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**The Epistemonical Status of Working-class Culture**

Epistemonical: 'capable of becoming an object of knowledge' OED.

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ABSTRACT

THE EPISTEMONICAL STATUS OF WORKING CLASS CULTURE:

I investigate my themes through a discussion of terms and theoretical frames, finally illustrating some points from two interviews and introducing the idea of the archive to bring things to a focused conclusion.

TERMS:

**Class** is a concept which has been confused by a major historical shift in the C20th nature of work from manual to mental. This has been accompanied by an increase in the intellectual education of the population which has brought conflicts with a basic tenet of classism, that working class people are lacking intellect.

Working class identity does not have a biological base determination, a difference with race and gender and one which defies any reduction to an essential identity and to a neat circumscription.

**Culture** exists both in diffuse everyday forms and as focused, distilled works of art. Class relations and values are intimately reflected in culture.

Working class culture has existed in discourse within various labels: **Folk culture**, which is mainly associated with rural traditions, has been alternately repressed and revived in modified form by those in authority. **Popular culture**, most broadly defined as all that is not high culture, focuses more on urban, commercial and contemporary forms. It too has been attacked, devalued and demonised by an intellectual establishment of both right and left. The defences by Herbert J.Gans (1974) and Richard Shusterman (1992) are examined.

Finally before looking at **working class culture** with reference to the work of Emmanuel Cooper I define **High art** as a specific and recent historically formation with ongoing mechanisms of legitimation. I questioned the position of the working class artist here and the problems that their exclusion from Coopers genre bring up.

THEORETICAL FRAMES:

I then reviewed the ideas of a leading sociologist and theorist of culture - Pierre Bourdieu, summarising his concepts of **Habitus**, **Field** and **Cultural Capital** as concepts which might usefully frame my analysis. The importance of another concept, **reflexivity**, is examined in relation to class and education. **Aesthetics** as a field of discourse is examined for defences of popular art. Problems in the full appreciation of cultural values by those outside of that culture are underlined. Shustermans re-appraisal of John Dewey Aesthetic of Experience is highlighted. Finally the class nature of **discourse is indicated**.

WORKING CLASS VOICES AND THE ARCHIVE:

Finally a long series of quotes from two interviews with people who collect cultural material in very different locations. Their collections are examined as **archives**. Archives as structures by which raw data becomes Knowledge (Derrida). Our collective sense of ourselves is contained in the public presentation of Knowledge.

## TERMS OF THE DEBATE 1. **The Mobility of Class Terms.**

Received notions of social class have been widely criticised as failing to reflect the complexities of Britain in the 1990s (see Joyce 1995). The crude image of class derived from occupation, designated A to E, ignores the plurality of positionings occurring within society which have been counterpointed by recently emergent black and feminist writings problematising older rigid ideas of identity (see Hall 1987). The inadequacy of the old economist class categories has been put down to material changes in social structures and the veracity and relevance of a class analysis has been questioned (see Pakulski 1995). However it will be argued that the inadequacy arises from its reductive definition as a diminishing and one-dimensional location in the labour market which, on its own, gives us few clues about how class effects socio-cultural relations.

''Academia has rarely developed complex understandings of working class people. Even celebrated studies like Willis (1977) can be read as an indictment of the working classes; they are so stupid they invest time and energy into ensuring their own oppression... There has to be better ways of writing about class in academia. For too long it has been trapped in the male, Marxist mode where the focus on materiality neglects the elaborate psychological complexities of social class. Unsurprisingly, the excellent examples which exist are all feminist texts written by academics from working class backgrounds coming from a range of disciplines (Steedman 1986, Walkerdine 1990, Hooks 1994, Skeggs 1996)'' (Reay 1997a).

Nonetheless class is still one of the major formative forces within most of our lives (see Devine 1992). Because the terminology is problematic and inadequate does not mean that we should avoid the area altogether. For some of us, who are caught on the sharper edges of class dynamics, the issue is one which feels urgent.

The view of class I will use is not one of an unproblematic binary opposition but one which imagines dynamic class relations as one aspect of a complex social world which is continually being formed by many dynamic forces. Generalisations must be used but should always be understood as indicating contested tendencies within a complex field of local realities (see Foucault 1980).

In looking at the way class relations impinge on any single life we can examine the usual sociological categories such as education, income, housing, occupation (past and present); but we should also examine the cultural and psychological value systems expressed in

social networks, religious affiliations, leisure activities, consumer choices and aesthetic propensities. Clear working-class positions are indicated by council housing, manual work, lack of intellectual qualification, local dialect etc. However this is an out-dated base stereotype which is a classist reduction from the broad majority of the population who rely on work or dole to survive.

Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, refers to the boundaries between classes as being 'flames whose edges are in constant movement'. The problems in making clear identifications of class may not be surprising when we consider that the biological differences which serve to clearly define, although they do not equate to, racial and gender difference are not present to anchor class difference. Appearance altogether has become smudged and indistinct as a class index. Dirty finger nails, accent, flat caps, work boots, or even smell, which once existed as reliable signs for social commentators like George Orwell, can no longer be taken seriously. However to equate lack of apparent indices with a disappearance of class, either as a state of economic coercion or cultural disposition, is surely an absurdity.

A close reading of the evidence of those who think of themselves as classless will often reveal that they carry the values of earlier class positions even more poignantly for their being repressed (see Reay 1997b).

To deal with the history of class as a term within broad written discourse we can see one major trend since the term working class came into use in the beginning of the C19th. This is the erosion of the group by an ever expanding definition of 'middle class'. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century middle class denoted the new capitalist class. By the mid C19th it included the professional instruments of the ruling class who took on the same culture as their interests became aligned with the establishment. By the end of the C19th there arose a new stratum of numerate and literate 'white collar' office workers who comprised 9.3% of the workforce by 1911 (Crossick 1977). The clerks and shop assistants were set apart from the dirt of manual work and although they were similarly exploited they escaped some the negative elements of working class identity and some took on a 'lower middle class' label. There was also a section of well-paid industrial workers, such as the Railwaymen, who could gradually afford to separate from base poverty and aspire to 'better' things. Unfortunately the aspirational images were successfully

the differential concept of  
a 'respect'

presented almost entirely in the terms of <sup>middle</sup> upper class culture. There arose a section of the working population which saw itself as 'respectable' rather than 'common'. With the increase in white collar work, especially since the 1960s this group, strategically labelled middle class by the state, has become a voting majority.

The other main contribution to the division of the working population has been the massive increase in higher education from the 1960s. The mechanisms of classism had defined the working class by their supposed lack of intelligence. <sup>↑ pre-education</sup> The graduate certification therefore provided a magical elevation of class status. Graduates not only got their degree but a new identity to go with it.

Within the spectrum of identities commonly included within 'Equal Opportunities' working class identity is <sup>(as imposed)</sup> the only one that is contingent on education. In Diane Reay's study the working class women she interviewed:

Drew on 'metaphors of exclusion to describe their own and their children's experience of schooling. There were repeated mentions of being silenced, of being physically excluded from the learning context, analogies of communication with teachers as 'like talking to a brick wall', incidents of 'fobbing off' and infantilism and in two women's accounts actually being expelled'' (Reay 1996a).

Working class people internalise the myth of their own lack of intellect. They do not on the whole have an image of themselves as intelligent. Working class young adults who do manage to achieve academic success cannot be accepted back into the working class community. There is simply no place for them. In spite of this many of the value structures and cultural sympathies of working class culture are maintained in some way by those who have 'moved out'.

In addition to defining working class as 'all those who have to work for a living' I also need to define working class by negative effects, as all those people who have been on the receiving end of the stick of oppression that is classism... or who have had negative effects passed onto them. This includes the effects of poverty but also psychological conditioning violences such as the myth of inherent low intelligence and disruptions of community such as those inflicted by arbitrary relocations of industry or by land development.

And, positively, as all those people who have a heritage of working class cultural values and forms, however fragmented or buried.

## TERMS OF THE DEBATE 2. **Cultural Negotiations**

''Culture as such is exercised in many directions. It even attacks the reactive forces of the unconscious and the most subterranean digestive and intestinal forces'' (Deleuze 1962).

Cultural agency constitutes a kind of thinking, often non-verbal, about our situation, which then allows a society to adapt to changing conditions. To fulfil this function culture cannot be rigidly formatted. It must be capable of innovation (Worsley 1968). Culture has variously been seen as the business of specialists and connoisseurs which we should look up to; or, initially by anthropologists such as Claude Levi Strauss, as the customs, artifacts and behaviours of daily life (Williams 1958).

The cultural processes and artifacts of a group express a distinctive set of values. They exist within the framework of a particular geo-political outlook or viewpoint on the world. It is this set of values which constitutes the implicit aesthetics of any cultural group. The culture therefore both expresses that group's particular history and conditions and records their own unique response to them. Culture provides a communal base for each persons identity.

The most important cultural innovation of the last millenium was probably the invention of the printing press in 1450 and the bourgeois literate culture that followed it (Febvre 1958). Oral and literate culture have fundamentally different characteristics. Some of these are related to the structural differences deriving from the spoken or written/ printed language (Ong 1982), but in addition the oral is associated with 'lower' class cultures and the literary is embedded within the bourgeois ethos.

Contemporary western urban culture is characterised by its plurality, it exists simultaneously on various planes. There are local cultures, class cultures, sub-cultures, religious and national cultures - whose planes all intersect in complex temporal dynamics which are probably rarely the same for any two individuals. The priority of any these planes of heterogeneity, at any particular time, will be contingent on current situations and needs. To make the complexity even more dynamic one of these myriad planes of culture might dissolve into another at a particular historical nexus or by individual agency.

The last might be illustrated by the case of the working class person who goes to (art) college. Two culture systems clash and the student must negotiate this without the guidance of a priesthood or traditional rituals. As Valerie Walkerdine has pointed out (see



appendix A3) this can sometimes lead to mental breakdowns or at worst suicide. As the academic high art tradition will often seem to require complete silence on traditional cultural heritage this can lead to a student rejecting higher education or engaging in a painful pretense. But more complex negotiations are also possible where parts of each are retained and a new heterodox dynamic identity is created. This might have two or more personas which can each appear separately in different situations speaking with different voices - both literally and metaphorically.

These complex mergings between the vectors of cultural difference, full of both brutal conflict and sparkling invention, are I would suggest, highly important to any understanding of contemporary culture. They are the flux points and intersections at which break and reverse flows can occur. They are the points of puzzlement and disturbance below indistinct aporia of knowledge. Indistinct because they indicate transgressive states, like 'working class women novelists' which would disrupt dominant categories of class if brought into sharp focus. 'Working class women novelists' do not exist as a category within western knowledge and are a 'non-existent' because the novelist represents the height of high art intellectual prowess and so denies the very definition of working classness which is posited on a lack of just such intellectual prowess. The publishing establishment would not publish such a book and it has been up to a group of working class writers to reify this category by publishing a book themselves (Richardson 1996). The Enlightenment ideal of knowledge, which is our norm, is nevertheless presented as open, neutral and objective.

People are like comets. Their past stays with them as an evanescent tail which follows them through time and space. The tail is not all visible to the naked eye but even the invisible parts exert their influence on the nature of our trajectory. This invisible tail seems to extend several generations into the past.

I would suggest a principle function of culture is to reify, to put into concrete forms, our more abstract relations to each other or our environment. A dynamic exchange of information between the individual and wider social groups which ideally ensures the optimum health and security of all. So that social structures evolve and adapt to fulfil and protect individual needs in a changing world. So an effective culture must be produced by the consensual responses of that group to the conditions in which it finds itself. This implies people with close and direct contacts with each other. It also implies prior

research and experiment by many individuals or small groups. Any complex society is inevitably made of specialists who collaborate to make collective wholes. This can be a job for the artist. Interviewed after winning the Booker prize James Kelman said:

''There are writers all over the world saying, 'Our culture is OK', it applies to places like Yorkshire and Cornwall as much as Scotland. Your own culture is valid. My culture and my language have the right to exist and no-one has the authority to dismiss that'' (Guardian October 1994).

### TERMS OF THE DEBATE 3. **Folk: Repression and Revival**

Before capitalism and before even the development of cities people lived, and still do, in what Claude Levi Strauss has usefully typified as myth-based societies (Levi Strauss 1978). Culture is orally transmitted and embedded within daily life. The stories and images generated in myth creation interconnect different aspects of life providing meaning and shared understanding to aspects of life which might otherwise be too abstract or complex to be shared or celebrated in common. The heritage of this culture has become known as 'traditional' or folk culture.

A 'Folk Revival' of the early C20th set a warped frame for our perception of this oral tradition which was even effective when the movement became driven from below in the Fifties and Sixties.

The Revival leaders, Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams and then, in the fifties A.L.Lloyd, organised a set of institutions which created the dissemination of our image of native English culture in classic hegemonic fashion. The English Folk Dance and Song Society, the Morris Ring and The Folklore Society presided over a variety of folk and dance clubs, mummers teams and so on. Later in the 1950s the Workers Music Association hardly challenged these models of acceptable working class culture (see Boyes 1993).

The model was of songs, dances and rituals handed down from a distant and idealised past. This material had to be handed down intact and could not be the product of contemporary invention or pastiche. In contrast the contemporary Music Hall songs were castigated as vulgar and worthless.

''The cardinal premise in the survival theory was, therefore, a definition of the Folk as manifesting a comprehensive absence of creativity'' (ibid p.12).

The early C20th revival was influenced by Romanticism and its

medieval myths of a rural 'Merrie England' in which everyone was content in their class roles, and was preceded by a widespread enthusiasm for the study of 'Popular Antiquities'. It was also influenced by the development of Darwinian anthropology which evoked a gradual rise or evolution of 'the savage' to the heights of civilisation. This was used to prove the superiority of the Aryan race and the inferiority of women within a broader context of a justification for the excesses of imperialism.

According to Georgina Boyes the early revival was motivated by the fear that:

'The sheer weight of working class numbers, combined with their inherited physical and moral weaknesses would inexorably lead to the political and cultural obliteration of the race, the nation, the empire and the social structures that supported them' (ibid p.24).

By the early C19th communal and seasonal customs, which had until then been seen as useful to a rural economy, came to be suppressed by a new code of decency and decorum. These often rowdy ceremonies were replaced with an increasingly formalised and constructed royal, civic, military and religious pageantry.

'Women were especially vulnerable to such social pressure and from the 1820s and 1830s their public participation in customary performances was greatly reduced' (ibid p.28).

After the initial period of suppression had created a nostalgic longing, there then followed a period in which folk pageants, cleansed of vulgar elements, were presented as a revival of 'Merrie England' in the grounds of the local manor house.

Astute politically minded men saw the potential of Folk Revival as a source of hegemony in a new modern culture of Nationalism. In the early C20th Cecil Sharp followed the pattern set by the revival pageant except that he used modern channels of social control to disseminate his representations; first through the burgeoning school system and later through Lord Reith's BBC (see Appendix A5). Clearly the power of these hegemonic institutions was many times greater than that of the Manorial pageant.

Songs were cleaned up in terms of grammar, scales, techniques of delivery, and, of course, content was bowdlerised. Revival style folk dancing became a part of village fetes and national celebrations across England.

The process still held a danger that working class people might take control of the movement and turn it from 'revival' to celebration. To

combat any such danger Sharp made sure that:

''Throughout, the English Folk Dance Society, the Folk Revival was organised, staffed, trained and recruited among the middle classes'' (ibid p.107). Even then the process was not uncontested. It was in fact a woman, Mary Neal who had initially started folk dance revival. She was a good organiser but her connections with the suffragette movement, politics to the left of Sharp's Fabians and use of working class dancers led to her being eclipsed by the machiavellian Sharp (Judge 1989).

Although things changed after the 2ndWW and the success of the Revivals representations was diluted it still colours and distorts our view of British native oral tradition and alienates working class people from our own cultural heritage.

TERMS OF THE DEBATE 4.

### **Popular culture: castigation and defence**

''Popular art has not been popular with aestheticians and theorists of culture, at least not in their professional moments. When not altogether ignored as beneath contempt, it is typically vilified as mindless, tasteless trash'' (Shusterman 1991). p.169

Britain was the first nation to industrialise but it was only in 1850 that a majority of the people lived in towns and it was only in 1900 that the vast majority was urbanised. These urbanised 'masses' lost their rural cultural identity in several ways: 15 hour working days left no spare time; old rural communities were displaced and split up; the new urban situation, a change from cyclical to linear time, demanded new responses; cultural 'management' was taken over by upper class philanthropists and 'socialists'; a lack of resources for working class cultural initiatives; the promotion of ideals of high culture and the commodity as life's prime achievement and goal.

In spite of all these factors the new industrial towns presented an entirely new scale of human closeness. And when people get together culture invariably begins to sprout.

Any culture is at its most powerful when people gather in large numbers. Perhaps the most important cultural form that arose from the new urban situation was the pub based 'free and easy' in which everyone was invited to do a turn. This developed in scale, by the 1830s professional performers were used in pub backrooms and by the 1850s a special hall was required. These 'music halls' soon became

major commercial enterprises. The rowdy mobile crowd was gradually pacified and by the end of the century fixed rows of seats were introduced. In the C20th the music hall was eclipsed by the cinema but the form survived as variety and pantomime. But it is the early pre-hall forms that were, and are still, important to the autonomy of active working class culture. There are many modern equivalents from the Northern Working Men's Clubs to the many rock pubs, comedy clubs and Karaoke which enliven today's urban scene.

Popular culture, defined as all that was outside high culture, has been criticised since the popular literature of the C18th and the rise of urban populations. Since the C19th this negative propaganda was extended to leisure behaviour in general. Both right wing conservatives and later Marxist radicals joined hands to make common cause against popular culture.

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Herbert J. Gans is recognised in current literature on the aesthetics of popular culture to have made the first comprehensive and authoritative defence of popular culture (1974). This was based on two value judgements: firstly, that popular culture does reflect aesthetic needs, and secondly, that people have a right to their culture of preference without denigration. Gans suggests that popular culture is in fact made up of a number of different taste cultures which are inextricable, overlapping and interpenetrating.

