

VAPOR

ART

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IDEAS

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Caroline Tisdall Interview
George Wyllie Interview
Krzysztof Wodiczko
The Assault on Culture
Adorno
Pornography and Eroticism
A Neoist Story
Edge 88
Video at the N.R.L.A. and Riga
Marion Coutts
Graham Harwood
Ivan Unwin

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VARIANT aims to:

document new areas of artistic endeavor in Scotland
discuss art in a social and political context

promote diversity through experimental art

VARIANT welcomes contributions in areas of art, ideas and theory. Artists' items/pages are also sought. Advance publicity for events is required if they are to be covered adequately. Galleries and organisations are asked to place VARIANT on their mailing lists. Unsolicited material cannot be guaranteed publication, though the editor will endeavor to reply to all items of correspondence. An SAE should be enclosed for return of material/photographs.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Douglas Aubrey is an artist and co-member of video outfit Pictorial Heroes. He lives in Glasgow/

Vera Body is an artist and editor of *Infermental*, Europe's video magazine produced on video. Hungarian, she is now

based in Cologne/William Clark is an artist currently involved in Transmission Gallery. He lives in Glasgow/Karen Eliot is a multiple name/Peter Gilmour graduated from Glasgow School of Art in '88 and he lives in Glasgow/Richard Gunn is a writer and researcher who is involved in *Common Sense*, a self-produced philosophical magazine. He lives in Edinburgh/Murdo McDonald is a reviewer and teacher who lives in Edinburgh/Charles Stephens is a writer and researcher who lives in Liverpool/Peter Suchin is a writer and abstract painter who lives in Leeds/Jenny Turner was born in Aberdeen and lives and works in Edinburgh/Craig Richardson is currently undertaking an M.A. fine art course at Glasgow School of Art/Gordon Muir is a painter who lives in Glasgow/Lorna Waite is a writer whose concerns are feminism and mental health. She lives in Edinburgh.

Editorial Quotes

IT is true that art, like religion, arises from unsatisfied desire."
John Zerzn, 'The Case Against Art'.

"The current uncertainty as to the precise function of art in our society is, of course, not a feature restricted to a self-enclosed art system, though the problem is often, mistakenly, understood only in the context of the support-structure, in the context of the individual artist's relationship with the market, with institutions, critics, curators and fellow artists. Rather, it is symptomatic of a fugitive and unclear relationship between a changed structure of developing social and political realities and the essentially unchanged assumptions of an art-community that draws its identity and its rationale from the past, from the tradition of art rather than from the realities of lived experience."

Kenneth Coutts-Smith, 'Role Art and Social Context' in "Performance By Artists"

"in the same way as feminism as a movement aims at the revolution of social reality, so feminism as a theory (and each is indispensable to each other) aims at a revolution in knowledge"
Christine Delphy

"is adding women to art history the same as producing feminist art history?"
Grizelda Pollock

"eroticism taken as a whole is an infraction of the laws of taboos, it is a human activity"
Georges Bataille

"the truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e. of those who established it) to define what is real. In this rupture, which is the achievement of the aesthetic form, the fictitious world of art appears a true reality"
Herbert Marcuse

"Certainly, those situationist, primitivist, avant-gardist and populist projects which work against the museum (or any other guardian of high culture), are only ever successful to the extent that they re-present themselves in another frame. One may find the most powerful cultural residues where art forgets its very name, but there are few who remain amnesiacs for very long."

Ross Hartley 'Where the Sidewalk Ends' in "Outer Site" (Five Contemporary Artspace Projects in Australia)

"The premise of Variant, as I read it, is this:
The existence, in current conditions, of an artwork, a performance, a piece of documentation, an exhibition, a video or a film is INHERENTLY problematic. Unless and until the conditions, which permit, allow, license or sponsor the existence of 'art', in the contemporary space of commodities and naked power relations, are comprehended, made naked and, if possible, violated or transcended, there is no possibility of communication, aesthetic or otherwise".
Charles Stephens from a letter to Variant 29.7.88

"The politics of distribution cannot be separated from those of production, nor of consumption. Where an image is distributed will effect who will see it, in what context, etc. It is obviously important to sort out whether an image is for private or public consumption, whether it will be seen in a gallery or magazine, etc. It needs to be asked whether an image's validity or usefulness depends on how an audience will use or interpret an image. For example, does the risk of appropriation by men invalidate producing erotic imagery for women?"
Kathy Myers in Lookin On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media

"a sovereign state has it within its power to monitor the effects of non-natives in its administrative structure. Scotland, not being a sovereign state will just have to put up with it. After all, to the official administrative mind, an Englishman in Scotland is not an outsider. It is just as much his country as a Scot's, except that, for convenience's sake, the name is changed to Britain"

Frank Kuppner, in Cencrasus, Autumn 88

'I SEE THE LAND OF MACBETH'

JOSEPH BEUYS AND SCOTLAND (1970-1986)



Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh 1983. Photo: Roderick Taylor.

Charles Stephens

JOSEPH Beuys made eight visits to Scotland between 1970 and 1986. They were the consequence of Beuys' meeting with Richard Demarco, in the former's Dusseldorf home, in January 1970. Although this meeting formed a part of Demarco's preparations for the seminal 'Strategy: get arts' exhibition of artists from Dusseldorf, which took place at the Edinburgh College of Art in August 1970, its character and quality were of a markedly different nature to most of the communications which were exchanged between Beuys and the international art world. When Demarco and Beuys spoke together in Beuys' home that January, it was not about the latest fashions and movements of European and American art. Demarco, according to the account of the episode which he published in the Beuys memorial edition of *Studio* in 1986, showed Beuys a collection of postcards of Scotland. The cards showed images of 'heather and heath; mountain stream and waterfall; forests and fields; deer, sheep and highland cattle; the midsummer sunset over islands, Celtic and Pictish standing stones among bluebells, gorse and broom.' Demarco continued his account thus, 'after a long silence, Beuys remarked: "I see the land of Macbeth; so when shall we two meet again in thunder, lightning or in rain, when the hurly burly's done, when the battle's fought and won." As my idea of a blasted heath was Rannoch Moor, I spoke of the Road to the Isles which he must surely take to the land of 'Tir-na-nog', that of the ever-young, where the Gaelic language in song and verse could be heard. As we spoke of Birnam Wood and Dunsinane, and Castle Cawdor and the Kingdom of Fife, I knew he would come to Scotland without delay.' The arrangement had been made. Beuys would come to Scotland.

Almost as soon as Beuys arrived in Scotland for the first time, in May 1970, Demarco took him to his vision of the blasted heath of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', to Rannoch Moor. Soon after they arrived on Rannoch Moor, Beuys performed an 'action'. ('Action' was a concept which Beuys

always preferred to 'performance' or 'happening' when describing his own work.) Beuys simply buried a lump of margarine in the emptiness of Rannoch Moor. In a landscape which was seemingly inhospitable to men, it was redundant and ridiculous for an artist to attempt to impose his own small individuality. Beuys was content to acknowledge the reality of the moor, at that time one of the last untouched European wildernesses, by simply donating to it a little warm energy. It was enough. The 'action' was carefully 'documented'. A film of the day's events was made.

Later that summer, at the Edinburgh College of Art, Beuys performed his 'Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony'. In the course of this long, elaborated ritual, Beuys' ideas about the nature of energy, his dialogue with the animal world, his presence in Scotland and the resonances of Rannoch Moor, which he deemed to be Celtic, were revealed in a dense, and strangely beautiful pattern. The images and physical material of Beuys' ritual seemed to possess particular meaning and weight in Scotland. Elsewhere they might well have generated more stupefaction than sense. Beuys performed his 'Scottish Symphony' in the life-class room of the Edinburgh College of Art. The desks and floor were splattered with the paint of art students. It was a place for working artists, not for exhibitions. The film of his 'action' on Rannoch Moor played, from time to time, across a screen at the back of the room. With the instinct of the artist, Beuys understood that his place was at the periphery, Scotland, and not at the centre, New York, Paris or London. The 'Scottish Symphony' was a major Beuys 'action', duly recorded as such on pp 202-206 of Gotz Adriani, Winifred Konnertz and Karin Thomas' 'Joseph Beuys: Life and Works' (1979). The 'Scottish Symphony' was also his first public 'action' in the English-speaking world.

Beuys was, in many respects, as much a teacher as an artist, in the conventional, and

narrow, usage of that word. At the time of the 'Scottish Symphony', he was professor of monumental sculpture at Dusseldorf Academy of Art. As a teacher, Beuys sought to address the whole man and the whole woman, in the completeness of their spiritual, ethical and material being. He was also concerned with the social order and with the relationship between that order and the natural world - animal, mineral and vegetable. The philosophy of Beuys was as much, or perhaps more, concerned with the nature of energy as with the opacities of human psychology or the abstract structures of socio-economic relations. In this respect, Beuys was a direct heir of the German tradition of the '*Lebensphilosophie*' which had been articulated by earlier German thinkers such as Goethe and Rudolf Steiner. Both men were profoundly respected by Beuys and their ideas exerted a considerable influence over the development of his own thought. Like Goethe and Steiner, Beuys sought, without respite, to draw exact and precise connections between his personal vision and the realities of the contemporary world. He sought to awaken warmth, creativity and light in the hearts and minds of those who listened to him.

Beuys did not wish to impart knowledge or information. He desired to demonstrate methods of changing consciousness and thence reality. His purpose was the re-working and re-forming of social reality in a direction which was warmer, more human and more creative. This activity he called 'social sculpture'. It was the exact antithesis of its maleficent contemporary, 'social engineering'. Beuys' ambition was to release the creativity which lay dormant within each individual.

Like many others, Beuys was convinced that the contemporary world was spinning out of control. However, unlike many, Beuys saw no cause for pessimism or despair. He was not mesmerised by power. He was not scared by intimations of apocalypse. Beuys knew, and found strength in the knowledge, that mankind, and mankind alone, could redeem the plight of the world. There was no need for the intervention of a 'deus ex machina'. As far as Beuys was concerned, mankind possessed the resource of its own salvation. That resource was creativity. In Beuys' understanding, the task facing mankind was the discovery of the means of activating that creativity.

This confidence in the salvatory potential of human creativity underlay Beuys' much misunderstood statement that 'everyone is an artist'. In politics, it led him to a radical commitment to participatory democracy. In economics, it led him to a vigorous distrust of the abstractions of banking and money and to an espousal of co-operative values. Like Marx, and many other radical economic thinkers, Beuys believed that value derived from labour and material rather than capital. As an artist, Beuys naturally focused upon the power of creativity. His extension of his ideas about artistic creativity to the fields of politics and economics might appear jejune. However, his rigorous commitment to participatory democracy, together with his attempt to displace capital and money from the centre of



Richard Demarco and Joseph Beuys 1974. Photo: courtesy R. Demarco.

his economic discourse, gave a particular resonance to his ideas. This was further enhanced by the form taken by his discourses.

Many of the principal metaphors of Beuys' discourses derived from his philosophy of energy. Beuys believed that it was warmth, rather than form or complexity, which distinguished life from death. Substances such as fat, fur and felt were cherished by Beuys because of their ability to conserve heat. In his sculptures, and also in his discourses, he set these substances and ideas against ineluctability of entropy. Beuys was deeply concerned about the sensitive and sustainable utilisation of energy. He was an ecological philosopher by instinct and by conviction.

It should come as no surprise that a man as radical in his intentions as Beuys should run into conflict with the established educational system. In 1972, he was dismissed from his professorship at Dusseldorf. The authorities gave a number of reasons for Beuys' dismissal. One of the most suggestive was the charge that he refused to apply the prescribed selection criteria to students who wished to enrol in his classes. In keeping with his educational principles, Beuys accepted anyone who wished to attend his classes. In Germany, such behaviour was unheard of. However, the ambience of Beuys' classes was exactly what the post-68 generation of German student radicals was searching for. Beuys combined, in his open teaching methods and in his person, a profound humanism, a commitment to creative freedom and an explicit radical intent. At the same time, he utterly eschewed the negative and destructive violence that was sweeping the Federal Republic in the wake of the Baader-Meinhof affair. Between 1968 and 1972, Beuys' classes were packed out. They became seminars of the emergent non-dogmatic left in the Federal Republic. Consequent to all of this, Beuys' dismissal became a cause celebre amongst the student and radical movement in the Federal Republic. Demonstrations, petitions, situationist events, scandal, non-violent confrontations with the police, avid media attention and general uproar ensued.

It was the spur of his dismissal that precipitated the most creative period in Beuys' activity as an educator. In 1972, he formed, in collaboration with Heinrich Boll, the 'Free International University', to which he dedicated much of his energy for the years which followed. The FIU was interdisciplinary, open to the participation of anyone, not associated with any dogmatic line and committed to the integration of creativity, economics and politics. It was also concerned with peripheral and unconsidered parts of Europe such as Northern Ireland and Sicily and with the lives and needs of marginal groups of the European population such as prisoners and migrant workers. The FIU was a grass-roots alternative to portentous bodies such as the Club of Rome and the ever-proliferating plethora of EEC commissions and talking shops. It also offered a continuous critique of, and a working model of an alternative to, conventional forms of higher and university education.

The practice of the Free International University was non-hierarchical. It was based on relationship and dialogue rather than the privilege of expertise and bodies of knowledge. It operated in regions far removed from the conventional educational, conference and colloquy spaces of the time. The FIU manifest in a derelict building in Edinburgh, in Belfast, in Sicily or in an office on a Dusseldorf shopping street. A significant part of the agenda of what is now called 'green' politics was discussed in the sessions of the FIU during the 1970's. The FIU was concerned with the decentralisation of power, with appropriate technology, with

central to Beuys' work from 1972 until his death in 1986, were made available to those in Scotland who wished to explore the possibilities. No comparable opportunity was available in England or the United States until much later, if at all.

In the summer of 1973, Beuys returned to Scotland in order to give a twelve-hour lecture to Demarco's 'Edinburgh Arts' summer school. Beuys spoke, amongst other things, about the forgotten democrat and visionary of the French Revolution, Anacharsis Kloots. When he was a boy, Beuys had played in the grounds of Kloots' castle in Kleve. Kloots' philosophy of universal



Joseph Beuys on Salisbury Craggs. Photo: courtesy R. Demarco.

"Beuys did not wish to impart knowledge or information. He desired to demonstrate ways of changing consciousness and thence reality."

resistance to nuclear energy, with questions of non-violence and with radical analyses of the nature of punishment and criminality. In 1979, the FIU was one of the organisations which was involved in the process which led to the founding of Die Grunen. Beuys was therefore directly involved in the creation of Die Grunen. He was a parliamentary candidate in the 1981 Federal Election. In 1983, Beuys left Die Grunen because he considered that they had become just another political party, not much different, in his opinion, from the SPD. It was the SPD Education minister of North Rhein-Westphalia, and later Party Leader, Johannes Rau, who had dismissed Beuys from Dusseldorf Academy in 1972.

Beuys' first encounter with Scotland, in the summer of 1970, had taken the form of an 'avant-garde' performance of a peculiarly rebarbative and uncompromising kind. His subsequent visits, all of which took place after his dismissal from Dusseldorf Academy and the founding of the FIU, took on a more overtly pedagogical character. During these visits, the ideas and practices of the FIU, which were so

democracy was not unlike Beuys' own. Kloots was executed by the Committee of Public Safety. In 1980, Beuys was once again in Edinburgh, this time with other members of the FIU. Richard Demarco organised a three-day long session of the FIU which took place in Gladstone's Court, an empty building in Edinburgh's Canongate. These discussions introduced people in Scotland to the radical critique of Western society which had underpinned the formation of 'Die Grunen' in the previous year. Nuclear power, solar energy, appropriate technology, education, penal reform, human rights and direct democracy were discussed, alongside the other subjects such as Northern Ireland and the future of work. The proceedings of the FIU at Gladstone's Court in Edinburgh were videoed and then despatched by express train for the benefit of viewers in London's Institute of Contemporary Arts.

During his visits to Scotland between 1974 and 1982, one place had a particularly close association with Beuys. It was the Edinburgh Poorhouse at Forrest Hill. Forrest Hill is situated

in a district of Edinburgh which is filled with intriguing resonances. At the top of Forrest Hill is Edinburgh University's Department of Machine Intelligence. At the bottom, where Forrest Hill joins Forrest Road, is Sandy Bell's. A few doors down was, until recently, John Calder's 'Better Books'. At the corner of Forrest Road and Candlemaker Row is Blackfriar's Church where the Covenant was signed in 1638. Opposite Blackfriar's Church was the old Edinburgh Bedlam where the poet Fergusson died in 1774. The Poorhouse was an appropriate place for Beuys to make his most personal statements about Scotland.

place of unique quality, a veritable temple. The Three Pots which Beuys used in the 'action' can now be found in the National Museum of Modern Art in Edinburgh, but that is hardly the point. Once again, this time in the ignored and decrepit heart of old Edinburgh, Beuys was making it clear that his art was not to be found in museums or under floodlights, but in the darkest, dingiest, most humble and most human of places.

A few weeks after the 'Three Pots' action, Beuys spoke alongside Buckminster Fuller at Demarco's 'Black and White Oil Conference'

1970's, defined the inadequacies of the European art world, were turned, by a disconcerting alchemy, into a prestigious art object which was cocooned in a portentous new museum dedicated to the embalming of art objects. These doors, metamorphosed into 'found objects' and ironically consecrated by Beuys, are the sole, sad relic of the Edinburgh Poorhouse. The irony of the situation is crudely obvious, but no less staggering for that. The irony is not at Beuys' expense. His sole adjustment to the doors had been the red light. He had, in effect, turned the Poorhouse doors into a warning, for those that cared to see, about everything which would surround them in their new, sanitized home. Red indicates danger. It also signifies the prostitution of those who practise the techniques which set The Poorhouse doors in the reliquary of the Moenchengladbach museum. The beneficiary of all this, by the gift of Beuys, was the impoverished and struggling Demarco Gallery which was still in the grimmest of straits after the debacle of 1980 when the Scottish Arts Council had, for opaque reasons, first cut, and then withheld, its annual grant. The sale of the Poorhouse doors enabled Demarco, without whose agency Beuys would never have come near to Scotland, to struggle on.



Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh in 1974. Photo: courtesy R. Demarco.

in August of 1972 and 1973, Demarco had arranged for this extraordinary space to act as a venue for Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre Company's memorable performances of Witkiewicz's plays 'The Water Hen' and 'Lovelies and Dowdies'. In 1972, the Poorhouse was ramshackle, decrepit, damp and dark. It had been most recently used as a plumber's workshop. The Poorhouse was not really a building at all. Once, it had been a narrow lane which ran along the sides of the Edinburgh Bedlam and Workhouse. Whatever the Poorhouse may once have been, by the 1970's it was not an authenticated, bona-fide for contemporary art, like, for example, the Edinburgh Fruitmarket Gallery. Kantor would have had no use for such a safe location. The Poorhouse was no clean white space. It was a site of work and of human toil and, consequently, the proper place for an artist such as Kantor to deploy his forces.

which had, naturally enough, been convened in the Poorhouse. This conference, which took place during the 1974 Edinburgh Festival, was one of the few non-partisan public debates about the implications of the North Sea Oil boom which seriously questioned the assumptions that lay behind the energy and environmental policies of the Wilson government vis-a-vis the North Sea. North Sea Oil was also the single most important issue of Scottish politics since 1945. Thanks to his association with Demarco, Beuys found himself right at the heart of contemporary Scottish life. The Poorhouse was not an air-conditioned ghetto of art.

There is one work of Beuys which embodies, with a studied and harsh irony, his activity as an artist in Scotland. As with everything else that he did there, this intervention was facilitated by Demarco. In 1982, the Poorhouse was finally demolished to make way for a block of flats. Before its demise, its doors, still covered with posters of the remarkable events which had taken place within its walls during the 1970's, were carefully removed. Beuys added a red, warning light to the Poorhouse doors. They were then processed by the international art market, purchased by the Moenchengladbach Museum and duly installed in its grand new premises. The doors of the Edinburgh Poorhouse, a place which had, during the

A few weeks before his death, on 26 January of 1986, Beuys agreed to be in Scotland for the opening of Demarco's new gallery in Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh. He would have consecrated it as a place for art. We cannot tell what he would have done. All of his acts made complete sense, but they were often unexpected and baffling at the moment of their unfolding. Perhaps he would have made a transcendent ritual like that by which he had honoured the Poorhouse in June of 1974. It is pointless to wonder.

On 27 September 1986, Demarco led a group of about thirty people to Rannoch Moor to pay tribute to Beuys' love of Scotland. George Wyllie, who had visited Beuys' Dusseldorf studio in the early 1980's, erected a wooden spire close to the site where Beuys had donated a piece of margarine to the moor in May of 1970. A stone bearing Beuys' name and dates of his birth and death was suspended from the centre of the spire. In time, wood, string and stone would, like the margarine and the body of the artist, be reabsorbed by the earth. It was a gesture that was consistent with Beuys' feelings about Scotland.

Beuys shared Kantor's appreciation for this remarkable place. In June of 1974, he made, what must be described as, an act of homage to the Poorhouse. In a long ritual of care and attention, he marked out the space with first one, then two, and finally three, black pots. This 'action', so like and yet so different from, that which he had taken at the Edinburgh College of Art in 1970, was a ritual of respect and worship. Beuys was indicating that the Poorhouse was a

In his contribution to the section devoted to Beuys in Contemporary Artists (London 1983), Alastair Mackintosh wrote 'one must not hope to understand Beuys if one has seen him only in the centres of culture, the great museums, the private dealers. One must catch him somewhere where people still talk to each other, still get drunk to forget, where they couldn't give a damn about modern art. There he makes sense, there people warm to him, but not in New York, Paris or London.'

Between 1970 and 1986, Scotland was such a place.

CAROLINE TISDALL INTERVIEW

by Craig Richardson and Peter Gilmour

Caroline Tisdall is a critic and writer living in London. She is the major chronicler of the work of Joseph Beuys and has published a substantial book on the artist and directed a film about his life and work which was televised in 1987. She was one of the few activists who helped formulate the ideas for the "Report to the European Community on the feasibility of founding a 'Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research' in Dublin" from which she writes:

"In every field of activity and in many countries there are individuals who doubt the viability of the totally specialist attitude and who advocate an interdisciplinary approach which can more effectively parallel the complexity of society while achieving an overall outlook. Europe is remarkably lacking in any facilities for the regular discussion and comparison of such ideas, based on the concept of a permanent conference, development of research, and dialogue with the community, involving its direct participation."

The concept of the Free University as an alternative model of education seems increasingly urgent as aspects of life today become more undemocratic and rigidly specialised towards the uncreative and profit-orientated. In the following interview, Craig Richardson and Peter Gilmour talked about the legacy of Beuys and of the F.I.U., which, as Tisdall stresses needs more energy and participation today.

C.R. *How do you envisage Beuys' theories, i.e. Social Sculpture, advancing towards the end of the Twentieth Century?*

C.T. I think many of his ideas were ideas that were current or that people have had before, but I think that the energy needed to dare to embark on trying to call something 'social sculpture' is important . . . It needs people, it needs energy, it needs a new generation of people - not people who were tied to what Beuys said or what Beuys did, the same as what Beuys said about Marx or any other state philosopher before, ideas only continue by changing or developing . . . I think his energy was a great loss but I think his ideas, the political ideas already existed and what he did was state them with enormous energy and inventiveness and in new forms, such as the 7000 oaks (7000 Eichen, 1982-1987, Kassel) and how effectively that spread through the community. It's a mobilising factor and that's a difficult energy to replace, but if the ideas depended on his person and him being alive then they would have been shaky ideas anyway - if they just stopped because a person is dead. One of his students, Johannes Stüttgen, even feels that with Beuys' death the ideas are released from that physical persona in the sense that the ideas are not just the property of one man and people had begun to equate them too much with the 'guy with the hat'.

Philosophically the roots of a lot of Beuys' thought lie in so many traditions from Christianity, through Theosophy, through Humanitarian Socialism, all sorts of things . . . They are not his property. The formulation of them in spectacular things like the theory of social sculpture - that's his formulation of ideas that are current. If you think about it things like Bakunin's "Republic of " are also theories of money, productivity, flowing through the community, and philosophically, as an artist, he also belongs to the European tradition that art is spiritual as well as material. That obviously links

back to Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, all sorts of other people. I'm sure people will see that in the future, kind of art-historically.

C.R. *I suppose 'art-historically' your role is important in the reading of the work*

C.T. I always hoped that it wasn't 'art history' . . . I never regarded it as this - I always try to write about its subject, not an 'art'. My interest was basically from the fact that writing about Beuys one didn't have to write about 'art'. Maybe that is the great loss, like someone who was actually practicing all sorts of things encompassing all forms of human knowledge within his work.

C.R. *Considering you were, and still are, one of the most important analysts or chroniclers of his work, how do you see your own role?*

C.T. There are different functions aren't there, I mean the important things he started, like the Free International University; Heinrich Boll's dead too (co-founder with Beuys of the F.I.U.) and that needs people with a different experience because it's . . . as a developing thing its weakness was that it was too much associated with one great figure. The whole essence of anything that is interdisciplinary and involving all different levels of creativity, activity, is that everyone has a role.

C.R. *You pointed out in your E.E.C. proposal (proposal to the E.E.C. for the creation of a Free University in Dublin) that it wasn't just a Joseph Beuys Studio, it was going to be much larger.*

C.T. We looked at all sorts of different models that existed historically up to the time it was written in the early '70's, from all kinds of things, education, even reform institutes - all sorts of things were going on. That was a problem for him too in that people always looked for him in the spreading of ideas.

P.G. *Do you think the public responded to Beuys himself or his art? Do you think, for*

example that if he had not been there in his 'public self' then his sculptures would not have worked so powerfully?

C.T. I think that now he is dead and the way his art if fought over, illustrates the danger when he's not there to represent the work - people take them as art in the traditional sense. I think it is great that a new generation are interested in the ideas with no financial incentive . . .

. . . Beuys did have a very optimistic belief that the meaning of the pieces was in the works and that could be unearthed. His attitude to museums was that objects placed in museums became relics - they were relics in the making, that's why the information side is also very important. Do you think that museums have a plot to formalise things at the expense of meaning?

C.R. *You mean unintended, meaning. It could be that a lot of the political meaning was just messy and inconvenient.*

C.T. I think so too.

C.R. *It's the idea that nameplates or whatever are inconvenient.*

C.T. Unaesthetic.

C.R. *The lighting being more important than background content or where it came from, and that has been lost for that work ("Infiltration - Homogen") because from a performance and the ideas behind it, it's so much more beautiful than just the piece it is.*

C.T. But there's another example which is interesting - the "Tram-Stop" piece, that was installed in its living form in Venice as a monument, upright, and then it was cast in copper-bronze as an edition and he said that piece will never stand again. It was the same with the "Honey-Pump". The "Honey-Pump" which symbolised all that activity, he



deliberately emphasised that it was dead, he was dealing with paradox in his own works, and when "Tallow" was taken to the Munchengladbach Museum they got in a terrible state because he wouldn't say how he wanted it organised, he said just dump it, in a flamboyant way, just dump twenty tons of fat, so he was playing with that.

C.R. *I read that the work wasn't to be viewed as relics of the past but artifacts to be viewed for a utopian future.*

C.T. The idea of Fonds, the deposits of material, huge chunks of material - "Tallow" (20 tons of fat in five sections) is a sort of fond. He was joking as well, if there was a kind of emergency in the future you could eat that "Tallow". The copper and the iron fonds - there's a fortune in copper and iron there!

C.R. *There's a certain kind of utopian push in the drawings too - they now look very old, and its obvious they seem that way, but they do have a look of very shamanistic things, but he was trying to refute the notion of the shaman. He was being an imitation shaman.*

C.T. I don't think he believed he was a shaman I think he was appearing as an enchanter, as he said in my film.

C.R. *I thought he was only being an enchanter to show up what was missing.*

C.T. Well I suppose it depends on what you mean by shaman. A shaman is a person who uses material in a magical or mystical way.

P.G. *I understood it to be the shaman as a kind of healer as well.*

C.T. Yes, very much so and that is fundamental - the idea of healing the wound in modern society.

P.G. *His work was about healing the wounds of materialism, getting over that, and killing that.*

C.T. And the corresponding divide that that has caused, yes that's great. But he often used to say 'you're right, use the word shamanism, but only once'.

P.G. *It was also to make people think about the*

spiritual side of life, as opposed to the material.

C.T. That's right. We weren't around in the '50's and '60's in Germany but the whole drive was based upon material reconstruction and 'forget the past, don't think back for one moment we can't afford to'. (He used some Nazi and Catholic symbolism, including a Nazi salute in some early work).

C.R. *Could you talk about the Free University, your role in it, Beuys' role in it, your proposal to the E.E.C.?*

C.T. It started with the opening of his class. He'd seen the need in Germany, generally, for a forum where ideas could be discussed in society and from where they could grow. At that time in the early seventies there were all sorts of ideas buzzing around, ideas like you could talk to Lucas Aerospace Workers Combine, the urges behind it were all the same, but there is no place, no organised place, and they tried to start one. Beuys and Boll worried about education becoming privileged . . . They attributed a lot of



violent activity and criminality and ultimately the Red Brigade and the Red Army Faction in Germany to the idea that potentially idealistic people were excluded from a useful social life. Ideas which were innovative but which could turn destructive if they didn't find a platform - that's where Beuys and Boll continued to comment. Boll did a lot right down to daring to stand up and say a civilised society should treat people in a civilised manner. That was bold of them at that time.

C.R. *Issues of 'criminality' were quite a large part of the proposal.*

C.T. The general alienation of huge chunks of society and they were right, it is a colossal issue.

C.R. *How did you get involved in that, in setting up something in Dublin and the proposal you gave to the E.E.C.*

C.T. The proposal I gave to the E.E.C. went through Dahrendorf, he promoted it and the people who were interested in the E.E.C. were the German Liberal Party. The people who got involved in the Brussels part of the E.E.C. were all the periphery people in Europe.

C.R. *What different peripheral countries?*

C.T. The Republic of Ireland and Sicily. There



was a terrific delegation of Sicilian economists, all the bits that were really shoved off at the edges and places where petro-chemical industries were being dumped and regional funds weren't. That was where much of the interest came from. When the Beuys exhibition "Secret Block" went to Ireland lots of people said 'we want it (the F.I.U.) here'.

C.R. *Was this through the lectures that Beuys was doing around Ireland.*

C.T. Yes, we looked at various buildings including Kilmainham Hospital (Dublin), all sorts of places but the project foundered because in the end there weren't people to keep up the energy there on the spot, to drive it through and they all wanted Beuys really.

C.R. *Did you not have international contacts but then no input from . . . what side in Ireland?*

C.T. There was stacks of input from Ireland but there was no day to day, year long organisation. There's lots of people throughout Europe still in contact and these contacts came through these - it's a network still existing.

