confronted with such liberal curatorial practices, it became customary for ‘new’ art historians to argue that art since the mid-1970s does not force a new set of critics to adopt a new way of seeing since it is always already publicly legitimated by educated figures: “...the objections raised by columnists in the popular Press are quite irrelevant, because the critical and curatorial success of [Andre’s] work as modern art was achieved quite independently of such reservations (where originally, as in the case of [Manet’s] *Olympia*, [...] a sense of the modern was constructed, to a certain extent, out of the commentaries of critics).”<sup>3</sup> While this comprehensive claim might elucidate one possible difference between ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ art worlds, its wider implications remain to be judged against the specific cultural and political contradictions which took place in Britain around the question of cultural and economic paternalism during the 1970s.

It might be argued that much of the late modernist cognoscenti of the mid-1970s had deliberately effected a reversal of the Arts Council’s culturalist aims, using public money and the media with the specific intent of offending, as opposed to ‘altering’, the public sensibility. This could be countered by the fact that COUM Transmissions had consistently aimed to make art popular by seeking more ‘direct’ forms of experience. Yet any critical potential of COUM’s work was in turn eroded by the common understanding fabricated by cultural administrators and the press, that the opposing face of the culturalist status quo was a monetarist mirror image. COUM’s assault on culturalist mystification, therefore, inadvertently aided the cause of monetarist ‘modernisers’ of the Labour Right who were, after all, the producers of the powerful media sensationalism which COUM rallied against. The assault on culturalism rapidly became a vast graveyard where the Left and the institutionalised avant-garde went to die. Both were forced into an impossible position whereby they could not have their negations and their politics too. One of the few groups of avant-gardists to recognise this were COUM, who used the opening night of the *Prostitution* exhibition to abruptly abandon the art world, re-launching themselves as the industrial band *Throbbing Gristle*. With the art world’s ideals scarred by the ‘failure’ of the 70s late-avant-garde, new art historian T.J. Clark was soon able to ‘convincingly’ proclaim that “the moment at which negation and refutation becomes simply too complete; they [the late avant-garde] erase what they meant to negate, and therefore no negation takes place; they refute their prototypes effectively and the old dispositions are—sometimes literally—painted out; they ‘no longer apply’.”<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between an intellectually demanding culture, museums as institutions which legitimise this difficulty, and the corresponding industry of explanation, was quickly identified by a large number of producers and administrators of British art as the matter for practical and critical engagement. To remain independent of popular reservations was deemed suicidal, as the threat to their secure, intellectual employment now came from the State. Citizens who feared an end to their privileged status were therefore forced to contrive an impetus for the initial rejection of modernism in Britain. As the New Right’s populism gained in audibility, critics and artists who had professed an affinity with the political avant-garde pretended to jump from their sinking Arts Council ship. What they were in fact doing was ensuring that their

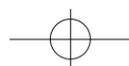
status became both the object and counterwork, thereby guaranteeing their position of high popular visual culture. Given that practices of modernist culture did not have to their usual practice of incessantly describing activities, it might appear futile to argue that cultural shift took place at all. Yet contrary to what new art historians, (who were major beneficiaries of this subtle ‘shift’), it might be alleged that the post-modern in Britain was constructed in the commentaries of its critics. Such a claim determining the extent to which the New Right unwittingly aided by the coterie of ex-monetarist administrators who re-emerged in 1976, Marxist ambassadors of cultural change, they pronounced their indignation at the of art under capitalism, and promulgated contemporary art, the ‘Crisis Critics’ printed to question paternalistic attitudes towards arts while ensuring lucrative future careers for themselves with the British Arts Council.