Q2 - He defines a taste culture as the values of a group or class of society and the cultural forms which express these values. A taste culture is an abstraction which includes both the specific interaction of the agent with mass media as well as traditional forms and innovations. Taste culture is based on an expressed choice and is partial for most people who may spend parts of their lives in various different taste cultures. Different taste publics may choose the same media fare for entirely different reasons.

Gans identifies four themes in the criticisms commonly levelled at popular culture. (He mostly does not reference these critics):

Q3  
points  
1. **The low quality of popular cultural:** Which supposedly is remotely directed from above, profit driven and producing a standardised product designed for the lowest common denominator. Gans argues that, much of high culture is also mass produced and standardised, such as books. High culture is also often quite predictable whereas some popular culture, like Rap, is quirky, unpredictable or improvised.

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"Each taste culture is sensitive only to its own diversity and judges

others to be more uniform'' (Gans 1974 p.22).

Innovation is rare but necessary in both areas of culture. The complete autonomy of fine artists is a myth as much as the lack of creative independence or artistic integrity of the popular artist.

In the comparison of high culture with low like is often not compared with like. The best of high culture will be compared with the most average product of popular culture.

**2. The negative effects of pop culture on high culture:** The only substance of this criticism seems to be that low paid high culture artists might be poached by the popular culture industry. But, of course, resources are spent from the common tax pocket to subsidise opera and ballet which has only a very small audience. These resources might more fairly be spent, as Gans argues, on non-commercial popular arts.

Roger Taylor (1978) argues that, rather than popular culture threatening to corrupt high culture, it is in fact high culture which has such a monopoly on the concept of Art that it corrupts working class culture. However this implied withdrawal from art is a dubious strategy and leaves the superiority of Art unchallenged.

**3. The negative effects of popular culture on its audience:** These effects may be summed up as a brutalising exploitation of sex and violence. But such effects are not supported by any evidence after repeated surveys. The popular audience is not, as a whole, as passive, vulnerable and uncritical as it was assumed at that time.

All the actual evidence that does exist indicates that violence is caused by poverty rather than media images (Gerbner 1970, Fiske 1990). At the same time all social institutions must effect our attitudes to some extent, but there is no evidence to suggest that deleterious effects from popular culture outweigh the considerable advantages.

**4. The negative, de-civilising effect on society:**

''At its worst popular culture threatens not merely to cretinise our taste but to brutalise our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism'' (Gans 1974 p.44 quoting Bernard Rosenberg).

Or later, paraphrasing Herbert Marcuse; 'the mass media atomise and narcotise'. The humanist ideals that came out of the Enlightenment: personal autonomy, individual creativity, and the rejection of group norms are not reflected in popular culture so it is in fact seen to dilute or threaten these ideals.

In dividing culture into several layers Gans ignores the non-commercial aspects of popular culture such as family photo albums (see Jo Spence 1991). This gives his analysis a serious bias as it is here

that popular taste can innovate, be individual and establish moral inertia as a counter to an amoral market place. His book is uncritical of the ability of market forces to accurately respond to peoples needs and seems to promote a liberal democratic idealism.

The current uncritical catholicity of the populist espousal of popular culture (see Savage and Frith 1993) might be traced to the liberalism of Gans's position.

One of the most interesting aspects of the attack on popular culture is the involvement of the left who in their general espousal of working class interests might be expected to be sympathetic:

''Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the well worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural form (which collapses under reflection) but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided'' Theodor Adorno (from *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* Continuum NY 1987) quoted in (Shusterman 1991).

Adorno produced his influential theories about culture in the late forties and fifties (see *Dialectics of Enlightenment* 1947). But it was not until recently that left intellectuals became critical of Adorno's position. Richard Shusterman's (1992) strategy is to argue for the value of sensory appreciation and response: ''The sensory immediacy (of rock) is negatively misconstrued as entailing effortless nullity and passive 'immobility'''. (ref?)

01 | The somatic quality of our response to rock disqualifies it from aesthetic legitimacy. Shusterman argues that the fallacy here lies with the myth that the somatic and intellectual are exclusive domains within a Platonic tradition. Although I agree that the somatic and intellectual are not separate domains, Shusterman's argument avoids the difficult issue of how classism maintains an intellectual discursive hegemony which does not allow the intellectual potential within working class culture to take flight. Nor does he go far enough in analysing the central place of this somatic/intellectual split in the mechanics of classism.

Pierre Bourdieu claims that the internal references that are required in academic art are missing from popular art (Bourdieu 1979 pp33-35 & 197). Shusterman points out that this is a fallacy which is due to the fact that someone imbued with one culture cannot read the deeper references in another's. A point already made by Gans and one I will return to - you can only read complexity in a culture within which you

are 'literate'.

Art, Adorno argued, needs an autonomous space. A space in which the artist can work 'objectively'. An 'art for arts sake' not an art motivated by economic, social or political concerns outside of art. Shusterman points out that this is very narrow and limited definition of aesthetics and one that is a relatively recent, nineteenth century, construction.

Shusterman goes on to identify four main barriers in the way of mounting a successful defence of popular art:

1. "The defence must be waged on enemy territory" (Shusterman 1992). The terms of the critique have to be used. Philosophy and aesthetics has been committed to an anti-populism and is broadly and formally embedded in a high art culture. The new category of Cultural Studies has been the base of some opposition to this onslaught. (For example Dick Hebdidge 1988.)

2. The defenders of popular culture within the formal area of philosophical aesthetics will often offer apologies for popular culture's supposed lack of quality rather than defending its aesthetic values. They end up "perpetuating the same myth of aesthetic worthlessness" (ibid).

3. A popular aesthetic is seen as a contradiction in terms. Aesthetics has been, in the recent historical past, associated exclusively with high art. This monopoly has only recently been challenged and by relatively few people. (For example Richard Anderson 1990.)

4. "The long philosophical theological disenfranchisement of the bodily aesthetic so as to submit the aesthetic domain and its power to the dominion of the intellect" (Shusterman 1992).

Richard Shusterman is perhaps the most influential philosopher defending popular culture since Herbert Gans in the seventies, his ideas are further explored in section 9.



## TERMS OF THE DEBATE 5. **Art (and Time-based Media)**

High art developed from anonymous artisanal skills within the Renaissance. The categories of painting and sculpture were the purest visual forms in which unusually talented artisans were supported by rich patrons. Theatre, opera, ballet and classical music also evolved from this period. All these art forms relied on opulent presentation, the selection of rare genius and concentration of skills from amongst many artisans and popular entertainers.

Capitalist exploitation became increasingly efficient and enormous wealth accumulated in towns and cities. Much of this surplus wealth was spent on the arts which as spectacle and in their excellence of skill outstripped anything that had been seen in Europe since the glory and horrors of the decadent Roman Empire - a dominance that lasted until the advent of the mass media in the twentieth century.

By mid C19th sections of the proletariat had achieved sufficient surplus income and leisure to become cultural agents themselves. Capitalism, ever responsive to new markets, developed the technologies of mass media: newspapers, cinema, paperbacks and radio. The ruling elites had to preserve their own 'high culture', which was the buttress of their superiority, from the onslaught of newly literate and culture hungry plebs. At the same time they had to manoeuvre to manage and direct the power of the new mass media.

We have seen an example of such management with Cecil Sharp and John Reith. The response of many fine artists and writers was to retreat into an esotericism which could only be appreciated by the congnoscenti (Carey 1993). However the power of the new media was difficult to deny and by the last quarter of the C20th:

'The egalitarian dream, whether Jeffersonian or Marxist, that for the first time in history, the common man, citizen or proletarian, would at last, come into the joyful appreciation of high art - this, once so buoyant and confident dream, is now dead, moribund' (Jerome Stolnitz quoted by Doherty 1988).

The power of a global digital media is such that fine art can only still be seen as superior by those who live in the past. However the myth of its superiority is still highly active. High art is now a symbol of status and a crucial playground of tactile experiment and innovation. Control of this zone of innovation defines standards and maintains the cultural leadership of the capitalist class: as epitomised by the 'public' Saatchi Gallery in London. This zone is mediated in various ways: through education (as a gateway to

professional status); the formation of canon (see Wollen 1993); by filtering access to publication or other shows; by control of resource allocation; by control of the archive (the funnel by which collected bits of culture become Knowledge). This essay will focus on the question of the archive and the epistemological status of working class culture.

"The distinction between high art and the popular arts is a social distinction: one which cannot be wholly located in the intrinsic qualities or the affective dimension of the work itself" (McAdoo 1987).

In making a case for working class culture from within the dominant culture I want to be more specific about the grounding of my own stance within art. The sub-category of art, time-based media, is both a place that I have practised from and a conceptual tool with an interesting provenance.

Time-based media is a term that came out of the rapid expansion of the higher art education in the 1960s and '70s. There was a massive influx of lower orders who brought with them an indistinct and battered oral heritage. The traditional categories of art came under attack from those who had a closer connection with an oral tradition in which such separation of art forms was alien. Artists were ignoring boundaries between painting, sculpture, film, theatre and so on, introducing influences from folk ritual, buskers, music hall, pornography, television, comics and other such low art forms and inventing new forms such as environments, tape-slide and performance art. One of the most prolific, varied and successful of these artists was Ian Breakwell whose work appeared in almost every conceivable media. He became nationally famous for his televised diaries (Henri 1974, Breakwell 1986 & 1992).

There was also a tendency for mixing between sensory media. Visual art, music, food and architecture might be fused in a single work. Bobby Baker is a good example. In the late 1970's she produced a whole household out of food including the baby. She then retired from art to bring up children before reappearing in the 1980's with a series of hilarious performances about cooking and other items from her daily life (see Warner 1995).

By 1969 there was even a network of new independent art spaces around the country, called Arts Labs or arts workshops, which arose to promote this melt-down of art forms. I happened to have organised one of these which was known as the Portsmouth Arts Workshop.

Time-Based Media became a cover-all term for this mish mash of media.

But also the trade of the international avant-garde, so this is synthetic & reflexive.

Middle class??

First used in Britain by David Hall in 1976. He had borrowed it from John Latham who subsequently objected to its new usage (see letter from Latham: Hybrid July 1993). Hall had started his Audio Visual Workshop from a base in the Sculpture Department at Maidstone in 1972. By 1974 this became Film, Video and Sound, announcing the advent of video, and only in the early 1980's became Time-Based Media to include a upsurge of performance (David Hall interview 20-9-96). From this beginning at Maidstone the term spread to other parts of the country. In Hull Rob Gawthrop and others formed a collective promotion agency run by artists, called Hull Time-Based Arts. Here, with the replacement of 'media' with 'art', the meaning shifted from its core in video to a more political emphasis (Rob Gawthrop interview 17-9-96). In 1995 Sean Cubbitt reports that the number of courses in time-based media is still increasing (Dickson 1995).

''The term 'time-based art' is generally used to cover a special class of events where a process (growing, such as in the grass works of Heather Ackroyd and Daniel Harvey) or activity (as in the durational human installations of Alastair MacLennan) or the sequencing of images (film, video, installations) is fundamental'' (Phillips & Hughes 1993).

The excitement of this mass of activity in the late 1960s and '70s was not generally seen from a specifically cultural class perspective. Looking back from the mid nineties it seems clear that: suddenly a deep strata of pressurised molten lower class culture had erupted through the fault caused by the sudden expansion of higher education in Art. The landscape of cultural forms was transformed overnight. But the molten material from underground cooled all too soon and the arts landscape was left littered with odd new forms which colleges, funding agencies and curators scrambled to tidy up and arrange into new orthodoxies.

But even if institutionalisation implies a degree of co-option, the activity which shelters beneath the time-based umbrella still retains a powerful connection to a more democratic, less elitist and exclusive, and more oral concept of art and culture. In its emphasis on process and experience, and the breakdown of compartmentalisation it is closer to the 'art' processes of oral cultures than it is the object and goal orientation of high art (see Nuttal 1979). It is a category of high art which occasionally gives elbow room to those with a working class heritage to maintain continuities. It is also a concept with which we might gain a better insight or analysis of working class culture than if we try using the older more formal categories of Art.

## TERMS OF THE DEBATE

### 6. Peoples Art; A Working Class culture?

Emmanuel Coopers *People's Art, Working-Class Art from 1750 to the Present Day* (1994) presents a very wide range of visual artworks by non-professional artists in England. Not only is it wider ranging and more fully illustrated than previous publications, such as A.J. Lewery's *Popular Art, past and present* (1991), it also offers some significant broadening of selection criteria compared with previous collections of urban 'folk' or popular art. We find a banner celebrating Gay Pride placed within the tradition of union banners (p.97); we find West Indian carnival costumes and art with an overt political purpose (p.86). The book calls for the creation of a national collection: such museums exist throughout Europe but in England we have yet to collect and celebrate our native art.

I'm taking this book to be a reference point as the most progressive definition of working class culture yet published. Cooper asserts a key part of his definition of 'People's Art' on the dust jacket: "Whilst peoples art cannot be nurtured, it can be collected".

'Cannot be nurtured' indicates the emphasis placed on 'little or no formal training' as a qualification for inclusion within a category of working class art. This excludes many thousands of working class people who have passed through art college.

Is training really so impregnated with dominant or Bourgeois values that nobody from a working class background survives with anything of the cultural values they grew up with intact? I would agree that art school training does often wipe out some working class cultural heritage in favour of a dominant tradition of high art. But this is not always the case and there are many interesting survivors who have barely been studied or critiqued from this viewpoint (see Roberts 1993, FAN magazine Vol.3 No.6 and Vol.4 No.5).

Cooper does concede that, even without a formal training, the 'trickle down' of good taste that occurs broadly through the media will still have an influence on the artist who has avoided formal training.

But many working class young people who have a strong vocation to make art will inevitably find themselves going to art college. Are collections of working class art really going to discount all of these people as if they had walked into oblivion?

If working class art is to be institutionalised in a museum, as

Cooper proposes, then it could simply act to maintain a barrier between working class people and some of their most committed artists. I would argue that this maintains the secondary myth of class oppression that the working class cannot have its own intellectual specialists. The primary myth being that the working classes are by definition non-intellectual. The value of Cooper's stern exclusion is that at least it makes the important points that people don't need a fine art training to be able to produce valid art.

The inclusion of 'professional' working class artists would weaken Cooper's case for a museum as it would be very hard to define who would be included in the category of 'People's Art'.

Perhaps a museum of urban peoples art is a logical progressive step in gradually returning a sense of ourselves as cultural producers and creators. However I fear that such a museum could easily slip into a devalued and marginalised 'folk' category.

A key characteristic of working class culture is a collective product with no apparent single author or composer. This is so alien to the middle class that they tend to idealise it absurdly as characterising all working class culture. Collections, such as Sharp's collections of ballads, have been notorious for not naming lower class artists.

The spontaneous and intuitive consensual process by which a new football chant is created is certainly something of value. Middle class heritage assumes creativity is an individual activity, it is difficult for the intellectual tradition to envisage the crowd or group thinking creatively. The process of consensual agreement flourishing through informal meetings and culminates in mass gatherings at football matches or raves.

The birth of a new football chant is unmediated, it comes from a great number of individuals in close proximity with an emotional charged agenda. It is a demonstration how language can change in a moment to suit the collective will. It is a demonstration that the collective will is autonomous and does not need guidance or leadership from 'on high'. The working class sense of collectivity, which is lost by the middle to upper classes, does not, however, imply a loss of individual agency.

'Collectivist understandings of self and social group have been increasingly displaced by individualistic notions premised on the self as consumer'' (Reay 1997a).

## **Habitus, Field and Cultural Capital**

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital, developed from a base in French sociology from the mid seventies, seem to be useful conceptual tools with which to map the dynamic relations between objective constraints and subjective forms of class consciousness which bear onto the diversities of working class identity at any point in time.

**Habitus:** The concept of habitus describes the psychic environment which is generated by particular materialities and social positionings. It generates complex layers of semantic maps which are derived from a study of capital distributions. Power is seen to be articulated by more than a straightforward relationship with capital that can be measured by financial wealth. Class positionings, which had been presented as an unproblematic binary opposition of interests can be seen to be maintained and reproduced through various 'fields' of human activity.

The habitus is seen by Bourdieu as having:

'A power of adaptation. It constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world which only exceptionally takes the form of radical conversion'' (Bourdieu 1993).

Within habitus we have identities which share the commonalities of the habitus as an organic, responsive entity and which in themselves are always coming into being, retreating, folding in on themselves, or unfolding, undergoing cathartic resolutions or petrifying. Identity is positioned within the vulnerable materiality of human life not above it.

This is not to suggest that a habitus cannot include relatively stable predispositions as well as elements which are in flux. In fact I would like to argue that we can even map low level commonalities across different habitus with a shared superiority/ inferiority power relation. We might usefully see this set of habitus, which might include such already broad and diverse groups as working class, women and blacks within a common operating system which organises an important underlying set of predispositions which has been known as oppression.

Just as much as habitus is a paradigm of the social world it also is internalised and normalised as 'second nature'. Class meanings are embodied, perhaps within the most cellular levels of our organism.

This allows a class to share deep and inexplicable empathies. It allows a people to act together as a class without explicit rules to be the 'individual trace of a collective history'.

'The singular habitus of the members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production. Each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory'' Bourdieu quoted by (Barnard 1990).

**Field:** A field as defined by Bourdieu is a context within which practices take place. A field might be a particular educational or art system and is derived from historical conditions generated by the interests of various forms of capital. The boundaries of these fields are not rigidly defined as they are intended are tools to be set up for use in empirical investigations rather than as a grand system which becomes imposed on and then comes to define reality. There is of course a strong link between habitus and field. Field, as an objective set of historical relations, both structures and is structured by the habitus. The habitus produces cognitive constructions in its relations to the field. It is these concepts which make the field meaningful to humans and give it a sense of value. It is these same cognitive constructions which are key targets of power relations.