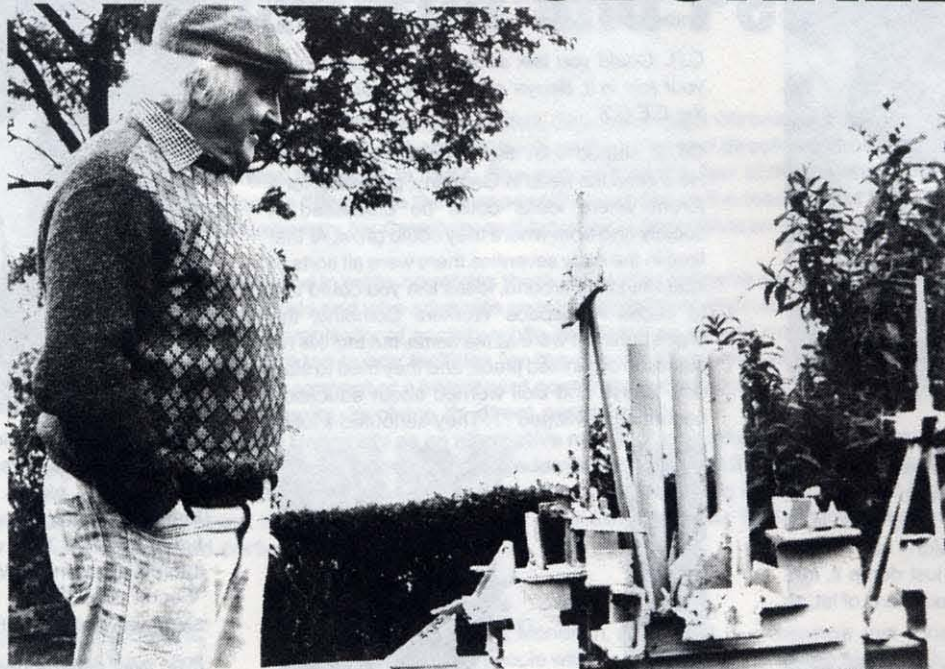
C.R. *So you don't think the climate has changed for that not to resurface in a larger way?*

C.T. The need is still there - it's even greater, the people are still there and there's a load of younger people still there too, but what it really needs is incredible ongoing energy from more than two people. There were three of us very actively involved and the demands were so enormous we got absolutely exhausted from 1973 to 1978.

C.R. *You don't see it as a failure now?*

C.T. No, not at all, the people are still there and there will always be lots more people . . . The difference between an institution and a network is that an institution, felt Beuys, needed a base and therefore needed permanent people. He kept running his studio in Dusseldorf Academy as an office (of the F.I.U.) - it just needs more people and more energy, year in, year out. Another kind of fatal flaw, if people start depending on the economic side of it for their living and who funds it, well is it self-funding?

GEORGE WYLLIE TALKING TO MURDO MACDONALD



George Wyllie in his garden (Holy Loch in background). Photo: Murdo MacDonald.

Beginnings

IT was to do with Ireland really. It has a human quality - you very much feel that you are yourself in Ireland, for better or for worse and in that respect it was a good sort of stock taking, a sort of cleansing agent, a retreat ... through things like Guinness and late nights and fights ... when I came back to Scotland - albeit that Scotland is much freer than say the South of England - all of a sudden it seemed so conservative and tight and I had this tremendous feeling (although I suppose I was only in my forties at that time) of growing old ... I felt I'm back here I'm in a steady job I've got a tweed jacket and that's about it. It was then I started this band, that was the beginning ... I thought I must break out of this. This would be about 1964. I started learning to paint and looking at art, going to galleries ... this was a dimension of life that had passed me by ... there was one exhibition of Italian sculpture in welded metal and I thought I can do that so I started making small sculptures.

And the most remarkable thing happened then: it's the purest thought I've ever had, I don't know how it came to me, it was an inspired thought. I thought at my age if you can't do something you really want to do for yourself, there's something wrong with your life ... if you can't really create something free from anyone else's requirements or thinking. So I decided to make ten objects at that time and just see what happened. It was like the old Chinese idea of the paintbrush being an extension of your arm, and I thought the welding torch in a way was the extension of my thinking. I kept thinking of Russian five year plans. I had to make ten and I did make them. These ten objects had a charmed life.

They were very tentative, they were lightweight metal ... ten tentative objects ... sounds like Paul Neagu doesn't it. They had to be light because my equipment was light ... I hadn't any burning equipment I just had oxy-acetylene, slow and light, the sort of stuff that you use for repairing car bodies and so on, and I got this idea of taking a sheet of metal and teasing it out. They were birdlike - I don't know why birds keep coming into my life. I gave them fancy titles, part of the business of being knocked out with the idea of making so called art ... Roget's Thesaurus was well thumbed at that time ... I came up with one lovely word "zetetic" it means finding out things by inquiry and it's a most appropriate word here and now. That was one of the better moments.

I ended up with of all things a crucifix. God knows why I made a crucifix ... I enjoyed making it. There I was with this jaggy crucifix and then I exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy and an architect bought it for a church in Barrow in Furness. I thought that was terrific. This would be about 1968. The whole thing was great. I then did some other things for commissions ... that was a bit of a nosedive from the purist point of view, being in the market. But I think it's good to be in market sometimes, it teaches you great discipline ... it also pushed you into new materials ... if something has to stand up outside, for example ... that's how I first got into stainless steel.

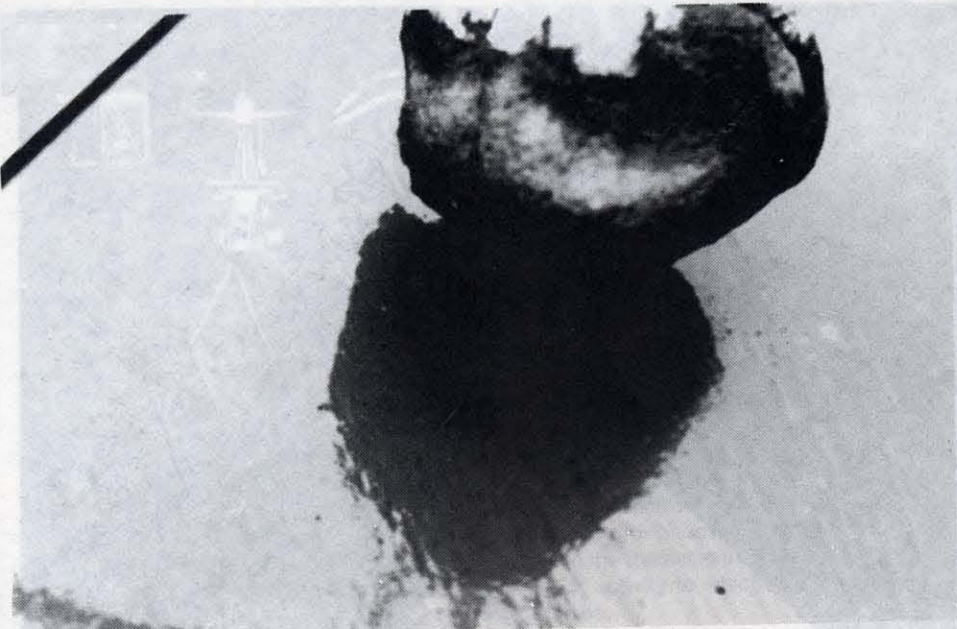
Philosophy

I entered into the art world freely, I had no tensions whatsoever, I had no directions

whatsoever, I was floating, I bobbed around like a cork in the ocean, I went up this creek and that creek and then I learned to motivate myself in certain directions and as you look at the art world you learn from it and of course being mature at the time I chose the things I wanted to learn ... not necessarily from painting and visual art but latterly from reading about them - the most recent one is the Adam Ferguson thing ... these are very important things ... the literary aspect related to the arts is not just important it's essential and what's wrong with a lot of visual arts is that the artists don't read anything. They only get away with it because the public are not up to analysing what they've done. You have to discard a lot of what passes for art. Maybe it was always like that. Maybe I am wrong. But there's something wrong with an education system that divorces the visual and the written.

I like the word "meaningful". It's a word that Beuys often used. I begin to be less inclined to accept some of the standards around, for example the recent Glasgow hype ... it demonstrates energy and there's something going for that but the way it was hyped up and is being hyped up, against the word "meaningful" it's not really good enough, it's not what it's about. It's a big confusing too, it pushes the big public of which I was once a part into wrong beliefs about art.

A Day Down a Goldmine was very important to me, it made me write things. I had been introduced to monetary reform in 1944 by a guy in the ship, the **Argonaut**, he was a social creditor, he got me started on monetary reform, I could always see the point of reforming money ... when I saw Beuys, an artist, declaring it, it was terrific, and it seemed so logical to me because



Spire by George Wylie.

of the institutions which control money ... money is a ticket that controls the release of energy and here they were controlling the energy of us all - and the way they control human energy is terrible - and I thought here's something to be examined. **A Day Down a Goldmine** started off with me being conscientious and feeling that since I'd got a big space at the Third Eye Centre I must do something with it, I musn't waste it ... so in a Scottish Calvinistic way I made it a meaningful exhibition and it was funny, it was meaningful and funny and therefore it became mildly satirical and that was a good thing to do ... although I went against all advice at that time ... I've never regretted doing the **Goldmine** and I still think it is a good statement.

Latterly the T.W.S.A. thing, **The Straw Locomotive**, was important too because it was a really edgy one, it could just as easily been a carnival event, it was very nearly that, that made it popular. It was a very gentle exercise in social sculpture, taking people through their own history and the cherry on the cake was that someone actually wrote a history about it - **Locomotive Building in Springburn** - it's a lovely book.

M.M.: How to you respond to the criticism that **The Straw Locomotive** is patronising?

G.W.: I never felt that and I obviously never intended it but I would have loved more serious comment about it at the time, I like cut and thrust arguments and I tried to introduce them myself because I thought **The Straw Locomotive** might throw up an answer. In fact it never threw up an answer. The only answer it threw up was that imagination has stultified through having been in a crest of the wave situation with locomotive building - we thought we knew it all and when a change happened for whatever reason we have to get used to imagining ourselves in the next stage. The same has happened to shipbuilding - I'll be dealing with that with the **Paper Boat** next year.

The Straw Locomotive could have been - if they'd had any guts - crammed (afterwards) into a gallery somewhere ... just occupying the whole thing, in an enclosed space it's even more powerful. But it was sentenced to death by the Glasgow Garden Festival and sent to the knacker's yard with no ceremony and I just had to let it go and in a way that was a statement in itself. I gave it to them - I shouldn't have - with the suggestion that they filled the burnt out frame with forget-me-nots, but one day they said I'd have to move it and a few days afterwards it was away for scrap.

Education

The ultimate social sculpture for me has been working at "The Factory" for unemployed people, set up with E.E.C. money, in Port Glasgow. I said I didn't want to be an artist in residence in the conventional sense, so I called myself "artist in touch" and instead of going in every day for three months I went a couple of days a week for a year. I had four or five unemployed people to begin with. There was this little engineering workshop and they wanted me to take them through sculpture, they wanted me to make products. I could have done that but it occurred to me that here was an opportunity for a purist exercise in social sculpture so I said to them "I'd like to carry out an experiment with you. Don't come with me if you don't want to do it, all I ask you to do is stay with me for about three months and do exactly what I want you to do. I'm not going to teach you anything beyond trying to teach you a new attitude". Then we embarked on a programme of such things as going to the National Gallery, the Gallery of Modern Art, the Demarco Gallery, I took them to the S.S.A., I gave them a lecture on my own work, I gave them projects to make birds, any bird they liked, after that I gave them a project to make fish any kind they liked - I didn't tell them how to make them I just helped them to get started.

Then they began working on their own and they made a Jazz Band, each one made one figure in

this band, life size figures and it got exhibited in a local exhibition, I took them up to the Art School for a day with David Harding and his students. All the time lecturing, giving them books to read.

But the marvellous thing was the wilderness visit, I took them up to Rannoch Moor, that was the turning point, terrible weather, and I was saying this is the world as it was when, probably, dinosaurs were about - this is what we got when we unlocked the package - and where you live in Port Glasgow is what people like you and I have done with it. So this is the clear tablet, you belong to this, anything that has happened to you is the result of other influences, your own destiny is within yourself. You can only solve your own situations by changing your attitude of mind. That was the real turning point that day. We found the spire that we put up for Beuys and re-erected it. One of the boys - always ahead of the game - had made a wee metal spire, so we found the old Beuys one and put it up beside it. Then the "Christmas Robin" order for outside the Assembly Rooms came through and we got involved in making them. In the end, the noticeable thing was they would speak and they were open and they were critical. They started thinking - that's all I wanted them to do.

Berlin

Approximation is important - then you've got to accept the variety of ideas, you've got to compromise your own idea to that ... the things which resist compromise are established ideas, institutions, that's why the institution must always be questioned. If it has any sense at all it will absorb the new ideas ... and now of course you come to the greatest institutions in the world, beyond governments, and that is the banking institutions.

Beuys recognised this ... the bank issues the tickets which control the energies of us all ... this certainly has to be questioned. Now there's an absurdity in the world just now which throws up the banking system as really requiring to be questioned hard - the moral situation, the monoculture situation, the debt situation, everything about it points to questions being asked. I was delighted when I was in Berlin the other week to discover that the International Monetary Fund conference in Berlin was being subjected to demonstrations in the streets. Surprising that the British press, maybe it's not surprising that the British press, haven't covered this at all well because there maybe hundreds of police vehicles in the main streets of Berlin and the demonstrations were coming from all quarters and they maintained these things for a whole week. A whole week of riot Police in the streets of Berlin. The most coverage I saw was the twelve column inches in the **Glasgow Herald** on one day.

Not only that but in the university they were having a special tribunal, an opposition tribunal with speakers from all walks of life, questioning what the bankers were doing, and I thought that is marvellous, this is the world awake in Berlin. An ironical touch is that Glasgow is trying to get the next International Monetary Fund meeting

which is funny because it provides the perfect platform for statements and so on to be made right on our own doorstep.

Anyway the Festivals Unit here wanted the City of Glasgow to make a present to Berlin and asked me what I thought. One was the big Berlin bird idea which is a pawky west of Scotland, Glasgow idea which will no doubt be fine, but a more serious statement is the **Spire** which I've already built and done a twelve hour performance (shades of Beuys) round in Berlin. It went extremely well but I was so scared. When I came back this time people kept on coming up to me and saying it was great. I didn't think it was that good. I think I got away with it because of my age. I had wanted to do it in front of the centre where they were having the I.M.F. conference. I wanted it to last for five days.

It was simply a question of sawing wood and cutting it into bullion sized logs and stacking them in a circle to make a circus ring and with the accumulated sawdust raked out inside with the Spire as a kind of tent pole in the middle, and then do an absurd performance about the absurd performance that was happening inside the conference centre and I wanted to do it when the conference was on - but they pushed it forward about three weeks in advance of the conference and I did it in a place called Ufa-Fabrik ... I erected the spire, sawed the wood, made some little objects, a little dog, balancing things, raked all the sawdust out. Didn't know what I was going to do, but I began to meet performers from a children's circus ... met a guy called Yupi and I asked him if he'd like to come into my circus that night and he had performing dogs ... then a little girl came up and said can I come into your circus tonight so I said yes and she came with three more kids who did pyramids and things, I felt like the pied piper. They all turned up made up like cats. I had this chain saw, busy cutting up logs. So we did a parade into the circus, then balancing plates on ends of poles me with my chain saw. In came the performing dogs, I sung a little song, etc. I had also made an eagle on top of a column and piled all these wooden ingots all round it and I had flares around it and I had a watering can full of inflammable material ... at the end of the performance I read this small statement about eagles about how banks like eagles, armies like eagles, air forces like eagles, eagles give out some form of respectability, somehow or other people think you can trust an eagle - eagles eat lambs ... and at that point I did a jump onto a seesaw thing I'd made and toppled the whole bloody eagle over, flames and all down to the ground, ran round the spire with my inflammable stuff and put a match to it, flames and swung the old Spire backwards and forwards, the kids were running about in the flames like Dante's inferno.

And I shouted out if you think this is a bloody absurd circus think of the I.M.F. circus that's coming here on the 24th of September ... end of statement, take a bow. At the end of it a lot of people came up shook my hand, especially the



George Wylie in his garden.

George Wylie "Spire". Photo: Murdo MacDonald.



Italians, they were from Bologna. And then they started buying me drinks and I thought great I'm so glad that's over I want to get pissed, but I couldn't get pissed, I was drinking whisky, I was drinking beer, I was drinking tequila, I was drinking something pink with coconut in it and I

perfectly all right, I must have been really high. That was a great success. Underneath the spire I have a plate and on it **A spire, for this Planet/ its air/its stones/and the equilibrium of understanding.** I shouted that out at the end too (nobody heard it in Glasgow).

KRYSZTOF WODICZKO INTERVIEW

Krzysztof Wodiczko is a Polish artist now resident in New York. He is well-known for his projections onto strategically chosen buildings or architectural sites (he projected a swastika onto South Africa house in London in 1986). He is a critical public artist as opposed to the "liberal urban decoration" of 'art in public places' and defines such activity thus:

"The aim of critical public art is neither a happy self-exhibition nor a passive collaboration with the grand gallery of the city, its ideological theatre and architectural-social system. Rather it is an engagement in strategic challenges to the city structures and mediums that mediate our everyday perception of the world: an engagement through aesthetic-critical interruptions, infiltrations and appropriations that question the symbolic, psychopolitical and economic operations of the city."

from "Discussions in Contemporary Culture" ed. by Hal Foster.

During the Edinburgh Festival in 1988 Wodiczko used Calton Hill as a site to project images of destitution on the columns of Calton Monument overlooked by the face of Thatcher projected onto the Observatory Dome. In the following interview he talks of this work in Edinburgh and sets out a coherent sphere of activity to which critical artists can address today. He was interviewed by Malcolm Dickson.

Q. What are the circumstances that have brought you here? It is a collaboration between the Fruitmarket Gallery and Artangel Trust - I read somewhere that the Fruitmarket's theme was on the city of the North fighting back.

K.W. I don't recall. I think it is a combination of interests. The initiative was partly the Fruitmarkets, but the Artangel Trust were thinking about developing several projects in different cities. I never thought of the Edinburgh Festival as a context, because of shift of time - but the way it all developed without planning it became clear that it would actually occur during the time of the festival so why not connect it (since it would anyway!). I wasn't really involved in all the steps, changes, dates and decisions and all the other projects didn't materialise due to lack of funding . . . all those institutions interested in public art, doing things in the city, with city space, they are usually busy with other projects and it's very hard to accumulate enough money to secure equipment and properly prepare everything. It is definitely easier to generate interest and publicity but it is much more difficult to properly prepare a project.

Q. Realising that the project was going to happen simultaneously with the Festival, did that have any bearing on the choice of images which you have used?

K.W. The idea of projecting images related to the situation of those who are in troubles, who are suffering difficult times surviving the present urban crisis and the official symbolic structures in the centre of the city. That idea did not develop because of the festival because I had been working on similar projects before in the U.S.A., in New York, Boston and Chicago, and I knew that after my preliminary visit here that Northern England, Ireland, and Scotland are most affected by the present urban crisis which makes them more similar to what I see around me in the States and Canada or Mexico - places I have witnessed, visited, and where I have



developed projects. My plan was to relate to those urban issues in several projects in the North and Scotland. When the other projects became impossible I did not change my plans but the fact that it came so close to the Festival reinforced my desire to do something . . . It wasn't that I was sure that the problematics would not be present here but I had indications at the base of my experience of other festivals that most likely there would be no direct connection with the problems of the city. I had this experience already in Kassel doing a piece for Documenta and my attempts to connect with specific issues of Kassel to connect selected sites, symbolic sites, with what was happening in Kassel was difficult. The City Festival in Kassel for example ended 2 or 3 weeks before the beginning of Documenta. Documenta were interested in my work but at the same time were not prepared properly to create the confidence among the inhabitants or establish communication with different groups and somehow develop what is a form of public relations or social relations of those projects, other projects. So the problem with this and with the Venice Biennale was yet another case of a festival usually not related to the situation of Venice, which is a very dramatic situation, the situation of people who live there and have to survive deterioration and urban crisis and unemployment there and also devastation of people's living conditions and the increasing isolation of Venice from the rest of Italy. There were artists, or tourism which is becoming a major industry in Venice. There is an image of Venice as an image of itself, Venice as a

Disneyworld. I was trying to address those specific issues on the occasion of certain festivals before. So this time (in Edinburgh) I didn't have to really refer to the Festival, I didn't think it was necessary. It wasn't a case of Venice to deal with the international tourism, the city as an image, because it looks like Edinburgh as much as other cities suffering similar problems and also specific problems. So to find the difference between what I know is happening in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Toronto, Los Angeles, San Diego or Tijuana or Mexico City was difficult because Edinburgh is far away from New York and I was here for only one day. I asked people from the Fruitmarket Gallery and Artangel Trust to make connections, send material to New York which I could read; those affected by drug addiction, the shelter branch here in Edinburgh and the London based organisation . . . More information through word of mouth and rumours and connections, about 8 I received in New York, so I was vaguely prepared.

Q. It seems quite an interesting manifestation at this point in the middle of the Festival and the Fringe which are spectacles of consumption and tourism. Here we have people from all over the globe coming into Edinburgh so it seems a particularly apt opportunity to ram home issues of increasing divisions . . .

K.W. Calton Hill was a very inspiring place for me. I was here for only one day but I immediately realised that that was the place I should work through, because this is a place of reflection and the reflection can be critical or uncritical. At this point, the Observatory is a site of a slide projection, an installation reproducing an image of the city according to the official tourist guides, but the kind of spectacular image of achievements and failures of the city according to the experiences of that particular social group or groups (middle-class and upper middle-class), historically. And so the sites, the monuments presented in this Observatory is

called "Edinburgh in Depth", and because it is in 3-D this is confused for depth. There is very little depth in that presentation, it's quite superficial and it is similar to what one can see from the hill without any optical instruments to possibly focus or concentrate on the outskirts of the city, or the areas suffering the most damage. So that is already a reason to act critically or to provide an alternative to it. Another thing is what people see from this hill during the Festival and maybe also between the Festival; the illumination of the city, lighting up the main landmarks and exposing through fireworks, and emphasising the importance of the Castle and those monuments. Also, it is like a montage, a collage of different events, one can experience this the life of the hill, because the hill belongs to particular groups which are using this hill. C.B. radio enthusiasts who are consistently there, police who must of course follow dark areas of the city, maybe to search for some kind of indecent, illegal or alternative economy supposedly taking place there. It is a place where people go or meet, for immigrants, for people who came from other places to live here who somehow like to see how, to reflect, or to re-focus on the places from where they came. They have much more opportunity to do so there, they can reach the imagination beyond the horizon and re-connect with Italy, India, China, Japan, Poland. So, tourists and all of those groups I mentioned come to this hill. At night when we are all involved with this projection, we see and communicate with 3 or 4 buses of tourists from Italy, Germany, Japan, and presumably, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Spain. These buses are loaded with people not necessarily that well-off, might be actually quite poor tourists, often guided by those officials, the experts on history, they are quite surprised to see something that is not on their schedule.

Q. I thought the bus loads of tourists were up to see your projections?

K.W. No, I don't think so. But they see both. They see projections of the city and they see projections of the tourist concept of the city and they also see these other projections. Some of them are happy to read texts. Tourists usually like reading texts, they read texts, they look at the icons, they ask questions, that is why they are touring. I take tourists very seriously, not only because they are people who accumulated some money and they want to educate themselves and experience something before they die, but also because they are affected, they are misled - they are tired, they are confused, they are frustrated and they want to know something and to experience something at the same time when they cannot experience very much, because it's in the name of the experience that they exist and they form those groups and they pay. But it is the image they experience rather than the reality. So the alternative image, the interruption in the way they are exposed to those monuments, spectacle, which is normal or usual and they might talk about this for a very long time afterwards. Their relationship to monuments is very close since usually that's all they have and that is what they bring back home in the form of photographs and albums and that's how they place themselves in relation to larger reality in

the world: is through monuments. That's how we are all growing up between monuments in photographs in our albums. There is always a monument between our body or we are in front of something of grand patriotic message or reproducing some kind of belief. That is the true ideological effect of those symbolic structures because we are being sentimental, close to them, part of our memoirs and our family and our leisure. First of all, they would transport that imaginary relation to history and the city from all those cities they visit back to their own cities and they might be even less aware of their own city as they are with those cities they visit, but they're still very unaware of any of those cities. Here I must also interject the possibility that one can be a tourist in your own city, that is like living in Edinburgh, for example and not really knowing about it. Having one's own image of the city. So, connecting all of this, one could say that those sites, as long as they are visited by tourists and by dwellers of the city or conducting their own life, they should be taken seriously aside of aesthetic practice. My opinion is that aesthetic practice should try to superimpose those structures with contemporary likeness to the events and issues very often contradicting the messages, texts, inscriptions and icons of those monuments.

Q. It's a political responsibility of the artist in contemporary culture . . .

K.W. I would take it very seriously but not without humour, that is my personal belief - not a sense of humour to make it less serious but rather to make it light in some way so people can take it, so it won't be that we are projecting messages of truth on the public environment, taking that environment as a screen for our statements and backgrounds . . .

There is the possibility to provide an alternative history to the official history of the city or tourist history. This is not really my main objective, but I can see this as another type of activity which I would embrace and would like to co-operate with someone who could do it; alternative bus tours, alternative maps, alternative guides, alternative "Edinburgh In-Depth", alternative 3-D shows and so that there are different ways and there's also the possibility of implementation of all kinds of practices, aesthetic practices to turn the city into a meaningful place or to force or maybe suggest to this environment . . . Or maybe exercise some other kind of tricky artistic devices to force the city to either respond to what is happening, to become a kind of communicating environment and to help people to communicate with the city, referring to our dream that the city should be a mouthpiece of the people. I don't know whether that dream can hold on really. One must be pessimistic about such utopia, but at the same time one must be a little bit utopian to overcome and to have energy and motivation to either help the inhabitants to speak to each other, to see the city through some kind of experience *with* the city which we can maybe articulate or reach or maybe give *them* the possibility to speak, the power to speak. In any case it is important to understand that people are affected by the media, and the city itself is quite a spectacular medium and that cannot be done without our appropriating, somehow, that media . . . Like a

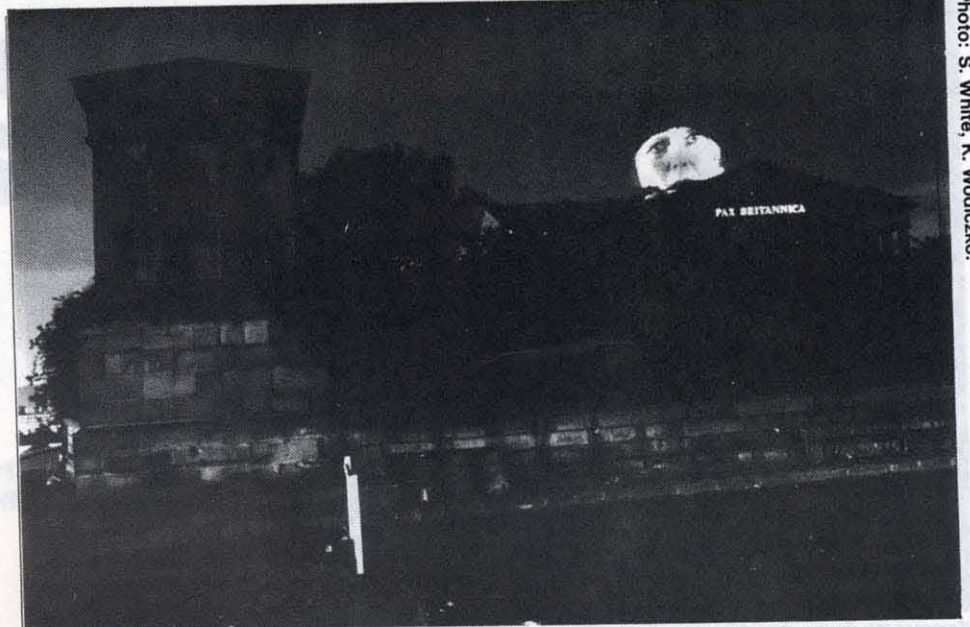
small simple leaflet or xerox sheet of paper might, of course, be helpful, but people are really affected by propaganda, consumer propaganda, political propaganda . . . So the question is how to be effective, how to be heard, how to be clear, how to communicate quickly and effectively with the public, with the people and in competition with all of those mediums. Maybe there is a possibility to find new spaces, new places where people communicate, where there is a possibility to speak. Maybe bars, maybe shopping centres. One has to understand the way the city operates today, be aware that communication takes place and what are the means . . . We still know very little about the city and about contemporary cities, cities in transition, in transformation, cities affected by what is being called 'uneven development'.

It is difficult to implement our understanding of economic transformation, cultural transformations in the theatre of the city because of the incredible manipulations, corruptions, public relation campaigns on the part of development agencies and also city councils in the name of the public or the perversion of public space, the deterioration of all the programmes and the destruction of housing, the gentrification, re-vitalisation processes. Several days ago I received a telephone call from a friend of mine in New York with whom I live and we live around the corner from Thompkins Square Park in East Village which became an object of attack by riot police several days ago. The homeless people had organised a demonstration against the attempt by the City to close the city parks at 1 o'clock at night. This park in particular is a park for people who have no other place to go. Parks are the only place really for people to go during the Fall, Spring and Summer in New York. If there are 100,000 homeless people in New York then the idea of closing parks at 1 o'clock is a death sentence put out. By staging a demonstration which ended up with a riot organised by riot police. This example shows that in the city - in transition, with the communities divided, fragmented, community ties destroyed, manipulations by economical forces - another protest is taking place; the destruction of the symbolic, the communicating ability of the city, a communicative medium is being destroyed because once you fragment communities you deport people, expel and evict, people can no longer speak to each other through the particular structures and areas. Then you have those waterfronts and all those sites of historic importance being turned into seafood restaurants etcetera. In this very difficult moment, I cannot say we are facing a loss of meaning or of simulacrum, or 'hyperreality' as Baudrillard would say. The thing we are facing is the possibility of increasing ignorance, isolation, of complete detachment from any understanding of what is the relationship between one development of the city and another, how one project creates homelessness and destruction in another area; things are not presented to us clearly in this Media - newspapers, TV, and radio are not working to clarify this. There are exceptions with some alternative press and radio stations. In this

situation, I must say my contribution is very modest. No matter how much I want to do here, how collective I want this project to become, it is still attached to me as an 'artist' and it is still just one project. I think it would be much more important to see the possibility of more people being engaged in aesthetic and cultural work combined with social and critical work, and with some kind of action, urban action in support of those who are in troubles, then we can talk about effective urban aesthetic practice. Being involved here as a guest from another country, I want to help and support those who are here but I cannot present my contribution is that great. It is just that it might be easier for a visitor to say things and speak but outside it might be easier to engage and also very easy to disengage.

Q. It is important for someone such as yourself who has a certain stature within the art establishment in consciously identifying with those dispossessed members of society. That seems very important . . .

