✱✱ PLAY TIME

Given (1) the exponential expansion of the art world, and (2) the reclamation work practiced on the art of the 1960s; I wasn't too surprised (a couple of years ago) to be contacted by a young Irish artist on placement in Frankfurt — Patrick Keaveney. He was planning a piece which took as its starting point an exhibition I had curated in 1969. The show was *Poetry must be made by all!/ Transform the world!*. Two other artists, Liam Gillick and Christopher Williams — with whom Keveaney was familiar — had already taken the catalogue as a source. But what turned out to be very surprising was the extent of the research undertaken by him.

The exhibition had originated in Stockholm at the Moderna Museet; Keaveney went there. It had travelled to Munich; he visited the Kunstverein, and even went to Switzerland chasing a connection. He got to know far more about the show as 'show' than I ever did. Mostly we exchanged e-mails, but one evening he phoned, and in the course of a very long conversation he asked me about the cover image. I explained that while working on the show in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1969 I had wandered into the University Anthropology Department (they had a one room collection of masks, ornaments etc.). What startled me was an alarm clock in one of the cases. Then I looked up, and on the wall was the photograph you see here. I had found the cover illustration for the catalogue.

Much of the exhibition focused on the 1920s and '30s avant-gardes — this image was roughly right in terms of date and had all the hallmarks of a montage with the added cachet of its entering into 'real life'. That idea was taken up in the last section of the exhibition which posited the prolongation of those earlier vanguards erupting in the May 1968 revolt in Paris, particularly the graffiti, with its markedly 'cultural' aspect "Live without dead time"; "Play without fetters".

As I told Patrick that evening I was doubly pleased because at the time I had just read Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* who quoted Walter Benjamin (this was the first time

I had come across the name of Benjamin) to the effect that during the July 1830 revolution in France rebels had shot at the clocks on the clock towers; '[…] wish(ing) to break the continuum of history'. Patrick then said he'd like to know more about the image. My reply was that this would be impossible since the Anthropology Department had been closed twenty years previously.

The next morning I had an e-mail to tell me the photo was by George Brown, a missionary. It was now in the British Museum, and the clock — without its hands and decidedly non functional — was now in a museum in Osaka. I was overwhelmed. This was another event on a parallel with the initial shock of seeing the clock in 1969.

What struck me was the way it dislocated time and space: Newcastle, Frankfurt, the Solomon Islands; Dada, cargo cultism etc; 1930, 1969, 2013. Rocketing round my mind, like one of those great montages from those earlier avant-gardes. It had all the hallmarks of an aesthetic revelation, the whole thing dependent on the new technology. It was a startling cosmology: the catalyst for a jump into another dimension — almost a parallel universe — one we have seemingly forgotten, unearthed by a simple query about that lovely image. A query I thought impossible to answer.

So I am back in the late 1960s, absorbed by the 1920s, and simultaneously stunned by the ever present, ever-burgeoning web, with its contempt for the categories of space and time. I am back with Dada — Heartfield, Huelsenbeck, Man Ray (clocks make regular appearances). Back with Marcuse and *Eros and Civilisation* — written in 1955 — and his repudiation of Freud's reality principle: the latter's concept that civilization is, and will be, built on repression. For Marcuse Eros could overcome what Freud had seen as a-historical. He finds support — not only in the relative freedom from work promised by automation — but in Schiller, Breton ('Imagination alone tells me what *can be*'), Stendahl ('Art is a *promesse be bonheur*'), the Surrealist idea that we 'practise' poetry. Marcuse even tackles 'Time' '[…] the fatal enemy of

lasting gratification is time, the inner finiteness, the brevity of all conditions. The idea of integral human liberation therefore necessarily contains the vision of the struggle against time […] if the "aesthetic state" is really to be the state of freedom, then it must ultimately defeat the destructive course of time. Only this is the token of a non-repressive civilization.' However, it has to be pointed out that in his 1961 preface he wonders if his conception of non-repressive civilization is 'frivolous'. In 2014 it certainly seems even more frivolous.
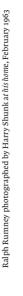
And yet… what we experience in such a state — an aesthetic state — are moments, moments that don't yet constitute a totality. Like the clock before its appropriation by a gentleman in the Solomon Islands they are elements of a montage waiting to be put together — awaiting their monteur or monteurs. Even if the wait seems nigh interminable. But we have phrases, lines of poetry that have become slogans:

> Lautreamont's 'Poetry must be made by all'. Marcuse's non-repressive society. "Play without dead time."

These may be mapped on to each other. They have something in common. They may have different authors, but they point in the same direction, the Utopian. Art remains one of the ways in which this Utopia may be visualized.

