



# VARIANT

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**Calypso: Lion**  
**The Lord Pretender**

**SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES**

**Poetic Terrorism**

**Sex and Censorship USA Style**

**Improvisation: Keith Rowe Interviewed**

**Lawrence Weiner Interviewed**

**Adrian Piper**

**Reviews:** Comics/Art & Technology/Signs of the Times/  
Outer Space/VIPFilm/Taylor Woodrow/Mark Pawson/Brian  
Jenkins/Is Modern Life Rubbish?/Small Press reviewed

Variant is a magazine of cross-currents in culture: art practice, media, critical ideas, imaginative and independent tendencies. We are a charitable project and publish with the assistance of grants, advertising, sales and subscriptions. Most items are commissioned, but we welcome contributions and ideas for news items, reviews, articles, interviews, and polemical writing. Guidelines for writers are available. We also welcome ideas for artists pages and for items which we can distribute within the magazine, such as stickers, prints, xerox work and other ephemera.

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Peter Suchin is an abstract painter and writer who lives in Leeds

Hakim Bey is a writer based in the USA. 'Poetic Terrorism' is pirated from his book T.A.Z. (The Temporary Autonomous Zone...)

Stuart McGlinn is a filmmaker based in Glasgow

Douglas Gordon is an artist based in Glasgow

Louise Wilson is an artist and writer based in Newcastle

Ed Baxter is a writer and publisher based in London

Ewan Morrison is a filmmaker based in Glasgow

Malcolm Cook is a freelance writer based in Hull

Lorna Waite is a writer based in Edinburgh

Ross Sinclair is an artist based in Glasgow

Tim Etchells is an artist and member of Forced Entertainment. He is based in Sheffield

Su Braden is an artist based in Reading

Shirley MacWilliam is an artist based in Cheltenham

Patricia Scanlan is literary editor of Lovely Jobly magazine. She is based in London

Alan Robertson is a videomaker based in Glasgow

Helen Cadwallader is a freelance administrator and writer based in Newcastle

Chris Byrne is a videomaker based in Edinburgh

Lorna Able is a filmmaker based in Glasgow

Slavka Sverakova lectures in Art History at the University of Ulster

Karen Strang is an artist based in Stirling

Simon Herbert is an artist and is an organiser for Projects UK in Newcastle

Billy Clark is an artist and writer based in Glasgow

Jim Ferguson is a poet and writer based in Glasgow

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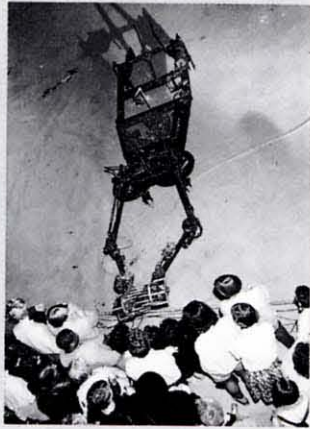
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**EDITORIAL ADDRESS:**

Variant  
73 Robertson Street  
Glasgow G2 8QD  
Scotland  
UK

Tel: (041) 221 6380  
Fax: (041) 221 7775

**Editor:** Malcolm Dickson

**Design:** Adam Geary

**Back-up team:** Ed Baxter, Carol Rhodes

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**EVERYONE THEIR OWN KALEIDOSCOPE!**

**O**n appearances the early 1990's are witness to an ever narrowing future in both the cultural and political dimensions. Rather than the expected upsurge in rigour that accompanies extreme times, it seems that mediocrity is winning the day: a new conformity permeates the arts, the traditional political left - non-parliamentary or otherwise - is beating a hasty retreat and the disinformation of the media has reached mind scrambling proportions.

Art functions within the popular culture of the day and that culture is so saturated by the values of the commercial and corporate marketplace that the so-called 'popular' and 'minority' cultures are as equally shallow. Assertions about the 'autonomous' value of art are as unconvincing as the 'rebel youth' delusions of pop sociology. The general state of things is characterized by the media sound-byte - the past as a supermarket of poses and radicalism replaced by dynamic dressing: it looks good, it sounds good, the technique is okay, but it's essentially trash without style and is gone in an instant.

The loss of identity, the seeming impossibility of real communication, an inability to understand what's really going on: - these are not the accidental side-effects of our modern condition, but - it seems - the necessary requirements for continued atomisation and for stability of the social order. Any public intelligence expert knows that in a state of bewilderment and separation, people will be less inclined to grapple with positions that question the ruling logic. Although voices are dissipated and articulations of *other values* are undefined, they are there in a multitude of samizdat forms.

In contrast to the very real problems of our time and of significant struggles being waged on a day-to-day basis by many today, such a stance may leave itself open to accusations of being dilettante, romantic and indulgent. But let's say that if art, literature, and poetry have roles to play in changing perspectives of how we create and communicate, then they can also prefigure the demand for real social change. On a more pragmatic level: how far can ideas and practices carry countervailing motives? To what extent does the subversive potential of culture become absorbed into a sanitized *reality*? To what extent is a lifestyle adopted as a substitute for a more questioning attitude?

Having points of view that may clash breeds debate: we are not interested in reinforcing people's ideas about the mainstream art world and the system it serves or in the diffuse alternative networks outside that. It is this, we hope, that makes Variant durable but not beyond being challenged itself. The speculative linking of dissident histories, their contemporary usage, and coverage of current practice is the starting point to assert the vitality of cultural practices in the present. It is also to contribute to the alternative directions for their continuation.

**Note**

The news section has returned with this issue and although this concerns matters largely local, the purpose is to inform beyond a local audience and stimulate a response. The contents in this issue represent our growing coverage and spread with articles concerning many American artists and reviews of projects across the UK. There are two new sections in the magazine, one on 'Comics' and the other on 'Printed Matter', which merges books with small press material. These will appear regularly and contain items weird, political, arty, offbeat and refreshing. We welcome the opportunity to extend comment into a letters page in future issues.

Subscribers to this issue will have received some Lawrence Weiner stickers to accompany his interview. Do as they suggest and stick them up somewhere rather than hide them in the archive. We hope to be giving away other items in future issues - subscription is your only assurance of receiving that junk mail you can't get anywhere else.

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## THIN AND VISIONARY

As part of the ACGB's restructuring of the arts for the forthcoming decade, National Arts Strategy, Scotland has been holding its own series of meetings under the grand banner of **A Charter for the Arts in Scotland**. The aim is to carve out a structure for the arts in the forthcoming decade, one which builds upon the momentum of already existing activities and one which is supposedly built upon by arts organisations themselves. Such a devolved approach seems to suggest that the role of the Arts Councils' may be less of the 'centre-out' model than as facilitators.

Already several meetings have been held covering most areas of the arts. At a meeting held in Dundee on 1st October, an impressive turnout of Scotland's arts community attended, including an unannounced bus-load of students and artists from Glasgow, which raised fears in the organisers at the front desk that their presence could disrupt the flow of the proceedings (a fear unsubstantiated, as the proceedings progressed). The brief covered many areas which in themselves could have benefited from a day each in discussion. These ranged from the role of 'Art Outside the Gallery', 'The International Dimension', to the more controversial sessions 'Attitudes to Contemporary Art' and 'The Independent Gallery Sector'. Attended by members of an arts

administrative community still shocked at the temporary closure of the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh and the then-recent liquidation of the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, it was perhaps insensitive to have included within the Visual Arts Paper, under the title of 'Consumption', the comments that *'The gallery's principal role is to sell... The experience for the visitor can be very different... Sadly some of the subsidised public galleries seem unaware of this problem'*. It was not surprising, but still absurdly ironic, that such statements were denied as having authorship by any of the people present, be they arts council members, or gallery administrators themselves. This led to heavy criticism of that paper and for that whole section to be dropped and that an 'truly independent' enquiry be conducted into Scottish galleries and their constituencies.

Despite this, there were productive sessions but with little time for discussion. The section on 'Moving Images' was welcomed and commended as being 'progressive' and a consensus was arrived at in broad agreement with the paper (see Moving Image News). The day ended on the high note that another meeting concerning galleries and public art would certainly take place.

The 'openness' of future discussions was placed in question on the second day of consultation in the Collins Gallery in Glasgow on the 14th November. Marked by an unwillingness to discuss fundamental ideas in relation to Scottish Visual Arts, the defensive

position and the relating anecdotal apparently held little interest to those who had attended the initial consultation day in Dundee.

Although valuable contributions could have begun serious debates, i.e. Arthur Watson (of Peacock Printmakers in Aberdeen) on Scottish Art Schools, the chairman Chris Allan (who also chaired the meeting in Dundee) is alleged to have, at various times, overstepped his 'objective' role or relinquished it completely. Many of those present feel that many questions remain unanswered about further consultation, the centralisation of diverse viewpoints, with the subsequent dismissal of dissenting voices being the most problematic. The other pressing question is that when the final National Arts Strategy is agreed upon by the four Arts Councils in June 1992, will decisions made then ever be reversible and how does the debate continue?

## LIQUID (isation) REFRESHMENT

Following the decision to put the **Third Eye Centre** into liquidation in October, following the 'unnoticed error' of running up a several thousand pound deficit within a nine month period, it was announced on the 30th October by the Scottish Arts Council that a new contemporary arts centre will replace its predecessor. Three key members from the Third Eye Centre, Nikki Millican (Events), Andrew Nairne (Exhibitions) and Stephen Kelly (House Manager) have been retained by SAC and Glasgow District Council for the purposes of shaping the new centre's identity when it re-opens in May 1992. From April 1997, tenders will be invited for the premises for 'contemporary arts purposes'. The Third Eye Centre was opened in 1975 under the directorship of Tom McGrath, whose position was taken up by Chris Carrell, who continued until it's surprising downfall. Having originally derived its name from the mid-70's climate which saw the involvement of Buddhists in the arts in Glasgow, can we suggest the title of 'The Sare Heid Centre', as an epitaph to those unpaid members of staff and creditors awaiting their deserved monies in vain?

Despite the Third Eye Centre's closure, curator Andrew Nairne has organised his own show in November '91 by local artists, most of whom exhibited together in the Third Eye show **'Self Conscious**



**State'** in early 1991. Although closed to the public, the 'display' appeared to be for the benefit of other curators visiting Glasgow who could sample the talent of new art from Glasgow which is otherwise non-studio based. This follows on from a show of work instigated by Nairne which was housed at the Project Ability centre in Glasgow at the same time as the **'Windfall'** exhibition in August of 1991. A second display of work at the Project Ability space - including many of the artists from the previous show and an associated group - was organised by Tom Eccles, and was 'not on view' sometime around September / October '91, except by negotiation. Contact Andrew Nairne for information at the Third Eye (041 332 7521), and Tom Eccles at Project Ability (041 552 2822).

## ARTS 2000

**G**lasgow's submission to be City of the Visual Arts in 1996 has been co-ordinated by former Third Eye Centre Director Chris Carrell (see *Every Penny on the People* in Variant 9). The final document is up against proposals from Hampshire, Bradford and the Northern Region. The Arts 2000 project is an Arts Council of Great Britain initiative whose aim is 'to create this country's artistic achievements and to lay the foundations for cultural life in the new millennium'. The winner of this competition is to receive the sum of £250,000 through the ACGB with which to 'create an arts programme of flair and scope with an impact Europe-wide'.

It is anticipated that the individual city or region that wins the award will put up a considerable amount of money from its own funds in order to realise its programme. These events are expected to be 'realistic and attainable' as well as providing 'long term sustainable development' of the visual arts within both the city and the region. Aware that such an opportunity should benefit individual artists within the community, a meeting was held early in October to discuss the impact of *Arts 2000* on arts within the city. A 'Working Party' of four were 'elected' to put these specific concerns forward at *Arts 2000* meetings and ensure representation of the needs of artists and small arts organisations within the final proposal. The Working Party has had success in evolving mechanisms to aid this within the overall management structure and selection

procedures, should Glasgow be successful in its bid.

The application for the bid is under the auspices of Glasgow District Council and the second application has now been lodged with the ACGB. This follows a re-draft after the ACGB sent it back to GDC as 'unacceptable'. It is alleged that GDC re-wrote the original application put together by Carrell and Julian Spalding, and included the mandatory publicity photos of the City Chambers and notable members of the Council, which was then sent off to ACGB. The ACGB stress the importance of the event being of benefit to the arts community in general and seem unlikely to look favourably upon any application that appears to be yet another Council event.

To date, Arts 2000 have managed to secure an amount of independence by setting up the project as a Charitable Company with 16 members, 7 of whom will be visual arts forum representatives 'chosen by practitioners themselves'. The proposal, however, will still be submitted under the direction of Glasgow City Council. A conference was held in December to take the proposal further. More news to follow.

## ARTISTS PROVISION?

**W**ith an ever diminishing number of contemporary art space in Scotland, artists in Glasgow recently suffered yet another confidence blow when **WASPS** (Workshop and Artists Studio Provision Scotland) announced a surprise increase in the rents of their studios, a rise of some 200% for most tenants. The letter, sent out to tenants at the end of May '91, also demanded the increase to be backdated to the beginning of April '9 and that tenants pay another 'deposit' on their studio spaces. The board of WASP'S made no apology of the fact that they lay the blame for the increase 'straightforwardly from the fact that rent from most studios have not covered the expenditure on these studios over the last three years'. The financial problems have already seen the closure of the WASP'S shop, the resignation of the Administrator and the redundancy of 7 of the WASP'S staff.

The tenants refused to pay and contacted Glasgow District Council in June who informed them that any increase in rent has to be validated

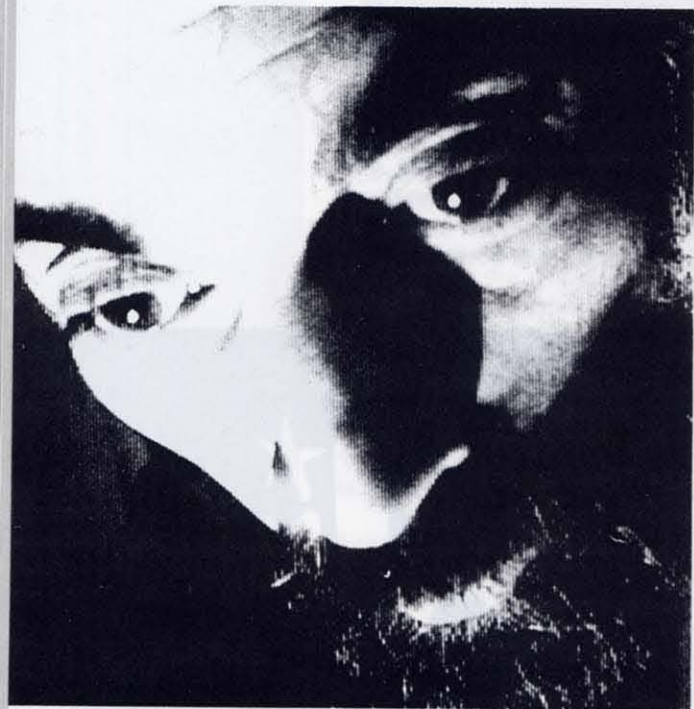
by them - since they own the building - and that they were not meeting until the Autumn. This threw the validity of the increase into some doubt and confidence in the WASP'S board, who had not met with the tenants for over 5 months at the time of the increase. WASP'S have no artists on their board and many artists suspect that the increase was an attempt to scare many into leaving, a situation which would affect the fine artists rather than the high-powered craft industries that also have studio/workshops in the premises. The 'campaign' to reduce the rent and make the board more accountable has not been aided by a division that has arisen between the fine and craft artists, with the former unable and unwilling to pay and the latter more willing to do so. The allegation that there are deeper financial deficits than those from the studio rents have been denied by WASPS, although the financial records have not been made evident to tenants who have requested them. Due to the campaign, the current increase has been reduced to approximately 70%, but tenants still feel that the WASP'S board are not providing a proper service at the King Street studios and no proper lease is yet said to exist. This yet again raises doubts as to the legal and accountable role of limited companies and their boards, and their incompatibility with the artists interests they have been set up to support.



## MOVING IMAGE NEWS

**A**t a consultation meeting for the Charter for the Arts on 1st October (see previous news report) the following recommendations, among many others, were made concerning the future of *Film, Video and Performance Art*.