K.W. If I was to project in Wester Hailes or in other areas, I would have to do something completely different. Maybe the opposite in some way, that is to . . . or to provide some kind of support and maybe hope for people because that is another difficult thing to envision. Speaking to activists there I realised that people should be congratulated and in fact life there shows that the situation is very great in front of incredible devastation and impossible conditions of life - people are actually doing very well contrary to the image of the media which just shows how people are devastated, how difficult their lives are. And yet, that the environment in which they live and the politics, the programmes which are abandoning them gradually, actually providing lots of possibility for strength and counter-action. So to work in such a situation I would really have to stay for a year I was quite impressed by those organisations (self-help and support groups in Pilton and Wester Hailes). Those people came to see the projection, those activists, community social workers etcetera and one of them said that anytime he is invited to see artists or works of art claiming to be concerned and engaged in social issues he is always scared to death, but then he said that this time he felt very good. I think it was an honest statement because I didn't think this person would talk to me or come up to me. They have very busy lives. So this distance between this and Calton Hill is quite substantial so I was really happy he came along. This is just a sign. It is a very symbolic act on my part. This is not like the type of work I can develop in New York, where I live. This time I'm involved in a project which has nothing to do with projections. I'm working on a design project for the homeless designing in consultation with particular groups of homeless people - we cannot talk about 'the homeless', specific groups of individuals who might be interested in using objects I've designed for them. Those people are helping to change my corrections and maybe to produce a mobile unit, a kind of cart which can be used for collecting glass, plastic and metal, cardboard and paper, cans, found objects to be sold for a very small amount of money. But also providing the possibility of turning this little cart into



Krzysztof Wodiczko City Projections, Calton Hill, Edinburgh 15th to the 24th August 1988.

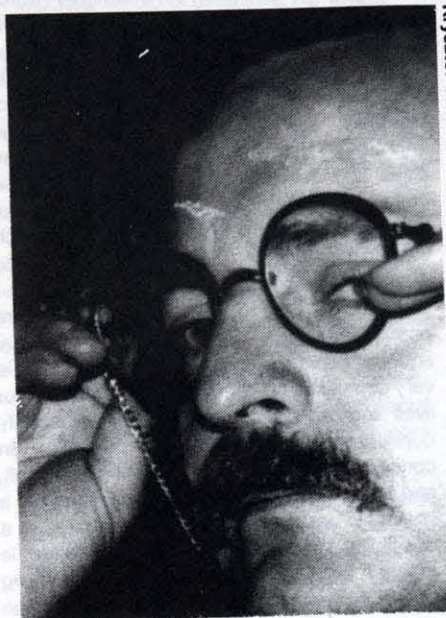
sleeping quarters in the Spring, Summer and Fall. And also to provide disturbing, upsetting, but an articulated object for the none-homeless so the condition of life for the homeless could be transmitted, presented on the street by means of design which the middle-class, for instance, is very well trained to read through design recognising conditions of their lives, articulating things which conveniently people do not want to see. Providing architecture very often means to provide dignity and identity and ability to form collective habitat.

. . . They are nomads who 'must' be constantly removed from the site of the non-homeless by the city authorities since they are evidence of the value of those authorities to continue the projects to which they were elected. I'm talking about a very serious situation in New York. Now the administration are building rafts or shelters, floating shelters, treating the homeless like rats, to possibly even float and deport them to somewhere else, another state, like garbage. . . I see that the artist alone cannot be very effective here. I have to work with someone who is

experienced in public relations, someone who is experienced in design - I'm an industrial designer myself so that helps - but also in engineering and to find money, take advantage of me being an artist means to have access to very modest but still available grants, exhibition spaces, galleries, publications etcetera . . . We have to combine the work of artists and non-artists and other resources - people who work in urban geography and engage in politics, activists who will help each other and be in constant contact and also maybe apply for money, but also the media people. This is what the city is all about anyway. I don't think any effective work in the urban environment can develop without us being as modern or as post-modern as the cities are.

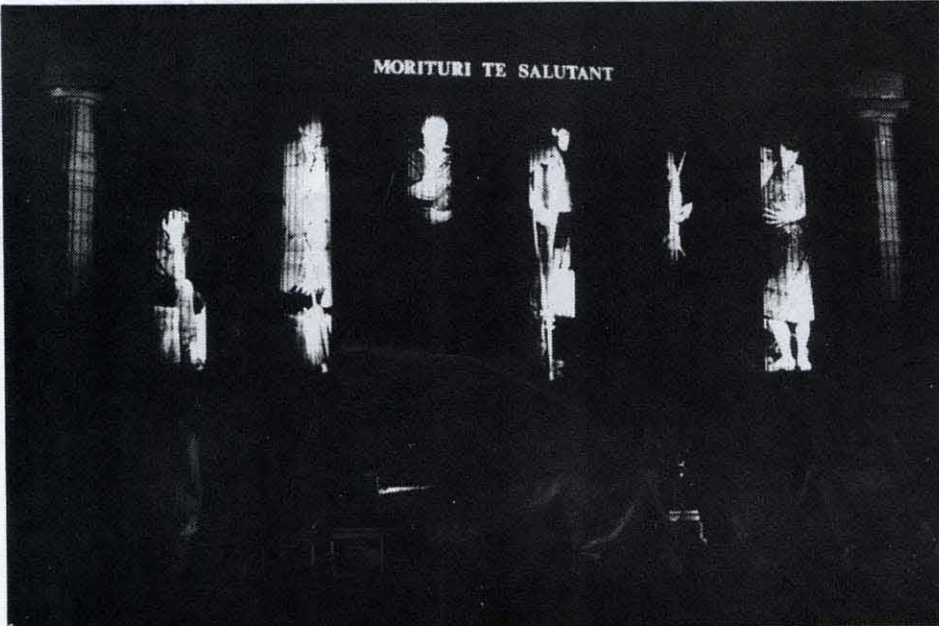
Q. Some of the things you have been talking about in relation to the city have much in common with the concept of unitary urbanism deriving from the Situationists. Do you see yourself as part of that history?

K.W. With the Situationists, the situation is difficult because I think one might risk categorising them as the last artistic avant-garde. Of course they denied themselves as artists which is nothing new in the history of the avant-garde project. Perhaps they were true Surrealists, true Dadaist artists. It is difficult to feel too closely affiliated to the Situationists because it goes without saying that we are not continuing a utopian activity - we don't have utopia. The Situationists perhaps didn't have a utopia as clearly defined as previous avant-gardes. Their manifestoes and attack on 'Spectacle', for example, that very radical position lead them to re-iterate the spectacle themselves. In other words, they were part of all the avant-garde traditions in the sense that they, by denying spectacle, attacking spectacle, they have no choice but to invent a new one, the alternative to the one in question, the official one. However, I think they did not fully recognise or realise in those contradictions . . . the dialectics of the strategy at least not in their writing. They recognised quite a lot because they dissolved themselves, they decided that they should not



Krzysztof Wodiczko eyes up Calton Hill

MORITURI TE SALUTANT



Krzysztof Wodiczko City Projections, Calton Hill, Edinburgh. Photo: S. White, K. Wodiczko.

exist anymore and that should be congratulated. But without avant-garde utopia, in terms of vision, of . . . a free society, of language which could be used to communicate across the entire globe, well that is nonsense from that kind of viewpoint. We can still learn from avant-garde tradition, we can learn from the Situationists. It's time to be more like an Intelligence rather than avant-garde, to infiltrate, try to concentrate in the areas available to us and expand without dreaming of some global solution, be quite practical and do as much in areas that we can, but also try to do, on occasion, impossible things too, with pessimism, but be very active. If we agreed that there is no possibility for a critical practice, in architecture, planning, the media, in art, in politics, what kind of agenda is left for us, for the next generation - what kind of structure or institutions can we envisage for the future? One must try and act through the system and also outside it in alternatives, there is not one struggle here. But I must congratulate the Situationists for their sophistication in which they entered the urban environment, the style of their action was very good and very familiar to many activities today - for example some actions of the Greens but also witnessed recently in Poland where there was an extremely sophisticated strategy of high school students all over Poland who are really taking over now the business of engaging public space in critical and alternative events. Their irony or humour, their support to life, to the unexpected but also in acts against ideologies whether they are coming from Jaruzelski or the Church or from Solidarity even, definitely a continuation of the Situationists and they don't even know about the Situationists. I cannot agree with the Situationists when it comes to utopia, especially the idea of festival. I personally agree with them when they say that firstly a festival should be something popular rather than like Edinburgh Festival, obviously I agree with that. But then to say that the ultimate form of festival was the Paris Commune is . . . of course it was true, but at the same time what does it mean to say that, what has to be figured

out is between such festivals, between historic action, between the revolutions do something not in the name that they are coming. Maybe there is a possibility to avoid the Paris Commune, it was one of the bloodiest festivals in history.

Q. Your function then as an artist, as you are trying to express it here, is to engage with and intervene in the dominant spectacle of appearances but at the same time practically involve yourself in work which involves the redistribution of knowledge, since knowledge brings power to people, power within communities. Do you see yourself moving into that through the projects you have mentioned?

K.W. I do not know what you mean by 'knowledge'. If you say that there is a possibility . . . we can talk of knowledge in the case of aesthetic practice and experience then I agree with you. The city already with all its structures and all its organisations of space is a work of art, is an art gallery already, together with the control over that space exercised by particular groups and agencies of which so beautifully writes Lefebvre. It's a very complex ideological effect, aesthetic, symbolic effect. That's why I'm so serious about the symbolic and the aesthetic in our counter-practices, because we cannot disregard the seductive power and the enormous talent employed in building those cities and developing that space. Of course there's lots of terrible stuff happening too, but the skills with which the space affects us, which the space provides a structure for us to reproduce our own beliefs and project our desires on it. One must not exclude the entire phenomenological projects from our critical agenda, because the way the space works is very sophisticated, the way our bodies and our lives and our disciplines, the way we identify ourselves, we manufacture ourselves in connection with the way these things are built, and in connection with everything else. It is a spectacle and I like to believe that there is a possibility of counter-spectacle. There is another problem in that there is a growing disbelief in any effectiveness of work in urban

space because of those processes of fragmentation, gentrification, destruction of meaning or de-signification, as there is no way any more to communicate through the city. I would like to say that I understand and agree with all of those points but I think it is not everything. I think that the city and the urban space will be articulating and will be capable to transmit, to participate in a communicating process. But it won't be able to do it in any critical way without us. So the question is how can we find our place and where to act perhaps in working with monuments is just a moment, maybe it won't work, maybe it will die, it is very limited, but then there are so many other places, like there's the transportation system. There's the telecommunications system, there are bars, there are gay bars, there are particular cultural institutions in the city. There are homeless people in the city who project themselves on monuments and public space. They are the new architecture, they are the new symbolic structures whether they want this or not, they possibly don't. There are shopping malls - easily dismissed as communicative spaces by critical semiologists recently. I read some set of texts actually dismissing that space as any real concrete space where any communication or exercise of any political and social activity can take place, because it is basically private space made public according to some deals. But at the same time was there really such a place? Were we not dreaming from the very beginning about Agora? There was never such a place or thing, it is an invention of the modern mind, it is a myth! We invested this Greece with this Agora which perhaps never really existed. At the same time one should try to do something in shopping malls. Why not? I don't know what kind of practices can develop and I think we should encourage, and by 'we' I mean all those who write, teach, who work in institutions and who might be trying to do things on their own, to provide the possibility for articulation and communication in symbolic plans and expression. Many of those projects I have seen in Wester Hailes, the most successful, I think, were those which combine psychological help, consultations and moral support and genuine human solidarity with those people who are in troubles, with expression, actually forcing that environment to work as a medium of communication - like those graffiti projects organised by women's groups. I think they are very hopeful forms . . . There are other places, I know for certain in England you have photography workshops and work done in helping people to aesthetically to understand and convey their own experience and their image through aesthetic work. Any other possibilities should be generated. Those are truisms, we know it is necessary, but at the same time to continue such activity in changing circumstances, to make it effective in far more ways, in development of new planning, television, of 2D publications, advertising, billboards, all of those incredible aesthetic invasions on those people. You have to change, to be flexible, how to counter react and this is still the area I am myself in darkness, I don't really know how to do it. It sounds like Brecht, it sounds like echoes of something we've heard before but I don't really know what it is.

Review of Stewart Home's THE ASSAULT ON CULTURE

Peter Suchin

It has been a perception of modern art that art is just what is called art, and that to produce a work of art it is sufficient to get whatever it is, that you have produced, accepted as art.

Roger Taylor¹

WRITING in *Variant* 3 Malcolm Dickson offered the view that 'The task of the radical artist today is to attack the prevailing methods of production, distribution and consumption of art; as has been the concern of the avant-garde this century.'² It is indeed the case that a predominant occupation of Modernism has been a critique of art from within the art institution itself. Peter Bürger's account of Dada and Surrealism and Terry Atkinson's television programme on Marcel Duchamp spring to mind, however, as descriptions of these artists' failure to overthrow, in the long run, anything but the internal dynamics of the artworld, causing not a cultural revolution (in the broad sense of that phrase) but instead merely revolutionising art.³ With this in view one can understand how Roland Barthes can generate a definition of the avant-garde as 'that restive language which is going to be recuperated.'⁴ Such intermittent attacks upon bourgeois society, together with their almost instant recuperation⁵ give to the history of the twentieth century art the look of a somewhat shallow - if at times vivid and intense - dialectic, a paradoxical logic of critique and realignment, one which today persists, somewhat uneasily, beneath the banner of Postmodernism. Barthes in fact suggests that the self-reflexivity of the situation of the artist and intellectual has reached a point where 'The idea of contestation itself becomes a bourgeois idea.'⁶ The artist as would-be Radical, the art producer with his or her sceptical, aestheticised politics, and the Radical Artist-cum-Critic are all, it would seem, lost in the woods.

It is a little difficult, at first, to place *The Assault on Culture* in relation to the flux to which I above allude. Its title suggests a concern with modern art's self-critical status; its subtitle - 'utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War' leads us into more particular (and more complicated) territory: not the interecine battles of modern art proper but rather those of a region which hovers at the periphery of the mainstream of art. It is an area which has hitherto appeared most difficult to map, not least because it is a site where 'art' and 'politics' awkwardly, yet crucially overlap.

Rather than pretend to occupy an inevitably spurious position of neutrality, the book is written from a clearly stated perspective - that of someone personally involved in the area of work under discussion. Furthermore, the paradigm under which the author operates is itself specified and explained. It is that put forward by the philosopher Roger Taylor in his book *Art, an Enemy of the People*.⁷ Briefly, Taylor's thesis is that 'art' is not a timeless category or mode of human expression but is in fact a form of life or label which is conferred arbitrarily upon a huge diversity of objects and activities. The only common feature shared by the multifarious things held beneath the umbrella of 'art' is that they have all been selected by the high bourgeoisie (the sub-class of the bourgeoisie which produces the ideology or 'mental set' which is (erroneously) read as 'truth' in capitalist society). The entities collated by Home are, it should be noted, by and large of a *samizdat* (i.e. self-publishing) format.

Home's stated intention is to give an outline of what he calls a 'utopian current' (page 4), the central determining feature of which is the intention to do away with the false, forcibly imposed divisions of culture. He writes:

Medieval expressions of this utopian current have usually been viewed as essentially 'religious' in content; whereas during the present century, this tradition has been seen as primarily artistic in nature. Such categorisation reflects the reductionist strategies of academics: the utopian tradition has always aimed at the integration of all human activities. The heretics of the middle ages sought to abolish the role of the church and realise heaven on earth, while their twentieth-century counterparts have sought the end of social separation by simultaneously confronting 'politics' and 'culture'.

It is this latter area, that of the twentieth century, with which the book is actually concerned. Readily admitting that he is sidestepping the issue of whether or not the disparate phenomena to which he refers convincingly

coheres and thus attains the status of a tradition Home offers the assertion that a useful, didactic purpose is served by assuming that the various bits and pieces he is to deal with do indeed coagulate in such a meaningful manner. I find this problematic insofar as if Home's claim is actually invalid then the implied constant critique of the forces of oppression loses its telos, its imagined, ever-extending thread of contestation. This is a (not unimportant) point of interpretation which allows one to adopt, depending upon one's relation to the idea of 'community' (term which intermittently emerges from the text) an optimistic - or pessimistic - position in relation to cultural critique. Are the groups and individuals with which *The Assault on Culture* is concerned little more than (praiseworthy) flashes-in-the-pan, isolated moments onto which Home has cast a 'unifying' spotlight, or is there - has there been - some kind of unified assault, something more substantial than only occasional attacks upon 'culture', upon 'art'?⁸ It would appear that some areas touched upon in the book only gain what I will call their validation with reference to their selection for inclusion in the text if there really is a fairly coherent 'narrative' or tradition into which they can be placed and in which, reciprocally, they have an important part to play. For if this is not the case some of Home's chosen items reveal themselves to be hardly more than obsessively executed pranks, from which are gathered no critical mileage whatsoever. (I have in mind here some of the activities referred to in chapter 16 under the heading of 'Neoism').⁹

Though it is only some one-hundred-and-twenty pages in length *The Assault on Culture* is broken up into seventeen chapters, into which much information and comment is, now and then rather awkwardly, crammed. Home wants, he tells us on page 1, to keep his text as short as possible. This means that various contradictions occurring within the sectors of culture which he describes cannot be untangled in as much depth as a longer book would give space for. Nevertheless the range of material covered and the manner in which this is carried out is laudable. Beginning with an account of the group constituted in 1948 under

the rubric 'COBRA' Home takes us through a variety of diverse, yet cleverly integrated 'movements': the Lettristes, the College of 'Pataphysics, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, the Situationists (four chapters on this mutating gathering of radicals), Fluxus (two chapters), Auto-Destructive art, the Dutch Provos, Kommune 1, the Motherfuckers, the Yippies and the White Panthers (these last five all in one chapter), Mail Art and beyond, Punk, Neoism and Class War. A conclusion, afterword, bibliography and name index are also appended. Though 'selective' the listing of sources and further reading cited in the bibliography is considerable, with reference being made to many obscure texts. This book is thus a very helpful introduction or first guide through its author's chosen field of research. An awkward area of research insofar as those groups and factions which flitted about the tricky interface of aesthetics and politics - I mean those dealt with by Home - don't easily or directly coincide with the well-documented artworld entities such as Dada, the Surrealists, the Futurists and so forth. Such gatherings of writers, visual artists and scholars have been much commented upon, even within publications produced in English (unlike as Edward Ball points out in a recent issue of *Yale French Studies*, the Situationists) and Home does not bother to rehearse these themes and debates again.¹⁰ One must, then, praise this little book, functioning as it does as a kind of *vade mecum* of modern, pseudo-artworld rebellion. I will make just a few more points about it before closing.

There are a number of misprints/mistakes in the book - for example the reference to Johan Huizinga's '1956 essay' on *Homo Ludens* (page 35) - Huizinga's work of that title was published in 1938 (its author died in 1945). There is inconsistency in the use of the word 'Utopian' - sometimes headed with a capital letter and sometimes not (and the same goes for several other pieces of terminology). And there is, to my mind an excessive over-italicisation of words, as in this sentence from the Conclusion: 'I hope the *successes* of *samizdat* are more than sufficient proof that cultural, as well as *political*, agitation is required (sic) if *radical* ideas are to have any impact on the repulsive society in which we live.' (page 105) - this overuse of italics occurs throughout the text, punctuating it in a way which distracts more than it serves to emphasise.

Finally, I should mention that I disagree with the stress placed upon, or the the interpretation given to some of the contents of the book. The College of 'Pataphysics' may be an interesting phenomena but it doesn't seem to be one with Utopian leanings or concerns. Similarly, I find the critical potential of multiple names (- see chapter 14, 'Beyond Mail Art' -), as well as the arguments Home puts forward for their defence unconvincing. This, however, is perhaps not the place to enter into an extensive account of these and the other (arguably minor) faults of a book which is a most beneficial contribution to late twentieth-century critical debates about the nature of 'politics' and of 'art'.

1. *Art, and Enemy of the People*, Harvester Press, 1978, p. 54.
2. 'White Trash: Art in Ruins', *Variant* 3, Autumn 1987, p. 18.
3. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester University Press, 1984. Terry Atkinson's programme on Duchamp was first broadcast by the Open University in 1983.
4. *The Pleasure of the Text*, Hill and Wang, 1975, p. 54.
5. On this point see Ursula Meyer's 'The Eruption of Anti-Art' in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Idea Art*, Dutton, 1973, and also Terry Atkinson's 'Disaffirmation and Negation' in the catalogue to his exhibition *Mute 1*, Galleri Prag (Copenhagen), 1988.
6. 'Languages at war in a culture at peace', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 October 1971.
7. See note 1.
8. The very idea of a 'Utopian current' suggests the theme of Redemption, which itself has been the concern of a number of important left-wing writers (for one example see Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in the same writer's *Illuminations*, Fontana, 1973). See also the article on Redemption (possibly unsigned) in *Here and Now* 7, forthcoming late 1988 or early 1989.
9. Home himself implies that he considers some of the earlier manifestations of Neoism 'little more than juvenile pranks' (page 104).
10. 'The Great Sideshow of the Situationist International', *Yale French Studies* 73, 1987. The issue of the journal is entirely devoted to the theme of 'Everyday Life', i.e. to the Situationists and their kin.

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A SENTENCE FROM ADORNO

Richard Gunn

Richard Gunn, in his article, outlines the complex dialectical relationship inherent in a consideration of the terms 'autonomous' and 'committed' art as used, in the former in the ideas of Theodor W. Adorno and in the latter, the work of Sartre and Brecht. In exploring Adorno's ideas concerning the preference of 'autonomous' over 'committed', he deconstructs the notion that it is simply a matter of the former being "less political" than the latter. To do so is to misunderstand the relation between art and society. By outlining the interdependence of enlightenment and myth and the role of art as mediator, he re-examines the meaning of autonomous art with reference to historical roots in the evolution of apocalyptic and utopian thinking. This analysis forces us to reject the so-called political innocence of autonomous art.

ON page 128 of the English translation of T. W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* we read: 'What distinguishes aesthetical images from mythical ones is that the former submit to their own unreality which is their law of form. It is in this way that the images of art partake of enlightenment . . . Adorno is never the easiest of writers, and this sentence (or sentence-and-a-half) certainly needs decoding. It is my belief that it is worth decoding because it tells us something important. It declares against the political innocence of even the most formal and 'autonomous' art.

Of course it is a conventional and even a banal point to say that political innocence cannot be secured by retreating into an ivory tower. As it were, to refuse to make a political choice is to make a political choice of a kind: it is to choose to support, however tacitly, the *status quo*. It is in the light of this point that Brecht and Sartre, for example, recommend not an 'autonomous' but a 'committed' art. However Adorno's point is slightly different. In fact he favours autonomous over committed art. The passage quoted continues by saying that 'any form of direct artistic commitment to ideological or educational values' regresses from 'enlightenment' back into myth. The recommendation that art should become committed misunderstands the relation between art and society, in Adorno's view. For Adorno a social perspective on art has, in the first instance, to be developed not at the level of the artist's aim or intention nor at the level of the art-work's content but at the level of formal considerations: 'The unresolved antagonisms of reality reappear in art in the guise of immanent problems of artistic form' (*Aesthetic Theory* p. 8). The art-work is so to speak a 'monad' whose formal problems and tensions recapitulate the tensions and contradictions of social life. Adorno's heroes are figures like Mahler, Schoenberg and Beckett in whose work social commentary is absent but whose irony and liberation of dissonance (be it musical or dramatic dissonance) encapsulates precisely at the formal level the crisis of a late-capitalist world. Committed art misunderstands, according to Adorno, art's own specific possibilities and provenance. It is in autonomous art that we should look for the cracks in the surface of an alienated and reified

form of social life.

What I have said so far is by way of background, and it is what commentaries on Adorno commonly report. Roughly speaking, the import of commentaries along these lines is to impute to Adorno the view that autonomous art, unlike committed art, is a 'good thing'. Autonomous art is non-innocent in the sense of carrying within it a radical and emancipatory perspective. Certainly it is this view of autonomous art which is predominant in Adorno's writings. But the sentence quoted from *Aesthetic Theory* suggests a different, though complementary approach.

The non-innocence of autonomous art, it implies, signals complicity and guilt. This is not to say that, after all, Adorno believes we have to side in the matter of 'committed versus autonomous' with Sartre and Brecht. However it is to say that Adorno regards the dialectic of autonomous art (and more generally of artistic 'form') as entrapped with darkness as well as light. The move of self-understanding which allows art to detach itself from 'myth' and to 'partake of enlightenment' is a move towards, as it were, an endarkenment which enlightenment already contains. Art 'partakes of enlightenment' to the degree that it understands itself as autonomous, both from myth and from politics. To the degree that it does so it plays not just an artistic but a political game. 'Art is and is not being-for-itself', says Adorno; 'Without a heterogeneous moment, art cannot achieve autonomy' (*Aesthetic Theory* p. 9). We have now to enter on the project of decoding in a more serious way.

In 1947 Adorno published his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* co-authored with Max Horkheimer. The central theme of this work is the interdependence of enlightenment and myth. 'Enlightenment', generally seen as projecting human self-determination and an end to superstition, via an appeal to natural scientific rationality, is construed by Horkheimer and Adorno as bound up with an aspiration towards instrumental control. 'Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men', we read; the dictator

knows men 'insofar as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things insofar as he can make them'. The rationality of enlightened natural science is a **causal** and hence manipulative rationality which, since anything whatever is grist to causalism's conceptual mill, comes to be applied to nature and to humankind alike. Enlightenment points back towards the myth it denounces as superstition because projects of manipulative control and domination have their roots, no less than does myth, in fear. Myth for its part points on towards enlightenment because (so Horkheimer and Adorno argue) the quantitative equivalence of phenomena on which causalist explanation turns is already prefigured in the primitive and mythic notion of symbolic exchange. Between myth and enlightenment there is not the clean-cut contrast which enlightenment holds to be the case; there is an interdependence. This, for Horkheimer and Adorno, is the key to modern technocratic ideologies, to Nazism and to capitalist mass-culture alike.

Notice that this dialectic of 1947 involves only two terms: myth and enlightenment. In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* of the later '60s the picture is deepened to include not two terms but three: myth, enlightenment and art. Art **mediates between** enlightenment and myth. On the one hand, it serves myth up to enlightenment in an innocuous and tamed state: 'Art is what is left over after the magical and cult functions of archaic art have fallen by the wayside' (*Aesthetic Theory* p. 185). Between art and enlightenment - whereas not between myth and enlightenment - a relation of peaceful co-existence (indeed even a united front) can obtain. On the other hand, art takes on board the role of feeding the mythic fires of enlightenment's own roots. (Think of the 18th and 19th century history-paintings which fed a sense of heroism, pathetic **hubris** and self-importance into the enlightened bourgeoisie.) Art feeds - but also dampens - these fires precisely by transporting myth into an aesthetic key, and it is in its tamed (its aesthetic) state that myth appears as at its most reactionary. At the end of the road from myth to aesthetics lies art which is autonomous. Autonomous art is art in, as it were, its pure form. Such art counts as innocent, because it can make its peace with

enlightenment in such a way that enlightenment finds nothing to say against it. Every philistine counts as an art-lover. But this innocence is a guilty one because of the solace and support it offers to those whose words offer to it only a hymn of praise. Autonomous art is tamed art, and this taming is its danger. One the one side autonomous art is a site of critical consciousness containing emancipation's **promis de bonheur**; on the other side it is art which has made its peace with the enemy's camp. Neither side is separable from the other (just as enlightenment and myth are inseparable). This is the dialectic of autonomous art which Adorno's **Aesthetic Theory** attempts to follow through.

It is in the context of this three-way distinction, as between myth and art and enlightenment, that the sentence quoted at the start of this article is to be read. 'What distinguishes **art** from **myth** is that the former accepts its own unreality' (I offer here a paraphrase and not a quote). To take artistic claims literally would be to confront enlightenment with its own mythic roots, i.e., it would be to challenge head-on enlightenment's bad faith. Art has to make its peace with enlightenment by retreating into beautiful illusion, as for example Nietzsche in his **The Birth of Tragedy** clearly saw. Beauty is allowed to hover above the world on condition that it never undertakes to make its appearance within it. Art is allowed to say anything and everything as long as it agrees to place all its claims in brackets, or in other words as long as it agrees that it has nothing literal and substantive to say. 'Unreality' becomes its condition. It belongs in the realm of the 'Unhappy Consciousness', in Hegel's sense. And yet it is permitted to belong there, innocently, only because the mantle of its beauty is placed on the shoulders of enlightenment and philistinism and capitalism themselves. It for its part is allowed the mantle of innocence only because it is complicit, like a court jester who oils bureaucratic wheels with wit. In fact it is superstition and myth to say that art has no place and no reality in a bourgeois order. 'It is by accepting complicity in the myth of its own impracticality that art makes its peace with enlightened reality' (a paraphrase rather than a quote once more). Precisely it is the radiance of beauty which shines through, and legitimises, the technology and discipline of a bourgeois world.

At this point we should take stock; doing so allows us to see how precise Adorno's historical insight is.

Art passes the buck to and fro between enlightenment and the myth on which enlightenment depends, and so is acceptable to both. It is acceptable to bo... because its claims are seen as marginalised and trivial: who cares about beauty when fun is to be had and profits made? This trivialisation of aesthetic claims is, I suggest, an ideological illusion. Or rather it is the crucial illusion of bourgeois ideology because in the end of the day it is on the mediation of aesthetics that the case for bourgeois legitimacy rests. Art is not just non-innocent but non-trivial, as for example every single advertising image and the whole culture-industry of fashion demonstrates. Advertising is

just one example of this, although the most obvious. The historical roots of the point go deeper. At the outset, however, notice this: it was in the eighteenth century (the heyday of enlightenment) that 'aesthetics' as a term for an independent discipline - the study of the beautiful - was first coined. At the end of the eighteenth century Kant, perhaps the first and the most serious theorist of aesthetics, demarcated aesthetics from on the one hand instrumental reason and on the other morals (as it were demythologised myth). In other words the wings of aesthetics were clipped at the very moment when, with the Romantics and the heirs of the French Revolution, it threatened to take flight. Aesthetics was ghettoised in the same movement as it was constituted. And the condition of a ghetto is that no-one can leave it but anyone else can enter it at will. Aesthetics, in other words, is **traversed** from its point of origin by the lines of power which it is invited to mystify and legitimise but about which it is disallowed to speak.

I said that Adorno's point has deeper historical roots than a consideration of the modern advertising and culture-industry which, to be sure, he deplures. Here, only a brief indication of these roots can be given. To see them we have to return to the early-modern period of political thought and to the battle between **apocalypse** and **utopia** which was then fought out, with utopia winning in the capitalistic end (cf. my article on apocalyptic and utopian thinking in **Edinburgh Review** 71).

Apocalyptic thinkers in the latter days of the Middle Ages prefigured in their various ways the end of the world, and indeed the end of historical time. By the politically radical apocalypticists, the ending-event was seen as a revolution whereby authority is overturned and the poor inherit the earth. From the standpoint of enlightenment, apocalypse counts as the purest kind of myth against which scientific rationality must declare. For a start, apocalyptic predictions were without exception falsified by the unfolding of events. Apocalypse accordingly stands 'refuted', by the canons of the natural science whose day, during the Renaissance, began to dawn. (When in our day Jean-Francois Lyotard, in his **The Postmodern Condition**, declares against what he terms 'metanarratives' he is in effect replaying this same scientific critique of apocalypse inasmuch as apocalypses are metanarratives of the most paradigmatic sort.) Over apocalypse, so much of which enshrined popular protest against nascent capitalism, enlightenment condemnation breaks out.