Without that visualisation, with its *promesse* — inherent in art and poetry and praxis, without that 'principle of hope' as another Franfkurter (Ernst Bloch) calls it, without a certain 'optimism of the will', as Gramsci wrote from prison; without a certain 'frivolity': the daring to suggest in the face of the particularly invidious performance principle of 2014 — that 'Imagination alone tells me what *can be*', then we are diminished.

> Ron Hunt speaking at *Poetry will be made by all!*, an exhibition co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Simon Castets and Kenneth Goldsmith at the LUMA Foundation, Zurich in 2014.

Ralph Rumney photographed by Harry Shunk *at his home*, February 1963

RALPH RUMNEY: THE SHAPE
OF HEADS TO COME
Natalie Ferris

I think the trick, as far as possible,
is to be sort of anonymous in this society.
You know, to sort of vanish.[1]

The artist Ralph Rumney never adhered to a fixed sense of self. Of the little documentation that exists of his life and work, most is comprised of his own disparately collected thoughts, letters, notes, interviews, images and recollections. Born in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1934, he experienced an unsettled and repressive childhood in Wakefield, prompting him to leave home 'by stages'.[2] His adolescent years were spent lodging with the 'notorious communist' Edward Thompson, hitching to London in 1951 for the Festival of Britain, and then travelling around Cornwall meeting 'all those Cornish artists like Pat Heron and Terry Frost and Brian Winter – and Barbara Hepworth', until, in order to avoid arrest as a conscientious objector, he moved where the currents bore him, between London, Paris, Milan and eventually settling for a time in Venice.[3] The writer, painter and only member of the British branch of the Situationniste International, was often the one behind the Rolleiflex camera.

This apparent lack of presence led to some suspicion among his critics as to whether he was indeed present at the founding meetings in Cosio d'Arroscia in April 1957 of the Situationist International. Of those faces that glower at the camera or laughingly cast their eyes at one another – Guy Debord, Michèle Berstein, Guiseppe Pinot Gallizio, Piero Simondo, Asger Jorn, Walter Olmo, Elena Verrone – Rumney's is notably absent. As he pragmatically states in his memoirs, as 'the only person with a camera' he was obliged to document the proceedings.[4] However, even the group he was noted as representing, the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA), was 'non-existent', invented during the course of the conference 'to "increase" the internationalism of the event'.[5] Another face missing from the photographs is Rumney's wife Pegeen Guggenheim, the daughter of affluent American art collector Peggy, who, preferring not to participate, had deemed the pursuit to be Rumney's 'own private obsession'.[6] It was an obsession with which he had become intimately involved. Should we only attend to the photographic roll-call of faces – lined up along rockfaces, grass prickling their shins, peering into darkened doorways or gazing down tiled alleyways, Rumney is merely a spectre within the proceedings. Rumney was admitted to the inner circle, however, during this unification of the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the Lettrist International and the 'non-existent' London Psychogeographical Association, to be present at the Cosio 'conference within the conference' between himself, Debord, Bernstein and Jorn.[7]

It was with two identity photographs, printed alongside a letter, that the expulsion of Rumney was announced across a full page of the first issue of *Internationale Situationniste*.[8] The 'mug shot' was used to make his exclusion all the more pointed, as Rumney had proposed only months earlier the use of just such a 'mug shot' beside the name of each contributor to the first issue.[9] Debord intended to expose Rumney as incompetent

1   Ralph Rumney qtd in Alan Woods, *The Map is not the Territory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.5.
2   Ralph Rumney qtd in Alan Woods, *The Map is not the Territory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.33.
3   Ralph Rumney, *The Consul,* trans. (London: Verso, 2002), p.11; Ralph Rumney

in Alan Woods, *The Map is not the Territory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.34.
4   Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.36.
5   Stewart Home, '"First World Congress of Liberated Artists" to the Foundation of the Situationist International', *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrism to Class War*, <http://www.

stewarthomesociety.org/ass/liber.htm>
6   Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.36.
7   Ibid, p.36.
8   Guy Debord, 'Venise a vaincu Ralph Rumney', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958), p.28.
9   Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.49.

and ineffectual, swallowed up by his 'psychogeographic' endeavour in failing to meet the publication deadlines:

> Heavy were those losses among those explorers of old to whom we owe our understanding of objective geography. We must expect casualties, too, among the new seekers of social space [...] Thus it is that the Venetian jungle has shown itself to be the stronger, closing over a young man full of life and promise, who is now lost to us, a mere memory among so many others.[10]