For this thesis the field is the processes by which culture becomes knowledge. The habitus is that of knowledge from a working class past, ''a knowledge that has its own logic, which cannot be reduced to that of theoretical knowledge; that in a sense, agents know the social world better than the theoreticians'' (Bourdieu 1993). This may not be overt knowledge but schemes of perception which operate below the level of verbal discourse and incorporate the fundamental vectors of force which structure a society and produce a common-sense normative consciousness. It is the theoretician's job to make this practical knowledge explicit.

We should note that habitus will often continue long after its conditions of emergence have dissipated. Within this 'common sense' consciousness, and sometimes set against it, is the idiosyncratic detail of each persons unique life history.

The sense of the class we are seen to be in, with its normative force, may conflict with an internal sense of class which is not an social label but a swarm of complex associations and signifiers. These can give rise to deep seated corporeal dispositions which can exist below current titles or designations and be quite discordant with them resulting in alarm, outrage or fear. These 'corporeal dispositions'

may not be not be able to be read by a researcher not attuned to such codes.

''Working class people practice a language of the body that eludes theoretical textual studies. Working class people do not have the quiet hands or the neutral faces of the privileged classes - especially when they are within their own communities'' (Zandy 1995).

**Cultural Capital:** The power relations within the habitus are organised by four forms of capital which Bourdieu postulates as; economic, symbolic, social and cultural. Economic is wealth which is accounted financially. Symbolic capital includes prestige, glamour and other charismatic qualities. Social capital is made of social networks and contacts. Cultural Capital incorporates manners, linguistic styles, preferences and orientations which exist in three states;

1. Dispositions of mind and body.
2. Institutionalised forms from dispersed categories like 'graduates' to organisations like the Arts Council of England.
3. Cultural artifacts such as books, dances and songs.

We can typify these ~~are~~ being roughly equivalent to 'high culture' but broader in scope. x

Transformations and transactions between the different forms of capital are possible. Often the four types of capital will align within a habitus but surprising anomalies will also be common and will often be used to discount generalisations regarding class.

Cultural capital will often follow national and linguistic boundaries. Immigrants might find, on arriving in Britain that their cultural capital is 'in the wrong currency'. However, without the debilitating sense of intellectual inferiority that is commonly targeted at working class young people, they may be able to catch up.

**Critique of cultural capital:** Pierre Bourdieu's book *Distinction* (1979) seeks to:

''Give a scientific answer to the old questions of Kant's Critique of Judgement, by seeking in the structure of the social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception of the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment'' (p.xiii).

The Owning class culture of Good Taste is however ruled by an ideology which gives precedence to those who have from an early age been imbued with high culture. Each household being ranked in accordance with ancient aristocratic rules of precedence. Those who acquire culture only by education depend for their position on the ranking conferred on them by education with its own rules and



'propriety' which is governed by Bourgeoise culture. The superior taste is one that appears to be 'natural', by birthright, rather than having been acquired, artificially, by study. The effect of mode of acquisition is terribly important. Those who have been brought up with 'daily contact with ancient objects' will show this 'innate knowledge over a broader field of lifestyle than even the most erudite scholar.

As has already been stated; any outsider to a culture needs to know the code of that culture to get meaning and aesthetic enjoyment from it. Without the code we must stop short at the sensory qualities or interpret them in terms of our own cultural code which may share meanings in common to a greater or lesser degree. To this extent no work of art may be appreciated universally unless it exists purely on a sensory level. It must first be decoded by someone who is intimate with that code.

The skill of decoding Good Taste is mystified and mythologised, by the dominant culture, as an innate quality of those with good breeding. In fact it is an unspoken code whose terms are learnt by familiarity. This gives Good Taste a sense of the indefinable; *The je ne sais quois*; the implicit.

''..the encounter with a work of art is not 'love at first sight' as is generally supposed, and the act of empathy, *Einfuhlung*, which is the art-lover's pleasure, presupposes an act of cognition, a decoding operation, which implies the implementation of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code'' (Bourdieu 1979 p.3).

Bourdieu then seems not to see that other taste cultures also require a similar decoding if they are to be appreciated in depth and the facility to do this decoding might also only be acquired by long immersion. Bourdieu and most other philosophers of aesthetics seem only aware of a thin surface of working class culture. Inevitably they see it as absent, shallow or reactive and this authoritative view becomes reified as knowledge.

What is implied here is that 'the lower orders' cannot appreciate higher pleasures. That their culture is all 'obvious' and has no deeper aesthetic level which might require decoding by those 'in the know'. Some work has been done in analysing the aesthetics of lower class cultures but not much. I refer to it in section 9.

Bourdieu considers working class culture only as it appears in his survey but his survey is not set up or baited to catch relevant evidence. The survey form itself may not be suitable. The fact that there has been a repressed culture would also have to be taken into account. A culture that may exist latently; under a surface; under a lid. He

seems unaware (at least in 1979) of the history of working class cultural autonomy.

''It must never be forgotten that the working class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetic'' (ibid p.41).

Bourdieu warned the philosopher Richard Shusterman, our contemporary defender of popular culture, that a theoretical justification of working class aesthetic does not, of course, render it legitimate in the real world. And by directing attention away from the social function of its current illegitimacy such advocacy would contribute to its perpetuation (Shusterman 1992 p.291). But, the field of aesthetics is not objective, nor is it homogeneously Bourgeois or above struggle, it is itself one of the rituals of legitimation by which high art maintains its precarious superiority.

## THEORETICAL FRAMES Ch.2. Reflexivity

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''Reflexivity is not achieved by the use of the first person or by the expedient of constructing a text which situates the observer in the act of observation. Rather it is achieved by subjecting the position of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand'' (Barnard 1990).

The old model of a polarised objectivity/ subjectivity has been questioned and problematised by post-modernist and feminist theorists such as Liz Stanley and Sue Wise who;

''stress the importance of theorising emotion in an attempt to reject binary ways of understanding the relationship between emotions, mind and body'' (Reay 1996a).

Emotions effect the objective nature of data in two ways. First, in the force with which things are stated and second, with the value given to an item or relation. This is particularly acute when we include primary oral data into our research.

Reay claims that female academics are much more able to focus on the pain, loss and envy of changes in class positionings. But theorists rarely engage with overt psychological processes resulting from educational upward mobility let alone the harsh trade off that underlies such symptoms (see appendix A3).

''While my working class identity increasingly lacks authenticity, my veneer of middle classness feels like a facade; a pretence which continually carries the risks of unmasking. Yet to reveal a working class background is to simultaneously reveal one's intrinsic inferiority... I suggest the female academic from a working class background is never likely to feel at home in academia... The

experiences of the working-classes get left out because they have no constituency in academia'' (Reay 1996a).

To engage in challenging existing class notions within academia brings up 'immense ambivalence'. One is then forced to be overtly working class, an identity which is profoundly alien within academia.

My own position is of being from a 'respectable' working class family that had a mortgaged house in the London suburbs. Both parents were displaced from their communities, my father from eastern Poland and mother from Nottingham and Lincolnshire. Both traditions were fractured and lost to me.

This loss seems to have given me an enduring curiosity about what happened and what was lost.

My mum was a nurse then a housewife, whilst my dad was a Mosquito pilot then a draftsman in engineering. Growing up I was told my identity was, if anything at all, 'lower middle class', said without much conviction. I was hit for saying 'ain't' and 'fings', told that God would blind me if I said 'Cor Blimey' and endlessly told to 'speak prop'ly'. I was in a tiny minority from my Catholic Junior school who passed the 11+ and got into the local Grammar School. The possibility of a transition to some kind of ill-defined middle classness was a vague option but it never seemed appealing or even workable.

My next educational stop was at Portsmouth School of Architecture. The pretentious 'professional' ethos, there and then in the art world, grated at me constantly. A series of <sup>apparently</sup> minor but cathartic episodes built up a conviction that I was actually working class in spite of the displacement, education and suburban effacement of tradition. An single example of such an episode must suffice:

I was with a group of middle class students when I announced that I was 'Going to the toilet'. One person commented; 'It's the 'loo', no-one says toilet'. This caused a heated debate, overheard from the WC, in which someone else defended my usage as 'a working class word' and 'perfectly good'. Such incidents may seem inconsequential in isolation but as a long sequence they had a profound effect on my consciousness.

This process was accelerated by a long immersion in a politicised type of co-counselling. In spite of all this I, like Diane Reay, still feel ambivalent within academia.

I should also note here that the dominance of the male viewpoint in this essay, (the two interviewees were both male and 75% of the references are from men), makes the thesis on this subject necessarily one-sided and incomplete. I scanned and read a fair amount of material

in the course of writing this essay, and beforehand (see Bibliography), and yet I found very little empirical research or published thinking about gender difference in these areas. This in spite of the fact that some of the more innovative material on class, I have used, is by working class women in other disciplines (Reay, Walkerdine etc).

''The modernists evolved a language and a philosophy of 'modern design'... In so doing, they left no linguistic or philosophical space for feminine culture to compete with what rapidly became the dominant culture'' (Sparke 1995).

This suggests that there might be a doubling of silence around thinking and writing about female working class culture. Silence as women and 'again' as working class people. Not that I consider there to be anything inherently wrong with a particular viewpoint, like a male one (To think otherwise would be to idealise the possibility of a 'balanced analysis'), as long as it does not assume it is the only, or the superior or the global, which has certainly be the case in the past.

What I have not done is to discuss the gendering of working class culture. To what extent is my view of culture a male norm? Of course working class male culture is different from working class female culture. But soon after I set out on this analysis (see Sparke above and Lash 1995), many other divergent differences called for an answer. Some of these are also close to my heart. What about those who are displaced? What about assimilation? What about working class Jews? The Irish? etc etc. How much would the examination of such differences modify or reinforce my thesis?

On the other hand gender is, except in some separatist camps, fully integrated with all other class differences so might claim a priority. In practise without making this the subject of my thesis I did take every opportunity to read and quote from the paucity of published women's viewpoints.

''Ethnographic relations, practices and representations, as well as the metaphors we use to make sense of them, are contextually contingent - their character is shaped by who we look at, from where we look, and why we are looking in the first place'' (Wheatley 1994).

THEORETICAL FRAMES Ch.9. **Aesthetics and Taste**

The 'aesthetics' department of philosophy seems to be a conservative domain of old and young fogies in which rock music still struggles for legitimation. On the surface aesthetics is a cool rationalisation of art and culture but beneath this facade is a visceral repulsion of the other. A physical and emotional reaction which is can hardly be accounted within the language of aesthetic discourse. (

''In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance of the tastes of others... which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious. Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes'' (Bourdieu 1979).

It was Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) who established the Liberal tradition of aesthetics. Aesthetic judgement for Kant assumed the particular cultural conditions provided by Western class privilege.

The analytic tradition which followed Kant argued that aesthetics could not be defined by rules. It was too subtle or complex to be formulated. As it was intuitive it was argued to be part of 'human nature', as Kant had defined it. From a more egalitarian multi-culturally pluralist and post-modern viewpoint this places the dominant aesthetic as belonging to a elite minority tradition with an emphasis on the intellectual qualities of our experience. Within this tradition it was thought that the somatic aspects of culture tainted aesthetics with the impurity of 'lower emotions'. *and relationship*

Richard Shusterman's critique of Kant (1992) sees this aesthetic tradition as limited by its attempt to fit into academicism's need for objectivity, and its dismissal of art as process and experience. It defines the aesthetic with an intellectual bias which denies the somatic dimension of our experience.

Within analytic philosophy art was defined as whatever was legitimated as Art by the art world. For years the object, preferably medium sized dry goods, has been the guarantor of the objectivity of criticism - but it also blinkers our view to a very straight and narrow view of art.

Cultures which do not focus their efforts on object orientated production cannot even be considered as candidates for aesthetic criticism. Even when alien cultures do produce objects, the lack of immersion in these cultures by most of the critics ensures that their

appreciation is shallow.

This alone ensures the apparent superiority of western high art as produced by its critical machinery and legitimating practices. We must now look more closely at aesthetics as a legitimating practice.

'Aesthetics [can be equated] with the philosophy of art, that is, abstract ideas and arguments regarding the fundamental nature of art, its basis and role in human culture, and, where extant, related standards for evaluating art' (Anderson 1990).

Using this definition Richard Anderson surveyed aesthetic theories in non-western settings and found that aesthetics exists everywhere. In complex societies, which have the tools of literacy, the theories may be explicit but in oral societies the aesthetic is tacit and must be noted within the discourse of daily life and 'between the lines' of traditional myths. In cultures which do not have a class of theoreticians; 'aesthetic must be sought in what Clyde Kluckhohn and other called 'implicit philosophy'' (Anderson 1990).

He goes on to identify four categories of aesthetic principles in the philosophy of western art: Mimetic; Pragmatic; Emotionalist; Formalist. These same principles, which are drawn up in relation to high art, seem to also underlay the theoretical foundations of popular art.

'Despite noteworthy stylistic and sociological differences, the two types of art derive from the same theoretical foundation' (Anderson 1990). This is supported by Theodor Gracyk who cleverly argues that good taste into a narrow locality and shows that the epithet 'bad taste' can rarely be justified (Gracyk 1990).

Richard Shusterman finds in John Dewey's book, *Art as Experience* (1934) parallels with such European theorists as Theodor Adorno, Fredreich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Georges Bataille, and a critique of the dominant Kantian Analytic Aesthetics. Art is argued to be more about experience than collecting or criticism. So with this as a guide we can define art as 'that which gives us aesthetic experiences'.

Dewey roots his definition of the aesthetic within the human organism. He points out that aesthetics must have a physiological stratum. We are reminded how the conditions of class separation are reflected in the characteristics of its aesthetics; in that the intellectual is valorised at the expense of the physical/emotional which is bestialised.

The legitimate aesthetic was argued by Kant to be superior to a common aesthetic in which the pleasure to be gained is through an

object's sensory pleasures, its usefulness or its meaning as a sign. In the legitimate aesthetic the important quality is one of 'disinterestedness'. The satisfaction is not connected to bodily pleasures, nor to social necessities but to an "elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world" which "takes the bourgeois denial of the social world to its limit" (Caygil 1989). The owning class aesthetic is interested in the representation and disinterested in the relation between the representation and reality. The aesthetic applied to all areas of culture functions as a way of legitimating social status by reinforcing this disconnection.

Dewey on the other hand argues for a global instrumental worth; Art which "serves life rather than prescribing a defined and limited mode of living" (Dewey 1934). Science has dominated our development but "the final measure of the quality of... culture is the arts which flourish" (ibid). Dewey carries out an assault on dichotomous thinking that has been generated by the separated spheres of art and science and further by the compartmentalisation of knowledge and cultural practice into separate bureaucratic forms.

"Art becomes, in Dewey's mordant phrase, 'the beauty parlours of civilisation,' covering with an opulent aesthetic surface its ugly horrors and brutality" (Shusterman 1992). *page?!*

*False  
consciousness*

Dewey typifies our high art culture as a museum culture which privileges the fixed material object over the processes and experience of art.

"For Dewey, the essence and value of art are not in the mere artifacts we typically regard as art, but in the dynamic and developing experiential activity through which they are created and perceived" (ibid).

Here we have another class orientated difference: Working class tradition is both interpenetrating and typically unseen because its aesthetic value lies exactly in those evanescent and discursively elusive processes which are not always reflected or contained within their material outcomes.

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## THEORETICAL FRAMES Ch.10. **Discourse and knowledge**

''Class envy and its corollary, class contempt rarely appear in research accounts. However, together with fear and fantasy, they are a daily ingredient of class relations and as such inevitably influence interaction in the research field'' (Reay 1996a).

Discourse happens from a particular place culturally, temporally, linguistically and so is contingent on these influences to varying degrees depending to what extent the subject under scrutiny has a peculiar aspect from that viewpoint. The full-time collection, collation and analysis of data and its assembling into greater wholes, which is the business of scholars and scientists, is fundamental valid work. It can also be useful with regard to the study of working class culture past and present. The problem has been that there has been an unholy conflation of the 'neutral' methodological aspect of academia, namely its attempt to be objective and non-emotive, and the classist virus within its middle class heritage.

This has provided us with knowledge about culture in which working class culture is either non-existent or couches issues which are pregnant with working class outrage in a bland neutral 'factual' style. Discourse about working class issues becomes saturated with facts but lacking in the moral force or commitment necessary to make sense of the information.

''It seems that the mundane and messy sphere of material struggle, class identification, complicity and the complexity of life in the concrete world have not been able to emerge through highly abstract language'' (Rimstead 1995).

Jonathan Rutherford says Raymond Williams:

''...describes the emerging identities of the new social groups and subjectivities as being confronted by a dominant culture whose discourses and language do not allow them to articulate fully their experience. He describes this struggle for a voice being at the very edge of semantic availability'' (Rutherford 1990).

Even an intellectual heavy weight like Williams was unable to provide further exegesis of this crucial edge. As Georgina Boyes (1993) points out the context of discourse only allows him to refer to working class lives through literary references or in his own fiction.

The rituals of legitimation are of course carried out with every appearance of rationality. For an intellectual to be influential s/he has to: Make a series of career moves which gain the high ground of an authoritative position; deal with the giants that precede hir by fighting them in critical combat; secure a prestigious publisher and work hir way into a academic position that has very little



administration (positions which are very rare); take on a key issue of the time and deal with it fearlessly and with every appearance of thoroughness and objective neutrality; publish work, either of scholarship or more likely of wide erudition; write works with a popular wide appeal which are written with style and which use powerful metaphors (Macey 1993, Bourdieu 1985).

In all cultures, as I have already noted, artifacts which are to be highly prized must be legitimated through a social consensus within the group for whom they hold interest. The difference with high culture's forms of legitimation is that in order to maintain its superiority, it must trash all that is outside of itself. It is an exclusive legitimation that leads to a violence to those who are excluded.

'Anyone who didn't fit into this discourse or this agenda never got funding. They didn't exist you know: it wasn't as if they got erased from history. They were a fucking absence'' (Fuller 1994).

Look into.

