

Back Issues

volume 1

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letters

Axis bold as brass

Dear Editor

The Board of Directors and Trustees of Axis have noted your article "Limited Axis" in your Autumn edition, which will usefully contribute to our monitoring and review of our service. We would point out however, that Axis remains committed to providing an accessible and democratic service, delivered through a number of complementing processes and mechanisms to provide information which is useful and beneficial to both enquirer and artists. However, the growth of our outlets, and progress towards our five year target of ten thousand artists cannot be achieved overnight, and require considerable resources.

Our service is free, except where printouts and contact sheets are required, which are charged at their minimum production costs. It is wholly erroneous to suggest that that (*sic*) the data supplied by artists 'is sold to drive' our business, which mainly depends on core funding from grants, supplemented by sponsorship and project income. The registration fee for artists is hardly excessive and, like the criteria for defining professional practice, is founded on extensive consultation with artists themselves. Our criteria is not elitist, but practical, and we make no exclusive aesthetic of evaluative judgements, believing that the information we provide should be rich enough to enable users to make their own judgements by whatever criteria is applicable to their individual needs.

We are also committed to developing full interactive web access to the register, but there are issues of copyright and protection of artists image which need addressing, and require more careful consideration. However, it is naive to suggest that the web itself is the democratic solution, and it is precisely because of the current very class, race and gender exclusiveness of the web that we are committed to a range of access platforms and mechanisms that together will ensure a broader constituency of users.

The feedback we obtain from both artists and users, along with our very thorough monitoring, provide a considerably more positive picture than your reviewer suggests. Neither does your reviewer's negative prediction for Axis match the rapidly increasing use of our service, the regular success stories we receive from artists who have benefited from being on the register, nor the enthusiasm and support we received at the launch in December of our first London Axis point. Yours sincerely

Doug Sandle

Chair of the Axis Board of Directors and Trustees

Variant Replies

Originally we had no intention of printing the above response, but on Marshall Anderson's request we undertook to publish it. Readers familiar with Anderson's article in Variant, issue 4 will have noticed that Sandle provides nothing to address or refute any of its carefully argued points. Instead he just blabs away with all this blatant hyperbole on his own organisation. The huge amounts of money seemingly wasted on Axis have in our opinion still to be accounted for, this was their chance to reply and they can't, or won't address any of the real issues. Also, who is on the board of Axis and how did they get there?

Variant's website is under construction as we go to press, but you can contact us by E-Mail at:

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John Beagles

Make me wanna holler, throw up both my hands

I WANTED TO ENJOY Tracy Emin's performance on the Tate gallery after dinner 'round table chat', but I couldn't. Despite my satisfaction at Roger Scruton's inability to disguise his misogynist contempt for the worthless piece of seaside flotsam he took Tracy Emin to be, it was impossible to suppress the thought that she had been set up. Sure it was enjoyable to see the tedium of television's professionalism ripped apart, to marvel at the drunken pomposity of David Sylvester, but once Tracy Emin had staggered off, I couldn't help feeling her irritation, frustration and anger had been expected and engineered.

The ensuring media/art world frenzy over Emin's 'outrageous remarks and behavior' seemed indicative of an increasingly dominant attitude towards her. Rapidly she is being maneuvered into the role of official young British Art's bad girl. In much of the patronising discussion surrounding her personae (rarely her work), there is more than a whiff of her being labeled as representative of a new breed of noble savage/idiot savant. While a lot of what Tracy Emin said on the Tate gallery discussion and Will Self's Saturday night chit chat was drunken rubbish, some of her objections to the misrepresentations of British Art rang true. However as they were articulated illegitimately (i.e. they didn't observe the dominant protocols of art discussion) they were either passed over or blatantly ignored¹.

Instead of considering why her remarks aren't deemed worthy of 'serious discussion' what becomes valuable and prized about Emin is her commitment to "getting everything out in the open" in her "naive, intense, raw, honest, direct, powerful, true stories"². As the noble savage from the exotic hinterland of Margate, Emin is attractive to those who find themselves simultaneously emotionally neutered, consumed with a voyeuristic appetite for a bit of 'rough' and harboring a romantic belief in the naturalness and truth of the "ordinary people". That her experiences as one of "the ordinary people"³, a not too atypically screwed up South coast misfit, who spent her formative years butting her head against the oppressive conservatism and misogyny of a seaside town the Germans forgot to bomb, is all well and good for a London art world plagued by guilt about its privileges and accusations of elitism⁴.

The roots of the privileging of Emin the artist, as solely a survivor, are multidimensional. As the embodiment of one kind of nineties female artist, her qualities of resilience and strength are highly valuable and important. By not giving a fuck about the petty, polite protocols of small minded Britain, the insipid machismo of the art world and particularly in setting up her own 'museum' she has, to use the talk show jargon, set a positive role model. Similarly her "rude aesthetic"⁵ detailing her experiences of abortion, sexual violence and her various relationships may have undoubtedly gone some way towards legitimising (again) areas of female experience previously stigmatised and marginalised.

However it's also possible to see the marketing and discussion of her as indicative of the return of an old spectre, albeit in new clothes.

The art world was very fond of its tortured, heroic male geniuses. Modernism's church was after all built with the supernova life-force of its worshipped deities. Struggling away in the garret, tortured by the likelihood of misunderstanding, such biographical details of male artists' victories provided the grist to the mill of the mythology of modernism. Artists had to be out of control, possibly slightly insane; insanity was a trademark, a byword for authenticity, originality and quality. A juicy life sold the monographs.

Then wave after wave of criticism landed on modernism; feminism exposed the phallogocentrism (exposure is always the best method of ensuring deflation), post structuralism peeled back the myth of originality and the conceptualists blew apart the lazy easy going role of language in relation to art. Even the attempt in the 1980s to claw back some of modernism's lost power, under the guise of the neo-expressionists' oh so ironic and clever strategy of—"we make big paintings, with big brushes, but we don't really mean it. Please make the cheque payable to..."—failed. Even Saatchi had trouble selling their stuff!

Much of the discussion about Tracy Emin highlights that for many she represents the return of the kind of classic modernist artist neo-expressionism had tried to resurrect. It is perverse that this incarnation of the artist as an "uncreated creator"⁶, a primitive expressionist bestowed with a unique, special gift operating in a sacred, separate space is exactly the kind the conceptualists and feminists thought they had seen off. Except of course, this is the twist, the point. This time the artist in question comes with the added bonus of being a guilt free incarnation everyone can enjoy. After all she's a woman. How could any of those old critiques of originality, authenticity etc. apply to her?

However a quick glance at some of her most prominent coverage highlights that for many she represents exactly this kind of artist. Ranging from David Barrett's universalising: "We are swept into acceptance by the sheer force of the personality", to his revealing remark "it's not always what she says, but how she says it that is so powerful"⁷ and onwards to Stuart Morgan's impersonation of Claire Rayner "the first time you had sex, was it against your will [luvvie]"⁸ it's impossible to escape the feeling that we are again in the presence of the "charismatic power of the creator"⁹.

Such a collapsing of the distinction between the artist and the work has powerful and worrying precedents. The monolithic power Picasso wielded via the fusion of his personality and art was so potent it was frequently impossible to get any critical perspective on his work. Likewise I can't help but remember the tyranny of much 'critical postmodernist' work. Frequently the work was so private in its mapping of the symbolic and real violence handed out to those perceived as existing on the margins, that any attempt to critique it was seen as a personal attack. The free fall into all out subjectivity that resulted nullified discussion, created a climate of intimidation and ultimately lead to the stagnation of the work.

Now Tracy may not give a fuck, and she may gen-

uinely be telling the truth (whatever that means) but investing in her personal biography as the best route to understanding is and always has been only a partial truth in the casual construction of a piece of work (it doesn't matter if she doesn't think of it as art, it's still exposed to the same myriad of influences). For example whether she's conscious of it or not, the role of the art world is impossible to shake. It doesn't really matter if no one tells her not to make a text piece detailing an abusive encounter with Jay Jopling, the inference will hover in the air, subtle intonations towards making the drawings will float her way.

The truth of Emin's narratives, their authenticity does not just explode supernova like from within; such a perception of the sovereign autonomy of the self smothers any of the conflicts, paradoxes and pressures that she finds herself in, making the kind of work she does, in a particular artistic, cultural and social space.

Such an obsession with the utterances of the artist is also deeply problematic. Are only those artists who give good copy, worthy of attention?

While not wishing to position artists as mute bystanders, inarticulate grunts who simply produce, there does seem to be a need for mediation between their ideas about their work and writers, curators and the public's responses. Reading a book about Martin Scorsese recently I couldn't get past the point that my perception of Taxi Driver and his, are completely at loggerheads with each other. I don't see the film he thinks he made. But that doesn't invalidate the work or our mutually incommensurable opinions.

While the "in yer face" persona of Tracy Emin represents for many the good old fashioned, straight up and down, uncomplicated pleasures of expressionist fervor, she also has become the embodiment of a new culture of meritocracy, increasingly obsessed with the cult of survivors.

Natural fact is I can't pay my taxes

Tracy is a top class survivor, who as David Barrett says is "a great story" because while "Andy [Warhol] never recovered from his wounds, Tracy just gets stronger". The popular hook of her work is that by sharing in her experiences via her cathartic outpourings of pain and suffering, we too become spiritually, socially and emotionally liberated. Emancipation through empathy. Tracy becomes a kind of Ricki Lake guest for those who would never admit to watching TV.

Now pulling yer socks up, getting on yer bike, doing it your way etc. have always been popular old chestnuts in Britain. Rallying together wot wot saw us threw the war, weren't it? Mmm. For the salt of the earth, the tarts with hearts and the all singing all dancing miner's daughter, pulling yourself together and taking whatever life threw at yer, was the best way of up and out. However in them days the possibility of embarking on this route was at least mediated somewhat by the simultaneous belief in a welfare state and some level of support for those deemed at the bottom of the pile.

Then came Thatcher, who in the space of a couple of years instigated the germs of a new meritocracy, which in its brutal push to absolute self reliance did

Make me wanna holler, throw up both my hands

(continued)

away with such “nursing”. Mortally wounding the traditional aristocracy, its previously unchallenged power of natural and hereditary rights, Thatcher spawned a generation stamped with the ethos of competitive go-getting (at any costs) who were free to plunder a massively deregulated and inflated private sector. Later Nick Leeson revealed himself as her devil child; “the gentleman banker destroyed by the crudeness of yuppies, subverting old class with new money”¹⁰. Leeson learnt fast and didn’t stop in his hunger to make “shagloads of cash”¹¹.

If Leeson is one side of the legacy of Thatcherism then the concentration and obsession with only those who display the credentials of being survivors, of battlers, is the other. In making a fetish of Tracy Emin as an ex-victim, there is the real danger of forgetting and punishing the failure of those unable to pull themselves together, for whom “the natural fact is they can’t pay their taxes”¹². To paraphrase Spock: the success of the one outweighs the misery of the many. Models of hope and resilience are one thing, but a hierarchy of suffering, with only those who have really been through it being valued, is something else entirely. That this attitude is not unique to life under Thatcher is glaringly obvious, when Blair’s bubble bath version of self-reliance and moral responsibility is looked at. Under New Labour there persists the notion that the marker of a healthy society is one which provides ladders of opportunity for minorities to climb. But as Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard remark “the capability of individuals to climb the ladder at all depends on them not being more than a ladder length from their destination”¹³.

I really feel I’m in mortal danger of coming over all Elton John and Candle in the Wind about Tracy Emin. Seeing her pissed on TV, being patronised and condescended to, I found it hard to shake the memory of so many wild child who’ve been before. Only allowed to be one thing, defined by a caricature of themselves set up by others to satisfy their own needs, there are a limited number of moves they are permitted to make.

Lets face it once she’s exhausted her biography of all its really succulent cuts, once she finds that the next batch of biography to be ploughed involves her relationship with Maureen Paley, getting pissed on TV etc. then just how wonderful will her anecdotes, her painful narratives, appear. *What will she have survived then? What will she be emancipating herself from then?*

Critics, curators and many artists like to perpetuate the notion that the art world is a special space freed from the vicissitudes of the everyday, that it’s a clean place, empty of the abuses of power that ravage life outside. Enlightened, leading a moral vanguard, artists, critics and curators are above racial and sexual discrimination, sexual violence, class snobbery etc.

Unfortunately the way Tracy Emin finds herself being represented highlight that such behaviour is not the preserve of others.

“The class which has dominated Cambridge is given to describing itself as well mannered, polite, sensitive. It continually contrasts itself favourably with the rougher and coarser others. When it turns to the arts, it congratulates itself, overtly, on its taste and its sensibility; speaks of its pose and tone. If I then say that what I found was an extraordinary, coarse, pushing, name ridden group, I shall be told that I am showing class feeling, class envy, class resentment. That I showed class feeling is not in any doubt. All I would insist on is that nobody fortunate enough to grow up in a good home, in a genuinely well mannered and sensitive community, could for a moment envy these loud, competitive and deprived people. All I did not know then was how cold that class is. That came with experience.”¹⁴

notes

1 I know it could be argued her drunkenness insured she wasn’t taken seriously, but I think it’s worth asking what was it about both situations which prompted her to getting pissed. As Pierre Bourdieu remarks in his essay “The Linguistic Market” (Sociology in Question pub. Sage), the truth of plain talking is that, “when it is confronted with an official market, it breaks down”.

2 All adjectives come from David Barrets review of Tracy Emin’s one person show at the South London Art gallery in May 1997, in the

May edition of Art Monthly.

- 3 The lumpen catchphrase, much used by the BBC’s Jenny Bond and ITV’s John Suchet in the aftermath of Diana Spencer’s death, which has propelled them to the top of the hit list.
- 4 Gillian Wearing got rewarded for providing some defence against such accusations of elitism with her pseudo documentaries. However Gillian Wearing has always been smart enough to jump camps when it suits. In one interview she’s speaking the language of an old fashioned documentary filmmaker, one who believes the camera is a benign presence which objectively records the thoughts emotions of its subjects, the next, well it’s all just a big con, they’re actors playing a part and I wrote the text on the signs.
- 5 Paula Smithard “There’s a tenuous line between sincerity and sensationalism” Make June/ July 1997.
- 6 This is Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase from the essay “But Who Created the ‘Creators?’” in *Sociology in Question* pub. Sage.
- 7 David Barret review of Tracy Emin’s one person show South London Art Gallery in the June edition of Art Monthly.
- 8 Stuart Morgan’s interview with Tracy Emin in *Frieze* makes entertaining reading. It’s hard to imagine anyone else being asked the question “in your work you talk about anal sex a lot, does it have to be pictured so violently?”. Perhaps of course that is the point; Tracy is unique and therefore deserves such treatment.
- 9 Pierre Bourdieu “Who created the creators?” in *Sociology in Question* published Sage.
- 10 *A Class Act—The Myth of Britain’s Classless Society* Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard
- 11 *Ibid.* Pag 45
- 12 Marvin Gaye *Inner City Blues* from the album *Whats Going On*. In many ways the fetish made of Tracy Emin’s suffering, and the incumbent problems, isn’t a million miles away from that afforded to many singers/ songwriters, artists such as Marvin Gaye and Bob Dylan.
- 13 *Ibid.* page 15.
- 14 *A Class Act—The Myth of Britain’s Classless Society* Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard

Guaranteed disappointment:

Punk graphic design at the Festival Hall

Neil Mulholland

The rip-off riff's authentic ring

A singer who can't really sing

Can only mean one fucking thing

Punk rock revival

Affect the look of a man obsessed

Predisposed to the prestressed

Now you know you're properly dressed

Punk rock revival¹

FOLLOWING A STINT of trouble-making at Croydon Art School, Jamie Reid began production of the Suburban Press, a publication which resulted from his disillusionment 'at how jargonistic and non-committal left-wing policies had become'² during the early '70s. It was while working on the Suburban Press that Reid made his most significant attempts to break out of the mould of Situationist

artiness and the Left's agit-prop in-fighting. Four years later, his 'rip off' graphics and Helen Wellington-Lloyd's 'ransom note' lettering were the benchmarks of 'punk design'. Reid's graphic experiments did not occur in isolation. In general, the 1970s saw a steady growth in 'radical amateurism' as montage techniques were adopted by photoconceptualists, community photographers, feminists, and anti-fascists alike. MINDA's photomontage designs for the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism³ confronted the rise of Fascism by drawing allusions between the images of the Conservative Party, the National Front and the Nazis.

Reid, meanwhile, was carrying out an assault on the iconography of fascism. It would seem that for him, MINDA's strategies were examples of the simplistic propaganda they opposed. From placing a swastika in place of the Queen's eyes (**God Save The Queen**) to forming a swastika from marijuana leaves (**Never Trust a Hippie**), Reid ridiculed fascist iconography by striking at its very heart, de-centring its power by problematising the meaning of its imagery.

The curators of *Destroy: Punk Graphic Design in Britain*—an exhibition of 400 record sleeves, posters and fanzines at the Royal Festival Hall on London's South Bank—have made little concerted effort to locate punk's contributions within a heterodox range of visual practices. However, this exhibition isn't about punk. It's about 'punk graphic design' and their histories are not necessarily identical. Writing in 1980, Peter York noted that the 'main thing that punk introduced was the idea of cut-ups, montage—a bit of Modern Artiness—to an audience who'd never heard of eclecticism. Punk was about changing the meanings of things'⁴ a view which has been dusted down to champion the exhibits in *Destroy*. A problem here might be that such blow-dried approval was clearly intended to celebrate punk's recuperation into the spectacle against which—disciples of its mythical origins cherish to enlighten us—it ought to have rebelled against. Of course, as

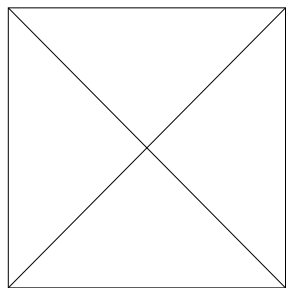
everyone is also advised, McLaren and Reid recognised from the beginning that delinquent subcultures, since created through the channels of the mass-media, could only simulate revolution.

Perhaps, then, it is reasonable to claim that punk's anti-design stance had always made the whole enterprise peculiarly *arty*. Not according to another popular myth currently being rehashed, this being that punk designers were untrained, anonymous figures, their designs raw and uncouth, using anything that came to hand—their aim being to deface the designs of happy hippies trained at art school. It is true to say that many designers remain anonymous while designated designers such as Sebastian Conran, who produced promotional material for The Clash, were self-taught. Yet many celebrated punk designers were trained at art school, and for them plagiarism was more of a carnivalesque prank than political art terrorism directed against Western property values. Malcolm Garrett began designing sleeves for the Buzzcocks while still a student at Manchester Polytechnic, where he had developed a taste for International Constructivism: 'I began merging a number of things I liked, the pioneering type of graphic experiments like Futurism and Bauhaus from earlier in the century with stuff from pop art and Andy Warhol.'⁵ In the summer of 1977, Garrett's fellow student (and future Assorted Images co-designer) Linder Sterling was finishing her dissertation on the sanitisation of punk. Her photomontage for the Buzzcocks **Orgasm Addict** (1977), while having obvious precedents in dada and surrealism, most closely mirrored the kinds of anti-consumerist montage produced by mail artists and feminist community photographers in the '70s, satirising imagery from magazines such as *Woman's Own*. Certainly such punk 'designs' were formally chaotic, irregular and harsh, while as 'cultural productions' they appeared subversive in intent. All laudable credentials for any aspiring subculture, but wasn't a very similar 'anti-aesthetic' to be found in the converse Hegelian logic of grunge-formalism which had demarcated 'fine art' from 'design' in most art schools since the late 1960s? *Destroy* is testament to such a view, given that it was not organised by anarcho-syndicalist employees of the Royal Festival Hall, but by Maria Beddoes and Paul Khera, a duet of sentimental graphic designers who, as students, had been inspired by punk to cast aside their airbrushes and set squares in revolutionary ferment: 'This is *The Evening Standard*. This is *Fiesta*. This is a pair of scissors. Now form an advertising Consultancy.'

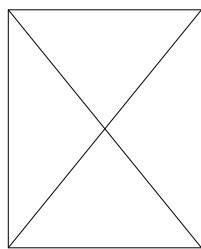
'The idea that you can still go out and do what you want is coming back at last', says Ben Kelly sleeve designer for Godley & Creme, A Certain Ratio, and The Cure among others. 'I still count myself as one of the lucky generation', fortuitously suggesting that some 'punk' designers were luckier than others.⁶ If anything, the cult of the individual designer was reinforced by punk's 'version of the credo *quia absurdum est*: you don't like it but you do it anyway; you get used to it and you even like it in the end.'⁷ Copyright, an issue previously of little interest to graphic designers, became *the* hot topic, (battles continue to take place over the attribution of many Pistols graphics.) Who was the best designer outlaw; who was the least indi-

vidual? Generating such contradictions, of course, was the whole point. However, given its pedigree, is it still possible to relish the 'irony' of such ambivalence? Adopting a visual vocabulary and style which was entertaining, yet acidly absurd, Reid famously recorded attempts to erase the Pistols from cultural history (**Never Mind the Bans**, 1977), before interminably representing their demise in posters and merchandising, much of which is represented in *Destroy*. Yet Reid's fear that 'the posters would end up as decor for trendy lefties' bedroom walls⁸, was misplaced, for this is one of many times in which they have found their legitimate home in a vinyl sleeved cube, the art-gallery-as-record-fair; legitimate since, according to Reid's version of punk, assaulting the pop scene head on, simply gave the Pistols a lot of publicity, enabling them to make 'Cash out of Chaos'. Khera has an analogous incongruous fable: 'The Pistols were playing on a boat across the river and were banned from coming ashore by the police. We knew that the show would get more of a reaction here and it seems an ironic venue because of punk hating royalty.'⁹ One end product of this version of events is Saatchi art. Literally. **New Labour, New Danger** (1996) saw Reid's Readers'-Wives style letterbox eyes and rip-off-style-ripped-off by the Right. To complicate matters, New Labour themselves appear to have heeded McLaren's 10 lessons in how to mask reaction in the doak of youth and revolt.

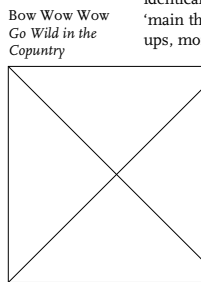
Like New Labour, *Destroy* is also about what it excludes, reminding us that cultural history results from a suppression of possibilities. It would have been interesting to have seen Genesis P-Orridge's **Paranoia Club** business cards here ('E know you don't write back because you hate us'), or perhaps a few posters such as **Gainsborough's Blue Movie Boy**, and **Gary Gilmore Memorial Society**. It seems unfortunate to have missed such an opportunity to have presented Throbbing Gristle's proto-punk work as COUM Transmissions, much of which has far greater appeal than Reid's numerous homages to the Motherfuckers. Unlike many punks who were relatively new to such matters, TG/COUM had been practicing for seven years as performance artists. They had also spent a great deal of time developing punk's deliberately offensive fascination with murderers and criminals, although in this, they were far from alone.¹⁰ TG were particularly adept at arousing an extreme response, leaving people in a dialectical position where they could not switch the situation off as a joke. Many of their record sleeves which are on display, on first inspection seem bland, a banal photograph of an everyday location, but to the initiated the spot is the scene of a crime, usually a rape or grisly murder. Representing the shock effects of sex crime, thought designer Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson, would provide an effective route to challenge the hegemony of the mass-media's manipulative sensationalism. With a heady mix of urban decay and accounts of the last murder and subsequent apprehension of the Moors Murders,¹¹ TG pushed sado-masochistic performance to its limits: 'Is it only legality that prevents the artist from slaughter of human beings as performance? ... Ian Brady and Myra Hindley photographed landscapes on the Moors in England where they had buried chil-



NEW ORDER
Procession 7" 1981



BARNEY BUBBLES



Bow Wow Wow
*Go Wild in the
Copuntry*

dren after sexually assaulting and killing them. Landscapes that only have meaning when perceived through their eyes. Art is perception of the moment. Action. Conscious. Brady as a conceptual performer? ...What separates crime from art action? Is crime just unsophisticated or 'naive' performance art? Structurally Brady's photos, Hindley's tapes, documentation.¹² This 'investigation' into the links between art, sex, prostitution and crime, provoked press malpractice and misinterpretation at a time when most of their short attention span was focused on the Pistols.¹³ As a result, P-Orridge received a number of death threats. Satirically exposing the hypocrisy of this situation, *Death Threats* appeared as a track on **Dead on Arrival: The Third and Final Report of Throbbing Gristle** (1978). The record sleeve dryly alludes to child pornography, involvement with which P-Orridge was also being wrongly accused of at the time.

COUM's feud with the 'straight' artworld was clear, as P-Orridge encouraged the use of text as purely graphic, verbal abstraction, stating that: "In much contemporary art words are juxtaposed with images and photographs. I do the same in a small exchangeable format. (It amuses me to parody real world / art world)."¹⁴ As for many punk designers, radical amateurism demanded a humorous assault on categorisation and intellectualisation. In many ways this served to challenge the pretensions of semiotic art and rectify the solicitous nature of educational photography by transforming them into humorous forms of insubordination. Early punk graphics derided the vogue for appending abstruse theoretical texts with fetishistic imagery: 'COUM have nothing to say and they're saying it. Make your own theory. COUM have no game to play and they're playing it.'¹⁵

However, by maintaining a contradictory and absurd stance, much punk design refused to establish the wider contexts in which it might retain a critical stance or challenge viewers to shift the goalposts for themselves. The punk fascination with highly conventional textual and visual cues of crime stories and pornography tended to disallow the ability to manipulate words and images to suggest new meanings: 'To suggest that the prerogative of art is simply to touch on possibilities without comment surely shows an insufficient grasp of visual rhetoric. ...Surely he must see that no amount of manipulation of context can redeem the use of the [Auschwitz] gas-chamber logo; in purely artistic terms, which he cannot escape, there are such things as a sense of diminished responsibility and a law of diminishing returns.'¹⁶ While the arbitrariness of verbal and visual language allowed for graphic artist's manipulation, their control over what was ultimately signified was tenuous at best. For better or worse, punk designers were unwilling to fully manipulate their audience's conclusions, that is, the artist's authority, once the work was in production, was ignored. Yet, even this much was never quite certain with TG. As a riposte to their tarnished image, TG appeared in Aran knit sweaters with Land Rover on an English coastal hillside for *20 Jazz-Funk Greats*, one of the highlights of *Destroy*.

Given that playing games is the major design concern here, the emphasis in the design of the later '70s and early '80s shifts away from 'punk' bands, towards New Wave and New Romantic bands. From the point of view of designers in 1976, such designs would not be 'punk'. This, however, presupposes that punk graphic design was primarily a question of form. It may seem absurd today to think that punk imagery could still be valued for its 'subcultural' status, but it remains clear that it contributed more than a little to changing the social, economic and political topography of Britain. Nonetheless, for many in the late 1970s, regarding record sleeve designs as possible solutions to the problem of the artist's contribution to the perpetuation of an oppressive system, would have made them guilty of the egotism and elitism they deplored: 'If they did anything, they made a lot of people content with being nothing. They certainly didn't inspire the working classes.'¹⁷ Such New Wave sensibilities therefore tend to dominate a great deal of the designs exhibited in *Destroy*.

In all, this seems to have been particularly pressing given that *Destroy* is the third in an annual series of exhibitions at the South Bank Centre entitled *Towards the Millennium*, each of which aim to capture the 'zeitgeist' of a decade through its art or design. Hence, we are given the impression that, from 1978, a greater

number of sleeve designs became more absolute, while others look like baroque creations fit to challenge the collection of souvenirs of art history that inspired them. In most cases, however, the carnivalesque and agitational side of punk seems to convert to an emphasis upon record-design-as-commodity. Given that many sleeve designers had quickly abandoned the anti-aesthetic, the emphasis on commodity fetishism was an ingenious means of ensuring that records did not lose their newly acquired art status.

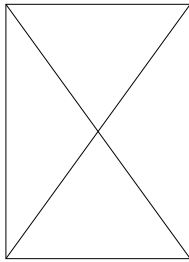
The sleeves selected for the later section of the exhibition explore the ways in which designers sought to correlate style and function when both were in an indeterminate context, producing designs without being preoccupied with the appearance of making or effacing art. The ironic 'Industrial' style which had been initiated by TG in the lead up to the 'Winter of Discontent', was reformulated and taken literally by technological determinists such as Cabaret Voltaire, Brian Eno, and Ben Kelly. Ultra-elegant Industrial sleeves inspired a plethora of designers to lovingly refine the utopian aspirations of ubiquitous modernist schools of design. Drawing on Garrett's successful appropriation of International Constructivist styles, Peter Saville turned his back on felt-tip and photomontage, and injected a melodramatic sentiment of romantic disintegration into the late 1970s by highjacking modernist design for a new generation of 'pale boys' raised on Kraftwerk and Berlin Bowie. Saville elicited a busy abstract sublime, activated by an engaging tension between a mass-produced look and a painstakingly handworked feel to the finished products for Joy Division, New Order and The Durutti Column. The operative tone of Factory designs remained hopeful and visionary, but exuded a powerful lack of meaning and place, creating a look which was neither critical nor nostalgic, but evolutionary.

Prophetically, Peter York once regarded punk designers as an important guide to this new Leisure Class, a new moneyed class which rejected the academic values of the middle-classes, replacing the pedantic rationality of 'good taste' with 'a pluralism of pleasure.'¹⁸ Certainly, Thatcher's emphasis on self-fulfillment, authenticity, and freedom of choice had an obvious appeal to participants in the sixties cultural revolution, many of whom were impresarios. Hence, in liberal post punk design, the consumer was king, driven by the desire to maximise pleasure. New Romantic design was a part of the raw, uncouth, socially, psychologically and sexually insecure new elite who were either unable or unwilling to attain the 'academic values' associated with Old Labour, values which had secured some members of the excluded a safe path to success since W.W.II. Such designers were set to take the lead in the corporate image-centred world of the 1980s. New Romantic sleeves openly celebrated the erasure of historical claims to knowledge made by the academic estate, while maligning of the nihilism and amateurism of Punk by re-establishing a perfectionist emphasis on image and 'product'. BOW WOW WOW's sources are absurdly eclectic. See *Jungle...* (1981, RCA), Nick Egan's translation of Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*, made the pointed suggestion that style and content were both subservient to the vagaries of fashion, stirring up a superficiality that would often border on neurosis. Following a similar line of reasoning Steve Strange, ex-frontman of punk outfit The Moors Murderers, formed the 'collective studio project' *Visage* in 1979 with Blitz DJ Rusty Egan, Midge Ure and Billy Currie of Ultravox, and John McGeoch, Dave Formula and Barry Adamson from Magazine. Announcing it 'leisure time for the pleasure boys', they quickly found themselves invited to all the right cosmopolitan parties with rich high profile social termites so despised by punk, and henceforth became the music press' whipping boy. Robotic beats, banks of varied synthesisers, flattened vocals, and the message

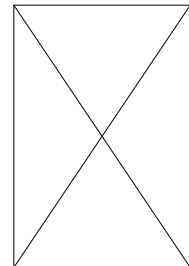
of terminally repeated choruses concealed the void between dead-end daily jobs and night time fantasies of The New Darlings of Decadence, who, deriding the conventionality of fashionable outrage, heralded the new order of posing: "New styles, New shapes / New modes, they're to roll my fashion tapes / Oh my visage / Visuals, magazines, reflex styles / Past, future, in extreme / Oh my visage."¹⁹ Strange's desire to substantiate and enrich his own image by depicting his own body as the source of his style was quintessentially New Romantic. The 1982 retrospective album *The Anvil* (Polydor), named after New York's infamous leather 'n' bondage dive, was launched at Strange's very own Paris fashion show. The album cover saw Strange in a Luchino Visconti movie-still photographed by the master of soft porn and presentation incarnate, Helmut Newton. Inevitably, Saville was responsible for the ceremonial graphics.