Perhaps he was a little lost to Venice; Pegeen floored him – '*un coup de foudre*'.[11] For Rumney, Venice was the most captivating site in which to carry out new kinds of pyschogeographic exploration. In *Potlatch* no. 29, November 1957, Debord had set out the plan for 'Psychogeographical Venice' as the 'first exhaustive psychogeographical work applied to urbanism'. Venice was chosen by Rumney, out of 'so many other equally interesting zones of experimentation' in order to address 'the sentimental resonance of a town that is tied to the most backward emotions of the old aesthetic'.[12] He had begun to ruminate upon the implications of just such a study while in Cosio, a 'détournement' that would 'despectacularise Venice by suggesting unknown routes'.[13] In his 1999 interview for the memoiristic *The Consul*, Rumney recalled that it was the space of the streets, the cultural pulp and patter of feet, the orbital networking of small square tiles, which fascinated him. While the crowds craned their necks to see the resplendent gilt mosaics of the ceilings and columns, Rumney was distracted by the magnetic appeal of the *fotoromazi* that tiled the newstands of Venice, 'those magazines of photo stories aimed mainly at female readers'.[14] His eyes were obsessed with squares – of tiles, mags, lenses and pages:

> [...] I looked at the ground. Those geometric figures are extremely complex and extremely detailed, with square forms. I don't know how to explain it, but squares – Polaroids, for example – have always fascinated me. A lot of my paintings are square. I still dream of making square films.[15]

His admiration for the square has informed compositional choices across Rumney's art and letters, from tessellations across canvases, collages within his 'photo-essays', and the interlocked typesetting of his writings.

He even mastered a chequered surface devised by Max Ernst to beat Marcel Duchamp at chess in the London home of Roland Penrose.[16] Debord suggested in his note of expulsion that Rumney's interest in the multiplying nature of structures, images and signs throughout his urban milieu had led him to a 'position of total inertia'.[17] Rumney's failure to produce the work on time was recognised as a failure of imagination, as he was unable to 'make life a passionate adventure' when faced with 'a world of boredom'. Yet this world was littered with possibilities for Rumney, narrative lines to be unfettered, rules to be set and broken, other voices to be addressed, new realms of urban play that were only to emerge upon his return to London in 1955.

OTHER VOICES: AGAINST 'ART FOR ART'S SAKE' IN THE MID-1950S

The British painter Ralph Rumney returned 'somewhat apprehensively' to London in 1955, nervous that his avoidance of military service would have serious consequences. Quickly realising that there had been few or no efforts made to catch up with him, having spent a year drinking with the Lettrists 'Guy Debord, Jean-Claude Guilbert, Vali, François Dufréne' at Moineau's in Paris and seeing through a successful small exhibition of Taschist style paintings in Trieste, Italy, he began to reacclimatise himself to London. Distanced from the cultural atmosphere in Britain, his immediate personal aim was for recognition: 'to get myself heard and acquire a certain legitimacy'.[18] His answer to this challenge was to set up a small weekly literary broadsheet, *Other Voices*. Avowedly not another 'fifties magazine', it would also not ignore the fact that the 1950s presented 'special problems to the artist'.[19] In his 'Editorial' for the first issue of the broadsheet, printed on Friday 21st January 1955, Rumney set down his aims for *Other Voices*, and the position of resistance it intended to adopt towards the 'paralysing influence' of the British literary establishment. Demurring to those few magazines 'of courageous and sincere efforts', which are 'so much a factor in the survival of good writing', he cannot deny their obvious limitations. Rumney offered a number of reasons: an 'ascetic attitude' to their material and presentation, all 'too infequent' in number, of little ambition and of a resolutely minimal circulation. Their commitment to categorisation as 'little magazines', Rumney assesses, does no more than 'sum up their inadequacy to fulfil their editor's hopes'. These 'gallant failures' do little to contradict the prevailing 'ostrich-like attitude evinced by *London Magazine* and other publications devoted to propagating the vicious doctrine roughly to be described as "Art for Art's sake".'[20]

Rumney was reacting against what he perceived as 'an age of crisis': 'The symptoms are everywhere. Wars and rumours of wars. Teddy boys. And one which will perhaps be nearer the bone for most of my readers, coffee-house philosophers.'[21] It is for this final aspect that Rumney reserves most of his vitriol. The artists have been driven out of the busy

10 Guy Debord, 'Venise a vaincu Ralph Rumney', *Internationale Situationiste* 1 (Juin 1958), p.28.
11 Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.29.
12 http://www.notbored.org/psychogeographical-venice.html
13 Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.47.
14 Ibid, p.46.
15 Ibid, p.47.
16 Ibid, p.79.
17 Guy Debord, 'Venise a vaincu Ralph Rumney', p.28.
18 Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.22.
19 Ralph Rumney, 'Editorial', *Other Voices* 1.1 (21 January 1955), p.1.
20 Ibid, p.1.
21 Ibid, p.1.