Naom Chomsky on how the intellectual superstructure of the US 'sustains and perpetrates ~~systems~~ particular visions and practices! (Richard Whitman THES 4/10/96 p.31.)

## CONCLUSION Ch.11 How can Working class culture gain the status of Knowledge?

''There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion; the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation'' (Derrida 1995).

So far I have made my arguments through the discussion of key terms and theoretical constructs. I now wish to attempt to illustrate some of the points arising with quotations from the transcripts of two interviews I have made. Finally I want to introduce a new term which is also used as a theoretical construct. This will be used to focus my broad arguments to a point relevant to the context of this thesis submission: an MA in 'Time-based Media' at KIAD in Maidstone.

The interviews were accompanied by participant observation and the long quotes are selected to, not only simply illustrate my themes, but also to infuse them with a subjective force - an oral 'voice', albeit a male only voice. The power of oralacy is a crucial motor in the cultural processes I am attempting to forward for analysis.

Simon Evans has a collection of audio and video tapes, photographs and slides which record local performing folk arts from Kent: traditional dance, song, music, drama, seasonal rituals, and Gypsy lifestyle. This also includes contemporary music from his 15 years producing a radio programme on local music.

The Xploding Cinema, as represented by my interview with one of the founder members Duncan Reekie, is on the other hand an urban phenomena focusing on film/video as an artform.

''Although there is a stage, platform and primary screen, visual events are strongly acentric. There are slides bouncing off the walls, short loops of film wobbling crazily in and out of tin foil frames and manifestos on over-head projectors smeared barely legible across the ceiling'' (Fuller 1994).

Fuller goes on to give a flavour of the films shown:

''It could be a short documentary someone's made on their pet hampsters; a paranoid sci-fi horror about the underground trains in London being really giant flesh eating worms; or some cataclysmic animation, with unnameable debris seething into chaotic life. There is undoubtedly some compere berating or coaxing the crowd between each film'' (Fuller 1994). See also Appendix A8 excerpts from Xploding Cinema programmes.

The process of selection was generous and inclusive. By all accounts nothing was refused a showing as long as it was short. The result was

a veritable cacophony of aesthetics, ideas and methods of delivery.

### **Reflexivity of interview subjects (as primary mediators)**

The habitus is internalised as deep-seated corporeal dispositions. Identity is embedded in the vulnerable materiality of life, not above it. In considering the reflexive positioning of the interview subjects it should be remembered that we are also placing local co-ordinates of the habitus.

Simon Evans' parents were both educated. One side of his family is from Kent the other from the East End of London; His London Grandfather used to sing traditional songs including Gypsy songs and:

''when he died he left me £25 and a mouth organ so I bought a camera with the £25 and that's what set me off on the photography... and I still play the mouth-organ!'' (T1 p.7).

But Simon has doubts about class identity which echo those expressed earlier:

''Just because we've had a certain education or been lucky enough to be bright, or could handle school work or could cope with grammar school, or whatever... then do you drop one set of cultural values and adopt another?'' (T1 p.7).

''There is this idea in our country that you're either cultured or you're not. Working class culture or folk culture is not 'culture'... that it is an absence of culture'' (T1 p.7).

We can sense here the effect of a history of cultural repression - a profound sense of lack.

''It is not something that is valued by cultural institutions. In fact I think most of them do their best to steer people away from it... and if you go and study English, or another language, you are not encouraged to study or understand dialect or colloquialism. You are told 'That is not the correct way to write'. It is not the correct use of grammar, perhaps the grammar you grew up with - that everyone in your village or your town speaks, is not correct!'' (T1 p.8).

This elaborates on the points made above with reference to Diane Reay's research. Simon trained as an electrical engineer and although he now works in Further Education he doesn't have a degree.

Duncan Reekie comes from the West London suburbs. His parents were white, active socialists with mixed class backgrounds who went from periods of relative affluence to complete poverty. He came from a family with six children, four of whom were adopted and of mixed race. He went to the local secondary modern school and from there progressed through technical college to university where he studied drama and then film.

''I was like a 'television addict' when I was a child. I spent a great deal of my childhood watching television and.. fantasizing about television, to the extent that I couldn't say that it was a separate structure from my own consciousness'' (T2 p.2).

He sees his family as a typical suburban family in that it was devoid of any clear or apparent class or regional tradition of culture. A vacuum which was filled with TV, records and youth culture (T2 p.4).

''I hated the academic system. I found it really paralysing'' (T2 p.5). It would be easy to assume that this animosity to the educational and cultural institutions is personal but in the light of Reays research it may be the result of his working class environment as a youth.

''Drama was stuck in this weirdo, sort of mystical, sort of fucking namby pamby liberal rubbish, you know, where no analysis was going on whatsoever'' (T2 p.5).

It is not only the institutions of Higher Education that he feels alienated from:

''I went and worked voluntarily at the Film Co-op for three or four months. And it was just really a miserable experience and... I became involved in the... collective politics... basically it was in-fighting and horrible personality clashes... and it basically confirmed all my worst prejudices'' (T2 p.7)

But the alienation doesn't end with institutions; the 'community of artists' is also found lacking. The participants at a film festival, funded by a multinational oil company at the time of the Gulf War, were apathetic.

''It wasn't as if they had questioned it, it just didn't occur to anybody... that there was even... the slightest contradiction. It wasn't even on the agenda'' (T2 p.7).

This disillusion leads him to a realisation that context was as important politically as content.

### **Kents regional culture as working-class habitus**

''Something else that the folk thing, that the term, has suffered from is people divorcing... the actual... artform, music, song, dance, drama, whatever... from the way of life of which it is a part'' (T1 p.2).

Simon Evans points out that collectors of folk culture ''tend to define it in terms of previous cultures... an unchanging previous culture.. which ain't the case'' (T1 p.2). ''There was an accepted viewpoint for a long time that the tradition was something that was static'' (T1 p.4).

He goes on to note that themes of rowdiness, bawdiness, licentiousness, disruption and inversion are glossed over in the published studies. For instance:

''On November the 9th the people of the town would elect a mock Mayor which they would hang up from a lamp post and set light to. And so you get an inversion of the established order'' (T1 p.3). Simon includes urban forms in his definition of 'folk':

''the C19th London Music Hall singers... were writing songs... about their ways of life, about their London town... People living in London would identify with the music hall performers... and would sing along with the chorus. It would be hard to say that was not folk song as well'' (T1 p.5).

The working class communities that Simon has focused on are the Gypsies in Kent. Simon started by recording Gypsy dance and song but gradually got involved in their whole lifestyle and history.

The traditional Gypsy lifestyle was eradicated within one generation. From the 1960s to the 1970s a thousand years or more of Gypsy culture in Britain was contained and effectively destroyed. The intensity of this period of bloodless internalised cultural imperialism is like a focused caricature of what has been happening to working class culture as a whole for two centuries or more. The full history of this state organised eradication of the traditional Gypsy has never been published... ''History is something that is alien to their culture... History is something that is held in the head'' (T1 p.6).

#### **Exploding Cinema as an element of urban working class Habitus:**

Duncan describes the inception of the Exploding Cinema Collective at the Cooltan an squatted factory in Brixton 1991/2.

''There was a group there run by Ken MacDonald, who was a kind of underground Super 8 cinema impresario, who's been running a club called Reel Love ever since the '80s and... what I really noticed about the event was that everyone was drinking and smoking and this... totally changed the atmosphere of the event because... it was like a social night out. It was no longer this incredible sort of sacred concentration upon the screen. And people were talking to each other and it was actually fun... it was like... going to a gig... or watching television... at home with a bunch of friends, except it was much better because there was also the possibility... you can get into any kind of social situation... which is impossible in a cinema'' (T2 p.8).

Back to Ken MacDonald:

''He was so incredibly inept. He would get the wrong films on, he would break the films in the middle, the machinery would break down for long periods... He would get incredibly stoned and talk over the films. It was just a complete fucking shambles. And whereas this irritated people, to me this was amazing because... It was revealed to you that you could do this. Anyone could do this. It was possible to do it'' (T2 p.9).

Being brought up in a working class environment often results in a debilitating feeling of cultural powerlessness - when this is contradicted there is a sense of exhilaration:

''To begin with... a group of people... met and talked, that's all it was. We didn't even show films. Of this group something like three people made films and the majority of people had never made a film in their lives... and, of all those people, the only one who had really had any in-depth knowledge of the kind of nasty crawling space that was the independent film scene at the time was probably me, so I... was really refreshed by this because... the cynicism, the... incredible cut-throat careerism, was just absent. And I just thought, God, this is great. So, we kind of had meetings and we talked and talked and talked'' (T2 p.9).

First they showed some films in a basement that proved to be too cold:

''What we'll do is we'll move the show to the café in the Cooltan. And this... structural... economic, meteorological effect, actually made Xploding Cinema, because that was the most vital thing that happened... once we moved it into the café everything changed because... Instead of having ranks of seats facing the screen, you had tables with chairs around them. This broke up the space and, to a great extent, completely changed the atmosphere... they'd turn to watch the film, but if they turned back, they were facing each other... The kitchen itself was in the room with the film, so that all through the film me and Stephen Houston, we'd both work as chefs as well, so we did food. And there was like frying noises and saucepans being banged together and stuff like this... And there were smells as well, and that was one thing we always used to say was... all your senses are catered for'' (T2 p.9).

What is being described is similar to the Free and Easies which were the anarchic pub based precursors of Music Hall which could be seen as the heart of urban working class cultural tradition (Bailey 1986).

''The jumble sale atmosphere ties in strongly with the conviviality of the pub environment. The flavour of cabaret is also in the mix, with the hushed sanctimoniousness of art theatre viewing swamped by an active crowd'' (Fuller 1994).

Working class culture typically embeds art into life and de-compartmentalises media.

As formulated by Bourdieu habitus is represented by the layering, of an empirical studies of distributions of cultural capital. Such 'semantic maps' cannot be derived from two interviews or my present scale of resource: however the term is still useful to remind us of the dynamic relations between identity and habitus the power of adaption in the relations of interlacing fields which reproduce and maintain the habitus. This usually incremental adaption can only realise political power if its population has a cultural agency through layers of data collection - synthesis - evaluation.

The contexts, for practices derived from historical conditions, which Bourdieu has called fields, is what has been denied to working class culture.

The fields I focus on here are firstly, the way in which a culture becomes legitimated as that which is most valued. The process by which selected bits of raw data accumulate to make the bigger concentrates of knowledge which make our collective representations of what it is to be human. And secondly, the sub-field of fine art that is Time-based media.

**The ARCHIVE as field, the production of knowledge and the accumulation of cultural capital.**

The archive is a consignment of knowledge, activated as 'res publica'. The archives are the pile foundations of the edifice of knowledge. The base of discourse builds a consensus which becomes our collective world view - as Knowledge.

As Derrida points out the 'consignment' of data to archive is, literally, a 'gathering together of signs' which by its exclusions and emphases forwards the cultural ground of a particular epistemology. I hope to demonstrate that Simon's collection of materials and Xploding's forum of action exist as 'archive' in neonate form but have difficulty becoming 'res publica' with the appropriate architectural prestige and usage by a network of scholars.

'The meaning of 'archive', its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognised authority, it is at their home... that the official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the law'' (Derrida 1995).

The written document kept within the public and intellectually integrated archive allowed a new dimension of stability, objectivity and developmental progression to accrue to discourse which an oral culture could not hope to achieve. The printed book then allowed an massive expansion of this power.

The museum or archive, functions as a ritual structure through the use of architectural vocabularies, dispositions of collections and the

routing and guidance of public access (Swallow 1996). The sum total of such designs will, of course, tend to affirm the status quo. It will rarely be a place of uncertainty as its central function is quite the opposite. Nor will it often invite debate and challenge to prevailing orthodoxies.

One aspect of this mediation of power is in the selection of the collections and archives that are donated or purchased. Further refinement is then achieved by the type and timing of displays. All these mechanisms surround the archive on its path from its emergence in collective 'Xplosion' or in private collection to its build-up into a 'palace' of Knowledge and the triumphant world-view that this entails.

But this is a generalised theory and in reality the museum ritual may be changing; at least to a degree, in the North of England. David Fleming, an Assistant Director of Tyne & Wear Museums Service, argues that museums are unpopular with working class people only when they do not deal in social history that they can relate to their daily experience. He even goes so far as to claim: "The days of middle class curators creating museums in their own image, dominated by their middle class outlook, are gone" (Fleming 1991).

However, Simon Evans reported that the local museum of Kentish life was not interested in his archive as they were solely orientated towards tourists and entertainment rather than contributing to deeper levels of learning, debate and knowledge. We should remember that archives of Kentish folk culture are rare so Simon's collection should have evinced a special value. This is not an isolated experience as illustrated by the recent prolonged series of similar exclusions related by Emmanuel Cooper. (See Appendix A4 *Not in My Gallery You Can't!*)

In the face of the lack of interest from the Kent 'archons' his approach to activating his archive as knowledge has been to make occasional radio programmes commissioned by Radio 3: This year he did one that was field recorded early on Mayday morning, then edited, and broadcast that same evening. He is currently preparing a book on seasonal rituals (see T1 p.5).

The Xploding could be seen through Bourgeoise spectacles as a exercise in kitsch. A sort of Special School for 'les enfants terrible'. But it may equally be seen to focus what would otherwise be unseen and unknown. It also nurtures those artists who are excluded for many reasons. Classism ensures that many working class artists

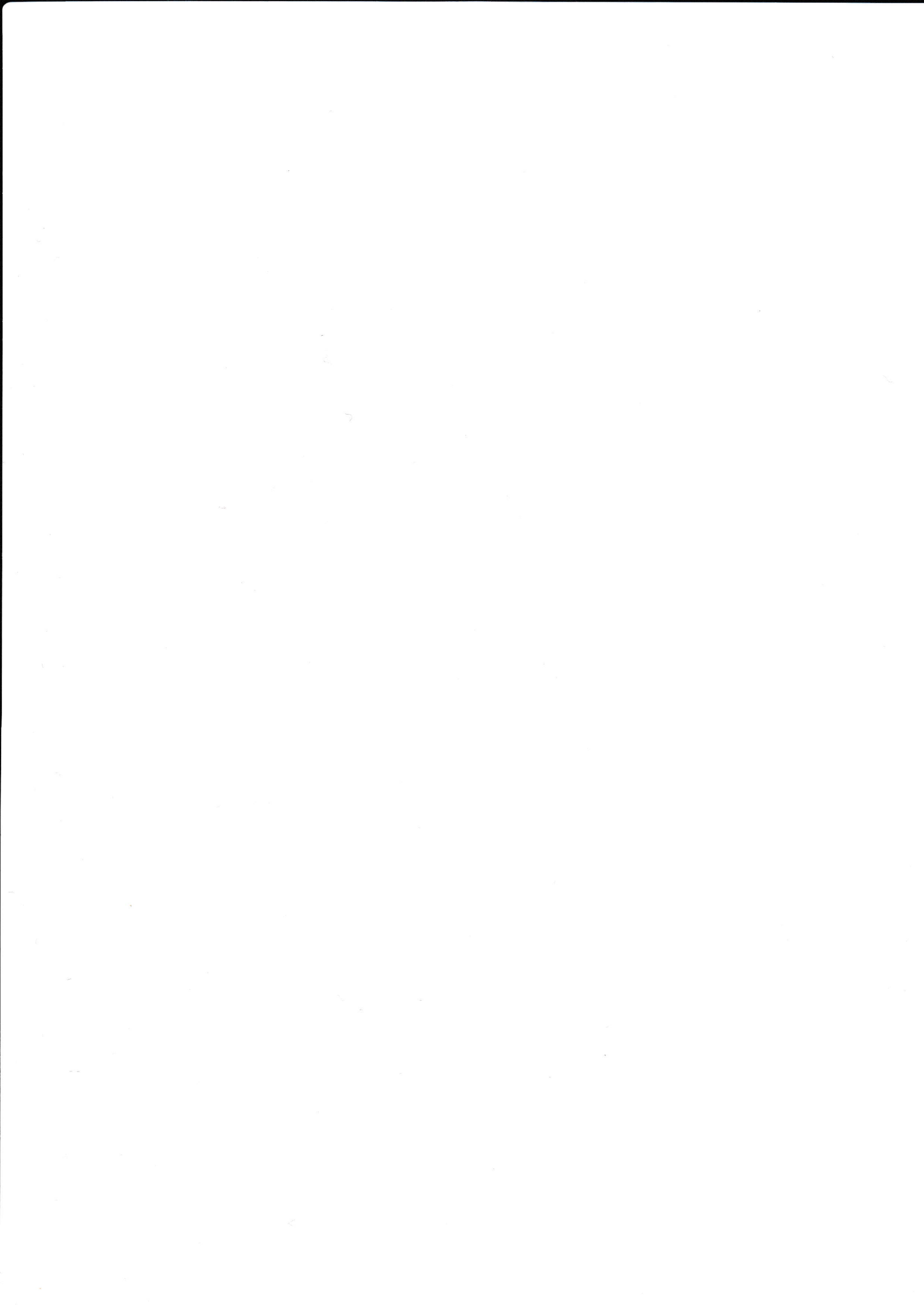


will be among this number. Apart from the photocopied programmes (see Appendix A6), which record the films shown by title and maker, the Xploding Cinema Collective also encourage artist's networks and independent festivals (eg 'Volcano' forthcoming November 1996). They are currently launching their first compilation tape amidst controversy as to whether this will produce a selective history which will misrepresent the diversity of the live event.

Working class cultural capital could be seen to exist in dispersed forms but capital is not activated as power unless it is concentrated. One of the mechanisms which concentrates cultural capital is the archive.

Unless the distillations of the archives are available a complex culture cannot be reflexive, cannot come into full consciousness of itself and so cannot adapt intelligently. The dominant culture, the heritage of the Enlightenment, is typified by a reason so cold and calculating that it becomes a distraction from or even justification of oppression. Working class culture is warm and somatic but denied an inclusive and integrated realisation of its intelligence as power.