Despite being responsible for the slick consumer packaging of Public Image LTD's *Public Image* (1978), the typewritten amateurism of punk fanzines such as **South London Stinks** (Anon. 1977) remained in the early issues of Terry Jones' **ID**. This magazine was quickly transformed into a market leader, as the editorial emphasis switched entirely to fashion, its punky credentials distancing it from advocates of the heinous 'graphix' style found in late '70s fashion journals such as *VIZ: Art, Photography, Fashion*. With Garrett occasionally helping out with design, *iD* succeeded to switch the British Fashion Press' emphasis away from prosaic interviews with 'Them' designers such as Zandra Rhodes and the Logan Brothers. Instead was lucid reportage of the outrageous fashions being worn 'on the streets' and at venues such as *Blitz, St. Moritz, Hell, Le Kilt* and *Le Beetroot* where nightclubs had been turning up as living works of art. Here was a sharp, timely contrast to the grubbiness of punk. Theatrical get ups; swashbuckling pirate clothing, Kabuki masks, make-up, and transvestites were all welcomed. There were sad Pierrot clowns, majorettes, toy soldiers, puritans and Carmen Mirandas. *VIZ* went into receivership, while Strange's *Eighties Set* took off. Following two entire editions of *The Face* (English for *Visage*) devoted to them,²⁰ The Now Crowd suddenly became an international movement, 'The Cult with No Name', with an article in *Time*, and lavish spreads in Continental magazines from *Stern* to *Vogue*.

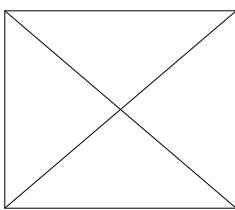
Not all New Wave design was as slick and polished as the airbrushed glam that punk rebelled against; nor was it all obsessed with mannerism and the sound of commodities fucking. One direction was the theatrical engagement with 'class' taken in designs such as Barney Bubbles' numerous editions of Ian Dury and the Blockheads' *Do-It-Yourself* (1979, Stiff). Far from being alienated youths, Dury and the Blockheads were ex-art school students (Dury even taught at Canterbury and the RCA) and greatly accomplished musicians. Consequently, Bubbles, another punk designer who had been to art school, took this opportunity to make a humorous jibe at the affected amateurism of *de rigueur* DIY punk graphics, designing a number of sleeves which resembled school books covered in scraps of flock wallpaper from the early '70s. Similarly, John Cooper Clarke, once heralded as the New Wave George Formby, is a poet who, like Ian Dury, had been around for some time but only started to come into his own with the advent of the New Wave: 'You can look at things like Dada and Surrealism and reject it for being a middle-class phenomenon. I think people in the New Wave have done the smart thing and walked into those areas. Now you've got a kind of working class vision of things. I don't think I've ever seen a punk rock group that didn't have something very imaginative about it. It's not being a traitor to your class to go into those areas. It only widens your perspective.'²¹ Saville's sleeve for *Snap, Crackle & Bop* (Epic, 1980) represents Clarke's trademark three-piece suit complete with tab collar, shades and JCC punky lapel badges. The 'pocket' comes with book of poetry styled like a Telephone Directory, the lyrics overlaid on pages listing the names Cooper or Clarke. With music handled by The Invisible Girls (experienced Mancunian hands Martin 'Zero' Hannett, Pete Shelley, Bill Nelson, and Vinni Reilly) the New Romantic stance as a parody of design, utilising theatrical breaks with 'straight' culture, was both pointedly mocked and cherished: "Don't doubt your own identity / Dress down to cool anonymity / The Pierre Cardin line to infinity / Clothes to climb in the meri-



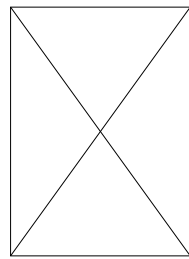
JOHN COOPER CLARKE *Snap, Crackle & Bop*



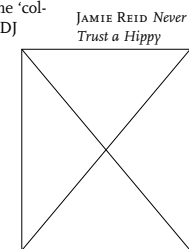
BURGIN *Possession*



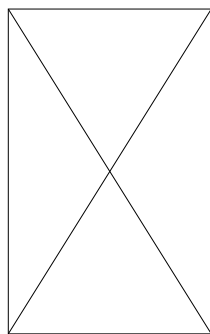
MARGARET HARRISON *Rape*



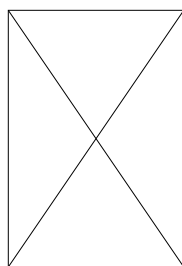
JAMIE REID *Never Mind the Bans*



JAMIE REID *Never Trust a Hippie*



SEX PISTOLS *Bulletin*



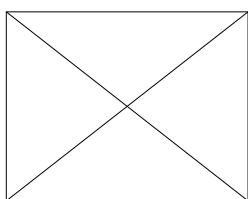
Steve Strange at *Heroes*, 1978

toocracy / The new age of benevolent bureaucracy.²²
 The intellectualisation of youth subculture was one of many targets of Clarke's drollery: "Twin wheeled existentialists steeped in the sterile excrement of a doomed democracy 'oose post-Nietzschian sensibilities reject the bovine gregariousness of a senile oligarchy."²³

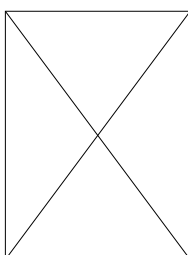
While *Destroy* is warts and all—including ABC and Duran Duran—it would be unfair to say that the 'punk artifice' parable has been allowed to run unhindered. The curators, perhaps daunted at the number of previous attempts to analyse punk, have settled with displaying everything taxonomically and in approximate chronological order. This modernist hang was not entirely a contemptible suppression of contingency, given that it gave scope for critical acknowledgment that cultural artifacts are the products of competing value-systems. Hovering in their transparent sleeves, 'punk' graphic designs are bracketed as open verdicts, allowing full criticism to run as the final, unwritten chapter. Visitors can examine stylistic shifts and provide monolithic theoretical justification for them, or openly consider the indeterminate relationships between the different factions involved without adopting the pretense that anything is capable of resolution. When beginning to consider if Reid's work has been juxtaposed with the first twelve felt-tip pen and typewriter script issues of Glasgow's version of *Sniffin' Glue* to emphasise or undermine Punk professionalism, tacit acknowledgment that the hang functions as a reminder that the culture of our age is one that is never finished. Since rules change in accordance with the needs of time and situational modalities, it would seem fair to say that exhibitions such as *Destroy* are one of a series of games played according to undetermined rules. The speculation never ends.

notes

- 1 John Cooper Clarke, 'Punk Rock Revival', Specially commissioned for *The List* in 1997.
- 2 Jamie Reid in Jon Savage, *Up They Rise: The Incomplete Works of Jamie Reid*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987, p55.
- 3 Minda, "Minda", in T. Dennett, D. Evans, S. Göhl, AND J. Spence, (eds.), *Photography / Politics: One*, Photography Workshop, London, September 1979, p125.
- 4 Peter York, "The Clone Zone (Night of the Living Dead)", *Style Wars*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1980, p47.
- 5 Malcolm Garrett, quoted in 'Graphics', *Creative Review*, February 1998, p37.
- 6 Ben Kelly quoted in Domenic Cavendish, 'The Great Rock & Roll Exhibition', *The Independent* (Style), 31st January—6th February, p5.
- 7 See footnote 10.
- 8 Jamie Reid in Jon Savage, *Up They Rise: The Incomplete Works of Jamie Reid*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987, p43.
- 9 Ben Khera quoted in *Attitude*, February 1998.
- 10 The passive nihilist compromises with his own lucidity about the collapse of all values. Bandwagon after bandwagon works out its own version of the credo *quia absurdum est*: you don't like it but you do it anyway; you get used to it and you even like it in the end. Passive nihilism is an overture to conformism. ...Between the two poles stretches a no-mans-land, the waste land of the solitary killer, of the criminal described so aptly by Bettina as the crime of the state. Jack the Ripper is essentially inaccessible. The mechanisms of hierarchical power cannot touch him; he cannot be touched by the revolutionary will.' RAOUL VANEIGEM, 'Desolation Row' (1967), translated in *King Mob Echo*, No. 1, April 1968, Pygmalion Press, London, p7.
- 11 Throbbing Gristle, 'Introduction' (1.01), 'Very Friendly' (15.54), *Throbbing Gristle Live Volume One 1976-1978*, Mute.
- 12 Genesis P-Orridge and Peter Christopherson, 'Annihilating Reality', *Studio International*, July/August 1976, p44.
- 13 Tony Roinson, 'Moors Murder 'Art' Storm', *Sunday Mirror*, 15th August, 1976, p9.
- 14 Genesis P-Orridge, 'Statement by Genesis P-Orridge to his Solicitor April 5th 1976', *G.P.O. versus G.P.O: A Chronicle of Mail Art on Trial Compiled by Genesis P-Orridge*, Ecart, Switzerland, 1976.
- 15 COUM Transmissions, 'What Has COUM to Mean? : Thee Theory Behind COUM', Typewritten Statement, Undated, *COUM Transmissions/Throbbing Gristle Archive*, National Art Library, V&A, London, 1990.
- 16 Stuart Morgan, 'What the Papers Say', *Artscribe* 18, July 1979, p18-19.
- 17 Ian Birch, 'In The Beginning', *The Book With No Name*, Omnibus, London, 1981, p11.
- 18 Ian Chambers, 'Urban Soundscapes 1976: The Paradoxes of Crisis', *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture*, Macmillan, Hampshire, 1985, p199.
- 19 Visage, 'Visage'.
- 20 The Face, Nos. 7-8.
- 21 John Cooper Clarke, *New Musical Express*, January 28th, 1978.
- 22 John Cooper Clarke, 'Euro Communist / Gucci Socialist', *Ten Years in an Open Neck Shirt*, Arrow/Arena Books, 1983, p10.
- 23 John Cooper Clarke, 'Psyche Sluts, Part 1', *Disguise in Love*, Epic, 1978.



BARNEY BUBBLES
Do It Yourself



THE FACTORY
May/June 1978

Megalomedia

William Clark

"We can achieve

a sort of control
under which the
controlled,
though they are
following a code
much more
scrupulously
than ever the
case under the
old system, now
feel free."

B F Skinner

GUS MACDONALDIS announced as Corporate Leader of the Year, Companion of the British Empire, Chairman of the Year. The list seems endless as he rolls onto a game show type set. He is slapped on the back by his old mate Billy Connolly who whispers sweet nothings into his ear and they embrace in a manly fashion. Gus is given a "Lifetime Achievement Award" live on the TV station he runs, by one of his employees, while the rest of them form the audience. With tears of emotion welling up in his eyes Gus approaches the microphone...at that point the national grid flinches like a wounded animal. The nation has put on the kettle. Some of us are wondering while it boils: *Was it Idi Amin who awarded himself the Victoria Cross?*

Personalising the issues is going to be difficult to avoid, but he started it. Yes there is very little criticism of Gus in the media these days, only words of sanctimonious sycophantic praise. This is not entirely surprising because Scottish Television is now the Scottish Media Group or SMG for short. It now (em...) kind of owns the "independent" media in Scotland as the new name suggests. It owns Grampian TV, the Herald and the Evening Times, its shareholders, The Daily Record/Sunday Mail and Flextech run most of what's left. According to the Scotsman—one of the few publishing houses not controlled by Gus—STV and Grampian alone will reach 4.7 million out of a possible 5.1 million viewers in Scotland. Somehow or other that does not constitute a monopoly or any breach of regulations in the eyes of the regulators, the ITC. This is because they were set up to de-regulate the market and have stood by while the whole independent network has become monopolised. If you remember the Monopoly board game, you don't have to literally own all the properties to control the game, just some of them. Also, surely any decent monopoly would "influence" its regulators, assuming that is, that they need influencing.

Last June the 3rd the Scotsman said that the purchase of Grampian by SMG: "should be subject to the utmost scrutiny," adding that: "this newspaper must comment, for who otherwise can?" Left all out on their own they were getting a bit panicky, and their analysis of the situation suffered, well, proved to be wishful thinking to be precise. They stated that "the ITC said yesterday it would bow to pressure and mount a public enquiry into the deal." Somebody was lying there, because the ITC did no such thing. Let's have a look at what happened.

The boards of Grampian TV and SMG only confirmed they had been talking together on the 6th of June. They did this because someone leaked information to a Sunday paper not owned by them and the stockmarket got wind of it. Four days later both parties had agreed terms and SMG bought about 20% of Grampian on the open market. By July the 11th the ITC had "concluded that there will be no requirement to conduct public interest test with regard to proposed merger with Grampian." Let me run that past you one more time. While the deal was being done before their eyes, the ITC decided that they would not even begin to look into the matter, and it took them a mere couple of weeks to arrive at this conclusion. They did not even detect a whiff of monopoly about it, despite the fact that they had earlier said they would "bow to pressure" after the Scotsman phoned them with what could easily have been a rumour of a takeover. SMG went ahead buying bits of Grampian until by September the 3rd it was "entitled now to acquire compulsorily (*sic*) all [Grampian] Shares held by shareholders who had not yet accepted the offer." A week earlier they had started another deal, this time purchasing 18.2% of Ulster TV with a view to a takeover. The ITC just ignored it.

The ITC's decision was also taken in the light of the fact that they had not so long ago already deemed it appropriate to investigate STV when it bought Caledonian Publishing, the owners of the Herald and Evening Times. They found then that:

"the overlap between Caledonian's circulation and Scottish Television's broadcasting area did not constitute a threat to the public interest."²

If the Herald's own reporting is to be believed on the matter, and it might be here, the reason the ITC let the Grampian deal go through was because:

"The Herald and the Evening Times were not deemed to be 'relevant local newspapers' in Grampian's broadcasting area."

That must have been a bit galling for the Herald to print. A few years ago they had dropped the "Glasgow" from their masthead in an attempt to convince advertisers that their circulation was UK-wide and massive. Now it seems we have irrefutable evidence that they are simply not read—are irrelevant in fact—in huge areas of the country. So let's look at the ITC's logic. With the Herald/Evening Times all we had was an 'overlap', nothing to worry about there, Gus may have Mayfair but Park Lane is just "overlapping". With their second decision on Grampian they simply did not even consider the position of STV, never mind the Daily Record, and put the accent on "local" papers. So the SMG empire is thus insignificant in Scotland because of the existence of the Aberdeen Evening Express. And what if the ITC conceded that they were significant? Wouldn't it just be another "overlap?" Some people will be wondering how exactly the ITC found out what everyone in Scotland watches and reads in the space of a few weeks. Others will be wondering what are they waiting for? Gus MacDonald to proclaim himself Lord of Hell and stamp 666™ on everyone's forehead? Then the ITC will perhaps 'consider an enquiry'.

It was left to the Office of Fair Trading to "scrutinise" the deal in terms of "competition." That too was passed, although few people could come up with a single name as a competitor of SMG, maybe someone is secretly running an independent TV station from their bedroom, who knows? The deal was also completed before the Devolution referendum. Thus Gus can argue, with a fairly straight face, that SMG is not a monopoly in the context of the UK; when it comes to an "independent Scotland", well what are people going to do—write to the papers?

Nearly everyone in Scotland watches the TV or reads a paper and yet we are all in almost complete ignorance of who owns and runs what we're watching and for what reasons. Meanwhile, our nicely anaesthetized minds are being delivered to SMG's advertisers. Although Gus MacDonald is fairly well-known, a huge part of the public façade of SMG is this constant portrayal of him is as some kind of "nice-guy socialist, people's champion." But it is hard to see what they were all celebrating in that awards ceremony; other than the creation of another mini-media mogul, say in the mould of Axel Caesar Springer who controlled 40% of all West German newspapers, 80% of regional newspapers, 90% of Sunday newspapers, 50% of weekly periodicals and two thirds of the papers bought in most big German cities. He was considered something of a despot by the German left in the '60s, but these figures are not far off MacDonald's. Springer was hated because he created an unrivaled nation-wide political platform which he obviously used. The Labour party are very popular in Scotland although most people believe them to be corrupt and of having betrayed them systematically³. It is a self-evident truth that the promotion of the Labour party in the Scottish media has had a lot to do with their "popularity". The Daily Record for instance openly aligns itself as a party paper and donates thousands to the party.⁴

Editors may well assert their autonomy in these situations, but they huddle together like sheep on the big issues. Their collective viewpoint is increasingly based on a belief that vast daily sales (largely to individuals whom they consider stupid) means mass approval of

what they offer. They see this as according them a political mandate. While party politics are only one perhaps vague (in that the press is biddable) influence on those who run the media: advertisers and shareholders are another; and here we're talking the language of real politics: hard cash. And the real language of newspapers is marketing: i.e. hard cash.

One of Gus MacDonald's letters (to shareholders only) of the 9th of April stated that:

"Your Directors consider that employees at all levels should be encouraged to identify their interests with those of the Company's shareholders and that this objective can be furthered by providing means for employees to become shareholders themselves."⁵

Is it not idiocy and bad business practice that the editor of the Herald/Evening Times should identify his interests with those of the Daily Record/Sunday Mail? "Yes", if they are competing and "no", if they are working for the same ends. The "competition" between them seems to be over: for is this not an instruction to ramify the whole network?

Another point of this "objective" is that SMG get back some of their employee's wages by acting like a bank. Their employee's money is 'tied up' for three years and when optioned will only pay out a limited dividend. But I am being all old socialist here. Isn't Gus—our former shipyard fitter—not just being realistic in the Thatcher, sorry Blair '90s? In fact isn't he just advocating a bit of profit sharing? Sure, but he isn't sharing it with everyone. The next line in the letter is straight out of Orwell:

"The proposed schemes are a sharesave scheme and a profit sharing scheme (which will operate on an "all-employee" basis) and two discretionary share option schemes for those key executives who are most in a position to affect the fortunes of the Company."

For shit like this Gus MacDonald gets an award? The "Company scheme" has been "designed to be approved by the Inland Revenue." The "Executive scheme" is completely "unapproved". With this scheme the 'company' itself will decide "which individuals should participate and the extent of their participation."

As ever the whole project must "satisfy the guidelines of the institutional investors," the banks and other media combines who own SMG⁶. Graciously (only) the chairman will not participate. The scheme is patently open to abuses of the worst kind, I would go as far to say it is abuse. It seems designed as some form of carrot on a stick to socially engineer SMG's employees towards cartoon levels of compliance and self censorship—one day, *Smithers you will get the key to the executive washroom*. For the wealthy it will create more wealth (an executive can invest four times their salary in it). For others it must have seemed that SMG wanted their savings for some kind of hidden agenda—and left them wondering what happens to my savings if SMG's empire over-extends itself? It is too late for worries of that kind.

And it is astonishing what is legal these days. On January the 27th, a couple of months before Gus sent out that letter, word got out that SMG planned to launch an issue of 200 million fixed value bonds. Backed by the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation and UBS⁷. *The net proceeds of this issue would be used towards payment of a massive bank debt related to SMG's acquisition of Southern Water and Manweb*, two privatised utilities supplying water and gas to the north of England, now only part owned by Scottish Power. Could this be the same "advantageous share scheme" that is being forced (the scheme if you remember operates on a "all-employee" basis) upon SMG employees, who are already working harder for less money?

The average wage per year (as a unit cost) has fallen like a stone: from £33,711 in '94 to £16,306 in '96. In

The reader will note the roughly similar ‘pattern’ of the director’s other interests. This is a common feature of many of the top UK companies. In Britain the term for a company is “Public Limited Company”, the French term “Anonymous Society” is perhaps more poetic.

Granada

Shareholders include:

Mercury Asset Management (12%),
Scottish Widows (3.5)

Gerry Robinson:

BSkyB, ITN, Savoy Hotel.

Charles Allen:

London Weekend Television, GMTV.

Stephanie Monk:

Member of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service Council.

Dr John Ashworth:

British Library Board, London School of Economics, formerly Chief Scientist of Central Policy Review Staff at the Cabinet Office.

Ian Martin:

Unigate (formerly deputy Chairman of Grand Metropolitan—both Robinson and Allen worked at Grand Met).

Michael Orr:

Lazard, W H Smith.

United News & Media

Lord Stevens of Ludgate (David Robert):

Premier Asset Management, Express Newspapers, MIM Britannia International Holdings.

Lord Clive Holick:

British Aerospace, Anglia TV, Meridian Broadcasting, Hambros Bank, MAI plc.

Charles Gregson:

Provident Finance, MAI plc.

Thomas Arculus:

Barclays, Severn Trent Water, Institute of Directors.

Sir James McKinnon:

Admiral, Ivory & Sime, MAI plc, Office of Gas Supply (Offgas).

Sir Eric John Pountain:

Midland Bank, formerly Tarmac.

George Bull:

Grand Metropolitan (see above), Advertising Association (see Walmsley of Carlton).

Carlton

Shareholders include:

Norwich Union (3.42%),
Lloyds/TSB (3.08)

Michael Green:

ITN, Reuters, GMTV.(note Allen above).

Sir Derek Birkin:

The Merchants Trust, Unilever, Royal Opera House.

Anthony Forbes:

The Merchants trust, Royal & Sun Insurance.

Leslie Hill:

Chairman of ITV association, formerly Chairman of Central Independent Television, chairman of the ITV Association.

Sir Sydney Lipworth:

Zeneca, National Westminster Bank, The Financial Reporting Council, Coutts & Co., Chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

June de Moller:

Anglian Water.

Nigel Walmsley:

GMTV, Independent Radio News, The Advertising Association.

the same period the profit per employee has gone up from £2,000 to £41,000. The return on the shareholders’ funds has similarly jumped from 4.37% to 67.11%. These figures relate to staff who have the impertinence to request payment for their skills. Were it possible to take into account those hopefuls who work for nothing, or on an expenses only basis, the actual remuneration would plummet further.

But SMG workers have nothing to fear, the people’s champion is at hand. No, not Gus, but another old socialist: Sir Gavin Henry Laird, board member of SMG and member of the Employment Appeal Tribunal. Gavin has been looking after the worker’s interests for as long as anyone can remember, particularly in the big right-wing Union, the AEU. Everyone must have wanted rid of him though, because he was kicked upstairs till his fat arse landed on a seat on the board of the Bank of England. The same year he joined STV, which seems to be acting like a bank itself these days. Gavin also “works” for Britannia Life, an insurance company, so it is unlikely that he is a big fan of the welfare state. He also “works” for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (who recently opted out of the National Minimum Wage scheme) and GEC Scotland. So he decides what soldiers get paid when they’re getting killed by weapons sold to the enemy by GEC. He also finds time to slave his guts out on the Edinburgh Investment Trust where the top directors from The Securities Trust of Scotland, Flemings Bank, Scottish Widows, Clydesdale Bank, Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland, all pool their knowledge to make a killing on the Stock Market⁸. So old Gavin can be forgiven for not noticing what is happening to SMG employees. It could also be that he knows fine well.

Aggrieved employees who for some reason do not trust Gavin could try the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). They are a little busy right now, or at least they must be given that they have been “working” on (some would say suppressing) the as yet unpublished report on the £100m of profit that went missing when that other old socialist, Robert Maxwell, did a bit of profit sharing himself. The Mirror Group, who own the Daily Record/Sunday Mail who own 20% of SMG, are technically still under investigation. Board members, such as Sir Robert Clark, still sit on the same seats they used to when Maxwell was there. As we all know nobody noticed a thing at the time, anyway nobody has been found guilty of anything and that’s the important thing. The hundred million simply vanished. Nobody is overly worried about that DTI⁹ report because another old socialist, Helen Liddell, went from working on the Daily Record to running the country in a few short months. She was put into the Monklands constituency after the death of John Smith. Monklands had more or less been designated a Labour Corruption Zone and some facts were leaking out. As can be imagined the investigative journalism which brought a lot of open secrets to light was done by one or two people on a small local paper. The Daily Record did nothing. Liddell claims to have been only remotely connected to Maxwell, but according to Private Eye

942:

“...she was renowned and feared for her ruthless devotion to Cap’n Bob. Escorting him to a function in Edinburgh City Chambers in 1988...she clung to him so closely that at one point she even followed him into the gent’s lavatory—a historic moment that was recorded by a BBC TV documentary crew filming the event. In the following two years she often accompanied Maxwell in his private plane on trips abroad, including a sortie to Bulgaria to advise the new government on how to run its elections. And in 1991 she was involved in the notorious Mirror Group floatation, which was the subject of a DTI inquiry.”

Oil, Polly Peck, Digital TV and Flextech

And what of Flextech, SMG’s other 20% owner are they any more trustworthy? Although little known by the general public they have grown to become the second largest provider of satellite programmes in the UK: they are responsible for Playboy TV, UK Gold, Bravo, Challenge TV (a game show channel) and a few other even worse channels. Back in the early ‘90s they were an industrial holding company mostly engaged in oil and gas services. Its companies mostly operated in the waters around Cyprus, Norway and Malaysia, all sensitive military areas. Its deputy chairman was Lawrence Tindale, chairman of countless off-shore Guernsey companies and at the time also a director of Polly Peck International, the company which crashed in 1990 at much the same time Maxwell went overboard. The company was “supposedly making profits of £200m per year but collapsed within weeks leaving shareholders with nothing and creditors who were owed more than £1 billion with little more.”¹⁰

Flextech moved into media in a big way when they were taken over by the European business arm of TCI, the biggest US cable TV operator, ultimately owned (35%) by United Artists, the American multinational. The driving force behind the company is said to be its chairman, Roger Luard, who is also on the board of SMG¹¹. One peculiar thing about Flextech is that although its shareprice has soared since its early days, it has not made a profit in years. On the contrary its accounts show it has made huge losses. It would seem that investors are backing it on the strength of the United Artists connection and on a promising deal with the BBC, which if you have ever paid your license fee you have unknowingly contributed to yourself. Back in October ‘96 the BBC chose Flextech as its 50/50 partner in the launch of an eight channel subscription package using old BBC programmes. At one point the Mirror Group’s David Montgomery and Flextech’s Adam Singer were in talks about a joint venture with the big cable companies exploiting the BBC deal. Both Singer and Montgomery are on the board of SMG, which is probably where the planning began.

Flextech are also involved in the chicanery that accompanied the licensing of terrestrial digital broadcasting. It is predicted that digital will see pay-TV phase out the old analog transmissions. The decisions were made last year but programmes will not start up till later this year. At present preparation is in a “complete shambles”. Two competing consortia wanted the license from the ITC: British Digital Broadcasting (BDB) who won, and Digital Terrestrial Network (DTN) who lost. A legal challenge (by the losing consortium) ensued and the Office of Telecommunication (OfTel) intervened, at first to advise that DTN was the better deal and then to request the removal of BSkyB from the winning consortium. There was nothing new in the winning bid, most of which is available on Sky.

What is on offer is primarily the Flextech/BBC package, indeed Roger Luard of Flextech has been rumoured as a potential boss of BDB. Flextech’s parent TCI has also been involved with Microsoft to develop technology to enable digital TV to link with the internet.

Although the ITC have on the surface asked BSkyB to drop out of the BDB consortium (which is a 50/50 deal between Granada and Carlton) Rupert Murdoch will not be shedding many tears. For a start BSkyB are launching their own digital satellite system (threatening some 200 channels) and they have been given the job of running the subscriber management system for BDB, thus having contact with BDB customers. The BSkyB company, News Datacom will still provide the encryption access and it will not have to bear any of the start up costs. Most press reports (in non-Murdoch newspapers) gave the impression that BSkyB had been written out of the terrestrial deal thanks to the intervention of OfTel. On the surface this is true, but OfTel have done nothing to ‘regulate’ on these ‘hidden’ involvements. But let us focus on the ITC

“Without detriment to programme standards”

The ITC was formed to take over from the IBA as a result of the White Paper Broadcasting in the ‘90s, written in ‘89 by Douglas Hurd. This proposed a “radical reform of the TV framework for broadcasting in the UK” for two principle identified reasons: “technological and international developments”; and that the government wished “a much wider range of programmes and types of broadcasting to be offered to viewers and listeners.” It was the usual Thatcher government lies about the free market masking political patronage: “choice should be widened, competition increased without detriment to programme standards and quality.” Back in 1989 everyone was getting excited about Satellite TV. As Rupert Murdoch himself said/lie: “Sky Television will bring competition, choice and quality to British Television. The monopoly is broken ...television will begin to develop the diversity it has lacked.” Murdoch the “monopoly breaker”. Sky began with four channels: the flagship Sky Channel featured game shows, including revivals of ITV shows such as the Sale of the Century and The Price is Right, a magazine programme with Tony Blackburn and Jenny Handley, an evening chat show hosted by Derek Jameson and American imports such as the Lucy Show. Rupert has been a little bit slack in delivering the “quality.”

The ITC have “requirements” from ITV not regulations. These are that each franchise:

- 1 Show regional programmes (including programmes produced in the region).
- 2 Show high quality news and current affairs dealing with national and international news, in the main viewing period.

Above:
BEER MAT
ADVERT FOR
PLAYBOY TV

Above right:
THE HERALD
22/04/93

- 3 Provide a diverse programme schedule calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests.
- 4 Ensure that a minimum of 25% of original programming comes from independent producers.
- 5 Ensure that a proper proportion of programme material is of EC origin.

Obviously it is all a bit of a joke. They don't deal with monopolies, that is the province of the Monopolies and Mergers commission which was set up rather late in 1973. The ITC just hands out licenses, it's the government's bagman. The ITC also has "responsibilities" concerning Satellite TV whereby "steps will be taken to ensure that the programme content of all such satellite services is supervised." Presumably Bravo's "Stripping Italian Housewives" is there to fulfill category five. Bravo (which is run by Flextech) has as its motto "Swearing, Sex and Violence," perhaps category three comes into play there. Although the ITC has some vague code on advertising and sponsorship the government made it plain that they favoured "liberalising the present restrictions" and then chucked in the usual nod and a wink pretend proviso: "provided the editorial independence and transparency for the viewer are adequately protected." This probably means that we have a right to know the identity of the "News Bunny," (which is someone in a bunny suit who "reacts" to the "news" on Lve TV).

The government was also pretending that it was determined to "impose limits on concentration of ownership and on excessive cross-media ownership, in order to keep the market open for newcomers and to prevent any tendency towards uniformity or domination by a few groups." That statement *typifies* what the media has become. The original fifteen franchises have been absorbed into only four groups. Most of the power has been concentrated into the hands of three men, Lord Hollick at United News and Media, Micheal Green at Carlton and Gerry Robinson at Granada, all of which are rampantly involved in cross-media ownership. So who are the ITC, why are they constantly described as "watchdogs" and whose interests are they protecting?