café quarters of the city by the imposing clientele and left to relative isolation, hiding their lights under their 'provincial bushels'.[22] As 'little is attempted to establish a virile interchange of ideas' amongst writers, Rumney diagnoses the worrying prevalence of an 'inter-war feeling', created by the gap left behind by all of those who were lost in the war, and all of those left behind in a state of creative paralysis. *The London Magazine* had done deplorably little, in Rumney's eyes, to invigorate creativity, after its restitution following a 125-year hiatus in February 1954 by the editor and writer John Lehmann, one of the most assiduous editors of modern literature in mid-century Britain. Since the success of his periodical *New Writing*, founded in 1936, Lehmann had gone on to edit the related journals *Folios of New Writing*, *New Writing & Daylight*, *Penguin New Writing* and *Orpheus*. Known by the writers featured in these publications for his commitment to modern writing and the publication of little known innovative texts or rare works in translation, *The London Magazine* slowly became a testament to what George Woodcock recalled in 1987 as Lehmann's increasingly 'conservative sensibility'.[23] Rumney ends his 'Editorial' with a condemnatory statement: 'There is no place here for those who think that the artist is one apart and for timid beautifiers in the Lehmann tradition', a tradition which arguably began when Lehmann became managing director of Virginia and Leonard Woolf's The Hogarth Press in 1938.[24] A few months prior to Rumney's account of the British 'vicious circle', the American poet Donald Hall in the 17 September 1954 edition of the *Times Literary Supplement* had characterised the 'cliché' of American opinion of England in the mid-1950s as 'an enormous Bloomsbury populated by tea-drinking epigrammatists'.[25] Although Hall understands it to be 'false', this representation betrays a general assumption made about the deferential gentility of expression in English letters. Hall substantiates Rumney's critical stance, forced to issue his dissidence from the pages of a fringe publication.

Other Voices was set up with the assistance of the Polish novelist and publisher Stefan Themerson, for whom Rumney had deep respect. In a letter to Themerson on the 5th of October 1954, already on headed *Other Voices* notepaper, he writes of his 'great interest' in the 'books which you have published'. He requests from Themerson four titles for a 'two thousand word article', to enable him to 'cover all of the ground'.[26] Wonderfully ambitious, Rumney suggests that the first edition of the weekly magazine will be out by the end of the month with a readership of three thousand. Themerson contributed pieces such as 'Concerning the Profession of Lampadephor Metaphrastes' in a passage reprinted from his novel *WOOFF*

WOOFF or who killed Richard Wagner?, and 'Castor & Pollux', a riddling version of the Greek myth. Themerson also recommended a Polish printer for the issues, The Poets and Painters Press, the same printer employed by Themerson's publishing house, the Gabberbochus Press. The first two issues of *Other Voices* feature an eclectic mix of contributors, integrating the poetry of Jon Silkin, Peter Fisk, Bernard Kops and Hugo Manning, the prose of Stefan Themerson, Ithell Colquhoun and Anthony Borrow, and reviews by Stevie Smith, Charles Fox and Ralph Rumney, among others. Embedded within the columns are the irreverent line drawings of Franciszcka Themerson and Stevie Smith, a number of dark photographs by Patrick Heron, and a pen and ink figure drawing by Rumney, as well as a number of typographical interventions into the texts. The magazine, however, was to join the ranks of 'gallant failures', lasting only six issues due to a deterioration in Rumney's health and an unsustainable business model. Rumney had taken on all of the production responsibilities himself:

> [...] I didn't have the facilities or the organisation. I had to collect all the stuff, take it to the printers, design the thing, typeset it – in those days it was hand typesetting, or quite a lot of it was, all the headlines were set by hand, and then we used to get the rest of it done by Monotype rather than Linotype because I was very fussy about typefaces and so on – so it only did six issues or something. I used to have to go hurtling round the bookshops that were prepared to take it, dropping it off.[27]

It was during this time that Rumney moved to his studio in Neale Street, and began to paint some of his most successful pictures, including *The Change* (1957).

A 'LUDIC PASSAGE'

In 1957, Rumney began a series of conversations with the influential deputy director of exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Lawrence Alloway. As an active participant in discussions held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, proposing exhibitions to the committee of the painters Wols, Enrico Baj, Henri Michaux, Yves Klein and Lucio Fontana, Rumney had made himself known among the 'group of individuals who had formed themselves into a sort of gang, a private club': The Independent Group.[28] Lawrence Alloway, presiding over this group of critics, architects and artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, Alison and Peter Smithson and Rayner Banham, was well placed to promote its vanguardist ethos and an art that emphasised its reception to mass culture. Proposing an 'environmental' exhibition, Alloway and Rumney elaborated a project known provisionally as 'Hiss Chamber', to study the changes upon human behaviour when attempting to navigate a maze composed of hexagonal spaces.[29] Due to financial constraints this project was never realised, and yet it was an idea that re-emerged later that decade with the 'constructed

22 Ibid, p.3.
23 George Woodcock, 'The Metamorphoses of New Writing', *John Lehmann: A Tribute*, (Montreal: MQUP, 1987), pp.99–109, (p.109).
24 Ralph Rumney, 'Editorial', p.2.
25 Donald Hall, 'The Two Faces of Parnassus', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2746 (1954), p.600.
26 Ralph Rumney, Letter to Stefan Themerson, 5 October 1954, Ralph Rumney Collection, The Themerson Archive, London.
27 Ralph Rumney qtd in Alan Woods, *The Map is not the Territory*, p.43.
28 Ralph Rumney, *The Consul*, p.30.
29 'Chronology', *Ralph Rumney Constats: 1950–1988* exh. cat. ed. Toni del Renzio, (London: Jane England Gallery, 1989), p.12.

situation', *Place*.[30] On 23 September 1959 the long narrow exhibition room in the Dover Street premises was overtaken by a new kind of visual 'Game Environment'.