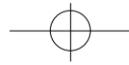
In 1976 Richard Cork published a book for the Studio International on ‘Art and Social Politics’ which he first began referring to himself as a ‘committed socialist.’ For the next two years, Cork perpetually at pains to state that the British art world’s lofty modernist ideals were arrogant myths. In Raymond Williams’ lead, he argued that ‘objective standards’ could only be available to those which he was a member. Since high art culture of the elite, the general public could not understand or appreciate high art if they were not ideologically of the elite (a fact which the Arts Council never disputed).<sup>5</sup> In order to remedy this Cork proposed “to restore a sense of purpose to artists cannot afford for a moment to operate in a vacuum of specialised discourse, considering their function in wider and more general terms.”<sup>6</sup> Despite his allegedly radical intention to place emphasis on the need for art to play a role while ‘exposing’ social deprivation (a role government) played into the hands of the

A man of many contradictions, Cork was organising *Art For Whom?* and *Art for Society* of gallery exhibitions intended to persuade the gallery system in order to make art for ‘nary people’. In May 1978, *Art & Language* criticised Art for Society for having “become a point of the self-promotional activities of left typified by the ‘socialist artist’ Conrad Rieuwerts’ fearless expose of the Queen Mother as a fascist.” As the correspondence pages of arts magazines filled once more with letters criticising art, and the Arts Council debacles, the issues raised by ‘social artists’ were obscured by the mythic theme of practice and debate during the 1970s. Who ran the art world? Atkinson’s analysis was fairly accurate:

“...the Arts Council of Great Britain is moving into a dominating and decisive role (‘inescapable editorial responsibility’) in the preparation for the eighties. This will, I believe, be a ‘tightening up’ of the ‘problematic’ areas of practice, particularly, though not exclusively, in the visual arts. Thus the work funded will be more ‘towards a visual arts ‘Cross-roads’’. In my view this will affect work in all media but most will be documentation, work with socio-political content, performance work and work which moves outside the accepted norms.”<sup>7</sup>

Clarification of the shift towards a safe “Cross-roads” had already emerged in the Andrew Brighton and Lynda Morris’ exhibition *Towards Another Picture*, which took place in 1977. Conspicuous inclusions were working class and populist painters such as Terence Stiles’ *Lord Mayors and steam trains*, a Shepherd, who specialised in African wildlife, and Shepherds’ elephants. In stressing the show’s ‘appeal’ with such inclusions, the organisers were attempting to claim a non art world audience.





# Neil Mulholland

thereby create a 'radical' alternative to the Tate Gallery and Arts Council perspective on British art. Remarkably envisioning that this positioned the museum institution under scrutiny while attacking the "intellectual vacuity, indolence, corruption and self-perpetuating mediocrity of the art world".<sup>10</sup> Brighton wrote of how "art history, properly practised, is part of cultural history. The task of those constructing a history of our times is to examine and understand the uses of art in our culture, not to reinforce the evaluation of one section of the art market by giving them doubtful historical lineage."<sup>11</sup> The form of critical culture envisaged in Brighton's brand of crisis criticism was impossible to achieve since, in the present political circumstances, the very concept of an educated culture implied limits on accessibility. Brighton, luckily enough, was there, at the centre of the new omnidirectional, postmodern art world, ready to explain all. The use of art in his culture was to perpetuate this situation. Brighton refused to recognise an old-chestnuts, namely, why might anyone wish to "question the unilinear account of twentieth-century art"<sup>12</sup> without first learning of it through the form of paternalistic education once provided by the Arts Council? Again, Brighton would administrate the case against cultural administration.

Julian Spalding missed the Crisis Critic vogue, a letter to Art Monthly in 1979 criticising Conservative cuts in funding to the V&A leaving no impression.<sup>13</sup> By 1984, the Director of Sheffield's City Council's Arts Department had learned how to capitalise on the many of the motifs manufactured by the Crisis Critics towards the end of the 70s, combining them with Peter Fuller's parochialism and the ruthless commercial exploitation of the New Image:

"The tide has now turned on the New York School, and the art capital has swung back, not to Paris, but to Germany, home of Expressionism. We are now witnessing a revival of figurative expressionism hall-marked by its large scale and bold brushwork. [...] Many young artists are tackling once again the problem of figurative composition and are beginning to rediscover the potential of oil paint, a technique virtually outlawed for more than two decades. It is timely, then, to mount an exhibition of works by the last artists in Britain who painted figuratively on a large scale in oil and who also absorbed some expressionist influences from the continent. In the process they created a school of painting that was original, rich, powerful and impressive and deserves to be re-instated into the history of British art".<sup>14</sup>