1. That a Moving Image or Time Based Media Panel be set up by The Scottish Arts Council,
2. That the £34,000 granted to the Scottish Film Production Fund be withdrawn should serve the initial funding base for such a department,
3. That galleries be encouraged to set up regular screenings and stage exhibitions of moving image work and, furthermore, that an equipment pool for screenings and installations be established,
4. That a biennial festival in Scotland could help establish the area on a European scale.



Although there was agreement on many of the points, it was apparent that there was a real need for research into the nature of the work likely to be funded under any new Moving Image panel of SAC; the profile and number of artists to be considered as its 'constituency'; the type of funding schemes that would be most effective and desirable to support such work by Scottish artists; the resources needed to produce the work; and how to promote and exhibit the work both in Scotland and abroad. Further updates in the next issue.

Such 'signs of change' are the result of a noticeable increase in interest and activity around the areas of artists film and video, i.e. the presence of DJCA in Dundee, the representation of work from the workshop sector, and most notably from Glasgow Film and Video Workshop, the success of projects from independent producers, and the sporadic but persistent support from a few individuals and venues in the exhibition and screening of film and video work. The most recent focus of activity was the **Seventh Fringe Film and Video Festival** held for four days and nights in Edinburgh's Filmhouse in November. Admitted by many to be the best organised festival so far in its history, it included some 118 works over 17 different programmes. The festival included independent work in a range of approaches, from animation to documentary, narrative to 'experimental', a breadth of programming that was reflected in the decision this year to change its name from the Fringe Film Festival to acknowledge the existence of video. Work was included from all over the UK, including student work from Bournemouth, Maidstone, Humberside, DJCA, Napier, some outstanding video work from the London College of Printing, as well as a sprinkling of work from Canada, Spain, the USA, and France.

There were certain concerns to be raised over some of the programmes, i.e. the inability to distinguish between the promotional material, as in the case of the 'showreel' from DJCA, and the work itself. The flippancy of the programme titles, i.e. 'Sweaty Orange', 'Ducking and Diving', 'Sun, Sand and Sheep', suggested that the festival could have benefited from a more selective rigor. Despite this, the festival provided an exciting platform and meeting point for Scotland's makers and audience of the next decade. As a model of how it will continue and develop in the future, it looks promising.

A catalogue, containing short essays and notes on all the films and videos included, is available and is free. Telephone Video Access Centre, Edinburgh, on 031 557 8211.

### 'EXPERIMENTA'

**T**he Arts Council of Great Britain's 11th Hour production awards are in the future to be known as

'Experimenta'. Application forms are now available and the deadline for submissions is January 31st 1992.

To clarify the situation for Scottish based Film and Video makers, the Arts Council of Great Britain stress that those based North of the border are eligible for selection on all ACGB/Broadcast projects, namely Experimenta, the Channel 4/ACGB Animation awards and Lateshow/ACGB 1 minute TV project. Variant would like to hear from any Film and Video makers who have received anything contrary to the above in their request for application to the projects mentioned.

## FILM PRODUCTION FUND

**T**he New Director of the Scottish Film Production Fund is to be Kate Swan, a graduate of the National Film and TV School and a previous organiser of the Edinburgh Television Festival. As a producer, her credits include *Play Me Something* by Tim Neat.

The SFPF is an independent organisation established to assist and develop the independent sector in Scotland. It is financed by the Scottish Office Education Department, Channel 4, BBC Scotland, and the Scottish Arts Council. It provides script development and co-production finance.

Since its inception in 1982 the Fund has been involved in over 50 completed films ranging from documentaries (*Tree of Liberty, Into Nicaragua*) to feature length animation (*Ra, Path of The Sun God*) to short films as well as features (*Venus Peter, Silent Scream*)

Penny Thomson resigned as Director of the Fund on her appointment as the Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

The first **Scottish Film Council** production awards scheme, supported by both the Film Council and Scottish Television have now been made to Film and Video makers. Thirty-five awards have been given, with thirteen of those up to the value of £2000, with three further awards of £2000-plus being



made to Edinburgh Video Access, Edinburgh Film Workshop Trust and Glasgow Film and Video Workshop, respectively. A limit of £500 was the rule for most, although specific amounts to individuals were not detailed by the SFC. The scheme, in its first year, is to continue and be monitored for a further two years. It is seen as a complimentary funding structure to those currently planned and in operation, which are deemed to be supporting more established 'mainstream' filmmakers, through the Scottish Film Production Fund on the one hand, and 'video artists' work, supported by the Scottish Arts Council. It is targeted at Film and Videomakers at an earlier stage in their development. The work selected was generally said to be ambitious and of a high standard and fell, according to the scheme's secretary, Erika King, into the categories of Animation, Narrative and Community production, as distinct from 'Artists Film/Video Art'. The Film Council propose to screen completed works at next years Edinburgh Film Festival and also at regional film theatres. For details of next years scheme, contact the Film Council on 041 334 4445.

## CHANGES AT THE SCOTTISH FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

The Validation Committee for the MSc In Film and Television production has now approved the course document to be offered by the proposed **Scottish Film and Television School**, to be based jointly at Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Edinburgh's Napier Polytechnic from January 1993. Rumours of a rift developing between the 2 institutions would appear to be unfounded, with planning for the school and the joint MSc course appearing to progress as scheduled. Recent changes within the collaborating institutions' staffing, the appointment of Paul Del Bravo to the post of Director of Video and Television at Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and the 'sideways' move of Colin McLeod, former Head of Electronic Imaging at DJCA, back to his roots in 'upwardly mobile' Edinburgh. McLeod steps down to the post of lecturer in Film and Video at Napier Polytechnic, which

will involve teaching on the college's undergraduate programme from January 92' and developing new courses in Electronic Imaging on Napier's behalf. No replacement has yet been announced to fill the post vacated by McLeod in Dundee, though the course Director of the New 'Scottish School', is expected to be Dundee's Paul del Bravo.

## VIDEO ART FESTIVAL

The proposed **International London Video Art Festival**, has temporarily been put on hold, the principal problem being the difficulty in obtaining suitable funding for such a venture in the South East's capital city (sounds like revenge of the provincial's!). A 100 page report has been commissioned and produced on behalf of the LVA by Anna Douglas, which according to a spokesperson for the LVA, contains an accurate picture of the problem in organizing such an event, although it is also said to contain certain discrepancies, which need to be resolved on Douglas' return from the US. The report will then hopefully be available for interested parties in due course.

On a more promising note, the LVA will begin a series of ongoing monthly screenings at the National Film Theatre (in London) under the umbrella title of 'Electronic Image', starting with a premier in December of Akiko Harrada's new production, in a programme called 'Musical Visions'. Screenings will then continue on a monthly basis, with January scheduled to feature a performance based programme called 'True Confessions'.

The LVA's new catalogue is now available contact: LVA for details on 071 734 7410.



## FILM/VIDEO FESTIVAL CALENDAR

The following information has been compiled on available information at the time of publication. Please inform us if there are any omissions in the festivals listing, or any incorrections in the details provided.

### JANUARY

*Imagina 1992*

Address:  
Boite Postale 300  
MC-9800  
Monte Carlo

Tel: 010 33 93501909

Deadline has now passed.  
Date: 29-31 January.

A large international festival of computer graphics, virtual reality, art, and symposiums.

### FEBRUARY

*Los Angeles International Animation Celebration*

Address:  
2222 South Barrington Avenue  
Los Angeles  
California  
USA

Tel: (213) 473 6701

Deadline has now passed.  
Date: January/February

*International 'Video Culture' Festival Istanbul*

Address:  
Director,  
Video Festival of Istanbul  
Kopenicker Strasse 16-17  
1000 Berlin 36  
Germany

Tel: (030) 612 2389

Deadline has now passed.  
Date: 2-6 February 1992

*Medien Operative, Berlin*

Address:  
Videofest  
Potsdamer Strasse 96  
1000 Berlin 30  
Germany

Tel: (030) 262 87 14  
Deadline has now passed.  
Date: 13-24 February 1992





# Report

## MARXISM YESTERDAY, THE MODERN TODAY

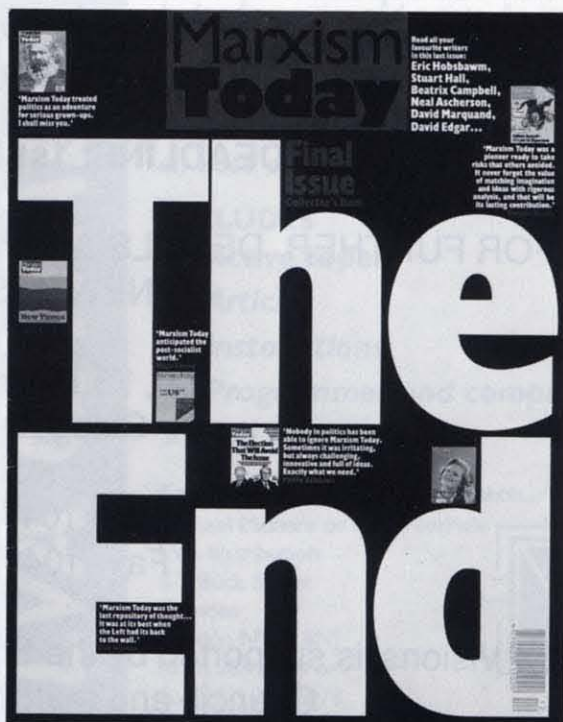
**M**arxism Today, one of the UK's longest-running newstand 'political' magazines (with New Statesman), is to close down with its last issue, published in December and now available. MT grew out of the Communist Party in 1957, with the aim of providing a magazine for a 'left-of-centre' tradition in British politics. The editorship was taken over by Martin Jacques in 1977, who moved it into the modern era and also onto the newstands in 1981. MT make it clear that the magazine is voluntarily 'closing down' and is not going into liquidation.

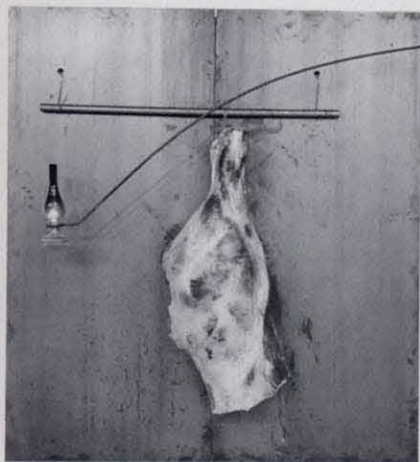
The magazine credits itself with having attempted to break down the traditional divisions between the left and right. Julian Turner, Managing Editor, told Variant that the major contributions the magazine suggested were: "Firstly that the old style leftism of the Labour Party as it arrived at the 1983 election was out of tune with the way society had changed since the 2nd World War and that it needed to rethink more drastically than it had done up to then. Secondly, to understand that a right-wing government led by Mrs Thatcher was something qualitatively different in British politics in that it represented something strategic and long-term, in other words: she had a project . . . It was in trying to understand what that meant for the

left and what direction left-wing politics should take". MT denied that this closing down represented a 'defeat' or a retreat for the politics the magazine represented, against a backdrop of an identity crisis for the traditional left with the supposed democratisation of the Eastern Block. "It would be very difficult", said Turner, "to define its politics now by using the word communist in any serious way. It's trying to rethink the future and because of that there's always been a tremendous tension to have a title that does too much to mislead people about what the magazine is. What we are saying that by its closing we can't retain that tension any longer . . . it has

had a good life, let it die in peace". There are no plans for any kind of relaunch, despite rumours of a successor titled 'Agenda'. Plans are underway, however, for a new 'think-tank' called 'Demos', which Martin Jacques is involved in.

Another magazine which might also be said to be appropriate to its time is **The Modern Review**, launched in the Autumn of 1991 and now in its second issue. A primarily non-curriculum cultural studies and literary review, the subject of concern is popular culture, and by attempting to mix trash with the high-brow, MR succeeds with the first issue in massaging some kind of 'hip image' for itself. Bart Simpson and Roland Barthes grace the editorial pages, the forced marriage of which tells us more about the paper's stance than the editorial itself, which is not without a cause: 'The cultural baggage of the past has been ditched, the old order turned upside down . . . Popular culture has taken the place of political causes as the glue that keeps our generation together - we all remember where we were when J.R. was shot'. Other items in the first issue for often interesting commentary include Boris Yeltsin, Frank Zappa, Hannibal Lecter and a bibliography of Arnold Schwarzenegger, with articles by contributing editor and professional brat, Julie Burchill on Jon Savage's new book. Another item worth reading, despite its authors unsavoury tabloid credentials is Garry Bushell's article on the illusions of the left over subculture titled 'Rock Against Reality'.





JANNIS KOUNELLIS  
A DIFFERENT IDEA OF THE IMAGE

## EXPENSIVE, NOT PENSIVE: recent issues of *Artscribe* and *Frieze*

Last summer saw the appearance of a new art magazine, *Frieze*, and also the launch of the much revamped and re-structured *Artscribe*. Given the still prominent presence of the recession this double arrival seems a pretty surprising event. Though quite different in content one's first impression of these publications is of an unfortunate similarity: it's something to do with the lavish and flash look which each exhibit, albeit in different ways. Clearly, a lot of money's been spent: this can be seen from the start.

*Artscribe's* new format is large and long (150 pages), and this allows it to carry a variety of types of writing - lots of short, snappy texts reflecting upon many aspects of contemporary art, but also several longer, in-depth pieces. This issue (no. 88) has major essays on Jannis Kounellis (by Jon Thompson) and on David Smith's *Medals for Dishonour* (David Batchelor), as well as a long review/article by Paul Wood focussing on Igor Golomstock's recent book *Totalitarian Art*. There's a substantial interview with the writer and publisher Sylvere

Lotringer and a survey-essay dealing with the latest wave of contemporary 'post-conceptual' artworks (by Eric Troncy). These extended pieces make up the centre of the magazine, with the many shorter items surrounding them front and rear. The overall structure is clear, with section headings such as, to give but a few examples, 'Frontlines', 'Polemic', 'Reviews', 'Panopticon', and 'Imprint'. Interspersed throughout are a large number of international artworld advertisements. There's a lot to go on: much on current art practice and general news items on artists, galleries and art market sales. Many reviews, a lot of high quality colour printing. Overall it has a 'luscious' appearance but one which, alas, also displays a kind of lack - you get the feeling that all the chirpy chit-chat and the expensive presentation offers little beyond a strongly seductive surface. Possibly this absence of anything really critical or disturbing is an accurate echo of the condition of contemporary art. Lotringer remarks on page 40 that '*rather than being anti-theory, I think we need more theories. We need more people who think. Because the world is getting more and more complex and the art world more and more simple*'. This position is a stance sorely lacking elsewhere in the magazine. *Artscribe* is attractive and impressive, but one would like something a little less affirmative, something more concerned to question and disturb.

The power to disturb cannot be cited as an attribute of *Frieze*, a smaller, less expensive but then, I think, far less interesting journal than *Artscribe*. The latter at least gives you a lot to read and you feel you get, despite certain reservations, your ten quid's worth. *Frieze* at £3 is glossier and more colourful than other art magazines retailing at around the same price. It looks good but again lacks grit; worse, it *appears* critical but throws nothing into crisis. If you took this mag seriously you'd end up thinking that Goldsmith's College of Art was the centre of the universe; no doubt for a few London smoothies it is. *Frieze*, at only two issues old, already apparently sees itself as an indispensable fashion item. But really, a long article on the Turner prize, two pages of 'ugly mug' snapshots taken at London private views? These are the kind of things you find in this magazine and, frankly, there's no need for it. It comes over as art school vanity publishing at its worst. The sharpest, most entertaining contribution to issue 1 is David



Batchelor's attack on know-it-all TV presenter Muriel Gray and her recent *Art is Dead* series on Channel 4. The rest of the magazine is not entirely lacking in interest - Gavin Pinney's article on 'Self-Reference in Modern British Advertising' does raise some questions about the morality and structure of recent advertising-world projects, and there's a six page presentation on the recent Glasgow-based *Windfall* exhibition. Yet the latter piece reads as a kind of patronising 'look north', complete with 'real' critics from London being asked what they think of the show. Ultimately *Frieze* offers an unsatisfactory selection. It's an irritating magazine: glossy, posh, self aggrandising and smug.