The enlightenment condemnation breaks out in the form of **utopias**. Utopias, especially those of the early 17th century, enshrined scientific values; and they enshrined beauty as well. Their physical planning radiates geometric perfection; their circularly laid out spatial ordering connotes not just aesthetic harmony but epistemological harmony as well. Beauty and knowledge (or enlightenment) go together in utopian thought. The study of utopian thinking shows that enlightenment comes into the world trailing clouds of beauty at its heels. Enlightenment thereby taps the mythic sources

of utopia and makes them its own. It makes them its own by transforming 'myth' into 'art'. Utopian enlightenment is a police-action against popular and insurrectionary apocalypse which goes forward not just by repression (although this certainly took place) but by incorporation. Precisely, utopian images 'submit to their own unreality which is the law of their form'. They seem like impractical dreaming - but this innocence of theirs conceals prosaically practical aims. Their concern is not just with beauty and knowledge and geometric spatial harmony but with social discipline, and these concerns flow together: in a geometrically ordered world, everyone has their place and anyone out of his or her place will stand out as sharply as does a misplaced pawn at the start of a game of chess. In utopia, beauty figures as social order. A clearer case of the non-innocence of aesthetic considerations would be hard to find. Utopian enlightenment condemns radical protest aesthetically, epistemologically and politically so that to this day radical upsurge of the meekest sort can be ghettoised as the province of a loony (read: mythological and unenlightened) left. Far from being impracticable, utopia installed itself as the world of capitalist work-discipline and surveillance: already we live in a utopian world. That is, we live in a world whose enlightenment is legitimated by considerations of aesthetics. The autonomy of art both conceals this mode of legitimacy (through trivialisation) and supports it. Capitalism marginalises art only because it relies on its support.

If this is so then Adorno was right. Let us read him again: 'What distinguishes utopia from apocalypse is that the former submits to the bad faith of construing its own beauty as unreal and thereby trivial. It is in this way that bourgeois legitimacy is born . . .' Adorno is never the easiest of writers, and so I offer this as a decoded version of his political insight. It is my belief that this decoding sheds light on his writings because it allows us to see his recommendation of autonomous art as dialectically complex rather than univocal and straight-down-the-line. 'Art may be the only remaining medium of truth in an age of incomprehensible terror and suffering' (**Aesthetic Theory** p. 27). Hence there is no political innocence even for the most autonomous and formal species of art.

Pornography and Eroticism

by Lorna J. Waite

THE questions surrounding the definitions of pornography and eroticism have always been so vigorously argued that the debate is frequently contextualised in such a way that it becomes polarised between a necessary strong feminist voice campaigning against the degradation of women, both in literature and art, and the libertarian idea of freedom of expression and uncensored production of images pertaining to the field of sexuality. Characteristic of the former is the disregard for the place of fantasy, imagination and desire in the creation of images for both sexes. Informing the latter is a disavowal of the crucial importance of the means by which the material is produced, the patterns of consumption which the source material promotes and the seeming lack of relations of the fundamental difference between the sexes in terms of the power relations within society.

The distinction between the erotic and pornographic continually fluctuates according to the shifting perspective of the looker. There is no definite criteria by which we can judge the position of the boundary. The notion of some clear cut difference is illusory. To question the terms by which we think of the difference between the categories of pornography and eroticism is to engender their fragmentation.

By throwing away these unwanted theoretical categories, the dichotomy of pornography - eroticism is recognised as false consciousness and we can choose to adopt instead a different analysis which detects the merging of the boundaries between the satisfaction of desire, needing continual replenishment, and the position of sexuality as a gravitational force perpetuating a culture based on commodities and consumerism.

It is not always appropriate to consider the "consequences of pornography" as being the repression of female sexuality through fetishized passive imagery nor the desensitization to intimacy through the mass production of male defined, cheap magazines or indeed the powerful status of art in a gold frame to escape accusations of "pornographic" imagery. This view, adopted by many feminists,

relies on the concepts of objectification, fetishization of anatomical characteristics and a monolithic view of patriarchal oppression which is considered to be directly responsible for an increase in sex crimes against women. If we take on board this critique, the implications of such an action are that the victim status, both with reference to women's sexuality and the position of women within patriarchy, is perpetuated and a strategic withdrawal from the bedrock of male oppression is advocated. In addition, an underlying essentialist attitude towards sexual identity and gender is constructed which leaves little room for a deeper questioning of the relationships between socialization of gender and power within a commodity culture which denies the acknowledgement of the healthy erotic needs of men and women be they lesbian, heterosexual or homosexual or indeed oscillate, either in reality or fantasy, between each of these

positions and the social constructions/constrictions associated with each.

Underpinning this paradigm, is the assumption that female sexuality is irretrievably colonised by men and defined in a manner that is disabling to women for whom the subordinate position is now not only prescribed by patriarchy but also by other women. Reactionary tendencies within this position are now glaringly obvious and indeed contain a repressive element beyond which progress can only be considered as a desexualized retreat. As Kathy Myers has written, feminist sexual practice cannot simply position itself in opposition to the dominant ideology. The kind of questions which it must ask have implications not only for what is meant by a representational system (and the part it plays in structuring fantasy and imagination) but also what is meant by power, sexuality and pleasure.



Robert Mapplethorpe "Bobby and Larry Kissing" 1980



Robert Mapplethorpe "Auto Portrait" 1979

Power and sexuality, in the work of Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault, do not depend on rigid binary opposites i.e. masculinity-femininity, activity-passivity but rather they possess qualities of polymorphousness and consequently emanate from many power-bases. In the modern period, it is only with the beginning of psychoanalysis that the recognition of private eroticism as being more interesting than public behaviour (that is to say the fracture between public and private has been historically admitted) has become possible. The influence of feminism is crucial here.

The legitimization of certain discourses of sexuality over others has made manifest the nebulous quality of the power behind the construction of gender identity. Parallel to this, an awareness of the confusion regarding the reality of the imagination and the imagining of reality threatens the structures which enable the rigid classification of sexual categories and the marginalisation of "deviants." Homosexuality can never be pathologised after Freud. However, challenges to the existence of differential power relations can easily be appropriated by the next advertising campaign or glossy pillow fantasy. One reaction against dissent is to enforce through marketing strategies the desire to be worthy of being bought. Dominant ideologies require the existence of false divisions i.e. pornography-eroticism to succeed in absorbing threats.

The visual is invariably the commonest form of language associated with the business of pornography. It is interesting to note that it is easier to define an image as "pornographic" that happens to occur in a male defined

magazine than it is to consider the institutions which perpetuate the depersonalization of women in a more insidious way i.e. marriage, advertising culture and the medicalization of psychological dissent.

Photography and theories of representation offer the opportunity to explore the meanings associated with sexuality and the consequence of depiction. One of the most interesting photographers in this respect is Robert Mapplethorpe whose work I wish to use to contextualise some of the ideas outlined above.

Mapplethorpe is adept at confusing the looker. It is very difficult to know how to 'read' the photographs: they are exquisite visual paradoxes. He could be considered the joker of a humorous, sexed photographic practice which subverts the area conventionally called pornographic. The representation of homosexual identity and the erotic beauty of the genitals, "objectified" in a compositional manner reminiscent of pornography, are mixed with humour and love which confuse us. Our need to both categorise the image as public and enter the private space cannot be fulfilled and forces us to question the language which we can use to understand the images we are presented with.

The phenomenon of objectification is a psychological reality which only becomes harmful if harnessed to a differential power relation which works to enforce rigid gender boundaries. This, therefore, stops the individual from encountering visual representations which not only challenge received meanings related to marginalised sexualities but also authenticate one's own erotic experience. We are selves who

encounter, study and think about other selves. Related to this fact, objectification can be used not only to create an ideology of gender fascism but also as a tool for exploring sexuality. Mapplethorpe's photographs certainly fit into this latter category by parodying phallogocentric imagery and creating a sexual aesthetic which questions as well as eroticizes. He has opened up areas of visual thinking which are usually silenced but in a manner which is not invitational but exploratory - and certainly not without contradiction. It is impossible to concentrate merely on the content of the image in his work. Meanings are multifarious and never fixed but in Mapplethorpe's work they never promise saleable fantasies which are founded on repression of sexual identity and perpetuated by commodity fetishism.

A feminist approach to the sexual politics of representation should move away from the use of old categories which defy definition, except in terms of what is considered the present dominant ideology, and try to diminish the power of a censorial attitude which can be resistant to sexualised imagery without qualification. Although this is understandable as the effect of a history based on humiliation, fear and idealisation, (woman as narcissistic wound of man), an effect of this is the passive resistance to the creative assertion of female desire. This does not depend on the fictions imposed by men in the name of the pornography industry and commodity capitalism but on a recognition of the importance of fantasy and desire in the construction of our erotic imagination which need not be the property of markets created by consumerism nor a danger to the sexual self-esteem of women.

A NEOIST STORY

by Karen Eliot

NEOISM is not an art movement. Neither is it, despite popular belief, a successful banking system, a computer hacking organisation, an international terrorist cell, an agricultural co-operative nor a chic fashion agency. Neoism is a cultural conspiracy which tricks unsuspecting critics, historians and journalists into believing that it is any one of the above at any time. Various neoist agents have infiltrated the art world and the advertising world. Eugenie Vincent has appeared in numerous ads and on the cover of Face. Monty Cantsin has been awarded thousands of dollars from The Canadian Arts Council to live in New York. The neoists are an international group of people who devote their energies to creating their own lifestyle, philosophy, mythology and culture. They regularly meet in various locations on this planet at gatherings called, for obvious reasons, Apartment Festivals (APTs).

Ooster, one of the 14 secret masters of the world, travels in time through a universe beyond the comprehension of most earthly things. Like all secret masters Ooster can change form and sex at will appearing quite by surprise at neoist conventions. In 1980 s/he took the form of a latex chicken of a type commonly found in joke shops.

tentatively, a convenience, mad scientist/d composer/sound thinker/thought collector/as been - krononaut/neoist/sub genius lay half dreaming and masturbating while thinking about animals. He recounted the story he had recently read in a magazine about men decapitating live chickens so they could thrust erect cocks into the still palpitating open neck wounds. In an instant he was overwhelmed with the image of a rubber chicken of the type commonly found in joke shops. His concept was to make a presentation before a live audience playing on the theme of masturbation using a rubber chicken - thereby playing on rubber fetishism and sado-masochism.

Laura Trussell had worked in the joke shop for 6 weeks during which time she had served tentatively, a convenience 14 times. Being a regular customer and witty conversationalist she had grown to like him a lot. She was, therefore, only too pleased to sell him the rubber chicken when he told her of his concept while

inviting her to the presentation. Unknown to him, at this time, tentatively, a convenience had begun his mystical adventures with rubber Ooster, one of the secret masters of the neoist conspiracy.

In 1984 Ho Robin, a Scottish neoist, organised the 8th international apartment festival in 13 Aulton Place, London SE11. One of the first to arrive was tentatively, a convenience. Around his neck he wore a 6 fingered hand made from mirrored plexi-glass and from the belt of his zipper pants hung rubber Ooster. A convenience was leading the blind neoist Litvinov, also from Bal Tim Ore. During the apartment festival Ho Robin told everyone of his forthcoming action to push a pram around Scotland cell e brating the image of the hobo and the Orwellian myth of 1984. As he had first met rubber Ooster hanging from a tent he suggested that he take her/him to hang from his tent every night. Thereby began Ho Robin's magical experiences with rubber Ooster.

In the neoist world coincidences do not exist. Events occur in time and space controlled by powers beyond the understanding of most people. Telepathic signals guide neoists to one another on converging paths. Therefore Ho Robin was not surprised to meet tentatively, a convenience and Laura Trussell in the company of Mark Pawson (legendary mail artist and badge maker) on Glasgow Green. Rubber Ooster had not warned him. A conspiracy had taken place between the neoists which excluded Ho Robin. A trap had been laid into which the unsuspecting prey was to stumble. However Ho Robin's lackadaisical gait foiled the ambush. Tired of waiting in their complex bunker of d composed vegetation by the River Clyde, the neoists broke cover having waited 50 minutes. Ho Robin caught them unawares under a flaming neoist sun by The People's Palace where tents were being pitched on the green. In cell e bration the portable booted usic busking unit/nuclear brain physics surgery school lab/philosopher's union member's mouthpiece/blatnerphone hallucinomat was assembled so that tentatively, a convenience could present an impromptu concert. At this time Ho Robin learnt of tentatively's scheme to visit the DATA Attic in Dundee.

tentatively, a convenience and Laura Trussell arrived at 16:25 on 1:7:88 in the company of a yellow, mute tasmanian bear called Grooginagah. Rubber Ooster did not crow, Laura entered. The door was open. The attic silent as tho a trap had been set. Ho Robin sipped mandarin tea. tentatively waited at the foot of 5 flights for Ho Robin to help him carry his cumbersome neoistic accoutrements up. His arrival was casual and indifferent. The 2 neoists treated one another as tho they had all the time in the universe (which they have).

After looking around the multiplicity of rooms. Xeroxed and plain. tentatively, a convenience announced that, instead of taking the large attic bed cell Ho Robin had offered he and Trussell would live on the roof for the duration of their 2 month stay. Ho Robin accepted this proposal without question. After suitable arrangements had been made and personal baggage transported above the 2 visitors were made comfortable. The neoists cell e brated on the roof with rubber Ooster and Grooginagah dining on gold chapatis, burritos and a brew of rockhead ale in the glow of a Dundee sunset. As an after dinner conversation guide-lines for social interaction were drawn up.

Ho Robin was not to go up on the roof without first writing a password onto a sheet of plastic which was sent up the chimney by a complexity of strings attached to a kite. To make things a wee bit more difficult and to extend the practice of telepathy to its limits of tolerance tentatively, a convenience would change the password every nanosecond without telling Ho Robin. Precise times and details of each visit request were to be given. Ho Robin was to notify the roof dwellers of his movements throughout the day so that they could descend to the facilities beneath without actually meeting. Ho Robin was not to cook for them. They would prepare all their own food and eat alone observing strict neoist laws of erratically. They would not wash during their stay but would use water to drink, collected during brief daily visits through the skylight. Various neoistic rituals were to be observed as well as strict codes of conduct. No smoking. No legal drugs. No radio. No Television. Daily

sexual and nudist activity. Continual monitoring and measuring of bodily functions and clinical reality. DATA sheets were to be completed twice daily. Ho Robin was to comply with this regulation so that comparisons could be made between the clinical well-being of ones above to ones below.

During the first night of his residency at the DATA Attic, tentatively, a convenience stole into Ho Robin's bed cell and set up the nuclear physics surgery school. This test involved sleeping through an ever-repeating audio compilation made by previous graduates. Successful graduates are allowed to add an audio work to the tape. During this UK visit Mark Pawson and Scott Larson also graduated.

tentatively, a convenience plans to hold a class reunion many years in the future of all graduates of the school during which the tapes will be listened to while awake for the first time.

Most of the days were spent reading sci-fi, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* and writing correspondence. Copies of all neoist output are relayed to The Immortality Center in Tepoztlan, Mexico where they are archived by Zack in his correspondence novels. Ho Robin was allowed to visit on a few occasions but mostly his requests to do so were refused. Frequently he would be called upon as cameraman during exercises in vaudio quasi-documentation. In the evenings, Ho Robin would retire to either his small, cramped office or bed cell while tentatively and Trussell took it in turns to prepare their one meal of the day. After eating they retired to their bed of blankets and sleeping bags in a temporary polythene shelter supported by one of the chimney breasts. This was comfortably adequate. On dry nights they would leave the polythene shelter and lie gazing up at the stars and planets dreaming that age-old neoist dream of space travel. tent is a frustrated astronaut while Laura wishes to remain on earth and become a silky.

The first collaborative project that the neoists made together took place at Tentsmuir. This location had been described by John Berndt in a missive from the Attic during a visit in 1992. As part of his continuing theme of animal experiments tentatively, a convenience wished to visit a large colony of seals resident among the shallow lagoons. He intended to play booted usic to them. During this trip all social formalities were cast aside allowing a free-flowing correspondence. Ho Robin was tolerated because of his abilities as a porter, guide and cameraman. During the concert, tentatively, a convenience wore no clothes, only a large Donald Duck mask that completely engulfed his head making him into a curious amphibious creature with obscured human proportions. The seals, tho not intimidated, enjoyed the presence of this mad scientist by calling and waving from the sea. tentatively, a duck waded out to greet them. A few bemused pups stayed on the tide-line hogging the limelight as much as possible. Laura, unsure at first, soon became enchanted

and disclosed to Ho Robin later that she wished to metamorphose into a seal. Ho Robin told her this was well in keeping with Scottish myth and legend.

tentatively, a convenience soon acquired a great fondness for poteen, a peaty-coloured pure spirit which Ho Robin had to go to great lengths to supply him with. To add to his difficulties, convenience insisted that this venom be diluted with fresh burn water from the Ben Alder Forest. This cocktail passed in the urine of tentatively rapidly eroded the fabric of the Attic roof causing stalactites to form in the space below from the seepage. Pools of acidic piss lay on the bitumen waiting for a rare Scottish sun to evaporate them. Fortunately both he and Trussell used the void of the otherwise unused chimneys while shitting. The residents of Union Street, and more particularly the workers in the Nethergate Centre whose offices overlooked the roof lodged no complaints. Rather, they accepted the visitors with an air of calm fascination. The art of voyeurism was encouraged both ways. tentatively experimented at this time with local herring gulls. These vociferous birds, which nested on adjoining rooftops took an instant liking to their fellow above-street dwellers. In no time they were eating out of tentatively's foot while he sat atop a chimney pot masturbating. The decomposer taught them a mathematical progression based on their vocal range so that together they could record a laridean plainsong.

The main reason for tentatively, a convenience's visit to Scotland was to take part in The Festival of Non-Participation, a decentralised collection of events cell e brating alternative culture. Being an avid anarchist and supporter of sub-culture he took the concept of the festival into his heart. While living in Glasgow he instigated The Glasgow Suburban Branch - Bal Tim Ore Underground Club in an abandoned station of the Glasgow Underground and presented his vaudio works at Transmission. During his stay in Dundee he showed a collection of vaudio works at DRCU as part of its Vaudio Weekend organised by Mike Kane and Kevin Guthrie. Also, while in Scotland, tentatively, a convenience and Laura Trussell visited Edinburgh where Louise Crawford arranged for them to present vaudio works at The Collective Gallery. On 8:8:88, a date of great neoist significance, tentatively, a convenience and Laura Trussell returned to Glasgow where they rendezvoused with Ho Robin, who had spent the previous 3 days in the hills above The Druimachdar Pass, for The Burning.

Ken Murphy-Roud began looking around Glasgow at the beginning of 88 for a suitable site for his contribution to The Festival of Non-Participation. He was also looking for a pertinent date. During correspondence with Ho Robin he picked-up on the noeist significance of 8:8:88. Although a few members of the art community promoted and participated in The Burning it was not an art event. The Burning was open to everyone. It was an action during which numerous contemporary symbols relating to consumerism, tourism, capitalism, journalism, sexism, politics and art were incinerated in 3

separate fires. The Burning took place beside the redash football pitches of Glasgow Green by The River Clyde in the spectre of Gorbals highrises at 8:00pm. Ho Robin constructed a Scottish Development Agency logo from wood. Ironically he laid purple flowering heather along its outline which, he explained, had been collected at The Druimachdar Pass. This wild area is to become a new ski resort sponsored by the SDA. His action was, therefore, a statement about ecology and a criticism of landuse for tourist development. While his fire burnt he handed round blaeberrries which were also harvested at The Druimuachdar Pass. Karen Eliot hoisted a painted banner atop the mountain of garbage put on the site by The Parks Department. As s/he set fire to this image of a goulish mask, painted with oils onto a canvas support, s/he explained that the gesture was a reaction against the commercialism of the art market. Obviously s/he was content to burn her/his image rather than offer it for sale. Laura Trussell was present as Tim Ore's agent. He had painted the slogan "the artist does not grant the purchaser of this painting the right to guard it in any way" onto a large sheet of white paper. After selling the painting to an un-named representative of an un-named gallery it was ceremoniously burnt in the flickering shadow of Karen Eliot's brand. tentatively, a convenience recorded the event on his PXL 2000, a digital scanning machine. A large spiral had been described on the ground from branches and assorted inflammable materials. In its centre stood a handsome totem of wood covered with hand-coloured xeroxes of Margaret Thatcher, in the style of Andy Warhol, by Ken Murphy-Roud. Above the Thatcher portraits were images of exploited women torn from a skin mag. Crowning the whole structure was a wooden head which had no clear significance apart from an aesthetic one. Despite lashings of petrol the spiral did not burn in the intended manner - from the outside in igniting the central totem in a blazing finale. Ken Murphy-Roud set fire to the totem and invited others present to add their own symbols. A chequebook, sent to the organiser by J Jordan from Sheffield was added page by page by those present. A poll tax form was, inevitably and satisfactorily reduced to carbon. Malcolm Dickson and Gordon Muir added 2 mysteriously bulging black bin bags which, upon being sliced open by keen flames, revealed their contents among which were small gold relief panels of hands. As well as being a serious criticism of certain aspects of post modern culture The Burning was intended as a social event. Clearly it was successful on both counts because, a fire, as the neoists proclaim, creates that magical atmosphere which enthral us human kind.

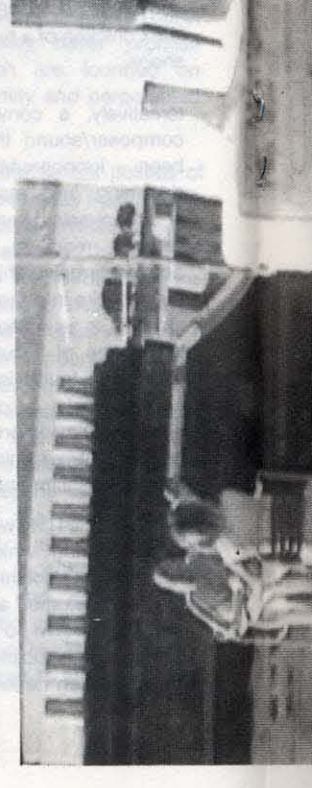
Before leaving Scotland in the company of Grooginagah on 21:8:88 at 22:20 by Stagecoach, tentatively, a convenience made 2 busking actions. The first, in The Murraygate, Dundee on 13:8:88 was presented with the assistance of Mike Kane, Laura Walker and Laura Trussell before she left for Norwich the following day. The second was presented solo in Edinburgh on 20:8:88 in front of a crowd of oggling festival acolytes and tourists. This occasion was filmed by George Ladanyi using his delux super 8 camera.



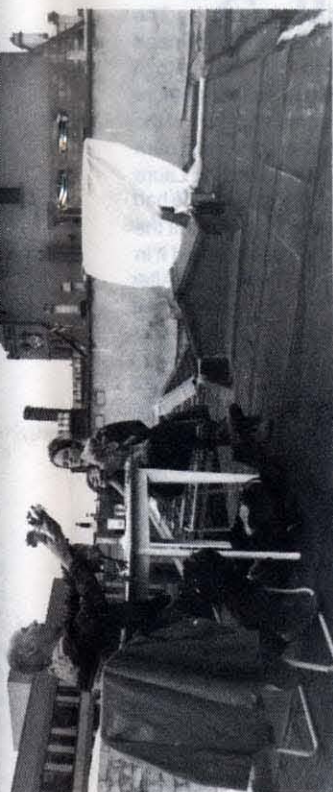
11:7:88 still from "Data 3RD Gene Flation Duplicity" video.
11:7:88 still from "Data 3RD Gene Flation Duplicity" video.



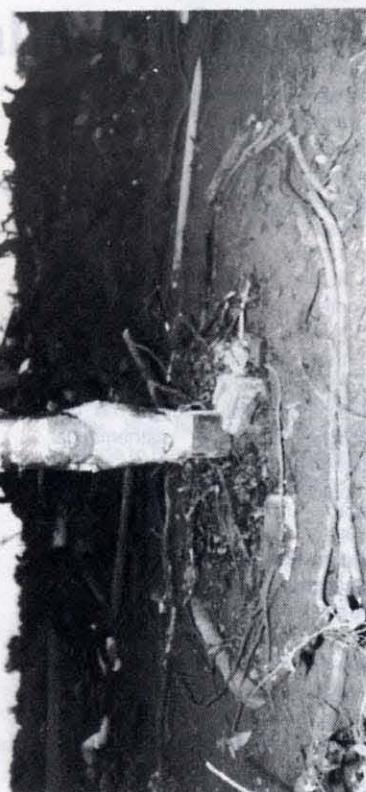
10:7:88 still from "Tentsmuir" video.
10:7:88 still from "Tentsmuir" video.



24:7:88 the daily Data sheet & body monitoring ceremony on the attic roof - still from video.
3:8:88 on the Data Attic roof, Tentatively a convenience and Laura Trussel.



11:7:88 still from "Data 3RD Gene Ration Duplicity" video.
8:8:88 preparations for the Burning.



8:8:88 Ho Robin burns his statements about Scottish landuse.

During the first night of the residency at the DATA A&B, tentatively, a convenience note into Ho Robin's had cell and set up the nuclear physical surgery boxes. The last involved...

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The Kitchen Cabinet of Marion Coutts

an anti-fawn fawn based on a recent show at the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh called WORTH

WHY WORTH

THE Collective, as gallery, forget the collective bit for the time being, is all space and light and regularity. Phone and cash box and a drawer with little round red stickers in it. As the show goes up Marion has her mates in to help, tapes playing and the space is untidy. This would seem to embody her working principles which are hecticness, unfinishedness and the squiggle. The show when up is mostly drawing on paper, to the front dominated by the construction **Slate Cape**, to the back (less so) by **Bush Table**. Great titles: concrete and monosyllabic for the most part. The forms we will meet again and again are that of a hulking female body, askewed but solid cone no top to it and a hairy cube thing. No canvas and very little colour. She likes to say she works on paper because you can draw on it, fold it, cut it and screw it up as much as you like. There is both integrity and wilfulness in the way she says it.

That the show is called **Worth** has something to do with an interest in weight and how it is conferred, physically, socially and morally. This comes
The theme in its critical aspect was intended to be carried by a poster which asks, **who decides who fails?** and hangs off the back of the door.

Under the question is etched a head which is distinctively the head of Marion, heavy cheeks and a little tuft of hair on top. Like how pet lovers are said to take on the features of their dog, artists heavily involved in self-portraiture recreate themselves as (often solipsistic) short cuts to statements about feeling or world. In the works of artists who do this the worry is that That Face with its baggage the 10th or 20th time over folds in on itself and becomes mere decorative repetition - Egon Schiele is a good example of this. The artist's public relation to the world can become that of flirt and tease, and the worry here is that this gets so absorbing that s/he forgets to reevaluate and revise the relation s/he actually has, wants or might have.

Thrush is an outline of wide woman in stalking position. One foot way beyond the other, softly-softly. She has an ironic and devastating attitude to her, but she is fucked. Her origin lies not in her body but in the vicious band of slime that comes from between her legs and has her ringed, vertically. Stuck carrying that band around with you everywhere. Unable to escape the stuff you carry inside. Those female conjurers in Thailand who bring forth doves, bananas, scarves and knives for tourists. In this context it's amusing to think of double meanings, birdsong and snail shells and twittering little twig feet. The whole done on manky paper that looks like newsprint.

Brain Food is a piece of paper with a great stump stuck to it, above it to the left a loop of electrical cord. Something square and hairy looking (scribbles or smudged hatching) is raining down from above. Witty. **Bush Table** is a tall occasional table with long slim legs. It has a cube on it made of twigs. A similar one was set alight, and the photographs of it, **Fire Table**, look forlorn, like photographs of happenings always seem to do. More interesting would be to know what shape the ashes took. Though I guess it depends on where it was lit and what the wind was doing, happenings, eh, what a way to cast our possibilities!

Coat Hangers

20 Plus essays on shape or form or femininity or craft or fashion or cut or line or critique or mecleature playing off on the one or more double meanings in such a title. As some sort of metaphor of the metaphoric process: those miserable advent calendar mobiles Blue Peter suggest we make for Xmas at home. Two coat hangers pulled into diamond shape, one stuck inside the other so forming a skeletal octahedron which Plato thought was the structure of air but they don't tell you that. You cover the whole in tinsel and stick candles to the points and had a representation of the Star of

Bethlehem. You were supposed to light a candle for every time B.P. was on till Xmas Eve. The overreaching resourceful added extra rhomboids until the star became a lump. Plato thought this was how totality comes about, from air accruing. 'Here's one I made earlier.' What a drag. If you just take the coat hanger, undo it, and twist it up to make something else.

Why Kitchen Cabinet

M.C. is my flatmate. We share a kitchen and bathroom and some interests but go about everything completely differently. She is an artist and strides about town with her stomach stuck out and most of the time is relaxed, delighted with the pieces of world that rear up in front of her head. I am none of these things and have the curious non-artist's tendency not to be really very interested in working method, materials, what they think they're doing and what they do do but to prefer to collapse all these things into a Kulturkritik. I wanted to write this piece as a way of learning to look at art from scratch and as an effort to understand the concentration (blinkers?) with which so many artists work.

Working with hands and minds on materials, in some corner hung with self-manifestations, there is this mysterious resource, the apprentice-master-pupil-ephebe-Law knot of tradition which gives you a hotline through history and works like a magnetic field to attract and repel. Sheep and goats. Craft and **Kraft**. Art school, the market, the mystified and mystificatory rubbish that passes for art criticism especially in this country: it all, if imperfectly, offers security, purpose and cushioning. It is perfect enough for me to find it hard to find a way of writing about what I see, and what it might mean, in such a way as to even acknowledge the existence of the real world of bus tickets and things to eat and house repairs and dirty socks that must play a part in it somewhere. Or even Lord Gowrie or green

giros or The Government, which some artists plunder for imagery without really recognising.

One thing I have talked with Marion about is science, about wanting to take on its knowledge base not for allusions or thrills or wit but in order to access into its seriousness without being privy to its power. The last not through choice but as a matter of fact. As Leonardo did with his explorations of the form of man; as Beuys did with his superstructural understanding of how, in a closed system, energy transforms from element to element, mode to mode. This is tied up with what is going on in **Worth**. As yet it happens without the mediation of the social. What is immediately striking of Marion's show vis-a-vis this line of interest is that all her pieces happen resolutely in the human scale. And, like Aristotle's Athens, the impression is not of the classicism which actually is afoot, but of dirt, messiness, a very human-size warmth. Is that an ostentatious comparison? This is what I mean about there being no median terms. The work has these reference points, but domesticated, lived and liveable in. And as yet the clearest reference to anything actually in the world now is to the artist herself, for she is the one that cooked it up. A sense of one-woman plot and of repast. Finally, there was in Variant a few issues ago another piece about an artist working in Scotland written by a non-artist who knew him well, called The Cabinet of Stuart Mackenzie and grandiose in its expectations. For all these reasons I thought of Kitchen Cabinet.