The Forgotten Fifties, an exhibition of the Kitchen Sink School, gained Spalding a greater measure of publicity, touring from Sheffield, to Norwich, Coventry, and Camden. Opportunist criticism came from John Roberts, who admonished that there "is no 'straight' road through to the social as was reflected in '50s painting, because realism as such can no longer capture the world so openly, so saguinely; realism must come—and has come—under new auspices."<sup>15</sup> (Roberts'/Terry Atkinson's auspices). Despite Spalding's relationship with Sheffield's populace being like that of an anthropologist to a remote tribe, Roberts at the time declined to reproach this as a revival of crisis criticism, perhaps fearing that his critical career was too heavily reliant on the perpetuation of customary refutation. As with Cork and Brighton, Spalding's motivation was clearly "the belief that the public, as a valid subculture, has a valid folk art which it creates and sustains but which is submerged and undervalued beneath the more sophisticated art strata that, with official backing, has tended to dominate the intelligentsia of the day."<sup>16</sup>

On taking over as director of Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries in April 1989, Spalding simply continued to map an anthropological model onto the civic art collection, while gaining greater publicity for himself. Following his inauguration, Glasgow's Great British Art Show was hurriedly conceived as a riposte to the 1990 British Art Show, organised by the South Bank Centre. Conveniently, the public row that took

place between Spalding and the South Bank Centre attracted more attention to Spalding's ideas than to his exhibition, (20,000 paying visitors, a typical week's non-paying attendance at Kelvingrove). His prompt endorsement of Beryl Cook and Peter Howson's paintings was essentially Neo-Classical, a reductivist search for a never-never land populated by picturesque clowns whose allegedly unaffected behaviour guaranteed that 'quality of life' was not distorted by the impact of culturalist civilisation.

Spalding's primitivist/crisis critical model has easily found a central niche in official Scottish culture, which has a long tradition of being unduly concerned with 'folk'. In the early 18th century, members of the Neo-Classical Society of Dilettante initially looked to ancient Greece for 'noble simplicity.' Genre painters soon turned to home-grown primitives, depicting mythical peasant folk who were said to have populated Scotland prior to the enclosure movement. The fashion for the genre paintings which drench the basement of the National Gallery of Scotland was nurtured by the main myth-makers of official Scottish cultural identity, Rabbie Burns's *sonsie verse* and the 'imaginative reconstruction' of history found in Walter Scott's tartan fantasias.<sup>17</sup> The nostalgic shortbread couture used to promote Edinburgh today is essentially no different from Spalding's anthropological obsession with Glaswegiana. Both animate myths of Scottishness for promotional ends; both construct a theatrical image of the people from Neo-Classical principles, and in their aim to de-historicise culture, push 'executive skills' to the forefront of cultural existence. The dramatised fantasy of the highland clans imposed long ago on Scotland by novelists and romantic tourists, has also become highly lucrative for artists and administrators who have successfully re-marketed the great tradition as nostalgia for the late 70s crisis mode:

"Fanciful combinations of warm, brooding heroin chic, and the mysterious, rugged qualities of Central-Belt housing-estates, and Tiswas are not merely pleasurable but come with a sublime sense of danger and excitement. Various camcorder activists will 'eat chips' like cultural constructs, providing a taster for the first ever deep fried subversive voice for those women exploited by installation artists for their own ends."<sup>18</sup>

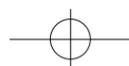
Where populists such as Spalding are much maligned for adopting an unsophisticated style to reach an 'unsophisticated audience', many remain at liberty to cultivate the older ploy of presenting 'lack of sophistication' as desirable to sophisticated audiences. Will Scotland continue to be a victim of its own propaganda, its official culture an amateur theatrical production? Even if its entire populace comes to understand and accept the values upon which populist artists and arts administrators proceed to shape them, they can play no part in the creation of those values or the decisions that flow from them. Following devolution, the official culture might grow in strength as power is further devolved to the 'New' generation of Labour monetarists who have duped themselves into believing that it is Scottish Culture.