Peter Suchin

# POETIC TERRORISM

WEIRD DANCING IN ALL-NIGHT COMPUTER-BANKING LOBBIES. UNAUTHORIZED PYROTECHNIC DISPLAYS. LAND-ART, EARTHWORKS AS BIZARRE ALIEN ARTIFACTS STREWN IN STATE PARKS. BURGLARIZE HOUSES BUT INSTEAD OF STEALING, LEAVE POETIC-TERRORIST OBJECTS. KIDNAP SOMEONE & MAKE THEM HAPPY.

PICK SOMEONE AT RANDOM & CONVINCING THEM THAT THEY'RE THE HEIR TO AN ENORMOUS, USELESS & AMAZING FORTUNE - SAY 5000 SQUARE MILES OF ANTARCTICA, OR AN AGING CIRCUS ELEPHANT, OR AN ORPHANAGE IN BOMBAY, OR A COLLECTION OF ALCHEMICAL MANUSCRIPTS. LATER THEY WILL COME TO REALIZE THAT FOR A FEW MOMENTS THEY BELIEVED IN SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY, & WILL PERHAPS BE DRIVEN AS A RESULT TO SEEK OUT SOME MORE INTENSE MODE OF EXISTENCE.

BOLT UP BRASS COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES IN PLACES (PUBLIC OR PRIVATE) WHERE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED A REVELATION OR HAD A PARTICULARLY FULFILLING SEXUAL EXPERIENCE, ETC.

GO NAKED FOR A SIGN.

ORGANIZE A STRIKE IN YOUR SCHOOL OR WORKPLACE ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT DOES NOT SATISFY YOUR NEED FOR INDOLENCE & SPIRITUAL BEAUTY.

GRAFFITTI - ART LOANED SOME GRACE TO UGLY SUBWAYS & RIGID PUBLIC MONUMENTS - POETIC TERRORIST ART CAN ALSO BE CREATED FOR PUBLIC PLACES: POEMS SCRAWLED IN COURTHOUSE LAVATORIES, SMALL FETISHES ABANDONED IN PARKS AND RESTAURANTS, XEROX-ART UNDER WINDSHIELD-WIPERS OF PARKED CARS, BIG CHARACTER SLOGANS PASTED ON PLAYGROUND WALLS, ANONYMOUS LETTERS MAILED TO RANDOM OR CHOSEN RECIPIENTS (MAIL FRAUD), PIRATE RADIO TRANSMISSIONS, WET CEMENT...

THE AUDIENCE REACTION OR AESTHETIC-SHOCK PRODUCED BY POETIC TERRORISM OUGHT TO BE AT LEAST AS STRONG AS THE EMOTION OF TERROR - POWERFUL DISGUST, SEXUAL AROUSAL, SUPERSTITIOUS AWE, SUDDEN INTUITIVE BREAKTHROUGH, DADA-ESQUE ANGST - NO MATTER WHETHER IT IS 'SIGNED' OR ANONYMOUS, IF IT DOES NOT CHANGE SOMEONE'S LIFE (ASIDE FROM THE ARTIST) IT FAILS.

POETIC TERRORISM IS AN ACT IN A THEATRE OF CRUELTY WHICH HAS NO STAGE, NO ROWS OF SEATS, NO TICKETS & NO WALLS. IN ORDER TO WORK AT ALL, POETIC TERRORISM MUST CATEGORICALLY BE DIVORCED FROM ALL CONVENTIONAL STRUCTURES FOR ART CONSUMPTION (GALLERIES, PUBLICATIONS, MEDIA). EVEN THE GUERRILLA SITUATIONIST TACTICS OF STREET THEATRE ARE PERHAPS TOO WELL KNOWN & EXPECTED NOW.

AN EXQUISITE SEDUCTION CARRIED OUT NOT ONLY IN THE CAUSE OF MUTUAL SATISFACTION BUT ALSO AS A CONSCIOUS ACT IN A DELIBERATELY BEAUTIFUL LIFE - MAY BE THE ULTIMATE POETIC TERRORISM. THE PTERRORIST BEHAVES LIKE A CONFIDENCE TRICKSTER WHOSE AIM IS NOT MONEY BUT CHANGE.

DON'T DO PT FOR OTHER ARTISTS, DO IT FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT REALIZE (AT LEAST FOR A FEW MOMENTS) THAT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IS ART. AVOID RECOGNIZABLE ART-CATEGORIES, AVOID POLITICS, DON'T STICK AROUND TO ARGUE, DON'T BE SENTIMENTAL; BE RUTHLESS, TAKE RISKS, VANDALIZE ONLY WHAT MUST BY DEFACED, DO SOMETHING CHILDREN WILL REMEMBER ALL THEIR LIVES - BUT DON'T BE SPONTANEOUS UNLESS THE PT MUSE HAS POSSESSED YOU.

DRESS UP. LEAVE A FALSE NAME. BE LEGENDARY. THE BEST PT IS AGAINST THE LAW, BUT DON'T GET CAUGHT. ART AS CRIME; CRIME AS ART.

## **HAKIM BEY**

AUTONOMEDIA  
P.O.Box 568  
WILLIAMSBURGH STATION  
BROOKLYN  
NY 11211-0568  
USA.

# MECHANICAL cata

## INTERVIEW: *STUART McGLINN*

Mark Pauline is the originator of Survival Research Laboratories (SRL) based in San Francisco. SRL create larger-than-life robotic creatures that run amok in spectacular and highly charged performances. SRL's work has often been interpreted as parodying the post-industrial machine age, and Pauline himself describes their work as 'the vaccine for the virus of total destruction'. SRL's work has yet to be seen in the UK, but Pauline was in Newcastle recently on a flying visit to the 'Blue Skies' conference (see review). He was interviewed by Stuart McGlinn.



**The work of SRL relies on spectacle, but how is this a positive force in the performances?**

It's sort of about recapturing the spectacle. There are real spectacles, if you like, and pseudo-spectacles that manipulate people, usually on the basis of something very unspiritual, like money. Real spectacle, I mean they're manipulative, they're supposed to be manipulative. It's somewhat of a positive relationship we have with spectacle - that's what is exciting, it enthrals you and that's one of the things we repress. We try to make a spectacle that is a popular one, in the sense that it isn't about making money, it isn't about manipulating people, it isn't about anything other than itself and its own boundaries.

**What is the reason or meaning for using the word 'Survival' in SRL?**

Before I was doing machines, I used to do these billboard modifications and someone gave me the opportunity to do an advertisement in a local paper. I was doing these illegal



SRL Photo: Bobby Adams, Sixth Street Studio

# astrophes

things so I couldn't take direct credit for them, so I needed a title. It was taken from a right-wing military magazine *Soldiers of Fortune*. I just felt it was something I could appropriate and make mean something different.

**Is there any relationship between survivalists attitudes and outlooks and those of SRL?**

It's related in an inverse sense. Survivalists have this very shared kind of ideology, like a religion really, and it's no surprise that survivalism in America is very closely allied with the far-right fringe religious movements here. SRL is about a society of doubters, who doubt the things that they see and hear, like all those rosy predictions of technology and the cosy relationship we're supposed to have with it and with work. All those notions are unquestioned assumptions. It feels good to be able to take something and turn it into something else, and I think that the magic is taken out of that, that basic human need and fascination with that. It's channeled into very unproductive and very debasing things like work and the kind of relationship you

have to have with bureaucracy to really live in this society. I think that those are unreasonable compromises to make and I don't think that people have to make them. I decided to have my cake and eat it, to go up against the expectations of the culture at large and still succeed even on their terms, even so that they will be able to respect you and even leave you alone, really. It is possible to do that in American culture. SRL is an antibiotic or some sort of protection against those things. It's not a question of rejecting the thing wholesale, we obviously don't reject technology, I don't believe that you should kill the host, I think that the host will kill itself and in the meantime the best thing to do is to parasitise it in a way that weakens and encourages other sorts of growths to take over. It may take a long time to figure out whether that's effective or not. It certainly doesn't look now as if anyone who's trying to work at odds with the culture at large is being very successful. In fact, it looks pretty bleak really.

**SRL and a lot of visually similar work takes as its basis a paranoia about the millenium and the**



**apocalypse, which seems fairly backward-looking. How would you defend your own work against this criticism?**

I think that everyone's speculating and how could you not speculate on something as melodramatic as the millenium, something that people have prefigured the consequences of for thousands of years? Like any other hysterias, it's just based on this need that people have to believe that there will be something different. A change for a world that is more interesting, better than this one, or at least different; but I don't think we're reacting to this sort of thing, though. I don't think what we do really posits a future at all, it's just trying to keep up with what's going on right now. Certainly the things we do are critical in some ways and it's very difficult to be critical of somebody unless you speak the same language as they do, then you have grounds for being accurate in your criticism. I don't try to rationalise why I do this stuff, I certainly don't make any money out of it.

SRL Photo: Bobby Adams, Sixth Street Studio



**You have said that SRL are gaining respect and moving closer to real research organisations within the scientific community who currently give you help and equipment.**

It's only close in so far that you can parasitise them, but obviously there's a gap. For the most part I think that they're interested in SRL in the same way that rich people are interested in slumming - they will go to sleazy neighbourhoods and see weird stuff, that's very obviously it. If that's their interest in SRL, I really can't argue with it. I don't think it is very harmful to me and I know that they're never going to be able to swallow it whole as long as it's maintained as the whole phenomenon, as its own hermetic self-supporting system. If I needed those people to survive then I think they'd be very dangerous. Their interest is basically voyeuristic and that interest plays into the future of SRL very well, because it allows us to get a lot of equipment. For instance, there is a research lab. in the area which just yesterday gave us 20 - 30,000 dollars worth of Star Wars military Capalitors. You can't buy those, there's no way you could ever get a hold of them, this person just liked what we do over here. But it's not so much an interaction but a passive relationship.

**Isn't there a possibility that something dangerous to the audience can occur at SRL performances?**

I agree it's very much a possibility. We've done 42 performances in 12 years and you'd think that was much more hazardous than someone like Christo, whose large umbrellas in some valley killed someone recently. What's really risky, what is dangerous with technology is when you fool yourself into thinking that something's not what it is. That's why the space shuttle blew up. That's why I blew up my hand, I fooled myself into thinking that something wasn't what it was.

**How are the performances structured and where does the audience fit in?**

Every person has a numbered list, a guide that all of the operators of the machines are supposed to go through, and within that guide they are allowed to improvise. Everyone is connected to me by helicopter headsets and so during the performance we can communicate and I can direct the thing to an extent. In some performances there is no assault on the audience and it can be a very narcissistic thing for the machines sometimes - it can be a parade rather than a show. Sometimes the interactions are strictly between the machines themselves, sometimes the machines ignore one another, and sometimes the audience figure very prominently. The equation shifts from show to show. As a rule of thumb we're always trying to get some kind of reaction from the audience, some kind of extreme reaction that can range from people doing things that are funny or terrifying. It ranges from being entertaining to being frightening, but there doesn't seem to be much of a consensus about what frightens people.

**What is the relationship between spectacle, audience involvement and audience provocation?**

The audience's involvement is passive and to some extent the audience is just another element in the performance, in the same way that the sets and the machines are elements. The audience can move around an area and have an intense reaction to something whilst another part of that audience can be watching that reaction. We've had a few incidents when the audience has very definitely participated in the performances. One time we distributed about 3,000,000 dollars of counterfeit money with these leaflet bombs that were exploding over the audience. They were scrambling to pick up the money as were the police who were guarding the performance, all of which made for a very strange spectacle. And of course the people on the other side of the audience just saw these people scrambling, they probably couldn't see what they were doing or what the hell was going on. So some people saw something definite and others saw this mysterious situation. Some people thought the money was a souvenir but when they saw how good a counterfeit it was...I mean the police weren't putting it in their pockets because they thought it was a souvenir, they knew that they could spend it when they got to Manhattan. In a more recent performance, the audience could feed cans and bottles to the machines or throw metal objects onto a grid which then vapourised them. It's very difficult to involve an audience in a situation that you've created when they haven't been directly involved in the creation of it. The cues for a language between you and your audience are always limited.

**SRL are also known for re-animating dead animal**





**corpses. Is this still a part of the act?**

It depends on the theme of the show. In the *Illusions of Shameless Abundance* show there was a lot of organic material and an excess of rotting food. In Barcelona recently we used a lot of meat because we could get so much of it, there's so many slaughterhouses in Barcelona. It fitted in with this idea of Spain being a meat-eating macho kinda territory. We were able to make fun of that.

**You have to deal with 'Boys with Toys' criticisms a lot, but is this something you're very conscious of or have you been forced to deal with it by other people?**

I will freely admit that this is a very indulgent thing in some senses, but I think that as you get older and you keep doing things it just gets more complicated. Unless you maintain a strict hierarchy about what you do, you can't really grow unless you become pluralistic. I think that that's sort of what's happened here. You have to absorb things around you that change a little. You have to understand what it means to be accused of being boys with toys. We are this privileged class here, we're mostly white guys, I mean. There are some women and some people who aren't white but on the other hand we're the people who are educated, who have access to these skills, who don't get in trouble for bending the law around. I'm a part of a privileged class, not rich in the traditional sense, but you have to be very sensitive to people who don't have those advantages. And the fact that you don't fall into those easy categorisations gives you much more bargaining power in the face of a very hostile and absorbing culture that we live in.

**What's your attitude to Republican and right-wing Christian organisations gaining increasing power in America, and how will SRL survive within such a climate?**

I don't depend on those groups, but I think that groups like those depend on people like me, on groups that they want to marginalise for their own power base. They depend on the weak, that's what the far right in this country depends on. They depend on the weak so that they can have a symbol with which to manipulate the masses of people and so they can have a voter base and a power base to make money and to gain more power and control. I mean, I don't think they believe in any of the things they talk about. But I think they depend on people like me being inept, on artists being able to be victims, they depend on blacks, on women. But as soon as you aren't a victim, as soon as you are able to to dish it out as good as they can, then you become a problem that they can never really deal with. I just don't worry about them. I'm always optimistic, right, I had a great time in the sixties when at least on the surface more progressive beliefs held sway. I don't really worry that the kind of opinions I have might become more popularised or less popularised. Maybe what I believe in will just get me into trouble oneday, but that's just the way it goes. What else could I expect. I think history would assign to me and to the people here, anyone who tries to push an agenda that's different to the status quo to that kind of end. But how uninteresting it would be to be able to be successful and just use that to make money. There are many more fun things you can do. I certainly don't look forward to the apocalypse. I mean, I have a very parasitical relationship with the culture. I would like to see the culture change but I don't really think you can burn the whole thing down and expect is to be any more interesting.

(This is the first of three interviews by Stuart McGlinn with artists addressing the uses and abuses of modern technologies in their work. Interviews with Genesis P. Orridge and with Stelarc will appear in forthcoming issues.)





# VOTE



# EMOTE

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VIEWER IN THE WORK OF ADRIAN PIPER

TEXT: EWAN MORRISON

**P**olitical art does exist. However, in what ways can we talk about its effectiveness? In the actions that it may influence, or solely in terms of the politics of art within institutions?

As Victor Burgin pointed out in the early '80s, the representation of politics is *prestaged* by the politics of representation. There is no transparent relationship between the subject of representation and the 'real world', due to the fact that communication is itself an industry operating within a specific political context. As art functions on the level of sign and commodity, or within the economy there can be no ideologically-free site from which to formulate any critique.

Whilst artists such as Burgin chose not to represent politics overtly, and instead concentrated on challenging dominant representational modes, other artists such as Adrian Piper have worked on two fronts; representing 'politics' and questioning the political context of the gallery and the viewer simultaneously.

Piper's artworks have involved an appropriation of imagery and media from mainstream culture, in the creation of multimedia, time based and photographic artworks which attempt to critique both the origins of those images and their recontextualisation within the gallery. Piper's critique of racism, and its institutionalised ramifications, then takes the predominantly white middle class history of the gallery as its main target.

In *Four Intruders plus Alarm Systems* (1980), the viewer is enclosed within an installation which includes representations of four black men alongside four tape recorded monologues by white American gallery goers. The installation creates a disparity between the immediacy of the images and the recorded comments, which are distanced 'art criticisms' of other works by Adrian Piper. Through this structure the installation allows a criticism of 'art criticism' to take place. Showing the ways in which the political content of the works have typically been made safe by criticising the works only in terms of their validity as 'art', the four monologues all shy away from dealing with the issue of racism, by upholding the opposition between art and politics, aesthetics and propaganda.