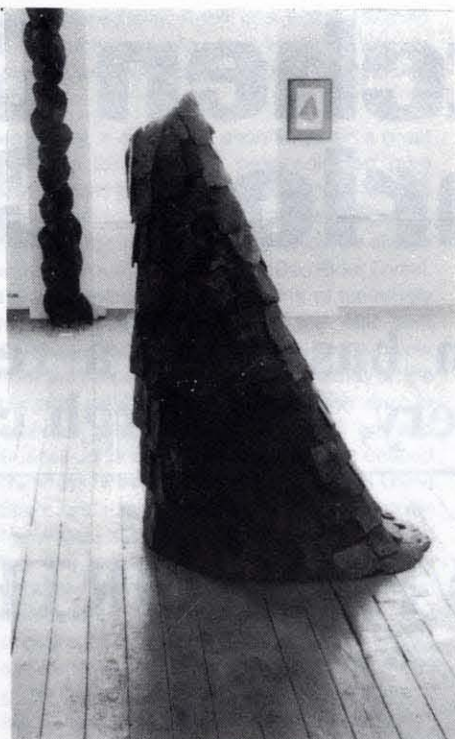
Slate Cape is the centre of the show. It stands stolidly, person-high. At the front it is vertical and flush. At its back it has a nasty little train, not pronounced enough to be ceremonial, which slimes along the floor. The joke about why women have legs: because look at the mess snails make.

When you walk around the Slate Cape it is overpoweringly solid and grey. Its grace comes not from use of elegant proportions but from its robustness and sense of being centred in itself (though asymmetric). It is lined in red plush carpet which you can see through the slash down its front, a cuff round the neck and through the carefully placed armholes.

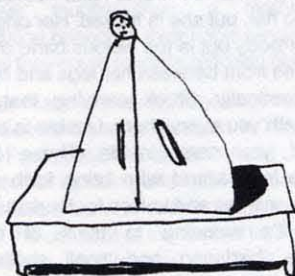
Then when it comes apart it is built on three concentric wooden yokes held up by slats, splaying outward in a ring, lined with dark and dirty red like the bins they used to have in parks. The slates, broken into tile shapes with a hammer, are tied into chicken wire, and are arranged in tiers to make it strong, though if they went in spirals like an igloo they'd be stronger still.

Chime is 31 slates in leaf shape hanging on a ribbon of wire. A green smear runs right down the middle. You're meant to hit it, and if you do the sound made is dull, organic, and makes you suddenly foolish.

Yarrow on brown paper with the plant shape and crappy unpainterly fields of white and greenish paint. Edgy and unsatisfactory. I would not have it in my house, and it looks too well used for a modern art gallery to believe it is original.



Marion Coutts "Slate Cape".



Marion Coutts "Slate Cape".

But I could do that if

I could do that if only.

Unfilled line drawings in soft pencil then sprayed with fixer, topped with glass. They are nervous lines that stop and start rather than following the curve through. Like bits of wire twisted together by hand, the hands cut and sore by so doing. People like me would not dare do this. We would not dare lift pencil from paper for fear the idea of bulk we want to render escapes. We cram the page with loops and it is as if we'd never thought about bulk at all. Just loops.

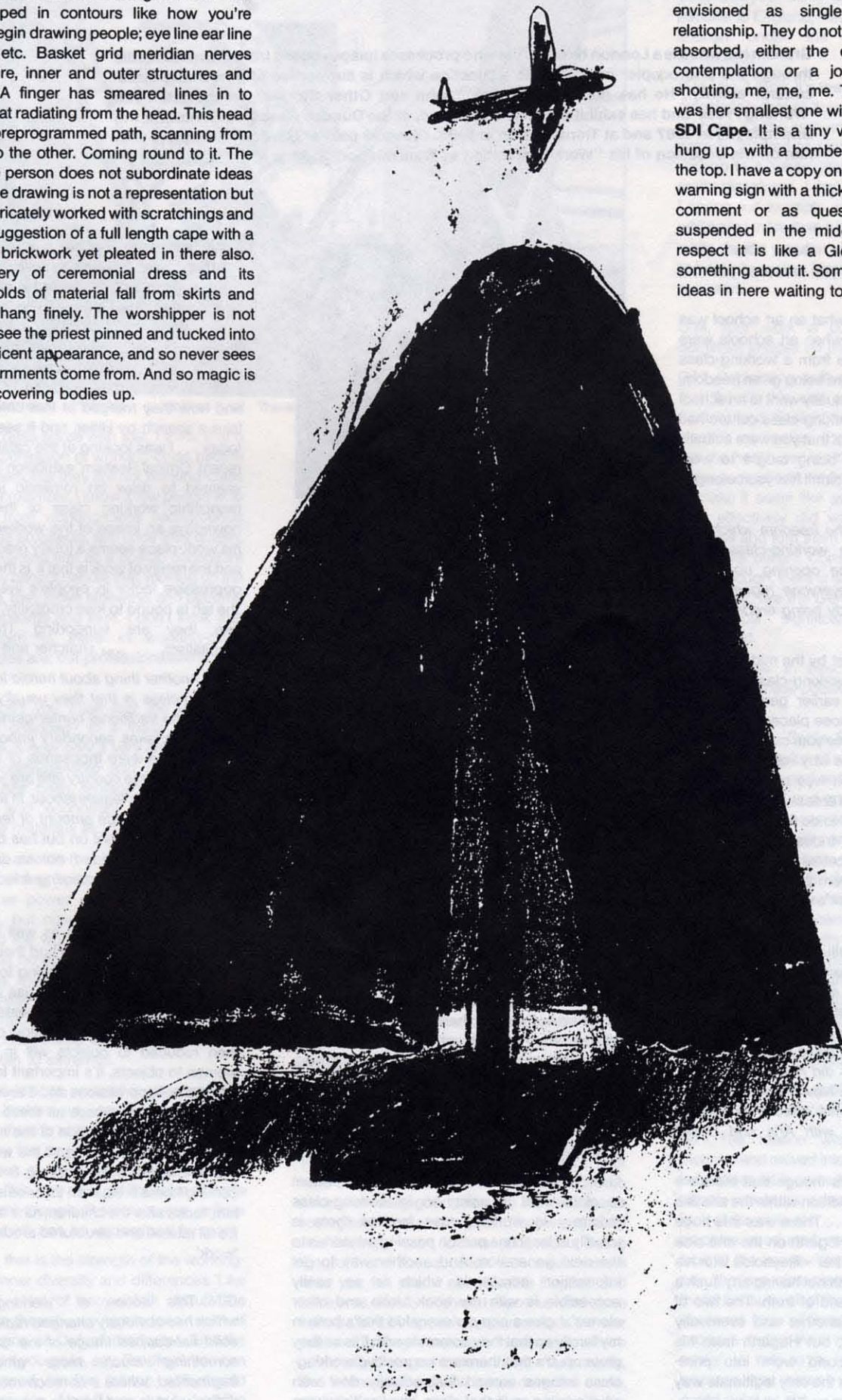
To get back to the scientific ambition. When I mentioned Kitchen Cabinet to M.C. she said that's weird, because the next thing I want to do is all about cabinets and I know why, some spaces she was interested in when little. Maybe artists with this desire to discover and to build in a serious way have to return to childhood impressions because that was the last time they were able to find things out and touch them without disappointment or irony of knowing the scheme they were developing is not, in a wordly, powerful sense, important. 'His majesty the baby.' And that is why, if we try to enter the world they're building, it seems so clear yet has no space for all the elements of adult, social consciousness we know are the important things. Why M.C. in her work and when she talks about it lends the greatest weight to a Thing, its thingness as it were.

Thermal and **Cape** are huge drawings, ah, big, bulky, anatomy, the female form, we know how to relate to this. Small heads, shoulders that are muscle bound. They cannot move – troggy, troll-like. If they try to plod bits of dingus drop off their feet, their legs, and right on up. Like the snail cape they make their mark. What a state to be in. So strong and heavy I am useless. Ah that wonderful ikon of contemporary art, the female form that is reinvented as powerful and pinheaded. **Cape** has a top half which is defined and rounded, padded looking, like an executioner in an executioner's leather helmet. Arms held hovering by those strong strong shoulders, plump, clasped, babyless. She is trying to turn to the right – in dancing? – but cannot, her maker has given her no hinge. Her mechanics will not let her move but watch merely, from side to side. She has no genitals, no form below the waist. Dropped down from her right hand side is a squiggle of an organ lump, liver or heart. A spraying line suggests the organ has fallen from her bottom.

Thermal has arms slightly out as if to hold up a skirt or in balancing mode. There is a suffering tilt to the head. She has the magnificent rounded belly, the junoesque breasts, two right hands, one flopped, the other erectly holding the pose. Nothing coming over her. The organ piece is now perched on her right hand side, at the crook of the waist.

Binding System is white chalk (smudged) on purple reddish glowing black muck background. It's massive and again the female form. Mapped in contours like how you're taught to begin drawing people; eye line ear line nose line etc. Basket grid meridian nerves chicken wire, inner and outer structures and networks. A finger has smeared lines in to indicate heat radiating from the head. This head also on a preprogrammed path, scanning from one side to the other. Coming round to it. The form of the person does not subordinate ideas at work. The drawing is not a representation but surface, intricately worked with scratchings and there's a suggestion of a full length cape with a surface of brickwork yet pleated in there also. The mystery of ceremonial dress and its trickery. Folds of material fall from skirts and collars to hang finely. The worshipper is not around to see the priest pinned and tucked into his magnificent appearance, and so never sees where adornments come from. And so magic is made by covering bodies up.

Yet this figure has carefully been given a tuft of hair on the head, Marion's preferred hairstyle, jokette. Quirky? Charm? Idiosyncratic? Ideas envisioned as single figures, state not relationship. They do not stretch out but are self-absorbed, either the chin in the chest of contemplation or a joyful leaping out and shouting, me, me, me. The piece Marion told was her smallest one with the enormous title of **SDI Cape**. It is a tiny wee drawing of a cape hung up with a bomber aircraft whizzing over the top. I have a copy on my wall, done up like a warning sign with a thick red crayon triangle. As comment or as quest it seems to hang suspended in the middle of nothing. In this respect it is like a Glen Baxter. But there's something about it. Some Thing. There's a lot of ideas in here waiting to be brought out.



S. D. T.

Graham Harwood interviewed by Gordon Muir

Graham Harwood is a London based artist who processes images culled from the mass media through the photocopier machine into a practice which is supportive of a 'working-class cultural activity'. He has published a book "John and Other Stories" on the artist run 'Working Press' and has exhibited twice in Scotland, at the Dundee Resource Centre for the Unemployed in 1987 and at Transmission in 1988. Glasgow painter Gordon Muir spoke with him on the occasion of his "Work" exhibition at Transmission Gallery.

G.M. I'd like to know more about your background. What did you make of your art education?

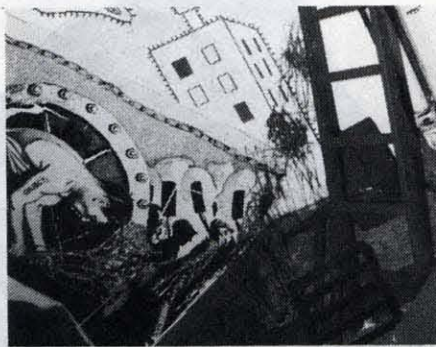
G.H. My initial idea of what an art school was came from the 1960's when art schools were expanding. If you came from a working-class family, it was like you were being given freedom, whereas, by the time I actually went to art school - which was in '76 - working-class culture had been reduced to the level that you were actually being intimidated and being taught to work within a culture that you didn't feel you belonged to. That was totally alien.

G.M. So you felt that the freedom which had been awarded to the working-classes, via student grants and the opening up of the education system to everyone regardless of background was already being eroded in the 70's?

G.H. Yes, but I think that by the mid-'70's, that had died away and working-class people - because of what the earlier generation had gained from going to those places - you knew that you was going to lose your culture by going to those places, which is why I chose to go to a technical college, which was more orientated towards more functional areas... I got accepted into Chelsea Art School to do fine art, or I could have done graphics or Industrial Design, so I chose to do that one because to go to art school is such a colossal rift from the people that you grew up with... And there's work, which I knew I didn't want to do so...

G.M. Official British culture is still very stuffy, stemming from - in painting - Constable or Whistler. If you look at something like the National Portrait competition with its emphasis on detail, technical excellence... The introduction of working-class students into art school in the late '50's did however go some way to challenging that. Now it's getting tighter again with Thatcherism's attacks on higher education, particularly with Arts and Social Sciences.

G.H. I think the thing is though that there's a whole working-class tradition within the arts like Bruegel and Hogarth... There was this huge sort of challenge with Hogarth on the one side and Reynolds on the other - Reynolds with his theory of beauty, Hogarth not having any such a theory, only of reality and of truth. The two of them challenged one another and eventually Hogarth was defeated, but Hogarth from his working-class background went into print-making, because it was the only legitimate way to achieve or earn money. He did the penny



prints round all the pubs, and that's how he built up his audience.

G.M. Print-making can also have a propagandist element to it - mass distribution of images amongst the working-class, rather than being forced into enriching the culture of the wealthy.

G.H. Hogarth's father was put into a paupers prison convicted of being a debtor, so I feel that kind of experience gives this work its contemptuous edge. He supported the bourgeoisie eventually, but I can understand that in the context of the times that he lived, his background and what he was actually trying to do. William Blake used printed works and it is amazing, he never refused any type of work - calling cards for undertakers and stuff, right up to the end. He simply never refused work.

G.M. I'm sure that activity was a practical one, coming as it does from the fact that in those days if you were working class and didn't work you starved and died.

G.H. Blake also got a lot of stick for marrying a tinker's daughter. But there is a tradition running all the way through of people working in reproduction, trying to aim their work at a mass audience...

G.M. There is a conscious attempt by you in your work to follow in that tradition, yet avoiding crass sentimentalism.

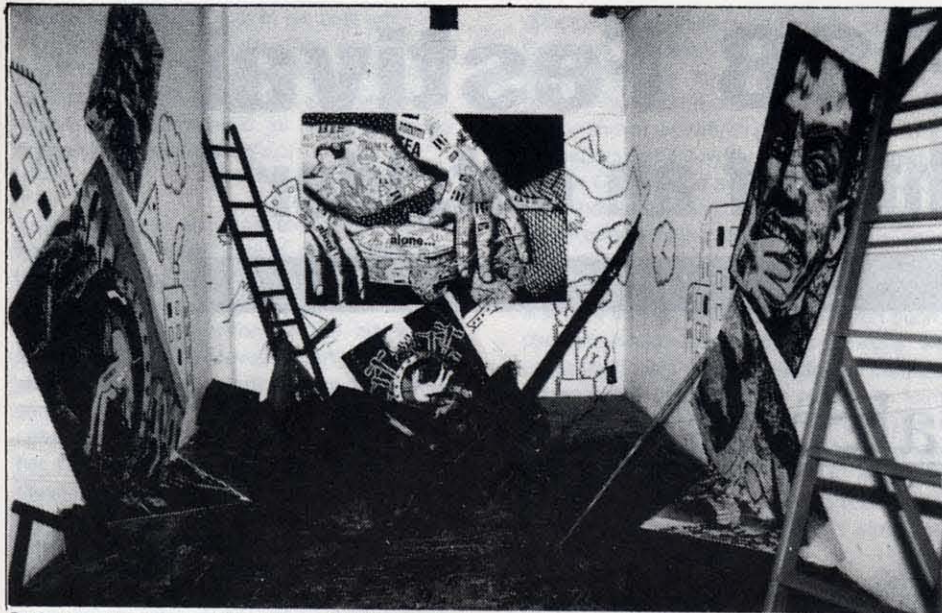
G.H. What I felt was that it was really important to state what is going on in working-class culture. In working-class families there is usually at least one person passing on stories to the next generation. And another way to get information across is which is as easily accessible is with my book 'John and other stories'. I give a copy to every kid that's born in my family so that they commute with this as they grow up. It's that there are no positive working-class images around that actually deal with what's going on in that class. You can't grow up

today feeling proud of being working-class, it's very hard, even though you build the roads, you build everything... In order to give some confidence in that I started to do things, like the book. With the "Work" Exhibition, I was interested in the positive images of work in the 1930's which were progressive in their day, from Socialist circles but also Fascist circles, and how they merged at that time. You could take a speech by Hitler, and it seems to apply today... I was looking at the catalogue for the recent 'Critical Realism' exhibition and the work seemed to draw on romantic images of a monolithic working class of the '30's, but nowadays an image of the worker at one with his work-place seems a totally reactionary idea, and the reality of work is that it is the single most oppressive factor in people's lives, and what the left is bound to lose credibility, because it is like they are supporting Thatcher and Capitalism. ...y Thatcher and Capitalism.

G.M. Another thing about heroic images of the working-class is that they usually portray the male in the traditional hunter-gatherer role and the female takes secondary importance, even though there were thousands of sweat-shops up and down the country (still are - editor), and industries using female labour. In this sense too there is also a huge amount of female cultural production that went on but has been ignored and lost, as it tended not to use the male dominated areas like painting. It took the form of tapestry, weaving etc.

G.H. I find it interesting as well that with the realities of work, that men had their self-esteem smashed to bits through going to work, being told what to wear, when to piss etc... Then trying to recover their self-esteem through oppressing women, as the follow on stage. Like men reduced to objects will in turn reduce women to objects. It's important to understand the basis of oppressions and it seems to me that work is an area where all these oppressions stem from, like the notion of the nuclear family has to be there to support the work situation. You know, the male working 8 hours a day, coming home tired, then the woman looks after him, looks after the children, runs the house and it's all related and structured around the idea of 'work'.

G.M. This notion of "working-class-ness" which has obviously changed radically from the solid flat-capped image of the '30's, to being something much more amorphous or fragmented, where it is much more difficult to define what is and what is not working-class.



Graham Harwood "Work" exhibition at Transmission.

G.H. I don't quite agree with that. I think that a big part of oppression of working-class people is to teach them that they are not working-class anymore. For example, I know a few people who have come from working-class backgrounds and trained as architects, and once they qualify, they join a building firm as a design consultant because they cannot handle that 'moving up the ladder' thing, they move sideways and become design consultants and stuff. I don't think that professionalism is there in working-class culture - trades are, but professionalism is a bit alien.

G.M. But don't you think that the notion of 'trades' has changed? In a mass consumer society there is now only a very small area for things like craftsmanship and pride in your work. This has been replaced by speed of production and economic growth through skimming on materials etc . . .

G.H. I think it also de-humanises things as well to a degree where, for example, an electrician used to have power over how things were constructed, but now he just puts plugs on hoovers and the workings are pushed further away, so that no-one has got power over the commodities they buy, in order to protect markets. I think that has a lot to do with the decline of craft, that you have to buy products instead of constructing them, like radios etc. that idea taken to extremes.

G.M. . . . The images you use in your work are fractioned, broken up, conflicting with one another, but there is also a clarity there which is enhanced by the way you clash images from high culture and from newspapers and magazines. This isn't a bag of liquorice all sorts for the viewer though, there are very definite narratives which can be understood by most.

G.H. I think that is the strength of the working-class is its inner diversity and differences. Like in Scotland, a lot of people talk about 'The English' as though we were one sort of monolithic race of Oxford graduates. But the reality is that if you go to, say, Bradford, you can find flat-capped hindus talking with broad Bradford accents. Also if you go to London

there's Caribbean groups, with two languages, a black language and a white one. I think it is really positive . . . People tend to hang onto this idea of the working-class as a monolithic thing, I mean the working-class in Glasgow are not the same as the working-class in South London. Its an appalling idea to reduce people to the one level. I also think that the thrust behind capitalism is to create one market, so that everyone is 'right-handed', everyone has the same history, so that everyone consumes the same commodities, everyone uses the same plug.

G.M. It's the product of post-modernity that you can go anywhere in the world and find the same crappy coke machines, the same effluent of consumerism. It flattens and nullifies small cultures.

G.H. It's more or less the same experience walking down the road in Glasgow as it is in Oxford Street in London.

G.M. You obviously have a positive approach in exhibiting in small independent galleries, and unusual, non-art based spaces.

G.H. Transmission is the first art-space which I have exhibited in. Normally I exhibit in spaces which are 'walk throughs', people moving through, going somewhere else, and that's why the images are quite punchy, they are designed to exist in the street alongside the hoardings and the crap, they are designed to survive out in the road. Those kinds of environments I find much more interesting, like cafes, or the Dundee Resource Centre for the Unemployed. Like in the cafe where I did my part of the 'Festival of Plagiarism' show - most of the staff were black and their interest and talk about the work was really good because they felt easier seeing art in that environment. That was a really nice feeling. I went to a meeting about being 'English' and the question was asked about what you felt proud about being English and there was deadly silence. I stood up and gave quite a patriotic speech, because since the war you've this huge women's movement, which has totally changed culture in the mass media, and a black culture which has done the same, so I think that's really positive and in those

respects there is a lot to be proud about being English.

G.M. Do you think that that is something peculiar to England, that those things could only flourish under the umbrella of 'British democracy'?

G.H. No. I think it's the only positive aspect of colonialism that all these people have a right to be here. It's the arse-end of colonialism that its actually worked to people's advantage, like if you go to a 'white' place in England they are really disastrous. I feel that a lot of people in London for example would fear going into a white area more than a black area, like a gang of white youths you don't know why they're going to beat you up, in a black area at least they have a reason.

G.M. Your work is concerned with turning dominant images on their head.

G.H. Reclaiming culture. It's also interesting that there's this sort of image-war going on. Saatchi and Saatchi for example at the last election campaign, took Labour's successes like the health service that struck a chord with older generations, and re-wrote all the captions to make it seem like a Tory success. So what they effectively did was take working class victories and turn them around and make them seem like blatant Conservative achievements. Again though, there is so much to be celebrated on the left, like the General Strike; it has great sociological significance, but it's never celebrated.

G.M. It's as if they are embarrassed to regurgitate these positive images which are so strong.

G.H. Yeh, like Cable Street as well. Like the biggest impression of white East-Enders is that they're racists, and nothing comes out of that history of unity and energy of the East-End. I went to oral history group meetings in the East-End and talked with people who had lived there all their lives, and there were lots of people from lots of places like Brick Lane market, amongst the Jewish community, fighting the Fascist blackshirts. And it seems simply because it had a direct conflict with authority it's now not officially celebrated. There is that sense that the Labour Party are scared nowadays of saying that conflict with authority can have a positive outcome. Even in Glasgow in 1926, it's really difficult to get the information on what went on, when it was such a major event in labour history.

G.M. You seem to avoid setting your work in a context which might strip it of these concerns.

G.H. The reason why I stopped painting pictures and moved into things like photocopies is because art is something to look at. And what people would do is look at how I had done it, look at the style etc. . . . Whereas when it was a machine produced image people could only look at the image. You know, people wouldn't say 'that's a nice piece of black you've used there' because all of that goes, because it is the cheapest form of image-making that you can produce today. And in that sense I found it easier to talk to a working-class audience, because they weren't worried about whether I could paint or not.

EDGE 88 Festival

thoughts of an outsider

Malcolm Dickson

EDGE 88 occurred last September in the Clerkenwell area of London. Initiated by Rob Le Frenais (ex-editor of *Performance Magazine*), it was organised in conjunction with Newcastle-based Projects U.K. and with the Air Gallery. Edge saw itself as Britain's first 'Biennale of Experimental Art', and as Chrissie Iles points out in her introduction to the catalogue, it was an international event. It claimed to have an 'emphasis on process rather than product' and she suggested a 'laboratorial definition of the art under discussion (rather than a 'genre' definition) which corresponded to one notion (raised by Pavel Buchler) of the experimental artist as an 'alchemist' who transforms materials. The introduction also mentioned something about 'a new approach'.

What was perhaps new, though not innovative, was its forum for artists of international acclaim, some of whom were visiting Britain for the first time. Some important names from the performance art history books were there; Carolee Schneeman (U.S.A.), Jerzy Beres (Poland), Stuart Brisley (England), Valie Export (Vienna), Ulrike Rosenbach (Germany) and a host of artists from England with established reputations; Rose Garrard, Ian Breakwell, Tina Keane and Alistair MacLennan (Ireland). Edge had the task of trying to put to centre stage a plethora of heterogeneous activities which have been manifesting themselves in the artworld since the Sixties with the categorisation of certain occurrences as Happenings, actions, site-specific and issue-based installation and media based art. Within the development of such activity there has been a set of critical approaches and ideas informed by analytical, feminist and post-structuralist theory from which criticism has emerged, though much less so in Britain than in the States, Canada, Australia or Europe. Such was the premise of Edge and it represented not new art but a retrospective of something already revolving too heavily on its own history.

What was also new about Edge was its high profile status, through funding, curatorship and marketing. It is no surprise then, given the tenuous position of art funding, that Edge has set itself up as a business, a consortium of interests in this area who aim to consolidate their positions or careers in the art world.

That the title "Edge" was taken seriously was questioned by participating Canadian artist Vera Frenkel, who had presumed before her arrival at the festival that it was an 'entrepreneurial gesture' and a 'recruitment fiction' to attract funds which it obviously managed to do (though it couldn't have been easy). It was also apparent that by the time most of these artists get to a festival such as "Edge" (in terms of their area of work and not the journey to London) that they are not experimental anymore, leaving aside - for the sake of argument - Rose Garrard's interesting point that all artists are experimental. Edge was riddled with the contradiction that what is truly avant-garde today is largely unseen and may well operate outside of the marketplace - 'artspeak' magazines, official festivals, or compete for funding from the live art promoters etc.

What concerns this polemic is not the particular artists who participated in the festival, or with a review of their particular work (some of which was worth seeing), but with the concept of the festival itself, how it perceives itself, its projected image of 'experimental art' and its attempt to force a tradition upon the work through curatorial manoeuvres.

The catalogue for "Edge" (published by *Performance Magazine*) does present some well-written essays which don't just relate art and its value to its support structure in terms of curators, galleries, funding, prestige (which are for the most part problematic when dealing with expanded art activity) but try to map out some complexity and depth to much of the artists work who were included in the festival. Apart from a tame introduction from the usually more incisive Chrissie Iles, the catalogue included writings from Dan Cameron, Sylvia Eiblmayr, Steven Durland, and Gray Watson. In addition, notes on the participating artists were included and a full page reproduction of each of the artists work (or artists text). With some irony, the reprint from *Parkett Magazine* by American critic Dan Cameron exudes a healthy cynicism and perceptive monologue on the superficiality of successions of style in a moribund art world. This might have been "Edge" applying an ironic self-criticism of itself given its liberal intentions were it not for the fact that humour, irony, or any

kind of subversive self-parody did not become apparent at any time during the event:

"Artists today seem much less involved in making actual breakthroughs than in painstakingly reconstructing the cultural signposts of a memorable avant-garde career. Even when these signposts indicate that one must overthrow the example of one's predecessors, the revolt is presented as a single stage in a finite process whose pre-determined goal is the ascendancy of one more creative individual to the rank of demi-god . . ."

Sylvia Eiblmayr in her essay academically relates feminist and psychoanalytical ideas to the history of the avant-garde, through Surrealism, Happenings, Actionism and Fluxus, through which to construct a "Female Concept of Self-Representation". She suggests that through deconstruction and moving away from the pure concerns of art and its medium-specificity and into the 'theatrical', that it has provided an area for women's praxis.

Steven Durland (editor of the more-hip *High Performance* magazine in the States) takes examples of 3 different artists as representing 3 separate decades of experimental work in the U.S.A. The work of Carolee Schneeman in the Sixties, Paul Wong in the Seventies and Survival Research Laboratories in the Eighties, suggests Durland, illustrate the sensibility informing expanded art activity in the U.S. and it also traces the emergence, development and accommodation of that practice:

"Schneeman began her career before there was a support structure (alternative spaces, grants etc. . .) for experimental work. Paul Wong's career is strongly associated with this support structure and he was instrumental in its beginnings in Vancouver where he was co-founder of Video Inn. S.R.L. came into being at a time when the support structure had become institutionalised, and as a group, they've generally tended to avoid it . . ."

London critic, Gray Watson, stresses the need for a more considered reading of what he calls "content rich experimental work" through which - citing examples of Alistair MacLennan, Stuart Brisley, Rose Garrard and Denis Masi - we can deepen our insight into our own moral, psychological and social conditions in the

present age. Watson can at his best articulate the significance of this grey area called experimental art and its possible intellectual functions, which may be confrontational, analytical or therapeutic (or 'healing' as he applies it to Ulrike Rosenbach's work).

Two conference sessions took place at the beginning of "Edge" which pre-empted any discussion of the festival as it had occurred (and thereby perhaps putting the organisers on the spot) or any discussion of the art works included in it. "Who Moves the Art" lacked any specific reference or starting point on which a seminar could be opened out beyond the speakers introductions. Iolwa Blazwick stated her position as that of aiming to disrupt the museum tendency to assimilate radical art. Quoting Krzysztof Wodiczko, she allied herself to the position of infiltrating and working with the late capitalist urban structure: TV, billboards, advertising; without compromising the art. This was a significant quote and an area to which most of the work in Edge eluded from and was thereby an area to which the organisers did not direct their interest when choosing work. Blazwick could quote such a statement for it did not bring her own role into question. Admittedly, one cannot expect someone to stand up in an art conference and question their job, though whether this is a stylish accommodation of oppositional art claiming to be an opponent of the museums accommodation of oppositional art, might be answered or further confused by the fact that she is an administrator in a bourgeois no-risk policy institution which sees itself as the centre of contemporary art. (The I.C.A. might hold conferences on Post-Modern Culture and the democratisation and accessibility of art criticism but it still refuses to stock journals such as this one - editorial note.)

Steven Durland made a significant point also by bringing up (in passing) the area of 'networking' - that by creating our own structures we need not be so reliant on the dominant mainstream system. The elements that make up art - culture, race, feminism, sociology, criticism, education etc., are all important and as Durland suggested, are more interesting than the system that surrounds it (funding, status against other artforms etc.). Once this is established then broader cultural ideas become engaged with rather than just the "art issues". As with Blazwick's points, they were not pursued since there was little time for audience involvement except for the usual accusation of cultural dominance by some artists in the audience.

The second conference session, "Experiment and Culture" seemed more focussed on a broad theme of how experimental art operates 'within a range of different cultural contexts'. Different positions or approaches were represented by the panel speakers: Kellie Jones (Visual Arts Director, Jamaica Arts Centre, New York) supported multi-culturalism and in breaking down the segregation that exists between 'black art shows and other shows of different cultural origin'. Isaac Julien (film-maker and founder of Sankofa Video in London) chooses to work through the political and economic framework of a black co-operative. Andreas Mortes also works co-operatively as a theatre

director in the political and artistic context of Catalonia in Spain. Sara Selwood (director of the Air Gallery in London) is involved in programming issue-based art or art which may not be shown elsewhere in London. Paul Wong defines his context as coming from the artist run area in Canada and as an artist, organiser and publisher he is involved in creating forms which, as he puts it, "allow marginal voices to speak out" whether that be new art, new ideas, issue or community art. Wong also said that this was the first time he had been asked to sit on such a platform where the word experimental was being used which might indicate the contrived nature of the event. Wong's comments found some empathy with us and his categorisation of himself as a "lobbyist for new expression" and of maintaining control of the means of production and distribution seemed convincing, though, needless to say, weren't elaborated upon.