'I have tried to establish the 'cold' aesthetic of high culture, with its cerebral and intellectualised appreciation, and the bodily and sensuous pleasures of 'low' cultures. What is most important is to understand the different conditions in which these pleasures - and their associated pains and hopes - are produced. In the oppressive conditions of the bourgeois order 'animal passions' are regulated, the 'rising of the masses' is feared, the individual is defined in terms of brain or brawn, the only way out offered is through cleverness, guile, making it, working, trying. And so embourgeoisement is the only dream left in all those desires for, and dreams of, difference ...' (Walkerdine 1990).



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**NOTE:** Feminist Art News brought out two special issues: Working Class Women Working It Out, vol.3 no.6 undated c1991, and Enough is Enough, Working Class Women, issue number 2 Vol.4 No.5 undated c1993. Chila Kumari-Burman, Gabrielle Humphreys and Alison Marchant were the guest editors in both issues. Over 30 contributors.

## Exploding Cinema programmes

All A6, self cover, b/w photocopy, 20pp. They are all richly collaged and include lists of films and filmmakers shown (roughly 20 per show) with short text accompanying some titles.

Chosen by Duncan at random although probably from the less successful ones as when the audience didn't turn up they had programmes over...

date, cover text, occasional quote from inside.

See Appendix A8

**27th November 1993**, 'Exploding Cinema, DURTY ART, Cleaning Fluid, Good Taste 125ml.'

**Sat 12th June 1993 or 94**, 'Meet the Professionals, EXPLODING'.

'President and financiers who oppress us, are as empty as their lives. Their money is as worthless, as the products they shit. And all the objects of their culture, are as meaningless as their flags.'" (my punctuation)

**2nd April 1994**, 'HOT CROSS BUN'.

'Just say NO. Spreading the virus, no more leaders, no more experts, no more artists...'

**29TH October 1994**, 'BACK WITH A VENGEANCE'

Includes a centre spread seven point guide on how to 'Be a Success-



ful Spectator''.

**11th June 1995**, 'EXPLODING CINEMA, ILL, INSTANT CRED'

Includes an article, entitled Pinhead Notion, about how the N.F.T., I.C.A. etc do not allow people to put up notices or give out flyers any more.

**Undated**, (German language) 'Out come the Freaks EXPLODING CINEMA'.

''...you can smell the stench of the other. Crawling through the media sewer. The Exploding Cinema delivers the unacceptable and the rejected...''

**8th July 1995**, 'EXPLODING SINEMA, (sic) CINE CIRCUS'.

Held in a circus tent.

Saturday 17th June 1995 'get real, MORON'S EXSTASY'.

**30th September 1995**, 'cine bargain show, X PLODE NOW, AMATEUR'.

Includes critique of the ICA's open screening which is like being at a 'tedious film school'. However; 'The only people entitled to judge your work are the audience'.

**28th October 1995**, 'Dan Duryea speaks out at the...EXPLODING CINEMA, It's an eye wank'.

**25th November 1995**, 'It's so strange it's normal, EXPLODING SINEMA.'

Includes a short article, by Colette Rouhier accusing ex-members of the collective of being parasites who ripped off equipment. (A counter to the account in Kinokase magazine.)

**16th August 1996**, EXPLODING SINEMA, Up the Garden Path.

Event in a pub garden. Includes an short expose of the apparent nepotism within London Electronic Arts selection of the film/video section of the Whitechapel Open (July - Sept. 1996).

With many thanks to the Librarians at Maidstone.

Ann Grey Video Playtime ?

women ~~and~~ use of VCRs / hiring videos.

Home Video and The Changing ISBN. 0861961889. ?

John Lebbey Media at Univ. of Luton Press

## APPENDIX T1

MA Thesis at Maidstone KIAD

### Interview with Simon Evans 4th July 1996

The interview took place at West Peckham, Kent. Recorded on Hi-8

(See notes at end for discussion of what is not transcribed.)

Starting off in Simon Evans study bedroom..

Note: Simons intonation goes from staccato rapid fire to slow and measured...

#### TRANSCRIPT

What sort of stuff have you got here? (in the archive) let's have a look round the room at it...

With regard to my personal research the stuff which I'm particularly interested in to do with Kent... no let's start again the stuff I've got here falls into various categories I spose there's stuff that actual research into local folk cultures such as local folk traditions what we might loosely call the performing folk arts traditional dance, song, music, drama, and perhaps seasonal festivals and seasonal rituals from Kent. I'm particularly interested in Kent because that's where I happen to be and there have been plenty of collections that cover the whole of the country but a lot of them leave Kent out because its assumed its been... cosmopolitan and built up for too long but that's not necessarily the case. Other things I have here are a lot of stuff to do with programmes I make drawing upon that material, but also a lot of the tapes... there's cupboards full of them downstairs that's actually to do with contemporary folk performance so its not just to do with the traditional stuff which we've had from years gone by but because of all the work I did on radio, producing programmes about folk music in Kent for a 15-16 year stretch on Radio Kent it means that anybody who performed in the county during that time, all the local singers and musicians, somewhere along the line came onto my programme and I have ended up with all these tapes of all these people. It's actually quite an interesting snap-shot of what the contemporary folk musicians were doing, as it were, based within the tradition

So the relationships become clear do they? Between the traditional stuff and the...

Yeah.. you see the so-called folk scene is quite a separate thing to what I might call the traditional folk culture. That is the folk scene may be something akin to the jazz scene or the classical music scene, as an area of contemporary endeavour which, to some extent, is divorced from its roots. And it's because I got involved with that contemporary folk scene that started to nurture my interest in the traditional folk customs of the area. Because I felt that a lot of the performers, when they got up and sang a song, it might be a sea shanty from Cornwall or it might be a miners song from Durham but very few people who are saying 'We are folk singers' are singing stuff to do with Kent, so that made me think that... well and... I got involved with traditional dance..

So the lack of stuff rather than the actual positive connections are saying this is a traditional song my grandfather taught me...

Very little of that...for various reasons for a start a lot of stuff wasn't collected and in Kent second a lot of people involved in the folk scene are not necessarily indigenous to Kent, shall we say, or have traditional song passed through their family because it a...

I s'pose the life of the traditional culture had changed by then in any case you go to other parts of the country perhaps Northumberland or Yorkshire then traditional folk song is still perhaps part and parcel of the local working class culture to a larger extent there than it is here ...so therefore... it's still easier to find traditional singers in those areas.

Yerr.

Just because of that... I wasn't really going to take no for an answer... people say Oh no that's all gone its died out 'round here but I really didn't think that'd be the case... also then they are predetermining what is folk and what is worthy of documenting and what is worthy of collecting. A lot of people involved with the folk music scene who go and collect, research and document stuff have a quite narrow definition it is of what they are looking for.. and they tend to define it in terms of previous cultures.. an unchanging previous culture.. which ain't the case.

One of the things I found interesting about the (your) presentation I experienced at Cecil Sharp house was the fact that you were collecting things in photographs. and video and tape and writing things... it seemed quite a bit like transmedia.. which is quite like folk culture. it doesn't have strict boundaries like 'music' and yu' know. it comes from ritual and people responding to things in... however they think appropriate rather than necessarily thinking 'I'm a musician' or something or I'm a ..

People tend to compartmentalize their researches, it seems to me, so you had people that were perhaps in the past folk song collectors.... 'I'm a folk song collector'..and they would go out and document folk songs or document folk music or go and research a whole range of things but they were only interested in one particular aspect of what it is they were looking for perhaps folk drama or whatever. Uhm..and in a sense the study has suffered because of that..Uhm.. my approach, I suppose, has been to say well..if this is a folk song, or this is a piece of music or this is a piece of traditional drama..all those activities are art forms... and art forms are expressive and creative..therefore.. of What culture are these things an expression?

So then you've got to cast your net much wider and get involved with contextualising this stuff.. a song has to come from a culture..and a dance has to be part of a culture... what did it mean to those who did it?.. Something else that the folk thing, that the term, has suffered from is people divorcing.. the actual, erh, art form, music, song, dance, drama, whatever.. from the way of life of which was a part..

Yerh

.. be interested in that but.. that's the way of looking at it. What's happened is that the more I've started to examine the actual, as it were, the creative artifacts, if I can use that word.. I've become interested in what they represent in terms of.. traditional culture... and look harder and harder for that. So yeh in order to do that documenting I have to use video, so if I want to go and record traditional dance.. or traditional Gypsy step dancing in Kent, obviously I take a video camera with me.. If its songs and reminiscences I'm interested in I take a tape recorder... but also..I take a lot of photographs as well.. and obviously the photographs are recording contemporary way of life, recording things to do with the here and now..

(Stefan asks where the photographs are.. in the darkroom in the attic. He takes a pan around the room...)

In a sense the written part of what I do..looking at the files of material...doesn't appear to amount to that much..... because I've really been quite specific about what it is I'm looking for.. and also it all goes and gets put on my computer in any case.. but there are things which I find of particular interest..

and they are for instance the season festivals..how people celebrate Christmas, spring-time and autumn is often left out. People think of May day and maypole and stuff... they think of Yule tide and Christmas carols... When we look at what actual went on also.. around the end of October and the beginning of November that was another potent festival..and in Kent there were some very interesting, rowdy things that occurred throughout the C19th in all the local towns. Total mayhem in actual fact! Extraordinary stuff....

I don't know about that in autumn.. what..would that be Guy Fawkes an that..

Yeh...Things got so bad, in Dartford for instance..

it says "running battles between the police and the populace", because..they tried to ban it they had these bonfire riots, people dressed up in fancy dress, put on masks, blackened their faces..and wore outlandish costumes and rampaged through the streets.. "The fifth of November Public Notice"... it says (reading from an old bill-poster).

"certain ill disposed persons attempted to prevent the lawful festivities of the public on the fifth of November.." It goes on;

"This is to give notice that a reward of ten shillings will be given for the head of every policeman..and one pound for the head of every inspector which will be delivered to the parish..pound to a gentleman who will be there authorised to receive it. God Save the Queen Dartford November the 4th 1863."

And erh.. Gravesend, Dover, Folkstone, Canterbury, Maidstone all these places had it.

So this theme of disruption isn't something that crops up much in books about folk, folk customs and things like that...

No it's not.. No it's not and there.. but all the traditional festivals...erh. Bonfire festival is like that the autumn one, in

The Mayday festival certainly, until the 18th century, was certainly a very rowdy and very bawdy affair... licentious dancing... the whole thing was very sexual and quite outrageous.. And that gradually became suppressed until the Victorians finally managed to gentrify the whole thing.. the Victorians, as well, who were also gentrifying the bonfire, as well and gradually suppressing it. And all these things... also during the bonfire one... we come across mock Mayors, because the major of London and also the Majors of local towns were ..... on November the 9th..

the people of the town would also elect a Mock Major which they would.. hang up from a lamp post and set light to.. And so you get this inversion of the established order.. At Christmas time you'd get this inversion again, you get boy Bishops. When a choir boy becomes a Bishop for the day.. In the Navy, the Ratings, y'know, the officers wait on the ratings..

In Spring time people likely have got Robin Hood and all he represents about the over-turning of the order.. Of common justice shall we say. and getting one over on the rich and powerful..

In all the seasonal folk festivals there seems to be, an examination of peoples role.. respective to each other politically.

and an overturning and exploration of that.. and that's why they were feared by the authorities. Sometimes these things did get badly out of hand... the theme of law and order seems to me an interesting..

(picks up the 'phone in error)

This is written stuff that I've got in here..and this... tapes, interviews with people, song.. what I used to do erh... roles of tape under here...

(Simon has full copies of all the radio programmes he has made)

What happens when you have got this material..

I'll look at it and think well what shall I do with it..

what interest is it and obviously one thing you can do is write as an end product of researches...

And I'm doing that at the moment compiling stuff into a publishable format..

So how many hours of material have you got here?

I don't know. I don't know.. I haven't measured it really. When you see on here its a total mixture, its stuff to do with... there's a lot of interviews here with local people and old people, and young people, but also there's tapes of music I've recorded.. but also...

I tend to include things I'm interested in.. you get demo tapes, a local rock and roll band bungs out a demo tape... and that's...

also of interest as it becomes part of the local culture again.. and so being in a privileged position doing work for the local radio station people send you things..

some of it is no good and some is good and needs hanging onto..

So how do you deal with the rock and roll demo tape.. that's an interesting thing.

**I put it on the shelf!**

In terms of a radio slot for a folk. it doesn't really enter into that does it? Usually John Peel or something..

.....the kind of music programmes I used to make were very eclectic and very broad.. I don't think there was a compartmentalisation, in any case I think it's actually detrimental to musical creativity..

"We are a blues band" or we are a folk band or whatever and people like to.. "I like country music"

I only like Jazz. So what happens is the broadcasters tend to compartmentalize this stuff.. So they have 'normal' music during the day, which is middle of the road adult orientated rock.. The they have specialist music programmes. So then anything which is not normal becomes specialist..

Of course if there was never an experimental element to culture. it would never adapt or change so there's that idea that folk and tradition is a kind of fixed..

That's something else again and the reason it has been perceived as being static in the past is that a few problems arose when people started theorising or whatever, finding out about it.. There was an accepted viewpoint for a long time that the tradition was something that was static.. That we shouldn't change it or ... meddle with it..

What happened really was that in the latter part of the last century.. the early part of this century... the notion of being a folk collector or of going out and doing this research really started to take off. Because it was an exercise which hadn't been done before... documenting the working class culture by members of the middle classes.. and they came across beautiful songs, and beautiful tunes...

and I don't think they could equate that level of creativity..

with ordinary working class uncultured people who had never studied music.. This stuff was actually part of the common tradition of folk song.. that was changing... People did write songs and make them up.

In a sense it was denying people their creativity. So if they didn't make it where did it come from? And it begs the question... It brought up, all sorts of problems of definition... In order to qualify as a folk song it had to be anonymous.. It had to be handed down by word of mouth and all this sort of stuff..

It presumes there was some sort of big bang theory for folk culture ... somewhere in the distant past it spontaneously arrived.. But of course that's nonsense. (Stefan decides to change the position of the camera).....It is a changing thing and it does move on.

That's quite important that point you were just making actually ..

What that it moves, tends to develop...

The problem then is.... My mind starts to get exercised on the next point leading on from that...

Where is it now? The contemporary folk scene people who learn some songs at college on their guitars..who go out and become part of the folk scene... I do not perceive as being part of the folk tradition..

Although perhaps in a modern day tradition they are part of a folk tradition... rather than learning this stuff off their grandparents knee or round the fireplace.. or whatever, they've learnt it off records.. Now that's not to say...

(Interrupting) That's true. there's no reason why the means of transmission should not change as well as the actual material..in adaptation to different social relations..

It's difficult to perceive where it is now. Like all..  
These things are determined in retrospect. When you go and study history and look at things...  
How they've evolved into something.. I'm concerned with where it is here and now.. Cos you feel as if you want to start pushing in new direction or something.. People do write.. I dunno...  
contemporary songs.. about things that concern them..  
There are, of course, communities in different parts of the country where people are still writing and performing within the tradition and even though it's changed.. and writing about the new things that concern them..  
but there where you draw the line between what is a folk song and what is an art song.. art music, which can include any kind of singer song writer..

Does it matter..?

**Can it matter?**

It matters to the point that people feel that its part of their own it's something to do with their own community.. is there a sense of ownership involved or something like that..?

**Sometimes its community, sometimes its family, sometimes its ..... national as well ... is Land of Hope and Glory a folk song as well ..  
a football match or the last night of the proms.. People identify with it....**

(interrupts) Will 'Footballs Coming Home' become a folksong now?

Perhaps it is already. A folk song is as much what people identify with and this is another thing really is that a lot of songs that are in what has become accepted as the traditional folk repertoire, were obviously written by somebody.. Or if I think about the body of work that was created by some of the C19th London Music hall singers..

People were writing songs... if it wasn't for the houses in between..  
about their way of life, about their London town.. Other people,  
in their locality or people living in London could identify with the music hall audience... would sing along with the chorus. It would be hard to say that that is not folk song as well..  
It came from a community and (was) identified with by that community.. and perpetuated by that community.

I'm also thinking that diversity... one of the Uhm... characteristics of working class culture has always been regional diversity.. Even in small changes in village to village or region to region.. Nowadays, because people have been moving around so much and.. Not only is there regional variation but on top of that there are also other dimensions of variation.... in one region you could have different ethnic communities or different people doing different things.. Or different styles, people taking on different sub cultural styles to produce music..

**Radio and television the mass media has a part to play in that too.. As well as people who rub up against each other.**

So its very complex...really...

**Yeh yeh .. ... of super endeavour ...**

It might be quite a good idea to look at some pictures...

We were talking about communities and communities need not necessarily be defined by where people live, perhaps a village.. but,  
perhaps by their culture and their family and certainly, in Kent.. there's a very high Romany Gypsy population, far higher than most people realise.. so I tend to become interested in all aspects

of that culture. I first got to know a lot of the local travellers through local travellers through songs and music. Because I play music and I was interested in that side of what they do. But inevitably you start getting drawn in, in a bigger and bigger way..

Photographically I s'pose I spend quite a lot of time documenting contemporary Gypsy lifestyles.. But in addition to that I do quite a lot of research going and looking for what everybody considers to be the old style traditional Gypsy life style..

(some of these are pictures taken by a local press journalist.. photographer, freelance, during the 1940s, '50s, and 60s..)

and also when I go and photograph people they always, then quickly start to drag out the family photos.. And these are all family pictures. And there's a singer for instance who ... and some people I end up interviewing... there's a chap called Ambrose Cooper.. who writes songs. He's got a large fund of traditional songs which have come down through his family..

... up in some of these pictures here as a young boy.. So- bits of the jigsaw start to fit together.. So much for traditional Gypsy lifestyles.... I wanted an exhibition of my work of contemporary photos.. and people who came to the exhibition said.. so that, actually, that only tells us half the story.. what it looks like now. And some of them said 'We think you should have a bit more information about the whole thing so I prepared one board which actually documented the old style..