*'Politics is really not what I'm here for.'*  
*'I couldn't care less about racial problems when I come to an art gallery.'* (From the comments book)

Statements such as these underline the ways in which racism is perpetrated through the insistence that the political arena is elsewhere. As such they show a failure to deal with the work's real physical presence, and the presence of the viewer. The reading of the work is then not concerned with objectifying and displaying the oppressed for the anonymous viewer, but with challenging the distance between the viewer and the work - showing that detachment is an act of complicity.



By isolating specific images from political struggle - the civil rights movement, the third world, the legacy of slavery and setting them alongside images of white bourgeois comfort, Piper challenges the self definition of the viewer. Even if you do not identify with stereotypical representations of the white heterosexual family unit, the very fact of your presence within a gallery, within that dominant culture, forces the comparison.

*"Pretend not to know what you know."*

Here lies the core problematic of Piper's work. Through the way in which she confronts the viewer she also culturally defines who the viewer will be. The viewer is designated a fixed position within the works, addressed as the 'you', in opposition to the 'we'; the isolated white viewer in opposition to the artist as part of a black community. However, this fixed opposition is perhaps a deliberate overstatement intended to provoke a personal response.

*Vote/Emote* (1990), an installational writing booth, addresses questions to the viewer within the format of books provided for written replies. Within the work many of the replies came from people from varying ethnic backgrounds, who felt that they had either been excluded as subjects of racist oppression, or falsely defined within the context of the oppressors.

The questions were as follows:

- 1) List your fears of what we might know about you
- 2) List your fears of what we might think of you
- 3) List your fears of how we might treat you
- 4) List your fears of what we might do with your accumulations

The implication was that the viewer was by definition white and racist, a position that many people, including myself, found problematic. As one of the responses pointed out: *'what I am has to be in some degree a product of what you think of me.'* By stressing confrontation and opposition, Piper takes racial division to crisis point rather than using the gallery as a potential site for integration and cultural plurality.

Piper poses a crisis of decision for the viewer, one that is left unresolved. In the final line from the video installation *Cornered* (1988), she asks *"what are you going to do?"* Whilst this may provoke a sense of personal responsibility in the viewer, it also brings into question the effectiveness of personal responsibility and personal action within the political arena. At a time when politics appears to be enacted through the circulation of images within the media spectacle, the viewer of Piper's work may feel prompted to action, without being able to make any effective political gesture themselves.

Piper's work then poses another crisis for the role of the artwork and the viewer, and that is the alienation which is reproduced through the separation of art and social practice. The separation of ideas from action, and of intention from effects. Does the production of representations of political practice count in itself as political practice? If so, then the answer to the question: *"what are you going to do?"* may simply be to acknowledge the validity of work which represents politics. This would then signify an acceptance of politics as operating on the level of the circulation of images only, and her main achievement would then have been in circulating images that deal with racism within the Media and Art institutions.

However, this is not enough for Piper. By isolating and addressing the viewer, she begs the question of the possibility of a politics that is based upon personal experience. By creating interactive works, she forces us to deal with our own inactivity as viewers - creating personal experiences, rather than situating politics as a representation of something that happens elsewhere. Piper's work sits uncomfortably between Art and Politics, and defies being easily accommodated within acceptable definitions of art. She pinpoints what is lacking within both commonly accepted definitions - that is, not just their institutional separation, but the fact of our non-interaction as spectators of both arenas. What we are going to do about racism is perhaps not clear, but it is clear that simply acknowledging the validity of her art practice is not enough in itself. She provokes a response, incites a need for action, in spite of the fact that such intentions may prove difficult to put into action beyond one's own personal interactions.

*'It begins between you and me, right here and now, in the indexical present.'* (Adrian Piper, 'Xenophobia and the indexical present', *Reimagining America*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, #199, p.290)

Work by Adrian piper was at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham in October '91

Adrian Piper, *Pretend 5* (1990), Ikon Gallery, 1991. Photo: Ming de Nasty



However, this is not enough for them. By isolating and  
 addressing the viewer, she puts the question of the  
 possibility of a politics that is based upon personal  
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By isolating specific images from political struggle - the civil  
 rights movement, the Third World, the legacy of slavery and  
 setting them alongside images of white bourgeois comfort,  
 they challenge the self-delusion of the viewer. Even if  
 we do not identify with stereotypical representations of the  
 white bourgeois family and the very fact of your  
 presence within a gallery, within this dominant culture,  
 forces the comparison.

...not so far from the...  
 ...the core problem...

...the way to which she...  
 ...culturally defined who the...  
 ...dominated a fixed position with...  
 ...the 'you' in opposition to the...  
 ...viewer in opposition to the...

# BURNING

Tim Miller, *Sex/Love/Stories*, Live Theatre, Newcastle. Photo: Steve Collins



the

# FLAG



This October, Projects UK in Newcastle presented *Burning The Flag?*, a week long festival of live art made by a number of artists from the United States whose work deals primarily with ideas around sexuality and power, and who as such have fallen victim there to varying degrees of censorship. They included **Holly Hughes**, **Tim Miller** and **Karen Finley**, who along with **John Fleck** became known as the *NEA Four* when their grant applications for funding were withdrawn despite prior recommendation by the appointed peer panel.

The action by the NEA last year has added to the raging debate on obscenity in the arts, ignited by **Serrano's** *Piss Christ* (a photograph of a crucifix submerged in the artist's urine), following a crusade by the Reverend Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association and furthered by attempts to prosecute galleries showing the homoerotic work of **Robert Mapplethorpe**. The media campaign, largely orchestrated by Senator Jesse Helms in Congress, has led to a severe weakening of the NEA and hit an unprepared art world at a time when it was already divided by internal politics.

What was particularly pernicious about this latest round of attacks, however, was the reasoning put forward by the NEA that these artists were defunded on the grounds of artistic merit rather than content, so cleverly side-stepping accusations of censorship against work which posits the rejection of fear and ignorance in relation to issues of homosexuality, AIDS and women's right of biological control.

One of the aims in offering the opportunity for audiences in Britain to see the work in isolation from its original context, was to provide a useful tool in order to assess parallel defences to censorship. The adoption of different strategies by these artists would, it was hoped, present interesting and inspirational models for art practice here. The accompanying conference *Where Do We Draw The Line?* which addressed censorship in the arts, would then continue to broaden the debate with invited speakers addressing issues such as censorship in Northern Ireland, curatorship and representations of disability. One of the strategies for art practice was powerfully articulated by Tim Miller in his composite performance *Sex/Love/Stories*. Principally taking the form of a monologue, as did much of the other work, it opened with Miller's autobiographical account of his gay relationships in New York, a hilarious crazed geographical tour of sexual migration around the city. However, the death from AIDS, years later, of an friend whom he'd met when they were both living in a particularly seedy tenement block, crystallised his own political position. Then stories about his ACT-UP performances were told, which culminated in the very funny *civil disobedient weekend* where the arrested demonstrators have an impromptu orgy in a police cell and masturbate over a photograph of George Bush. As a founding member of ACT-UP in L.A., Miller presents an interesting example of the greater links which exist in the US between artists and the gay community. Indeed, one senses that the artists represented in the festival were speaking with the approval of the peer group that they represent.

At one point during the performance, a semi-naked Miller addressed his penis and ordered it to "get hard", listing a number of reasons why, such as "it reminds us that we're alive...get hard...because it's the least we can do". This expression of the desire for sexual pleasure in the face of AIDS was also articulated by Simon Watney during the panel on representations of the body and sexuality. The operation of the unconscious in its relation to psychic censorship was broached, accepting the unconscious as a site of struggle and thus at odds with the operation of censorship, which tends to be rooted in *correctness*. Censorship, in seeking to control an external reality, can forcefully reject the complexity of psychic operations. Watney stressed that now more than ever we have a responsibility to be truthful about sex, politically and intellectually, for ourselves and for others. The gay body viewed as a source of primitive fear and the projection of this hatred on to gays will inevitably become internalised. So when one talks about issues of artistic production and the representation of homosexuality, it should not be divided from the larger sociological issue of the fear of AIDS.

It is the spectre of AIDS which intensified the homophobia and subsequent de-funding of these artists, verbalised in the offensive conflation of 'homoerotic art' and 'obscenity'. The reductive labelling of the artists as 'gay men' or 'lesbians' has allowed an incredible degree of ignorance about their practice to permeate the debate, prompting John Frohnmayer - chair of the NEA - to assert that Holly Hughes "is a lesbian, and her work is very much of that genre". Her ironic reply to the NEA, using section 28 as an inspiration, stating that her artistic goals were 'to advance *lesbianism globally*', was not found amusing.

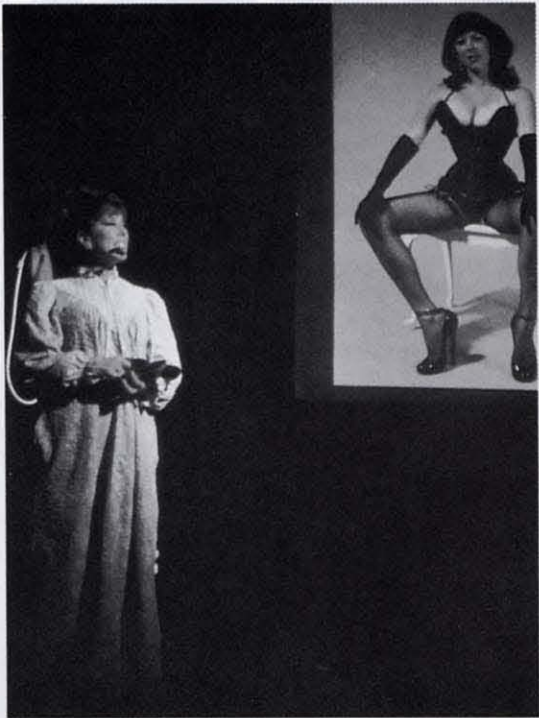
In her presentation at the conference, Hughes spoke about the censorship surrounding her work, which have included accusations of being a 'lesbian pornographer' which have come from the gay community itself. There was a fear that the representation of lesbian sexuality outside of the lesbian community would be liable to mis-appropriation. She traced the connection back to earlier feminist theory and discussion which had sought to equate sexual violence with the representation of sexuality and therefore of pornography. The latter panic button could be pushed uncritically by the right and left and has left artists with little or no support structure.

In *World Without End*, Hughes asks "what if the worst is true and the feminists and born-again are both right?". The frightening possibilities of this appear the more limiting in the light of this narrative performance, which conjured up a rich series of visual metaphors to evoke the ambiguities of sexual preferences and upbringing.

The majority of performances for *Burning The Flag?*, with a particular regard to **Annie Sprinkle**, were presented in a highly entertaining way, yet articulated often very problematic and contradictory positions. The work perhaps appeared very new to audiences in this country, steering clear of formalist and dogmatic approaches and prompting one to surmise that theories of sexual representation have a lot of catching up to do. It may be that feminism has yet fully to address work of this nature, to find the language to articulate it. As Hughes remarked, when she was isolated and under extreme personal attack and media backlash, where were the likes of Andrea Dworkin and other academics to support her position as a woman and an artist?

At one point during the performance a semi-naked Miller  
 addressed his penis and invited it to "go back" during a  
 number of scenes which were as if it were a character in  
 the play. Miller's penis was the focus of the play. The  
 play was also subtitled by Miller "What's Wrong with the  
 Penis" on representations of the body and sexuality. The  
 question of the penis was in fact central to the play's  
 content. Miller was interested in the penis as a metaphor for  
 the state of the world and the state of the individual. The  
 penis was the focus of the play's content. Miller was  
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The possibilities for the work to empower an audience were felt to some extent in *Sluts and Goddesses* by Annie Sprinkle. By prefixing her performance, which provided a subjective look at her life in the sex trade as prostitute and porn star, by saying she would share with us a bit about her life, "nothing more and nothing less than that", one was disallowed the chance to view her purely as a victim of that world. It provided an upbeat deconstruction of the sex trade, displaying the 'toys', mail order scams and accessories of 'high hair and high heels' necessary for one to be a porn star, with the latter transformatory ability depicted in the before and after slides of 'normal' women Sprinkle has herself photographed. The negative aspects of her past were touched on only very briefly with an extremely powerful segment of a couple of minutes duration when she sucked a row of dildos to the point of literally gagging herself, whilst a layered soundtape of male voices pressuring her to perform, and critical female ones urging her to stop was played. Her own transformation on slide from shy Ellen Steinberg to brazen Annie Sprinkle ended with her new found and 'new age' persona of Anya, who "meditates...while she masturbates, of course". Whilst many felt the final enactment of sacred ritual and self stimulation in the guise of sacred prostitute to be celebratory, one could not help but think the mythologising of self as goddess to be retrograde, and what Anglea Carter calls 'consolatory nonsense' (*The Sadeian Woman*).



Annie Sprinkle *Sluts & Goddesses*, Live Theatre, Newcastle. Photo: Steve Collins

The strongest position to emerge on censorship from the conference was voiced particularly by the American artists who argued for complete freedom of expression and were against any censorship restrictions irrespective of political affiliation. One should, of course, have the right of reply. This position became momentarily charged when Susan Edwards, who works in an advisory capacity for the Department of Public Prosecutions, began to state her position in seeking to ban books from general sale which she felt vilified women and children. She singled out *American Psycho* (Brett Easton Ellis) and *Juliette* (Marquis de Sade) as particularly harmful, for desensitising the reader, yet both were readily available. Edwards saw the Obscene Publications Act as an ineffectual tool and felt the need for its object of concern to be changed. Unfortunately she felt unable to finish her paper in the ensuing heated interruptions, so questions around the decontextualisation of content were not addressed. The anti-censorship lobby argued that the law which would ban these books would be the same one to deny access to gay literature and images. As solicitor Mark Stevens remarked in the opening address, "it is only by protecting what we don't like [that] we can see what we do".



Cheri Gaulke *Fire is Not Sated by Wood*, Live Theatre, Newcastle. Photo: Steve Collins

In discussing whether a special case should be made for art, the journalist **Yasmin Alibi** provided an articulate challenge to these laissez-faire concepts of expression. In shifting the nature of the debate away from sexuality and gender towards that of race and religion, one was forced to re-evaluate fixed notions of 'freedom', particularly its meaning for minority groups in this country. Alibi believed strongly that freedom of expression should be upheld in political life, but not go unchecked within the cultural sphere. She cited *The Satanic Verses* as an example where the sliding scale of a person's right to feel pain has operated. Tim Waterstone, for example, vociferously defended the rights of his bookshop to sell *The Satanic Verses*, yet had previously refused to sell *God's Ultimate Biography*, fearing it would cause offence to his christian customers.



Faded, illegible text at the top of the page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.



Marshall Weber / *I Cry the Tears for a Nation*, Live Theatre, Newcastle. Photo: Steve Collins

Vertical text on the left side of the page, oriented sideways. It appears to be bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

Vertical text on the right side of the page, oriented sideways. It appears to be bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.



Alibi asserted that artists must take full responsibility for the power of their images, particularly as these are produced in a society where the persistence of colonial relationships induces intolerance. We must accept that we are already controlled to an extent, and do not even mind some of these controls. The sentiments Alibi expressed induced a sense of discomfort, yet evoking this in the audience could help to open debate and prompt commitment to change.

The marginalisation of Northern Ireland in debates such as these was noted by **Fiona Barber** before presenting her paper on censorship in Ireland. She connected the restrictions within broadcast media made by both the British state and the Southern government (which meant for example, the withdrawal of Derry Film and Video's *Mother Ireland*) to the highly charged spaces of public life where political murals are frequently defaced. The Republican murals are, however, singled out in particular for paintbombing by the British Army and effectively censored. It was therefore interesting that Dennis Adams' piece *Siege* (for TSWA 1990), with a photograph of the demolished Rossville flats incorporated into a structure resembling gaelic goalposts, was similarly attacked, apparently the act of an army patrol. The piece itself had alluded to the mechanisms of surveillance. Nancy Spero's piece, also for TSWA, could have been interpreted as an act of censorship by the artist, since she had appropriated a wall commonly used for murals and obliterated its previous images.