The conference revolved around the definition of 'the experimental' which is a bit like stating the obvious but is also proposing that we might have a problem in our perception of it, which is not normally the case. This might have been due to the chairperson Steve Rogers (editor* of Performance Magazine who also published the Edge catalogue), or more likely with jaded London attitudes to the area which now can't see the wood for trying to classify the trees (the same kinds of questions were directed at the audience in Glasgow during the National Review Platform discussion chaired also by Rogers). It is unfortunate that Steve Rogers became the Edge apologist thereby relinquishing his role as 'autonomous critic', since criticism should have been welcomed by the organisers and they should have responded to it. Rogers did manage to - eloquently, in my opinion - state that which we knew already at the beginning: that video, performance, installation are formally experimental and that 'experimental' means 'going against the dominant grain whether that be artistic or political'. Rasheed Araeen, visibly unsettled, threw an arrogant spanner in the works though the point was to question the Eurocentric nature of the whole discussion; "the culture we are talking about at this table is fixed - culture is not a fixed entity, it is in constant transformation and that transformation is not only taking place in Europe it is taking place everywhere in the world". This could have initiated a good starting point when the chairperson salvaged from the general confusion the points that "... experiment is a process and does the process of experiment actually parallel the process of cultural change or does it somehow create the cultural change?" It was too late in the day to ever start considering it.

The theoretical and conceptual framework expressed in the catalogue and at the seminar do not necessarily - and rarely - correspond with the intentions of such a festival or with the eventual outcome at the end of the programme of events. In retrospect, Edge 88 seemed less concerned with that 'continuous border to be found in all directions' (Durland) as it was in legitimising an area in terms of the prevailing power structures in the artworld. The motivations of the director of such a festival have to be considered, as does the future

intentions of such organisations. The differences between being a catalyst or being involved in a promotional exercise are crucial but fast disappearing in our marketable free enterprise culture. One need not be an opponent of festivals or with the concept of Edge, but through its mode of organisation and its re-affirmation of the various myths surrounding the artist, its possible only virtue was, in retrospect, attaining the funds to do it in the first place.

FOOTNOTE

IN the early 80's the role performed by the Basement Group/Projects U.K. (see interview in Variant 4), by Performance Magazine, and by the National Review Of Live Art is considerable in providing the possibility for funding and some support for the live art area. The N.R.L.A., always rooted in the 'performance art' genre, this year combined audio-visual theatre, experimental dance and installation work, predominantly from groups South of the Border. This year in Glasgow it demonstrated that with the participation of others, it can be an important event and as the video section confirmed (see review elsewhere in this issue) that it can also have pertinence to an area of work and interest in Scotland. Projects U.K. have promoted unconventional artistic approaches in a challenging and professional way which in many ways has resulted in other organisations also outside of London setting up their own projects as in Hull (Hull Time Based Arts), in Halifax (Paul Bradley, Babel) and in Glasgow (Event Space). As a counterpoint to Edge, 'New Work Newcastle 88' occurred shortly after Edge including many artists from it, though given their previous festivals in '86 and '87 and to an ongoing strategy for funding for experimental approaches (and to that which is often of political or interventionist intention), 'New Work Newcastle' is the precursor to Edge and employs a way of working which Edge might be suspected of hyping.

Whilst the role employed by Performance Magazine was one of support rather than criticism, that valid position in the early '80's is diminished somewhat with the growth of a support system and the (limited) interest other art magazines devote to live art. It seems imperative that some kind of expanded criticism take off from the art in order to renew the activity today as the problematics of art practice become more significant in the light of such things as the festival city concept, commercial festivals and to the fact that art today seems more about administration than creative concepts.

*Steve Rogers tragically died in December 1988. Variant extends its admiration for the enthusiasm Steve maintained for performance art and hopes that the support Performance Magazine gave will be returned in continuing such a publication now that it has lost its editor.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Edge 88

William Clark

I went to the Edge Festival to write on two performances: Carolee Schneeman's "Cat Scan" and Ulrike Rosenbach's "In the House of Women". I include reference to other artists work because they were presented alongside the two works under discussion. I do not evaluate them in comparison, but simply to illustrate points. I have included Helen Chadwick's installation since it helped me to focus on shared elements of spiritual themes and imagery. This piece is not meant to be comprehensible of the festival. I aim to give an impression of installations and performance work which have now ceased to exist, but for me provided issues which remain alive.



Ulrike Rosenbach
"In the House of Women"
performance at Edge 88.

PERFORMANCE Magazine had been commandeered by Edge and served as a catalogue for the festival. Basic information was provided by the critics - even allowing for this, I was still not particularly familiar with Ulrike Rosenbach's work. My expectations were that I would see someone akin to Beuys, with an ideology firmly rooted in

concerns which aim to take the political into the arena of the personal. Extending this territory seems a concern of Helen Chadwick's work; indeed she takes the opportunity in the catalogue lack of sensibility as regards the historical codification of religious imagery and symbolism.

Photo: Jon Bewley. © Projects U.K.

Both Rosenbach and Chadwick made works set within a 'natural' setting. This decision (which the organisers fully appreciated) was a direct result of the intrinsic aims of what both artists sought to achieve in relation to art, audience and nature. Most of the other installations which used 'non-art spaces' tended to do so to gain a convenient, anonymous or atmospheric setting. The works of Chadwick and Rosenbach shared a complete identification with their location: deciphering its 'cultural inscription', using an overall balance between art and nature which makes the gentle demand for open-ness of mind.

Rosenbach's "In the House of Women", conveyed the impression of being a 'simple' work, yet it also conveyed an undeniable seriousness of intent. Within the light and air of the out-door setting (a cloistered garden adjacent to a church), it drew upon natural 'in situ' elements such as a statue of Christ on the cross and three large trees which were linked together by a lattice made from three red ropes. Slow ringing music and the burning of incense formed a prelude to Rosenbach's entrance.

Dressed in a long red skirt she stood in the threshold of the stone archways at the back of the garden. Coming into full view she began to walk carefully and with great poise over to the trees and ropes - all the time feeling the grass beneath her bare feet. The music changed subtly, Rosenbach unclasped her hands from behind her back and with them outstretched for balance she began to spin round continuously. With a spiralling forward motion she wound her way around and within the confines of the red ropes. Her body and hand would continually entwine and extricate themselves in a flowing, searching motion, round the entire perimeter of the ropes for about 10 minutes. She then stopped completely still with the ropes clasped above her head in a prayer-like manner. Throughout the performance she maintained a fixed and intense gaze - this look of concentration remains strong in my memory.

Helen Chadwick's installation "Blood Hymen" was made specially for the Clerkenwell and Islington Medical Mission. Again it could be described as conveying a simplicity of design. This simplicity belies an adroitness in her ability to create a fertile poetic harmony between thoughts preconceived in symbolic form and the more particular ideas associated with the physical setting of the work. This type of orientation within the art work carries with it not only problematic technical demands but certain responsibilities which in my opinion she met in quite an inspiring manner.

On entering the church in which the work was set, the viewer seen nothing but the pews and blank stares normally associated with a church. The viewer was directed to the pulpit at the far end of the space. A square opening was above it, indicating an attic space. Once bowing down and standing with head and shoulders in the opening, one could then view the installation.

This 'hiding' of the work heightened its revelatory aspect. It also made it a more

And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind Him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd. *St Luke, VIII 43-44.*

Linking beginning and end, the knife's cut to the gash of the lance, we trace a passage on the body of Christ from man to God... Christ's redemptive Passion, which culminates on the cross in the blood of the sacred heart, begins in the blood of the penis... The coupling of Christ's last and first wounds becomes topical in 15th & 16th-century Passion pictures that guide the trickle of gore from the breast back to the groin: a *blood hyphen* between commencement and consummation.

Leo Steinberg "The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion" October No. 25, MIT Press, 1983. I wish to call attention to artistic depictions that suggest that Christ's flesh was sometimes seen as female, as lactating and giving birth. Over



and over again in the 14th & 15th-centuries we find representations of Christ as the one who feeds and bleeds. Squirting blood from wounds often placed high in the side, Christ fills cups for his followers just as Mary feeds her baby... Blood is what is emphasised - blood as covenant, in part, but primarily blood as suffering. Thus

blood is redemptive because Christ's pain gives salvific significance to what we all share with him: and what we share is not a penis. It is the fact that we can be hurt. We suffer.

Caroline Walker Bynum "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg" *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol XXXIX No. 3, 1986

By pressing the control pedal, the doctor can shoot the laser either as a short burst or a continuous beam. The direction of the beam is along an ordinary visible light beam - often red or purple - which shows up on the cervix where the laser is targeted. When the beam hits the cervix it completely vapourizes a tiny area...

Graham H. Barker FRCS, MRCOG "Your Smear Test" Adamson Books 1987

personal experience. The installation consisted of a dimly lit upper space which had been created through the construction of a false roof, which became the floor of the space. Here the viewer could discern the neo-Gothic shapes of two rows of Church windows centralised by a large organ and surrounded with choir pews. The windows were shaded with sepia brown paper whilst (the most striking feature) a long red laser light beam traversed the space diagonally. This fell on a photograph, immediately to the viewer's right, which depicted a microscopic detail of cells taken from a cervical smear test. On leaving the installation I noticed the words inscribed directly behind me on the Church wall, which read:

"Be still and know that I am God".

These motifs render humans as frail but valuable. In need of healing, extending to the healing of their very ideals. The words behind the viewer refer to a 'solution', a healing of spiritual anguish and uncertainty. State of mind is being increasingly linked to cancer as a means of fighting it and conversely as a cause. The statement on the wall (a quote from the Old Testament) expresses an offering of reconciliation, aiming for a balance and peace of mind. Should I regard these words as part of the artwork? Although this is a problem with this type of work, for art to penetrate social ideology as a reality (to its fullest extent), then it must become diffuse.

Rosenbach's ritual/prayer could be described as enacting the process of spiritual crisis, turbulence and an eventual peaceful resolution. Chadwick and Rosenbach share concerns while using different methods of representation and enactment. Both artists operated on a highly symbolic plane without becoming lost in abstraction. They remained strongly inspired by nature while using religious imagery 'in situ' as an ideological landscape: effectively combatting cultural displacement. By embracing this cultural setting they enhance their work with optimism, completely bypassing antipathy and angst. There were

RAPHAEL The Crucified Christ with the Virgin Mary, Saint and Angels, National Gallery, London (1495). Reproduced by kind permission of the National Gallery, London.

Helen Chadwick -
from the Edge 88 catalogue.

performances at the festival (such as that by Stuart Brisley and Alistair MacLennan) which chose to embody the de-spiritualised state of society. In my opinion this continual presentation of a cathartic experience could be said to run the risk of an eventual loss of power by frightening off their audience or desensitising them or make them desirous to see a more dangerous spectacle next time.

Gray Watson in one of the catalogue essays describes Ulrike Rosenbach's work as "genuinely healing". Healing as a process demanding human contact and understanding seems aptly suited to performance work. Marina Warner quotes a passage from Chadwick's notebooks, which makes a good summary:

"Progress has to be made through self-understanding, self-awareness, but one of the taboos has been an exploration of one's own body. To understand the capacity for transcendence through the flesh one has to move in the face of theory into areas that cannot be comprehended by theory. I want the body to be as much a site of victory as the brain"

Carolee Schneeman's performance was much longer and more theatrical than Rosenbach's work, perhaps more 'experimental dance' than 'performance art'. It also does not lend itself to abridgement. It took place in the main area of a warehouse space which hosted Stuart Brisley, Mona Hatoum and Paul Wong in the lower floors. There was a large audience for the event, comprised mainly of artist and organisers, and there was an enjoyable air of expectation in the wait for the performance to begin.

The audience was greeted by a sudden onrush of a gang of grey clad figures of both sexes. They proceeded to demolish what at first sight appeared to be a video installation but what turned out to be a hollow construction, which with the aid of slide projections, gave the illusion of a bank of monitors. This was also enhanced by a voiceover soundtrack which played continually throughout the work. This consisted of various words and phrases related to cats and sex. The six grey figures proceeded to go

through a dance routine with the aid of various props such as shopping trolleys, sweeping brushes. The movements of the dancers were choreographed in a cyclical movement, each of the protagonists exchanging objects. The performance settled down to these creeping movements punctuated by the thud of a brush being slammed on the floor. Slides were projected over the dancers at all times and these consisted of images of Schneeman burying a dead cat alternating with images of Egyptian art and worship. She entered the space herself while the dancers lay in a tangled embrace on the floor. She was dressed in a leotard and red tights upon which were small Egyptian motifs. She seemed wound in red bandages like a mummy and proceeded to dance ungainly around the area. It is here my notes fail me, the performance effectively broke down into a series of disastrous errors and mistakes with a particularly embarrassing episode of a blindfolded Carolee Schneeman falling on her audience, repeatedly.

The performance seemed to have been orchestrated from an extremely dillitanté position. It failed as an experiment - in it's relationship to Egyptian culture (described by Schneeman at the conference as "cultural re-proportionalism"). Here she seems to have fallen prey to a disguised cultural imperialism which consists of her adopting a few elements from one of history's most highly symbolic and mythological religions. Bolstering what in reality is playful whimsey with an occult sophistry largely of her own devising. Various aspects of her lifestyle were accorded the same importance as the dynastic heritage of ancient Egypt. The gods were against her on the night, but leaving that aside, any meaningful communication of her ideas were as imperceptible as the music she was dancing to on her personal stereo.

Carolee Schneeman's much vaunted reputation as a sixties performance artist of note, seems almost wholly constructed from documentation photographs which are enhanced by certain critics who regard her as a referential milestone in the history of performance art simply because other critics do. After actually witnessing her work live I fear this reputation slightly illusory.

Celebrating the Egyptian aristocracy's practice of cat worship seems just as ill-considered as celebrating our own Royal Family's dog and horse worship. Celebrating the Pharaoh's androgyny as a feminist issue also seems as ill considered as celebrating any of our own incensuous ruler's corpulent bulk.

The performance lacked the fascination of dream, mythology and enigmatic ritual which, if we believe her statement on the work this is said to permeate it. Schneeman's presentation of herself as the centre of attraction was a grave error. The actions she performed were just too irrelevant and humorous to achieve anything other than a denegration of her subject matter. Furthermore her projection of herself at the expense of thorough exposition of the culture she "re-proportions" is tantamount to a regrettable display of egotism.

It seems to me that Schneeman's performance and the critical writing surrounding it suffers

from an unwanted legacy stemming from the sixties. Problems of terminology do exist in Performance Art, but they also exist in what history we align it to, and construct for it. One of the clarifying factors in understanding it and evaluating work is that we must weigh performance art's contribution to critical theory against the social values and the cultural determinants it postulates. Performance art criticism suffers from a reluctance to engage in a level of debate which not only aligns this type of art to anthropological concerns ranging into pre-history (shamanism, ritual etc.) but encapsulates this in a positive progression in religion and 20th Century political thought. As Harold Rosenberg noted in the sixties, the avant-garde suffered from a crisis in becoming a "de-politicized zone". This was partly due to the freedoms won becoming irresponsible luxuries in encouraging the refusal to distinguish in practice between whether art is a socially creative activity or part of the bourgeoisie value system.

I see performance art in non-theatrical terms. I see it as conveying its means of production. I see it as having significance not as one of many signs; but in its ability to rediscover the creative energies of the community by de-mystifying art. In questioning what ideologies are determinants in the constitution of its organisational structure.

Performance art has given us profitable insight into ways of organising art which do not seek to be merely new intellectual frameworks; but rather, they shun the cult of novelty in a progressive manner they gather the received wisdom of all ages and cultures into a forceful utopian vision. The arena of performance art has brought to bear ideas and systems, ways of seeing and being which have tremendous use value in society and how we organise ourselves within it.

To me the most important points raised by the festival, as regards the conference of ideas which it represented are indicated in some way when the writing by Iolwa Blazwick on Krzysztoph Wodeczko was quoted at the conference. There was also very positive points brought up on artist-run spaces but the implications of both these went largely ignored. For ideas such as these to fully develop their social potential; the futile race for status and "to be fashionable" must be replaced by regional development and joint purpose rather than international commodity exchange and lone profit.

The successive provision of new intellectual frameworks postulates a context where the artist is forever above the audience; explaining the difficulties of art and creating them in the first place. Site-specific work holds the potential to work alongside the 'public' in the city. Despite the tacit acknowledgement of the lessons learned (in organisational structure) from the Women's movement, there still remains the need to preclude Bourgeoisie appropriation and refuse the ghetto of 'sub-culture' or 'pseudo-culture'. To create the state of being of a parallel culture, moving towards opposition: full contestation and the assumption of power. No a communication of ideas only, but a communion of minds.

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Views from an Electronic Attic

Channel A: Video at the National Review of Live Art, The Third Eye Centre, Glasgow from 5th-9th October

Doug Aubrey

ALL the work presented in the much improved, new formula and thoughtfully presented section of the National Review of Live Art (sounds more like a soap powder than an exhibition) concentrated, to quote the catalogue notes 'uncompromisingly on video as a form in its own right.' The show provided an opportunity to see a lot of new tapes (mostly produced by Artists in Scotland) in a broader context, in a space, which if the Third Eye have the insight could become an excellent permanent venue for video work. (What about a Third Eye Videotheque or National Video Archive, but then a space for video - on its own you mean - without the other stuff . . .?)

An energy and spirit of experimentation typified the majority of the work on show - both the successes and the failures.

A spirit often lacking in much 'live work' which seems obsessed with key figures from the sixties and seventies (as was the case at Edge) or unable to break from the constant recycling of existing styles, approaches and attitudes (How much longer can younger performance artists go on 'imitating' McLennan, Brisley, Aktionsim et al before someone starts to experiment and trust their own experience and ability rather than simply appropriate style without content or spirit?)

Although relatively partisan in its selection, the Video programme overall showed that as the decade comes to an end that there is like in other artforms no one way to make work and definitely no singular or limited vocabulary by which (in particular) younger artists operate.

Chris Rowland's piece **Hothouse** addresses itself to the festival city in particular the (currently being bull-dozed) Glasgow Garden Festival. A random and tangled mass of monitors lie stacked on top of each other inside a glass green house, from the viewers position an over saturated, roughly shot flow of images move across the surfaces of the TV. screens. Confusion is contained within the stable structure of the green house, with some images trying to get the better of other ones. Glass breaks and we hear voices - punters in awe at the glory of the gardens?

The Garden Festival was very much about a lot of gratuitous imagery - and folly to which a large number of artists have willingly contributed. It is both essential and relevant to tackle such subject matter from a critical perspective rather than simply become collaborators (the difficulty

being how as artists we all avoid simply becoming victims of an overbearing and often restrictive realism, yet still deal with an issue and avoid falling into the trap of simply making counter propaganda).

Work which deals directly with Social or Cultural criticism or comment is often looked upon by many as being either second rate or irrelevant, usually by those obsessed with much which is often outdated, obscure or style orientated at this period of time.

"If the shit stinks then smell the flowers instead. But then when you think about it what makes the flowers grow . . .?"

Rowland's piece was the only installation which attempts to deal with such a specifically poignant issue, which is both admirable and significant. However, the clarity in terms of content and presentation needs to be further resolved so that the impact and the implications of the work can be more fully realized and appreciated.

Beyond Colour A nine screen, video wall presentation by Mineo Aayamaguchi, ran continually throughout the event. A composed and rhythmic flow of images created a sense of harmony as landscape, nature, man-made objects such as digital displays on hi-fi's and

neon lights blended in with close up details of a clothed human body, creating a sense of 'wholeness' from formally disparate subjects and objects. Images seemed to flow across the surface of the TV. screens, breaking down the physical frames between image and the medium. On the floor mirrors reflected the images on the screens, broken-up and fragmented out across the space itself and into that occupied by the viewer.

The work's overall simplicity had an attraction which became infectious, drawing you back, to witness something different in the overall flow of events on each separate viewing, essential if the work's full potential was to be experienced and its sculptural quality fully appreciated. Contrasted with many of the other works in the show, this piece was relatively low-tech in its production, relying on composition of subject matter with the camera and well timed editing, to create many striking and beautiful images. A good example of where simplicity is often the best effect available to put ideas across.

At the other extreme in terms of the technology used to create it, Lei Cox's **The Untitled** created a work which attempts to transcend the time-base. If it were possible such a work would exist as a series of 3 looped images, running continually, with no discernable beginning, middle or end, reflecting on Cox's interest and



Chris Rowlands "Hothouse" installation. Photo: O. Bamboye.

activity as an important image maker/photographer rather than programme maker.

The three screens used each contained an image of a half-man/half beast-creature born from the technology (indeed Cox spent what probably amounted to hundreds of hours creating his image).

On one screen a fish with the body of a human swims across the front of the screen, a girl tapping the inside of the tank (the other side of our TV screen) trying to attract this strange creature's or our attention.

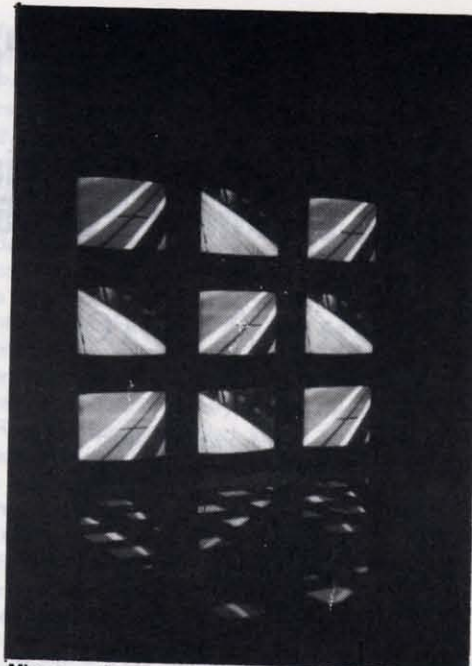
On another screen, a bird-like creature sits in a cage, its wings and body replaced with that of a human, again another face looks out from behind the caged image, making one wonder who exactly it is who's caged - Lei's creatures, the observer or ourselves.

On the third screen a half man half rat scurries around, trapped in a looped movement observed in the same manner as the others were. Occasionally, a model aeroplane flies past, either in front or behind the creations, adding depth and perspective to an otherwise 2-dimensional image.

Accompanying these 'creatures from the digital dimension' were a number of sampled and manipulated sounds, strange shrieks and primordial cries, emanating from the TV's and their caged creatures, somewhere deep within the medium itself. A fourth, as yet to be completed, image is awaited, necessitating countless more hours of time working with advanced technology such as the Quantel paintbox.

Cox, like several of the other artists exhibiting has been lucky enough to pursue and develop his ideas on some of the most advanced resources available to artists in Europe, at the Television Workshop in Dundee. The question which begs to be asked is would such lengthy periods of time be available to artists outside of such places and whether artists like Cox could pursue such a significant and important direction in their work outside of the current education system?

Like many others who were showing, Cox is a recent graduate of the Electronic Imaging course in Dundee, which now has the potential and resources to allow artists to make the medium as an artform into the nineties and beyond and out of the current confusion and conceptual 'difficulties' which hold it in pause and which if these younger artists are not given



Mineo Aaymaguchi "Beyond Colour" installation. Photo: O. Bamboye.

the opportunity, will result in a return to the numbing and stodgy pre-occupations of the seventies.

Alistair McDonald's piece **Staircase**, relied on the technically difficult requirement of ensuring that all the tapes were running in sync.

When this was the case the work is McDonald's best to date, dealing as it does with the themes of male hierarchy and masculinity, as we witness a 'rite-of-passage' from boyhood to manhood, with many of the images reflecting on the kind of media stereotypes to which males (supposedly) aspire.

A relatively simple piece in terms of its subject matter it has unlike any of the other installation works on show a narrative structure requiring that as viewers we are prepared to give up five minutes of our time to appreciate the work in full (obviously far beyond many respected art-viewing critics).

The subject matter is both significant and overlooked particularly from the obviously hetero-sexual stance which the work adopts. We are left wondering whether the media images and film icons included in the work are there for a critical or celebratory reason. Either interpretation has both a valid point and is one well worth addressing.

McDonald made this work almost eighteen months ago and like many who choose to work in the medium currently works in the 'industry' to be able to both live and sustain a creative practice. A new piece from McDonald is now long overdue . . .

In contrast to McDonald's piece, Kate Meynell's **Medusa** seemed unable to sustain its presence within the space. Whether this was through lack of consideration by the artist of the context in which the work was to be placed, or that the work itself required a more suitable and specific space (the piece was previously shown at the Tate Gallery) is open to interpretation. Whether a good installation should (to use everybody's favourite catch-all phrase) be 'site specific' or strong enough to transcend its context is open to debate.

Slower and more contemplative than the other works shown, an image of a human eye, moves slowly within the frame of TV screens, its mesmerizing gaze firmly rooted on the viewers. Images of varying significance were keyed over this - a solarised shot of a snake, the sea and pomegranates all appear as the work attempts to reverse or challenge the dominant (cultural) gaze of the male, questioning both the view point one may have or adopts. Accompanying the images is a hissing sound which at times becomes hypnotic, at others annoying.

The works relationship back to ancient mythology is interesting but predictable in the light of a multitude of works which use these classical themes as a central point to deal with certain important and relevant themes and is very much synonymous with a certain school of thought and group, of women artists who have come to prominence.

An interesting parallel to Kate Meynell's piece in the single screen selection is Nicola Percy's complex yet poetic piece **Into Oblivion Caring not, Daring not**.

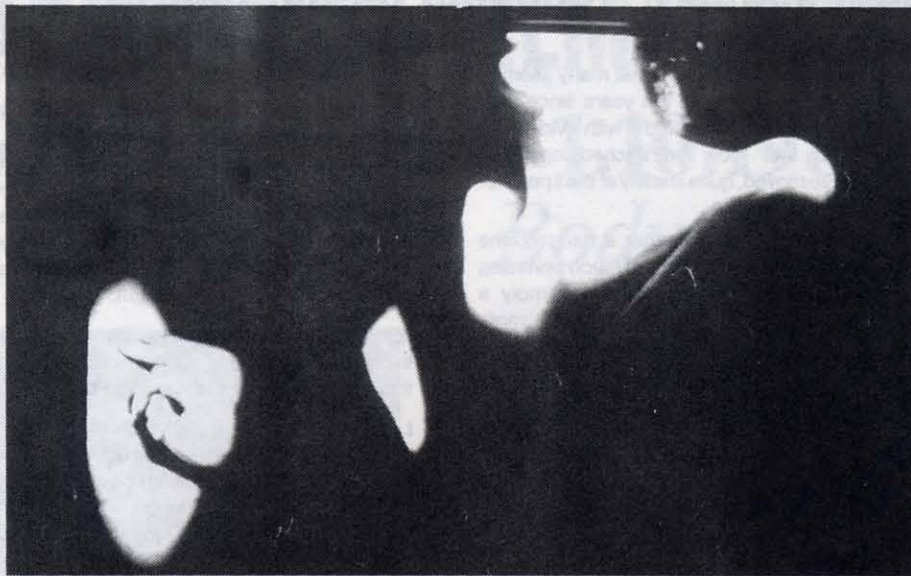
Put together with a captivating and haunting sound track, the beauty of the tape lies in its treatment of the female body.

At times its complex images created by mirrors and the defraction of light bordered on the erotic and sensual, as others we are confronted by images which appear stark and voyeuristic.

Somewhere in between are glimpses of things which create shared experience and unite us with the subject on the screen.

Lei Cox "The Untitled/The Observed" installation. Photo: O. Bamboye.





Nicola Percy, still from "Into Oblivion: Caring Not, Daring Not"

Clio Barnard's excellent **The Limits of Vision** a work in two parts deals with the notion of genius, obsession, potatoes and everyday activity as a work of art. A clear concise and often witty narrative overlays images, mostly set against a black backdrop, which vary from the beautiful to the absurd. Striking in particular is the image of identical twins, dressed in flowery frocks, sitting in a bath and a discussion which unfolds between them and Leonardo Da Vinci. Barnard has the potential to become a significant tape maker, if she can maintain the impetus. Interestingly (and a bit predictably) Barnard is one of a new wave of tape makers passing thru Dundee on her way to London.

Steve Littman's **In the Name of the Gun** is a single screen work based around the themes explored in the installations **Smile** and **Street Life**, presented at last year's National Review. Littman remains a catalyst in the organizing and promotion of Artist's Video events - often at his own expense and with much criticism from many under-achieving live art-hacks.

That aside, it's about time he made a new piece of work . . .

Other works produced by younger tape makers, many of whom are still students or recent graduates are those by Cavan Convery and Richard Couzins, which display a flair, humour and ingenuity lacking in much work produced by more 'established' artists.

Venus by Sandra Christie is both a perceptive and well constructed work by a video maker who deserves a higher profile and encouragement to continue. The animator Liz Power's piece **A Cruise to the Universe** is an odd work to try and classify. Power is particularly keen to develop her skills as an animator for children, difficult in an industry now so self obsessed with the fast moving and 'wacky' constructivist rip-offs which recently graced our T.V. screens.

Currently her work attracts a sympathetic eye from artists' video audiences, though it will only realize its full potential when shown on broadcast to children or when the current 'acid-house wall-paper makers' realize they've run out of frames to squeeze things into . . .

Vicious/Soccer by Nigel Lindley are works produced by a recent graduate from the now defunct Fine Art based course at Maidstone (the pioneering centre for artists' video in Britain). Suffice t say that love them or hate them, these tapes are made by one of a number of younger artists trying not to fall into the trap of 'designerism' which plagues the medium and who work to often uncertain and unsupported ends. Unfortunately the wisdom of the dominant free-enterprise, art school entrepreneurs who control such institutions is that such practice (as it existed) is no longer relevant and more specifically hasn't got a place in the design-led nineties.

LES-A Dream in The Life directed by Dean Stockton is a broadcast piece made on a budget greater than the cost of staging and making all the other works put together. At its best, it's an interesting piece of broadcast television - challenging many broadcast conventions and offering an interesting insight. I don't really know why it was included in the event - particularly when much dialogue orientates around the need for artists to break with the conventions of television and start making 'art' again. That aside, it was watchable, well made and sensitive and is a good example of Television's potential when dialogue is avoided.

Sentences by Steve Partridge with sound by David Cunningham are designed as a series of interruptions into the conventions of Broadcast Television. Unfortunately to show them consecutively took away their potential as interruptions (their 'sting' if that's the right term) - they needed the context in which they were designed to be screened to clarify them. As

works in their own right they represent a significant move from Partridge's earlier collaborations and reveal a desire for a return to the minimalism and conceptualism apparent in much of the earlier work of his peer group, and many of whom now hold influential positions as artists, teachers, producers and administrators who have in many cases produced little during the eighties. (Partridge being an exception).

Several other Events of relevance which occurred within the context of the N.R.L.A., were the staging at Transmission (in many respects the pioneer in presenting and fostering time-based work in Scotland) of Paul Wong, a Chinese-Canadian Media Artist, who presented extracts from his various projects to date. Often lengthy, these pieces revealed an Artist prepared to confront and deal with subjects ranging from an exploration of sexuality, to his position both personally and culturally in a country in which he lives and remains as an outsider, dealing, as he does with the 'yuppie mentality' which surrounds him, using lifestyle advertising techniques, whilst at the same time exploring his background in China in an almost Cinema-verite style (as was the case of a work in progress **Ordinary Shadows Chinese Shades**).

Back at the Third Eye Centre, much was being made of the visit to Scotland of a Russian Artist/Video maker Boris Ukhananov. It becomes difficult when one tries to evaluate the work which was presented. Should it be viewed from the context of the medium and its use to date, or should one consider it as a phenomenon of Glasnost that artists from the Soviet Union are now able to make creative/avante-garde films and videos, no matter how primitive or clumsy they may seem?