Thirty-four paintings on canvas by Ralph Rumney and the Royal College of Art painting students Robyn Denny and Richard Smith were assembled throughout the space at perpendicular angles to one another or along the walls.[31] Each picture adhered to rules agreed in advance by the artists, restricting colour, organisation and composition, but the most important related to the size of the pictures. Two sizes of 7ft × 6ft and 7ft × 4ft were chosen 'as the standard size as it is just larger than man-size at full stretch', and yet 'small enough for handling and dismounting'.[32] Roger Coleman as organiser of the exhibition and editor of the Royal College of Art's influential periodical *ARK*, penned a 'Guide to PLACE' and provided a plan, to assist visitors through the labyrinthine orchestration of pictures. Assembled at diagonal angles and clustered in a maze-like arrangement, the paintings were intended to create an immersive experience, which would recalibrate a spectator's spatial orientation to one which was to be guided by peripheral engagement as much as that which was laid before the eyes. In this approach, the navigation of the exhibition lay with the spectator, offering only 'four main vistas' as points of discernible contact with the separate bodies of work of the individual painters. It was intended as a challenge to the 'highly conventional' manner of display and curatorial bias in British galleries:

> stale and habit-bound, [the galleries are] almost completely dependent on size balances, centring, and colour contrasts. Frames, also [...] presuppose a certain kind of picture, usually small with a receding space effect, whereas many modern pictures are large and flattish.[33]

More than this, as outlined by Alloway in his supportive critical review, 'Making a Scene' in *Art News and Review*, the provocative nature of *Place* volunteered a marker in the recent history of British art, asking 'what can British art be?' Cynical in his appraisal of the contemporary critical climate, so heavily reliant upon the 'usual lousy definitions of our national capacity (the Picturesque, linearism, love of country, the light

of St. Ives)', Alloway saw a 'starting point', the opportunity for an 'improved self-definition' of British art.[34]

The 'environment of paintings' in *Place* was one of a number of 'attempts' made by the Institute of Contemporary Arts to dramatically involve the visitor.[35] As Alloway carefully set out in his review, '*Place* is collaborative but, and this is decisive, not between different arts; three painters, master-minded and compered by a critic, were the participants. Their joint presentation is aimed to secure an effect of spectator-participation, but without any of the quasi-architectural pretentions that often bug such projects'.[36] Communicated in the exhibition press statement, the 'visitor to the exhibition will find himself surrounded by their paintings, arranged so as to give diverse views'.[37] These paintings were 'designed to occupy the floor of the Gallery', breaching the contractual distance between painting and spectator in which a picture is to be hung at a vertical angle, a given distance away from the body of the viewer, positioned at eye-level and typically framed.[38] As much as the exhibition was categorically 'not an exhibition of the work of three painters in the accepted sense' it was also not 'an experiment in arranging paintings nor an exercise in exhibition design'.[39] Alloway was less interested in the aestheticisation of the exhibition space into one 'Gesamtkunstwerk', as the integration of 'plastic planes as "pure architecture"' observed in Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore's *Exhibit II* in 1959 at Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, and more stimulated by a dramatic 'continuation of the forms beyond the frame [...] so as to involve the spectator dramatically'.[40] The most significant exponent of *Place* was its willingness to admit the 'mass media as a legitimate body of reference' to the rather more austere framework of abstraction.[41] This was to be insisted upon as a 'specifically British' approach by the three artists, as '[i]n England', Alloway stated, 'the younger abstract artists have been expressly concerned with the painting-spectator relationship', an impulse which was driven most influentially by the spectacle of mass media. A useful source was Futurism's 'aesthetic of intimacy', which presents the work as 'a hot sample of the spectator's daily environment and not as a special object for meditation'.[42] Rumney had hoped that *Place* would be the first British exhibition to display the intentions of Situationism, though Alloway had neatly prevented such an emphasis. Most likely aware of the movement through his international networks at the ICA, Alloway dispelled the 'pleasure-and-traps-of-the-spectator syndrome' in favour of an environment deserving of the same academic esteem as 'Bernini's means of involving the spectator in his sculpture'.[43]