She noted, however, it is in the realm of sexuality and art that censorship increasingly proliferates, with the recent decision, for example, to withdraw funding for a public sculpture depicting two prostitutes. Censorship in Northern Ireland, Barber concluded, sustains Protestantism and patriarchal attitudes such as homophobia within Unionism.

As a curator, **Antonia Payne** spoke of the self-censorship that may occur either through fear, which should be avoided at all costs, and respect for the different sensibilities of others, which is often less easy to dismiss. She outlined a number of guidelines which should be considered in relation to "dislodging the centrality of the curatorial eye". These included: lobbying for an enhanced role for the arts in tertiary and secondary education, a commitment to equal opportunities in every aspect and the importance of clarity, both in terms of the context for devising work and for the public to understand an exhibition's standpoint.

The notion of fear was picked up by Peter Sylveire, who called it "the meat of censorship", and had himself been prosecuted along with sculptor Rick Gibson for the 'human ear-ring' exhibit at the Young Unknowns Gallery. The position of isolation he felt, since he was prosecuted under common law which disallows a defence of artistic merit, was worsened since he failed to gain support from major arts funders and galleries. Nick Serota of the Tate had replied to Sylveire's letter that he felt since the work 'lacked artistic merit' he was unable to support them.

A viewpoint from America was added by editor **Steve Durland** (*High Performance*) who surmised that the dangers of censorship by curators, as defined by Antonia Payne, were similarly at work within editorship. He felt that this was to some extent redressed with the inbuilt mechanism of 'letters to the editor' and where he felt unable to tackle areas such as cross-cultural issues, for example, he would

relinquish total control to a guest editor. His notion that he was creating a magazine for how he *wanted* the world to be, cross-cultural involvement for example, was an inspiring one.

The notion of strategies for change, which many felt had been some way addressed within sexual politics, became more cloudy with regard to disability. This is ironic since two speakers raising this subject felt the isolation experienced by many disabled people to be akin to that suffered by the gay community. **Jackie Clipsham** and **Robert Harris**, both from the States, gave illustrated talks relating to the depiction of people with disabilities in western art and literature. As Robert Harris argued, people's notions of disability are often shaped at an early age through literature with characters such as Captain Nemo and Tiny Tim representing the polarised positions of villain or redeemer.

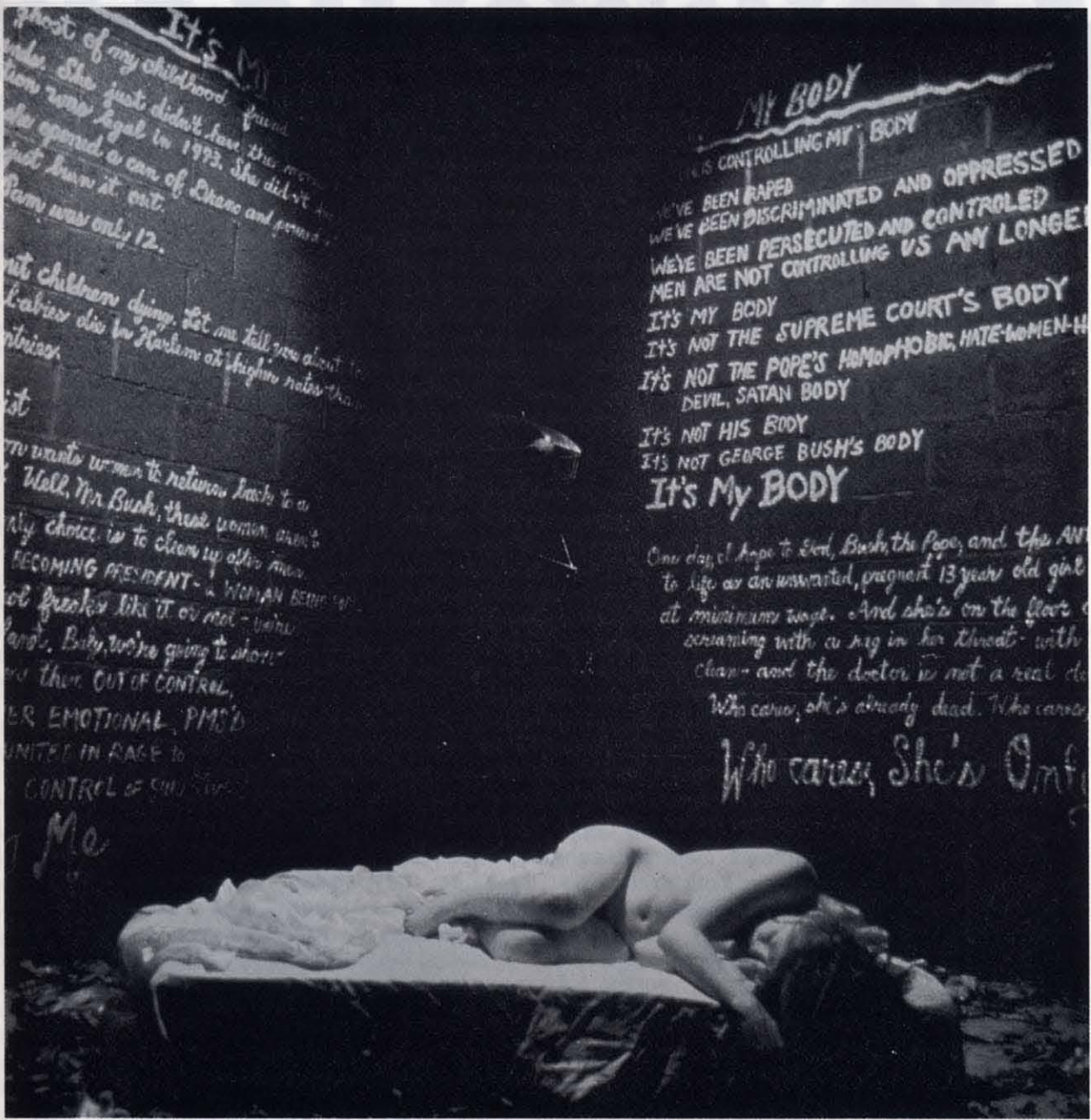
It appeared that comics had somehow offered positive images since many of the heroes were in effect disabled characters. The language used to describe disability was explored and a call for the outlawing of certain words, such as 'handicapped', was made. This had proved to be a problematic area: Karen Finley spoke of how her performance piece involving the word 'dwarf' in the title had been effectively banned by Jackie Clipsham at the Women's Caucus, since Finley refused to change it to 'I like a person of short stature on the table when I give him head'. As an artist she felt that she should be allowed to use whatever language she wished. This certainly fuelled the idea that language may be particularly inflammatory within these debates, and recalled Serrano's *Piss Christ* since the title itself was considered offensive.

Despite hopes by many organisations in the States that they just need to weather the recession and everything will be back as it was in the early 80s, the truth is it won't, and parallels can be made with Britain. Within the latest round of censorship over there, arts funding has now been eroded to such an extent that new models and strategies will have to be found. **Marshall Weber** spoke of the use of *Deep Dish TV* using the satellite network in America as a means of transmitting work. His performance *TV Tumour* involved the interactive use of a video monitor mounted on his shoulder, mixing fast cut visuals from television advertising with images of military and political events. A physical dialogue was set up between performer and TV in a piece which aimed to locate the product placement of military technologies within consumer culture. At one point he turned a video camera on the audience to elicit response: however, they remained mute.

In his background to the *NEA Four* ruling, Steve Durland traced some of the underlying reasons which prompted it to the criticism Congress was then receiving for the size of the National Debt, in addition to a number of sex scandals which had rocked the Fundamentalists. The latter occurrence conjures up thoughts of the *fin de siècle*, traditionally a time where calls are made for sexual alignment and when sex scandals, according to Elaine Showalter, have led to 'demands, often successful, for restrictive legislation and censorship' (sexual anarchy). It is therefore interesting that Durland says the performance artists in the USA have become the politicians and evangelists, and Tim Miller coincidentally has recently been giving performance art lectures at an Episcopalian church in Santa Monica!

In *Fire is not sated with wood*, **Cheri Gaulke** made





Karen Finlay *Momento Mori*, Riverside, Newcastle. Photo: Steve Collins

connections between the witch hunts of the middle ages and the rights women have to fight for now in the US over biological control of their bodies. A resonant use of language was accumulated using metaphors of fire to stand for both passion and prejudice. The patriarchal position of the church which Gaulke referred to, such as her thwarted desire as a young child to enter the Lutheran clergy because she was female, was reiterated in Karen Finley's installation *Momento Mori*. Slogans and drawings on the wall of the large warehouse space proclaimed 'the Virgin Mary is pro-choice' and 'my God is homosexual'. Through a series of *tableaux vivants* an attempt was made to contextualise mourning and loss through AIDS by way of censorship in Ireland, the criminalisation of abortion, sexual harassment and the hierarchy of artist (male) to model (female). The initially upbeat atmosphere in which the audience were encouraged to spit red wine over the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, gave way to sombre elegy as one passed by a row of beds with quietly staged scenes of patients and loved ones, ending with an empty bed adorned with a wreath of flowers. One was then invited to lace a red

carnation through a net curtain and light a candle, simple yet powerful triggers for remembrance and private thought. Finley's text, written in gold paint on black walls, carried a weight of anger and grief over the death of friends.

*Yeah, I'll tell you about ART. I'll tell you about Performance Art.*

*Ethyl had Aids.*

*When I walk in to a museum I feel so uneasy - just thinking about the rich, white 'liberal' world. The rich buying art and the nice little artists who can afford art school and their boring, postmodern, conceptual designs THAT ARE SO GOD DAMNED SAFE AND PRETENTIOUS - Let's make some blood prints off Ethyl's wrists. Let's take some photos of my friend killing himself - BLOW UP THE PHOTO - AND PUT SOME GOD DAMN TEXT ON IT THAT SAYS 'DEAD' AND MAKE AN EDITION OF 10.*

*Yeah, let me tell you about Art.*

Karen Finley from *Momento Mori*





# CALYPSONIANS

Calypso emerged as a recognisable modern popular song form in the early part of this century. In the 1930s, a record shop proprietor, Eduardo Sa Gomes, decided to try and sell recordings of the most popular songs then being performed in the carnival tents in Trinidad. Selected calypsonians would travel to New York and record their hits. Calypso is characterised by the lyrical pyrotechnics of the singer and the documentary nature of its subject matter. In terms of melody, the songs rely on a series of recognisable dance 'standards': the emphasis in calypso is invariably on the lyrics. One of its leading figures for more than half a century, Raphael De Leon, alias "The Lion" or "The Roaring Lion", began singing calypsos in 1926 and first started recording in 1934. Invited to the Festival Of Britain in 1951, he stayed on for fifteen years, becoming active in securing proper housing for immigrants from the West Indies. He is the author of "Calypso from France to Trinidad: 800 Years of History" (n.d., San Juan, Trinidad). He has written and recorded innumerable songs and performed all over the world. Lion is still active as a calypsonian and has a remarkable stage presence and voice. He is also a widely consulted expert on herbal medicines. Ed Baxter spoke to him during the "Real Calypsonians" tour of 1991.



**Going back to the 1930s, when you were first recording calypso, what was the process? Would a group of singers go to New York and rehearse with a band?**

It didn't start like that. It started out first that two people went (Atilla and myself), that's all. A year after, every year there were new faces going along with us. I went every year. Sometimes a couple of fellows would come, those who had good songs. All in all there were not more than about seven different people who went to New York.

**Were there no recording facilities in Trinidad?**

None at all at that time. Nothing on a par with what there was in America - we recorded at Brunswick. They were one of the leading companies. That was in 1934. But we went away before that, in '33, not to make records but on a tour of the islands. The aim was to publicise the calypso, to popularise it in places where they didn't know anything about it. Most of the places didn't know about it.

**What other song forms were popular at that time?**

There were a lot of popular song forms. The whole thing started in France: most of the Caribbean songs - 99.9 per cent of them - started in France, are French songs - maybe under a different name, but the form is the same. You would find that the different islands that the French possessed would be more attached to certain kinds of French songs. In other words, whereas calypso is one of the most popular forms that we have, still you might have other forms in different places - the *Virelai* form, for instance, although they may not know the original name. In some places they kept the name, but not necessarily on the islands which passed from one hand to another as far as government is concerned. If you haven't made a study of French forms, you couldn't know exactly what they are. For instance in the last century we know that somebody got the idea of calling the Ballade a Calypso. Nobody knows who or when - but it is recorded in the papers of the last quarter of the 19th century that the name "Calypso" is used in reference to the Ballade.

**Did recording determine the length of song or formally effect it in any other way?**

The stanzaic form of calypso has to be, is still, and has never been changed. There are people who don't know much, people who are writing songs, who will call it calypso. They might write *Chansons de Geste* which consists of irregular verses. **Chalkdust** and many of these people who write that still call it calypso. They really don't know! You see for some reason people in my country, in Trinidad, don't seem to pay much attention: they don't really study their music, they don't study their history. Everybody says what they want and calls it what they want. And that is what makes it pretty difficult for a foreigner or someone who is in search of knowledge - as far as research is concerned, they would find themselves caught in a *cul-de-sac*. Because when he thinks he has something, he has

nothing. But when you study the French folk songs, say from about the 8th century, then you will see that there were different forms and each form was given a different name by which you were able to identify it.

**What cultural information is specific to calypso? What makes it specifically calypso?**

The stanzaic form; and the fact that it is an instrument of education and information.

**When recording, was there pressure from record company or public to produce a certain type of song?**

The calypso, in the sense that it was created, was always an instrument of information, whether politics, whether philosophy, whether satire - the calypso speaks as everything and records everything. And anyone who really knows calypso, say, for instance, in my country, will definitely find their history from calypso.

**You've argued that calypso ultimately has a French origin. What of those commentators who say that it has African roots?**

They say that the Haussa tribe, which is one of the four tribes of Nigeria, have a word "Kaicho" or "Kaitcho". But as far as I see they make it an elastic word which can mean what they like. For instance, a fellow comes and says "Johnny! - or, Ed! You mother is just dead - just died, rather." And you say "Kaicho" - meaning an expression of sadness. Then another fellow comes and says, "Your father just won a million dollars" and you say "Kaicho" also. Well, it's ridiculous! It can't mean both, can it? But further, then they say naturally that people change words, make them mean something else... Bunk! It *aches* me to listen to it, for the simple reason that I checked the Haussa tribe: it was enslaved from about the fifth or sixth century - most of them were slaves, 99.9 per cent of them have long Arabic names. They don't even know much about their culture, very little. It would hardly have been possible - or it isn't *likely* - that you would have had members of the Haussa tribe in Trinidad, where slavery only started in the 18th century. Also, the Moslems were in the habit of exchanging money whenever anyone was made a slave: when you're a slave, the moslems pay for you. So they would never have reached here. If any, it would have been very few. The next thing is that even if it were true that they came here and created this form of song - to make what? wisecracks about the masters? - then there would have been *something* in all the records - it would have been mentioned. But there is not even one word of any African tribal dialect anywhere in our records, in any song or anywhere else for that matter. Research would show, and African intellectuals themselves would tell you, that calypso is not accepted in any way, not even in the remotest form, to be related to any form of their folk songs and so forth. But they admit that they do a nice trade in calypso - they import it from Trinidad! Further, linguists have discussed this matter. There is no such word as "Kaicho" in the Haussa language. I have all this written down. In my book I've included five different African songs and the forms don't even remotely resemble calypso, which is eight lines and four verses. So where the devil...!? The only thing that I know for sure is this: you're young but you may have heard of a fellow, a very famous opera singer called **Enrico Carouso**, an Italian. What I know is, that at the





beginning of the century, the Victor Recording Company was experimenting with the gramophone record and they were getting into their stride. Enrico Caruso made his debut in 1884 or 1894, somewhere round there. By 1908 the Victor Record's gramophone was popular, and because of that people's songs were then passing from country to country through the medium of the record. Enrico was so popular, powerful that when anybody sang a song, the people would say "Carouso" and liken you to the man, you see? And some would naturally cut out the first syllable and just say "Rouso". They'd never bother with the "Enrico", they left that out. But "Carouso" - it meant that you were performing well and they were likening you to the man. They did it with Bing Crosby, they did it with the Andrews Sisters. Somewhere down the line, I can remember hearing that, "Rouso". It isn't necessarily to do with Calypso specifically, but somebody somewhere probably corrupted it and said "Calypso" one day. But there is also this: there's also a French word from the 14th century, "Canso" - a love song. And since all our songs were written in patois or French, it is clear that a fellow who didn't know very much about the French language would say not "Canso" but "Caiso" or anything like that. It's so much nearer than "kaicho". Well, this is as a result of research that I know that. So when a fellow comes and says, "This is Kaiso" - absolute trash! He doesn't know anything. And I don't want to be involved in anything that makes anybody feel bad, because it aches me when I hear that. And this more or less dragged me into writing the book - because of these people with their "African" talk. They never give you any information, any dates, or anything that could substantiate what they say. But they think that if they have a PhD and they say a pencil is a bottle of ink, then you must accept it! And so I wrote the book; and I offered three thousand dollars to any PhD or BA or whoever that could prove me wrong. Nobody came. Because they couldn't prove me wrong. You see, they didn't believe there was so much in the way of fact behind it. Everybody just says, "Africa, Africa, Africa". The poor Africans! Look, even if we assume that the Haussa were there, most of the slaves in Trinidad were born into the household of the masters: if the masters were Portuguese, the slaves too were Portuguese; if French, they were French, if Spanish, they were Spanish. They spoke the language, they did everything in the way of that culture. Very very few if any of them

would have known anything about it; and when they came down, there is evidence that slaves arrived just captured, just from Africa, were scoffed at and scorned by those who were born in the household of the masters. So these fellows would have had to fall in line with them - and before you know it, they would forget everything. Otherwise... Further, under the Spanish law introduced in 1826, no slave master had the privilege of allowing his slave to enter a dancehall or anything like that on a penalty of twenty five dollars - and that was even more the case with the black slave-dealers, with the African slave-dealers, of whom there were 1500 out of 7000. Everybody talks about the white man buying slaves and nobody talks about the black man who sold them. Make an effort to read my book. You will see that everything is supported by documentary evidence, by authorities.