Lord Snooty and his pals

Sadly it is all a bit predictable, but frightfully British! **Sir Robin Biggam** is the ringleader and gets £65,580 for failing us miserably. He makes more money in the (guess what) arms trade, working as the director of British Aerospace. He is also a money seller with Foreign and Colonial Investments¹². Next up is the **Earl of Dalkeith** (real name Richard Scott), who is the heir to the title of the Duke of Buccleuch (there are only 24 Dukes and it rates just under Royal Dukes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh). Mr Scott seems to do nothing. He was on the board of Border TV for a year in '89, he was on the old IBA and seems to have been accidentally left behind. He is also on the Millennium Fund Commission. He gets £12,630.

As does the aptly named **Micheal Checkland**. He used to be the Director General of the BBC and before that also worked on (guess what) an arms company, Thorn Electronics. It was Checkland who complied wholesale with the lunacies of Thatcher and supervised the censorship of the eleven Republican and Loyalist groups. During his tenure we also saw the censorship of Duncan Cambell's programme on Zircon, where the Police actually raided the BBC, poisoning the air for future investigative journalism. So much for category two of the ITC's "regulations". It was Checkland who made the assertion back in 1990 that he "was keen to work

alongside the new TV channels as a programme provider," which was put into practice in deals with British Satellite Broadcasting, paving the way for the Flextech deal and the rampant commercialisation of the BBC.

But by far and away the most interesting character on the ITC is **Dr Micheal Shea** who works for Caledonian Newspaper Publishing, a subsidiary of Gus MacDonald's SMG. Shea has a long history of duplicitous activity i.e. telling lies for a living. It is also transparently obvious that he has intimate connections with the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). He joined the Foreign Office (which claims to oversee MI6) in 1963, serving first in Ghana and then in Bonn in '66 where he was also seconded to the Cabinet office, then Bucharest in '73, then New York in '76 where he headed an outfit called "British Information Services"¹³. He then became the Press Secretary of the Queen for ten years.

On the filthy lucre side of things he sits on Scotland's premier Unit Trust, Murray International. Fellow board members here include George Younger and Angus Grossart, the latter being a recent ex-STV board member. The Grampian buy-out was put together by Noble Grossart Merchant Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland, both run by Grossart. Shea is an independent advisor to Grossart's wing of Arthur Anderson, the second largest Insurance Broker in the World. Shea is also the head of "political and government affairs" at Hanson plc. In between finding time to eat, sleep and go to the lavatory he is on the boards of Strathclyde University, the National Gallery, Edinburgh University and Gordonstouns. He joined Caledonia in '93. Shea should not be on the board of an "Independent" Commission; there should be an independent commission watching Shea. The notion of characters like this being paid to lord it over us, deciding what we see or do not see is repulsive and as stupid as the belief that they are in any way "watchdogs" for the public good. Even a scant look at their activities offers convincing evidence that they do not give a toss for the public and consider themselves above and aristocratically superior. But it is these people who control who gets the license to broadcast. Despite all the smirking lies masquerading as legality of the White Paper, the ITC are actively encouraging monopoly.

In 1990 when the ITC were set up, 15,000 people were employed in ITV. As the companies in the network rushed to 'rationalise' in the run up to the franchise auction two years later, the number fell to about 10,500. In 1996 according to the ITC's own figures, the number fell to just over 8,200. The familiar pattern of mergers being justified on the basis of cost-saving and resource-pooling will be of little consolation to those skilled workers who were faced with the choice of either becoming "freelance" (a euphemism for unemployed-but-waiting-in-the-wings) or giving up altogether. The casualisation of the work-force has seen an explosion in the activities of "independent" production companies—the "stars" of the media all have their own and corner the market. With over 1,000 "indies" competing for work largely based in London, those freelancing are forced to follow in the hope of picking up some scraps. An "anonymous senior industry source", quoted by Jamie Doward in his Observer article of September 28th '97 said: "One strength of the old system was its commitment to regional programming. But the industry is in danger of moving away from that." This observation contrasts with Gus MacDonald's patriotic optimism of '93 when, in the STV annual report for

'92, he made much of STV's "Scottishness" claiming it as a major asset which would help ensure future success. His robust confidence in Scotland's indigenous talent seems curious given that in the following years he and the rest of the board have reduced the number and wages of employees. In the accounts they seem to have doubled their employees but this is only because of all the mergers.

In 1996 the ITV network had an income of £2.2 billion, none of which came from license fees. It was generated by advertising. Where do the advertisers get the money? From us, via the products we buy. Hence, the actual cost per person for the right to have advertisers in the livingroom becomes a matter of guesswork. An average family shopping trolley will be full of products, all of which carry a built-in cost to recover the promotion of the product. Banks Building Societies and the big companies who simply have to tell us how nice they are, all pass those advertising costs on to us. In effect we are all paying the network to sell us what we have already bought. The more we buy it, the more successful it becomes, the greater the need (and cost) for us to confirm that we do indeed buy it. In other words, pay over the odds for it now, pay again later.

The (digital) Revolution will not be televised

In a country which has rejected right-wing parliamentary politics so completely, it is essential to remember that the non-parliamentary right are entrenched to such an extent that they will always elude democratic attempts at change. They are simultaneously a coherent and incoherent force in that they are both destructive or allied to one another at any given time. The alliances in the media, even on this scant evidence, reveal a complicity with big business with SMG branching out to own privatised utilities. We must always remember that our local independent Television Station provides us with an education, an outlook. Consider the words of another Scotsman who worked his way up to the top to become an award winning mogul:

"...Andrew Carnegie wrote eleven essays called *The Gospel of Wealth*. In it he said that capitalism—free enterprise—was stone cold dead in the United States. It had been killed off by its own success. That men like himself, Mr. Morgan, and Mr. Rockefeller now owned everything, they owned the government. Competition was impossible unless they allowed it... Carnegie said that this was a very dangerous situation, because eventually young people will become aware of this and form clandestine organisations to work against it...Carnegie proposed that men of wealth re-establish a synthetic free enterprise system (since the real one was no longer possible) based on cradle to grave schooling. The people who advanced most successfully in the schooling that was available to everyone would be given licenses to lead profitable lives, they would be given jobs and promotions and that a large part of the economy had to be tied directly to schooling..."¹⁴

While this applies (indeed is an antecedent) to compulsory education it also echos the illusion provided by the media, particularly television which is akin to the notions behind B. F. Skinner's "learning machines". As the creepy Skinner quote at the beginning of the article suggests there are people out there who, through rampant megalomania or some darkness of the mind, seek complete control. MacDonald and Laird represent an extremely generous and tolerant form of socialism, so

much so that they can encompass its polar opposite. As for their motives, well they have both gained vast amounts of money and power. But they're trying too hard, they're trying now, to fool all of the people all of the time.

Future developments in digital TV should bring with them a feeling of optimism, access to TV. We must remember that not every one has the ability or resources to even contemplate this and that the power of TV is such that the Advertisers/distribution companies and providers will move further toward a cartel. We will wait a long time for the software which will provide everyone with TV station-like access via the internet.

Scottish culture has been represented on STV in perhaps the most insipid and erroneous ways imaginable. The arts (whether literature, drama, music or art) have provided some differing forms of "education" which has tried to counterbalance this situation. We can wave goodbye to all that in a few years. TV culture (the voice, the agenda, the outlook, the people) has always been at a remove from the reality and evidence of our senses. To understand why requires investigation not just of the talent for impoverishment broadcast on the programmes, but investigation of who is running the thing and why. It is seldom attempted.

Scottish Television has reduced itself to news and sport: the news will have all the formality of the classroom, sport, all the "freedom" of playtime. We will never be informed that the news is manufactured or its agenda limited (for instance that by some co-incident the exact stories will appear on the other side), or the limitations of that agenda. STV and now SMG has preached the big lie. And the big lie is that there is a criminal underworld and an honest overworld and that they do not interpenetrate. SMG's agenda is fast becoming one which serves as a cover for the legalised crime which big business engages in every day.

MacDonald used to be an "investigative reporter." What was it he found out back in the '70s that made him pretend to promote free speech in Scotland while working for those who seek to deny it to us? Perhaps he now feels *free*. as Skinner would put it; and glad that he has been given such a "profitable license" as Carnegie would say.

notes

- 1 Somewhere along the line the Chase Manhattan Bank started acquiring more SMG shares, at the same time the BBC Pension Trust sold theirs.
- 2 *Glasgow Herald* July 12
- 3 And they would be right.
- 4 This has been complicated slightly by the attempts to weed out embarrassments among "old Labour" in Scotland, whether through their corruption or left-wing views, and replace them with Blairites (i.e. opportunists). This has been portrayed (read "news managed") particularly in the *Herald*, with allusions to a secret group called the "Network" thus propelling it into the ambit of conspiracy theory. The purge is real enough, but somewhat ineffectual.
- 5 SMG's main shareholders are Flextech (19.95%), Daily Record/Sunday Mail (19.93%), FMR Corporation (7.38%), Chase Nominees (5.31%), Mercury Asset Management (3.43%). Someone could fairly easily buy up 40% of SMG which would be a controlling shareholding.
- 6 They of the Blue Arrow affair.
- 7 Directors of most Investment trusts interpenetrate like this.
- 8 A kind of political ornament
- 9 *Private Eye* 808. It collapsed when money was pumped in by bankers and shareholders. *Private Eye* 832 states that a dealer who boosted Polly Peck ended up working for Mercury Asset Management, who also own about 4% of SMG. Polly Peck's more famous director, Asil Nadir ran off around May 93 in the wake of court charges, a secret Scotland Yard investigation, all the Micheal Mates lunacy, connections to Micheal Hesletine and with £440,000 of Polly Peck money ending up in the Tory party coffers. A bit of a mess.
- 10 See *Investors Chronicle* May 30/97 for background on Luard and Flextech. *The Observer* of 15/3/98 states that the Mirror Group and the Chase Manhattan Bank have been in close discussion with Flextech's owners TCI, the Mirror group wants to join with them in a Cable TV deal.
- 11 Probably the premium British investment outfit.
- 12 This more than likely had connections to the IRD (the Foreign Office's black propaganda outfit) but I have no direct evidence.
- 13 An Interview with John Taylor Gatto (*Flatland* No. 11)

Kamal Sangha Ethnic Cleansing

AMARANDHISFRIENDS spent most of the summer hassled by police. A few minutes after the shopkeepers' shutters were down a patrol car invariably pulled up on the corner where they swapped stories to keep themselves going. Two officers told them it was an offence to be brown and think you owned the streets.

PC McKenna loved these moments. He got a real buzz out of it. He would brag to his wife after they made love, smoothing his hand across her throat, and then snap his fingers—*Like that!*—after he spun the air with a restraint technique tacit in standard police training manuals.

Each night Amar came home his parents turned to him from two, low, wooden stools in the kitchen; they cut loose threads and made final adjustments to garments for a local manufacturer. Cloth dust filled the air and weakened the light. Amar thought they looked like the two people in a painting in the local museum: solemn and sullen and still working after a poor dinner. He couldn't handle it and went straight back out after he finished eating.

His mates practiced dance steps to the music coming out of the late night record shop, totally skint bar a few cans of lager placed in one of the open doorways. If the owner was out they would go in and request a medley of made-to-measure grooves. Then they would dance as pair, trio, quartet, full tilt, right up on the beat.

McKenna watched them on a monitor at the station. He would study their mouths for a pulsing tirade or a self-incriminating rhyming couplet about cops. Often he got confused as they mixed Punjabi and English. It was enough to make him snatch his fags off the desk and take out his truncheon and thwack it against his palm before he slid it back into the holster.

The boys were really going for it. The late sun was still strong and happy sweat poured out of their faces. One of them suggested they regularly practice, he reckoned they could make it as an outfit dancing at birthdays and weddings. Suddenly everyone agreed and started talking quickly about what they could achieve. It was great to be alive.

McKenna brushed his trousers as he stepped out of the car. He was six four and proud of his body. He used to have a partner but now did the rounds alone—back up was only a gesture away. In meetings with local community leaders and liaison officers he would stiffen to the word multicultural, thinking, how did it get this far: these black cunts with their halting English and local clout; their grandfathers, who used to polish his one's boots, obedient to all non-verbal commands under the Indian sun. In spite of the changes this was his patch and his people before him: the clubs, the pubs, the market, the boys brigade. Now there was a temple, restaurants, women in orange silk. When was the last time he'd seen hopscotch.

McKenna approached the dancers. A few people stopped and watched from the other side of the street. He put his foot on the kerb and tapped almost to the music, just stopping himself in time. He balled his fists and kneaded them into his sides, smiled and shook his head.

Amar stood in the dark of a doorway blowing smoke out into the street. He watched McKenna pick up the glow of the cigarette. One of his mates carried on dancing. The others clapped in unison and nodded to the beat. The lone dancer stopped mid move, arms

extended up past his head, fingers splayed, swivelled and turned to his friends. Ar-ee-pa! The boys threw back their heads and laughed, lapping it up for all it was worth. McKenna was old hat, a knackered emissary from some totalising, racially fucked up confederacy.

Another song, another remix. A different dancer veered towards McKenna and came to a halt a foot or so, frozen in dance. He looked at the boy's face: pouted lips and dilated eyes. A knowing smile slithered into his head and he began to work out which bones he could cleanly break.

Amar stepped out of the doorway with a can in his hand and took a long swig. The lone dancer collapsed his arms and asked for a drink. He took it out of the back of Amar's hand while Amar simultaneously took a can out of the hand of another, a swift, cool, balletic move dazzling audiences around the world. McKenna licked the inside of his mouth. He hoped to sit in front of a cool pint as soon as all this was in the shade. He looked straight ahead and pointed at Amar's chest.

You: put that in the bin.

An old Punjabi folk song played in the record shop. Amar's father hummed it as a dirge about farm hands pushed off the land where they ate and sang at the end of the working day, lightened by some home-made brew.

Amar lobbed the can at a bin attached to a lampost. It bounced off the edge and a gush of lager splashed McKenna's upper body. One of the boys was about to rejoice but another pulled him down and told him to cool it.

McKenna didn't even flinch. He stood still with his hands on his hips, legs at ease. He ignored the lager on his arm and shirt and rolled the can with the sole of his foot towards Amar.

Pick it up—now!

Amar clicked his tongue in his mouth. For months McKenna had pushed him around, stopped and searched his dad's car umpteen times—makin him go down to the station to show his documents, waitin at the front desk and slappin him down and showin him the front door and tellin him to sort out his boy in front of other officers.

McKenna dabbed himself with a hanky and wiped his sunglasses. He might just let it go this time until he got him on his own: a couple of strategic blows between chest and navel—where there would be no marking. Nothing that would show up in court. C'mon junior, let's do it, right now. Jesus! I don't know what's worse: you, or a bad meal in a restaurant.

The can stopped two thirds of the way to Amar. It was cheap shit and he didn't like the taste. McKenna was ready—the colour of a dark bruise. He wanted a knock out in the fifth and a briefcase of broken bones.

Amar eyed the can and stepped towards it. He swung back his right foot, making sure he got his toes right underneath, and smacked it as hard as he could. It sped through the air and hit McKenna full in the face.

Later that night a doctor announced the death of Amar Singh Dhillon. His parents shared a mug of hot milk to help them sleep. They were not waiting for the telephone to ring.

Michelle McGuire

Forced on Politics and Pleasure

Regarded by many as one of Britain's leading experimental theatre companies, *Forced Entertainment* devise theatre that questions issues concerning contemporary life. Based in Sheffield, the company has toured nationally and abroad with diverse shows for small scale theatres, installation works for galleries, site-specific performances, digital media pieces and most recently films. Formed in 1984 by a group of six graduates from the University of Exeter, the ensemble are a rare breed for having stayed intact through Arts Council cuts and a volatile arts environment.

Perhaps the secret of their success is an ability to operate within the media culture of the late 20th century - firmly placing themselves in a society of changing cultural forms, TV politics and consumerism. I met with Robin Arthur, Claire Marshall and Cathy Naden to discuss the processes of their understated work.

Michelle McGuire: Is Forced Entertainment a reflection of the times and therefore a product of Postmodernism?

Robin Arthur: I think the short answer to that is yes, probably. As people, as artists, we've always been consciously trying to make work that is contemporary. There are quite a lot of artists that are trying to make work that is almost like classical work. And I don't just mean people who, in theatre for example, go back and approach the classics. But, there are a lot of writers who think about their work being in the high modernist classic tradition - almost outside of the time - who would almost regard the notion that their work emerged out of the time that they write it in, as being a kind of insult, a kind of cheapening of what they do. But I don't think that is true for us at all. I think we've always tried to make work that is contemporary and arises out of the moment.

Claire Marshall: So it's always been influenced by music, by film, by videos, by other aspects of culture.

RA: When we first started making work, I didn't know what Postmodernism was. But when I found out what it meant, it did seem like quite a good way of describing some of things that we were doing. I think that our relationship with that term or that set of conceptions has gone rather more cynical of late. But, I think it would be stupid to deny that it is something that describes quite well a lot of what we do.

Cathy Naden: Tim [Etchells - Artistic Director] always used to put this quote on publicity that was around, might have been as early as 200% at *Bloody Thirsty*, which was a show that we did in 1989. He used to say

that the work was always understandable by anybody, "who was brought up in a house where the TV was always on". And I think that in a way, we are kind of filters for everyday experience and that can be things we've seen on television, or things we've seen on the news. And it is not a conscious process of looking out for those things. I think it is like an expression of what it's like to be alive now. Because things kind of filter through accidentally, like the Gulf War happening around the time we were making *Marina & Lee*. And it crept into the text and little parts of the show. But that was never an overtly political statement we were making. It was just one part of an experience that was creeping into the work. And also, I think that the way you can use the high culture and low culture that you get in Postmodernism, is something that we use a lot. The sort of putting together things that shouldn't go together, trash things and crap things and making something new out of it.

CM: I think Postmodernism has become a bit of a dirty word sometimes, that suggests that everything is very ironic, very cynical and very removed. Although it's a word that describes some of what we do, it is just a describing word. You don't set out to make a Postmodernist piece of work. Sometimes it feels like it's not a good description because a lot of what we do contains a lot of cynicism, a lot of anger and there is also a lot of naivete and hope and innocence in the things that we want to make happen on stage.

RA: I think that is a really good point. Critical terms like Postmodernism are interesting at the point where they arise from an observation of work that is taking place. So, when the term was created, I think it was an observational term, it was a term that detected something that was present in work. One of the problems is that as soon as the word became in vogue, people tried to make Postmodern work. Those critical terms, it seems to me, should always be subsidiary to the creative process rather than in control of it or dictating it. I wouldn't like to think that we attempted to make Postmodernist work or that that was in the back of our minds. Or that we were trying to conform to some critical formula, it's a word that has, at various times in the work that we have been making, been a relatively useful description. But it is not a formula that we attempt to fulfil when we make work.

MM: Much of Live Art has a political social awareness. How does Forced Entertainment fit into that sphere?

RA: Again, the fundamental part of what we do that makes it political or socially involved is to do with the form. It's to do with things that we've discovered about what we do in live performance over the last ten years or so. Working out about five years ago that we didn't want to go and play in huge theatres in front of 600 people. Being involved in a form that's about small scale and about a kind of intimacy with people, is for me, one of the biggest political parts of what we do because it's a rejection of all those notions about 'up-scaling' and 'size is important' and mass communication being incredibly important. I mean, I'm not saying that we are totally opposed to those things and I don't even think we've worked out for our-

selves how or why that it is important to us. But it always comes back down to the fact that when we make performances, it's for small auditoria, it's for small numbers of people. At the top range of our touring circuit where you are dealing with venues that will hold two hundred people, you get in there and it's horrible, you don't like playing those places. You don't like the lack of communication or the lack of contact. So, that kind of smallness, not conceptually, but just the very gut-level instinctive rejection of the notion of commercial success or commercial concerns is very political. It is that kind of decision which is perhaps less overt than you might be talking about with regard to the whole live art thing. But I think it's there in that whole live art agenda, almost at root, because of the medium that people are dealing with.

CN: I think we tried to find our own way through the funding maze. We haven't followed the normal career path for a small scale company because we haven't moved from project funding to revenue funding. But three or four years ago, we made this decision to diversify. So, we tried to keep the creative process by making pieces that weren't with theatre and diversifying into other things like digital media. So in that sense, those sorts of projects that have been happening within live arts have really been tapped into. And that is also about getting to different audiences and reaching the fine art world or digital media world.

MM: So is that how you see Forced Entertainment progressing in the next few years? This kind of diversification?

CN: Yeah, I think we will still continue to make the live work. Certainly economically, it makes sense to diversify. I think it's really good when you can have work out there that's doing the job for you without having to involve other people. The thing about touring shows is that you always have to go to where they are going. A project like *Frozen Palaces* (CD ROM) could be out there in the world doing the work for you.

MM: And you do all your work in one day.

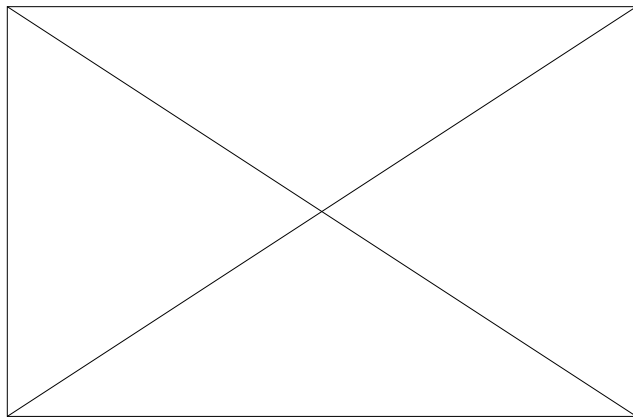
CM: Yeah, but there is something about that which in a way is at odds with what Robin was talking about because for all of us, it is a political act to commit so much time and so much hands-on work to make these shows. Everything is still to do with us all cleaning the buildings, us all being responsible for doing the little jobs that happen. I don't think it will ever come to the stage where Richard [Lowdon - company member] sits down, designs a set and hands it over to someone and they build it. I just can't see, not completely, him not wanting to see what materials are being used on the set and having to work with the performance as it grows. So, keeping the hands-on approach is really quite important. And then, sit that beside the idea that you can write *Frozen Palaces* and send it out in the world.

MM: And that is going back to that kind of multiplicity that we were talking about before. Where you then reflect back into that mass multi-media.

CM: And I think both of those things have to exist for us to exist. Sometimes, I think that in ten years time, Forced Entertainment will just be this name under which different projects exist.

RA: I think that what Claire was saying there comes back down to the other aspect of it that is - God, I don't really know if we really constitute as a co-operative anymore, but effectively that has always been the

HUGO
GLEDINNING
Pleasure



Entertainment

way that the company has worked. It is a strange kind of pragmatic socialism that takes place for us in our work environment a lot of the time. It is changing a little bit but at root, I think it is still there and I've not liked to think about us getting down to the point where the division of labour was so specialised that I only ever just turned up and did a show. At root level there is, in terms of the choice of media, in terms of the way that we work, a collaborative way that we work which, as I go on, think it is an increasingly rare to encounter. It does happen, it rarely happens for a very long time.

CM: I think it is almost unique given the longevity. Other companies that have been going a long time generally have about two original members. People like Natural Theatre Company, I think, are two creative directors with different performers each show sometimes. Having your little space in the middle of the city and all being centred around that and essentially nobody having major commitments outside of that is very unusual.

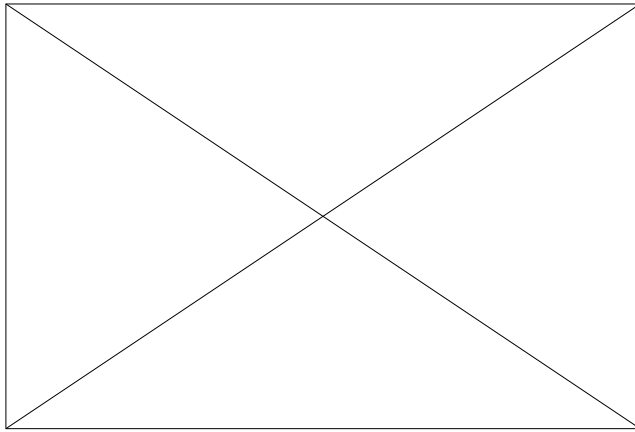
RA: Having established those two crux points to go back to, the political or social agendas that are more normal in live art. I think that, in a way, when we then embark on making work we don't carry that mental baggage with us. I'm sure that actually, because of the nature of the process and because of the nature of the business, that the work that we make is actually political, but for me it's political in a naturally evolved way rather than a formalistic way. I think the work has political and social concerns that emerge from the process and from the way that we work rather than political and social concerns that are bolted on. If you look at a lot of theatre as opposed to live art, because live art is a very different category, but if you look at the most overtly social or politically social theatre work that has come out of this country in the last twenty or thirty years, most of it has been made in the context of an incredibly, perniciously, nasty, not just capitalist system but a kind of really strange world. Where

notions of democracy or commitment are utterly out of the window. If you think about the great political playwrights, their relationship with the means of production of their work is well, dictatorial. It has no democratic credentials at all. They write the damn thing, hand it over to a director who directs the damn thing. And I don't understand how you can think about making political or social work if you haven't sorted out your own means of production to start with. It's utterly ludicrous for someone to claim that they are writing left-wing, social critiques when the mechanism that they use for bringing that stuff out into the world is highly suspect, by anybody's standards.

CM: I can remember thinking when that play, *Blasted* was on at the Royal Court which was all horrible ultra violence, buggery and terrible swearing on stage. I remember reading about it and thinking, well we've done all that, we just didn't make a fuss about it and we didn't pretend that our blood was real. We said it was fake and you could see the squirter but we covered ourselves in it and we died. The way that Tim and Cathy write, is a language full of obscenity that is just kind of casual. We use violence all the time by talking about it or not doing it or sort of pretending to do it. There are tons of angry political statements in a lot of our work, it's just that instead of making a play about 'the poor homeless people', or the problem of homelessness, you get a card board sign that refers to that or you get a little bit of text that talks about the people all around being 'just a bunch of fucking cunts'. I think it is very angry, especially with all the Thatcher years and the Major years. It doesn't start off that we are going to make a show about this, it's just if you're angry and political with a small 'p', that's going to be in the work.

RA: I think that is very true. There is always a belief that the world is more complicated than Disney or the Communist Manifesto. The world is a more complicated place than either of those things would like you to believe it is. And our politics are rather more amorphous, even romanticised. That results usually in a kind of general pissed-offness! It's more to do with punk than it is to do with structuralism. It is not about having an intellectual overview about what is wrong with society, it's about saying, 'I saw this thing and that made me fucking puke and then I saw this thing and that was rather sweet'. And how those things actually work for you now in the world. And that is where our politics and our social agenda comes from and where it makes itself apparent. The work always dictates its own politics rather than politics dictating the work. It is less common now, but in the early eighties, there was this Marxist critique that said that politics and political and economic underpinning of society dictates everything, which means that when you're an artist, you should be concerned with those things primarily and your art should in some way reflect that. And we've always had the attitude at root, that that is a very skewed way of looking at the world. And that the artistic way of looking at the world is a valid one. If it occasionally takes swipes at various economic or social political things on route, then for sure it's going to do

HUGO GLENDINNING *Showtime*



HUGO
GLENDINNING
Marina and Lee

that because it lives in the same world as those things.

MM: Is *Pleasure* [touring show 97/98] representing the mood of the company?

CM: *Pleasure* must have come out of the mood of the company. I mean, I think we were exhausted making it, we got really stuck making it. It was an incredibly difficult show to make and we went down a lot of blind alleys to make it. And when we were touring it before Christmas we were still changing it. I don't think we are going to change it anymore now, as you have to put a stop to it at some point. But it does reflect something. The last show, [*Showtime*] was such a show about making work, it was such a show about being a performer, it was a show about being away so much and being dislocated. Making *Pleasure* is kind of a reaction against that. It's like, what have I got? What do you want to see? What can I do for you? And I think a lot of the mood of *Pleasure* is about that. I think it is a very strong reaction to a very mixed and difficult and busy year.

RA: I think another thing to say about *Pleasure* is, when we started work on *Pleasure*, I think we all thought it was going to be a very different show from all of the other shows that we have made. And, one of the interesting things is that it turned out to be not such a very different show. I think it exposed a difficulty, within the company which is that the work is always a compromise, a complicated and difficult compromise between lots of people whose quite idiosyncratic desires and wants form a piece of theatre. I think it has been a good learning process for us to know that you can't just suddenly launch off into something entirely different and just expect it to just to be this radically different thing. We are always going to advance in tiny little grandmother-like footsteps, I think. Rather than in big jumps. It is not in our nature as a group of people to do that.

CM: Because you are some kind of democracy. You can only do those big leaps if you brought in a new director and you did what they said. And we wouldn't!

RA: And I do think it is how we make things as well, and you can't get away from it. It sure is a hell of a lot different than *Showtime*.

Tales of The Great

THE GREAT UNWASHED depends on daytime custom to survive. Big-spending youths on stag or hen nights are few and far between, and the clientele holds no benevolent lottery-winners or locals-made-good. The folk who pay the bills are the old ones who use the pub as a second home.

For the most part the regulars are men, and for the most part they are poor. But they move in numbers, and between them are capable of consuming impressive amounts of drink.

There is a myth which holds that the aged are privy to some little-known wisdom. The nostalgic and naive can sometimes be seen plying the old-timers with drink in the hope that this may part them from some pearly advice. It is never forthcoming, or else takes the form of such banalities as could be read in any daily paper's horoscope. We once had a student from one of the city's leafier suburbs who came in with a tape-recorder and a note-pad. He claimed to be a social anthropology student, and was collecting oral history for his project. He pestered one and all for a full afternoon, bought drink for anyone who could tell him a story, but made the mistake of asking Sippy Pat for her recollections of the war. Pat wasn't born until the mid-fifties, so was none too pleased. She quietly hailed her cousin who, with a couple of friends, escorted the tiddy historian to the lane by the car-park where any remaining curiosity was kicked out of him.

Of course the old ones do have their stories, but they keep them close and quiet. What stories they have that would interest others don't always involve the teller as hero, and so many of the best come from others, second and third hand.

I can tell you about Sammy the Biter, who was well into his sixties when he decided that he wanted to be taller than the five foot two nature had allowed him. He purchased, by mail-order, a special pair of shoes

which would make him three inches taller. I recall the dreich Autumn day when he came in, soaked and shifty, and much taller than he should be.

—What's happened to you Sammy? I asked, and he put a forefinger to lip and leaned closer.

—It's the special shoes. It's a miracle. Just like it said in the ad so it is, three inches on you and no-one will notice anything untowards at all.

The astonishment on the faces of those seated proved that the improvement had been noted, and had inspired a stunned silence.

—How can they not notice Sammy? I whispered, you're too tall now.

Sammy made for the toilet in slow, careful steps. The shoes, for everyone was now looking at them, seemed unusually short, almost square, and the movement of Sammy's legs suggested he was walking on tippy-toes, causing terrible distortion of his upper legs and hips. It occurred to me that perhaps he had become a devil, and the black shinies contained not feet, but cloven hoortrotters. Sammy emerged from the toilet, went sadly home, and the shoes have never been seen since.