Characterised in literary terms by Roger Coleman in his catalogue statement, the show was 'an instructional essay in art-appreciation', illustrated by Coleman's three 'Backgrounds' to the exhibition, providing frameworks to enhance the viewer's experience: 'The Mass Media', 'American Painting and Space' and 'The Game Environment'.[44] The purpose of *Place* was to partake in the 'game': to engage with the formal vocabularies offered by each painter: the echoing 'web of colour references' produced

30 Lawrence Alloway, 'Making a Scene', *Art News & Review* 11.18 (September 26 1959), p.4. Alloway also wrote another impartial review for *Art International*.
31 Éric de Chassey counts 24 pictures placed back-to-back and 10 positioned along the walls, in '*Place*: A Constructed Abstract Situation in the Urban Cultural Continuum of the 1960s', *October* 120 (2007), The MIT Press, pp.24–52, 25.
32 Roger Coleman, 'Exhibition: PLACE An Environment of Paintings' Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 24 September to 24 October 1959. ICA Collection, Tate Gallery Archive, London. TGA.955.1.12.110.2/5, p.1.
33 Lawrence Alloway, 'Making a Scene', p.4.
34 Lawrence Alloway, 'Making a Scene', p.4.
35 Roger Coleman, 'Exhibition: PLACE An Environment of Paintings', p.1.
36 Lawrence Alloway, 'Making a Scene', p.4.
37 Roger Coleman, 'Exhibition: PLACE An Environment of Paintings', p.1.
38 Ibid, p.1.
39 Ibid, p.1.
40 Lawrence Alloway, 'Making a Scene', p.4.
41 Ibid, p.4.
42 Ibid, p.4.
43 Ibid, p.5.
44 Roger Coleman, 'Exhibition: PLACE An Environment of Paintings', p.1.

by Smith, the colossal arrangement of head fragments by Rumney and Denny's systemic, meditative line. Taken 'off the walls and clustered in a series of screens', each of the artists adopted systems of formal arrangement in their paintings, creating a new visual language of developmental forms and presenting a 'ludic passage' of decryption:

> Game participation exists on two levels. 1, the interpretation of the painting/spectator relationship as a game situation in which the painter's gestures, marks, etc., are moves within a strategy which in turn elicits a 'strategy' from the spectator, and 2, on a more literal level where the spectator is invited to manipulate the work [...]

Rumney, Denny and Smith had already plotted out their 'ludic' experiential values within a similarly self-contained arena. In the weeks preceding *Place*, the three artists had contributed their own section 'environment' to *ARK* no. 24 (1958).[45] The collages, screenprints and black and white reproductions of paintings for Smith and Denny's *Project for a Film: Ev'ry-Which-Way* were arranged on the recto side of a large pull-out length of pages in the middle of the issue. On the verso side of the same length of paper, Ralph Rumney's extraordinary photo-essay *The Leaning Tower of Venice* was finally to see publication, and under much more propitious circumstances. This 'study', rather than taking the city itself as its focus, paid greater attention to the ways in which the environment affects the experiential 'play-pattern' of the 'player' – and in this case the American Beat writer Allan Ansen (alias 'A'). The photographs and typewritten captions slot together like a cross-work of impressions, snapshots as both records of instants and preconceived scenic set-ups. Ansen indulges in children's games, leaps over stairs, observes the people of Venice or tracks traffic lines across piazzas, and the whole endeavour quickly descends into a 'kind of *Goon Show* version of a holiday snapshot album' before 'A' disappears, only to re-emerge to encounter Alloway on the Rialto Bridge.[46] A small reproduction of a map of Venice is pasted at the top of page, upon which a long black line snakes through the narrow alleyways and water channels, devising what is captioned as [...] an ideal trajectory through the zones of main psychogeographic interest'.[47]

It was not only the binds of the 'Venetian jungle' to which Guy Debord believed Rumney had succumbed, but also to those 'mystical cretins' the American beat poets epitomised by the eponymous 'A'. For the Situationists this 'rotten egg' mysticism, also accorded to the 'reactionary' stylings of the Angry Young Men, exposed their dislocation from the glaring '*change of terrain* of all cultural activity', merely shifting 'their opinions