In a devolved Scotland, such greatly empowered cultural emassaries may be unable to achieve true productiveness, to break out of the vicious circle of their fate. If they fail to become agents of history for themselves, they will remain blissfully isolated from the historical conditions that have determined their destiny, their actions relating only to the promotional structures of the art world, which will therefore remain the very fabric of their perceived history. As strangers in a world we have not made, we will continually find that our world is made in their image: Pat Lally appears at civic building, there is a vast picture of a stocky grinning character attached to its facade. Can Scottish culture be regenerated if the ossified clichés that dominate it are merely ridiculed? 'Scottishness' has already faced numerous forms of aesthetic de-legitimation. Attempts to redress the myths of official Scottish culture are inexorably pervaded with its romanticism, transfixed as they are by a culture they imagine they can successfully overmaster simply by

unmasking it. Often enough, the urge to unmask the duplicitous kilted culture is itself a mask for an urge to partake, to enjoy the apparent rewards it pretends to despise by further hypnotising an already bored and hypnotised audience. Since mystification is inevitably entailed by cultural practice, gestures opposed to official Scottish culture must rest parallel to its surface, and therefore cannot be produced through the fissures that they are often imagined to inhabit. Whether conscious or not, the objective will always be to preserve a model of a culture that is never more than the sum of its parts, to accept these rules in order to play the militant dilettante.

## Notes

1. Nicholas Fairbairn, "Prostitution", Daily Telegraph, October 19th 1976. Reprinted in Caroline Tisdall, "Art Controversies of the Seventies", British Art in the 20th Century, Roy Academy, p85.
2. Director General Roy Shaw, on the other hand, later condemned the exhibition: "It is my personal view that this is not the kind of thing which public money should be used for". R Shaw in Richard Cork "Richard Cork's 1976 Art Review", Evening Standard, 30th Decem 1976.
3. Briony Fer, "The modern in fragments", Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in Nineteenth Century, Yale University Press, 1993, p43.
4. T. J. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of Olympia in 1865", Screen, Spring 1980, p27.
5. As a barometer of British aesthetics in 1978 see Roger Taylor, Art: an Enemy of the Peo Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, and Sue Braden, Artists and People, Routledge & Kegan P 1978, both of whom elaborate the view that art is a partisan concept distinguished by certain associations which link it irrevocably with the middle classes.
6. Richard Cork, 'Art and Social Purpose', Studio International, 1976.
7. Art & Language, "Art for Society?", Art-Language Vol.4 No.4, June 1980. It remains to be seen how far Art & Language's 'Black Propaganda' (c.1978) differed from the critics and as they disparaged, given that they also made their cultural capital out of the rise of crisis criticism.
8. Charles Harrison & Fred Orton, A Provisional History of Art & Language, Editions E. F Paris, April 1982, p61.
9. Conrad Atkinson, "Correspondence: 'Lives' Lives", Art Monthly, No. 27, 1979, p28.
10. Andrew Brighton, interview with Adrian Searle, Review: "Towards Another Picture", Artscribe No. 10, January 1978, p48.
11. Andrew Brighton replies to John McEwen, Art Monthly No. 16, 1978, p20.
12. Andrew Brighton, "Artnotes", Art Monthly, No. 15, 1978, p32.
13. Julian Spalding, "Withdrawal of Government Support for the Arts", Art Monthly, No.21 1979, p24.
14. Julian Spalding, "The Forgotten Fifties", The Forgotten Fifties, Mappin Gallery, Sheffield 1984, p6.
15. John Roberts, "The Forgotten Fifties", Art Monthly, No. 77, June 1984, p16.
16. David Sweet, "Artists v. The Rest: The New Philistines", Artscribe 11, April 1978, p38.
17. See The Lamp of Memory: Scott and the Artist, Buxton Museum and Art Gallery, July August 25, 1979.
18. Prof. Plum, "Exhibition Information", The City is No Longer Safe, Largs Central Institut of Contemporary Cultural Productions and Non-Psychic Arse for the Encouragement of A Nihilism and/or Critical Consumption, June—July 1997; a themed exhibition from the Auditorium for Critical Attitudes to Self-identification with the Definition 'Cultural Produ as a Sufficient Response to Cultural Issues, near Stirling.