Indeed many resembled the often produced works made by people who get access to video equipment for the first time (a phenomenon not unique to the U.S.S.R. I hasten to add . . .). There is without a doubt a need for dialogue between artists from East and West (I think we could learn something from each other no matter how critical that dialogue may be). What concerns me is the appropriation of both Artists and their often suspect ends (many of whom have scant regard for either the medium or artists using the medium). If Ukhananov's visit proved anything, it was how hungry him and his contemporaries are to meet and see other artists who work with time-based Media.

Ukhananov spent hours watching tapes, talking to artists and experiencing the city (and its nite clubs). His energy and enthusiasm was apparent as was his desire to talk to as many people as possible. His presence also revealed much about the sycophancy and suspect-motives of certain gallery owners, evidenced by an incident in which a certain influential figure (Richard Demarco) and his entourage sat and watched video for half an hour, before they realized that what they were watching were not Russian works, but Dance documentation pieces, upon which it was decreed that 'this is not culture' - exit one previously captive audience and their mentor in pursuit of Boris, who was probably watching a less entertaining performance elsewhere . . .

Channel B: Finding a context: Thoughts on the future

THE following are a few personal comments and points which I would like to make as both a practising tape maker and in the light of a number of dialogues which occurred informally around the 'National', which proved to be an excellent platform for discussion between tapemakers and critics alike, many brought together for the first time. They in no way should be seen as generalised statements produced by a group of artists but stand as a number of personal observations on events which are unfolding.

Criticism of any such events, or a review of works becomes increasingly difficult in the current climate for change which surrounds video as an artform, the status and role of tape-makers and the areas tenuous associations with performance at one extreme and its relationship to television at the other.

As essentially a late eighties (and nineties) tape-maker, I am concerned about not only my chosen medium and its status within art/culture but also about the apparent reactionary attitudes of many of the live-arts, time-based arts or whatever all encompassing term/category video should be slotted into.

It is becoming more apparent that video should not (and possibly cannot) be evaluated in the context of performance art alone - indeed the more inventive many video artists become, the more their works often become a fusion of many influences with previously under valued or unknown elements emerging and converging, ranging as they do from sculpture to narrative.

In the context of the National Review and other such events, it is important that the medium is treated with the same status as other Live works and integrated accordingly, which means a lot of major rethinking by artists and more importantly by administrators and organizers of live art events. Many see video as being a 'poor relative' and constantly claim they are yet to see a 'good' (?) video piece, yet seem unwilling to define the criteria by which such assessments can be made. Sadly, when the criteria for such assessment is made it is often outdated, out of touch and prejudiced.

The option is for the medium to start standing alone in its own Festivals, or in events, run in association with live art organizers. One thing for sure is that it can no longer be treated as an added extra on live art events, or marginalised in anyway.

The period leading up till 1990 (and beyond) both in Glasgow and in other parts of Britain could prove decisive, both in terms of the dialogue, discussion and debate surrounding the area and in terms of events planned. (In particular Video Positive in Liverpool, next year's National Review and potential stand-alone International festivals in Glasgow and elsewhere, along with improvements in both the distribution and presentation of works).

In terms of assessing work, what many seem to find difficult is that in the ten years since they may have either 'dabbled' with video or formulated their now entrenched opinions, things have moved, quite literally at the speed of light.

The discussion about whether a return to the conceptualism and pluralism of much seventies work is a genuine progression or simply a counter-reaction against younger more technology orientated or issue-based artists (whom themselves reacted against what they felt was the one-way street up which much Artist's Film and Video was heading in the late seventies and early eighties) is a relevant one.

Any such discussion and debate about the future of the medium and its directions in the nineties - has to encompass not only the idea about what artist's should be producing, but the politics, culture and technology which now influence and affect younger artists in particular.

Granted things are very confusing, with artists now achieving with the medium what was thought inconceivable ten years ago (even five years ago) but does the answer lie in the reactionary or regressive attitudes of many who influence time-based work in this country, who tend to switch off when things start moving in ways they find 'difficult' or have 'problems with'? The answer to this really lies with the artist's willingness to discuss, promote, subvert and threaten both the sanctity and relevance of contemporary (?) policies. Most importantly is the need to challenge and undermine the 'historical context'.

In terms of the medium it does not lie in an over reliance on technology, nor in a reaction against the technology, as this often comes from those who've either never really considered the technologies or whose own particular work does not require paintboxes, flips, tumbles et al. The 'toys for boys' argument is simply a convenient way for those whom whether deliberately or not, have simply avoided or conveniently by-passed the gadgets.

In short quite often ignorance is the rationale.

Everything is an effect now - witness the use of hand held camera work, of super 8mm and of many artists' techniques in everything from piss-water lager adverts to 'stings'. Where does that put the arguments of the video Luddites?

There is an obvious need for sensitivity when dealing with any of the subject matter which artists' work with - both in terms of an empathy with content and awareness of technology.

There is no one correct or right way of making work, I don't even feel that it's possible to distinguish work by its use or lack of technology and most of all it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate or establish any criteria for quality in works - particularly when considering them in the context of other 'time-based' work (namely performance).

One continually comes back to those reactions and associations found in any good art.

What context do we really consider them in?

Should practice be determined by a few big names (mostly American) with a lot of technology or a group of 'New Age Hippies' seeking to take things back to the mid seventies. The best work quite often transcends these things or has the affect of hitting you between the eyes with both its stunning visual content and use of the medium.

Is it valid simply to press 'intellectual eject' when things start moving in ways we don't want, or things start to blend and converge in new ways?

Love it or loathe it, the technology, artists' thinking and time itself have all come a long way from the kind of things which were relevant ten years ago. Many who clung on to their purity, invariably and sadly found themselves becoming redundant or unable to find a place in the dizzying progress of the past decade.

We all now experience in three minutes what we would have done twenty years ago in 90 - How long before the feature becomes redundant? - When will we experience the epic in fifteen minutes, five minutes, 30 seconds? Or do we already and haven't yet realized?

What is apparent is that it's really time for artists to start making art with video, television or whatever one wants to call it, rather than see video as performance etc and for British video artists in particular to be given both the opportunity and access necessary to produce a sustained and resolved body of work.

This will, granted be difficult - the consideration of technology, of the cultural implications of the medium, its sculptural and visual aspects, along with its associations with a 'narrative' tradition (espoused by dinosaurs such as the B.F.I.) are all relevant and necessary elements in any production. Let alone its tenuous links with live art.

So where does the association with performance begin or end?

Performance itself to use a late eighties jingoism has a market - indeed we are witnessing the development now of the multi-national performance organization and the performance artist as consumable ikon.

Performance Artists themselves now promote vodka, whisky and make beer mats - how can you argue that artist's video looks too 'good' or too 'commercial'?

Video, unfortunately suffers from its associations with both television and its cutting edges ie Pop promo's et al and doesn't seem to fit very well into the grand scheme of things.

As Video makers, the temptation to let Live work continue its current trend towards multi-national status and to get out and into either the 'commercial sector', or more mainstream production (Television) is one with which many of the newer video artists find themselves confronted with - but then maybe a lot of the best artists aren't making art anymore . . .

ARSENALS - FILM FORUM

RIGA 23.09 - 1.10.1988

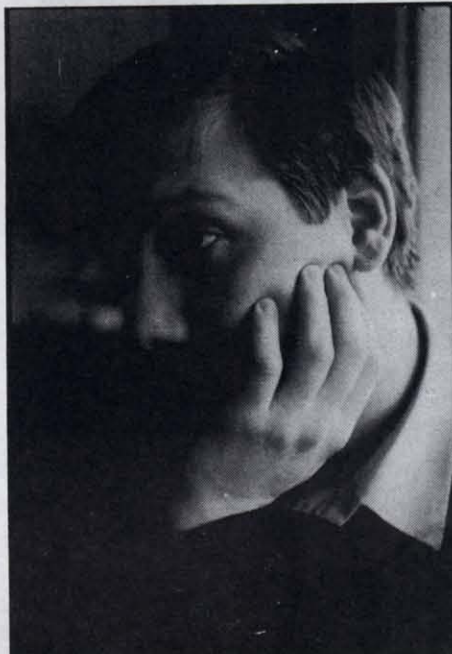
by Vera Body



IT is a two day rail journey from Cologne to Riga. A flat landscape adorned by a variety of architectural styles characterises the line and there is a great deal of time for reflection as to my eventual destination. The Baltic with its ancient judeo-christian culture now as a central switchboard for cinematographers from East and West. The festival in Riga is one of the very few non-commercial film festivals - even in the Soviet Union there are only two other such festivals - Moscow and Tashkent - and occasionally in Odessa - and these are not renowned for their commitment to experimental films or to art video. This is then one further reason to salute the creation of this forum by Vladis Goldberg and Atis Amolins as a very special act of self-affirmation by the avant-garde of international cinematography.

The official prelude to the opening of the festival was provided by artists from Riga at the Planetarium (a former church, which has been converted into a museum of architecture), where an 'Iron Curtain' (a fishing net) some 25 metres long and approximately 4 metres wide was symbolically cut through with special scissors. This act of 'perestroika' was intended to give concrete expression to the desire of the organisers for totally open communication. It was the declared aim of the Forum according to an interview with Vladis Goldberg for *Infermental* to encourage the population of Riga towards new ways of perceiving their environment and to consciously provoke discussion of new visual art.

The overall structure of the festival was based on these principles. There were retrospectives of the works of Jean-Luc Godard, Miklos Jancso, Milos Forman and Jos Stelling, a series of documentary films from Latvia, a programme provided by the 'Independent American Cinema', an English avant-garde retrospective including a David Curtis selection and a showing of the works from the new soviet cinema. The Cracow Cartoon School and Polish experimental scene with Josef Rabakowski and Malgorzata were introduced and a wide-ranging international programme of films from the years 1987/88 together with a special video section added the necessary up-to-date flavour to the whole.



Filmmaker Gleb Aleinikow, Moscow 1988 c Cine Fantom.

Film director Hercs Fraks' documentary film about the blackmarketeer from Latvia who was recently executed - 'Doomsday' - provided important indications as to the extent of social deformations within the U.S.S.R. and a shattering analysis of the ambience of both judges and judged (condemned).



"The Bank Robber" 1988 Leningrad. Photo: Eugenin Jufit © Cine Fantom

Outside the official programme young soviet cinematographers were given the opportunity to show their work in the Amateur Filmmakers' Club. The group 'Cine Fantom' was represented there by a programme entitled 'Parallel', which included the works of the Aleinikow brothers 'Teatr & Teatr', as well as those of Grigorjew



Filmmaker Igor Aleinikow, Moscow 1988

c Cine Fantom.



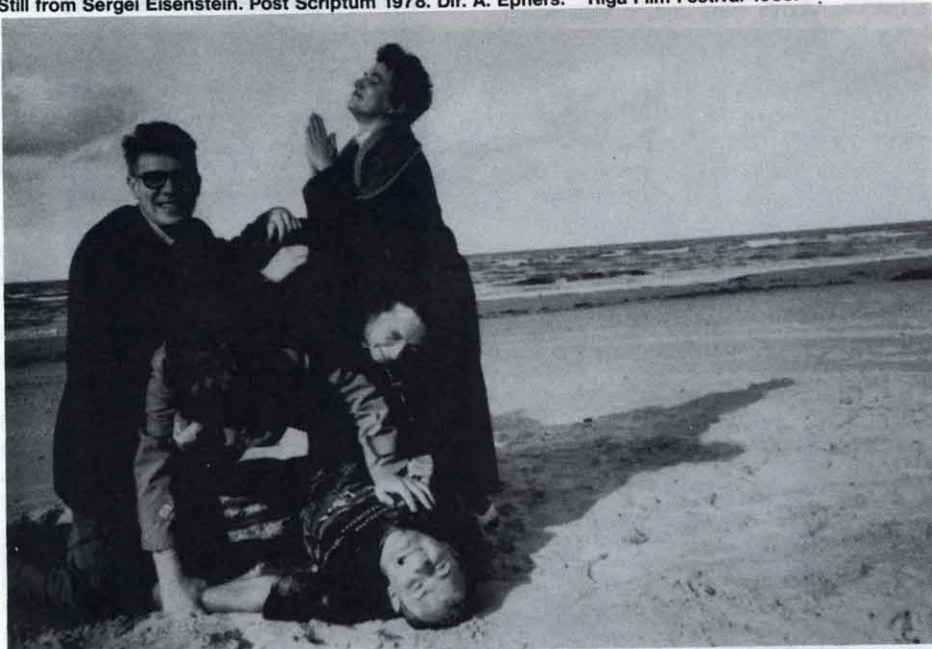
Igor and Gleb Aleinikov = The End of the Film, 1988 Moscow, with Eugenin Kondratev in the picture



Performance by Teatr No. 8. Riga 1988



Still from Sergei Eisenstein. Post Scriptum 1978. Dir. A. Epnors. © Riga Film Festival 1988.



Vera Body & Cine Fantom Seminar on the Beach of Riga during the Filmfestival on the 29th of Sept

Ostrezow and Evgenin Jufit from Moscow and Leningrad respectively. While Jufit represents again the 'Necrorealizacija' programme of the Aleinikow brothers, the 16mm film 'Tractor' by these same brothers was genuinely innovative. Igor and Gleb Aleinikow conjure up the ambivalence and symbolism of a piece of machinery within a socialist society in a multilevel narrative style remarkable for its scrupulous accuracy and its exquisite humour.

Boris Jochanow's requiem for 'Prince Fassbinder' with Evgenin Corba and based on the novel and film 'Querele' was found to be exceedingly repulsive by most of the audience in the Amateur Club. It is still not an everyday experience for soviet film-fans to attempt to come to grips with so-called supernatural phenomena.

Similar scenes to those encountered at the Moscow Film Festival when Infermental VI was shown in the Cathedral Cinema, followed the showing of Infermental VII/Buffalo - New York Edition 1988 and Infermental VIII/Tokyo Edition 1988 at the Riga Planetarium and in Meluzzi Riga - Jurmala - in all 10 hours of the best of international video. Many of the young people in an extremely excited audience had only one question for the organisers - 'How can we become part of this scene?' Vladim Drapkin from Leningrad and Henrikas Gulbinas from Kaunas gave an impromptu showing of their work as an appendix to Infermental. As part of the focus on contemporary video the work of Rene Bartlett from England and Norbert Meissner (the 235 Distribution) from Cologne was given a showing.

Throughout the 8 days of the Forum a stimulating programme of live performances was also on offer. In the former St. Peter's Church in Riga it was the theatre group 'Studio Number 8' which put together an extremely exciting series of performances. Although unsubsidised this group plays regularly in the cellar of a building in the town centre and cannot complain about audience sizes. Given this intermedial context it is not surprising that the films of Dore - O and Werner Nekes found ready acceptance by audiences in Riga.

It is to be devoutly hoped that this forum will happen again one day in Riga and indeed on a regular basis. The organisers would also like more independence from the State Cinema in Moscow; a smoother delivery of film and video-cassettes involved in customs hold-ups. Vladis Goldberg and Atis Amolins have laid the foundations here for a film festival with a rich cultural future.

Among the foreign visitors to the Riga Forum were Ulrich and Erika Gregor from the Federal Republic and they have promised a large input from the Riga programme at the forthcoming Berlinale Festival. I hope very much that the new films by Alexander Sokurov and Sergei Paradjanow will become accessible to the 'stay-at-homes' at the Berlinale in February 1989. Infermental IX/Vienna will certainly want to include the new videos from the U.S.S.R. And its Premiere - Berlinale '89.

ember 1988.

IVAN UNWIN INTERVIEW



Ivan Unwin "Residue Septik Activity". Photo: O. Bamboye.

In May of '88 Ivan Unwin gave two performances at Transmission of his "Residue Septik Activity" at the beginning and the end of the month. The gallery also presented his film work and a library of video work on the I.K.O.N. catalogue.

Ivan Unwin studied in Luton and in Stoke-on-Trent moving through film work, sculptural installations and performance in an adaptable manner. He remains a difficult artist to categorize. He was interviewed by Billy Clark.

B.C. How do you feel about the distribution and promotion of Video and Performance? You're film work is on I.K.O.N. which is based in Manchester.

I.U. As soon as I finished the 'Flickering Shadows' compilation I moved to London. I ran around trying to find the Film co-op, L.V.A. and some other 'dubious' video distribution things. I remember (this is really bizarre) two daughters of this Taxi driver in the East End of London, started up this "Video distribution of Art" type of thing - to take round the clubs. I met all these people and was naively trying to dump my work off to them. They would say, "Yeah, yeah, we can have it shown in any Club in town". I was new to anyone who even wanted to see the stuff and it was exciting to hear that... but after a very short time it becomes total nonsense.

B.C. What do you think is lacking in things like the L.V.A. as regards their set up in London?

I.U. A commitment to a limited catalogue (at the moment) and a selection process which is of personal value and not what they believe they ought to be presenting. The L.V.A. seem to be like: if you are around the L.V.A. in the office or as the administration then you get your stuff promoted in quite a strong way. Whereas (not with any grudge or anything) if you're like me and just don't go in there at all - not even to use it as a facility-house then they just have your tape on hold, it's just there, it does nothing. It feels a lot healthier to have it do nothing with I.K.O.N., where they list it with everything else they do and don't promote any others in any other way than they promote your own thing, as opposed to this hierarchical 'George Barbour is so hip so George Barbour gets his name put forward all the time'. There is a danger with all those located places, that rely on the popular vocabulary of those running it rather than what is considered nationally or world-wide to be what's going on.

B.C. Do you think that's a strength that the 'regions' have - that they are not so deliberately or directly plugged into a commercial network?

I.U. Sure, and London offers it doubly because almost everyone goes there who is trying to get plugged into this network. So they constantly get filled up with another name to be put on the list - then they dump off some old ones.

B.C. I can see some of your influences coming from "Post-Punk" music and not the 'Performance Art' circuit which has become quite distinct now really (although you mentioned Mark Pauline).

I.U. Things like the Virgin Prunes and Nuebaten are the only type of performance art I've ever seen. To hear people talk about performance art and not take these things into account seems suspect to start with. They are negating the whole issue of what is performance art and what

is culture; and these things are as much part of it as anything else. Quite often there is a lot more clarity in what they have tried to achieve than the supposed performance art area is trying to achieve - which is outlined by the very people who don't include that sort of thing.

B.C. I think the present situation in performance art has lost and possibly avoided this critical edge - which is perhaps more readily associated with sub-culture, underground politics, which is more present in music: do you think this situation is the fault of artists or exhibition organisers?

I.U. I think it's jointly both. But the main fault is that although this stuff is going on it is not being put through the same sort of filters as everything else, so it's being put aside. There are loads of people working within the performance area but are not getting anywhere near the same sort of access or even taken within it.

B.C. How would you compare working in Berlin? Does it seem less of a 'circus on a circuit'?

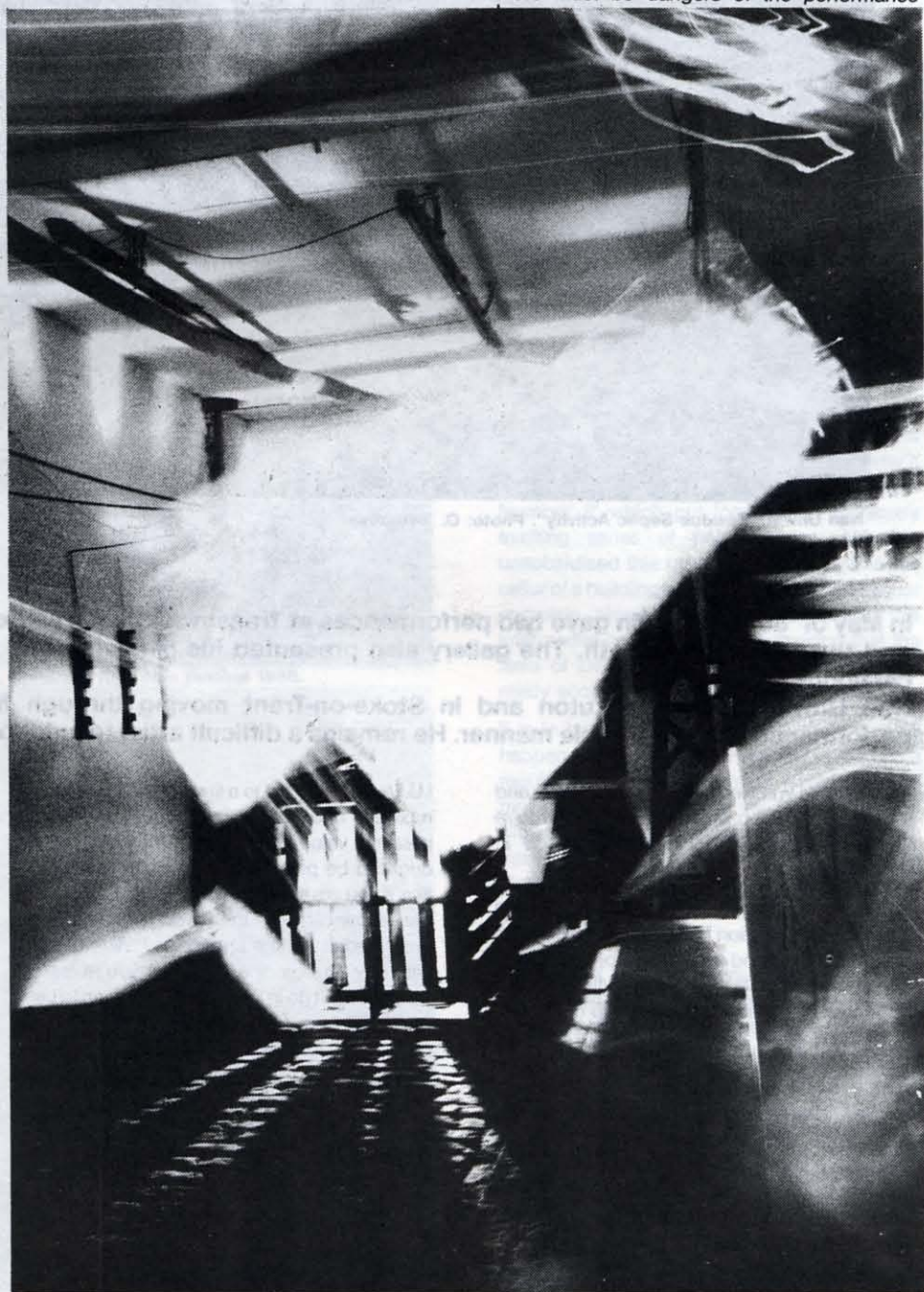
I.U. It's so much more exciting. I've done the performance - working it out in London, maybe ten times before I went over there. It was getting to the point where there was some really disgusting performances. I began to wonder why on earth I was doing this and getting very embarrassed about being involved in performance art. Then to be swept over there, get off the plane and be bizarrely bundled through Customs with all these devices for the performance; wondering what I was doing. Then turning up at the building - still wondering whether I really wanted to do this. Then the guy on the P.A. put my soundtrack on full volume and all the roof began falling in. It simply felt like a new level which I had not achieved or not been given access to in England where every P.A. here was a puny disco P.A. There was no real benefit in doing any of those performances because you could do it at home with the same potential; whereas the performance was meant to be a stage higher than that. In Berlin things were just so well presented, both as something important and alongside bands, people reading etc. At one point the guy who was organising it said 'At the moment there are 1000's of people who want to say something', and so what he did was to make one of those rostra things with a mike on it as a free mike for anyone in the audience who wanted to say some thing. Hundreds of people were getting up and ranting on - everyone stood there listening. The thing went on all night and I was part of it with the Anti-Group, the first time. It was colossal, I couldn't understand a damn word of most of it, but there was still no comparison, in what I'd seen or been involved in in England. There are occasionally these 'Squat things', which I've been to but they usually end up on the Anarchist/Punk/Crass type level and remain there; rather than Cultural/political levels varying.

I.U. That year there were riots in Berlin: it all leads to things like that, I'm sure. There were a lot more openly spoken things going on in England a few years ago than there are now. The type of art we are talking about is something which goes along with what comes out on the streets as a supposed 'outcome'. Talking about the performance art scene in England (I've tried to become aware of it). It's only there for the artists or selectors. It is not really reaching outside to anyone who hasn't got very strict preconceived ideas about how they are going to 'enjoy it'. Just by doing these things in clubs where it has not really been programmed before, it felt like the audience were just having to adapt their values immediately or just walk out. One or the other. In the opportunity I had at the Air Gallery they were confronted with it in a way that everyone knows that they are going to get a 'performance art thing' and they just sat down and took in in some sort of dismal, mindless way.

B.C. The original ideas of performance included the audience participating more than just intellectually. This has been taken away. This is what has made it so passive now.

I.U. The idea of Septik - when I started doing it - after doing the films that I made I wanted to kick into something that was a lot more hard hitting than the slobbish mentality of people just watching the films. I couldn't do anything with the films that would make them respond in a really direct way. Although I felt it was there in the films no-one seemed to get that 'punch in the face'. With the performance it seemed to get more and more like that.

B.C. There are violent aspects in what you do. Does it worry you that people won't get the ambiguity in the performance. In the 2nd one you did at Transmission it had the addition of a slow passage which seemed to clarify your intentions; but with the look of the weapons, there must be dangers of the performance



Ivan Unwin "Residue Septic Activity". Photo: O. Bamboye.

B.C. This almost seems to point out why this sort of thing isn't taken seriously: because it will become more troublesome. If you get lots of people saying exactly what they want, this will inevitably involve taking away certain people's power.

being just a bit of exciting entertainment for people. Does this worry you?

I.U. Not at all. I'd sooner entertain in an exciting way than bore them shitless, like most of the other things. Anyway it's only been done (with the exclusion of the slow passage) once as an experiment. As I knew that it was going to be shown in its complete form, it was even more calculated to be this excitable thing: to make people want to either come along to the next one or not bother - however they felt about it.

B.C. *But I mean are you not wary that the violent aspects distract from the true meaning of the work i.e. the comment on violence being overlooked?*

I.U. I think it can only make it more focussed.

B.C. *What is this new work you're working on? It is a bigger project, needing a lot more money. You're going to have to get that from somewhere.*

I.U. The film 'Eclipse' and the performance which coincided ('Bunker Protection') was the last film I finished in 1985, 3 years ago. I've been working on these two projects and they are both very different. They are both at either end of the scale of what I've been doing and both of them have drained me completely dry of any ambition to continue in the way that these two have been made - to not be drawn into the immediate excitement of making something new just because I've got an idea for something new; but to try and reserve the energy and reserve the excitement and creativity till it can be done correctly, to the scale that makes it justifiable and not just make immediate compromise all the way through. They're not bad compromises but they're riddled with them. As I mentioned, things like using out of date film and getting really dodgy results also not being able to afford new batteries so some of the film comes back crap. All these things wreck what you wanted to do; whether that would be better or not you're still left in the dark. I've never been given the opportunity to make these things correctly. It

just feels like a pointless process to just continue working on that level (not the creative level) but the financial/resource level. When you're in an editing suite for 8 hours and you've got to get it all together otherwise that's it done for; you come out with something which financially is all you can do. You knew that another 2 hours and you would have been quite happy - even that you can't afford. With the scale of the performance it feels totally unrealistic to ever see any one being prepared to finance it in England. The first time the Septik thing was ever taken seriously was by Monika in Berlin. She runs an independant nightclub out there. It was her 50th Birthday and she wanted to put on things which she really liked: things which were really positive for her. The festival was called 'Myths, Mutants and Monsters'. She put on a week of what was considered by 1000's of people the most exciting thing since, well, since a lot of exciting things happened there (Laughs). She took it totally seriously and financed it in a correct way. So I was able to do it how it should be done. It even felt far too out of scale for me. I wasn't prepared for roadies helping me out. I exhausted myself setting it up. I should have let someone else do it who was there and prepared.

B.C. *Have you ever thought of actually organising events rather than just being part of them. It seems to me that what is needed are larger events organised by artists. There must be a lot of people who are able to see how the established circuit is run and controlled by so few people who merely curate it. I'm sure it is possible to change this, but it would need so much co-operation from artists. It would also need a willingness from funding bodies.*

I.U. The fundamental blocking in that is the funding bodies. I have put in loads of applications for 'Residue Septik Activity' to become quite a major thing. They kind of 'do the dirty' every time. It'll be a couple of hundred quid, rather than what you asked for. To go forward and to really make this thing into something that you really wanted it to be, and you can't do anything with that, other than become more immensely frustrated - It is never

finishing it, which is the annoying thing, you're always having to go on to the next one and hope that that one will work. The worst side of this, is to see what the funding is given to. For God's sake how did they write their application out! What it comes down to is that, because the funding I've been getting is so low; it would probably be better to do without it. To just go out and earn a couple of hundred quid on whatever skimpy job you have to do for a few weeks. Rather than spend 3 months doing an application: which is more time consuming and draining than the labour to go out and get the money - the same money for a couple of days work - It's ridiculous. What am I trying to get from them, they're not giving me anything, so why carry on with the facade that they're trying to pretend that they're promoting independant performance art or independant film because they're not . . . It's like their positions of administration gives them the position to make judgements on what is going on.

B.C. *It's control, it's government. They are governing the arts.*

I.U. There have been some really brilliant people in these positions but there is an awful lot of other people that they have to work with who drain their ambitions as well. There are some people within the arts council and within the regional arts council that I've talked to who are so frustrated with the rest of the people that they have to work and deal with. They can't believe the mindless position that they have to counter with other people in the same offices and buildings. You just can't imagine how they got the job in the first place.

B.C. *The way you describe your work process: how you're ideas come about: how they "end up" as films or videos. Yet this is not an ending in its nature. Funding bodies have got to understand the real nature of experimentation and creative processes, and how you can't write down a few lines which accurately describe this.*

I.U. Applications for the stuff that I do although they say what it is about (and you can't just put down what it's about). You have to put down what everything else is about because it's part of the whole thing. They are just confused by what you're trying to do, because they can't understand the first thing that you did so you've lost them on day one (it's completely misconstrued) which again makes it more pure to do things in places like the warehouse squat where I've done almost all my performances in London. Just to know that the people running that don't give a damn about all these decisions that other people have to do when they put you on or accept you. They just want to know, "What might do you want to do it Ivan". It doesn't really matter when, or how, or what it's going to cost, because you're funding it yourself, you're doing it yourself and you'll have to make the whole thing work in a whole different way. It would be a whole lot easier if there was funding to provide for that, so that you didn't have to go out to work to fund the thing in the first place. Even to try to go through those other channels. The National Review (of live art) etc., it just seems like a further facade to get on the circus, do the nation, get the Septik Tour T-shirts printed. (Joint laughter).

B.C. *Enough, Enough.*



Ivan Unwin "Residue Septic Activity". Photo: O. Bamboye.

LETTERS

send to: 37 Union Street, Dundee DD1 4BS

Savaged by Plagiarists

Comradely criticism and disagreement is one thing, the invective issuing from Baxter and Home in response to my writings in your last issue is another. I seem to have touched a raw nerve. Am I really such an important figure? Are there not other, bigger targets far to my right more deserving of their intellectual energies?