I did another board which actually brings us into the 1960s..

people were moving off of the road were it was getting harder and harder to live this sort of traditional lifestyle.. Because the hop picking has been replaced by machines..

....traffic and laws regarding stopping beside the road have prevented this sort of horse-drawn lifestyle.. So what tended to happen was that people were getting herded together beside the road in huge metal trailers and in woods.

During the 1960s, very much a time of turmoil, people getting evicted from the roadside, with nowhere to go.. and then we end up ...

are these taken by you?

No some of these are family photographs..

or taken by a local freelance press photographer

So you have sites (1960s) in which you have the old horse drawn caravans but also the modern type as well.. a time of change.

It became quite an intense story press wise. Norman Dodds, during the 1960s, fought for the Caravan Sites Act..

*More commentary on the photograph boards...25.00.00 to 44.00 approx.*

Simon tells the story of the eradication of the Gypsy lifestyle or the containment of the Gypsies in the space of one generation.

"There has been no coherent history of this change published in any form." Due to the Gypsy culture being oral.. "History is something that is alien to their culture history is something that is held in the head"

We then moved into the attic /darkroom to look at more framed photographs.

He shows framed pictures from an exhibition he had a grant for called 'Romany Lives' It was a travelling exhibition in a caravan in the Kent County mobile unit. It travelled around the town centres.

Stef note: the working class' is in fact made of many sub groups such as Gypsies for are identified as more different from than similar to working class as a whole. Simon observes there are no votes in Gypsies. their numbers are too small to effect voting and nobody will vote for them.

Different cultural values can be critical. The Gypsy difference of inner and outer... Romany. The inside of the caravan can be spotless the outside a mess.

Which is what the outside world sees.

Kent is full of people with Gypsy connections...

"How different cultures rub off on each other."

"The importance of recognising cultures"

His own Gypsy heritage from his grandfathers repertoire of songs in the East End of London had songs which are part of the Gypsy repertoire.

The connection to the East End...of London

Stef notes: We are motivated and captured by difference it is more difficult to see the every day that we are embedded in. To what extent do we make a romantic map of difference when we are trying to capture working class lives?

transcription restarts...

Do your own family become integrated into this collection of photographs or what?

**To tell you the truth I don't have many historical pictures of my family here at all. They are in a couple of big suitcases at my parents house, they've got them so I don't necessarily have them here..**

Its quite interesting that before we were talking about the past how the middle class collectors ..  
.....how their own values effected the way they collected things..

You're collecting with a different background but your own values will effect how you collect as well so...

I'm interested in whether you map that at all or think..

**I do because it starts to raise questions about.. If your're starting talking about cultural explorations, folk culture, middle class culture or whatever, one starts to consider your own back ground who you are and where you've come from and if you're going back in my own family say two generations on both sides working class families.. one was more... shop keeper class I spose,**

Were either of those two families singing when you grew up?

**Yeh my grandad was I've got some tapes of him down stairs I'll play some in a minute .. I've got his mouth organ downstairs. When he died he left me £25 and a mouth organ so I bought a camera with the £25 and that's what set me off on the photography..**

That's a good conversion of media! He He That's lovely... I like that!

**And I still play the mouth organ! So it's very much working class on that side.. the other side are more shop keepers er um...**

**It does beg the question.. Now the family, through a couple of generations, has become educated.. Do we say we are no longer working class or.. Do we say we are we working class people who are educated or are we now middle class.. It brings up the question of...**

**cultural definitions of what class is.. Just because we've had a certain education or been lucky enough to be bright, or could handle school work or could cope with grammar school, or whatever, then you suddenly become something else.. And then do you drop one set of cultural values and adopt another..**

**and there is of course a lot of that.. and once they find themselves as it were, elevated.. in the eyes of the rest of society, by having had a certain sort of education.. The people find themselves duty bound to acquire the trappings of their new position.. A certain sort of motor car, a certain sort of house and a certain sort of lifestyle..**

**It's a place... but I'm not sure about that... it's historical isn't it. Again its implicit in a lot of work I do.. Looking at folk culture/ working class culture is something that is not recognised..perhaps.. as such.. by those institutions that promulgate Culture.. There is this idea in our country that your're either cultured or your're not. Working class culture or folk culture is not 'culture'.. That (it) is an absence of culture. It goes back to the Victorian education system in away..**



**Dragging people off the streets... "you can better yourself.."  
And aspirational ideas about moving up the social ladder..  
and as I was saying earlier about rowdiness and behaviour associated with 'the rabble' during  
public holidays and public festivities..**

It's all very well when we're studying some foreign culture and watching the Aborigines... or somebody like that 'go crazy' but when it starts to happen down the road from where you live.. It's a bit more disturbing...

**And very much frowned upon by the Victorians who said we can prevent this rabble from behaving like this any more by giving them culture. We can cultivate these people and make them something else.. And I think it's a shame and erh... working class culture or folk culture, whatever happened to it or wherever its gone or whether it ever existed or not, it doesn't matter, It is not something that's valued by cultural institutions. In fact I think most of them do their best to steer people away from it..And if you go and study English or another language, you are not encouraged to study or understand dialect or colloquialism, you are told that is not the correct way to write.. It is not the correct usage of grammar... perhaps the grammar that you grew up with... that everyone in your village or your town speaks... is not correct!  
When you go to art school the kind of painting your're encouraged to do will not have any relevance to a cultural connection.. but it is defined only in terms of other painting movements. Like you make reference to Impressionism or Expressionism, whatever going right back.. and people will attempt to define contemporary painting in the historical terms of that..  
When it comes to folk art.. that then gets a pejorative label like naive.**

It shares some things with women's art really doesn't it so if your're doing a quilt.. or knitting you can't really go and do a degree

**You can do textiles can't you..**

But its a 'lower' art form even then

**Sure, sure.. it would be..**

**Folk art is seen as being primitive or naive.**

**Which goes back to what I was saying that both terms imply a lack of culture..  
or a lack of understanding.. And that's unfortunate..**

Stefan announces ten minutes left....

He shows more photos.. working as a photographer in residence with kids on a Council Estate...contemporary folk culture.

Also concerned with changes that go on in the country side...

Comments how the quaint and picturesque environs of working class culture is taken over by the richer middle class with example the conversion of oast houses.

A good metaphor of how we can't inhabit our own cultural history.

plays mouth-organ and then tapes of grand father singing in the 1960's recorded by his dad on his Grundig Dictaphone... Then Robin. whose one and a bit has a play of the mouth-organ!

#### Note on Omissions

The omission of the central section about Gypsy culture may very well reproduce the anti-traveller bias of the non-nomadic population and at the same time shoot myself in the foot. Gypsy culture is clearly a very good example of working class culture. Working class culture is made of just such heterogeneities!

However I've decided to leave this as is to illustrate the point that on the one hand I'm not trying to set up a them and us situation and on the other that this critique is very much from my own bed of interests.

## APPENDIX T2

MA Thesis at KIAD Maidstone

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH DUNCAN REEKIE : 13th July 1996

The interview took place in his front room in Dulwich, South London.

Interview was casually videoed on Hi-8

Interviewer Stefan Szczelkun

I thought I'd quite like to start off - I don't know how you feel about this - but just to do a five minute autobiography.

**All right, an autobiography of me.**

Like, where was Duncan born? And how did he get here? In five minutes.

**Well, I should say that, to begin with, Xploding Cinema is a collective so talking to me is basically talking to one member of the Xploding and the story of the Xploding Cinema and its activities is basically a collective history. I'm just an example.**

**I just don't want to be a spokesperson. I can be an example of one of the people who's involved.**

**In terms of how I got to be involved in the Xploding I suppose the two most important things were that I always wanted to make films and I was always interested in film.**

What was your earliest memory of being interested in film? Was it really a childhood thing?

**Yeah, to me it was always ... I was like a television addict when I was a child. I spent a great deal of my childhood watching television and sort of fantasising about television, to the extent that I couldn't say it was a separate sort of structure from my own consciousness. It was totally embedded in television and I organised my life to a great extent ...**

But did your parents let you watch television as much as you wanted? Was it that easy going?

**They kind of did. I came from a family with six kids in it.**

Whereabouts in the country?

**In West London, originally in Teddington and then we moved to Twickenham.**

That's the area where I come from.

**Yeah, six kids in the family and we just kind of ran wild really because there wasn't much you could do with us. And I just used to watch TV all the time.**

Did you have colour television?

**No, we didn't, not for a very long time. That was my parents' kind of discipline, that they were going to get a colour one. I remember seeing colour television for the first time, being taken to see it by my father and being quite amazed. But no, we had a black and white one.**

Give us a few early programmes that you remember.

**I suppose things like Department S would be a favourite programme of mine, or some of the kids' programmes. I really used to like the kids' programmes.**

I don't remember Department S.

**Department S - it was a kind of very strange, it was like a camp seventies version of The X Files which was much stranger than The X Files. There was a character in it called Jason King played by Peter Wingard and he then got his own series. There was another very strange programme I used to like called Ace of Wands which was about a kind of hippie warlock detective. That was in the seventies as well. They should revive that.**

I missed all these things. It's interesting because that was when I was a dropout and I missed watching

television.

**There was a few very strange attempts to have a counter cultural pulp sort of genre, hippie detectives and things, which were quite interesting. But I used to watch everything. I was very omnivorous. I even used to watch things like, I remember watching Open University when I was, like, seven and stuff and not knowing what it was about but just knowing that it was kind of interesting and stuff. So then ...**

So, did you get a degree by the time you were ten?

**No, no, not at all, no. I didn't really understand it. I just sort of picked up bits of it that kind of went into my consciousness.**

Are there any bits that you picked up?

**I remember watching something where they were saying that you could tell the difference between the past and the future because structures always go into chaos and this never happened the other way round and they did this thing with snooker balls. I remember watching the snooker balls and they were saying you can tell which is the set-up of balls before and which is after, because one has structure and one doesn't. I remember thinking that this was a kind of huge revelation to me at the time. But I didn't really connect any of this with anything else that was going on in my life. But yes, I just used to watch TV and I never really thought about what I was going to do anyway, really. I never thought I was going to be a film maker particularly but I just used to watch TV all the time and then I kind of ... Eventually, I went to college after I left school but then I gave it up.**

What, art college or what?

**No, I left school. I was at quite a strange school. It was a secondary modern that was going to be a comprehensive in Richmond Borough, which was like one of the last boroughs where there was a grammar school system.**

What year was this? Was this the seventies?

**Yeah, seventies. I must have come out in '76, I suppose. So, it was like this very strange school that was like a mish-mash. It was a very liberal school and yet it was also like a high Protestant school and it was a secondary modern but it was going to be a comprehensive. It was weird anyway. So, I went to school and Graham Harwood, in fact, do you know him?**

Yes.

**I went to school with him.**

Oh no. I didn't know that.

**Yeah, yeah, we were in school together, the same school.**

That's amazing.

**Very odd. We did a magazine together, in fact.**

You haven't got it?

**No. When we were about 13 we did it.**

[Interruption]

**That's just my sister getting back from holiday.**

That's amazing. that you went to school with Graham.

**Yeah, me and Graham went to the same school. And we then went to the same college, actually. Anyway, so I went to college and then I dropped out of college and eventually I ended up doing this**

course in drama and ended up at university doing drama. I was doing plays. I was writing plays and stuff and I kind of realised that what I was doing in the plays was I was trying to recreate the filmic experience as a live event and I realised this was kind of probably ... I might as well just start making films because what I was doing I was using actors with slides and actors with bits of film and actors with projections, and I was using scene changes with blackouts which were basically kind of cuts in film. So I suddenly realised, this was a revelation, I was actually making film, but live. I suppose one of the things that really made me think a lot at that time ...

Did you record any of those?

What, of the plays? No, I've got the old scripts. I never recorded them. They weren't performed. They were performed maybe two or three times each because in this theatre you couldn't get much time. But, I suppose one of the things that was really interesting then, to me personally, was the discrepancy the methods we were using to study and the material we were studying and also the kind of way that everything was like separated off, 'cos I did film there.

Could you explain that a bit. What were those discrepancies?

The most obvious one would be that there is a whole edifice of film study and film theory which is essentially literature - it's a form of literature, and it's a genre which is literature and it has its own structures, which are literary structures, and the magazines, the periodicals have their own structures. But what you're actually writing about is film and this occurs again and again and again in, kind of, educational establishments. There's this discrepancy between the study and the thing itself so that ...

What would you say the thing itself is then?

Well, in film making it would be film.

You mean it's not a literary thing. it's essentially something completely different?

It's something completely different, yeah exactly, it's completely different. It's not literature. Literature is completely different from film. And then one of the things that happened was that when theorists started writing about film in a scientific way, with like semiotics and structures and stuff like this, they kept coming up with these when they're going, "Oh my God, film's a language, it's got grammar". And you talk about the grammar of film and you talk about the language of film and maybe you talk about the different dialogues or sort of dialects in the film, something like this. And this incredible kind of splendid metaphor happened where they're saying film is like language. But film isn't like language. I mean, film is like film. The trouble was these people were using literature to decode film so, of course, film appeared to be like literature to them because that's what they were using. I mean, things become what you ... And if you analyse something with certain tools, you know, then it's the tools that are actually gonna sort of characterise your analysis. But the same thing was happening with lots of things, like drama was being analysed in literature. I was studying drama and film and there was, like, no crossover between drama and film - none whatsoever, no analysis. Do you know what I mean? Like, there was no analysis of some kind of study of acting, for instance, where it's like you get this massive extended structural sort of analysis of film, you don't have to do that with acting and the reason is that acting's too difficult to do it to. You couldn't do it basically. But why not? Do you know what I mean? It's like everything gets separated off into its tidy little compartment.

Can I just flip back for a second now? This is really interesting but I want to, you know, you've had all this kind of massive experience of TV which is very kind of of the now, of the 60s, 70s kind of television. In your family did you have any traditional stuff coming through as well or was there any cultural ... Were you taken to things or were you shown things or did you have books or was there any of that stuff coming out?

I don't know. My family's kind of weird anyway because I have four adopted brothers and sisters who were all of mixed race, and they were all different mixed race, so I have a ... My brother is mixed race, Afro-Caribbean. I have a younger brother who's mixed race, European-Mexican, and a sister who's ... So

Adopted at an early age?

Yeah. Yeah. Adopted as sort of toddlers, really.

They didn't bring their culture with them?

No, no, not at all. We were basically ... Apart from the fact that in my family we've got mixed race kids, we were brought up as a typical suburban white English family, with no other culture whatsoever.

No history ...

No history at all, no nothing. I mean, we didn't even really have any kind of history that was like sort of that characterised our own, whatever, class or location or anything. We were just completely of modernity or whatever. Our culture was like youth culture, the culture of the 60s and 70s and TV and records and stuff like that.

It relates to me. only a decade earlier.

Yeah. I mean, my father was ... My father and my mother were very old socialists, kind of like post-war socialists, who met in the Labour League of Youth and went out to Yugoslavia and helped Tito rebuild hospitals and shit and stuff. So they've got that history but they were even very kind of reticent about that. They didn't really tell us about that. We had to kind of wheedle that out of them.

So they may have known somebody like E.P. Thompson or somebody like that. His brother was killed there.

Probably, yeah. My dad probably did. He knew a lot of people like that. He certainly ... You say this person, he goes "Oh yes, I knew him", and stuff like this.

I find it interesting how things seep through into people. you know what I mean?

Well, yeah, I mean most of my information about ... Yeah, I suppose my whole childhood, my childhood was like seeping, you know, there wasn't any kind of great revelations or moments where, you know, things were said and suddenly everything was thrown into sharp focus. No, it was just kind of like consciousness, like things coming in, vagueness, you know.

Okay. let's fast forward again to where you were before.

Oh, right. So, anyway. Like I said, this is just kind of my kind of history. My kind of history was that I then came out of university and was very frustrated about what had gone on there in terms of, like, I could see that,... I hated the academic system, I found it really paralysing.

In which you studied what?

I studied drama and film studies. I mean, drama was interesting because at least it was physical, at least there was a physical element to it and there was an element of a kind of physical discipline to it, but also a kind of discipline, a three-dimensional discipline to it. I mean, you were actually moving about and you could move people about and you could actually go from room ... You know, it was a thing about rooms and environments and spaces and stuff. It wasn't simply paper based, a paper based literature thing. So that was interesting. But the great frustration to me was I did drama and I did film, and film was like, at East Anglia University where I was, film there was like this incredible cutting edge, forging ahead, kind of like Marxist structuralist, post-structuralist thing, which was like probably the most advanced discipline of all the disciplines at the time. And then there was drama. And drama was like stuck in this kind of weirdo, sort of mystical, humanist, sort of fucking namby-pamby liberal rubbish, you know, where no analysis was going on whatsoever. And they were both hived off into their ... Nobody was making any connections between the two. So that kind of... I came out thinking I was annoyed about that.

Anyway, the next thing that happened was I got together with some friends and we said, well, what we're gonna do is we'll make a film. So we said all right. And we thought, how do you make a film? So we thought, we'll get some money to make a film. So we went to the funding agencies. No. I know what happened first. I wrote the fucking script. So I wrote this script, this script took me ... It was a horror film, it took me about three months to write, and I wrote it. All the time this friend of mine was saying, yeah we'll get the money. We then went to the funding agencies and the funding agencies just were not interested in this script at all and were very patronising. We mistook their patronising attitude for kind of, like, largesse and affection but in fact they were just getting rid of us, you know. So then we said, all

right, we're not going to get the money. So I said, so we all said, let's just do it anyway. So we said, right we'll do it anyway, how do we do it anyway? We started to find about actually making a film. We found about Super 8. I'd heard about a couple of things in America where people had used Super 8 to make longer films, so we went and we slowly taught ourselves about Super 8 film making and the whole thing gathered momentum in a kind of crazed way that we couldn't actually stop it. And we ended up going up to Norwich which was where it was located and making this Super 8 feature film, feature horror film, with sound and dialogue and actors and everything, everybody and ...

So was this a Night of the Living Dead kind of influence? That was about the time then.