# Assuming Positions

## David Burrows

Jean Baudrillard's smug grin greeted me as I walked into 'Assuming Positions', the ICA's summer show that offered a speculative glance at the 'renewed romance between art and mainstream media'. The position assumed by the exhibition's curators was designed to be provocative and consisted of selecting work for its delight 'in the immediacy, accessibility and impact of the "pop" image'. The French sociologist's bulky figure, sheltering in the ICA to avoid the storm outside, vibrated with stifled, uncontrollable mirth and I remembered the heady conferences and exhibitions that announced the arrival of Post-Modernism, staged regularly at the ICA throughout the previous decade. I watched the Blackcurrent Tango *St George* ad, one of the shows star exhibits with its impossible 90 second tracking shot, and contemplated the question posed by the show's curator Gregor Muir, 'just what defines art as being "different"...' Baudrillard's eyes twinkled with Gaelic charm and I remembered his essay 'Beyond the vanishing point of art', an image that once fascinated me simply because it was an event I was unable to visualise. The spectre of Baudrillard's now forgotten thesis, that artists following Warhol's acceptance of 'absolute merchandise' should work to affect art's disappearance, was being raised by 'Assuming Positions', though the writer was never referenced by name. Baudrillard's admiration of Warhol is built on a crude misinterpretation but the question — is the uneasy relationship between art and mainstream culture disappearing — posed by the exhibition echoes Baudrillard's lines of thought. Through my naive, 'received idea' of Post-Modernism I thought that any artwork moving beyond a 'vanishing point' would have some strange, electronically-produced aura. Artworks that were 'pure signs', I thought, would be like the complex neon signs at the Kentucky Fried Chicken shop that made my eyes smart. Now I understand that art's disappearance, that is the collapse of the distance between art and mainstream culture and consumerism, could be a far less spectacular affair. So these were the issues I debated as I wandered around 'Assuming Positions' to kill time while I waited for the rain to stop.

'Assuming Positions' was a polite exhibition despite claiming its agenda was influenced by Dada. References to Haim Steinbach could be found in Tobias Rehburger's vases which were exhibited on plinths and completed with flowers. Rehburger suggests that the vases, made from a hollowed tree-trunk, ceramics and glass, embody the personalities of colleagues in the art world. They resemble Steinbach's displays, though Rehburger's sentimentalism is far removed from Steinbach's Duchampian analysis. In Rehburger's displays there seems to be little irony of the kind found in the work of Steinbach, Jeff Koons and the Neo-Geo artists such as Peter Halley. Supporters of these artists firmly believed in the 'Vanishing Point'. Neo-Geo, through its repeated mantra that nothing, not even abstraction, could escape capitalism's system of commodity / sign exchange, was an attempt to resist the 'Vanishing Point'. This brave front could not be maintained forever and, retrospectively, Neo-Geo art practices appear as a way of keeping the corpse of a Modernism warm, with its distinction between high and low culture intact. Was 'Assuming Positions' proof that this distinction was invalid or not worth making?

On the top floor of the ICA, Sarah Lucas' *The Great Flood*, a toilet in full working order but not much used, was placed in a central space in a room of its own. The toilet challenged visitors to publicly bare their toilet habits and made the 'fun slot' on several news programmes. News at Ten forgot to report that the piece parodied Francis Bacon's angst-ridden representations