### **As topical song, calypso often touches on political matters. Were there any cases of records being banned or destroyed?**

Yes, two of my songs were banned: 'Sally Water' and 'Netty Netty'. They said that certain words I used made it vulgar - so they say, but it wasn't. You see, the police had the authority to intervene on such a song if they thought it was offensive to the general public. They couldn't stop me singing it. I *did* sing it. It was the carnival song! But they stopped the fellow who imported the records from selling it.

### **Was there any kind of outcry?**

Yes, the general public talked about it because it was stupid. What I was saying wasn't really vulgar: it was *double entendre*. In this song I took a line or two from a nursery rhyme to use as the punchline at the end of the song. I was telling a story: "I met up with a girl and she was a wealthy dame/ You can imagine how the Lion made his name." Well, they know this is a love affair. "She said she loved me, she's so confused/ Asked for a dish" - she told me to ask for a dish: "So what you think I choose?/ I choose her sally water, sprinkling on a saucer rice, sally rice, sally-sally-sally water!" Now, that's an old nursery rhyme. I really meant what we'd associate it with - but I didn't say *that*. They couldn't stop me fortunately.

## Was there ever any move to introduce any formal kinds of censorship?

There was no direct censorship. They have a law they can apply in some cases. They discussed on many occasions the question of censorship. But they found that the majority of the public was against that. Notwithstanding, the calypsonians would in any case be guaranteed to resist it. It was clear that whenever a politician wanted to do something about putting it into the statute book in the form of the law, it was clear to everybody that it was because some calypsonian somewhere had said something embarrassing about them to the public and everybody would come out and complain about it - doctors, everybody - so they couldn't have their law. If you sing any song that was considered slanderous or defamatory to any particular person, calling their name, so that the subject you sing about is recognisably *this* person, calling their name and the song touching on something that is against the law, they can charge you.

## Did the libel laws mean you had to be circumspect then?

You had to use *double-entendre* - we call it "double talk". You'd say coca-cola, but you'd mean whiskey. But by the way you say it, the way you tell the story, people would definitely know what you were talking about. The police couldn't do anything because we were not calling anyone by name. For instance, there was a time when a very big man there, this very, very big fellow, was sent down there - it was alleged, and in fact it was certain, that he killed a commander who was going around the island a long time. The police were involved, assigned to do the job. But the only class of the people who knew about it could be found among the calypsonians. I am the man that was called upon to deal with that subject. And I sang about it. The police knew too what I was talking about, because they were saying it was incitement - that I was saying it was murder. But I was using what you call "fairy tale" names and telling a story about one character having done the other character this and that and the other - the story was clear. But it wasn't clear enough for them to say I was speaking about this man.



## Did you ever go so far as to provoke possible physical violence?

No, no, no - everybody likes the calypsonians. They like to hear what we have to say. As a matter of fact, they would talk to us and they'd say, "Listen, you have to sing about this, You haven't sung about that", and so on. So I think the calypsonians have been - I don't know about today so much - very well embraced by the general public. Any attempt to bridle the calypsonians has been resisted by the public. When I say the public, I'm talking about important people in society as well - lawyers, solicitors, doctors, other politicians (the opposition) and all. They arrested me for this business and I was very calm because I had a barrage of lawyers saying, "Let them charge you - and we'll see!". The only way they would have won was to bring a case which they *still* would not have won, for the person involved would have had to admit that Yes, he *did* kill the man - because I wasn't saying he did. If the fellow was going to say he was the character I was referring to, he'd be admitting that he killed the man. He couldn't do that, could he?

## Selected Discography:

The "Golden Age" of calypso is represented on the following contemporary releases: 'The Real Calypso, 1927-1946' (Folkways RBF 13). Includes Lion, Caresser, Lord Invader, Sir Lancelot, &c.; 'Where Was Butler?' (Folklyric 9048). Includes The Tiger, Lion, Caresser, Growler, Attila, King Radio, Lord Executor &c.; 'Calypso Breakaway, 1927-1941' (Rounder Records CD 1054). Includes Growler, Executor, Lion, Beginner, Wilmoth Houdini &c. All the aforementioned come with excellent notes &c, particularly 'Where Was Butler?', which documents events surrounding the activities of the radical strike leader Uriah Butler. For an interesting latterday interpretation of calypso, including several of The Lion's songs, Van Dyke Parks's 'Discover America' (Warner Bros 9 26145-2) is a treat.



Lion, London 1991. Photo: Mark Honan



# THE LORD PRETENDER

PHOTO: MARK HONAN

## INTERVIEW: ED BAXTER

Pretender, London 1991. Photo: Mark Honan

people would say "Caravan" and you'd know it was Ed Baxter. The record was released in 1968 and it was a big success. It was one of those records that you can't hear and not know it's Ed Baxter. The record was released in 1968 and it was a big success. It was one of those records that you can't hear and not know it's Ed Baxter. The record was released in 1968 and it was a big success. It was one of those records that you can't hear and not know it's Ed Baxter.

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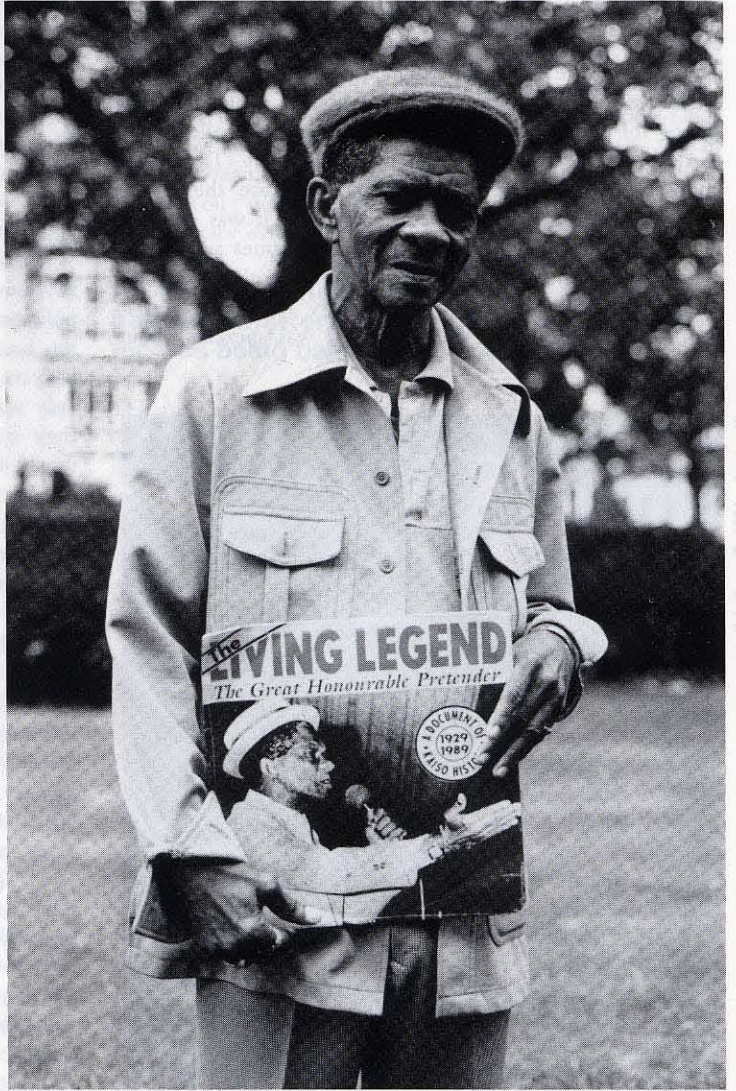


PHOTO: MARK HONAN



**'The Lord Pretender' was born Alric Farrell in 1917 in Tobago. A child prodigy, he was singing alongside the established professionals at the age of twelve. Renowned as an "extempo" virtuoso, he was National Calypso King in 1957. In recent years he has toured the USA and in 1991 made his first appearance in Britain. Shortly before his appearance at the Notting Hill Carnival, the Pretender spoke - and sang - to Ed Baxter.**

I was born in 1917. When I started I was four or five years old. I sung calypso since I was ten or twelve years. I was born a calypsonian. I was always singing from 1929, that's sixty-two years and I'm still singing. In them days you could only record in New York. **Lion** and **Atilla** went to New York. I never recorded anything in them days. **Sa Gomes** would do all the sending. **Lion**, **Atilla** mostly. In them days the older singers were the singers. You had to be over-good. When you were young like me and **Kitchener**, you had to be over-good. Most of them - **Lion**, **Atilla** and the rest - were older than me. I was twelve, **Lion** was, say, in his twenties.

After the war, the only ones recording, from 1956, were **Stalin**, **Sparrow** and **Kitchener** - sending records from England. I had a wonderful LP I made in 1989.

I never write in my life. I was told to write down my songs, my autobiography. I never do it. I was a working fellow. I was born to sing. I didn't care much. I work on the dock, 1959-1980 - the oil boom. I resign in 1980, get a pension and national insurance. They take all you money when you're working. Times hard: that's my kind of song. But they used to give me time off to sing.

With my calypso, if the government do something good I sing about it. If it do something bad I sing about it. Don't take no sides. I sing the facts as I see it. Everybody know what I mean. I don't call anybody by name or that. I don't like 'war' - joking to bring the other fellow down, I don't like that at all.

Carnival is plenty money to sing. In the early days, you walk into any tent and sing. Then they started up commercial tents and started paying, small money but pay. From the war days, from 1941, tents were open, plenty money. Now 8000 dollars a week nowadays for **Sparrow**, **Stalin**, in the tents. Plenty money, you see? The tent this year has me, **Sparrow** and **Stalin**.

The Lord, they call me. Everybody love me. I was of the highest standard of carnival singing:

*Well, put this in your head  
I want to tell you something substantial, Ed  
Something I will make you know  
I am a true true genius of Calypso  
I love freelancers, I'm speaking to you  
And that is why I gave you this interview  
I hope you do very well, you must agree  
Through knowing me you make the money*

*You asking me what the people talk about me  
That is high class stupidity  
By the writing on my record you could tell  
They love me and they love me well  
I am the living legend, you must remember  
They call me the great honourable Pretender  
One of the greatest fellows they ever had  
A true calypsonian from Trinidad*

I sing how I feel. I sang the first black protest calypso ever in 1943 - 'God made us all'. That was acclaimed the best calypso for years and years. National award even. All come and go, Pretender always there. They don't make them like me any more. You ask if I think I'm a natural? Natural? Natural? What is this?! Where you get that from? It's *God given*. Definitely. When I sing on the stage I don't know where the words coming from, just keep flowing. The happiest time of my life. Luck. Coming from God.



A BIT OF  
MATTER AND  
A LITTLE  
BIT MORE

LAWRENCE

but when she takes about the... the poster and... as if it's... The poster is... that is essentially... to be a... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

more, as an... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

but it's not... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

**INTERVIEW:** DOUGLAS GORDON

Have you been in Glasgow before? I visited Glasgow... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

What do you remember about your time in Scotland? In Glasgow, the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

Do you place a large responsibility for leading with the viewers? The poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

time in that place, where they happen to be... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

# WEINER

Born in New York in 1942, Lawrence Weiner stands as a pioneering figure in conceptual art. Describing himself as a sculptor, Weiner is best known for the words he uses to communicate his sculpture. His work is well known worldwide, in galleries and in public spaces. He was interviewed by Douglas Gordon.

the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...

in relation to the work in Glasgow, words in the gallery and a sticker distributed throughout the city, why a sticker as opposed to the other options like posters or billboards? The poster and... that is essentially... the poster and... that is essentially...





## Have you been to Glasgow before?

I visited Glasgow on my way to Europe for the first time in 1963. The Icelandic Loftflighter flight went from New York City to Renfrew Airport, I believe it was. That was about the cheapest way to get across the Atlantic Ocean.

## What do you remember about your time in Scotland?

In Glasgow, the first time I was there, one did not get a sense of any contemporary art, but it was a difficult time anyhow, in 1963. When I was in Edinburgh at the Fruitmarket Gallery in 1986, there was quite a bit of activity although there didn't seem to be much money around. But Glasgow is a more industrial city, I believe, than Edinburgh. I'm looking at Glasgow more from what I know of it from literature (from the period of time of the so-called Angry Young Men) and also from the terms of what one finds in newspapers and general representations of Glasgow. Glasgow is a 'represented' city to me, rather than an emotionally felt city.

## Do you place a large responsibility for reading with the viewer? The onus is on them, at that time, in that place, where they happen to be.

That's a funny question. A large responsibility? I really believe the consumer, the user of art, is as much a part of the process of the functioning and the reason for the existence of an artwork, as anything else.

## How do you perceive your 'place' in things - the world in general and the artworld in particular?

I see my place in general as a citizen of New York City who is sometimes resident of Amsterdam. I see myself as a contemporary artist, but how do I perceive my place in things? I can see where, perhaps, some of the research and some of the presentations I've made might have shown somebody else what might be interesting. But that's almost like tripping over a pile of trash in the street and then somebody comes along and finds something in the trash that they can use. I'm trying desperately, and have been trying for the majority of my adult life, to make art that appreciates, uses, and has learned from the previous art but in no way tries to build its aesthetics and its rationale upon its relationship to of what is academically called the 'art historical line' per se. I would prefer to have each work of art done by each succeeding generation standing all by itself and then later, almost as an investigatory process, find out where it stands in relation to accomplishments and other productions of what we euphemistically call 'mankind'.

## In relation to the work in Glasgow, words in the gallery and a sticker distributed throughout the city, why a sticker as opposed to the other options like posters or billboards?

The sticker operates in this context where, economically and culturally, most people are feeling really rather under attack. This economic situation encourages the general attempt to put art back in its place. Remember, art has a different meaning in the Scots/British context than it does in the Western European and US context. There is no implication at all that people become artists out of a privileged position. Art schools are the producers of people who didn't go to University.

But when one talks about the billboard and the poster and so on - the billboard is a total imposition. That's a taking up of a public place, that's buying space, that is essentially paying the dominant culture to let you put up what you feel is functioning as art at that moment. The poster can, of course, be flashposted, but a poster is advertising something. A sticker, though, functions in a different way. If it is available at the Transmission Gallery, if it goes out through Variant Magazine, then that sticker, if it does stand as art, can be stuck anywhere, by anybody, anytime.