John the Midden has a good stock of fighting tales, but in all he is cast as the victor. They are mostly true it seems, but he omits his few losses which are of far more interest to those of us who are less than enamored with the big fellow. His ignominious hammering at the hands of tiny Finny MacAteer and Pakky, at the end of which he was taken under police escort to the hospital with a big aubergine stuck in his throat, is the stuff of local legend. But that's another one altogether.

Personally, I don't care to listen to too much talk from the old ones. I find that few can be honest about their own failings and mistakes, are too ready to blame spouses or offspring for their own weaknesses, and there is a sizable minority who have no stories at all,

but are simply reaching the end of their span as they lived it, in total boredom, only slower than before.

But there was one whose story stuck with me, and has for thirty years or more.

Guilt keeps the memory of Poppy Laggan alive. My guilt. He had been a regular as long as Da could remember at the time I met him. I was still young then, and with my own team of children just a couple of decades behind me, I was full of life and wanted more. I absorbed stories and characters, sure that the remainder of my span would be taken up with visiting fantastic places when I'd made my fortune, telling my sons and daughters about all the world-wide wonders awaiting them, becoming then a grandfather, a contented slipper-bound sage smoking exotic tobaccos and surrounded by enigmatic souvenirs.

Poppy Laggan was not remarkable to look at. Fifty-something, prematurely gray like all his four older brothers, much smaller than the others. The runt I suppose. He would come in on the way back from his job at the printing works, have two pints of stout and a glass of red-eye, then head home for his dinner. Very occasionally he would come in of a Saturday evening with his brother Sean, but even then he would hold his silence, content to let the older man speak. Poppy was seldom obvious in his drunkenness, could hold his own with the others. He never gambled, and had an almost phobic aversion to horses and any talk of them. But he was well-liked by all.

It was a Thursday night when he came in at his appointed time, and he gave no indication that anything was amiss. I hadn't noticed he was wearing a collared white shirt, and it was only when he removed the black tie from beneath the scarf that I realised he must have been to a funeral. I didn't dare to enquire, and left him in peace. The radio was on that night, and the place was busy, listening to some European

Ian Brotherhood

Unwashed

game whose participants and outcome have escaped me.

When we closed, Da moved to the end of the bar and sat with Poppy. They didn't say much, but I could tell something was up. I cleared out the cellar and settled the cash, settled the optics and poured them another. They had moved to the snug below the gas mantle. Da beckoned me over.

Poppy was worse than I'd ever seen him, but for all he poured in the drink it seemed not to worsen his state. His eyes, red and tired, would close for several seconds, then he would shake himself awake, drink more, and mumble something to Da. I could see Da was more than worried - he was frightened. I got more drinks. And more. And Poppy's story slowly came out.

Sean had died. Heart attack. The first one, and a big one, it had finished him at fifty-eight. Poppy had been the closest to him.

-See, thing is, I know what's happening now, said Poppy, and Da nodded and I watched.

-It's alright, said Da.

-Ma told me from early I had a gift, that I had the sight and all that. It's like being locked in the picture-house, not knowing what's coming on. I can't stop it. Closing my eyes makes it clearer, opening them just makes it fade.

I thought I caught a movement, Da making a tiny sign of the cross with his forefinger.

-How's the difference 'tween a curse and a gift, carried on Poppy, when you get to see them things no-one should see? Sean's back again now. I don't know if it's behind or ahead, and that's no matter. I don't even know where. But he's back in it again when he thought he must've been out. He was happy being out, I know that much.

Poppy drank deep and long again, eyes closed. Da lit their cigarettes.

-There's a to-do before he's born, a ceremony on the shoreline. It's a clear sky and cold as hell, and the stars have something to do with it. It's the women in charge, the men are settled about the fire and they bring him in with the music and animals on leads, kids dancing about. What a terrible smell of fish all about there is. It's happy, and he's lifted up and there's a cheering, then silence. They look like us these folk, just the same. But it's not his Ma that's holding him. She's dead. A figure comes out from the dunes, all covered with hairy things and not a face on it you can see, and it's chanting over and over and the cheering gets back up and there's an almighty party. He soon knows he's special. Other weans get taken out on the boats to fish, or else help their mummies about the house. There's always work to be done. But not for Sean. Not that that's his name now you understand. I can't say his name. I can hear it, but it makes no sense. But it means The Deer or The Stag or something like that. It's a special name. He does as he pleases. If he wants to eat when the others are working, he eats. If he chooses to sleep all day, so be it. There is never an angry word against him, no child dares near him. Angry dogs get their tails between their legs when they smell him coming. He has a fight with a simple lad from a nearby village. Maybe they're about ten or eleven. The bigger lad gives him a fair old thumping and Sean goes back to his village with bruises and burst lips. There's a real to-do over it. The women all get together and stroke his hair and make him lie down and give him special mixtures and foul drinks, even though he's fine and just wants to get back out and about. The men come in that evening and there are angry shouts. Next day, before the sun, the men leave with weapons clanging, and return before mid-day with the head of the boy impaled on a lance. It is taken to the shore. There is another ritual, quiet and serious. The head is left atop the lance, and even when the birds have stripped it clean it stays. Sean has his own house, deep-set in the low flat stone, and everything he needs. Every woman in the village is his mother and sister, every man his father and brother. But he has no family. Everyone is his friend but he never has a visitor at his comfortable home. He takes to wan-

dering further and further from the village, climbing the cliffs, hunting alone for the men will not allow him to join them on land or sea, and he meets travellers who are happy to talk until they find out who he is. He has no sense of being famous or fearsome, but it seems that he is. He grows tall and broad. The girls start to gather within view of his home. He is in the angry years, and takes it out on his own. He fights with anyone, daring them to fight properly, though he knows they will always go down eventually. He takes a girl back one night, and the following day there is a lot of talk but nothing done. Her parents smile and allow her to bring him some food. He takes another girl, and another. No harm comes to him. The men let him come out on the boats, the great low long boats, and he retches and heaves for days on end. He feels like life has started for him with this voyaging, albeit little more than bartering trips across the bay. And then it all comes so fast. I don't know how old he is, but not much over twenty. A rider comes and talks to the village men and right away you can see there's something up. The women start crying, the children start running about, fighting each other. They're going to war it seems. Sean's watching from his house. He feels fear now. First time. Real fear. A great ship arrives the next day, and together with their own smaller ship they prepare. Food salted, kegs of beer, weapons greased and wrapped against the brine, furs piled high in the wide base of the ship. They leave at daybreak. The women and children watch from the shore as the ships move away and head South. Some of the older children run alongside the clifftops and wave and watch and wave until they cannot be seen. The voyage is unlike anything Sean could have imagined. He had heard the men talk of high seas and monsters, but nothing had prepared him for such terror. He cannot eat, cannot sleep. He alone takes no shift at the oars. After weeks, they beach at midnight on moonlit sand. The land they have found is low and quiet, and not a tree to be seen. The sea washes calm, carries a warm wind from the West. Sean in half-sleep, the men discuss the attack. The chiefs debate long into the night, consulting hide-etched maps. Tonight is their last before the assault. The last of the beer is consumed, the beef soaked and eaten. The priests of all the villages represented come together and invoke whoever's favour. The music is muted and serious, but grows stronger and faster as the night goes on. With the light at its weakest, for it never really gets dark now in the Summer, the priests become frenzied. Sean joins the others in the dance about the fire but he is roughly subdued, made to spectate from the centre. Then the dance stops. The prayers continue as the men fall upon him, and they pull at his hair and face, two men to each limb, they rip him apart. His being alive seems to be important. He screams. But with no mouth and no tongue there is no sound. He can see tears in the eyes of some, but others are laughing and frothing. Leathered fingers pop his eyeballs, and he hears the excitement mount as one of the priests takes a small knife to Sean's belly and slices space enough to get a hand in. Out with his guts and heart, but it's something else they want. Maybe his liver. Whatever, the warm meat is pulled from him, hacked off and raised. Sean listens, dying. The meat is squeezed, its juice added to the bucket which the men will drain as their last and most important protection. Sean dies again, and the last faces in his mind's eye are those of the only folk he'd ever known and loved, berserk with fear and rage.

It's not for me to say if Poppy was simply drunk and gibbering. It doesn't matter if his story was true or not, and no-one can ever say it was or wasn't, except maybe Sean. What matters is that I, in my excitement and stupidity, repeated the story to the others the next day. Poppy is a seer, I told them. He has the gift, I said. Da cracked up when he heard I'd been talking, but it was too late.

Poppy was forced to wander even further afield in search of a pub where he would not be pestered for racing forecasts and bombarded with selfish medical enquiries. People would

go to his door at all times of the day and night, and there was even talk of some film crew wanting to make a documentary with him in it. He eventually moved away, and none of us even know if he's still alive.

Sometimes I wonder if he sees his own next life, or had seen mine, and then try to imagine what he may have seen. And then I see my own life for myself, and wonder what that means at all. Not as exciting as Sean The Stag's, that's for sure. Then I look about here of a daytime, at the shaky old crumblers who pay my bills and my wages, and I wonder whether I'd rather my guts torn from me at the peak of an adventure, or be left to fossilise in peace. And I truly don't know.

Leigh French

Babes in Toyland

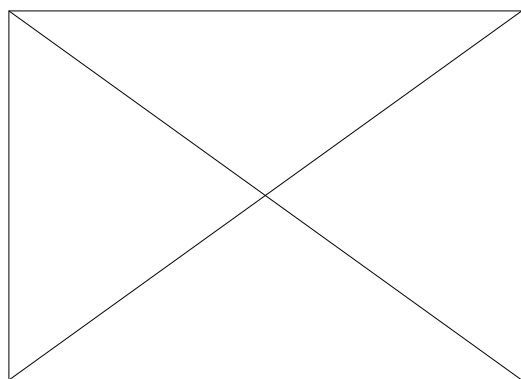
review

becks new contemporaries '97

Cornerhouse, Manchester, 31 May–20 July '97
Camden Arts Centre, London,
1 August–21 September '97
CCA, Glasgow, 12 December '97–31 January '98

I SUPPOSE I STARTED THINKING, not unlike the Turner Prize, another year, another newcontemporaries exhibition. Reading through the catalogue my initial feeling was that this year there at least appeared to be an attempt to address the parameters of the New contemporaries exhibition ethos. This is currently situated as 'a' highly publicised (as regards the art world) selected exhibition of newly graduated and soon to be graduating artists. Parallel to this, there seemed to be an inquiry into the purposes and conditions of the art educational institution within a European context today. The catalogue consists of discussions between the selectors of the exhibition: Sarat Maharaj, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gillian Wearing, and responses (invited letters) to the selectors' statement: "The art school closes in 1997: imagine its reinvention". These are by students, critics, artists and educationalists, based predominantly in Europe.

However, this feeling of optimism was short lived. The amount of actual examination appeared a flippant gesture. There are deep rooted issues concerning the



New
Contemporaries
Image: CCA

intertwining relationships of how 'culture' is defined and affirmed through the processes of education, together with the consecrating power of 'commercial' publicity. To represent this with a simplistic 'survey'—where nearly all the reproduced invited responses cover one A4 sheet or less—all for 'nothing more than' reproduction in a catalogue with little intended follow up, is tokenistic. This criticism had some presence within the pages of the catalogue. In a reply to the requested response to the possibility of the reinvention of the art school, Stephan Dilleuth replied "...as if it were possible to reinvent the art school just for the sake of a funny curatorial mood...it becomes issue surfing as diversion".

The selectors' actions, through concentrating the catalogue 'deliberation' not on the individual artists and their works but in a limited way on the systems and structures that led them to be exhibited, could be interpreted as a means of distancing themselves from being individually identified with the specific artists and works chosen. As suggested by Sarat Maharaj in the catalogue discussion, reasons for taking this approach may be because the means by which the participating newcontemporaries artists are selected have led in recent years to an 'outright', unquestioned endorsement of their work by our ever vigilant cultural

commissars. A quick and easy celebration of this year's new model, the 'only' qualitative judgment undertaken being grounded on the artists' 'natural' inclusion in the 'hallowed halls' in the first place. The accusation is that this 'phenomenon' not only forecloses on the possibilities of a more expansive dialogue to exist around the 'presentation' of artists' 'work', but also on what forms/strategies the production of 'work' may take and what a relationship to an 'audience' may be.

Over the newcontemporaries' various incarnations, from the Young Contemporaries through to corporate sponsorship with BT and now Becks, it has ossified into a template of patronage. The artists/critics/curators on the selectors' panel over the years, perhaps through the expression of their own particular 'tastes' within a group dynamic, have appeared, sometimes blatantly, to select applicants who best reflect their own practices and positions—a legitimising, 'naturalised', historic linearity the result.

"The establishment of a canon in the guise of a universally valued cultural inheritance or patrimony constitutes an act of 'symbolic violence'...in that it gains legitimacy by misrecognising the underlying power relations which serve, in part, to guarantee the continued reproduction of the legitimacy of those who produce or defend the canon." 1

Where has this left the spaces within newcontemporaries for 'anything else' to happen when there appears to be no challenge to the circus of the myopic exhibition circuit?

Within the catalogue there is a challenge to the newcontemporaries' applicants' belief in a 'formula for success' (that belief being interpreted as the apparent mimicking of recent work and approaches by 'leading' contemporary artists), and the college and market encouraged 'artistic practice of repetition' (the artist emerging from college with a 'whole', 'complete' practice, their years spent in education in perfection of it and continued thereafter in the production of easily quantifiable and advertised commodities). Instead of this, Sarat Maharaj desires work that is "eccentric", "erratic", "obsessive", "quirky", and "plain daft". This in itself has no escape velocity, if that is the intention. Given the product placement of 'the' young-british-artists, such work (if we see it as "eccentric" etc.) has been consolidated in just such a formulaic way. Hasn't the 'unique artist genius' been reinvested under the guise of the 'integrity of the individual'? In a market that values originality as an expression of authenticity isn't novelty 'the' prime trading point? The same fetishism of originality, originality for originality's sake.

There is also the feeling from the newcontemporaries catalogue discussion that a shifting, dynamic practice is 'just' that of the student in search of 'their own' voice, implying that they will find this most perfect and personal means of expression, in time—the value of the process only being legitimised by the evidence of the final product in 'the' marketplace. However 'understated' in presentation, this is reinforced by Gillian Wearing's confession that she was rejected four times from the newcontemporaries: from not fitting in, somehow her aspirations and newcontemporaries' seem to have magically converged.

Perhaps in some quarters there is also a backlash against what appear to have been acceptable, not unadventurous, distortions of an '80s critique of 'masculine' 'originality' (a critique perhaps 'typified' by Sherrie Levine) and Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author' (where the 'viewer' is seen as an active reader of the work, integral in constructing meaning). The distortions being "everything's been done, therefore..." and "it's a free-for-all" 'respectively', saw the lines of individualism redrawn, the specificity of history evacuated, and the 'empty' husks treated as nothing more than entries into a visual backcatalogue for re-use, ready to be 'personalised' with a new 'charisma'. But

perhaps far from being a 'fad', a blip, this is the culmination of the contradictory constitution of UK arts education: of socialised learning, still not overtly dissimilar to the apprenticeship tradition; of the therapy session reinforcement of the imperative for 'unique' individual expression—which together 'happen' to reflect the markets' requirements for peculiarity while maintaining a continuity.

The apparent distancing by the selectors from the actual act of selecting this year is perhaps also an attempt to generate precisely a space in which to 'entertain' the thoughts of 'other' artistic practices and activities, other than what is presently 'encouraged' symbiotically through newcontemporaries and 'the' educational system: to 'explore' other forms of 'exhibition' strategy that don't 'just' lead to a validation of the international-bright-young-thing, quick sale mentality. Sarat Maharaj's comments in the catalogue best pursue this, for example, on the changing role of the tutor, the critic, the visiting artist and the historian he states: "It seems to have become less easy to distinguish their ideal function of offering critical challenge and debate, of raising difficult, sticky issues from the rather more narrow business of promotion", and his view that newcontemporaries should not become, "...simply a site for high-speed endorsement of work with an eye to market trends", which I take as a polite suggestion that he feels it already has. Unfortunately this year's show does little to counter this. In at least raising the spectre of art education, the catalogue starts to bring to the fore the questioning of the specific process of cultural transmission and training, and "the process by which the realisation of culture becomes 'natural'." 2 There appears to be a presumption in the catalogue, though, that all discourses in art schools (within the UK) are the same. That presumption is the universalism of 'the' London experience, an ignoring of geographical specificity. However spurred on by the government through a replacement funding system based on prescriptive research assessment (where colleges are attributed points primarily on the grounds of staff 'performance' through exhibiting and publishing, and, in a game show manner, these points converted to cash) and art colleges half-hearted attempts at imitating a mythologised 'London' model of 'success', this is 'simply' not the case.

Gillian Wearing states that "...the show should function as a kind of snap shot-transcript of art activity, making and thinking about art in the late 1990s...a show which is saying 'this is the state of play among a sizable swathe of young practitioners in the country today'". This though is also not the case. It is a selection by a selected panel of four individuals of work by finishing and recently graduated students who decided to apply. Newcontemporaries may actually provide an opportunity to focus attention on selected activity within this designated slice of producers throughout the UK, as opposed to just the familiar focus on London psychoses. Whether in the resulting collating of work it does or not is up to the selected selectors' tastes, particular interests and relations to teaching establishments and students, and the desired participation by those who are deemed eligible (both selectors and students alike). All of which is overseen by the exhibition strategy, where the artists' work still has to be both 'transportable' and 'transposable'.

While questioning the lack of idiosyncrasy in practices within the applications to the show, what is left out of the discussion within the catalogue is the actual questioning of what effects the social, economic and political barriers erected over the past 15 years have had on art school/college intake. It is problematic for the newcontemporaries' selectors to query the range of the work represented in the applications without also querying the racial, social, sexual, geographical and gender representation within art schools. Undoubtedly, the government 'imposed' changes to the financing of Higher Education have further resulted in the privileg-

ing of education to those who can afford it.

Underscoring the 'entertaining' of the possibility of change in art education within the catalogue is the rash premise that the principles and purposes of education are removed from state authority and its interests—free floating in a utopian bubble. That production is socially determined, the result of a long and complex historical process, is jettisoned, for the ease and simplicity of ... 'discussion'? The prime obstacle in any shift within the educational system as a whole are the institutions' immersion in the broader ideological state apparatus.

The late '80s closing down and merging (or is that downsizing) of art schools within London were the outcomes of the Conservative government's 'vocational education' drive, presently being expanded upon by the 'new Labour' government. This includes the privatisation of Further Education funding and the advancing of competition, rather than communication, between institutions through the research point funding mechanism, amongst other things. This competition is just as strongly reflected in the internal struggles between departments within those very institutions in the annual pillar to post pursuit of funds and studio space.

Within the schools and colleges full time staff are increasingly having to take over greater administrative functions, the result of imposed structural changes, bizarre course assessment procedures, increasing financial pressures, intensifying student numbers in relation to staff student ratios and available studio space. The resulting outcome is all too often makeshift or makedo.

Part time staff have been 'drafted in' in an attempt to shore up the 'teaching' shortfall, partly as a cheaper alternative to full time staff and partly in response to the institutions' need for research qualifications—these predominantly 'young' artists through their own activity in the areas of exhibiting and publishing and their relative numbers 'produce' more convertible research points.

The employing of part time staff and visiting lecturers is not new. It is a commonplace activity within arts educational institutions, but perhaps some of the emphasis for their inclusion in a course has shifted. This is not to undermine the potential of such relationships and the benefits to those artists/critics in having 'employment', however sporadically, and access to the 'zest of youth'. Part time staff and visiting lecturers may allow for a broader representation of interests and practices within schools/colleges, being either a balance to the 'dead wood' or to supplant the student contact time of the actual educational full time staff. However, with part time staff often being on 'fragile' contracts, they have little leverage to create concrete changes within the educational environment. But they are able to make small inroads in raising the expectations of students and encouraging 'other' ways of working. The student, though, is still left to challenge the institutional monoliths alone. And let's not forget, part time staff, as with full time, can also be drafted in to support 'the Department's position', effectively foreclosing on any 'other' activity.

In the most cynical regimes, specifically employed 'research members' may not necessarily be intended to have any contact or execution over the college's

JEMIMA BROWN
Pumping up Dolly
Brown (video)

existing day to day educational activities, being there simply to concoct the research points, annexed in relative isolation.

In the UK art education system students are at an institution for between 2 and 4 years (undergraduate, postgraduate), once understanding the system within which you are enveloped and delineated by, there is only so much time in tenure for students to attempt to affect the actual educational institution itself, perhaps unintentionally through trying to cross departmental boundaries in the processes of experimentation. The continued fanciful pigeon-holing of 'legitimate' practices into separate compartments within art schools, painting, sculpture etc.—despite broader institutional acceptance of a diversification in what constitutes a practice—may well serve the interests of departmental jerry-mandering but do nothing to encourage such exploratory multiform work.

Once in the school/college door, there are also specific funding difficulties for students in challenging the institution, in whatever way, especially today. As individual schools/colleges have the financial responsibilities of students previously undertaken by government and local government dumped on them, and as the student 'grant' rapidly vanishes, internal school/college grants and bursaries become an ever more essential aspect of day to day survival for students. The expectation that students are going to demand a better 'service' for the education they 'purchase' doesn't reflect the continuing disproportionate power structures within academic institutions. The National Union of Students (NUS), the supposed watchdog for students, was ineffectual in defending its members' interests against the last government and has shown little backbone in doing so in the face of the present one. Hardly surprising when the NUS seldom looks more than a grooming parlor for the 'official' left. Any student within, and wanting to continue in, Further Education is ultimately reliant on the institution for endorsed qualifications as those qualifications are the bureaucratic bench marks within the present and proposed Further Education funding systems, not to mention private bursaries and grants. These qualifications may actually take on even more of an importance within this circuit, from foundation level and its equivalents onwards, as the financing of the Further Education system is progressively privatised and private funders look for some form of guarantee of return on their investment, sanctioned qualifications acting as just that.

Not to conflate the 'relatively' independent existence of newcontemporaries and the state subject educational system, but problems that arise for transitory staff in effecting change within the educational system in some ways parallel any one newcontemporaries panel attempting to effect change within its exhibition structure, as perhaps this year did. Newcontemporaries' selectors are only there for a short period (one show), and they also effectively reflect the broad tastes of the overseeing panel who selected them. In this instance the onus for change within the newcontemporaries lies with having a progressive directorship/management. (Newcontemporaries' 'personnel' are faintly listed within the opening pages of the catalogue as: chair—Sacha Craddock; Vice Chair—Jill Ritblat; directors—John Huntingford, Rebecca King-Lassman, Dez Lawrence, Andrea Schlieker, Mark Wallinger; company secretary—Tony Paterson; administrators—Bev Bytheway, Andrew Critchley.) And as Gillian Wearing suggested in the catalogue regarding art schools/col-

leges at the present time, one way of removing some of the barriers to allow for more experimentation by those already in college is in having good flexible relations between defined departments, or in removing the regulatory departmental fences altogether. This, though, does nothing to breach the widening financial moat surrounding access to education in the first instance.

While the newcontemporaries catalogue serves to raise questions of both art education's and newcontemporaries' broader involvement in the placement of young artists in the market, the underlying managerial structure of newcontemporaries is left intact and the selectors' own authority within this system of consecration remains largely unquestioned, if not tactically sidestepped. This year's newcontemporaries exhibition suffers from the very same annual ills supposedly under question. The difference being this year that the exhibition reveals the symptoms, the catalogue readily diagnoses, suggested cures are sought, the body lurches on regardless.

The changing panel of selectors for the newcontemporaries, as chosen by the management committee, this year allows for a range of individual artist's, critic's, curator's diversities of tastes. But the newcontemporaries' annual shifting public face, within a general field of practice, has gone without any real questioning of its present day purposes, and still has a limited ability to 'represent' due to its exhibition structure and continuing constraints on practice. It currently appears to be unable to challenge the assumptions of what an 'artistic' practice could be. At least the dialogue and responses within the catalogue may begin this process, something more than is tolerated, never mind generated, within the present 'backs to the wall' educational environment. One question arising is how willing and able are educational establishments to critique these 'competitions' when they are so heavily involved and reliant on them as markers of 'their own' success and endorsement within the vocational framework—how many students from their courses get chosen for newcontemporaries, or how may newcontemporaries artists apply, and get on, to postgraduate courses. The education system at present is, after all, based on a system of competition (there are winners and losers in games of college and departmental 'profiling' and 'suitability') which the newcontemporaries is itself an active participant in. Any questioning of one is implicitly a questioning of the other.

The panel made its choice of artists and work and effected the few events and discussions that surrounded the exhibitions. But perhaps it is acceptable to vaguely discuss the reinvention of the art school precisely because it is insubstantial and because next year it will be a different issue surrounding the newcontemporaries, given the change in the selectors, a new tail to pin on the donkey, more grist for the mill.

Within the catalogue it is suggested that possibilities for an expanded framework of participation (by both practitioners and public) may lie in the inclusion of 'new technologies', CD ROM and Web work. The newcontemporaries' application form for this year (1998) includes such media. Hopefully this is not the stuff of technological utopianism as the technology itself does not necessarily escape the dynamics of the systems supposedly under question. 'New Media' is now able to be brought into the fold in this way precisely because it is able to "...overturn the hierarchy of the field without disturbing the principles on which the field is based. Thus [the] revolutions are only ever partial ones, which displace the censorships and transgress the conventions but do so in the name of the same underlying principles".³

notes

- ¹ *The field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bordieu; Editors Introduction, Randal Johnson; Polity Press 1993
- ² *The field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bordieu; Polity Press 1993
- ³ *Ibid.*

BLOCK Capitalism

The BLOCK Reader in Visual Culture

As we rapidly head towards the impending millennial deadline of the year 2000 all sorts of people, in all kinds of contexts are, it would appear, becoming increasingly addicted to the characteristically nebulous notions of the 'spiritual' and of the 'soul'.¹ The sphere of the arts has, predictably, more than its fair share of such subscribers to vagueness and to the unexplained. In the art schools, metaphysical patterns of perception and ideologies of self-expression hold stronger-than-ever positions of influence, gullible clusters of students being more than keen to swallow as 'gospel' the ravings of certain mindlessly inspired teaching staff. What might be referred to as the long-term nonsense of the pious and priestly image of the artist has been, in recent years, further supplemented with the equally pernicious 'mindset' promoted by glossy potboilers such as Matthew Collings' "Blimey!", a book that is in many ways the practical antithesis of "The BLOCK Reader".² Both works exist as examples of writings produced in intimate relation to the art school environment but this is just about where the similarities begin and end. Whilst Collings' terse and lackadaisical tract acts to reinforce mainstream, often unconvincing ideas about artworks and those who produce them "The BLOCK Reader" offers, in contrast, an entirely different 'take' on the context, attitudes and strategies found to be operating in art and design institutions today. For one thing, Collings' contribution is an intended easy read, a short and slimy account of the London 'scene', supportive of its central trends, antagonistic to theory, which it presents as the enemy of art practice as such. Whilst trying to don the mask of an up-to-the-minute intimacy with Brit art's increasingly pungent dumbness, Collings' croaky prose poses, no doubt without intending to do so, the question of its own inadequacy as a fashionable guide to current arty fashions. It is already the case that within the Fine Art department of London's Goldsmiths College, a key site in Brit art mythology, the abbreviation 'yBa' has taken on the resonance of (italic) 'yesterday's British art'.³ Fashion, by definition, contains its own near-instant disintegration of values: what was, only a moment before, pertinent and true becomes, inevitably, that which is passé and bland, having lost the vigour, presence, glitter and pitch of its previously unproblematic qualitative distinction. "Blimey!", first published in 1997, has now been issued in a second edition but its cutting edge image is already blunted and broken. Furthermore, the prominent themes of the book looked from the start somewhat 'old hat', its author scratching around for evidence of the novelty of his chosen corner of the scene when little of genuine novelty was there to be had. The same old naive musings on the extra-linguistic nature of art, the same stupid mutterings about how art 'speaks' for itself: it was really these clichés and cracked beliefs that Brit art had attached itself to all along, its plug-in 'punk' inanity popping up as a defense claim whenever it had to deal with anything approaching a serious critique of its credentials as interesting art.

So much, then, for the novelty of the 'new'. The paradox of this comparison between "Blimey!" and "The BLOCK Reader" is that the latter publication is in many ways the more timely of the two books, emphasising as it does an interrogative approach to art and design practice that is not a little needful in today's narrow-minded, tightly-clannish climate. Making its first appearance in 1979 and, ten years later, closing its run with its fifteenth issue, "BLOCK" was, as the opening sentence of the book's general introduction

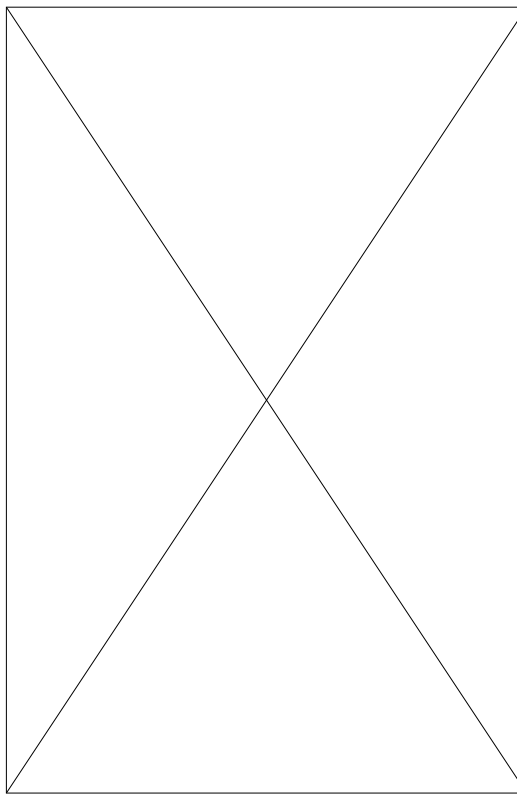
indicates, "...an initiative that was very much of its time and place: a manifestation of the cultural logic of a newly self-conscious, historicised, and politicised initiative in the cultural realm; and a simultaneous allergic reaction to the idealism of academic art history."⁴

The irony is that, notwithstanding the point about the chronological and geographical specificity of their production, the essays comprising this anthology mark out, and by their re-publication, reassert, the relevance of certain key theoretical, critical and methodological concerns which have, it is true, been somewhat marginalised by recent art-world trends.

The "Reader" contains seventeen essays, placed under the three distinct categories of "Art history", "Design history" and "Cultural theory", each section being introduced by a short, unsigned, editorial text. These section introductions contain a number of noteworthy remarks and encourage the view that the anthology has been assembled not only in order to bring to a broader audience material first published within the journal, but also in an attempt to intervene in present-day institutional structures and beliefs, in that is, "the institutions of knowledge and their increasing capitulation to the logic of the corporate mentality..."⁵ The individual essays in each section are presented in order of their first publication. The book opens with Lucy Lippard's "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980", from "BLOCK" 4, 1981; and concludes with Judith Williamson's interview with Jean Baudrillard, "BLOCK" 15, 1989. There is an appendix listing the contents of all fifteen issues of the journal and an excellent index. Twenty-four black and white reproductions are employed within the text. Physically the book is well-made, sewn with only the minimum of printing errors. The cover carries a colourful grid of closely-photographed closed-circuit TV cameras, signifying spectacular society's rage for surveillance and self-policing, whilst recalling too the quirky diversity to be found amongst the products of industrial design. Warhol, appropriately, is also suggested.