of men on lavatories and Duchamp's celebrated, non-functioning urinal. Opposite Lucas' toilet, in the adjacent room, a cinematic projection of Jarvis Cocker performing a spoken version of *Babies*, directed by Pedro Romhany, flickered across the gallery wall. Comfy jute-covered poufs by Tobias Rehberger were provided in the same room. Not only could visitors sit down to watch Jarvis Cocker's antics, they could ponder whether their arses were supported by works of art or furniture at the same time. The question posed by the exhibition, however, was not, 'can you tell the difference between art and pop music, design and the Blackcurrent Tango ad?' Specialist disciplines are not undergoing a crisis; Lucas is unmistakably the artist and Cocker the pop star. 'Assuming Positions' instead asked, albeit through crude juxtapositions, whether the status of art as the estranged other of the twentieth century culture has disappeared, at least for some contemporary practitioners who show no signs of distress at being seen as just another branch of the culture industry. This would be hard to argue as Sarah Lucas' position but perhaps artists don't always have a choice in their relationship with the mainstream media which has learned not only to love art, but also value its current photogenic image. Further still, perhaps the admiration is mutual: maybe there is a love affair going on and it is not just a case of a mainstream media screwing contemporary art for quick gratification. As one-dimensional and as banal as 'Assuming Positions' often was, it is one of the few recent exhibitions to address this question. The show posed one further question too: 'Is this "romance" between art and mainstream culture a bad thing?' In current circumstances, the positioning of art in relation to 'popular culture' and a spectacular mass media remains one of the most important questions facing any practitioner. Art has of course not disappeared and many artists would not recognise the agenda of 'Assuming Positions' to be worthy of comment. However, a widespread questioning of the distance demanded by critical Modernism and Post-Modernism in relation to mass culture has occurred. In that sense 'Assuming Positions' was a missed opportunity. The dilemmas faced and new departures undertaken by artists who have collapsed or narrowed this 'distance' was not acknowledged in the show.

It was important that 'Assuming Positions' was international in its selection and by drawing on artists from Western Europe and America, rather than just from London, the exhibition implied that the 'romance' between art and mainstream media was a phenomenon common throughout the Western art world. Whether this is the case is hard to ascertain but certainly in Britain, style and fashion magazines and quality newspapers have been desperate for a bit of art to feature in their pages. In return, the exhibition's curator included a collaboration between fashion photographer Phil Poynter, whose work often appears in *Dazed and Confused*, and Katy England. The resulting collaboration, a series of photographs of a model taking her clothes off and then lighting her farts with a match in a darkened room, aspires to be art and begs the question why do some fashion designers / photographers desire to be recognised as artists? The motives behind magazines like *Dazed and Confused* featuring art might be less romantic: contemporary art can be utilised as a legitimising burst of serious or high culture.

Rather than choose between fidelity to the traditions of a critical Avant-Garde of the past or the embracing of mainstream and everyday culture, it might be possible to argue that some position occupying the tensions of this relationship is possible. This was the position occupied by the most engaging work

in the show by Hillary Lloyd who exhibited a tiny video monitor that played a documentary / portrait of a woman having her hair cut entitled *Nuala and Rodney*. Another documentary / portrait, *Dominic*, displayed on two monitors, presented the journey of a DJ to and from the club Heaven. The artist's concerns are similar to that of ID magazine but there is also an interest in chance. Lloyd appears to be a contemporary flâneur, finding her subjects through chance encounters in clubs and night-time London. Like some others of her generation, Lloyd occupies a position which does not place itself above everyday and popular culture (both her own and other people's) but, at the same time, is not entirely affirmative of that culture either. There is no need to write a manifesto on this position as this is what many artists have done and are doing anyway.

If for the present moment we accept some kind of shift has occurred in the discourse about art's relationship to mainstream media and consequently the critical distance demanded by Conceptual and Post-Conceptual Art in the 70s and 80s appears, due to a number of circumstances, less and less feasible, perhaps one aspect of Conceptualism can be drawn upon. Conceptual Art can claim a significant intervention in the relationship between an audience and an artwork. By challenging a 'Modernist Protocol' conceptual artists created new conditions of audienceship by turning modernism's passive viewers into readers and interpreters of an artwork's contingencies. What was lacking in the curation of 'Assuming Positions' was a challenge to Post-Modern protocol and a consideration of new conditions of audienceship for our contemporary situation.