Home's attack on my book 'Crossovers' is entitled 'Review' yet it does not even indicate the publisher (Comedia/Methuen), date of publication (1987), price (£7.95 paperback, £25 hardback) or the fact that it is illustrated. To help readers make up their minds whether or not they wish to acquire a book, any review surely has a basic duty to **describe** its contents before moving on to a critique of those contents. (Description, Mr Home, does have some virtues.) Like several other reviewers, Home foregrounds the topic of rock music/artschool but does not make clear this is just one chapter from the book which also has sections on promo videos, scratch videos, collaborations between fine artists and rock bands, posters and graphics using fine art sources. Whatever faults a reviewer identifies, it is surely also necessary - in fairness - to cite any strengths the book may possess. 'Crossovers' was the result of about five years research in an uncharted inter-media zone; whatever one thinks of the text as such, the detailed 8 page bibliography alone is surely worth crediting. From the letters I receive from students around the country I know it is already proving of value.

Every text has an implied reader, a presumed constituency. I feel it is fairly obvious from the character of the book that it was not written for the likes of Home or Baxter or 'street kids' (whoever they are), but for the kind of students who attend my courses on art and mass media at Middlesex Polytechnic. After twenty years of teaching this is an audience I feel I do know something about. Recently I asked a class of mine, a class of 45 (yes, this is the staff-

student ratio now), mostly young adults but also including mature students, how many of them had heard of Test Department (the answer was 5), how many had heard of Nam June Paik the world's most famous video artist (answer none), how many had read the Communist Manifesto (answer a few). In complaining about a lack of theoretical rigour Home's 'review' does not seem to take into account the question of audience. I have published more theoretical pieces in small-circulation journals like **Block**, I also have hundreds of thousands of words of 'theory' gathering dust because of the problem of finding publishers willing to risk their capital on such material. Of course, there is theory underpinning a book which claims to be descriptive, a mapping of a territory, but an author can still choose to describe and analyse artworks and images rather than spend pages trying, in the abstract, to distinguish between the concepts 'fine art' and 'mass culture'. I have never claimed to be a leading theoretician. What I have tried to do is to explain and popularise those theories I have been able to understand and have found useful. My working definitions may well be open to the charge that they are crude or too generalised but greater detail was impossible because of space limits set by the publisher (a detailed chronology and an index were omitted, much to my regret, for the same reason). It has always seemed odd to me that it is perfectly acceptable for artists to produce sketches and schematic images but not, apparently, writers.

Home's objection that the book is not about Pop music is anticipated in the introduction where it is argued that Pop music has always been more than the purely musical dimension (i.e., it includes stage performance, record covers, etc.). My book certainly does not give a potted history of Pop music - there are plenty of such histories already - instead it charts certain aspects of the visual dimensions of Pop, in particular fine art influences and cross-overs. In fact, if Home had

read the text carefully he would have seen that there are some discussions of formal equivalences between musical sounds and visual imagery.

Given that **VARIANT** is an 'art' magazine one would of thought that the design of the book (with which I am not that happy - despite every effort to influence matters, the publishers have the final say in this area) would also have merited some attention. If Home is indifferent to questions of design and aesthetics, why does he bother with the field of art at all?

The serious charge that the book is a 'reiteration of ruling class values' is not one I can rebut in a few lines. All I can say here in my defence is that the book is an honest attempt to explore and understand an exceedingly complex area of interaction between high culture and popular culture. As an ex art student exposed all my life to mass culture, I relate to and appreciate (in confused and contradictory ways) aspects of both realms. I presume this is the experience of many others from working class backgrounds who underwent higher education. Home seems very sure about how other people respond to rock music but it is extremely heterogeneous and the different bands and styles appeal to audiences of many sizes, ages and tastes. Since their responses are bound to be differential, any generalisations about consumption are likely to be speculative. (More empirical research needed?) Whatever the fate of fine art when used by mass culture (or vice versa), what is clear is that aesthetic pleasure is crucial to both, so perhaps this should be the focus of future discussion rather than whether or not something counts as art or not. I do not see myself as 'a tastemaker' - much of the material in 'Cross-overs' is not to my personal taste at all (though doing the research for the book did enlarge my musical tastes).

A final point. The sneer 'provincial schoolteacher' is an insult not to me but to all teachers who live outside London. 'The inbred world of British academics' is also a slur on the students at 'the academy' I

teach, some of whom were recently ejected by the police for an occupation to resist the decline in educational provision. At a time when education is under attack from the Tories and when Pink Floyd's 'We don't need no education' is repeated on the radio, there is a need to defend the existing education system (whatever its limitations from a Left standpoint), not dismiss it. After all, if children don't learn to read they can't read any Marxist or anarchist texts.

Ed Baxter attacks me for a review I wrote about the Festival of Plagiarism. At least I took an interest - no other art critic that I am aware of bothered to see or review the shows. Snide remarks about 'silently accepting the perks of review copies' are absurd. Thousands of review copies of books are sent out each week in the hope they will thereby receive publicity. Often, from the point of view of the recipient, they are unsolicited mail. The Plagiarists sought me out, I did not seek them.

Baxter also criticises me concerning the concept of commodity. Again I am accused of a lack of theoretical sophistication. I have written a more theoretical piece about artworks as commodities (**CIRCA** (Belfast) 32 Jan/Feb 1987, pp. 26-30.) which I presume Baxter did not read. Obviously, an author cannot repeat all his previous writings whenever he undertakes a new commission. The **CIRCA** article makes it clear that my concept of commodity is that of Marx (i.e. an object with both exchange-value and use-value). The article cites a number of artworks which self-consciously expose their commodity character in terms of their content, and I discuss the value of this strategy. It also mentions examples of artworks which sidestep or resist commodification. I entirely agree with Baxter that within capitalism there is no escape from commodities, all I have been trying to do is to examine some of the consequences and contradictions this gives rise to for those critical of commodities but who are forced to communicate

Letters continued

that criticism via commodities (in which I include my own books and reviews). I have also tried to consider the issue of use-value even in respect of the type of high culture, bourgeois art collected by the Saatchis and popular culture products which generate profits for the likes of Richard Branson. I agree that commodities are received and consumed in many different ways - hence it is possible to read texts oppositionally and to derive use-value in ways not envisaged by their makers, however we should remember that before commodities can be consumed one has to be able to afford them! (I am still waiting to avail myself of the use-value of a colour television and VCR.)

To refer to my class of 45 again: in May I gave a talk about commodities and discovered that for the majority this was the first time in their lives that anybody had discussed the arguments for and against commodities with them. This demonstrates the scale of the problem facing Left-wing teachers in education even those 'stunted by laziness and vested interest'.

Ref. Bob Geldof's lack of radicalism. Clearly, no Marxist believes that charity is the real solution to the problems of hunger, Apartheid, aids, etc. But this is surely no reason to dismiss the humanitarian feelings which prompted Geldof and those who sent money. One can also respect and learn from the way Geldof used the power at his command - fame, contacts - to mobilise the rock world. He did manage to shame the mean policies of Thatcher to reveal that not all human actions are determined by self-interest and market forces. Charity obviously serves the music business as an alibi for its affluence and pursuit of leisure and hedonism, but what is of interest, surely, is the way the popularity, media-power and aesthetic pleasure of the culture could be used for wider political goals.

I seem to have attracted much abuse but what are the material facts about my position. I come from a working class background in the North, but my education via grammar school and university has placed me in the class of the petty bourgeoisie. This has given me considerable cultural capital but no monetary capital. I am an

intellectual worker who sells his mental labour-power to an ideological state apparatus (part-time Polytechnic employment) and to publishers in order to live and support a child. In this respect I am no different from manual workers and feel no more shame than they do in having to sell their (frequently better paid) labour-power. Much of my work is undertaken at home and taken in total the hourly rate for my writings must be on par with the lowest paid home-workers. Within such limits one strives for a better world.

In the past I have been attacked by Bernard Levin in *The Times* and by writers in *Artforum*, so Home and Baxter are in good company.

John A Walker

Poplar
London E14 6QG
5/9/88

Dear Mr Walker

Malcolm Dickson kindly sent me a copy of your response to the critique I made of your book. I had hoped to have received a reply to my two letters to you by now - since you initiated this protracted discussion by obtaining my 'phone number and calling me up.

The first point I would like to make about "Savaged By Plagiarists" is that for someone who claims to want a discussion conducted in 'a cool and reasoned manner' (you in your covering letter to *Variant*), the title is unnecessarily sensational. You have not been 'savaged', all that has happened is that your writing has been criticised in print. By posing rhetorical questions about yourself - such as "Am I really such an important figure?" - you make it appear that you are unable to differentiate between yourself, your writing, and criticism of your writing.

Secondly, as someone who frequently has writing published in the art press, you presumably know that it is the editorial policy of individual magazines which decides whether a piece of writing is put under the heading of 'review'. Although you do not state explicitly that I am responsible for this, the emphasis you place on my role in 'attacking' you, leave the impression that it is me and not the editor who chose to place my critique in the review section. Similarly, it is the editor who is

responsible for the fact that the same issue of *Variant* contained criticism of your writing by both Ed Baxter and myself. As I told you on the 'phone, I did not discover that Ed had written anything about your Festival of Plagiarism review until the issue of the magazine in question had been published. And again, if you've checked against the other article included in the review section of *Variant*, you'll have noticed that it is editorial policy not to indicate the publisher of a book, date of publication and price. Personally, I include these details as a matter of course at the top of any polemic I write with regard to a specific publication.

Your assertion that I claim that your book is not about 'pop music' simply isn't true. What I say is that the book 'hardly... touches on the subject of music' and that 'there is no musicology in... (the) book and therefore it is not a book about music'. I make it clear that *Crossovers* is concerned with various aspects of rock culture: to quote from my critique, 'the lyrical content of rock songs, the packaging and promotion of rock records, fashions associated with certain rock groups, some of the theatrical aspects of pop culture'. It is ironic that you should criticise me for a careless reading of your book (in specific reference to the point with which I have just dealt), when - if we refer to the texts in question - it can be demonstrated (by reference to your ascription to me of a claim that I have not made) that it is you who has not bothered to make a careful reading of my critique. If you'd given my writing the considered reading and re-reading that I devoted to your book, you would have realised that I was making a distinction between musicology (which offers description and analysis of vocal and instrumental techniques; melodic and rhythmical structures) and your formless contemplation of rock and pop culture (which because you do not struggle to give it an identity of its own, necessarily assumes the shape of the reigning ideology). It is all very well to draw up lists (as you have done of rock musicians who at one time attended art school), but unless there is some kind of structural analysis which relates these lists to a concrete subject, then such inventories are doomed to remain abstract, meaningless and without value.

As I have already pointed out to

you in a previous letter, the more 'theoretical' pieces of your published writing to which you refer can be criticised on exactly the same criteria as those I used to criticise your 'descriptive' book. I was well aware of the fact that you based your conception of the commodity on the ideas of Marx. However, Marx is as liable to error as any other author, and as such has been subject to much criticism from both the left and right. Your ideas on the nature of commodities demonstrates exactly the type of ivory tower in which it is possible to become imprisoned if one takes as 'gospel' a 'cannon' of writing produced 150 years ago. I was shocked to see you assert that 'before commodities can be consumed one has to be able to afford them'. Have you never heard of theft?

As someone who in your own words feels you 'know something about' the students you are teaching, you should be well aware that the reference to the 'inbred world of British academics' is not a slur on those who have to suffer your lectures. There is a very real conflict of interest between students and teachers in higher education. Students attend universities and polytechnics for a variety of reasons, the receipt of a grant and awarding of a degree (with the increased job prospects this brings) are among the more important of these. People teach in higher education for all manner of reasons but the salary, prestige and opportunity to discipline students must surely rank among the primary attractions of an academic career. Unless students submit to the discipline and opinions imposed upon them by their teachers, they risk not only failing their degree but also being thrown off their course and thus losing their grant. I can sympathise with students who opt for three years of higher education where standards of discipline - although rigorous - are still more lax than those found in the work place. The opportunities for skiving off without loss of income are certainly far greater for students than employees! Because the aims of a student in entering an institute of higher education are often very different to those of their teachers, it is not a slur on students to criticise academics.

As a specific example of the conflict of interest between

students and teachers, I would cite the case of a former pupil of yours who I met by chance last week: she complained of being instructed by you to read your book "Art In The Age Of The Mass Media" and alter her dissertation in light of it. She carried out your instructions against her own wishes because she did not want to risk the consequences of calling your opinions into question (you could have refused to submit her dissertation to the NCAA on the grounds that it was 'academically unacceptable' and therefore a 'non-submission' and/or provided her with poor references after she left college). Perhaps this incident sheds light on why you consider that your book is for students and not for people such as myself. Your students are not prepared to criticise your texts because to do so would be to risk their grants, degrees and future; contrast this to the fact that you are not in such an obvious position of power, over me and therefore have a far less direct influence over my reading of, and response to, your ideas.

It was an error of judgement on my part to use the term 'provincial school teacher'; I should have said 'small minded school teacher'. I do not consider it unfair to describe the author of a book on 'culture' as sounding like 'a small minded school teacher' when his prose abounds with statements such as: 'Although (John Lennon was) intelligent he had a poor school record and was fortunate to gain a place at art college...'. And if we are going to criticise supremacist assumptions in each others verbal formulations, then your bigotry far surpasses mine. To equate - as you do - provincialism with anyone living outside London, is a particularly vile form of nationalism. When I used the term provincial school teacher, I certainly did not have in mind people teaching in Berlin, New York, Paris etc. Similarly, in my critique I specifically criticise you for the statement 'distrust of art is... a sign of philistinism'. In the case of the critique my argument was greatly condensed and I was not able to make explicit a number of my concerns (which include the fact that you were attempting to prevent criticism of art as a bourgeois mental set by stating that any such criticism was uncultured). However, of more relevance in view of my current argument is the fact that the

Philistines were a people who inhabited ancient Palestine and that your derogatory use of a term which has its roots in this people's history is racist.

You are testing my credulity by asking me to believe that you had a class in which the majority of students had never discussed the arguments for and against commodities. People simply do not go through a lifetime of buying food, clothes, records, books etc., without discussing the objects and mode of their consumption. The fact that such discussion is unlikely to use the specialised terminology of marxism in no way invalidates it. To claim - as I presume you are doing - that people have not discussed the commodity, on the basis that they have not done so using a marxist terminology, is snobbery. Similarly, it can only be snobbery that causes you to affect a tone of dismay when you relate that out of a class of 45 only a handful had read the Communist Manifesto, 5 had heard of Test Department and none had heard of Nam June Paik. Can you cite one objective reason why people should prefer reading the Communist Manifesto to Mickey Spilane's "One Lonely Night", or have heard of Test Department rather than Bros or Nam June Paik rather than Bruce Lee? You claim not to see yourself as a tastemaker and yet you are quite happy to make assumptions about the supremacy of specific cultural products and to have your biases commercially marketed in book form. If you could offer a rational argument as to why the work of Test Department, Paik, Marx and Engels is - as you assume - superior to the vast majority of written, visual and aural culture produced over the past 150 years, then I might be more sympathetic towards your ideas.

Your arguments about the remuneration you receive for your work would have been clearer if you'd provided a breakdown of your annual income. In my experience, part-time college lecturers (paid at approximately £16 an hour) can earn more from working one eight hour day than most homeworkers can earn from working a 40 hour week. Even without knowing your annual income, I for one, would be more than happy to swap my financial position for yours.

As for your reference to being of working class origin, this typifies

your strategy of side-stepping arguments and instead bringing up issues which are of no relevance; but with which you hope to raise sympathy for yourself. In itself, being working class or of working class origin, is no guarantee of 'ideological correctness'. If it was, then from a 'socialist perspective', conservative policy would never have been able to attract widespread support among the working class of this country. When you state that you feel no more shame at having to sell your 'labour-power' than a manual worker does, you imply that I suggested you should. This simply isn't true. But it demonstrates very well your mode of argument; snide insinuation with which you hope to stifle discussion and prevent criticism of your ideas by presenting any such discussion and criticism as 'unreasonable' and 'uncultured'.

Your use of rhetorical questions has a similar function. You ask: 'If Home is indifferent to questions of design and aesthetics, why does he bother with the field of art at all?' Actually, I am not indifferent to design and aesthetics: the reason I did not mention the design of your book was because my polemic was directed against the bourgeois assumptions which underpinned the text (I do in fact have an opinion of the design of Crossovers; it's shoddy). While we are on the subject, your identification of the terms design and aesthetics with the term art, is slipshod. Art as a category must be distinguished from music, painting, writing, design etc. Current usage of the term art treats it as a sub-category of these disciplines; one that differentiates between them on the basis of perceived values. Thus the music of John Cage is considered art, while that of Middle Of The Road is not. (In my critique I have already demonstrated the definition of art you adopt in Crossovers is inadequate). As for aesthetics, it is the philosophical discourse which deals with the question of taste; to adhere to your use of the term would mean describing Kant's "Critique of Judgement" as art (I hope that even you would agree that the resulting description is rather silly). Interest in art as a broad category does not necessarily follow from an interest in design or aesthetics and vice versa. And as to the reason why I bother with the field of art, that is something quite

different again. As I see it, if my criticisms of this society are to have any effect, it is necessary to criticise those mental sets and activities through which its ideology is transmitted.

My opinion on how other people consume rock music are based on 17 years of consuming and mixing with people who consume rock music - and ten years of playing in rock bands. I presume you are aware that these opinions mirror the detailed statistical findings of Pierre Bourdieu on class differences in the way cultural products are consumed (see his book "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste"). Your assertion that responses to rock music 'are bound to be differential' is framed to present this position as an unquestionable truth. To use the term 'bound' (to insist that something is so without the necessity of surveying the relevant facts) is to refuse to engage in discussion of the issue. Rather than suggesting that I need to carry out empirical research, perhaps it is you who should attempt some - this should not be difficult for someone who has the backing of the full resources of a polytechnic.

As for your eulogies to Bob Geldof and humanism in general, I find these particularly nauseating. The media spectacle created around Live Aid served to mystify the real causes of 'third world' hunger by reducing the level of debate on an extremely serious issue to a trivial opposition between those who are 'for' and those who are 'against' Bob Geldof. Your assertion that Geldof managed 'to shame the mean policies of Thatcher' is nonsense. Those of Thatcherite persuasion seek to justify their programme (dismantling the welfare state etc.) through an ideology of self-help (in which those who cannot 'help themselves' are to be subjected to the indignity and insecurity of relying on 'charity'). Geldof's activities have insisted in the reproduction of this ideology at the global level. His career has been entirely consistent with the Thatcherite project. It began with the record 'Looking After Number One' (from memory the lyrics run something along the lines of 'If I want something I get it/No matter what I have to do/I'll step on your face/Or my mother's grave/Never underestimate me/I'm nobody's fool'). Only after Geldof had

achieved his own material wants did he indulge himself with the luxury of 'charitable' work. And we should not forget that this work transformed Geldof from a moderately successful pop singer into a media personality who was able to make a fortune from a best-selling autobiography. The 'charitable aid' sent to the 'third world' in the wake of the Live Aid spectacle was a drop in the ocean compared to the interest repayments the 'third world' is making to western banks. If the 'third world' was growing food for itself, rather than cut-price luxury crops for the West (tea, coffee etc.), then it wouldn't need 'charity' (just as it has no need of the imperialist connotations - 'the white man's burden' (sic) - with which such 'charity' is loaded).

I have no idea how you came to 'review' parts of the Festival of Plagiarism. But neither Ed Baxter nor myself sought you out as you insinuate. Neither were you the only art critic to attend the Festival. Mo Dodson, Rob Le Frenais and Steve Rogers were among those art critics who attended events but did not review them. There was also substantial coverage of the Festival (including a front cover devoted to Graham Harwood's work) in the February 1988 issue of Artists Newsletter. Personally, I was happier with the coverage we received outside the art press (such as that by Jonathan Sale in Punch and Jon Savage in Heartbreak Hotel). Because of the criticism I have of art as a bourgeois mental set, art critics such as yourself were not prepared to deal seriously with what I and other people involved in the Festival had to say.

Finally, to suggest that I am 'in good company' because alongside Bernard Levin and other figures on the right, I have 'attacked' you, is to sink from theoretical inadequacy to paranoia. I would have more respect for both you and your writing if you attempted to deal with my criticisms of your ideas instead of complaining that my polemic only dealt with a part of your book. As I explained to you on the 'phone, I dealt with what I considered to be the core of the text; the underlying assumptions upon which your very partisan description rests. Even if you feel unable to deal with my 'charge' that your book is a 'reiteration of ruling class values' in the amount of space that is likely to be allocated in a magazine such as

Variant, you could do so to me by letter. Since I managed to deal with this 'theoretical issue' in a one page review, I find it strange that you are continually deferring the time and place where you will defend the assumptions which underpin Crossovers - and in particular the idea that art transcends social relations. Making vague references to theoretical writings which are gathering dust because you cannot find publishers for them does not get you off the hook. If you were seriously interested in debate - rather than trying to stifle it - you would have replied to my letters by now and sent me manuscript copies of some of your pertinent but unpublished 'theoretical' texts. By 'phoning me up you initiated a discussion, therefore you should have the decency to address the issue that lies at its heart.

I will be mailing a copy of this letter to Malcolm Dickson with the request that if he prints your piece he should print this alongside it.

**Yours sincerely
Stewart Home**

Dear Variant

Thanks for forwarding John Walker's interesting letter and response to writing published in "Variant" 5. I have replied to him personally and, on reflection, do not think it is worthwhile taking up space in "Variant" reiterating my position, which would require another article in itself (a long and pretty dull one). Still, perhaps I can briefly point out that I did not intend any 'personal' attack on Walker' it was simply his role as critic that was the object of scrutiny, something to which he can hardly object. (My remark about review copies was snide and unnecessary, though the point is not so absurd. It is a question of power and its use: of having to court critics, which Harwood presumably did in this instance; certainly it wasn't me - and have them very often misrepresent one's work, just to broadcast a bit of possibly useful information). Home's opinions and mine differ in many ways. The fact that we both happened to mention Walker is coincidental: I mentioned his review because it was the only substantial comment to have appeared in the establishment press about any of the Festival, and because of its symptomatic significance. The

fact that two negative views of Walker's writing appeared virtually side by side is, obviously, an editorial decision on which I am in no position to comment.

**Yours
Ed Baxter**

MODERN PAINTERS

**Rosebery Avenue
London EC1R 4PH**

Dear Variant

It is a pity that in the last issue of the magazine, whilst two pages are given over to dismissing the racist right-wing **Modern Painters**, only one page is spent discussing another new magazine - **Third Text**: Third World Perspective on Contemporary Art and Culture. We are sure that the irony of this is not lost on Peter Fuller (even when white culture sinks as low as **Modern Painters**, it still takes more space to dismiss than Third World culture needs to be discussed). Neither, we suppose is the further irony lost, in that Fuller's obviously ideologically unsound project is 'addressed' by Paul Wood, who in a recent issue of Artscribe (Jan/Feb '88) has this to say about the Saatchis in an article about the "exemplary" exhibition Art-of-our-Time: "But it is worth noting, and avoiding, the soft-left tendency to preface Saatchi discussions with a ritualized wail about Thatcherism. The Saatchis are powerful, and what self-styled radical ever approved the grounds of power of the dominant?... Some left-wing moaning about the Saatchis is little more than an admission to not being as sharp, or as clever, or as powerful as they are. In moments of despair in this dismal world which is partly of their making one is driven to acknowledge that **at least** they spend the proceeds on art".

Perhaps it is worth asking, in his avoidance of prefacing his discussion of the Saatchis with a "ritualized wail about Thatcherism" (as he does with his discussion of **Modern Painters**) whether this puts him on the **Hard-left** or on the **Right**? (There is no centre anymore). Perhaps he is of the opinion that the Saatchis are sharp, clever and powerful not only because they spend money on art (which is a good thing

because it gives critics some art to talk about, otherwise they might have to discuss the Saatchis relationship to power, advertising, Thatcherism, South Africa, etc.) but also spend it mostly on the art he himself has a particular interest in? "Their Boundary Road shows over the last three or four years have been landmarks, mostly for their adequate display of minimal, and related, installations."

It is a pity that, in what is a tedious and redundant, though no doubt 'historic' confrontation between the narrow nationalism of **Modern Painters** (with its royalty and pseudo-aristocracy) on one side, and the international corporate modernism of the Saatchis (with a whole host of defenders - including a Charles Harrison inspired school of pseudo-Marxist discourse, created, mostly in Artscribe to defend the 'relative autonomy' of the Saatchis) on the other, it would seem that by employing Paul Wood to dismiss **Modern Painters** that **Variant** unfortunately appears to come down on the Saatchi side of the fence. Something we are sure you did not intend.

Modern Painters and the Saatchis may have different tastes in art but they both serve the Thatcher government in different ways. Paul Wood may claim his moral ground from the self-critical programme of modernism, whilst Peter Fuller his from nature, nation and God, but in the end they are both authoritarian and both would be threatened by the (Scottish) "nationalists and feminists" (that Wood dismisses for being upset by David Salle's work at the Fruitmarket) whom we are sure a magazine like **Variant** would wholeheartedly support.

**ART IN RUINS
Glyn Banks & Hannah Vowles**

Dear Art in Ruins

It is a pity that in response to the last issue of Variant which contained a one page review of Third Text and a two page critique of the utterly tedious **Modern Painters**, that you reduce the arguments to merely a quantitative level without regard (it seems) for what the review by Lorna Waite on the magazine Third Text actually had to say. It seems you have disregarded this in order to launch criticism of the

writer of the piece on Modern Painters, Paul Wood.

It is of little concern to Variant as to what Paul Wood did or didn't say about the Saatchi in a previous Artscribe or in whether you have quoted him in or out of context. I care even less to check the accuracy of the details - artspeak can remain the alienated privilege of Artscribe and to those artists and critics for whom ideological pedanticism is a hobby. I do not speak on behalf of Paul Wood nor condone arguments here. What is of concern is your assumption that the particular writer, Lorna Waite, is ignorant of the Eurocentric domination of cultural practices, and that furthermore, by "employing" Paul Wood, Variant "appears to come down on the Saatchi side of the fence". The first point answers itself if you should read the review over again and the reference to it in my editorial of the last issue. The second point is very funny in a perverse sort of way.

It is flexible editorial policy to allow invited contributors to take as much space as they require to say whatever it is they have to say (within certain limitations of space and relevance of the issue/project etc.) Variant has never been in any financial position to 'employ' anyone at any stage in the production so contributions go beyond the self-serving rhetoric of art-criticism and I would hope the magazine as a whole relates little to the colourful bourgeois dross such as Art Line, to which you regularly contributed in the past. There is no conspiracy at work here in undermining the self-determination of oppressed peoples and cultures. I need not add that Variant is, after all, based in Scotland.

A final irony lies in the fact that Paul Wood did, in fact, write a lengthy review of Third Text which was printed in Artscribe. Your other points are taken with consideration.

Malcolm Dickson
Editor

Variant Audio: submissions on audio cassette are invited to contribute to an audio issue of the magazine for limited circulation in May 1989. Free copy of tape and complementary subscription of Variant to all participants. Send your submission by mid-April.

1919

Glasgow G22 6AT
25th July 1988

Dear Variant

Thanks for your complimentary copy of Variant. I cannot pretend to understand the grammar of art. It has, over the ages, had varying languages and differing purposes, or no purpose at all, except its own contribution to the experience of existence. But I suppose there has always been a form of art which gave articulation to the spirit of revolt against established values. I think this spirit is present in many forms of modern art; probably because this is the age of the philistine, when art is prostituted to market values, and the concept of commercial art is acceptable.

To give expression to this spirit of revolt, this inner discontent, which is the burgeoning of new life, the sap from which richer consciousness develops, is an imperative need. It finds its outlet in the rebel, in whatever sphere he/she operates. The artist who is also a rebel gives expression to his reaction to the prevailing reality by the challenge of his art, be it in words, sound, form, movement or colour - or even in juxtapositions of fragmented appearance which passes for reality. I don't believe there is an ultimate realisation of human endeavours. Man's destiny is to make the journey. Perfection is death; life is in the striving. Always the dead wood of the decaying past must be cleared as its edifice falls; and always this is the task of the young in spirit. But life does not begin when we leave school, or begin to shave. It has been going on a long time. We are like cinema-goers who make our admittance in the middle of a continuing performance. The show is already on. We have to get some notion as to what went before; and get a general idea of the plot. So some acquaintance with the past is helpful. That is where the articles of recent history in Variant are relevant.

I like the poster which is enclosed. This is valuable in a number of ways. It gives an impression of the massive solidity - if not solidarity - of the demonstrators. It is also a reminder to us older folk - who must count more than 75 candles on our birthday cake, if anybody remembers to give us one - of the

class differences, the subdivisions of the working class shown in the different habit of dress.

At the most impoverished end of the scale were the casual labourers and unemployed. They lived in the worst tenements in the most depressing back streets. The garb (I confine myself here to the masculine) was almost invariably cloth cap and muffler. A youth who put on a collar and tie would be teased by his mates. In the next street the young fellow - myself for instance - who put on a muffler with his cap would be told off by his mother for "looking like a corner-boy".

One notch further up the scale would be the tradesman. He would wear a soft hat and a starched wing collar and tie. If his daughter married - or went around with - a person of the labouring class it would be a matter for much embarrassment. Then there was the gentleman from the tiled closes, the backbone of middle management. He let his status be known by his bowler hat, spats, and (sometimes) pin-striped trousers. Of course there was some cross fertilisation, but within limits. A soft hat in a back street would attract unwelcome attention, a bowler hat, if worn by a resident, would draw a crowd.

There were also loosely defined areas in the city centre where class differences were evident. From an upstairs window in Sauchiehall Street one could see a stream of soft and bowler hats passing below. From a similar stance in Argyle Street the stream would be mainly soft caps, and an occasional muffler. This is, of course a general observation; but a policeman would look hard at a group of cap and muffers walking along Sauchiehall Street. I have left women out of this commentary. All I will say is that as late as the Second War shawl women were not a rarity on the streets of Glasgow.

Variant gives an exciting report of the 1919 demonstration in George Square. That was Bloody Friday. Guy Aldred was still in jail for his resistance to the war. His companion, Jenny Patrick, was at the back of the crowd depicted here. But she was in the forefront of the battle which took place. When the police charged at the crowd at the bottom of North Hanover Street Jane was standing beside a lorry of bottles

being collected from a pub. When the police charged, the strikers had ready ammunition from the lorry. The police were quite unpleasantly surprised.

Willie Gallacher is quoted: "We were carrying on a strike, when we should have been creating a revolution". But it was Gallacher who appealed to the crowd to disperse 'for God's sake'.

If there had been a few Gallachers around when the people stormed the Winter Palace in Petrograd there might have been no revolution there either. I don't say a revolution would have succeeded. The demonstration was only for a shorter working week, not for the abolition of the wages system. At this point there was a swing away from the probability of a revolutionary change of the system. Here the course was set for careerist parliamentarism and capitalist accommodations of Trade Unionism. This is examined in "The Legend of the Red Clyde" by Ian MacLean.

A considerable tributary of the class struggle, usually ignored by the social historians was the agitational work of the antiparliamentarians. Now this omission has been remedied by the publication of a book by Mark Shipway: "Antiparliamentary Communism" published by MacMillan at £30. The price is prohibitive, and ironical, considering that it puts forward the views of people who issued penny pamphlets, addressed to workers. I don't see many dispossessed proletarians buying this book. Yet it is necessary reading for anyone wanting to be informed about the socialist movement of the '17 - '45 period. It deals mostly with Guy Aldred and Sylvia Pankhurst who were the twin pillars of antiparliamentarism at that time.

J T Caldwell

Burning all Illusions