In the introduction to the second section of the "Reader"⁶ we are told that "BLOCK" evolved in an art school where the majority of students were engaged in design practices..., and also that the journal "set out to treat design, like art, as an ideologically encoded commodity, the value and significance of which were dependent on dominant modes of consumption." "This approach", the text continues, "was in opposition to prevailing versions of design writing which adopted untransformed art historical notions of univocal authorship, inherent meaning and received hierarchies of value." "Critical perspectives", it is also proposed, "acquired an early relevance in the drive to provide a social context for various components of everyday life."⁷

These remarks comprise but one example of the editor's attempt to give an account, however briefly, of the founding of and approach utilised within BLOCK, as well as highlighting the current relevance of the material chosen for inclusion, and perhaps, by implication, those writings carried by the journal but not reproduced here. (Of the approximately one hundred essays included in "BLOCK" some eighty remain available exclusively by accessing back issues of the journal). They also point up a recurring theme, that of the position of design history as a supposedly coherent discipline, one claiming independence from that of art history. This is not a matter of merely academic dis-



pute so much as the raising of a question about the relationship of design to broader societal factors. It further suggests a welcome recognition that knowledge produced within academic institutions can be used to criticise and reformulate prevalent capitalist trends. Now that academic institutions are at the mercy of managers whose chief interest is in the production of company profits (their self-image as 'barons' of industry being one of the more laughable, though also most alarming aspects of recent changes in the education sector), this awareness needs to be most vigorously asserted. As Fred Orton notes in his essay on Jasper Johns: "The production of meaning is social and institutional, differential and dispersed, contestable and continually renewed."⁸ It is a virtue of many of the essays in "The Block Reader" that they address how it is that meanings and values are fabricated and distributed through the particular physicality of a given project or design strategy, as well as much as by individual works of art and design. The articles by Fran Hannah and Tim Putman, and by Necdet Teymur do this directly, through an examination of prevalent design-world attitudes and corresponding forms of teaching practice, whilst the pieces by Kathy Myers and by Philippa Goodall attend to matters of object commodification and to gender-connected values inscribed within individual designs, as well as to the contexts of their consumption.

A recognition of how important it is to attend to the rampantly ideological nonsense promoted within the confines of fine art education is displayed in Griselda Pollock's essay on "Art, Art School, Culture". Pollock

Peter Suchin

observes that: “Bourgeois concepts of art celebrate individualism by means of the idea of the self-motivating and self-creating artist who makes things which embody that peculiarly heightened and highly valued subjectivity. It is fundamentally a romantic idea of the artist as the feeling being whose works express both a personal sensibility and a universal condition. What art schools today actively propose or promote any other concept of the artist, for in stance, as producer, worker, practitioner?”⁹ The implied negative response to the question closing this extract might well be similarly negative if again raised today, a dozen years after this essay was first published. Brit art’s boastful dumbing down is the jewel in the crown of the art school establishment’s pro-stupid stance. In what other educational framework would one find so many participants proposing that to be informed about the history and parameters of one’s practice was anathema to the further development of that practice? Similarly, several of the issues examined in Jon Bird’s analytically astute discussion of “Art History and Hegemony” remain of considerable relevance. Amongst other things Bird touches upon definitions of the public and the private (often found in a muddled form within the art schools but here clearly and concisely expressed), the supporting of ‘blockbuster’ art shows by ‘blockbuster’ beers such as Beck’s, the radical potential of Foucault’s ideas as tools of critique, the inescapable nature of language (art students please note!), Virilo’s reading of the nuclear age as one in which a sense of the sublime has resurfaced through a recognition of the potential extinction of the human species, and the spurious claims made for the autonomy of aesthetic value judgments. Bird is, furthermore, perceptive enough to be aware that not only are certain conservative ideas well-entrenched within capitalist social life, but that there are other dangerous frames of reference, action and aspiration, equally demanding of vigilant consideration: “It is easy to forget, outside of Left-intellectual art historical circles, just how fixed, particularly in relation of questions of gender and race, are the terms “art”, “artist”, “history”, “society”, etc... in the broader context of the dissemination of high culture. On the other hand, in street-wise, post-structuralist, post-modernist deconstructive circles, questions of truth, political morality, cognition, etc. are dumped as outmoded referents in the celebration of image, spectacle and surface.”¹⁰ This passage displays a complex and intelligent relation to the academic world, which can easily be, even today in the ‘age’ of modules, learning contracts and money-motivated research interests, a context that is relatively isolated from the vicissitudes of the marketplace, at least insofar as intellectual fashions are concerned. Following fashions of any sort is a way of rescinding responsibility, the examples given by Bird being especially problematic, since they have an ambiance of political correctness about them, notwithstanding the fact that they may involve a moving away from values of greater political pertinence.

The structure of “The BLOCK Reader” is such that it can be easily read as either a series of discrete essays or as a more extended and interconnected panoply of issues. It is clear that the editing work has been assiduously carried out, the selection working well as a whole, with themes appearing in individual papers and then being again, later on in the book, further developed. Individual essays do not appear to have been altered since their first publication in “BLOCK”, with the single exception of Teymur’s article, which is a “revised version” of the piece published in 1981. The

section introductions emphasise recurring themes without distorting the emphases made within individual contributions, and it is not difficult to see why the book is divided up into three distinct, if interlocking parts. Since one of the issues under discussion in several places within the Reader is the debt owed to art history by the (still insubstantial) ‘discipline’ of design history, and another involves debate about the reading of more extensive, less discipline-restricted fields of cultural production, the gradual move from an examination of art and the artist to ‘culture’ via analyses of what exactly ‘design’ and ‘design history’ might be is convincing and to the point.

This double act of division and, in effect resolution, is all the more impressive for the diversity of contributions. This is not to suggest that the pieces of the jigsaw always neatly interlock, or that the book is entirely lacking in points with which one would disagree. But given the nature of the project, which is at one and the same time an act of historical documentation and an attempt at assembling a work of some contemporary relevance (irrespective of whatever changes have occurred within our culture since the texts collected here were first published), given these conditions, the value of this work is considerable. “The BLOCK Reader” is not an easy, quick or shallow read but it is an interesting and informative one. I take it that the febrile aficionados of “Blimey!” and of Brit art will disagree.

The BLOCK Reader in Visual Culture,
Ed. Jon Bird et al
Routledge, 1996 (ISBN 0-415-13989-9) 342 pp. £14.95 (paperback)

notes

- ¹ For a discussion of the analogous late 19th century obsession with metaphysical matters see James Webb, “The Flight From Reason”, Macdonald, 1971.
- ² Mathew Collings, “Blimey!”, 21, 1997. See the October 1997 issue of “AN” for a review of this work by present author.
- ³ Simon Ford has examined the ‘mythological’ aspects of ‘young British art’ in his essay “Myth Making”, included in Duncan McCortquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (Eds.), “Occupational Hazard”, Black Dog Publications, 1998.
- ⁴ The BLOCK Reader in Visual Culture, p. xi
- ⁵ Ibid., p. xiv
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 131
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 109
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 53
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 79

Red Rebel Song

sing boy
sing
dere’s more to you
dan skin

ya DaDa’s fingers
witlow
from years of cleaning corners
where brush an dustpan couldn’t reach
Some han
would tap ya shoulders
wid hope an Dreams
of some rainbow future.

Nikki the warrior

When all my stolen moments
from all the memories of
me and you
gather to form a shape...
your smile begins to appear
on a single soft sheet
of paper
I could almost taste ya kiss
if I put my lips on them
sheet of paper
I could scent ya smell,
And feel ya gaze
but be careful not to gaze too
long or your brown eyes
might start to water

5662

I wanna be westernized
I’m Indian, I’m Chinese
Polonese
Jamaican, from
Dominican Republic of
Nigeria, Algeria

But I speak YOUR twang
I just wanna be accepted
I need not be protected
from my roots, cos
I’m sellin out 5662 years of
civilisation
achieved by my nation
And will be one of you guys
with NO ties about,
your spiritual being
And that feelin’
Deep inside. needing to belong
to a culture
I’m a vulture
And I’ll eat ya if ya
Don’t give me my rights
I’ll behave...Not like the
Slave my DaDa was
I’ll hunt ya down.
Make ya see the Real me
An Arab, Polonese,
Afro Chinese.
Syrenese
With mutilated thoughts
AND A MAGNUM⁴⁵:

R.E. Sammi

Career Opportunities, the ones that never knock

Interviews with Matt Hale of City Racing,

David Crawford of Beaconsfield, and John Russell of Bank

David Burrows

MOREOFTENTHAN not, the opening chapter on the history of the Avant Garde features a visit to Gustav Courbet's bungalow. Courbet was horrified that the Exposition Universelle of 1855 displayed his paintings, dispersed among other paintings, in the same light as common commodities and he removed his canvases from the Exposition to a purpose built bungalow which he then opened to the public. Maintained for five months, Courbet's bungalow was not a home for rejected art works, unloved and unwanted by the Exposition's committee. Gustav's bungalow was instead a gesture of defiance that signaled Courbet's attempt to control the exhibition of his own work. It could be objected that Courbet is not a *bona fide* member of the Avant Garde as he was not alienated from the public reception of his work. The removal of art from institutional and commercial settings to independent lodgings however, is a familiar story throughout the history of the Avant Garde. In the 20th century the attempt to occupy a space beyond the institution allowed artists to broaden the field of artistic activity. The Bureau of the Surrealists, for instance, was a place where the visitor could not only encounter surrealist objects but the Surrealists themselves. The Avant Garde's occupation of territory beyond the institution, which defines the social challenge of the Avant Garde, is often accompanied by a second process in which the institution accommodates such independent enterprises. The role as chronicler of culture furnishes the institution with its power. In this process the museum is not all-powerful of course. If institutions do not refresh themselves they become dry and crumble. The institution always requires fresh bodies.

In London for instance the boundaries between institutional, commercial and independent space are no longer so clear, presuming that is, that they ever were. Britain's art scene is often praised for the 'DIY' attitude of its artists, particularly in London and Glasgow where the mythical rise of 'nBa' is intertwined with the lesser known history of independent initiatives of the last ten years. In London, Time Out have recently dropped the term 'Alternative' under which such exhibitions were once listed. Time Out's new term, 'up-coming', was received with derision by many but perhaps it is closer to the aspirations of artists that organise their own shows. In the following interviews I discussed the relevance of the term alternative with three members of artist run spaces in London, City Racing, Beaconsfield and BANK, to see whether they thought the term had any relevance to their own practice.

Matt Hale of City Racing

City Racing is situated in an old betting shop adjacent to the Oval cricket ground in South London. A group of five artists consisting of Matt Hale, John Burgess, Keith Coventry, Peter Owen and Paul Noble, programme and organise the gallery. Since 1988 the group have exhibited their own work and, amongst others, the work of Gillian Wearing, Lucy Gunning and Sarah Lucas.

David Burrows: I want to ask, first of all, about the history of City Racing. Did City Racing show work outside the interests of mainstream and commercial spaces in the beginning?

MH: I don't think I could say that. But it was work that was not being shown and that was the reason for City Racing existing.

DB: Why wasn't the work exhibited at City Racing being shown in commercial venues?

MH: Usual reasons. People didn't know you or what you did, nerves in approaching galleries, and if you did approach commercial galleries there was a feeling that they wouldn't be welcoming. So there was a feeling of exclusion.

DB: So in 1988, when City Racing began, it was a very West End (of London) orientated art scene with only artists of a certain age group showing and City Racing plugged the gap?

MH: I think that's the feeling I definitely had and I suspect that is what others felt. Keith Coventry and Peter Owen organised the first show—they wanted to show their work. But not as an alternative gesture saying we don't like West End galleries... I have to say that in '88 there was one City Racing show and that I wasn't involved. I went and Keith and Pete basically mailed out to their friends, old tutors and a list rummaged out of Time Out and City Limits. I think the opening was just friends, artists in the main.

DB: So, in one sense, City Racing refused to be marginalised from the mainstream and had conventional career aspirations?

MH: Yes. The second show in 1998, which I was in, was in a disused bookies, City racing, which was really Keith's studio. We tried to make it as white-cube like as possible, as gallery-like as possible. There was no high principle behind it, just a desire to show... We were fed up of waiting to be offered a show, so we thought show yourself, but we didn't discuss this at length, or at least I didn't.

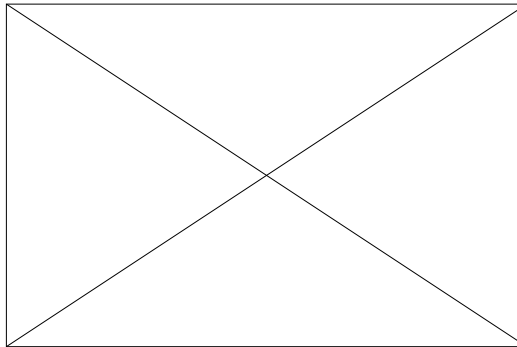
DB: And there was no shared idealism?

MH: No, not in that we read this and believed that or understood the history of alternative spaces... But I don't think we were totally naive and we were aware of how things had been done. I saw shows that were curated by artists and I remember that energy and it did seem different when you went to these shows.

DB: There's a claim made about this period of activity ('88-'90), and about independent shows and spaces in general, that of a 'DIY' ethic coming from Punk. Neville Wakefield suggested this in his essay for Brilliant but...

MH: Yeah. Well it was well after Punk but maybe there was that energy. I applied to Chelsea Art School because I was into Punk. I didn't give a shit about the college except it was on the Kings Road, simple as that, pathetic really, but...

DB: But I find it hard to believe that there is a direct link



SARAH LUCAS
Seven Up,
Untitled and
Upturned Bicycle:
City Racing 1992

between artists organised exhibitions in London in the late '80s and Punk.

MH: No I don't think you can say that but I think it is interesting you should mention it as maybe there was an idea that the best bands weren't from big record companies, bollocks to them, the best bands were from little companies, small labels. Maybe there is a link with independent labels.

DB: What about later on when City Racing became more established.

MH: You mean the Karsten Schubert thing... We had a benefit at Kartsen Schuberts'... I think his interest was to do with street cred, commercial galleries were being questioned by the press, saying that they were boring and that here was this better alternative scene happening in London.

DB: Where did this idea come from?

MH: I can't say, other than it's just a memory I have. A gradual change. An alternative art section appeared in Time Out and City Limits and my memory is that I thought at the time this is why Karsten made a link with us.

DB: It's interesting that artists' activity affected listings. Were openings important, is that how a scene developed?

MH: Yeah, I think so. The social side of City Racing for us was important at the time. Artists weren't meeting up to talk about things. After college you didn't know many people and you wouldn't get invited to commercial galleries, so yeah, the openings were important.

DB: City Racing showed Sarah Lucas, which was a successful show. There is a view that City Racing became seen as a feeder to commercial, more official galleries. Do you think that's unfair to say that?

MH: No, I don't think that's unfair. Some shows were like that and some weren't, but I remember thinking that City Racing was there to show artists' work and they might get other shows, some at galleries like

Karsten Schuberts, if it was somewhere else then fine. But it wasn't only that, we did a lot of installations which weren't commercial in an obvious way. Quite a lot of work that wouldn't have been seen as they were awkward buggers to show or sell. The shows that I like are the ones that wouldn't have happened elsewhere.

DB: I want to talk now about the way art associated with 'nBa' came out of small, localised scenes and that something of the initial impulse behind some of the work disappears when placed under the 'nBa' banner at an international level. Does City Racing recognise itself in this image of London's swinging art scene?

MH: It's interesting you should say that. We certainly recognise an international context, in other words lots of people from abroad started to come to our shows. This is how we did a show in Bremen, the guy from Bremen had heard of us as one thing happening in London.

DB: I feel that independent artists' ventures came out of specific circumstances, lack of experimental spaces, economic situations, responses to local hierarchies. A lot of recent British art has drawn on local culture. Like Bank using British tabloids, or Sarah Lucas' use of slang. That's very different from Cragg's use of found objects, Deacon's garden furniture sculpture and even Woodrow's use of a washing machine. They all had more international outlooks.

MH: My memory is that in the '80s, somehow people produced expensively made work. There was an idea that there was an international debate and an international scene. And there were people who aspired to that but I couldn't see myself in that or that it was possible to be involved in that. Therefore it felt like an exclusion took place. So the reaction was to look at your own navel a bit more, and yeah, think in more local terms but not nationalistically. I remember shows where everything was clean, expensive, lots of MDF and sharp edges, glossy surfaces. This was something related not to the artists but to some debate going on in Flash Art or Artforum and you just thought, 'why are you doing this, you're never going to be in those shows or magazines?' I did see artists change, stop doing that and do other things entirely in the late '80s and early '90s.

DB: There was a change?

MH: People made more quirky things. I tread carefully when talking about City Racing but, for instance, there was one show where Paul Noble hung toilet rolls from string and another where Keith Coventry stuffed nylon stockings with cuddly toys and biscuit tins.

DB: What did people think they were doing?

MH: We were conscious of not making museum art, that I can say. But people do things without always knowing why. At the time I was making paintings and wrapped up with the argument of what's original. DB: After all the artist run spaces that have sprung up over the last ten years, do you think they failed to chal-

lenge existing power structures and hierarchies in London's art scene?

MH: I don't think City Racing ever thought we could. I'm not trying to be clever after the event, but I didn't think things would be different, but there has been a change, there is a different kind of work about that wasn't being seen before. Installation for instance.

DB: Where I teach I sense that *Sensation* has created a pressure on some students.

MH: They think of *Sensation* like we thought of Museum shows in the '80s. That the doors are shut and that it's an exclusive club. Yeah, some people feel excluded in London and I'm certain City Racing is seen as the establishment as we have certain contacts, but again I don't think we thought we could change that.

David Crawford of Beaconsfield

Beaconsfield are a group consisting of David Crawford, Naomi Siderfin and Angus Neill, which grew out of Nosepaint, who organised art events and performances that took place at a range of venues. Today, they have an impressive venue, formerly a school, in Vauxhall. Beaconsfield show a broad range of work and are sympathetic to video, time-based and non-object-based work.

David Burrows: Could you first of all talk about the relationship of Nosepaint and Beaconsfield.

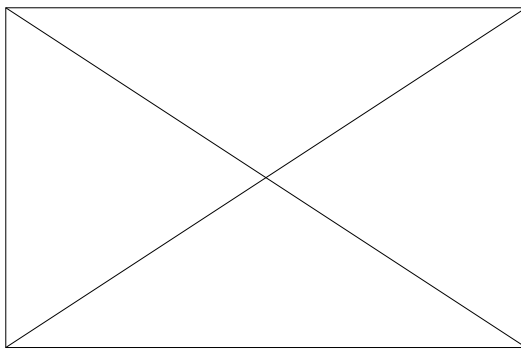
David Crawford: Nosepaint was something Naomi and myself started about 1991. It was an idea about having a dialogue between artists, writers, film-makers and musicians. Our interests as artists was for people to join in from outside, so I suppose it was idealistic.

DB: Were you tapping into a localised scene, friends and acquaintances?

DC: Yeah. In a sense we wanted to form a network rather than exploit a network which is more the case today in London. If you have a scene like the one we have today then people will exploit that, and that's sort of natural, but maybe in 1991 say, there wasn't such a situation in London to exploit and it was about reacting to all the negativity that was about... In 1990 or whatever there was a dissatisfaction with things, the recession, but also a feeling that galleries were dysfunctional and we wanted to take things down a peg or two, look at the work and not where the work was. I don't know if you remember what it was like to go to galleries in the '80s and feeling like a piece of shit. The whole hierarchy that was apparent. I think people thought 'Fuck that for a laugh' and combined with the recession you realised that there had to be another possible route.

DB: The difference between Beaconsfield and other artist run things that have occurred since 1993 say, is that you have remained informed by theory, conceptualism with a small c. You have remained serious about what you do.

DC: Yeah, we are serious but we don't take ourselves



BEACONSFIELD
Thatched: 1997

too seriously. What I'm trying to say is that we are quite self-critical and have never been too seduced by the very system we are operating in. Everyone probably feels that.

DB: You've resisted the dumbing down of art.

DC: We could be criticised for that... I think setting up Beaconsfield was a subversive act. It is trying to make something that isn't exploiting a fashionable scene and say 'Fuck you' at the ICA, and in a sense establish a confidence to work with the best of what's around. We originally thought we would take the best from the alternative, commercial and institutional spaces instead of being in opposition or marginal. We thought we would exist inbetween these things and create something new.

DB: It does sound like you think of yourselves as an alternative, as an alternative to a lack of debate, is that your proposition?

DC: Yeah maybe you're right, but isn't it the case that we are at a point where we have to examine what's happened and what artists can do? We like to think we give artists an opportunity to do something that might not be possible. If you do a show at BANK I would imagine that there is a tremendous pressure to keep up with them. Here there isn't that attachment... Naomi and I know what we like... a kind of critical curiosity which we feel is important.

DB: What do you think of *Sensation* and the 'nBa'?

DC: When we went to Finland we took the work of Tracy Emin and Mark Wallinger and we thought that it might be problematic. You can't just say though that Saatchi owns these artists and you have to break these hierarchies apart or you're fucked, that would be an 'us and them' situation.

DB: So do you still think you can change things?

DC: Yeah, I'd like to think that, but if the result of this period of time ('91-'98) is the *Sensation* show then we have failed.

John Russell of BANK

BANK currently operate from Galerie Poo Poo (previously

called *DOG*), in *Shorditch*. There are four members in the group, John Russell, Milly Thompson, Simon Bedwell and Bill Williamson. Their shows have included 'Fuck Off', 'God' and 'Winkle the Pot Bellied Pig' and they work with a variety of artists from the established to unknown and recent graduates. In the past, BANK shows have not been conventional group shows but often look like large installations in which individuals show work.

DB: The first BANK show was in 1991 in a disused bank. Was it quite considered or was it a case of 'Yeah, let's do it'?

JR: Yeah, just do it. At the time myself and Simon (Bedwell) sent out invites to shows that didn't happen. Then we did group shows. We fell into various traps. Painting the space white, site specificity, whatever that meant. Like Anya Gallachio put fruits in an ex-fruit warehouse and that supposedly says something about something. We did a swimming pool show at a swimming pool. But at the beginning it was fun to get people to give you a building for free to do a show.

DB: This situation came out of the recession as there was a lot of vacant buildings around. Also people didn't do stuff for Museums and collectors to buy, which was what *Freeze* and *Building One* was about.

JR: I suppose we weren't that sussed, obviously, we didn't have the contacts or the money to compete with *Building One*. We worked through different brands of idealism going from reasonably stupid and so on.

DB: Tell me what these were?

JR: Some of them are embarrassing and I can't speak as a group because it's not as if we have some party line, even now, but from my point of view there was taking art to the people, the democratisation of art.

DB: By doing shows in non gallery spaces?

JR: Yeah. Then you get into a fatalist idea where you think you'll never get any where so you think you have nothing to lose and you might as well do things.

DB: Who do you aim the shows at?

JR: I went to an art school where I accepted a lot of dumb things so it never got to the stage where I asked who should we send invites to. The initial idea was that it should all be like a party.

DB: But BANK has in a way been successful as a lot of people come to BANK openings as it's a big event like a party. People come from both in and outside the art scene. You may have had naive ideas but they worked.

JR: Yeah, well you're always going to be naive to start with and not being naive means knowing the score. But if you claim to be doing anything alternative in the present climate you are accused of being naive, dumb, hypocritical or just dull. The thing is I don't see any other tactic. If you buy into the idea of a clever manipulator you're already in a *cul de sac*. I think to be naive and to work more or less instinctively is OK.

DB: Did you think BANK at the time was alternative?

JR: Yeah, well I still think we are. It depends what you mean by alternative... If there is one thing I think

about BANK it's the social side of things. What's it like for people to be at the show. We tried to push things and make spectacles though we've never had enough money to do it properly.

DB: Because galleries and museums are places of entertainment though no one likes to admit that. And there is always pressure to be responsible, serious and educational and take a distanced position.

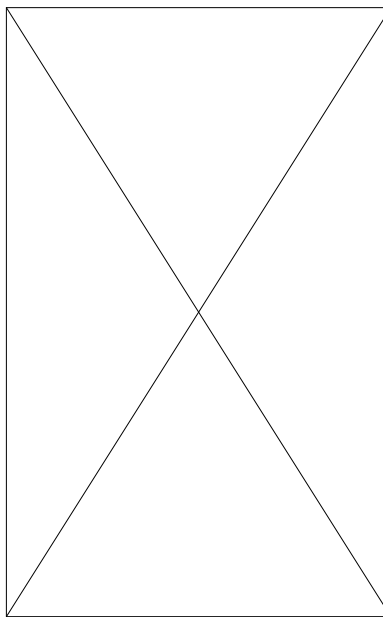
JR: Yeah, that's where I say naive ideas are useful. When I went to the Berlin Art Fair you see lots of art you like, like Donald Judd. You know from what you've read in his writing that he had motives beyond making commodities. Seeing his work in Berlin was a banal experience, for me it was depressing. But you have to ask the question if art isn't just a commodity what is it? The other thing is that there are no alternatives being offered at the moment. If the ICA had a position which they had to argue for and defend then that would be a good thing. But in terms of a position they don't have one. It's the same with the Arts Council. I walked around the art fair and it's incredible how stupid these gallery directors are. You have to be rich before you can run a gallery. It's simplistic to say this but these people and people like them control a large part of our culture. And not only is it unfair but it's worrying that they're so stupid and this has been replicated throughout the Arts Council and state funded arts. You have a gang of morons running arts centres. You know the case when Nicholas Serota's wife is running the Royal College of Arts curation course, and you can say, 'ah I smell a fish, nepotism', but it makes perfect sense. You can not accuse anyone in the art world of nepotism, the art world is nepotism. Similarly you can not accuse any one of corruption, the art world is bribery. You can respond by saying 'hey that's the way it is' or as far as I can see, if the Arts Council and arts centres are getting public money they should be trying to counter the effect of money on art.

DB: What about the content of BANK shows? I'll approach this by saying that... a lot of BANK shows, and the work that has been shown in various projects, draws upon popular culture and everyday culture without valorising it. Do you think that BANK treats 'high and low' culture equally?

JR: Yeah, I think it's true, it's something we have been wary of, but on one level we've been interested in a specific form of popular culture: that is film. We're interested in lighting and the way narrative works in film, like jumps from normality into horror. The way we make a show is like producing (film) sets.

DB: But there is also the BANK tabloid newspapers, the playing of classical and rock music during shows. All the stuff you appropriate or use is stuff the group actually likes.

JR: Yeah, we don't distance ourselves, we don't do that and that's partly because we don't have time. I like the idea we do so many shows that on one level, we don't think about things. We were trying to accelerate things. A couple of times we thought it would all blow up, occasionally we have dreams about making it and



BANK
Zombie Golf: 1995

villas in Italy, but basically we're fucked and we know that we are not going to make it at that level. The best stuff we've done is when we have realised we're fucked.

DB: But isn't it a case that you've made a decision to enjoy yourself as well?

JR: Yeah, well that's what it comes down to when you realised you're fucked. You don't have to do anything you don't want to. In another way, part of the attraction of working with other people is that things happen that you wouldn't have done yourself... And I don't believe you're either a moron, like people think Tracy Emin is, or clever like people think Art and Language are. Jake and Dinos Chapman do rock 'n' roll stuff but they're clever and informed. You can't do good stuff unless you are informed. We are mostly thought of as idiots by most people.

DB: All this is about the way artists have to become professionals.

JR: It's about how you represent yourself as intelligent and theoretically informed or not. I just felt like reacting against all that bullshit, that's why we did shows like *Zombie Golf*.

Marshall Anderson

Working with children and the snake

DUNDEE-BASED ARTIST Stephen French began painting collaboratively with his son Max in 1995. French was 42, Max 9. This project which has now attained a total of 73 small works began quite accidentally. French had embarked upon a series of local landscape studies intended as a commercial enterprise and while he was working in his kitchen from a photograph of a cottage in Glen Prosen, he gave Max the same photo to copy. He was immediately struck by his son's genuine naiveté; made all the more quirky by his use of a strong black line. At once French saw the possibility of creating an exciting image from a combination of Max's naiveté and his own art school trained painterly sophistication.

At first French was self-conscious about working with an untutored nine year old and invented a pseudonym which thinly disguised his own involvement. From Conor MacLeod, a name taken from Highlander (the movie) and Stephen's mother's maiden name, and his son's name, was born Max MacLeod. The resulting works had a distinctive style not unwholly detached from French's own easily recognisable hand. French draws with a black line and often employs a

some years. He saw immediately the commercial advantages of working with his son and moved from a rural subject matter to instantly recognisable architectural features in Dundee, thereby tapping into a bigger market and capitalising on people's affections for popular landmarks. The H. Samuel Clock on the corner of Reform Street being one such place where Dundonians habitually rendezvous.

Max never goes on location with Stephen, who prefers instead to take a snap-shot for his son to work from. Max works fluidly on the kitchen table, his concentration varying and not becoming over-concerned with details. He abstracts and invents within the framework of reference, imbuing his picture with a characteristic charm and personality. Max works on A5 pieces of card with a Staedtler pigment liner, preferring a point 07. Stephen then works on the drawings alone giving them a wash of base colour before filling in with acrylic.

Max MacLeod's originals are colour xeroxed and sold in editions of 100 for £5 each. Max receives 20% and appears to be driven by this financial incentive. He has no ambition to be an artist wanting instead to design computer games. To date three different publishing agencies in Dundee have reproduced Max MacLeods as postcards and there is now talk of a larger commissioned work featuring the university's new Welcome Building on the Hawkhill. For larger scale works Max will continue to work on A5 which Stephen will then blow-up on a photocopier and trace, using carbon paper, onto board. Now that Max MacLeod has become a commercial success and Stephen French has lost his initial reservation, the works are attributed to Stephen and Max French.

Stephen French believed his father and son creative collaboration was entirely unique. He was totally unaware of the vibrant history of artists working directly with children throughout the 20th century. Ironically, Stephen French's painting has always referred to Hockney's uniquely playful naiveté in the 60s which in turn invokes child art. French, however, claims that since art school he has relied upon creative instincts. These instincts, it would appear, can direct an artist without knowledge of history so that a short cut is taken. It is possible therefore for someone like French to emulate child art via Hockney without knowing why Hockney adopted that style in the first place and accordingly be oblivious of the whole tradition of child art inspiring artists of the modern movement. It would be interesting to pursue whether these instincts derive from culture or somewhere deeper.