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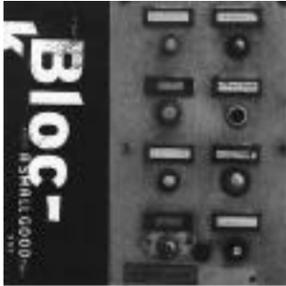
# SoundScape

Recent experimental CD releases reviewed

Robert H. King

## A Small, Good Thing: Block

Leaf, Bay2CD



The genre hopping ASGT release that has to be their finest and most accomplished work to date. Block sees them leaving behind their 'Ry Cooder on skunkweed' excursions for some serious funk up drifting Dictaphone laden groove narrative, sort of John Barry and A Certain Ratio meeting head on in a soundtrack for a low budget (but bags of style) detective movie, Harry Palmer meets Raymond Chandler. The cool flowing breezy keyboard intro suffused with a lone trumpet on 'Cooling System' sets the mood and pace for nine chapters in the life of someone you'll never meet but whose diary you've read. The distant thunderstorm on 'Moving Heat Source' soon makes way for some clean brisk drum loops and weather system percussion blowing its way to 'The Horn' and a voice snatched from the aether, providing the backdrop for some wonderfully bright basslines. But don't despair its not all clean livin', Block has its fair share of dirty treats and there are moments of raw genius here. On first listening it appears straightforward enough, but press the endless repeat function on your CD player and it gradually seeps into your psyche and like the stunning artwork that wraps this release up there are hidden storylines inside just waiting to be discovered. Block is like nothing else you'll hear this year. Fresh and up but with a sting in its tail.

## Beat System: 2297

Time Recordings, em:t 2297, CD

"Invade areas where nothing's definite". The phrase (spoken by John Cage) that starts this latest emission from the impeccable Nottingham based label is an apt description of their output to date. Never being quite sure what to expect from the em:t series is part of the attraction. Never repeating themselves in terms of musical output is an admirable stance, many would be tempted to 'milk the winning formula dry', but Time Recordings continue to release innovative debut work. Beat System is an oddly deceptive name as the sounds on this disc don't adhere to any ideas of techno or ballistic junglism, instead it weaves its way majestically through voice experiments, binaural and electronic recordings of fireworks, soaring guitar treatments in the vein of Sylvian/Czukay/Brook/Eno, musique concrete re-appraisals and seductive weightless minimalism that pays homage to Glass, Reich, Riley and La Monte Young. Acknowledging and exploiting such diverse influences could so easily fall flat on its digital face but Beat Systems Derek Pierce pulls it off big time easily producing one of the most impressive releases in this em:t series to date.

## Benge:I, Computer

Expanding Records, ECD497, CD



A shift in geographical location and a shift in dynamics sees the digital Benge hitting the road with a frenetic display of rhythmic acrobatics. This, his fourth release, takes a hyper-stylised route to greater things, as previous releases, impressive though they were, merely threw us glimpses of what Benge is capable of and with I, Computer he seems to have found the right path. A rattle and drum machine trip departure from his more soothing style (see Variant 3) takes him on the road to a more 'Detroit' approach, but still maintaining an appealing mix of gentle pulses and high end scrapes and scratches interspersed with haunting synth lines. This adventurous departure will no doubt see comparisons being made to the acclaimed Richie Hawtin (Plastikman, and that's no bad thing). Given better distribution

Benge will be destined for bigger things, but at present his self produced material is developing at a welcome pace.

## Adam Bohman: Last Orders

Mycophile, Spor03, CD

As a member of Morphogenesis Adam provided prepared violin and strings but what he presents us with here is an intriguing array of sound sources: wine glasses, balalaika, wire brush on tiles, toy telephone, muted trumpet and self built string instruments, to name but a few. Gradually unfolding gentle and soothing textures at first delicate and intricate, steadily build into moments of intense abrasiveness only to slip back into the depths of meditative calm. Last Orders has been skilfully crafted with the attention to detail of a watchmaker, making for a work of true electronic experimentation.

## Nocturnal Emissions: Sunspot Activity (Soleilmoon, Sol52, CD)

For almost two decades Nigel Ayers as Nocturnal Emissions has maintained a singular iconoclastic vision, to produce music that is innovative and challenging. He has survived the 'Industrial era' that produced a spate of visceral recordings (no doubt leaving many listeners with hearing impairments), been sampled by Afrika Bambaata and The Soul Sonic Force, moved to the solitude of the Derbyshire countryside and composed moments of sheer beauty and reflection and has been embraced by performance dance troupes. Each album has broken new ground and Sunspot Activity is no exception. Ayers makes no attempts to disguise the unashamedly lo-tech conception of the sound sources used: the crackle and distorted drift of a vinyl run-out groove, bursts of reverse loop bells and chimes, fractured electronic layers of the analogue kind and snatches of cosmic radio frequencies all merge seamlessly to create a hypnotic and tangibly coherent night-time soundtrack.