It was. It was kind of influenced by *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Evil Dead* I think had also come out by then which was a big ... And we kind of believed this mythology, this big Hollywood mythology of people making films for nothing. So we kind of believed this. We thought, we'll do it. And we went up and we just got enough people to believe that we were doing it and, once people could see that we really were doing it, we made this feature film. And then, once we'd shot it all, we kind of had it put on video and came back to London and set about ... We also did it as a collective as well. That was the first collective thing I was involved in and it was basically this insane collective in which we actually rotated the functions of the film crew.

We had this idea that we'll do this collective thing. We thought, we'll rotate the things because everybody wanted to direct and everybody wanted to be the camera person. So, there were four of us and we said what we'll do is we'll do a four day rota. So every fourth day I was director and every fourth day I did camera and every fourth day I did sound and I can't remember what the other job was. What was the other job? Camera, direction, sound and I think it was general organiser or something. So we rotated the jobs and we had children and dogs and blood and graveyards and everything and it was just a complete nightmare. And then we took it back to London and we tried to edit it, also collectively - the four of us sitting in a room collectively editing this thing. And we kind of watched it and realised that we'd forgotten to shoot whole scenes which made the film have some kind of sense and we also realised the sound was completely out of sync and we also realised that we now hated each other because we'd been together for too long and the whole thing kind of dissolved into misery and it's now in a cupboard. But we did, we actually got one edit, like a kind of rough edit out of it and it's now in a box downstairs. There's this huge box containing this mess which one day I hope to kind of resuscitate, just out of period interest. Anyway, so then after that I thought, well, the thing to do is to learn how to make films a bit more proficiently. So I did a couple of film courses. Did a course at Goldsmith's which is a really good course. Well, it was a really good course because I went for the course that gave me maximum access to the machines, really, and the teachers were just dreadful, awful. But I got access to the machines. So then I made another film and it was a kind of big 16 ml dialogue, all talking, action movie thing, 15 minutes or something. It was kind of like a post-modern structuralist Godardian thriller thing, it was pretty awful actually.

What was it called?

Called? It was called *Only The Only*, it was called. And this had a measure of success.

It sounds like it had some sort of ironic tone if it had a title like *Only The Only*.

*Only The Only*. It was a kind of attempt to ... It was about terrorism but it wasn't really about terrorism. It was about ... It was kind of about film making to a certain extent. It was about what it's like to make a film and also it was about a kidnapping and the kidnap was like a metaphor for making the film and it was about the kind of ...

I should probably hurry you on at this stage. I kind of want to get on to the Xploding.

Yeah. The point is that I then made this film and thought, well, great, this is it, I've broken in to the ... And at this point I started to actually learn about certain things and the things I learned about were the way the film industry worked and the way that the funding organisations worked and I started to meet a lot of people who were involved in the funding organisations or who were involved in so-called political film making or oppositional film making or whatever you want to call it and independent film making. And I began to become very disenchanted with the whole thing and I began to realise that, if you were going to make political films, then you had to rethink the project, the project had to be totally rethought. Okay.

When you say the project, you mean the whole business of making, showing, the whole process.

Yeah, really, the whole thing. I mean, the sector that I was involved in, that I was interested in, was essentially the independent scene. But there were also other questions which were, like, how could you have, sort of, the incredible radical film making of the 60s which went as far as popular feature films, it got that far, it got into cinemas, it got into people like Godard, and people like, I don't know, the whole fringe, new wave and certain English film makers - how had that happened and then just sunk back into sort of history and disappeared? And you've gone back to a situation which was perhaps worse than the pre-60s in terms of feature film making and the film industry. How could you have movements such as the English movement which was called, uh, I've forgotten it, which was the movement which was like Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson and Dick Lester and people like that who did the movement called free cinema, the free cinema movement - how could that have happened and then disappeared? How could the English underground film movement and the Co-op have happened and then become so ineffectual, so appropriated and stuff like this? And I began to get very interested in that. And at that point I kind of began to realise that, if you were interested in political film making or oppositional film making or subversive film making, you had to sort of rethink the whole project. And I then ... I'd been going round slagging off the Film Co-op for quite a long time on very little evidence and people started to say to me, well, how can you slag off the Filmmakers' Co-op when you don't know anything about it? So I thought I'd better for the sake of, you know, justice and freedom, I'd better go and check it out. So I went and worked voluntarily at the Film Co-op for six, no three or four months. And it was just really a miserable experience and involved me ... I became involved in the Co-op politics and the collective politics, the democratic politics that was going on and basically it was infighting and horrible personality clashes that were going on and it basically confirmed all my worst prejudices, which was very gratifying. So I sort of left that in a very smug way.

Can we have an update of what year ...

That was 1991. Then what happened was ... The big turning point to a certain extent for me was the Gulf War came along and in the middle of the Gulf War, the height of the Gulf War, I did some sort of, went on a couple of marches and stuff, and around that time there was a festival in London at the Riverside Studios and it was the second festival of ... It was called the BP Expo and it was an international festival of student film sponsored by BP and it took place over the course of a week and it was a mixture of student film, independent film, art film, experimental film. It was very high profile, posters all over London, leaflets and everything and TV, everything. And it took place at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith. And at that point I was just leaving another course. I was a bit of an eternal student because this was the way, if you want to make independent films, to get your hands on good equipment. It's either to teach or to be a student. That's the way things are, or used to be. And so I'd just finished another course to get my hands on some more equipment. Then this festival came along. It was the Gulf War and I just couldn't believe that all these old radical film makers and students and people were going along to this festival, sponsored by an international oil company, during the Gulf War, and nobody so much as even ... It wasn't as if they had questioned it, it just didn't occur to anybody, it never occurred to anybody that there was even a contradiction here, the slightest contradiction. It wasn't even on the agenda. It was so far from the agenda that people were just amazed when you even raised this issue. And at that point in my own personal story I'd already been thinking that the thing to do here is not to make films about political issues but to make films and projects that in themselves are political issues or political weapons. So it's like saying, in my opinion, political content within films is redundant. In fact it's probably ... Political content within films is actually reactionary because what it does is it presents people with a spectacle of action but, if they watch a film in which there's a political issue being investigated and analysed, it actually sort of like emolliates the situation. It's kind of like you then watch a programme and say, oh well, somebody's doing something about it because, if somebody's making a film about it, then obviously something's being done about it. So then I said, well that's not true, in fact it's the opposite. If somebody's making a film about a political issue, it means that the lid's being kept on the issue, the actual sort of contradictions and things are being ... So I decided at this point the thing to do was to make films that were themselves or make projects that were in themselves sort of toxic. This was the idea, to make toxic things. So I started doing two things around that time. One thing was I was applying for funding from agencies who were never going to fund me and I knew lots of people who were also applying for funding. So I then realised that what we were doing was we weren't making films, we were applying for funding. This was our major activity in life. Our major activity in life was filling in forms for funding and going to openings of other people's films where you met the right people. So I thought, if this is my main activity, then I should actually put some kind of ...

Can I just pause for a second? [Interruption - car door opening]

So then for a very brief period I came up with this plan. The plan was to apply for funding. Well, it was a kind of double plan. It's like I said, at this time you would talk to people and say, who is your audience for your film? And this was another thing. This had never occurred to people. Well, you know, actually it's not about who your audience is, it's about what I want to make, what I want to express. And then you'd say, well, who do you want to express it to? And they'd say, well everybody. And you'd say, who is everybody? Where are you going to show it? This did not occur to people. So I sort then of thought, well I'd better identify my audience and my audience seem to be the funding panels who are the only people who are seeing my work because I'd have to send them work so that they could look at it and see if they were going to give me any money. So I thought what I'll do is I'll just make films for these people and it's much more personalised than any other audience because I can find out who they are and then I can just make films for them. And so I began to sort of put in these outrageous funding applications for films which I knew were never going to be funded but I was doing it actually as a kind of like an experiment, targeting my audience. So I did that for a bit.

Did you have people speak off screen to the Arts Council officers?

No, never. I never got that far. At the time when Xploding happened I was working on the final thing which was to try and get momentum behind the funding for a documentary which would be about corruption within the funding system so that you could set up this horrible little toxic sort of circle, like a dog eating its own tail, where these people would then be presented with this project which was like investigating their corruption in funding and yet, if they didn't fund it, you could then accuse them of being corrupt because they were hiding something. And I thought this was a kind of nasty little thing for them to deal with. So, anyway, this happened at the BP Expo and then I did, like, a propaganda leaflet. I went in and I gave out these propaganda leaflets which were kind of fake leaflets which were basically attacking the festival. And they hired security. After I'd done it I went back and there were all these security guards there, like watching all the leaflet racks, and I thought this is great, you know, because it's obviously ... And I talked to somebody who actually knew somebody who was working on one of the desks and I said, what's going on, and they said, well, this bunch of anarchists have like infiltrated the ... And I thought, well, that's me, you know, it's not a bunch of anarchists and I started realising how easy it was to play with these people's minds. That was quite interesting.

Right, which brings me to what happened at the Xploding. What happened in Xploding was there was this old suntan oil factory on Effra Road in Brixton which had been empty for years and years and an arts group called Pullit squatted it and they were very sort of direct in what they wanted to do there. But they also had quite a good measure of like openness to other projects and started inviting people in to do whatever they wanted. And I then heard that there was ... Somebody'd seen a note saying, come to the Coulthard and show your films.

This was the name of the building. Cooltan?

It was called Cooltan, a suntan oil factory.

Can you give a date to that?

This was the end of 1991, this was in the winter, not the autumn of 1991. So I went along there and there were two things going on. One was that there was a group there run by Ken MacDonald who was a kind of underground Super 8 cinema impresario who's been running a club called Reel Love ever since the 80s and, kind of, he disappears and reappears and is very kind of shifty and mercurial, and he was doing a show there and at first I thought that this was what this was about, I suppose. That was really exciting because here was a room full of people watching Super 8 films and what I really noticed about the event was that everyone was drinking and smoking and this in a way kind of totally changed the atmosphere of the event because you had a kind of social ... It was a night out, it was like a social night out. It was no longer this incredible sort of sacred concentration upon the screen. And people were talking to each other and it was actually fun, you know, it was like, it was similar to like going to a gig or something and ...

Or watching television ...

... or watching television. This was the other thing. It was like watching television at home with a bunch of friends except it was much better because there was also the possibility, the same possibilities that go



with any social event which is you can meet people, you can meet women or whatever, men, or you can just get in, you can get into any kind of social situation you can, which is impossible in a cinema. A cinema is like a kind of sealed, hermetic suspension of life. You know, life is actually suspended for the duration of the film whereas in a small room where you're doing this kind of thing life actually goes on. And the other sort of exciting thing about what Ken was doing at Reel Love was that he was so inept. He was so incredibly inept. He would get the wrong films on, he would break the films in the middle, the machinery would break down for long periods, he didn't know ... He would talk over the film. He would get incredibly stoned and talk over the films. It was just a complete fucking shambles. And whereas this irritated people, to me this was amazing because you suddenly ... It was revealed to you that you could do this. Anyone could do this. It was possible to do it. In fact, with Ken it was so obvious that you could do it better than him. It was such a revelation because you just said, well, anyone could do this better than Ken. He's so bad, do you know what I mean? He's just so inept and this was brilliant. And then, shortly afterwards, I met Stephen Houston who was the person who'd put this thing up about forming a group. There was him and his girlfriend who was called [Cathy Gibbs?] and I remember there was a meeting and I went along and we sat in this freezing cold room with no windows and kind of talked things through about forming a group and this had been something I'd been after for a long time, probably before the Co-op but also especially after the Co-op. I thought, the Co-op's dead, there's no way you can disentangle its history, you know, it's fucked, its whole structure is, like, completely fucked, there's nothing you can do with it. So you've gotta form a new group if you want to do this. And I didn't know how to form a new group. I kind of thought, maybe you start a magazine or something, I don't know. It was kind of vague. And suddenly here were these people saying, let's form a group. And so I thought, this is for me. So I then started going to these meetings on a regular basis and eventually ...

At the Coulthard did this start?

This was at the Coulthard, it was all based at the Coulthard. And the group kind of slowly got members. I mean, to begin with all the group was was a group of people who met and talked, that's all it was. We didn't even show films. Of this group something like three people made films and the majority of people had never made a film in their lives, which was kind of good as well, and, of all those people, the only one who had really had any in-depth knowledge of the kind of nasty crawling space that was the independent film scene at the time was probably me, so I kind of like was really refreshed by this because there was no ... The cynicism, the kind of incredible cut-throat careerism, was just absent. And I just thought, God, this is great. So - we kind of had meetings and we talked and talked. And then what happened was Reel Love, Ken's show, left the Coulthard. So we were then in the position of, if there were gonna be film screenings at the Coulthard, we would have to do them. So we then decided we would do it. Initially - this was in the winter of 1994 - so we then said, right, what we'll do is we'll do them in the same space, which was a kind of cold storage room down the back of the Coulthard. And the winter was really cold, it was really fucking cold. It became impossible to do these shows in this cold storage and everyone had coats on and hats on and gloves and scarves and it was a dead loss. So we said, right, we'll have to move the show and what we'll do is we'll move the show to the café in the Coulthard. And this ... basically that kind of, like, structural whatever you call it, economic, meteorological effect, actually made Xploding Cinema, because that was the most vital thing that happened. What happened was that we moved it into the café and once we moved it into the café everything changed because then you had ... Instead of having ranks of seats facing the screen, you had tables with chairs around them. This broke up the space and, to a great extent, completely changed the atmosphere. It changed the atmosphere because it broke up the space, but it also changed the atmosphere because people were facing each other in a social situation rather than facing the screen. So they'd turn to watch the film, but if they turned back, they were facing each other. It becomes a kind of different atmosphere. Also we made food and we actually had ... The kitchen itself was in the room with the film, so that all through the film me and Stephen Houston, we'd both work as chefs as well, so we did food. And there was like frying noises and saucepans being banged together and stuff like this. And this kind of made it kind of, like ... And there were smells as well, and that was one thing we always used to say was like, you got, all your senses are catered for, because you can smell. And ... Then, so there we are, we're showing Super 8 films and home videos. I mean, we were different from Reel Love in that we'd got a monitor and started showing video. So we had TV, monitors, food, smells ...

Did you have things playing at the same time. simultaneously?

No, we didn't. We started doing that quite slowly, mostly on ... There was a staircase going up the early Coulthard and we started putting projectors on that and ...

With loops?

With loops on, yeah. And we started doing ... The first time we used loops we actually did it outwards. We did it onto the windows of the building so they could be seen from the outside, so that people would be brought in. Then we turned them inwards and put them on the walls and on the screens and things like this and slides and ... That kind of developed slowly. The MC thing happened ...

Did that develop ... Was it a knowledge of the kind of happenings that you used to, you know, the sixties happenings or early seventies happenings or anything like that? Or was it more just to do with, like, lots of material pouring in or something?

Umm. I had knowledge of the sixties happenings to a certain extent, a limited knowledge, and other people did as well, but I would say that people didn't actually call on that knowledge, although they knew it. I would say what happened was - it was really very much dictated by the dynamics of the event, that once we'd gone down that road everything else followed. Once we had begun to say ... Like, originally we had one projector, okay. So, I mean, we had one projector and all we could do was show on the screen. Then somebody bought ... You know, we'd go to jumble sales and we'd get a couple of other projectors. And then you start saying, well, you know, what do we do with them? And then the ideas slowly came round. Well, we can do things with them. We can show films on the walls and we can show them on the stairs and stuff like this. And also we had Lech KB (?) who was in the group at that time. He's kind of like ... he's still around and he's always been a kind of fellow traveller. He's always been ... he'd come in and show his films.

He's a musician, is he?

He's a musician, yeah. But he would also do things which involved ... If left to his own devices he would go off and do stuff. If he saw a projector there, he'd say ... And next thing you'd know he'd done something with it. And so he did stuff like that as well. He introduced ... he was the first person I saw using mirrors for effect, like he'd put mirrors all up on the wall and then project onto them. So that was interesting. But ... Yeah, and going on with the MC, well that kind of developed, sort of evolved, because the MC ... We had to have someone to introduce the films, so they introduced the films. Then they would introduce the films and they would introduce the film makers and get the film makers to come up and talk about their films. Then ... The projectors would be constantly breaking down and everything would be breaking down the whole time. So it would help if the MC would do something. So you either had to just do some kind of like, just talk to the audience for long periods, or like there was a girl, Jenny Marr, who used to be in the group and she would sing, or you would say to the audience ...

Unaccompanied?

Unaccompanied, yeah, completely unaccompanied. And we would say to the audience, is there anybody in the audience who can sing or can play the guitar or whatever?

And there was a kind of sense of humour around all this to make it kind of possible so it wasn't like a disaster ...

No, no, we kind of evolved a way of doing it which was the audience ... A lot of the audience would come and they wouldn't know what it was gonna be like and they wouldn't know that things could break down or they wouldn't know how amateurish we were. And so ... Like sometimes when I was doing the MC's and it would break down, I would then kind of be very straight and say we were gonna have a discussion about the last film and people would believe this and it would be ... And because they'd come, because some of them had come from a kind of very stulted sort of like co-op, like they'd been to the co-op and they knew vaguely about structural materialist films and the only other kind of artist experimental film makers they'd met before were ones who were incredibly dour straight-faced people. You could lead them along and you could say, well, you know, you could start coming out with some kind of structuralist rubbish and say, well, what do you think of this? And they would go along with it, for a little while, and then they would realise we were taking the piss, you see. That worked quite a lot. We used to say you can't smoke.

So, you're using a microphone at this time?