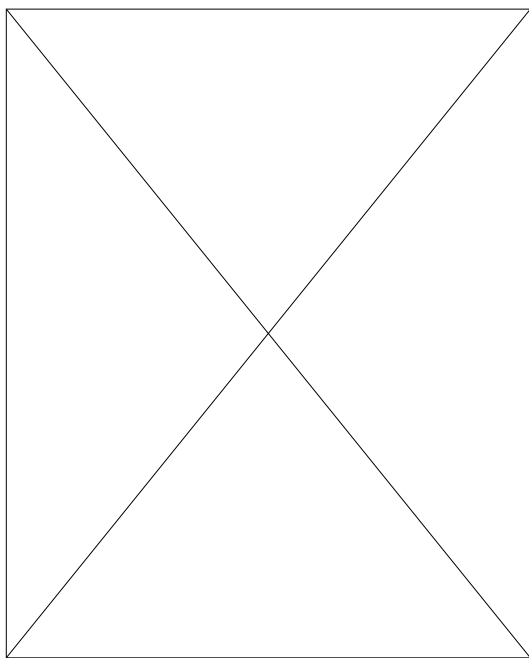
To Stephen French it is coincidental that Keith Haring collaborated with kids during the '80s. Once with a 9 year old boy, Sean Kalish, in a suite of etchings and again with a teenager known as LA2. Another New Yorker, Jean-Michel Basquiat, also collaborated with children and actually paid 8 year old Jasper Lack \$20 per drawing that he worked on. This information is taken from a thoroughly researched book, 'The Innocent Eye', by Jonathan Fineberg (Princeton University Press ISBN 0-691-01685-2) charting the history of the modern artists' relationship with child art from the 19th century to present day. In the final chapter, 'Mainstreaming Childhood', Fineberg relates how Basquiat introduced Jasper Lack to Andy Warhol in 1986 as "the best painter in New York", failing, unfortunately, to credit Basquiat with any sense of tongue-in-cheek humour or irony. Nor does he do so when recounting another Basquiat comment that he

(Basquiat) would prefer the art of a 3 year old to that of any contemporary artist. One is aware of an intelligence that is not empathising with that of the artist whose is more intuitive, emotional, idealistic, and at times naive. Fineberg's approach throughout this lavishly illustrated volume is academic and linear in structure. He takes no risks either in his historical or logical construct but does offer us a work of importance that reproduces for the first time art by children from the collections of 20th century masters who were directly influenced by them often to the point of plagiarism.

Fineberg, Professor of Art History at the University of Illinois, commences in Chapter 1 with the romantics of the 19th century who espoused the idea that children, being less "civilised", were more a part of nature. This implied, to the romantics at least, that children were also closer to the meaning of nature. And it was through nature that the romantics attained a closeness to God. In the 18th century, Fineberg informs us, "The wish to return to nature through the child was new intellectual territory" and that "The romantics allied the child's naiveté with genius." There was then a nonsecular attitude towards child art and a sense that self-improvement might be attained through a study of it. Charles Baudelaire claimed that "the genius was someone who could regain childhood at will." It was Radolphe Topffer, a Swiss artist and educator, who was the first in 1848 to study children's drawings in any detail and to emphasize "the centrality of ideas in art over technical execution." Public awareness of child art was assisted by the new science of psychology and by the 1890s there was a growing body of studies and public exhibitions of it. In 1890 Alexander Koch began his publication 'Kind und Kunst', a journal of art for and by children, which in turn led Franz Cizek to offer juvenile art classes providing children with "creative liberty".

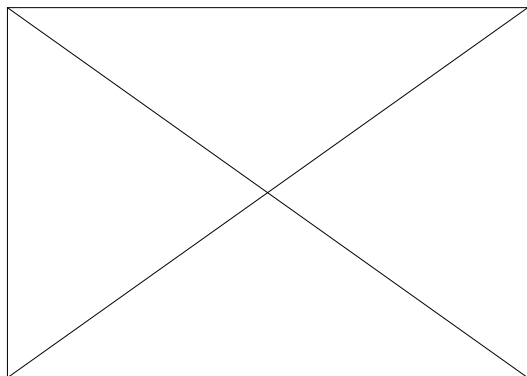
As one century gave way to the next, important collections of children's art were established and the Expressionists, Cubists, Futurists and Russian neo-primitives all hung the artworks of children alongside their own. This overwhelming interest in children's art was not confined to Europe and Russia. Alfred Stieglitz was the first New Yorker to organise exhibitions of children's art in his 291 Gallery in 1912 and in 1917; and in 1919 Roger Fry exhibited child art at the Omega Workshops in London. Fineberg concludes his first chapter by stating that "virtually every major artist in the first generation after the Second World War became involved with psychoanalysis and existentialism, which in turn led them back to childhood through personal introspection." The following chapters are devoted to Mikhail Larionov, Vasily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Jean Dubuffet, Cobra, and finally a contemporary round up of the usual suspects given an American bias.

Professor Fineberg's failure to acknowledge humour and irony as a contributing factor is undoubtedly established in Chapter 2 when discussing the art of Larionov who, he tells us, "painted a number of compositions on the theme of soldiers in 1909 and 1910 (coincidental with his experience in the military reserves)". 'Soldier on a Horse, ca 1911' is reproduced and described graphically by the author, "the boxlike rendering of the muzzle of the horse and the oddly stuck-on look of the legs on the animal's far side." Added to this, its rich primary colour scheme and very



black ground in his paintings with the result that his strong colour is separated by bits of ground and/or line. Once his painting technique has been applied to Max's drawings the works become distinctively French but on second glance appear more off-beat and drunken; not quite right and a little inarticulate.

Stephen French has long been aware of the commercial potential of his own art. His strong aesthetic married to a choice of popular imagery makes his product readily marketable and successful. His paintings result from a concept rather than a series of haphazard experiments. In this respect he works like a designer and in fact had his own design business for



Working with children and the snake
(continued)

bold composition made up of three elements makes this a classic example of plagiarised child art but it is far more than that. It is a comic mockery of the cavalry. A satire that goes unnoticed by Fineberg whose analysis probes no further than the obvious childlike drawing. As an avant-garde neo-primitive who espoused the art of the people Larionov was non-conformist and a dissident with Bolshevik sympathies. His visual language, therefore, not only reflected his political stance but was also carefully chosen to have the maximum effect. Larionov was one of the first painters to use the child's visual vocabulary for political satire. Fineberg does say that Larionov influenced the Russian futurists but his only comment on their politics is summed up by saying: "the irretrievably dissident attitude of the futurists went out of favour after the revolution and they largely disappeared too." Larionov had left Russia in 1915 well before the October Revolution of 1917 (unmentioned by Fineberg) but we are not told why nor where he went.

Throughout this important work Fineberg adopts a noticeable non-political stance often failing to acknowledge any political influences on these major artists who he would have us believe were motivated only by philosophical, existential, and aesthetic concerns which challenged the parameters of acceptable traditional art. By focusing so narrowly upon his area of interest, he fails to acknowledge those other influences, such as political and social, which combine with artistic, aesthetic, and intellectual ones to form the artist's visual product. This approach is continued in Fineberg's treatment of Kandinsky in chapter three.

Without giving any background details, Fineberg introduces Kandinsky and his lover Gabriele Münter through a series of richly illustrated pages that show how the couple's collection of child art directly influenced their painting and the works of fellow artists in the Blaue Reiter circle. In his approach Fineberg implies that Kandinsky introduced Münter to child art but neglects to inform us that prior to the couple's meeting at the Phalanx School of art in Munich in 1903, Kandinsky was more specifically influenced by folk art, legend and Bavarian glass painting. I think it very possible that Professor Fineberg has given way to male chauvinism by failing to credit Münter (described as 'the amazon of abstract art' by Constance Naubert-Riser) who surely encouraged Kandinsky's appreciation of child art, something he had not considered prior to their relationship. It is clear from the evidence supplied by Fineberg that Münter was more directly influenced by child art than Kandinsky, who used it as "a source of vocabulary" and a way of freeing up his illustrative style. Ulrike Becks-Malorny in her book on Kandinsky (Taschen 1994) tells us that Kandinsky found displays of personal emotion embarrassing and had no time for German Expressionism and that his abstractionism was a way of hiding feelings. Fineberg says, "Kandinsky seems to have been more intent on analyzing and exploiting the general characteristics that made the children's renderings 'childlike'." Münter, he says, "approached the child art in a more visceral and less metaphysical way." What mattered most to Kandinsky about children's art "was that it offered an entrance to the deeper, spiritual meaning of things through which humankind as a whole might grow." Kandinsky, an independently wealthy son of a tea merchant, was an intellectual who placed emphasis upon the spiritual rather than the political. When he and Münter went their separate ways in 1914 Kandinsky ceased to have any interest in child art until his reacquaintance with Paul Klee at the

COBRA Group 1948

Bauhaus in 1921.

Again in the following chapter on Paul Klee, Fineberg infers that it was Kandinsky who directly influenced Klee's reference to child art. But it was Klee himself who had kept his own childhood drawings and carefully documented his own son Felix's artworks from the age of four. Throughout his painting career Klee referred to child art, primitive art and the art of the insane in ways that Kandinsky never did and in ways that pre-empted Cobra. Klee began teaching at the Bauhaus in January 1921 giving Friday evening lectures on composition illustrated by child art. The radical teaching practice of the Bauhaus at Dessau under Walter Gropius was opposed by the Nazis who closed it in 1933. A politically and culturally monumental event that Fineberg casually and discretely alludes to - "1933 when the political conditions in Germany forced him (Klee) into the isolation of Bern." This convenient short-cut reveals nothing of the political machinations within the Bauhaus that led a disenchanted Klee to leave in April 1931 for a post in the School of Fine Art in Dusseldorf from which he was dismissed and from where he actually returned to Bern in December 1933.

Chapter 7 manages to deal in part with the century's greatest promoter of "Outsider Art", Jean Dubuffet, who coined and patented the term "Art Brut" which referred to his significant collection of art of the insane, visionary, primitive and child art now housed in the Château de Beaulieu in Lausanne. However none of that is mentioned here while Fineberg concentrates solely on the way children's art influenced Dubuffet's raw and visceral painting style. He studied at the Académie Julien in Paris from 1918 and continued painting until 1925 when he was forced to return to Le Harve and run the family wine business which he eventually leased out in 1942 to return to Paris and painting. He was 41 and the Nazis were occupying the French capital. A strange time to return perhaps but Fineberg doesn't seem to think so. Nor does he comment upon the coincidental return to a very anti-establishment mode of painting loaded with political criticism.

Dubuffet's, 'View of Paris: Life of Pleasure, February 1944', is a crudely painted street scene with a row of black stick figures across the bottom foreground. Fineberg describes them as being "like duck-pins", an obscure reference to figures in a shooting gallery, but he misses the obvious caricature in the goose-stepping posture of the two mustachioed men exiting stage right, their out-stretched arms mimicking a Nazi salute. "Dubuffet's assault on accepted standards in art belong to a larger repudiation of traditional values in the context of the grim reality of World War Two (WWII)," says Fineberg. He continues by quoting Michel Tapié, a friend of Dubuffet who wrote, "One needed temperaments ready to break up everything, whose works were disturbing, stupefying, full of magic and violence to reroute the public." Presumably to reroute them from Nazism as well as from, "a misplaced geometric abstraction, and a limited Puritanism which above anything else blocks the way to any possible, authentically fertile future."

Between 1946 and '47 Dubuffet painted a series of 150 portraits which he described as "anti-psychological, anti-individualistic" but which are also very satirical. Dubuffet's infantile style permits mockery, derision and possibly loathing, revealing more than the artist was prepared to admit to. Dubuffet continued his vehement attack on bourgeoisie culture and in 1951 delivered a lecture in Chicago entitled 'Anti-Cultural Positions' during which he said, "the values celebrated by our culture do not strike me as corresponding to the true dynamics of our minds."

If Fineberg has deliberately ducked shy of political resonances in the first seven chapters, he is compelled to acknowledge them with reference to Cobra in his eighth. There is irrefutable evidence to support the thesis that the expressionistic style of the Danish avant-garde not only evolved from the existential visual language of European dissident art but also came about as a direct opposition to right-wing fascist values as promoted by the Nazis. I quote here from 'Danish Abstract Art' by Robert Dahlmann Olsen (1964): "The strange thing was that the tenseness of the situation

(occupation of the country by the Wehrmacht, and sabotage activity in connection herewith, in which many artists took part), caused an increase in activities in the sphere of artistic development and made them rich and exciting." Surely there was a connection between the kind of visual language that artists of the resistance adopted and their political ideologies.

Cobra's lineage is radical, politicised, loaded with symbolism and charged with an anti-art/anti-bourgeoisie/anti-establishment rhetoric. Briefly, Cobra's growth began in the house of Elise Johansen in Copenhagen's red light district where, from 1932, painters, poets and sculptors of the Danish avant-garde met to discuss ideas. It is said that the head of the snake formed in this house. Four seminal magazines emerged from this background: Linien (The Line), Helhesten (Hell Horse), Spiralen (The Spiral published in Charlottenborg) which acted as a transition between Helhesten and Cobra (which ran to ten issues from 1948 to 1951), all of which were financed by subscription and which carried the ideas beyond Copenhagen. Of the band of young art hooligans who terrorised the Danish establishment of their day, Asger Jorn is the most prominent and visionary. His relentless energy charged from Copenhagen to Paris where along with Karel Appel, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Corneille Hannoset, Joseph Noiret, and Christian Dotremont he signed the original Cobra manifesto in the back café of the Notre Dame Hotel on November 8th 1948. It was the Belgian writer, Dotremont, who coined the acronym from the group's cities of residence: COpenhagen, BRussels, Amsterdam. WWII was over but the cultural war raged on with the suggestion that the snake would paralyse the bourgeoisie establishment with its venom.

Fineberg provides something of this essential political background information to Cobra but one has the distinct impression that a kind of historical sterilisation process operates when art is analysed academically. He mentions Linien (1933 to 1939) and Helhesten (1941) published by the Høst group "spearheaded" by Jorn which collided with Reflex (1948) founded by the Dutch avant-garde - Appel, Constant and Corneille. Their unifying characteristic, Fineberg tells us, "was their desire for a liberated expression of the self." He goes on to say that "Cobra artists' general rebellion against the strictures of convention were in part a reaction against the grim years of war and German occupation. He does not, however, mention that Cobra was opposed to the way cubism was stifling European art and that they were against the type of formal abstraction of artists like Kandinsky. In this context one must examine the avant-garde's agenda which is to confront the established culture's values and taste, whether abstract or naturalistic, and one does not achieve this through a genteel painting style. To paint like a child or a madman had a disturbing effect. An effect that shocked. And a shock tactic that is still employed by artists seeking recognition of their opposing views and a tactic that goes unacknowledged by Fineberg. It was probably this confrontational approach that led Jorn to refuse Andre Breton's call for "a pure psychic automatism" in his final break with surrealism. Jorn said that one could not express oneself in a purely psychic way - "The mere act of expression", he said, "is physical." Fineberg continues: "This intervention of imagination in the apprehension of events also had an explicit political implication to some of the Cobra artists," he proceeds by quoting Constant in Reflex (1948). "The general social impotence, the passivity of the masses are an indication of the brakes that cultural norms apply to the natural expression of the forces of life...Art recognizes only the norms of expressivity, spontaneously directed by its own intuition."

Cobra had a short tempestuous life from November 1948 to November 1951 when its death was marked by an exhibition in Liège organised by Pierre Alechinsky who had joined in March 1949 at the age of 21. 'The Innocent Eye' does not reproduce many paintings from the Cobra years but does illustrate how Cobra's manifesto continued to live through the art of Jorn, Appel and Alechinsky. Nowhere in his chapter on Cobra does Fineberg make reference to William Gear, so it is all the more surprising to find his name associated

with this explosive renegade art group in an exhibition originated by Aberdeen Art Gallery in collaboration with Edinburgh-based composer James Coxson.

William Gear was born in Methil, Fife, in 1915 into the hardships of a poor mining community, instilling in him a particular working-class ethic which may have been hostile to art. However, his father, a face-worker, was a creative man who experimented with photography and grew flowers where his peers cultivated vegetables. In his own contributing essay to the catalogue Gear's son, David, implies that fate and a lack of opportunities suppressed his grandfather's talents but that his father's generation was able, "through luck and greater opportunities," to blossom artistically. William Gear studied at Edinburgh College of Art where he won a traveling scholarship taking him to Paris in 1937 where he decided to enroll in the small academy run by Léger who was passionately opposed to surrealism. It was Léger's intolerant attitude to surrealism that drove away another of his students, Asger Jorn. It is most likely that Jorn and the young Scot met in Paris at this time. Whether Gear shared Jorn's communist convictions or not has never been recorded and it is unclear what ideological commonalities Gear actually shared with Cobra. His artistic background was certainly very different from that of the Danish avant garde whose education was charged with polemic and a sense of political purpose. One might imagine that Gear, having been brought up in a mining community, would have had communist sympathies but according to his life-long friend, Neil Russel, Gear was only "a bit left-wing". As art students together they had talked about joining the Spanish Civil War but never did. Russel went on to tell me that as far as he knew Gear was not politically inclined. Towards the end of his life, Russel said, Gear was a conservative with a small 'c' and wouldn't take the Guardian but preferred instead to read the Daily Telegraph or The Times. Gear, by all accounts was, like Kandinsky, an academic abstractionist rather than an expressionistic one.

When WWII broke out Gear was teaching art in Dumfries. He was conscripted and served as an officer in the Royal Corps of Signals. In 1946 he was transferred to the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section of the Central Control Commission in Germany. Throughout this period he continued to exhibit and visit Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris during leaves. His rank afforded him the opportunity to discover artists, one being Karl Otto Götz who he later introduced to Cobra. During one of his leaves to Paris in 1947 he was introduced to Constant by a fellow Fifer, Stephen Gilbert, born in Wormit in 1910. At least socially Gear was in with the avant-garde prior to the formation of Cobra and when he demobbed he returned to Paris to enlist in their ranks.

Of the 39 works on paper on show in 'William Gear and Cobra' at Aberdeen Art Gallery, 22 are by Gear. These are hung chronologically commencing

with 'Olive Grove, Italy September 1944', a water-colour in the style of William Gillies. Next to this hangs a poem which first appeared in Meta No 5, March 1951, a magazine published by Götz.

To the wretched square waiting to be born,
Foetus-like but having yet no heart.
At light speed to the card indexed archives
Of the visual memory where the answer lies,
Never before consulted, which will give life
To the foetus, animate the square.
The process is essentially psychological,
No one has a special pair of eyes,
As had a labourer a Sunday suit,
To put on when he looks at pictures.
Not only do these two stanzas recognise his Calvinistic roots but they also pay allegiance to Cobra who believed that anyone could make art. Any sympathies that Gear may have shared with Cobra are not transparently obvious in the works, only six of which were painted between November 1948 and '51. A striking gouache, 'Landscape, Yellow Feature November 1948', executed in vibrant primaries is very close in style to the work of Asger Jorn at this time. Both artists using a fractured black line to separate colour and break up space. In 'Winter Landscape 1949' Gear's fractured black line suggests a crazy gathering of gyrating sprites and spiky zoomorphs, the closest he comes here to emulating Cobra's potent mythical beasts.

In an accompanying video made at Emscote School, Warwick, in 1994 Gear speaks about his exhibition there of 20 paintings dating from 1947 to '73. It is difficult to associate this avuncular, bald man in a grey suit, white shirt and tie with one's image of a renegade band of art hooligans and when he is asked about his Cobra mates he refers to them as "they". "They got to know my work", he says, "which was similar." Nowhere does he mention having the same influences but instead speaks about being inspired by Fife shire harbours, pit heads, naked trees and hedgerows reminding us that he is essentially a landscape artist whose use of solid, black lines refers to Léger, the Forth Railway Bridge, and medieval stained glass windows (a common reference among Cobra artists). It is most likely that Gear was dragooned into the ranks of Cobra to help boost numbers and to give the first Stedelijk exhibition in Amsterdam an enhanced international flavour. According to the thorough catalogue essay by Peter Shields, Gear exhibited with Cobra on three occasions but by the time Alechinsky organised the final show in Liege, Gear was already living in England having taken little of the snake's spirit with him.

Gear's later works retain the black line which becomes more structural referring to designs for sculptures that were never made. His abandonment of any Cobra principles he might have had is obvious but the other works in the exhibition clearly demonstrate that hard-core Cobras held on to their beliefs. The

King Cobra, Asger Jorn, is represented by only three, fairly minor, works - two of which relate to the Cobra period. Of these 'Composition with Two Figures 1951', ink and watercolour, refers to his later more visceral, large scale paintings populated with metamorphic man-beasts. It provides an apposite accompaniment to Karel Appel's solitary contribution, 'Twee Figuren en een Vogel' which similarly marries humour to a naked savagery. This is the most distinctive Cobra trait, intended to disturb and shock. Both Constant's works demonstrate this tactic. His suite of eight lithos, 'Huit fois la Guerre 1951' succeeds in monochrome only while his coloured drawing pays homage to either the child's unconscious hand or the schizophrenic's, or both. Complementing the child-like gestural drawing style is the artist's use of his first name only reminding us how we tend to refer to children, informally and with fondness. His close associate, Corneille, likewise uses this method along with a child-like drawing style. In 'Compositie met Figuren 1949' Corneille employs an automatic schizophrenic hand but his other two works from 1965 and 1989 show that, like Constant, his most venomous imagery came from the heart and soul of the snake.

The youngest Cobra member, Pierre Alechinsky, is represented by three works of 1950 vintage but Carl-Henning Pederson, an old campaigner from the days of Linien and Helhesten is poorly represented by two later works from 1978 and '79. Stephen Gilbert, that other Fifer, shows two works, the smaller of which, a pen and ink drawing from 1945, most ably demonstrates his early influences which collide with those of the other snakes in a way that Gear's do not. Documentation shows that Gilbert collaborated in the painting of a mural during the first Cobra congress and was also included in the first Cobra journal (Spring 1949). Gear makes an appearance in the fifth journal but there is no documentary evidence to show that he participated in the collaborative mural events that were central to the two Cobra congresses - Bregnerød, August 1949, and Amsterdam, November 1949. These large scale collaborations also involved the participation of the Cobra's children and very likely any other 'innocent' bystanders.

William Gear and Cobra tours from Aberdeen Art Gallery to The Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (where Gear was the curator from 1958 to '64) January 24th to April 26th; The City Art Centre, Edinburgh, May 2nd to June 20th; The MacLaurin Gallery, Ayr, June 27th to July 26th 1998.

review

Articulate: A response to issues of Rape and Sexual Abuse

Hilary Gilligan & Lorna Healy

A Critical Access Project, ArtHouse, Temple Bar, Dublin.
February 16th–21st

Jane Kelly in a recent discussion of the work of Stephen Willats has pointed to a generalised nexus of critical concerns in respect of community arts, issue-based work and alternative critical art-practices in general.¹ Citing the work of Hal Foster (who in turn cites the 1930s polemics of Walter Benjamin) Kelly identifies certain key aspects to Willats' methodology. Importance is attached to the fact that the "ideas framing the work, the choice of sites, the imagery, are coordinated, in negotiation". This dimension of negotiation is presented as multifaceted and includes "individuals in the area where the project takes place, the gallery and its curators, the city and its elected representatives" and also what is loosely described as "local community involvement" and the "responses of participants". The project ARTICULATE was initially conceived as a modest intervention into the larger problematic of issue-based work which sought to consider the resources of negotiation in relation to the project of a socially engaged art practice.

Initially artists were invited to submit expressions of interest and/or proposals in respect of a weekend residential dialogue and exchange centred on a specific subject area. The other participants in this exchange would be a small group of non-artists with diverse and particularised relationships and engagements with the specific subject area. Thus for the first phase of ARTICULATE the subject area identified was Rape and Sexual Abuse. The participants in the weekend long exchange were invited from different agencies and constituencies with a specific engagement with the topic - Rape Crisis Workers, Survivors, Law-workers etc. The intense and intimate exchange was facilitated in such a way as to ensure safe and responsible dialogue. The artists' brief was to enter into this dialogue as participants with the objective of realising sometime afterwards, a project which in some way furthered, or was informed by, the open-ended exchange established by the residential weekend. That is to say, they were asked to develop not to document the exchange. They had no brief to represent or to speak for the other participants, but they were requested to listen and in some way respond to the multiple voices present. The artists' were not obliged to realise this practical outcome necessarily as a conventional and discrete artwork. The form of their productive activity was to be at their discretion.

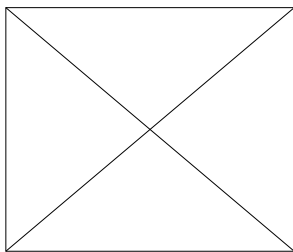
This process culminated recently in the presentation of two art works in Arthouse, a centre for Digital Arts in the trendy Temple Bar area of Dublin. The works were by the artists Hilary Gilligan and Lorna Healy. Hilary Gilligan's work *Articulate Exhibit B* involved a performance embedded in an audio-slide projection installation. Lorna Healy presented *The Dancing Subject*, a short video projection with accompanying audio track featuring the voice of an actor reading a theoretical text intercut with the sounds of young girls laughing and singing.

In Gilligan's work the viewer sat and watched a series of slide dissolves in a darkened room while the artist stood back in a darkened corner of the space, just behind the viewer's preferred position. The slide images began with representations of hair which became bound up with the notion of forensic evidence and inspection. This reading was promoted both by the narrative drift of the accompanying audio-track but also by the presentation of images of evidence-bags and a disposable speculum. There were two particular vectors to the narrative. Firstly, and overridingly, a story was proposed around the construction of legalistic representations of rape and sexual assault. Secondly, and imbricated in this first story, there was a story about the crude and abrupt cutting of the artist's own long

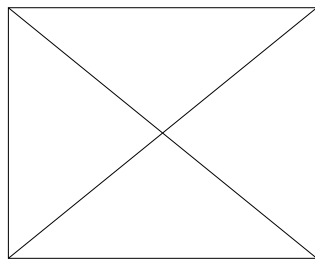
hair. This overdetermined and ambiguous sign of shame / guilt / defiance / refusal / self-negation / self-transformation, finally resolves into a playful acting out of various roles implicated in the legal narrative. Thus the artist appears in a series of slide images goofily playing out the roles of doctor, police officer, barrister and so forth. The central position occupied by images of the artist in the work imputes the status of survivor to her and suggests an autobiographical dimension. The central slide-dissolve presentation is interrupted at several points by an askew lateral projection of varied images of the speculum. Upon the conclusion of the slide-sequence and the audio track, the artist steps forward a little and speaks several short phrases in a contrived and performative manner. Her intonation is suggestive of poetry or formal theatre and abruptly terminates with an alarmingly forceful though not overindulgently emotive injunction: "articulate!"

In Healy's work the image of a relatively neutral green open-space with an ambiguous, distant, and vaguely urban horizon-line is projected onto the gallery wall. The camera does not change position or focus. However, there are a number of rhythmically paced edits (cuts and dissolves) which mark off various phases of activity in this open space. Two young girls are shown variously running into, through, and around this space, playing, spinning, singing, laughing, and dancing. The tone of their activity is in part defined by the snippets of a Spice Girls' song discernible in their repertoire. At various points their play converges on the camera which they address directly by blowing raspberries and laughing. This also interacts with the theoretical text being read aloud on the audio-track which is derived from a text by Luce Irigaray and describes the eponymous "dancing subject".

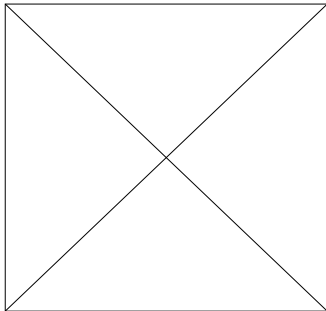
Rather than engage in an explicative reading or a critical evaluation of these two works, these short descriptions may serve as points of departure for a consideration of the larger problematic of issue-based work. However, before pursuing such a direction for discussion it is necessary to provide some preliminary remarks about the general terms of this discussion. It might be argued that the ethnographic paradigm as employed by Hal Foster to describe a general area of practice is perhaps overly focused on the specifics of a North American art scene. Therefore it should not be unproblematically generalised to define the broad remit of socially-engaged practice. The North American cultural debates in respect of cultural pedagogy and critical practice which underpin Foster's discussion have foregrounded throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s the paradigm of identity politics. Issue-based work has recently most often been construed as a question of constituency, alterity and identity, most often understood through the nodal terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, and biography. There is of course a clear historical premise for this manoeuvre. The universalist claims of modernism and the autonomous-aesthetic project both concealed a specific set of interests to do with gender (male) ethnicity (white) and class (privileged). They also both operated to make illegitimate the locating of aesthetic practice in relationship with these very same concerns. (A typical instance of this was the controversy around the 1993 Whitney Biennial.) It is in dialectical tension with these conditions that the issue-based arena has been discursively constructed in North America. Foster's work reproduces this discursive frame hence he draws on the notion of a revision of the Benjaminian formula Artist As Producer in the positioning of the Artist as Ethnographer. The central terms of



HILARY GILLIGAN
Articulate
Exhibit B



LORNA HEALY
The Dancing
Subject



HILARY GILLIGAN
Articulate
Exhibit B

this discussion are "difference" and the "other". The central terms of post-60s oppositional politics in North America have been those of identity and difference.

It is important to register that issue-based work can be construed in terms other than alterity. The term "issue-based" implies a privileging of the discursive and the unresolved as the supporting structure for art practice. *Articulate* attempted in its programme structure to privilege precisely the polyvocal and open-ended discursive dimension. However, in privileging the artists' take on this dialogue it did run the risk of producing the "Aesthetic Evangelist" scenario which proposes the artist as some kind of ideal subject capable of accommodating and transcending the particularised positions of non-artists.² In this sense the ethnographic paradigm might be applicable however, this would involve ignoring the specific programme pursued in the project. There is a further dilemma thrown up by the particular space of exhibition.

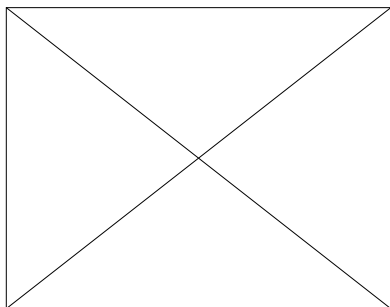
Arthouse and Temple Bar in general are ideologically loaded sites where a boomtime Irish bourgeoisie is busily reinventing itself as culturally progressive and vital. That the work is consumed in this context is inevitably problematic as it contributes to the myth of reinvention. On the other hand, this is possibly a productive intervention in as much as it attempts to position the issues of rape and sexual abuse in an arena other than moral panic and/or sanitising entertainment. It must be underlined here that both

works under discussion employed devices which attempted to interrupt any simple co-option of the work.

The performative dimension to Gilligan's work rendered the viewer's encounter with an instance of representation ("here is something to do with rape") reflexive: "here is something to do with rape, which is to do with me, but also to do with you". The implication is that responsibility in respect of questions of rape are not simply to do with victims and offenders but to do with all who participate in the circulation of representations of rape. The issue of rape is not identified with an identity or a position but with a multifaceted network of relationships and discursive exchanges. This does not dissolve the experiential density of rape into an endless relay of signifiers but it does interrupt the assumption of an essential truth of rape which can be known from an objective and unimplicated distance.