## Michael Prime: Cellular Radar

Mycophile, Spor01, CD

Michael Prime is an ecologist/conservationist and like Adam Bohman (see above) was a member of Morphogenesis providing electronics and sound projections. Since the age of 12 he has developed an interest in electronics that has more recently grown into a fascination with the hidden sounds that are all around us but for which we don't have the sensory organs to perceive. Using a bio-activity translator he records the electrical activity of living things (plants and fungi etc.) turning them into an audible signal, weaving them into acoustic environmental sounds and incorporating electronics to produce stunning sonic landscapes that ebb and flow with an at once graceful and violent fluidity. Listening to these recordings on headphones leaves one reeling with their spatial dynamics, phase shifts and snatches of the human voice speeding from the back of your head out to either ear before spinning round to be enveloped in a wall of processed sound.

## Paul Schütze: Second Site 27° 37' 35" N 77° 13' 05" E

Virgin, AMBT23, CD

For me Schütze is a true innovator, constantly shifting his axis but never losing sight of his ultimate musical goals, his skill lies in envisioning the end work and absorbing the mastery of his chosen musical partners. This is possibly one of the few genuine 'ambient' releases available in that it aurally describes the sound of a space, an environment, in this instance a sound documentation of an 18th Century astronomical garden located in the city of Jaipur, India. Over its 100 minutes (102 sections) a calming female voice narrates descriptions of the sites pillars, spheres and stairs and their interaction with the sun and how an individual

can affect them, "To move through these structure to set them in motion...". One is ineluctably drawn into this immense work and that it was produced with a minimum of instrumentation: flute, percussion and sound processing combined with the voice it could almost be said that it is approaching a state of musical geomancy.

## Spoke: Spoke

Noise Museum, NM009, CD

This wins the award for packaging of the year. The disc has a miniature bicycle tyre around the rim and sealed between two sheets of card screen printed to look like wheels and held together with a miniature wing nut, just brilliant. The material (recorded live the 'Musiques Ultimes' Festival in France last year 41 minutes of seamless percussive brilliance. The 1st offsprung of the mighty 23 Skidoo play searing basslines over dirt track drums and mountain bike interspersed with some unique samples, "...becoming cyclonic..." from the shipping forecast is a stroke of genius. The live sound is cavernous, natural reverb adding to the echoing drum loops and deployed whistles create a mesmeric, heady mix of percussive improvisation and meditative funk.

## David Toop: Spirit World

Virgin, AMBT22, CD

For Spirit World Toop assumes the role of virtual traveller, lucid dreamer and shamanic storyteller. The opening moments of 'Ceremony viewed through iron slit' with bursts of aether static and fragmented narrative open up the minds' eye to an inner world of striking images of exotica and roads yet untravelled. Snapshots of electric trumpet gracefully drift over charged soundscapes (courtesy of Scanner) whilst tar and cymbal drones (supplied by Robert Hampson of Main), shakers, tablas, flute and e-bow blend effortlessly with Max Eastley's inflatable percussion. Too list of collaborators which extends to include the H Hop/ Junglist Witchman, Michael Prime (bat recordings) and Toshinori Kondo perfectly exemplifies the current state of experimental music in that it embraces the notion of an embarkation point where many disciplines converge continually providing new and exciting paths to tread. Toop's (highly recommended) 'Ocean of Sound' revived my interest in experimental music, Spirit World re-affirms that interest.

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Em:t / Time Recordings distributed by Pinnacle.

Expanding Records:

P.O. Box 130, Loughton, Essex IG10 1AY, UK.

Leaf distributed by Vital.

Mycophile:

30 Petten Grove, Orpington, Kent BR5 4PU UK

Soleilmoon

distributed by Vital or contact: P.O. Box 83296

Portland, OR 97283 USA.

Virgin releases should be available from any good record store.