I mean, as an anecdote, we had this idea of doing a radio broadcast in Berlin sometime in the 70's or early 80's - whenever. You were not supposed to do radio broadcasts in Berlin at that time. And we then made a sticker that did end up, of all things, on the backs of the police cars that were looking for the radio transmission.

But it's not any kind of counter-culture, nor any aggression, to put it on a sticker. It just takes it out of the context of the average advertisement. The sticker is something that you put on. It's a temporary tattoo on the something that it sticks to.

## How do you see the differentials that govern our perception of a work in relation to gallery and non-gallery work?

I don't really see the difference. This is an old-fashioned idea from 'standing outside looking in/standing inside looking out'. There is no real difference between the functioning of a work of art. Its the old Duchampian idea of taking a thing out of one context, putting it into another context and of course that will change the inherent content. No! The reason that Jasper Johns' *Beer Can* functions is *not* because it is taken out of one context and put into another context. It functions because the artist is being smart enough, and intelligent enough, to realise that it is *still* a beer can but it functions as art. It doesn't function as art because it is in a gallery, it functions as art because a human being has taken the trouble to say - *this is Art*.

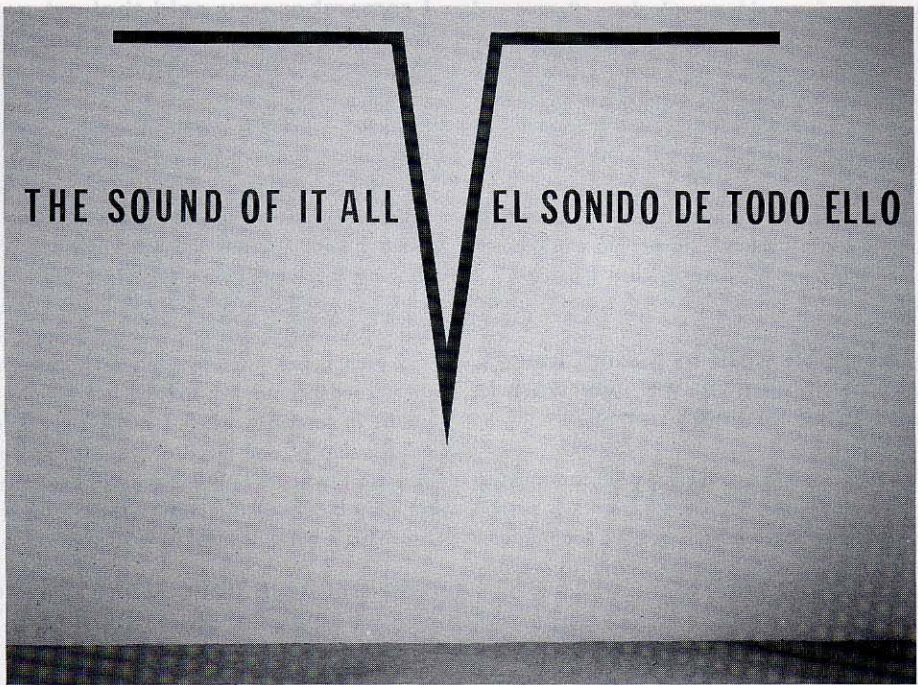
## How about our perception in relation to temporary and permanent work?

Everything is temporary or permanent. You can't own all art, you can't have all art in your home. You go to a museum and you see a piece of art in Glasgow, or you see a Rennie Mackintosh facade or something, and then you find yourself in Vienna or New York City. That's a temporary work of art you've seen - it doesn't really exist any longer but you do remember it. So there is no real problem. If I can put art out and somebody sees it and it interests them enough that they will remember it, then it doesn't matter whether they can go back to it or look at it again. I don't think that anything that anybody does is so deep that one's initial perceptions are not good enough.

## You have mentioned before that you were concerned about the survival of ideas, through books and publications.

Yes. That's different. That means that one generation after another can come upon it all by themselves. They don't require the superstructure of the state, they don't require the acceptance of art history, all they require is either the perseverance to go and look for it or the ability to have some bit of luck and come across it in a bookshop or in a library. They will find out what somebody at that





point in 1991 in Glasgow was thinking about as presenting art within that context.

**Another part of the art-making process seems to be the 'art of negotiation', especially as regards art in public places. You experienced this recently in Vienna ?**

Vienna. That turned out to be, happily for both the work and for myself, more a tempest in a teapot. There was more fear on the part of people to put it up than there was any basic attempt to censor it by the authorities. The work did refer to what they thought was a metaphor recalling - and which I know to be - an ugly time in their lives. But outside of the metaphor, the idea of tonality, the idea of sound being a basic structure for the making of sculpture, and sound being an inherent quality in sculpture, are all still being dealt with. But once the work was up, well, people were not running through the streets lauding it, but they certainly weren't running through the streets trying to destroy it. So, I think, most of those 'negotiations' come from our paranoia more than anything else, and sometimes they come from us paying attention to people who really don't have any right to say anything. Artists, we forget, are people just like everybody else - they pay taxes, they go to work, they fix their teeth, they get their kids' teeth fixed. If we are going to have rugby fields, or football on TV, or Museums of War, or Museums of all the other nonsense that people do, you sure as hell can have Museums of Art. An enormous percentage of the population seems to be interested in it and (another) very large minority of the population seem to be involved in making it, either as amateurs or as professionals. Art is just a part of the human condition, it seems.

**Where does language fail?**

Where does language fail? Where does language fail? Where does language fail?

**Where does language succeed?**

That's easier. Language succeeds in the presentation of art, by making it possible to carry across, to convey, and to communicate a relationship of objects without having to have with it the entire psyche involved in the production of a realistic object. That's where language succeeds.

**Translation implies an element of trust between both parties involved. You work with language other than your own native tongue. How far does this extend towards the process of collaboration?**

There is no trust. It's a matter of - if somebody is a professional translator then they are a professional translator. I'm quite careful in what I write and I try hard to find out how the other language structures work. But I don't see a translator essentially as a collaborator. It's not a hierarchical issue, I see a translator as a translator - which is quite a viable and respectable profession.

Regarding collaboration, I have been lucky enough to collaborate on various projects. As a sculptor I spend a lot of time alone in the studio and make decisions, in a sense from an ivory tower. I decide whether it is correct or it is not correct, whether it is to go out or not to go out, even what it is. But every once in a while it's real good to take what you've been dealing with and go out with someone else - it's almost like musicians going out and playing together. So, I've been lucky enough to go out and 'make music' with certain people - I've made books with Ed Ruscha and Matt Mullican, and I've done movies, where you basically have to explain to everybody what you're trying to think. Each time this has either been a very frustrating or a very rewarding experience. Both seem to be part of the production of art.

**How do you accommodate difference in language?**



There's not very much of a problem with that. Poetry and literature find themselves in enormous difficulties when they are translated. Most scientific things don't, and art is basically on that same level. A piece of wood in Japan is a piece of wood; it may not look the same as a piece of wood in Glasgow but it is basically wood. And poetry is made by people not to be translated, it has an essence and a nuance, whereas the work that I make, its initial concept IS to be translated, either into a picture in people's minds, or a remembrance of materials, or into another language. I don't find it a difficulty.

**Having done so much work in public spaces, you must have an opinion on the way work is read by the public, the 'ordinary person'?**

I try to make work from materials, and concerning materials, that are available to all. Of course, each person is going to have a different take on it, but if by looking at a work of mine somebody can really relate better to walking across the cobblestones the next day, then that's not so bad.

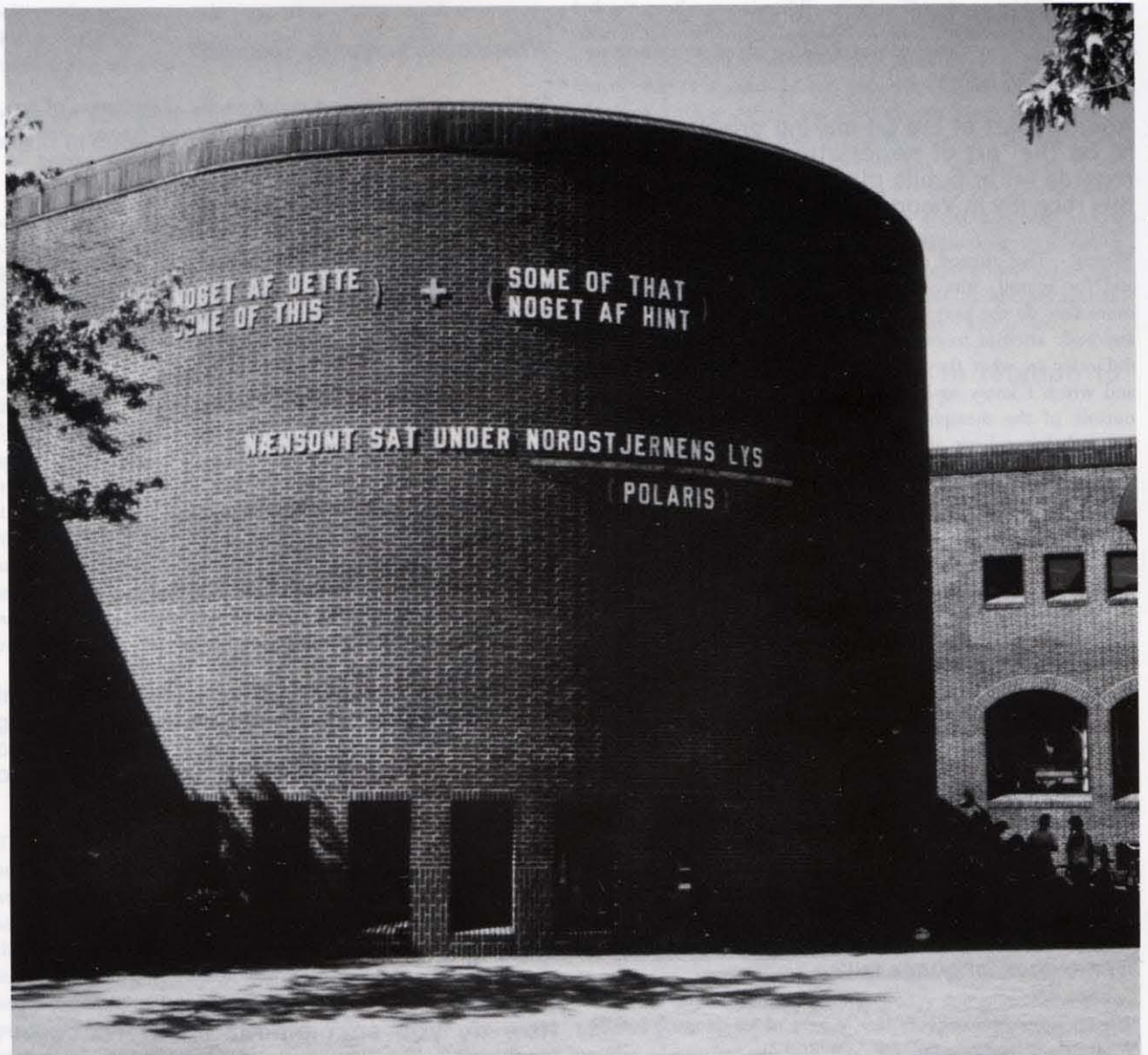
'Ordinary people'? I'm an ordinary person. I eat, drink, piss, shit, just like everybody else. I have the same feelings and desires that I have to quell and I have all the same other things. There is no stuff to say on this issue, it's a non-issue.

**I remember you said that art gets interesting when it puts our 'immortal soul' in a dangerous situation. What is a dangerous situation?**

I did once mention in London that art is interesting when it puts our immortal soul in danger. And that comes about to the extent that I just don't know. I have not, myself, a cause to believe in an immortal soul - but at the same time, when I look around, the entire East & West seems to be running around talking about their souls. So I figure, being a person, just like everybody else, they got one, I want one too. And if I've got one, I want to take every single thing and each belief, each system, each pattern, each thing that gives credence to my existence - I want to take that and put it in jeopardy when I make a work of art. That the relationship of one piece of stone to another can produce a situation where I will have to basically request the building blocks of the culture that I'm relying upon to exist in. That's what I meant by a 'dangerous situation'.

**You will have noticed the renewed interest in the 'radical art' from the 60's. This must be interesting from your position.**

I have noticed a renewed interest in the history of art. The 60's were a long time ago. In the 60's they had a renewed interest in the Ashcan school and the art of the 40's. It's



Lawrence Weiner, Polaris, Høstetor City Hall, Denmark. Materials: aluminium and copper. Photo courtesy Anthony d'Offay gallery, London



just one form of nostalgia, and another form of trying to understand the so-called roots of where people come from. Why I think the art of the 60's is still applicable right now is because of the radical change in the 60's. Radical change was not the inherent context of the art, because the art world essentially has not changed and it probably never shall change. Artists are a force by virtue of the society - who - in some way, manner, or form - sell what they make for money to buy time to continue to make it. Not much different from anybody else that comes along. When you say it must be interesting from my position - it's funny that you assume I have a position. My position on the 60's, was that it was the 60's.

You must remember that what looks a little bit interesting to the world of art as we know it - both academic and genuinely 'art making' - is that the artists (in NYC at least) were coming from a situation where art was not viewed with great favour by anybody, unless it was a certain kind of art that was 'International Government' kind of art. That's a funny position to notice after this generation that have just gone through the 80's, who seemed to think that art was the same as the movies. Whereas, in the 60's, the art most people were making was art for people who were interested in art. They really didn't think it was going to get anyplace else. And when they went out into the streets

it was more or less to find people in the streets who were interested in art.

The relationships between artists were far less competitive, but that's only because the pie was smaller. There was no pie. Now we live in a time that's filled with pies. Or so it seems to be. But now most of the bottom is dropping out of the pies.

But I don't have anything more to say about the 60's.

### How did you see the 80's in New York?

Through my eyes. I saw them everywhere.

**You must have noticed a difference in the perception/reception of art due to the proliferation of the art media, especially in the early 80's.**

There may be more art media, but I don't think that art has spread its wings any further. People know now that art is one of the places you look to find out where you stand in relation to your culture, and where you stand in relation to the quality of the objects that surround you within your culture.



# KEITH



Photo: Paige

# ROWE

**A founder member of AMM, Keith Rowe's radical innovations in the field of guitar-playing over the last thirty years have had a profound, lasting but rarely acknowledged effect on many aspects of both rock and free improvisation. Playing prepared guitar laid flat on a table, augmented by transistor radio and found objects, Rowe is a virtuoso performer without peers in contemporary music-making. Now resident in France, he spoke to Ed Baxter about some aspects of his unconventional technique.**

**Are the aesthetic advances you've made mostly deliberate, or do you value accident above deliberation?**

In some respects, if you are working very fast, accident and deliberation aren't that far apart. In the AMM the actual work rate for me on guitar is sometimes very rapid. Accident and intention are almost interchangeable. There is no essential difference between them. It reminds me of something that happened once at **Cornelius Cardew's** house. We were round the table - this is about twenty or so years ago - and Cornelius's son Horace was next to a bottle of drink; and basically the bottle of drink went over on the table. Stella said, "*How did that happen?*" and Cornelius replied, "*Well, it started off as an accident but carried on as purpose*". And I tend to think of it like that in the context of AMM.

I've probably pulled away from accident in my mature years, but I don't think it's been replaced by an enormous amount of deliberation. I mean, I might have an idea about one day finding (which is the accidental bit) a piece of metal which is very floppy, for use as a guitar preparation - like a cloth almost - something I could put on top of the pick-ups and with which I could control the sound just by putting my hands on (that's the deliberation)... I've never found it. It's going to be an accident if I find it, but there's deliberation in that I've often thought, *Wouldn't it be wonderful*... At times accident and deliberation for me are not a million miles apart.

One of the things about my use of radio, is that it involves various methods of getting the sound out through the system. That is to say, with the radio you could have it come through its own speaker; or you can block off its speaker with a mini plug and route it into the amplifier. A third way is to monitor it on a single earpiece. If you put the earpiece near a magnetic pickup, the pickup will induce the sound of the radio, as the earpiece is a piece of metal oscillating. In my work I've often liked to place restrictions on my playing, or to realise a particular idea. One notion I've explored is to route all sound through the radio which normally operates independently. I get around this restriction by monitoring the radio through a mini earpiece. By placing the earpiece near a live pick-up, the radio image/sound is picked by the pickup, therefore making it a guitar sound. This system also satisfies another of the notions of restrictions - that *all* sounds must originate from strings or string-like structures. I view the long coil in the earpiece as a long string and therefore as legitimate string information. The importance of these differing systems is in their contrasting sounds and attached emotional meanings and responses.