on a few social conventions'.[48] However, Rumney, Smith and Denny were all eager to emphasise their sense of a place as a 'climate', as a 'frame of reference'. In *Ev'ry Which Way*, Smith and Denny's collaged storyboard, itself a built environment of billboards, slogans, the blinking lights of computers, the recognisable faces of the cinema screen and their own typewritten or handwritten reflections, offers a 'viewpoint' which 'pans over the world'. The 'intermittent stimuli' of the urban environment 'make montage' in their relation of 'private (painter) situation to a public world', in which it is 'fruitless to search for universals'.[49] Their composition mimics the assertion that all experience is flux and stasis, as the three separate areas of the collage, 'habitat', 'inhabitants' and their own gestural paintings, do not quite occupy the same visual plane. The concertina fold out is too wide to view in respect to all of its aspects, much like the experience of viewing one of the large-scale abstract paintings for which Denny and Smith were becoming known or the widescreen of the cinema. The act of viewing is both one of attempting to assimilate the overall 'flux' of images, while attempting to make sense of given points across the field of visual register: headlines, recognisable faces, monoprints of found photographs. This is not to justify their inclusion of the material of 'external stimulus', or even to rationalise their painting in terms of a particular external stimulus, but to 'pinpoint certain elements in a related environment which provoke a particular pattern of response'.[50] Equally attentive to the 'pattern' as a framework by which the complex experience of a situation may be registered at given moments, as there were to the impossibility of the 'attempt' to ever offer a comprehensive 'reading' of an experience.

The screen sirens and anonymous publicity bodies that people their landscape, anticipating J. G. Ballard's 'condensed novels' forming *The Atrocity Exhibition* of 1970, are refracted across the elongated pictorial plane. Denny and Smith provide their own condensed justification for the coupling of their abstract expressive images alongside that of the collaged faces of pulp culture:

> These people fit. Manage to live with the stimuli or provide them. Hero types on top of their world feature in ours. No pedestals are needed. The heroes, whose image may be in professional hands, are always due to change. Inclusion may depend on silhouette, symptoms or situations – all qualities tending to mutate but though the figures are expendable, their myth-quality is highly charged, pro temps.

45   Robyn Denny, Ralph Rumney and Richard Smith, 'environment', *ARK*, 24, Winter 1959, Royal College of Art, London, pp.v–vi.
46   Ralph Rumney, 'The Leaning Tower of Venice' *ARK*,

24, Winter 1959, Royal College of Art, London, p.vi.
47   Ibid, p.vi.
48   Anonymous, 'Le bruit et la fureur', *Internationale Situationniste*, (1979).
49   Robyn Denny and Richard

Smith, 'Ev'ry Which Way', *ARK*, 24, Winter 1959, Royal College of Art, London, p.v.
50   Robyn Denny and Richard Smith, 'Project for a Film: Ev'ry-Which-Way', p.v.

The 'myth-quality' of the 'heroes' of pop culture, set down from their 'pedestals' to inhabit our world of screens, pages and posters, mirrors the similarly 'charged' intentionality of Smith and Denny's highly expressive, gestural work, here found reproduced in the pages of a magazine as opposed to the gilt frames of the gallery. By Rumney's reckoning, the 'silhouette, symptoms or situations' of the cinema was the most powerful frame of reference.

HEADS 'LARGER THAN LIFE'

In 1984, Rumney listed the three major 'themes' that he observed to have obsessed him throughout his working life: the 'female body', 'abstraction' and his 'head-shaped pictures'.[51] For Alloway, it was this meeting of hard-edge abstraction and an emergent pop culture that marked out Rumney's work from that of his peers: 'hard and two-tone in colour, influenced by Ellsworth Kelly, but forming silhouettes of heads, elongated like the 'Scope screen or rounded at the edges like TV'.[52] The invention of the Cinema-Scope camera in 1953 by the president of 20th Century Fox, Spyros P. Skouras, for the purposes of shooting widescreen films, transformed the idea of spectatorship. In 1959, Alloway had coined the term 'Cinemascope aesthetics' to describe a new phenomena in the visual arts, inspired by this dramatic expansion in the field of vision.[53] This was noted by other artists; the painter William Green observed that he always sat in the front row of CinemaScope films, attending to the utter disintegration of forms and play of scale.[54] Creating a feedback loop between the 'real and the projected'.

CinemaScope, however, was not met without a critical unease. In a 1957 review of three continental films by Arthur Knight for *Saturday Review*, the CinemaScope camera is merely the device by which directors may achieve a certain degree of 'pictorial embellishment'.[55] The expansive capacity of the camera is observed to usurp the content of these films, in which it becomes 'almost too clear that the whole point of the plot was the excuse it provided to spread forth these vistas of exotic and beautiful lands'.[56] When the lens is turned on urban environments, it is viewed as an attempt to 'search out life [...] and throw it on the screen without

apology or moral stricture'. The film *Stella* however, to which Knight finally turns his critical gaze, sets the film 'almost entirely in the streets, the cafes, the markets, and the ugly tenement flats of working-class Athens'. For Knight, it is the distorted widescreen close ups of the distressed female protagonist's face that reveal the true potential of the technology.