Yeah, yeah, we used a mike. Simply because there was a PA. And so the whole thing just kind of evolved like that. I was really conscious, quite. As it evolved I became quite conscious, like, I'd seen the

Co-op, I knew what the Co-op was like and I'd met even some of my friends out there in the independent experimental scene and I knew how cut-throat it was. And I was quite worried. I was thinking this is really great but, you know, we're being so open and so incredibly welcoming to people. We are really just like here. If somebody wanted to come along and sort of fuck with us and basically try and take it over, try and be a leader, enforce their will ... Because what was really refreshing was nobody enforced their will on anything. We would sit in this room and have our meetings and they would go on for hours, you know. And we would go out of our way to make sure that everybody had their say. And if somebody wasn't being heard you could say, excuse me but we're ignoring this person, can this be ... Or new people would come. And it became like laughably sort of democratic and egalitarian. We would be so welcoming that we would, like, welcome in these people and halfway through a meeting we would realise that they were completely just deranged, you know what I mean, which was a problem because, you know ...

# If Tracey had seen my student video she might still be alive



TRAGEDY: Tracey Cole

**V**ALERIE Walkerdine knows the fear and loneliness working class students can feel when they are plunged into the rarefied atmosphere of university.

As the daughter of a semi-skilled manual worker from Derby, she felt alienated and inferior in her first term at Goldsmiths' College, London University.

Even now, as a professor of psychology at the same college, she remembers the experience so vividly that she has made a video to help students from poorer home backgrounds adjust to the middle-class world of academia.

*And she believes that if only tragic Oxford University student Tracey Cole had seen her film, she might still be alive today.*

Tracey, who achieved the highest marks in the country for her A-level sociology exam, was found hanging from the ceiling of her college room just days after starting her degree course earlier this month.

Police believe the girl brought up in an Exeter council house killed herself because she was "completely overwhelmed" by her first few days at Oxford's Lady Margaret Hall College.

But Valerie, 45, says: "If only she could have seen my video she would have realised that she was not alone."

The film features five working-class women who tell of the anxiety they felt when they first entered the hallowed halls of one of the country's leading universities.

"Sadly this feeling of loneliness is not uncommon among working-class students who get places at top universities."

"Next year I would like to screen the video during Freshers Week so that any working-class students who feel cut off can see that other people have been through the same experience and survived.

"It is a very painful film. The



LONELY: New students can feel alienated

by MATTHEW BENNS

women in it are coming to terms with their alienation from both their family roots and from their academic circle.

"I certainly think the film would have helped Tracey Cole. Students need to know there is support there for them.

"I am now a professor of psychology and am proud of my roots, but it has taken me a long time to be able to say that. For much of my academic career I had a feeling of not being good enough. Of course I was, but that feeling stemmed from my working-class background."

Valerie claims the class system



SUPPORTIVE: Prof Valerie Walkerdine

**'I felt like a freak until I found a friend from the same background'**

is still rife in British universities. She says the few working class students achieving the grades necessary to get them into Oxbridge feel like social lepers.

*"These students get to university and immediately feel left out. Their contemporaries talk differently, have more money, more experience and more in common with each other," says Valerie.*

Most of these students also feel alienated from their parents, who are often in awe of their unexpectedly brilliant children.

"Working-class people tend to cope with their problems themselves. If a student is feeling alone

how can she turn to her parents and say 'I am unhappy' when she has got everything she pushed so hard for?"

Valerie was 18 when she first arrived at Goldsmiths' in the Sixties. "I was very excited, but very frightened," she says.

"I also started to feel ashamed about my roots. This feeling came from within the college and the staff even offered me elocution lessons so that I could disguise my background. I didn't take them."

"In the North there was a different attitude towards these almost mythical institutions - the feeling is you are doing very well to get there.

"Among the middle-class students I met here, there was an impression that you had performed very badly if you failed to get to Oxbridge."

Little appears to have changed today. One of this year's intake of students at Goldsmiths', a working class girl from Runcorn, Cheshire, says: "I never felt any different until I got here and then immediately people started to take the mickey out of my accent.

"Until I found someone from the same working class background as me I felt like a freak.

*"It was just great to talk to somebody who was in the same boat, I can imagine how lonely I would have felt if I had not found that friend.*

"I was also shocked to find that most people go home in their holidays or go on Interrail trips around Europe. I assumed they were like me and spent their holidays working to pay off their overdrafts. They have just got so much more money.

"I think it is important that freshers are given some sort of support when they arrive because universities can be very lonely places."

Perhaps Valerie Walkerdine's video will now provide that support, and go some way to preventing another tragedy like the death of Tracey Cole.



## Appendix A4.

# Not in my Gallery,

Emmanuel Cooper, Curator and author of the People's Art exhibition and

# You Can't

book, chronicles his ten-year battle to

win a hearing for 'industrial folk art'.

**T**he People's Art exhibition was the first attempt to bring together examples of objects made in the last 200 years by ordinary men and women, to offer an analysis, and to present modern work within an historical context. This was admittedly a tall order, but when it was offered to the Arts Council in 1984 the initial response was positive. After a series of meetings the idea went onto permanent hold; it was 'a project that interests but which we still need to think about'. I accepted this at face value. I did not know the code for 'Not on your life'. I received the formal rejection letter some time later.

As it had been suggested that People's Art 'would look better somewhere else', next stop was the Crafts Council. The Council's exhibition sub-committee (since disbanded) seemed to be in favour of the show, but ominously various officers expressed serious doubts. How would a hybrid like People's Art look in the fine-crafts showplace? Again after long delays, the verdict was that the show 'would look better elsewhere.'

The proposal fared little better at the Barbican. A meeting with the Director elicited much enthusiasm, but nothing else. It was the same story at the Royal Festival Hall. Again lots of interest, meetings, slide viewings, even a lunch. There were imaginative ideas about setting up fairground rides outside on the South Bank. But nothing was really decided and amid vague mutterings about the fullness of the programme, funding and the difficulties of forward planning, etc, the whole thing was quietly dropped.

A positive response came from Manchester in 1986. Julian Spalding, director of the City Art Gallery & Museum, had seen the slides and liked the idea. Here at last was someone who was in a position to do something. But no sponsor was forthcoming, and two years later Spalding left for Glasgow. The verbal agreement to mount the exhibition was cancelled.

Eventually terms were agreed with the Angel Row Gallery at Nottingham. A private sponsor was found, a date fixed and a contract signed. Two other galleries agreed to take People's Art on tour. Yet to date no venue in the South has been persuaded to show it.

Convincing a publisher to produce a book to accompany the exhibition provided a coda to the People's Art saga. The Gulbenkian Foundation helped fund the original research, but they rarely publish books. The big art publishing houses 'liked the idea' but were deterred by the cost, particularly as the theme was limited to the Britain and would, therefore, be difficult to sell abroad. Eventually the Edinburgh-based publishers Mainstream signed a contract and the Crafts Council chipped in towards the cost of colour reproductions.

**W**hat can we conclude from this epic? Gallery space is not finite, resources are limited and countless excellent exhibition proposals go down the toilet every day of the week.

Yes, of course. Yet I do think People's Art was fighting a battle on many fronts. I do not believe the problems lay in the quality or creativity of the work itself or in the combined exhibition/book idea. Rather, it lay in the deeply conservative nature of an art establishment which has severe problems with material which does not fit its modernist aesthetic.

The Hayward Gallery fights shy of any work which may appear to undermine its role as the premier showplace for modernist art. Regularly under attack by the left and the right for elitism and remoteness, the Hayward is continually defending its programme amid mutterings of discontent. An exhibition like People's Art might have been seen by the officers as too risky at a time when any excuse for chopping is in the air.

An equally testy problem has been the determination not to cross the art/craft divide. Never once has the Hayward shown anything which could be construed as craft, which is a pity given the brilliance of current work. In this respect, People's Art posed especial difficulties – it was neither high art nor fine craft. Arguments about its popularity, its social relevance and its inventive visual aesthetic failed to move any hearts. I suspect that if the work has been made in the folk tradition of the United States, or culled from remote towns of Peru it would have met the rigorous Hayward standards. Being homegrown, it failed to make an impression.

But there is another 'difficulty' with People's Art. That is its implicit allegiance to working class culture. This rarely stated or acknowledged political element is intrinsic to the work. Many of the objects have to do with trade unions. Other images express a patriotism which is loyal and conservative, but no less working-class for that. Some of the work can be deemed sexist by the politically correct.

By definition People's Art is about working class rather than middle class culture, the usual constituency of art institutions. The irony is that many of the directors and exhibition officers would identify themselves as lefties, despising the current government and longing for a change of régime. Yet when it came to putting their agreement to a project which would appear to be controversial, they quietly withdrew.

*People's Art is published by Mainstream at £25. No full-length review has appeared in the national press to date. Emmanuel Cooper's other book The Sexual Perspective: homosexuality and art in the last 100 years has just been issued in a new edition by Routledge (£12.99/£40). There was an accompanying exhibition at Jill George Gallery in London from 3-16 September.*

## APPENDIX 5

### The BBC and Lord Reith

Of course Sharp wasn't a lone wolf. This the manner in which the mechanisms of class acted at that time. Another character even more powerful than Sharp was John Reith who set up BBC radio. A few quotes will give an insight into the type of classism operating beneath the civilised and cultured public appearance:

"The pronunciation of the King's English is a sore trial to students of our own language. It is also a matter of considerable concern and irritation to ourselves ... One hears the most appalling travesties of vowel pronunciation. This is a matter in which broadcasting may be of immense assistance" (John Reith 1924 quoted in OSSEI 1996).

"A long talk with Lord Byng after lunch at the Athenaeum... He said I ought not to keep anyone on in the B.B.C. after being divorced, irrespective of the circumstances, which is what I have felt all along, although I was glad to have his confirmation" (Reith Diaries 2-2-1927 quoted in OSSEI 1996).

"In six short years Sir John Reith has made himself more even than the guardian of public morals. He has become the judge of What We Ought to Want... Sir John has taught us to regard him as the last surviving Victorian father, the man who alone knows what is good for us"(Helen Wilkinson M.P. Evening Standard 16-6-1931 quoted in OSSEI 1996)

Note: Helen Wilkinson was a working class author

These people were apparently incredibly successful. They infiltrated the ~~the~~ Labour Party and other working class leadership and hollowed out socialism and filled it with their own ideals. In many ways we still live in their shadow. But perhaps all they achieved was a massive confusion rather than any permanent surgery: David Hevey is working class photographer who is now making television programmes... perhaps a future head of the BBC?

"The issue for me, then, is to explore and show how obscuring of objective or subjective class relations has not meant their absenting but their physical and psychic intensification. What is the process by which we make sense or create order from the denial, disavowal and oppression?" David Hevey (Roberts 1993).



**The only people entitled to judge your work are the audience.**

## Appendix 6.

### AND THEN IT GETS WEIRD..

A friend of mine who is working for a Soho based product company phoned me up to say he'd been desperately trying to get hold of me as they are working on this brilliant project for the ICA.

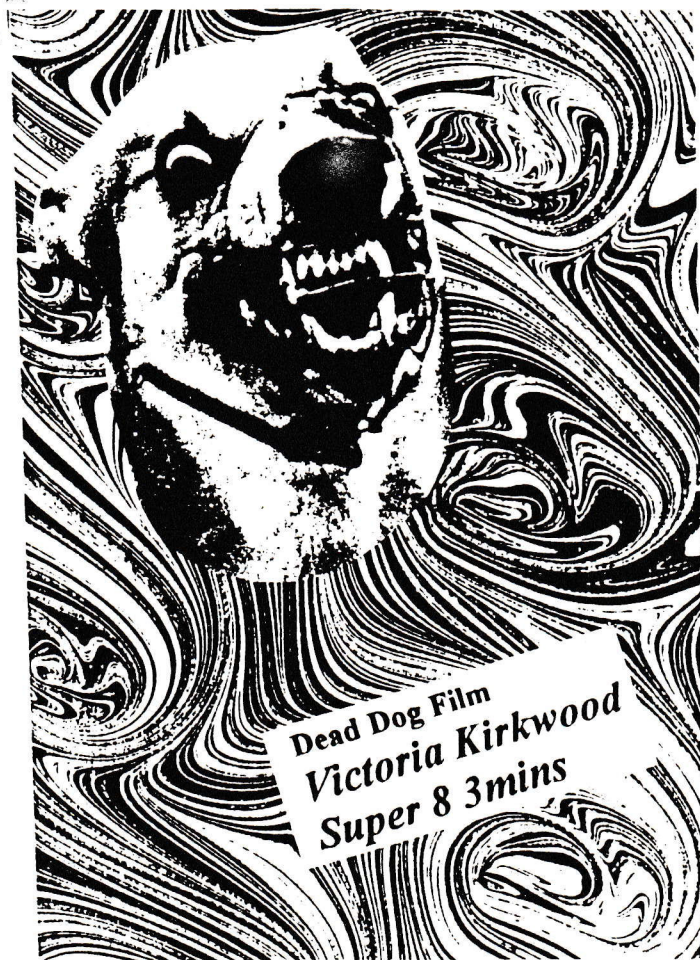
Basically the ICA and it's ad agency have come up with the best thing to hit the art scene. Yes, we artists are personally invited to submit ideas for a 5 second slot to go towards a fat ad showing how diverse the ICA is and how in touch and hep they are.

Boy was I excited. I thought - me on telly and I can make my own story featuring ME! Then they will send in this brilliant Euro film director and his chunky crew to film my idea and then they will finish it off brilliantly with a nice ICA logo. And there we will all be, completely fucking sucked in and labelled as ICA property, in our 5 second slot. *And I thought we all get 15 minutes of fame.*

The Soho types were also keen for me to get the Exploding Cinema in there somehow or even give 5 seconds to the EC. Like the EC could make a little ad for themselves as part of an ICA ad. This is when I got confused and asked how much money there was ... silly me. As if I would get any money to make a film.

Needless to say, I got balled out by Exploders for being so slow in getting the drift - one that smacks of APPROPRIATION. The way this lil' institution behaves they should swap the letters around to read CIA.

**THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE.**



The short story of a fly who gets trapped inside a commercial while it is being edited



# EXPLODING CINEMA

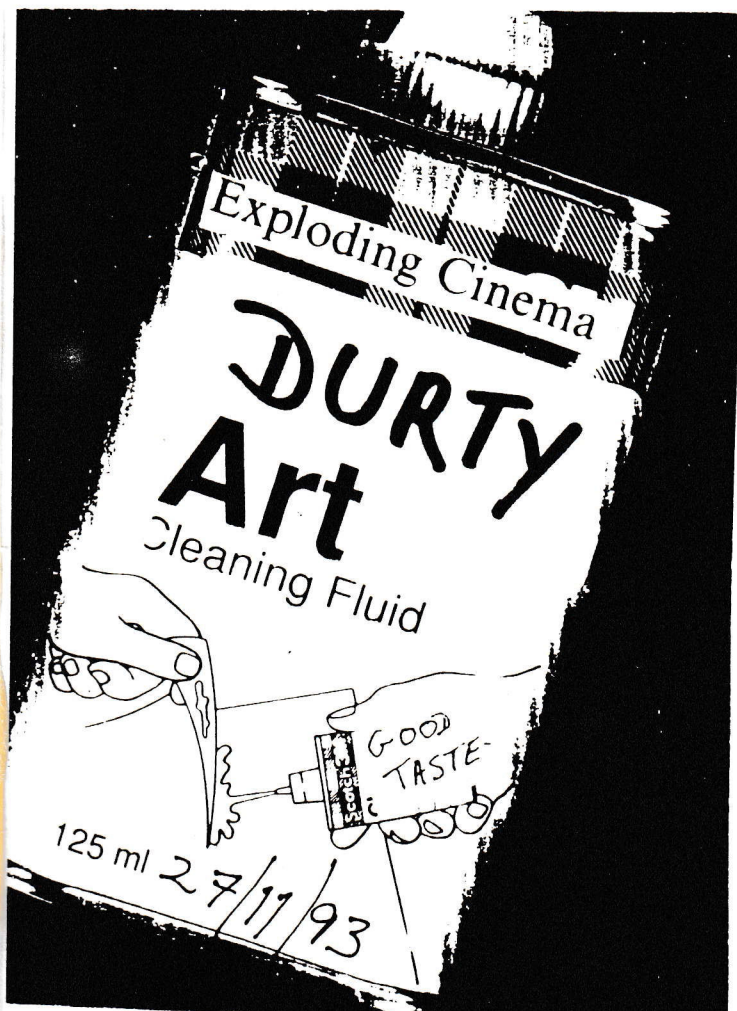
SATURDAY 17th JUNE



MORON'S ECSTASY



*Meet the professionals*



Dan Duryea speaks out at the....

# EXPLODING SINEMA





EXPLODING



CINEMA

Out Come  
the FREAKS



FINE BARGAIN

SHOW

EXPLODE  
NOW



*It's so strange it's  
normal*



EXPLODING SINEMA

somewhere foreign - it cost £1 from a charity shop



Anny Dynamite  
Super8 4mins

Home Movie

# EXPLODING CINEMA

We are the fly in your ointment,  
We are the poopers at your party,  
We are the hair in your gate.



Nowhere is Safe Nothing is Sacred



Singing in the rain . . . snow . . . hail . . . sleet. You name it and Gordon Banks still is happy.

Presidents & financiers who oppress us are as empty as their lives,  
Their money is as worthless as the products they shit,  
And all the objects of their culture are as meaningless as their flags.

## programme

SATURDAY 12th JUNE

TITLE	MAKER	FORMAT
BURN BABY BURN	Stefanie Toth	VHS
SALTY DOG	Gorhard Tietz	16mm
THE NORTH CAROLINA SERIES	Janis Henderson	VHS
BERLIN RICKSTRASSE	Alan Dein	Super 8
FILTHY HABITS	Paul Bakelite	VHS
I N T E R V A L		
SKIP STORY	A Dog On A String	PERF.
MY COMMANDMENTS	Max Boyvalti	VHS
SPEED MONEY	Janis Marsh	16mm
MIND THE GAP	Martin Pickles	VHS
SNAPS IN SPAIN	Michele de Leon	Super 8
HAIMARI	Yasunari Maeda	PERF.
I N T E R V A L		
INTERSPECIES INTERFACES	Michael Prime	PERF.
FREEWAY	Andre Stitt	Single 8
AN ILL WIND	Film Photo Manray	16mm