In a different but related mode Lorna Healy's work also implicates the viewer in the questions of rape and subjectivity. The critical moment of the presentation when the young actresses address the camera, and (medially) the viewer, by blowing raspberries, operates to disrupt the safe-distance of viewing. It is a theatricalised interruption of theatricality. This combined with the modified Irigarayan text definitively challenges the construction of identity through representations of rape. The raspberry blowing interrupts the authoritative masculine voice reading feminist analysis/theory thus:

The dancing or whirling subject offers a line of enquiry which isn't led by the finished art object / art fetish ...allowing for a consideration of the performative aspect of art making ...it also allows for considerations of where and how work is made public. [Raspberries blown.] ...Within Western art, since the Renaissance, rapist and rape have become objects of the artistic narrative. [Raspberries blown] Culture's recurrent representations of brutal victimisation through sexual violence is not only seen within histories of fine art but also across a range of representations within literature, the press, pornography, film, TV, etc. Images are controlled by key institutions i.e. the church, state, art world, social work, counseling and the legal system...We are what we can talk about. ...The dominant imagery of the entertainment industry ...persists in portraying the victim



as narcissistic, taboo, sensational and/or eroticised. Cape Fear. Pulp Fiction. Last Exit to Brooklyn. Innocence as sexual commodity. [Laughter].

Clearly, the issue of rape is here construed again as relational and situated within an economy of representation. In arguing to problematise Foster's analysis in its wider application outside his highly localised frame of concerns. I am not proposing to disavow the wealth of critical insight presented within his analysis. Rather I wish to challenge the overall drift of his analysis whereby the terms of alterity are privileged as the defining characteristics of issue-based work (which is variously in opposition to aestheticism / formalism / uncritical pluralism.) Martha Rosler and Grant Kester have also drawn on a specifically North American context to elaborate critical analyses of socially engaged practice but have done so in a way that does not prioritise the logic of othering *tout court*.³

Returning to the specific case of *Articulate* there is a good deal to be gained by applying some of Foster's insights in this instance. He has pointed out that the "deconstructive ethnographic approach can become a gambit, an insider game that renders" the art encounter "not more open and public but more hermetic and narcissistic, a place for initiates only where a contemptuous criticality is rehearsed." This is clearly a possible criticism in respect of elements of *Articulate*, although it might be seen to underestimate the experiential texture of the actual encounter with the work. An important aspect of that encounter was the sense that there is a gap in knowledge which cannot be bridged by appeal to experts, and yet, this gap in knowledge implicates the viewer in some way. A further factor requiring consideration is that the art world continues to demand the discrete artwork product and privilege the moment of exhibition. It is therefore necessary to strategically foreground the methodological and procedural specificity of a project like *Articulate*. Thus the weekend residency and the

LORNA HEALY
The Dancing Subject

fact that the enabling organisation is a voluntary collaboration of artworkers (Critical Access) who are displacing their own direct art production in favour of a facilitative role in respect of the discursive and productive activities of others needed to be underlined. It is not trivial either that this is also a process of self-education and self-enabling on the part of the group. Furthermore the manner in which the *Articulate* show is discursively followed up will be of central importance in displacing the model of the Art "Statement" in favour of an emergent model of ongoing art-dialogue.

Coda:

Finally, it needs to be remarked, in respect of the issue-based initiative in general, that there is a wide constituency for whom to challenge their investment in the art object, the transcendent artist, and the autonomous aesthetic as ideological (with the inevitable ideological-unmasking), is quite simply redundant. If we are to engage in issue-based work we must also then be engaged by this issue and by/with this broad constituency. This matter is of course inflected by (but not reducible to) the political terms "left" and "right" or the terms of "identity."

Mick Wilson

notes

- ¹ *Variant*, Autumn 1997.
- ² See Grant Kester's essay in *AfterImage*, Jan. 1995.
- ³ See Kester, *AfterImage* Vol. 20. No. 6; Rosler in Becker (Ed.) *The Subversive Imagination*, Routledge, 199.

Marlborough Maze

Amidst the recent hype surrounding young British art, the pundits promoting this scam overlooked a number of cultural forms that might have provided a more solid platform from which to promote their rather dubious agenda. Early in 1997 the Norton Museum of Art in Florida hosted a major exhibition entitled *An Amazing Art: Contemporary Labyrinths by Adrian Fisher*. Portsmouth based Fisher has been designing labyrinths for donkey's years and played a major role in organising *The Year of the Maze* in 1991, a celebration of the 300th anniversary of Hampton Court, the oldest surviving hedge maze in England.

Many new mazes were built as part of the 1991 celebrations and Fisher bagged the prime spot in Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire. Blenheim occupies the site of the legendary Rosamund's Bower, an architectural labyrinth with heavy defences in which Henry II is said to have installed his mistress Fair Rosamund. According to the story propagated by various popular ballads, when Queen Eleanor finally penetrated the maze in 1176, she forced her rival to drink poison. Blenheim Palace replaced the ruined medieval buildings in the eighteenth century and was given to the First Duke of Marlborough in recognition of his many military victories. The Marlborough family's other famous military scion, Winston Churchill, was born at Blenheim in 1874.

Fisher based his Marlborough Maze design on Grinling Gibbons' Blenheim Palace roof carvings depicting the Panoply of Victory. Seen from above, the lines of yew hedges that make up the labyrinth portray pyramids of cannonballs, a cannon firing, and the air filled with banners, flags and bugles. The maze has entrances on the left and right with a central exit. Two wooden bridges add an exciting additional aspect to the puzzle element of the maze, while simultaneously providing viewing points from which to survey the work. One of Fisher's colour mazes can also be found at Blenheim. This labyrinth consists of nodes connected by coloured paths, the choice of path at each node being determined by the colour of the path previously taken.

Mums and dads stop on the bridges of the main maze to view a piece of symbolism that makes Sarah Lucas look subtle. Children race around the labyrinth enjoying the three dimensionality of the work in the same way that they might relish Tracy Emin's *Everyone I Ever Slept With* tent. The Marlborough Maze isn't difficult to solve, the first time I went in it took about twelve minutes to get out again. Alongside the aesthetic frisson of the mock pompous symbolism, the twists and turns of the labyrinth cause the maze to echo with the noise of laughter and wonderment. The crowds flocking to Blenheim are very different to the audience attracted by young British art. On the surface those using the labyrinth may appear less sophisticated than gallery groupies, but beneath this superficial appearance their aesthetic tastes are actually far more radical.

The institutional defeat of modernism has resulted in an increasing assimilation of art into representational categories of popular culture. The Marlborough Maze is a perfect example of an art that does not have to justify such pleasures to its audience. This has generated a certain amount of confusion in the interpretation of Fisher's work and while his mazes have received coverage everywhere from *Scientific American* to *Der Spiegel*, they are largely ignored by the art press. Art critics generally view Fisher as politically conformist, intellectually timid and an aesthetic revisionist. Such views are extremely parochial since they are based on the surface appearances of Fisher's work at the expense of the wider cultural context.

While young British art has been justified as a demotically voiced assault on politically correct post-modernism, the Marlborough Maze attacks something infinitely more sacrosanct. Woodstock Park in which Blenheim Palace is situated was landscaped by Capability Brown, whose naturalistic aesthetic resulted in the destruction of many mazes and the formal gardens of which they constituted a part. Hampton Court maze only survives today because Brown was told not to touch it. This must have irritated the Royal Gardener, since he lived in the house next to the maze for twenty years!

The Marlborough Maze is much more than simply a slap in the face for aesthetically 'educated' taste or a simple parody that sets ghosts walking. Despite Fisher's unqualified regard for the voluptuous pleasures of popular culture, he does not seek to assimilate himself to popular culture in fazed admiration, as if his only ambition was an anti-intellectual release of libidinal energy. Rather, he treats the aesthetically despised pleasures of maze making and walking as something that is first nature and commonplace and mutually defining of subjectivity. The labyrinth is a vibrant cultural form precisely because it has avoided the aesthetic hype of the contemporary art market. As such, Fisher and maze walking represent the future direction of visual culture.

Stewart Home

Talking to Tom Leonard

Dan Stephen

Tom Leonard recently visited the University of Colorado, Boulder, at the invitation of the university's writer-in-residence, the poet Ed Dorn. While there, he was interviewed by history student Dan Stephen for the creative writing department magazine *Sniper Logic*; edited by Ed Dorn's partner Jenny Dunbar. The following is a transcript of the interview with introduction.

When I was given the opportunity to interview Tom Leonard I jumped. After all, Leonard, a native of Glasgow, is not only a leading British poet who had never before travelled to the United States, but is a representative of a literary tradition that is distinctively, even defiantly working class and rooted in local language and experience. Leonard is hardly known in the United States though his work has attracted considerable attention in Britain. He occupies a particular position in the culture of western Scotland, as a contemporary spokesperson for a poetical tradition that, at its best, is willing to defy authority and convention to speak with an authentic voice. Born in 1944, Leonard is an accomplished popular writer and poet whose work is wholly his own, without being overly personal or eccentric. The Glaswegian dialect that structures a significant part of his work is the vernacular of his childhood and locality. The subjects of his poetry, while often political, are the result of his ongoing engagement with that local culture.

For Leonard, politics is part of living, it is as inevitable as breathing. He told me, "Although obviously there is a way in which my work is political, that's because the language itself in Britain is a political issue. It's not that politics is something that I take down from a shelf and do, politics is just part of the process of being. To get through the day is political." Part of the key to Leonard's politics is Glasgow's former position as Britain's "second city of empire" and the paradoxical position of its working class Catholic and Protestant citizens as colonised subjects within a broader imperial culture. In Britain, dialects are markers of relative status and power, and the speech cultivated in elite schools has been a marker of status. While the climate has begun to change, it is still possible for working class speech to draw laughter, or to be a source of discrimination. In a satirical passage in a

Leonard poem, a BBC news announcer is given a Glasgow working-class accent to announce bluntly why the BBC avoids working-class accents in its news-bulletins:

...if
a toktaboot
thi trooth
lik wanna yoo
scruff yi
widny think
it wuz troo...
yooz doant no
thi trooth
yirsellz cawz
yi canny talk
right. this is
the six a clock
nyooz. belt up.

Leonard's contrary position, that as one speaker in a poem puts it, "all livin language is sacred", has not always been an easy one to maintain in a British culture that privileges certain dialects, or in that tourist Scotland that in the past has created an industry out of sentimentality. Fake clan tartans and Brigadoon views of history are pleasing to tourists but in overabundance are poisonous to a genuine culture. A large part of Leonard's life has been spent trying to explore and to interpret for himself what is vital and essential about the culture of his own region of western Scotland.

He spent several years during the 1980's as "Writer in Residence" at Paisley Central Library, just west of Glasgow. There he had access to the library's substantial collection of local regional books and pamphlets. Between items of news and religious or political disputation there was a lot of poetry, most of which had been out of print for over a century. The authors were not professional writers but ordinary people: farmers, bakers, mothers, and workers, many of whose poems crackle with wit and bite that still hits home, even after a hundred and fifty years. These Renfrewshire poets were largely self-educated, and they wrote not for a school, academy or publishing house, but for themselves and their neighbours. While working at the Paisley library, Leonard read through this time capsule from A to Z, then made a selection of poems, published in 1990 as *Radical Renfrew*.

Though more than sixty poets were brought back into print after a century of neglect, Leonard insists that the selection process was nothing to do with "levelling down" or suspending criteria. "I rejected a hell of a lot," Leonard told me. "The ones I rejected were often writers who put on a kind of salon-pastoral suit in their writing, using grand-toned language because that was the language they thought poetry should be in. The poems I responded to had in some measure language that was alive, and engaged."

Renfrewshire is the county immediately north of Robert Burn's Ayrshire, and a number of the anthology's poems show the influence of Scotland's best-known poet in terms of poetic form and the writing about everyday things. Political themes evident in the book include work and unemployment, trade unionism, democratic reform, feminism, and republicanism. But the poetry is not all radical in the political sense, and the title *Radical Renfrew* was chosen for a more fundamental reason. "Part of the meaning was to do with the Latin 'radix', or 'root'," Leonard explained. "It was a statement about the root of poetry in this area, using the word root in the various resonances it can have. What are the roots of the culture

we are in, 'we' meaning the people in the west of Scotland. Also, here is a poetry that is rooted in the culture of which it is a part."

During his presentation at the British Studies Center, Leonard talked about Alexander Wilson, poet and pioneer ornithologist who left Paisley for America in the 1790s, and there brought out before his death the 9-volume *Birds of America*. "In fact Wilson didn't leave for America", Leonard adds, "*he fled*." Charged among other things with distributing Paine's *The Rights of Man*, Wilson for one satiric attack on a local employer was jailed and forced publicly to burn his satire at Paisley Cross. Like some others in *Radical Renfrew*, he wrote under risk.

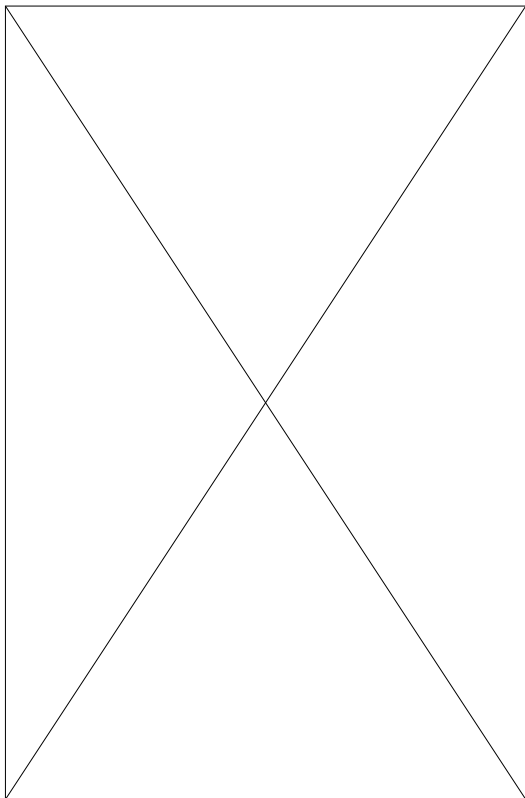
Paine's *The Rights of Man* was popular in Scotland, and Leonard argues that the exclusive nature of the literature and language allowed in British schools was part of the process which counteracted such as Paine's egalitarian ideals. "In fact the spread of the right to vote in Britain paralleled the right to literacy, in that both were allowed within formal codes whose names acknowledge the supremacy of the status quo which must not be challenged: Her Majesty's Government, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Schools, the Queen's English. The rights and values of the monarch and aristocracy were sown into the definitions of what the people's new entitlements to personal expression actually were."

The language and culture of Renfrewshire itself became devalued and marginalised. By the end of the nineteenth century the intellectual and linguistic range of the published local poetry had narrowed, often being limited to the sentimental and safe, in spite of continued working class oppression.

Leonard's views have drawn criticism from some in Scotland who accuse him of attacking Literature teachers just for doing their job, a view he dismisses as "utter rubbish". He puts it that literature teaching is valid insofar as it can avoid functioning as the representative of institutional authority, which "tends to make it into an arm of government." He recognises "the inspirational effect a single teacher can have as a human being offering knowledge and personal engagement with specific works of literature from their own life. This is something I don't denigrate nor would want to." But away from that personal interaction, the structural institution, the competition for grades, prizes or scholarships by students writing essays on literature for examiners, is all opposed to the very nature of what literature actually is. Such practice, says the introduction to *Radical Renfrew*, "turns the living dialogue between writer and reader into a thing, a commodity to be offered in return for a bill of exchange, the certificate or 'mark'. But no caste has the right to possess bills of exchange on the dialogue between one human being and another."

This argument is of a piece with the anti-clerical stance of some of the poets in the anthology itself, who take the view that they do not need any clergyman to judge the quality of their own dialogue with their Maker. Leonard remarks, "When I go to a university library and see yard upon yard of the institution-generated litcrit industry, I see it largely as the byproduct of another clericism."

Leonard's language concerns have led him into broader politics, and at one time or another he has written in support of leftwing causes. During the Gulf War he produced a pamphlet *On the Mass Bombing of Iraq and Kuwait*, commonly known as "*The Gulf War*" published by the anarchist AK Press of San Francisco and Edinburgh. This analysed and satirised media control and inconsistencies in reporting of the events, and complained in plain, standard English about the extent of Iraqi deaths due to the bombing and set to continue as a result of the destruction of the country's



infrastructure, and the continuing embargo on the import of medical and food supplies. The booklet went to three printings, and Leonard recalled how moved he was when at an Edinburgh Festival poetry reading in 1991 at which he read some of the satire, a woman approached him from the audience afterwards and said, "Thanks a lot for writing that. My son was over in the thing."

As it happened, Leonard arrived in Boulder in November at a time when tensions between Iraq and America were again building, following President Hussein's expulsion of American weapons inspectors. A renewed American and British bombing campaign seemed likely. Leonard connected the prospect of the bombing once more with control of public language, citing the always-repeated description of Iraq's alleged stockpile of "weapons of mass-destruction". "Ironic," he says, "given that I live in Glasgow thirty minutes' drive from the Trident nuclear missile base with a stock of nuclear warheads sufficient to wipe Scotland from the face of the earth many times over."

Leonard gave two public presentations at Colorado University. At the English Department he gave a talk on the Scottish poet James Thomson (1834-82), author of "The City of Dreadful Night". Thomson, who spent nine months as secretary to a mining company in Central City in 1872, is the subject of Leonard's biography *Places of the Mind*. The same evening at the British Studies Center, Leonard read poems from *Radical Renfrew* together with a selection of his own poetry.

I met him on the Pearl Street Mall on a cold Saturday morning the next day. We wandered around looking for a place to meet and talk, and ended up at the Penny Lane coffee house. Even though Leonard spoke clearly and slowly, there were times when my unfamiliarity with Scottish accents caused me to miss a word or two. He agreed to talk only on condition that he himself could ask me whatever he wanted, saying that for the dialogue to have value both parties had to be on equal ground. I had prepared questions in advance, which I showed to Leonard and to which he referred occasionally, though our conversation wandered far from this prepared list.

Stephen: Do you believe, as you seem to be saying in the introduction to *Radical Renfrew*, that the growth of institutions has tended to cut off dialogue?

Leonard: What I say there among other things is that state institutions in nineteenth century Scotland cut off and controlled the dialogue between the indigenous culture and the people—and therefore more crucially, sought to control the critical dialogue taking place between the people and the state. I don't think that sort of phenomenon rare, nor has it been confined to Scotland.

Stephen: Is it harder to express dissenting opinions today? Even when there seems to be little opposition to dissent, people are not writing—

Leonard: Could you elaborate on that? I don't really think it's true, but I'd like to hear what you think.

Stephen: Well, for example, since 1989, it's hard to dissent to the free market. People think capitalism fought some sort of ideological war with the Soviet Union and won. The last ten years or so have been capitalism running amok.

Leonard: In the former Soviet bloc welfare has been

confused with communism, and therefore totalitarianism, and all the rest, and scrapped with the asset-stripping. The waves of that are really hitting Britain and America now, all this crap about welfare being a sign of moral degeneracy. It's about underfunding public services, the political system supposedly directed to the notion that people pay less and less taxes, because people who don't pay taxes are negative entities, society's anti-matter. But dissent takes place as it always has done, in the culture.

Stephen: Our culture is being taken over by advertising and corporations. It's difficult to express an opinion that goes against the grain of that. I don't mean that people are being driven out of the country or thrown in jail, but if you dissent to what everybody supposedly thinks at some level you are assuming some kind of immediate risk. That situation is helped along by newspapers and everything else that often repeat the same opinions over and over again. There's a huge industry connected to corporations that does nothing but generate propaganda.

Leonard: The important phrase there is "what everybody supposedly thinks". The mass newspapers and endless media newsbulletins are as much about marketing a specific sense of phatic communion as about information. Which doesn't generate dissent or critical dialogue. Phatic communion comforts people. You watch the game then go home to read about it.

Stephen: What do you mean by that phatic communion?

Leonard: The phrase is from the linguist Malinowski, it means that level of discourse which is a bonding device, mutual reassurance about shared givens. When somebody says for instance, "Cold, isn't it?" and the other says "Yeh, it's freezing," etcetera. It's not a real question, it would be unsociable in a blizzard to reply you felt warm, you would be thought off your head. *The Crucible* remains a fine play.

The situation can parallel the nineteenth century Scottish education phenomenon, in that the gates seem all opened but what gets through is in certain essentials reduced. That gets very obvious in times like the Gulf War, or in Britain recently after the death of Diana, where unbelievably the BBC merged its channels into one on radio and tv, in case you got away from showing your respect. The language everywhere on the British media that week was appalling, obsequious and self-indulgent hysteria, the Gulf War all over again with a madonna in place of the Devil. It

was like if you didn't show yourself stricken with grief you should be strung from a lamp-post. As I said last night, I gave up on newspapers and newsbulletins totally for more than two months afterwards. That was actually quite liberating.

Stephen: In the nineteenth century, people did not face an opinion industry.

Leonard: They did when they went to church and school, radical culture survived largely despite these, not because of them. Also if you look at the established newspapers you get the establishment line. My local city newspaper the *Glasgow Herald* for instance, is just one of the many that consistently opposed democratic progress in Ireland and working class advances in Britain. That was standard.

Stephen: But how many people read those newspapers? Their circulation was much smaller.

Leonard: So was the electorate. But then as now there were other narratives, other publications. Dissent is always going on, and always will. You're showing dissent in the basis of your questions.

Stephen: I'd like to wrap things up with something that is just my own personal interest. Somewhere I've heard that you're a fan of the writer and poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who's come under a lot of fire recently. Do you have anything you wish to say about him?

Leonard: MacDiarmid is a major figure in Scotland, the key figure in the attempt to establish a literary form of the Scots language as part of a counter-colonial nationalist strategy. Some of the attack on him you refer to is from those people dismissing everything and anything to do with the Left. One way I fundamentally differ from him is in wanting to use a language descriptive of what actually is linguistically, rather than prescriptive of what ought to be, or historically was: the difference between us is a common one between writers in a colonial or post-colonial state. American writers such as [William Carlos] Williams helped me to my own mode, and MacDiarmid's intellectual breadth, whatever the differences between he and I, is such that it was no surprise to me coming recently on an essay of his in an Edinburgh University magazine from the early sixties in which he was welcoming the publication in the magazine of the then young Allen Ginsberg, and Black Mountain writers like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley.

Stephen: Thanks very much for your time and patience.

review

Cynicism and Postmodernity

Timothy Bewes

Verso ISBN 1-85984-196-1

Woody Allen put it rather clearly when he exclaimed "Marxism is dead, feminism is dead, humanism is dead and frankly, I don't feel so good myself." We all know, and have for some time, that the grand narratives have collapsed, we all know that cynicism is the inevitable result of a loss of faith, and that a certain ironic wit and negativity is the only way to survive on groundless terrain. The only problem is that cynicism has gone from being a survival tactic towards becoming an end in itself. We have grown used to it and cannot let a political event, an artwork, a novel or even a relationship pass without a sneer of self-conscious irony.

Cynicism and Postmodernity marks the next turn in the spiraling tale of self-conscious postmodernity: the condemnation of cynicism and the rather contradictory project of subsequently trying to find a position from which such a criticism could take place. A kind of cultural criticism in reverse. A burst of well intended frustration and anger followed by confusion.

In this Timothy Bewes' first published work, his focus is on politics, the arena in which, he claims, postmodern cynicism has had the greatest impact and the most damaging effects. It sets out ambitiously to assess the impasse of postmodern thought and to re-orientate contemporary theory towards an active politics beyond cynicism and apathy. As such it is one of the many new publications in what is fast turning into a backlash against postmodernity.

Cynicism and Postmodernity characterises "post modern cynicism" as "a melancholic, self pitying reaction to the apparent disintegration of political reality," — a period of disillusionment with Grand Narratives and totalising ideologies. Postmodernism is seen by Bewes as a cynical reaction to the aims of enlightenment thought and modernity.

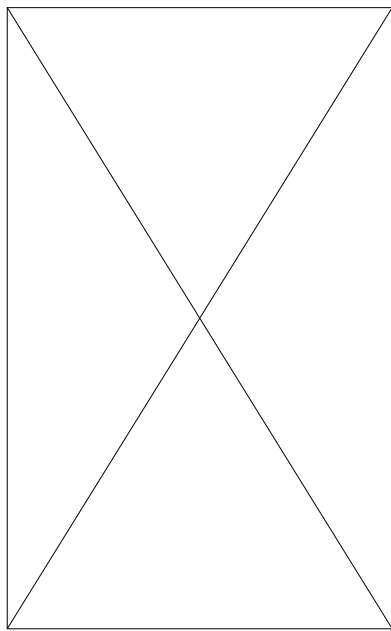
For Bewes, as for postmodernity's time served critics, Habermas and Norris and Eagleton; the postmodern is a temporal historic blip, a small upset or period of cowardice in the face of the difficult ascent of the enlightenment project. Postmodernity, in this view, is already pre-staged by Hegel, as a part of modernity: "the reification of a certain panic in the face of psychical violence and epistemological kinesis..."

According to Bewes, postmodernity is pre-staged and therefore dismissed in *The Phenomenology*, in which Hegel describes the possible responses to the violence of consciousness during its progression towards knowledge. Paraphrasing Hegel, Bewes diagnoses three distinct types of response to the fear of knowledge. These are characterised as "decadence, relativism and irony."

According to Bewes: "Hegel introduces and dismisses the intellectual credibility of these recognizably postmodern states of mind, symptoms of a crisis in the thoroughgoing skepticism of the healthy philosophical sensibility."

Postmodernity is then, seen as a period of inactivity, in which indulgence in metaphysical introspection and critique stands in for any real activity, in particular political activity. The postmodernist is cynical of the Grand Narratives of modernity, and instead revels in doubt, nihilism and apathy. The postmodernist, lacking a foundation for ethics, or a scientific basis for social analysis, has no other terms to assess anything on, other than subjective impressions and existing cultural values. Hence so much post-modern theory is taken up by the relatively apolitical study of "aesthetics." Applying his three tools of decadence, relativism and irony, the postmodern aesthete becomes either decadent, reactionary or nihilistic.

Following through on his claim that postmodernity is a historical blip, Bewes attacks the foundations upon which the epistemological break with modernity



occurred: Auschwitz and the implication of modernist rationalism in the rise of totalitarianism.

"To equate such logic [national socialism] with reason, as Gillian Rose or indeed Hegel or Kant, or Arendt variously conceive it, is a postmodern fallacy."

From Bewes' perspective postmodern thought has turned against reason because it has mis-conceived rationality. Bewes goes on to characterise postmodernity as a fear of reason. Quoting Zygmunt Bauman and his cautionary relativism, as an example of the fear of risk inherent in postmodernity; Bewes shows how this fear of exercising reason can lead to a liberalist political philosophy which elevates the tolerance of confusion, to its prime principle. Bauman, like most postmodern relativists, justifies his position by a severe mistrust of the connection between reason and totalitarianism.

"This condition of uncertainty, of over-riding caution in the face of impasse or irresolution, is to all intents what Bauman prescribes for the postmodern ethical subject: embrace your bafflement, and live accordingly."

In the face of ethical choice, claims Bauman, it is better to err on the side of caution. Against this Bewes defines modernist reason as "risk", and Bauman's ethical caution as "fear of risk." The fear of violence which Hegel characterised as the lack of courage in facing the challenge of enlightened knowledge.

What is at stake is an important point, and this is the heart of the debate from which Bewes himself, somewhat disappointingly, retracts. The question is: is modernist rationalism as profoundly implicated in totalitarianism as many post-modernists would claim, or has rationalism been mis-conceived by postmodernity? In short, is it possible, in any way, to return to the modernist project of enlightened reason?

To address this question Bewes looks at a number of positions expounded by postmodern theorists on the subject of Auschwitz and Nazi general Eichmann's use of Kant's categorical imperative, as part of his defense at the Nürnberg trials. However, the weight of evidence he brings up against his own claim, far outweighs his own side of the argument, however boldly he states his case. "Auschwitz is a corollary not of reason, but of the fear of reason."

Disappointingly Bewes does not follow through the logic of his own argument to make a case for re-instating the modernist project; or to denounce postmodernity, as Habermas and Eagleton and Norris have done from their different positions. When faced with the immensity of the project before him he simply falls back on a rhetoric of exclamation:

"[Postmodernity is] a dangerous rhetorical sophistry, a pervasive counter Enlightenment and relativistic drive to abandon ideas of truth, and the possibility of social progress." While he acknowledges the work done by anti-postmodern theorists he does not endorse their un-shaking belief in the reinstatement of the enlightenment project, or acknowledge the difficult work that

is still to be done on supporting and developing such an argument. Nor does Bewes pay respect to their work or develop any of their arguments.

Bewes does not follow through in support of the initial quotation by Hegel upon which such an argument could be based. Instead Bewes heads off into the realms of contemporary politics, cultural criticism and literature in the attempt to find some real substance to grapple with. Believing as he does in some vague notion of "political engagement" and "risk" in the face of so much postmodern apathy. As he leaves the work of other theorists behind however, he also steps off the track that might have led him to a position which could legitimate the claims he makes.

Bewes about-turns on the importance of answering the question (the complicity of rationalism with totalitarianism) dismissing it as mere metaphysics. In a chapter *Energy vs. Depth: The Lure of Banality*, he develops the claim that we cannot apply metaphysics to politics; as the former is based upon notions of depth and the latter upon energy: the former on universal concepts and the latter upon cultural variables, contingent historic facts and localised pragmatics.

"Postmodern politics is therefore founded on a fundamental confusion between the affairs of politics and those of metaphysics. Its aims are all too apparent: to put a hold on the hazardous exercise of political rationality in the quest for metaphysical stability. This end necessitates that the political temperament, which is essentially one of instability, risk and perpetual uprooting, be divested of its credibility."

It is at this point that *Postmodernity and Cynicism* loses its credibility as a critique of postmodernity. In his exonerating of energy, temperament and force, Bewes starts to sound like his critique of rationality is coming from the perspective of an irrationalist: Nietzsche, and the proto-Nietzscheans, Deleuze and Foucault, as we all know, use the same language, and are well known postmodernists.

In attempting to find a basis for political action, through "passion, energy and force," Bewes steps out of philosophy, historical analysis and even politics, into the realm of the irrational, into the realm of fiction. It is not surprising then that he abandons the difficult work of theorists and philosophers to address the person of a fictional character (as a metaphor for the point he is trying to make): in the charismatic character of Rameau, in *La Neveu de Rameau*, by Diderot: a character whose existence is "to all appearances, the preference for energetic thoughtlessness, over the philosophers profundity... Rameau's position is one of resolute indifference to all 'higher things'...freedom, truth, genius, wisdom, posterity, truth or dignity." He is characterised as: "The destructive character' an agent of unsanctioned lawmaking violence...the catalyst of history..."

Bewes pits the energy of Rameau against the impotent depth of the postmodern theorist (whom he characterises as "the metaphysical philosopher"), Rameau is seen by Bewes as "the enemy of...the pervasive fear of violence in 'late' postmodernity." Bewes quotes Hegel's references to Diderot's Rameau as an example of the negative movement of dialectic thought. Rameau is then built up through the rest of the book, as a metaphoric example of the energetic power of Hegel's dialectic between philosophy and action.