From the walls of Rumney's apartment on the Quai de Bourbon, Paris, his enigmatic 'Heads' glowered. Two of his largest 'Head' pictures, *Head on a Floor* and *Striped Head*, (both from c.1961) were, for a time, the backdrop to the family home. During his 'taschiste' phase, he had painted the likeness of his own head in *Self Portrait* (1957). Whorls of ink are spread across a bare canvas, in both deliberate strokes and random spatters. The marks curve and merge to form shadowed eyes, the lines of cheekbones, pursed lips, flattened hair. It is an ambivalent portrait – the gestural nature of the marks are not explicit enough to be self-affirming, yet their fluidity conveys the charged experience of its making. In keeping with the style that informed his pictures for the pivotal exhibition 'Metavisual, Taschiste, Abstract: Painting in England Today' at Redfern Gallery of the same year, Rumney had developed his own peculiar blend of Taschism – one which worked with colour as much as with evocative, unpredictable mark-making. Rex Nankivell, the owner of the gallery, had given over the entire ground floor to Rumney's canvases. Exhibited alongside some of the most successful artists of the 1950s, such as Patrick Heron, Ben Nicholson, Victor Pasmore and William Gear, Rumney was the most heavily featured artist in the exhibition, with fourteen paintings compared to Heron's twelve, Nicholson's four, Pasmore's four and Gear's ten.[58]

By the beginning of the 1960s, Rumney had produced many more 'Heads', and was asked to write an explorative piece on this compulsion by Alloway for the first issue of a projected journal, *Number*. 'The Shape of Heads to Come' is an 'explanation', penned by Rumney, which attempts to situate new painting in the appropriate historical 'climate'.[69]

> The two most significant factors in the present evolution of the human image are CinemaScope lenses and applied Science Fiction (as opposed to applied Science). Anti-radiation garments, aluminium suits for firemen, Robbie the Robot, telephotos, closeups of faces six-feet high on screens forty feet wide; this is the stuff of which heads are made.[60]

A head blown up, flooded with technicolour, transformed by the constituent technologies of its epoch, is overwhelmed by its own spectacle. Today the head, Rumney asserts, 'as a large coloured shape on a larger coloured background is such a symbol'.[61] The head has become representative of the epoch, and taken on a cultural immediacy – spread across the widescreen, pasted up on the billboard, filling the pages and television advertisement slots. Our own heads are Rumney's heads, lost in the enormity of their composition, refracted across multiple peripheral points of concentration and faced with the analogical maze of modern life. This is a life that demanded the use of new objects, the management of visual

51   Ralph Rumney, *The Map is not the Territory*, p.149.
52   Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop Art', p.52.
53   Nigel Whiteley, *Art and Pluralism: Lawrence Alloway's Cultural Criticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.95–98.
54   Nigel Whiteley, *Art and Pluralism: Lawrence Alloway's Cultural Criticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.72–77.
55   Arthur Knight, 'The Mov-
ies: CinemaScope Without Tears' *The Saturday Review* (16 March 1957), p.27.
56   Arthur Knight, 'The Movies: CinemaScope Without Tears' *The Saturday Review* (16 March 1957), p.27.
57   Michèle Bernstein, 'Ralph Rumney: La vie artiste', *Ralph Rumney (1934–2002)*, 1 September 2010, Galerie lara vincy, Paris. <http://www.lara-vincy.com/ralph-rumney-en/biographie/> [12 November 2014]
58   *Metavisual, Tachiste,*
Abstract: Painting in England Today ed. Denys Sutton, exh. cat. (London: Redfern Gallery, 1957).
69   Ralph Rumney, unpublished typescript, 'The Shape of Heads to Come', Lawrence Alloway Papers 1935–2003, 2003. M46, 26/5, pp.1–3, Getty Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
60   Ralph Rumney, 'The Shape of Heads to Come', p.3.
61   Ralph Rumney, 'The Shape of Heads to Come', p.3.

cues, the perception of new data, the ability to waver between fact and invention, between subject and self. In 1957, for a catalogue statement, Rumney had written himself out of the equation of his paintings:

> An act of creation must be autonomous and independent of the creator [...] a work of art [...] must not rely on the personality of its creator for its impact [...] The artist seeks to eliminate his personality in his work [...] The power of a work of art rests in its subject. The subject is independent of all formal qualities and becomes a violent and powerful entity in its own right.[62]

What if the subject mirrors the self? In 1994, Ralph Rumney slowly and deliberately pasted portrait photographs across a white card. *The 'mes' of yesteryear*, a chronology of an evolving identity, catalogues eight different Ralphs from the years 1957 to 1991.[63] 'PLUS CA CHANGE...' he declares with irony, as the hairline visibly recedes, the austerity of fashion slackens, and the gaze becomes more resolute. Ridiculing the arbitrary passage of time in this shifting self-portrait of portraits, he nonetheless evokes the remainder of the French adage across the ellipsis of his title: 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'; 'The more things change, the more they stay the same'. The changes made visible by age and appearance are superficial, the remoulding of surface: his face may have changed but the resolve of 'l'artiste' did not.

1957