Bewes attempts to build up an emotive argument for some kind of political action, and spirit of risk, not by analysing the reason for "postmodern apathy", but by stockpiling examples, and attempting to create a sense of frustration with it. *Cynicism and Postmodernity* is filled with impatience and frustration but never gets beyond the limits that are causing the frustration. Inevitably, what Bewes is looking for is not a realpolitik or politics based upon methodological analysis, but instead a spirit of political engagement, a temperament even. A new kind of energy with which to sweep away cynicism. A passionate "risk".

Until he has answered the much bigger question, this notion of "risk" within the political arena seems unformed, and un-informed: a call to arms without a cause to fight for, energy without direction. Bewes, it seems, is almost willing to risk another Auschwitz in the name of the creative violence of reason.

The book should be heralded for its detailed diagnosis of the intellectual impasse of postmodernity, through all aspects of contemporary culture, quoting as it does, from a breath-taking array of sources in literature, theory, sociology, media studies and contemporary politics. The pluralistic and eclectic nature of Bewes' references, however, serve to confuse and defer the difficult argument that was initially intended. Thus Bewes' mixing of references to the K Foundation, Tony Blair, Derrida, Rorty, Death Brand Cigarettes, Auschwitz and Dazed and Confused magazine, serves only to dilute his argument.

It is exactly this attempt to pull together so many reference points and to jump between genres and disciplines in a flurry of intellectual activity, which nonetheless obscures the very clear issue at its core. Having diagnosed the problems of postmodernity, Bewes is unable to find a direction or methodology which might lead to a solution. His method is itself, irrational and eclectic. The subject areas he attempts to span are too broad, and we have no grounds in either metaphysics, empirical fact or political theory upon which to judge any of his statements. The form of the book itself, is a product of postmodern pluralism in academia, the breaking down of boundaries between disciplines. The book partakes of the same retreat from method and discipline into subjectivity, that it attempts to condemn. Bewes is interested in the notion of re-instating reason without actually exercising reason in the form of a rationally structured argument.

Ironically, the postmodern culture of cynical self-awareness and apathy is only added to by this book. As a culture, our cynicism exists not because we are unaware of what is wrong with postmodernism, but because we are only too aware of our inability to get out of the impasse, our inability to take a risk, to commit to a cause. *Cynicism and Postmodernity* is then another attempted critique of our cynical postmodern culture which inevitably adds to the canon of self-consciousness but impotent knowledge. All diagnosis and no cure. Knowing that we are cynical, just makes our cynicism all the more profound.

Ewan Morrison

live review

Homage to JG Ballard

Diana

Cours Albert, Paris: Sunday August 31 1997

THECONCEPTUALARTIST Diana, "Our Lady of the Media," at last unveiled her latest music action piece to a public positively salivating with eagerness and anticipation. Earlier works by this former pupil of Wolf Vostell and one time member of Negativland had been criticised as being guache, self-indulgent and politically inept. Under the canopy of a starlit Parisian night, *Homage to JG Ballard* for four voices, Mercedes Benz and motorcycle cavalcade once and for all silenced even her sternest critics—that fawning rat-pack whose presence she so often bemoaned.

It was a stroke of marketing genius, if not of aesthetics, to employ some of this parasitic entourage to serve as the chorus in her most mature and considered piece of urban theatre. Detractors will carp that she had merely noted the grilling received by Guardian critics when they directed plays at a recent BAC season, and cynically sought to turn the media on itself, but those of us who count ourselves her fans see a more profound and original mind at work.

A small but select band of Diana's most ardent followers gathered at midnight to witness this crucial benchmark of late '90s art. The piece would be in three parts, the press release told us, starting at the fabulous Ritz Hotel, lit by one thousand chandeliers and emblematic of all that is tasteful about contemporary life, and ending at the rather more gloomy but undoubtedly hip underpass of the Cours Albert. Speculation was rife as to the myriad influences that this penetratingly perceptive, even cheeky, mistress of postmodernism would absorb, reconfigure and claim as her own. Some saw hints of Hans-Peter Kuhn; others argued that Diana was "the original Spice Girl". Others still protested that she was first and foremost the high priestess of post-kitsch, while a few cynics sneered that she just provided "Virilio for lounge lizards."

When you look into the void for too long, said Nietzsche, the void starts looking into you. Diana was saying much the same in this elegant and powerfully visceral meditation on the trappings of power, fame and her own role as a creature of the media. The performance began with the quartet entering their vehicle, moving off at a steady pace, joined—with a clear nod to Fellini—by the drove of paparazzi. So far, so much traditional modern opera, the socialist realism of the outside environment alone hinting at anything radically new, but still within spitting distance of Jonathan Miller or Robert Le Page. Gradually, subtly, the pace shifted and the audience settled into watching, enraptured and absorbed, a kind of flight and pursuit as first one figure, then another, drew towards the artist, then withdrew, in a teasing foreplay that for some spectators was more than a little risqué. The simple elegance of this opening movement, delicately bathed in the soft light from half a dozen car headlights, did not, however, offer more than a hint of what was to come.

The second and penultimate movement was surely the culmination of a life's work by this gifted young artist (who has been compared favourably to Tracy Emin and even humorously dubbed "Scanner in drag"), at once calling to mind the Lettrist notions of derive, contemporary chaos theory, and wickedly—in the kind of whimsical gesture that has made her the "Queen of the people's hearts"—the famous Papa/Nicole car advertisements (allegedly scripted by one of Diana's mentors, Raoul Vaneigem). The almost balletic grace which the Mercedes Benz (deployed in reference, no doubt, to Diana's favourite Japanese noisecore group Merzbow's notorious edition-of-one CD, sealed into a car of the very same model) leapt and bounded across the Cours Albert literally took the breath of this critic away. The sense of abnegation on

the part of the players, akin to the vertiginous feeling of oblivion encountered in the work of the most extreme of today's isolationists, was (it was generally agreed) singularly impressive. A chorus of delighted mews of appreciation rose from the spellbound audience. Who could fault Diana's biting critique of bourgeois mores, her mercurial speed-reading of the contemporary urban landscape, her quicksilver delimitation of neo-classical hubris in the figures represented (the artist herself daringly foregrounded) in this most alluring and, it must be said, sexy masterpiece?

It was only with the so-called Epilogue that Diana could be accused of letting her fanbase down. Nowadays who among us has not grown bored of the endless screenings of so many interchangeable hospital dramas, the tedious Casualties and ERs, chocabloc with clichés—the alcoholic surgeon, the wounded eccentric, the inevitable hackneyed recourse to (one one thousand, two one thousand) cardiac machines? Diana's attempt at a supra-ironic positioning of the artist (à la Orlan) at the centre of the operating space came across merely as inapposite and pandering to the demands of hoi polloi. The smorgasbord of mangled metal, the heady cocktail of petrol and bodily fluids, the positively electrifying incorporation of police and ambulance sirens—son et lumière sans pareil, indeed!—was already more than enough, and this over-long and frankly dull conclusion to the music, until then so full of futurist sound and fury, was a major miscalculation. Nevertheless, the critical response was overwhelmingly positive, and both public and professional scribes agreed that this would be right at the top of their Hits of '97 lists. So much for the "Silly Season."

Although a repeat performance seems out of the question—Diana insists on the aesthetic priority of public art performed in real time and is barely interested in documentation, dissing it as at best a halfway house—the rave reviews that this new work has already attracted seem destined to keep it in the public mind for some considerable time to come.

Ed Baxter

These boots aren't made for walking

Style, fetishism and the 'will to adorn'

Adele Patrick

review

Style Conference

Bowling Green State University, Ohio July 25-28, 1997

THE STYLECONFERENCE provided the first cross-disciplinary forum for a range of issues and ideas that fuse the traditionally discrete territories of design, art and fashion theory and history, and the more permeable fields of queer theory, gender, women's and cultural and black studies to be aired and debated where they interrogated the meanings of style.

Meanwhile, Bowling Green style; Big Boys, Buckeye Budget Inns, tractor-pulling championships, 'Elizabethan' jousting on the campus lawns all went untheorised. Bowling Green jocks hollering 'lesbians' at women delegates with an almost nostalgic unself-consciousness, as news of the Dean lost in the Puerto Rican jungle broke, provided a poignant backdrop for the proceedings.

Papers of cringing banality and searing relevance to theory were delivered by speakers who seemed either daunted or encouraged by the interconnectedness of research in disciplines remote from their own and the onus (inferred by the conference organisers in their introductory remarks) to situate their own bodies in the debates.

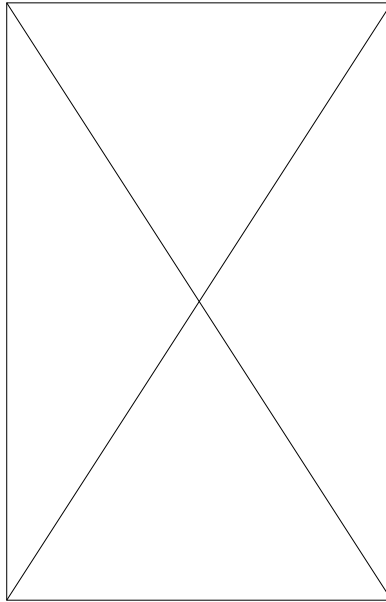
Organisers Ellen Berry and Laura Stempel-Mumford made the bald observation that narcissism and the critique of the clothes, hair and style of other delegates are inherent in the planning and hosting of most conferences, and shared with us the fact that getting tattooed and e-mailing make-up tips had been critical in theirs.

Valerie Steele's keynote lecture was a promo for "Fetish: fashion, sex and power", and set a radical sex agenda. Her exhaustive (fetishistic?) rehearsal of the history of (male) fetishism from 'margins to mainstream' was unproblematised by any rigorous contextualising of her survey in relation to issues of class, gender politics and ethnicity. Steele asserted the

Foucauldian pervasiveness of the fetish, iterated by the work of Krafft-Ebbing, Gianni Versace, second-wave feminists (in their stereotyped anathemisation/promotion of corset-wearing and high heels), through the agony pages of 19th century popular journals and the 'agency' of Emma Peel.

Foucault was also deployed by Christine Braunberger in her paper "The tattoos post-modern performance of art"; interpreting tattooing as (an appropriate) response to an 'internal panopticon'. Braunberger rejected Jameson's claim that postmodernism is all surface, acknowledging the complexity of surface play in body modifications and was at her most emphatic and earnest in her analysis of tattoos as the abject avant-garde. For Braunberger the body is a site of production where the things that cannot be said are inscribed. In a move not conclusively made, such inscriptions become art that: by-passes the gallery-system, cannot be stolen or sold, is a compensation for assimilation and that can be taken with you when you die. (Body) Art is thus within everyone's grasp. It is palpably transaesthetic—even the aesthetically literate probably cannot name a great tattoo artist. Here, the 'low brow assaults high brow' paradigm was invoked. I remained unconvinced that tattooed bodies 'play games with capitalism' and that tattoos (more than clothes, make-up and other forms of self-fashioning) are more likely to express corporeal subjectivity. My reservations were confirmed by Braunberger's 'revelation' that despite her 'conventional' appearance she too was a 'tattooed lady'. How is the low brow assaulting the high brow when corporeal transgressive art remains invisible (or its existence is called into question) and when being tattooed is merely a (further) measure of 'cultural competence' for academics? Karmen MacKendrick, although undeniably corseted for her paper "Technoflesh (or didn't that hurt?)", provoked my return to this concern when she described the frisson of excitement she experienced in an academic gathering knowing that although she 'passed' in this context, underneath she had a modified body.

Neither speaker addressed the analogous ways that markers of ethnicity express corporeal subjectivity that troubles the academy. 'Race' however, may not be so easily played with or hidden. MacKendrick's paper was illustrated with many slides culled from internet new primitives/body modification sites of (white) bodies modified by various means. An image of full-face tattooing provoked a palpable audience response. Just as much popular body-modification literature tends to avoid discussions of ethnicity and 'race' preferring to restore 'otherness' as an anachronistic, anthropological well-spring or source book of the decorative, so the image of the indelibly 'coloured' face, the stigmatised face that cannot be hidden, provokes the white circus audience's response to the grotesque 'other' in the contemporary (overwhelmingly) white conference audience. The liberatory potential of the 'technologies of the body' expressed through modification ('delight in the body') were posed by MacKendrick in rather rabidly couched opposition to Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin's infamous diagram of the female body, modified by patriarchal demands, was used to raise a self-conscious, post-feminist belly-laugh from the audience. Whilst MacKendrick and others welcomed the development of 'ugliness' as a subcultural, surgically-



achieved radicalism, Dworkin's 'ugliness' would seem to remain beyond recuperation (mis-read as a sign of feminist Puritanism).

MacKendrick's charges against the pathologising of modification (and her persuasive demonstration of the inextricable tension of modification with medicine) were fruitful and illuminating (e.g. hygiene/dirt dichotomy). MacKendrick correlated the body and cyber technology, suggesting that both systems are the ultimate in rejections of our mortal destinies. (i.e. Transcendental Modification).

In her paper "Highbrow/Lowbrow cosmetic surgery" Mary Thompson critiqued the relationship between Orlan and the 'living Barbie', Cindy Jackson. Jackson has Barbified herself in an ironic quest to avoid mediocrity. In a move reminiscent of Orlan's surgery documentation, Jackson has had (even more widespread) coverage of her surgical morphing in the US tabloids. In the light of Jackson's performances (and self parody), Thompson's questions 'Is Orlan a feminist? Is her work art?' seemed rather delimiting. Modifications of the body whether they are performed by Cindy Jackson or Michael Jackson, and whether they are enacted for an art or popular audience are ultimately socially, historically and culturally determined.

A number of papers were delivered that managed to fuse the methodological approaches of cultural studies and social science research, offering satisfactorily grounded readings of the body/text in specific (but contingent) contexts. Denise Witzig, in her paper, "Young and natural: California youth culture and the anti-aesthetic" demonstrated the uniformity of counter-cultural fashion, (US commodity fetishism meets counter-cultural connoisseurship), exemplified by jeans. Witzig discussed the notion of 'back-to

nature' and related fashions that produce a moral religiosity in young women's (anti) beauty regimes, and critiqued the proliferation of the mantra of real, and (consumer) freedom' in post-war US advertising aimed at youth. Ironically, Witzig suggested that 'Heroin style' has been misread—'clammy and sweaty are what 'real' people look like'.

An 'ethnomethodological' research paper by Catherine Egle Waggoner and Lynn O'Brien Hallstein "Boys have penises and girls have party shoes: the ambivalent relationship between feminists and fashion", explored the complex relationship traversing the expressive, repressive and liberatory in the texts 'Fashion' and 'Feminism'. These were usefully theorised through research with white female academic feminists. Analysis of these 'constrained agents' resulted in the identification of four rhetorical strategies (two performative, two 'piecemealing') used by women to assert agency. Through their use of e.g. incongruity, interruption, and appropriation of the texts of fashion and feminism, women were interpreted in this study as superseding objectivity. Through a knowledge of their own subjectivity and a reworking of these historically oppositional texts, women are shown to grant themselves a kind of authorship. The limitations of this study in terms of ethnicity were accepted by the speakers. Jasmine Lambert in her paper "The relationship of women of colour to the 'exotic other' in fashion" accounted for the lack of visibility within fashion (and, historically, feminist?) texts of women of colour and detailed the pleasures for white women of supplanting the potential role of black women in such texts in their identification and performance of the fictional exotic. Further ironies of cross-identification were raised by Lambert's own identification (as a young blackwoman) with Liz Taylor's portrayal of (the black?) Cleopatra.

A further example of white Western occlusion, fanaticism for, and appropriation of, 'otherness' was provided in Bill Osgerby's paper, "Beach Bound: Exotica, Leisure Style and Popular Culture in post-war America, from 'South Pacific' to Jan and Dean" The popularity of the leisure-vogue for South Seas kitsch was read by Osgerby as both symbolic of liberatory potential (where Polynesian becomes a byword for hedonism) in the rise of the habitus of mass consumption and a widespread rejection of the (middle-class) veneration of work, embodied in the popularity of surfing counter-culture.

Given that the tastes and pleasures of (working class) women are rarely addressed at a theoretical level, Mary Anne Beecher's "Good things: the role of nostalgia and ritual in Martha Stewart's Style of Living" provided a memorable example of the richness and relevance of research in this field. Stewart's cult appeal was thoughtfully addressed in a paper that admirably eschewed a 'queer' ironising in favour of conceptualising her popularity as evidence of the importance of ritual, detail and nostalgic longing.

Equally enjoyable were two papers that focused on Dolly Parton's appeal for women. Melissa Jane Hardie's, "Camp quality: Dolly Parton's Country Style" interrogated the 'colonial' ideology of country and Parton's varied simulation, throughout her career, of the country way of life. The theme of transformation (e.g. in Parton's use of fetishised prosthetics) was identified as critical to her practice and was usefully contextualised (according to Hardie, Trump and Dallas changed the valance of big hair from low to high class 'from Jacqueline Suzanne to Onassis'). Importantly, Hardie demonstrated that 'Kitsch is always class contingent'. In her paper "Dolly-izin': Dolly Parton, singing as a woman" Jeannie Ludlow utilised Luce Irigaray's theories of disruptive laughter, irruption and disruption of femininity and Mary Russo's 'Female Grotesque', to assert that Parton is never merely subjected by her performance of feminine excess but manages to 'recover the place of her

exploitation' through making sounds from underneath her encrusted femininity. 'The dumb blonde has a drag voice'.

Disruptive hair identities and the notion of 'fugitive fashion' expressed by Afro-Americans was explored in a paper entitled "Hair Dramas: bodies, style and African-American Identity". Here, Noliwe Rooks critiqued the paucity of theories and methods available in current (fashion) theory to discuss Afro-American identity other than where 'whiteness gets troubled'. Productively drawing together Zora Neale Hurston's belief in the 'the will to adorn' in Afro-American culture and Susan Bordo's conceptualisation of 'embattled bodies', Rooks asked what adorned (black) bodies mean in specific cultural contexts, resisting the tendency, that Kobena Mercer has critiqued, of essentialising black (and 'white') bodies. In her examination of recent cases where the hair identities of young black women were deemed 'unacceptable' by white school administrators, she suggested that the culturally utopian production of braided hair in the Afro-American life and literature are routinely 'misunderstood' (e.g. where hair can be correlated with gang activity) and concludes 'Hairstyles have meaning, they frighten white people'. In a context where white women can appropriate black hair identity without being read as disruptive Rooks asked what theories of fashion have to offer this contradiction? The British theorist Grace Akuba, in her paper "Coming to voice through dreadlocks: hair signification and women of African descent" usefully charted the history of theorising hair, adopting Mercer's view that 'hair is never a biological fact'. Akuba reported on her qualitative research with black British women and amongst other interesting analyses concluded that contrary to historical notions of 'good' and 'bad' hair, and the anthropological consensus that people with different hair have different ideologies, blackwomen with dreadlocks make up a heterogeneous group.

Both Penelope J Engelbrecht, and Shiva Subberraman demonstrated the appropriateness of using their own bodies as a site for interrogating style and the constructedness of our gendered and 'racialised' subjectivity (as women who have 'passed' as heterosexual/lesbian, Indian/American respectively), and expanded knowledge of the cultural performance of identity through the use of clothes.

Corey Creekmur provided further persuasive evidence that in the oft-quoted words of Ru Paul, 'We're born naked and everything else is drag' in his fascinating survey "Boots, Buckskin, Buttons, and Bows: Cowboy Drag in American Culture". The fact that the British have been just as absurdly and improbably keen to drag-up as cowboys from the 19th century was amply illustrated (e.g. by Oscar Wilde, Julian and Sandy, the Pet Shop Boys, and ubiquitous jeans and cowboy-boot wearing from the 1960s onwards) Creekmur's encyclopedic knowledge of the field was deliciously detailed but the critical relevance of the invention of the West 'where men are men' to histories of sexuality was intriguingly developed through a comparative reading of two studio portraits of Wilde and Buffalo Bill Cody taken during Wilde's first promotional tour of America. Wilde's image was created in the process of homosexuality being invented; Cody's cowboy image as heterosexuality was encoded. But as Creekmur suggested it required no 'reading against the grain' in these portraits to see that, even at this moment, the categories are unstable, as cowboy

images would continue to be.

A strong contingent of black theorists based in Middlesex, (including Akuba cited above) addressed a diverse range of issues concerning 'race' and ethnicity in Black British contexts. It was exciting to see the results of large-scale empirical work (including video documentations) mapping Asian audiences tastes and cross-cultural consumption discussed by Bilkis Malek in "Hollywood meets 'Bollywood': diasporic consumer styles and the politics of identity". Elaine Pennicott is also engaged in vital work exploring the construction of the black man in the urban landscapes of Britain ("Masculinity as Masquerade"), drawing on Fanon, Baudelaire and Benjamin to construct less fixed, pathologised identifications.

The burgeoning of interdisciplinary work on British style, tastes and fashion would seem to demand a British venue for the next Style gathering—however painful this might be.

Video documentation of the above papers and those listed below were made for Glasgow School of Art, Historical and Critical Studies Department and Glasgow Women's Library.

Alex Seago, "Burning the Box of beautiful things: the origins of art school pop style in London 1959-1965"

Laura Stempel Mumford, "Drawing the Gaze"

Julie Haught, "I know who you are , but what am I?: lesbian style and lesbian identity"

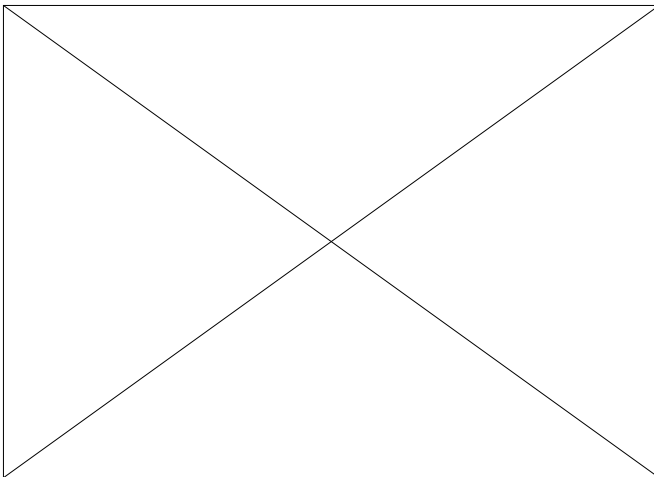
Norma Coates, "Genre and Generation: rock style and the older woman"

Timothy Yap, "Transgressive style; death of the male supermodel"

Lola Young, "Thoughts on female beauty"

Joanna Frueh, "Dressing Aphrodite"

Both images:
ADELE PATRICK



SoundScene

Experimental electronica on-line and off-line reviewed

Coil

Time Machines (Eskaton 010CD)

For the past fourteen years Coil have managed to remain fresh, innovative and miles ahead of their contemporaries. Emerging out of the confines of Psychic TV they set themselves apart from the so called 'Industrial' scene and set new ground with *Scatology*, entranced us with the divine grooves of *Windowpane* and confused many with the droning eloquence of *Coil vs Elph*. Never ones to sit too long in one place they move forward with *Time Machines*, a series of electronically instilled hallucinogenic tones that owes as much to the work of La Monte Young as it does to the likes of Faust. Coil have always had a fascination with drugs and their effect on the users perception of time and place and indeed it is this state that they are attempting to harness and induce with the pieces contained here. Used in conjunction with the visual experiment of staring at the black oval of the CD cover and closing your eyes, the listener should then be able to visualise a 'gateway' to other times and possibilities. This technique is derived from methods used by The (in)famous Golden Dawn. It is an extremely subjective idea and a deeply personal one and whether you can attain this state or not should not take away from what is still a compelling work that induces a strong sense of relaxation and calm with its floating, soaring sea of sound.

Doppler 20:20

Klangfarbenmelodie (D.O.R, ador2311)

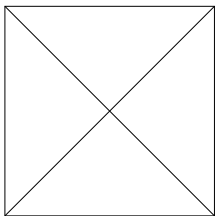
Martin Lee-Stephenson (aka Doppler 20:20) has surpassed the dub induced electro of last year's phenomenal *Art Electrique* with his latest offering of symphonic collage experimentation. *Klangfarbenmelodie* is a collection of ethnically tinged smooth grooves, enchanting minimalism and haunting melodies all suffused with Stephenson's unique take on breakbeats and drum'n'bass. Many club and DJ magazines are bemused with Doppler 20:20's approach and even confused as to what 'review section' to file it under. Such single mindedness epitomises all that is wrong with this country's so called 'experimental dance scene' in that it misses or is too blinkered to see the bigger picture. 1998 is a very exciting time for electronica/electronic music as the majority of those participating and creating refuse to be grounded in any hampering genre tagging. Within the eleven tracks of *Klangfarbenmelodie* we have a perfect example of this refreshing approach to embrace and cultivate all musical fields. Thus Stephenson shifts with ease from the serene keyboard wash and ecstatic rhythms of 'Weird goin' down' to the Gamelan inspired loops of 'Different waves for a paved beach'. Skip buying the fashion centric club mags for one week and buy this instead. You won't regret it.

Funkturn

Digital Mantras (D.O.R, ador409)

On a recent trip to London I was fortunate enough to meet visual artist, website coordinator and sound designer Richard Gallon. He was in the middle of preparing some of his new work for a show at a London exhibition space and upon leading me into his Kings Cross apartment I was confronted with large sheets of photographic paper attached to practically every surface in the front room, all in varying stages of development. Gallon is obsessed with expanding and exploiting the minutiae of his surroundings both audio and visual and his latest visual project centres around creating a negative (in the photographic sense) of chosen sites or objects and rebuilding these within another location. A strangely captivating construct that leaves you feeling uneasy and disorientated. 'Urban Mantras' has that same effect on the listener and as Gallon's soundwork is an attempt to capture the state of mind between sleep and waking, subtle ambient tones and textures punched through with sharp stabs of electronic breakbeats. We've all woken up at some point and had to lie still for a few moments to reorien-

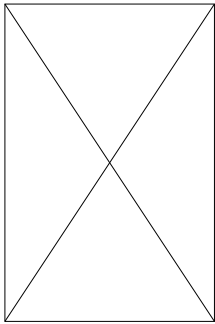
tate ourselves within our surroundings and Richard manages perfectly to capture this feeling here. Just as you're relaxed with the soothing calm, half buried tape loops and analog bullroarer swirls of 'Shimmer' a disembodied voice utters an incoherent phrase in your ear leading you into the menacing sub terra drum loops of 'Call Sign' with its undertow of a lone child's chant. Urban Mantras is a very fluid virtual narrative reminiscent of Aphex Twin's more tenebrous atmospherics which is mirrored well in the 12 page photographic documentation that accompanies the CD. Blurred imagery, ghost-like doorways and hazy horizons lead you through a night in the mind of Gallon, low frequency pulse loops, strains of electronic insect drones and claustrophobic rhythms steadily speeding up as on 'Fragile' which somehow captures that waking moment when you know you've had an uneasy night and hastily try to recall your mind's wanderings before they're gone forever. A soundtrack for your own sleep experiments.



NATURAL
LANGUAGE
0098

Natural Language

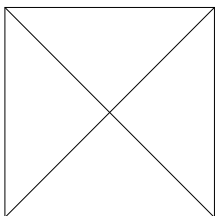
0098 (Time Recordings, em:t 0098)



DOPPLER 20:20
Klangfarbenmelodie

Another numerical entry in the impeccable digital diary of Nottingham's Time Recordings, Natural Language is the emit alter ego of British composer Hywel Davies previously heard on Russell Mills' audio adventure *Undark*. Davies exists in a world of electro-acoustics but is (thankfully) free of the shackles of mathematics and academic theories that so often bog down otherwise invigorating experimentation. The opening timbres of becalming electro ambience and temple bowls that is 'We are learning about blue' quickly gives way to a group of jazz assassins in 'At the White House'. It's raining outside as I listen to the rainfall on 'I am not part of Nature' which results in some strange

audio anomalies in that what I am hearing is akin to subtle tones of white noise interspersed with choic rumblings. Davies' forte is the cello and its arrangement (his main contribution to *Undark*) and this shines through on 'La repos du sable' a cogent nine and a half minutes of haunting, sweeping panoramic brilliance. The instrumentation on this album is so richly varied and complimentary that you cannot fail to be impressed by how Davies moves from the delightful chiming of delicate bells, sharp piano interludes and searing saxophones to the grinding rhythms of a concrete mixer all manipulated into



FUNKTUR
Digital Mantras

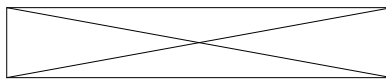
sharp bursts of colour permeated with strategically placed moments of silence. Natural Language insists on your attention, it refuses to be background music. It is an album of deep contemplation that goes a long way to defining soothing new shades of sound.

Contacts / Distribution

D.O.R distributed by Sony/3MV.
Label contact: P.O. Box 1797, London E1 4TX.
Website: <http://www.dor.co.uk>

Eskaton distributed by World Serpent.
Website: <http://ipisun.jpte.hu/coil/coil.html>.
Coil info: BCM Codex, London WC1N 3XX.

Time Recordings distributed by Pinnacle.
For more info on the em:t series send a SAE to
Time Recordings, 389-394 Alfred St North,
Nottingham NG3 1AA.



Pirate Radio on The Net

Back at the start of the nineties I was a DJ with Scotland's first pirate radio station. Radio Mercury was run from a series of locations in and around Glasgow and it broadcast (using a two turntables and a DAT machine) to the city and outlying areas. Its renegade attitude helped it run for several years, garnered much praise and set a few DJ's on the track to bigger things before the accumulative effect of raids by the DTI and subsequent loss of equipment brought about its demise. So it was with my pulse racing and memories flooding back that I logged onto my first taste of pirate radio on the Net.

Radio on the Internet is a brilliant concept, at a basic level (and in theory) all you need is a computer, a modem, a phone line, a couple of turntables, a CD player and a mixer and the world can tune in to whatever you decide to broadcast. Several large stations already have Net broadcasts (I refuse to give them publicity by telling you who they are) sending out countless hours of vacuous MOR rock ballads and third rate sports commentary, so the idea of maverick DJ's mixing up a storm via the Net fills me with some hope. Just think—no more sitting in cold flats waiting for the inevitable DTI raids!

In fact one of the UK's first regular stations is broadcasting for the world to see from The Global Internet Cafe at the heart of Soho in London. www.pirate-radio.co.uk goes out every night from 6pm (GMT) and has already featured blistering sets from the likes of Irdial Discs, Mixmaster Morris, Tony Thorpe's highly recommended Language Recordings imprint, Tom Middleton (The Jedi Knights, Global Communication) and the crew of Ambient Soho to name just a few of an increasingly impressive roster.

Don't be misled at the thought of broken links and slow jittery sound coming at you down the phone line. To the contrary, via a small application called RealAudio (available for free downloading via a link on the website) that works in tandem with your chosen browser the sets you hear are fed into your computer and updated by the second making for a smooth streaming broadcast. In an ideal world it should be this easy to do, but for the present such vanguard endeavours manage to survive thanks to the support of companies like RealAudio and the DJ's playing for free. Let's hope regulations don't interfere and that you can continue to tune in and hear cutting edge music that you would doubtless not otherwise get to hear. You can access the site at any time for an updated list of what's scheduled for broadcast. Log on, listen, then email your words of support.
<http://www.pirate-radio.co.uk>

Robert H. King