The radio can play on its own; routed into the mixer and routed out through the system - with the option of it going out through the guitar foot-pedal. Or you can have the radio on, but unheard, then hit the guitar with something, give it a blast of sound with the volume pedal - and you get an extraordinary synthesis of, say, a string quartet and the strings of the guitar coming out and going back very fast. It's very nice if you are lucky enough to get, for instance, Charles Ives's *'4th Symphony'* or something like that and have some very complicated preparation on the guitar; and you've got them both going very loud, then let the volume go... When it comes through the amplifier, you get this incredibly rich block of sound. You can shadow the Ives with your preparations. It's to do with sound image and definition quality: you get a very clear image through the direct system - when the radio is plugged into the mixer. With the earpiece over the pickup, a more ragged sound is achieved, much more distorted and embedded. There's some relationship between Rauschenberg and this technique: he'll have a silk-screened or petrol-print image, then he will scrub paint around that with the brush. The relationship between these two things - brushstrokes and high-definition image - is like that between the guitar sound 'scubbing around' the radio image.

Often, there's something happening in the music and there's this feeling - not intellectual, but emotional - that what the music *needs* now is a slightly chattery, noisy radio image. You can do it on the instrument, certainly, but the guitar might already be occupied, contributing to the overall sound. At that point, you've got a number of options: you can pre-hear the radio through an earphone, tune in to a particular sound, then let it out - choose what's there; or you can just turn in on - but then you have to be prepared to turn it off immediately, because it might not be what you want to be happening. Shortwave has a way of embedding itself *inside* the music. You can have it very low and you can bring the volume up until it just begins to bubble underneath the music that's going along, so you have to be listening quite hard to know what it is - but you *know* something's bubbling away underneath. This is particularly the case if you take the top off the image. If you want something from the outside, the FM signal provides a much sharper image - the actual information is in a sense much clearer; you get the feeling that something very much from the outside is being added on. Providing the existing music has an "open" quality, it somehow attaches itself to the music, but with a large sense of space. Longwave and mediumwave again have their own characteristics and sound quality. I use the radio as a soundsource - like cello or violin. But what is it in its history that *allows* us to use it?

I was always interested in the fact that a radio speaker itself is made of cardboard. That what you're hearing is a piece of cardboard vibrating. I recall that one of Cornelius Cardew's pieces was *'Make sounds with paper'* - there's a Christian Wolff piece like that also - and I became quite expert at getting sounds out of pieces of paper. But the ultimate was this piece of cardboard vibrating - a piece of cardboard could imitate the sound of an orchestra, the way a lithographic print could imitate a painting, as in a Rauschenberg.

Another aspect of the use of radio is that it allows the human voice to come in. There is also a way of using the radio like a musical instrument. It could be that I've found a piece of piano music on FM and **John (Tilbury)** will pick up on it and form a relationship with it. There's often



a very interesting relationship between the two - at times it's hard to figure out which is the radio and which is John. Or the reverse - John will be playing a particular phrase on the piano and if you are very very quick, you race through the dial and find something - orchestral backing perhaps, some form of commentary, or another piano - anecdotal performance. When I was in Istanbul once, with the AMM, I had the radio on during a performance of 'Treatise' and there was this Turkish music on... afterwards the audience, about 2000 students, gave us a huge round of applause. A couple came up and thanked us for our "very respectful performance... bringing the Koran into our work". We didn't know what was going on! - we didn't understand the cultural information. They thought it was pre-planned, an interesting piece of synthesis.

This brings me to two things. First, there's that whole area of synchronicity. Once I was performing with a dancer, Birle Petersen, who was running round and then freezing, running round and then freezing again, like a statue... she'd keep these statue poses for a long time. I turned on the radio, and a very clear voice was talking about political statues in Leningrad, in a flat, 'Radio Moscow' tone. And it fitted beautifully. And - this is the second point - the audience thought *it could only be a tape, it's got to be pre-planned*. After the performance I could convince no-one that I'd just turned the radio on. Anyhow, I turned it off, but didn't shift the dial - I thought, I'm onto a good deal here! About ten or twenty minutes later the dancer was now doing exercises. I turned the radio on again, and now they were talking about workers doing exercises. I don't know what to make of that kind of thing. As a performer I don't feel I have to account for it - for that kind of synchronicity. For me there is an incredible excitement when something like that happens in a live situation. Also, sometimes you've no idea what to make of it - it's so ambiguous, you don't know *how* to respond.

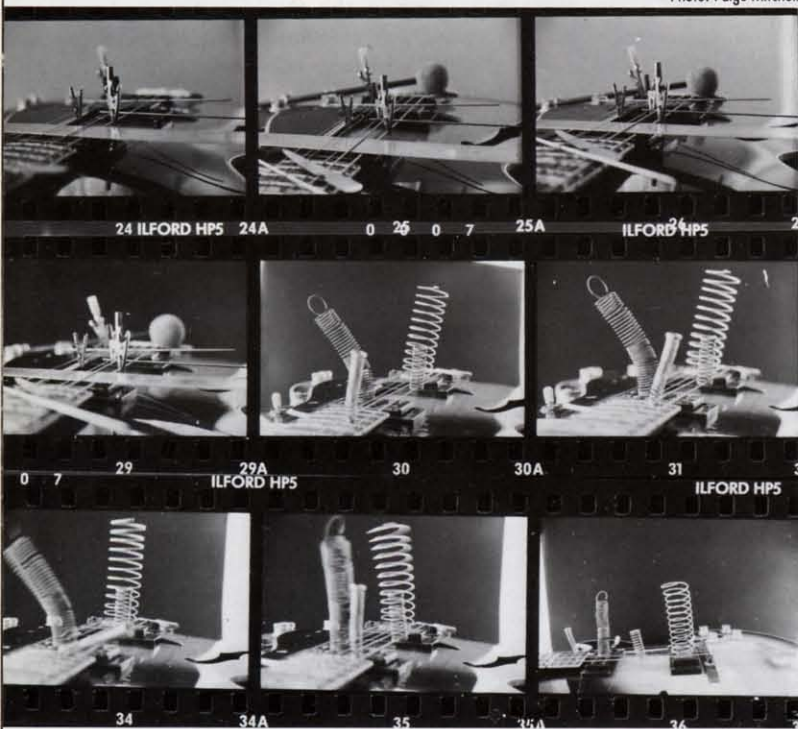
I suppose that when I say that people couldn't believe it, partly I'm distressed that they think that's the methodology I use. In that case there's a chasm between my intention and what they think is going on, their resulting feelings about what I've done. I think it touches something central in improvising music.

For me the aesthetic difference between the use of radio and tape is enormous. I do use tapes, but they have a very specific use, almost always in connection with Cornelius Cardew, or a memorial to Cardew - that kind of area.

### What initially prompted your decision to lay the guitar flat?

It was because I got more and more into preparations. The first non-legitimate thing I used was a piece of paper between the strings. It gave me a kind of jangly piano effect. This was the late '50s. I used to use also a half-crown, a large coin with a serrated edge, using the edge like a plectrum. I got interested in Duchamp's idea of the 'object': in 1917 Duchamp signed a porcelain urinal 'R. Mutt' and submitted it to the Independents exhibition in New York. At the time he expressed it in terms of having a 'new thought' for the object - for me he challenged the relationship between the customary modes of perception and the artistic fact as presented by the artist. I saw this as the artist putting down a marker. It was *non-negotiable*. Plus it had an ambiguity - when you were looking at the urinal, what were you seeing? When a piece of metal, say, is left vibrating between the guitar strings, what are you listening

Photo: Paige Mitchell



to? The metal? My performance? The guitar?...

My reason for departure from the Westbrook Band was that, amongst other things, as one of my experiments in the context of a regular jazz group, I made a New Year's resolution not to tune the guitar. This was 1962 or '63. So it just became more and more out of tune. You can hear it on the early recordings. It's horrible! Poor Mike. He had the patience of a saint, actually. By then I was cutting up guitar parts for a score... he got pissed off eventually and I had to leave!

What provoked me partly was the provincial mentality of English jazz guitarists in the late '50s and early '60s - highly derivative of the American model, both stylistically and in its content. I was into...*doing something* - something which reflected my concerns. Traditions and solutions are not sacrosanct - they need to be questioned and revised. I wanted, to view the guitar with a spread identity to be extensively re- and de-constructed - to use timbral variety as musical organisation.

### Your technique is uncompromising. Has this proved problematic over the years?

One of the problems that surrounded the work of Jackson Pollock was the question of 'Could he draw?' I feel it's a bit like that for me playing the guitar: 'Can he *play* the guitar?' It's to do with a perception of status partly, but it takes on a more central, fundamental and critical position. One suffers the effect of working without a public, the effect of a hermetic situation. 'Can he draw?' becomes something much bigger than merely to do with the question of formal training. In our culture you can *do that* - you can piss on the instrument if you want - *if* you've learned to play it first. But you can't just piss on it straight away. You've got to acknowledge all that other stuff. And in the end it effects your whole life and career, if there's a doubt as to whether you actually learned to play it 'properly'... Knowing that you do gives the audience confidence. Take Derek (Bailey), for example - the fact that it's known he played with Anne Shelton - or was it Gracie Fields? well, whoever it was! - that knowledge gives the audience confidence to listen to him now, to take him seriously. Plus they can detect technique in his playing. You can see that he can 'play'. I think that my playing presents more difficulties. What Pollock did was to take European easel painting with its attached techniques, lay the canvas on the floor, punch holes in the bottom of tins and dribble the paint onto the canvas. It's much more difficult to see the drawing in that; with Pollock the drawing-into-painting is very hard to detect. Likewise it's difficult to see that I actually "play the guitar" - very difficult to tell that I once played a bit like Charlie Christian... It presents a challenge for the audience, particularly the first time - even in 1991, virtually thirty years since my first experiments with laying the guitar flat (first on my lap, which wasn't so problematic as Hawaiian and steel guitarists had made that acceptable, then on the floor and later on the table). By laying the guitar flat on its back I gave up the technique - the 'small brush' as it were. I chose to give up the technique. Pollock could have used a brush but instead he took advantage of gravity. I gave up the technique - partly because it was bloody uncomfortable to try to play with the traditional techniques like that! Also, on the floor it's very difficult to use the volume pedal. So I started to use the table - around the mid sixties, on the Clapham bandstand performance for instance. The preparations necessitated having the guitar flat.



I make no attempt to show I can 'play' - it doesn't actually worry me. To some extent the ECM record shows I can. I was just coming to the end of an interest in the use of rock and roll cliches - taken from the Green Note publication (*Teach Yourself Improvising Rock Guitar*) detailing them - and extended cliches, which I had used while playing with Trevor Watts' Amalgam. This idea of using 'independent materials', even perhaps alien inputs like the use of a rock and roll manual within the context of a jazz group, actually goes back to the Scratch Orchestra. In the Orchestra there were a lot of sub-divisions - CUM, they were communists, rock music largely, which led on to People's Liberation Music; the Slippery Merchants, who used record players and things; the Promenade Orchestra, with Christopher Hobbs... and so on. Lots of sub-groups which sometimes led an independent life, but which were at times purely a section of the Orchestra, like any other orchestra. In this context **Eddie (Prevost)** and I had something we called Restaurant Music. I learnt Johnny Smith's version of *'Moonlight in Vermont'* and we would do incredibly slushy versions of restaurant music. Restaurant Music was the music you might hear in a restaurant: guitar, clatter, and so on. Part of Eddie's percussion was to do the sound of the washing up. We worked Restaurant Music into the first track of the ECM disc, which is a history of the AMM, including some rock cliches and so on, a programmatic piece.

Because I had an arts training, I tend to understand and express my ideas through the language of the plastic arts - though in the late '70s I studied under the composer Michael Graubart and began to understand my work under the general heading of 'meanings': for example, designative meaning versus embodied meaning - in short the antecedent and consequent relationship. Ultimately, I think the differences in performing between the very early days and now are actually quite subtle: rather like early and late Monets. With the AMM a lot of people would perhaps agree. In fact, on one of the gigs AMM did last year, someone walked out after ten minutes - we've got it on tape - and he said, "Same old boring shit that they did in the 60s!"

### Selected Discography:

- Keith Rowe, *'A Dimension of Perfectly Ordinary Reality'* (Matchless Recordings MR19)
- AMM, *'Combine & Laminates'* (Pogus Productions P201-4)
- AMM, *'The Nameless Uncarved Block'* (Matchless Recordings MR20)
- AMM, *'AMM Music 1966'* (ReR Megacorp AMMCD)
- AMM, *'It had been an ordinary enough day in Pueblo, Colorado'* (ECM/Japo 6031)





# Review

## RE-PRESENTING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

**Signs of the Times:** Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. 7th October - 9th December 1990, and at Leeds City Gallery and Leeds Polytechnic Gallery October 1991.

A notable absence at the re-staged '**Signs of the Times**' show in Leeds was **Rose Finn-Kelsey's** installation *Bureau de Change*. Perhaps it was not possible to persuade a bank to lend the £1,000 of 'loose change' with which to construct the mosaic of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*. Perhaps they couldn't find the wage for the security guard to attend the 'painting' during the show. Perhaps they couldn't find the extra monitor and camera to survey the 'painting' or perhaps Rose Finn-Kelsey wasn't able to be there to install the work. It could be, simply, that the elaborate *Bureau de Change* was just too much of a headache for all concerned.

Audio-visual work can be unweildy and unco-operative for curator, artist and audience alike. From the curatorial viewpoint, to tour a show so that each work is carefully and appropriately installed is no unambitious project. It needs maintaining and turning on and off, and when it goes wrong a technician is left exposed in the midst of a disfunctioning work in clumsy view of the audience.

Usually only fairly well-known artists get sufficient technical support. When an audio-visual artist is showing work in a gallery unfamiliar with the media, often the full brunt of responsibility falls on them: to find the equipment, transport and install it. It is a time-consuming and infuriating process which is invariably unpaid.

For the audience, accessibility is an issue, given that one frequently has to negotiate less than welcoming spaces, wait for things to happen and even move between locations, as was the case in Leeds. Curating '**Signs of the Times**' can have been no easy feat, even before considering how the work is understood

as representative of, or extracted from, a 'decade of video, film and slide-tape installation in Britain 1980-1990'.

*Bureau de Change* delineates quite clearly a number of related issues: the relationship between art and market; discursive intent and audience; spectatorship and cultural position; the activity of work and how it is paid; and maybe, most pertinently, the thorny question of the 'museumisation' of audio-visual work and the role of the curator. *Bureau de Change* is the theatre of the museum in a museum. However, the guard was *really* guarding the money.

The museumisation inherent in creating a show such as this necessarily re-presented works in locations other than those for which they were originally made. *Electro-Television Circle* by **Judith Goddard** was commissioned for a forest site on Dartmoor. Inside, the installation's (question-raising) conquest of the landscape and the elements was lost; the 'environment' became a sequence of slides of urban landscape and domestic interiors which attempted to qualify its new situation.

**Susan Hiller** chose to re-contextualise *Belshazzar's Feast/The Writing on Your Wall*, seven years after it was made, with two wall-mounted texts: one, a framed transcription of the bulk of what is spoken on the tape; the other, a large photocopy of the text, reproduced in the catalogue. The latter discusses the relationship between the TV and the hearth and introduces the metaphors within the work. The texts provided entries into and reflections on the video, and gave it an historical moment. In the re-installation, she positioned the audience (on red cushions opposite each monitor on the floor) and so explored conditions of attention, a relevant concern within time-based work.

The artist's consideration of their audience, however, may be undermined by an insensitivity to installation on the part of the gallery. A curious aspect of the exhibition at Leeds City Art Gallery was the random scattering of gallery sofas around some of the installations in a way that was neither useful nor appropriate. Nor did any of the work at the City Art Gallery benefit from the fact that **David Hall's** piece was being put up several weeks late. Installing the work in Leeds was bound to be difficult, given that the exhibition was curated by **Chrissie Iles** at MoMA with particular space and resources in mind. Nevertheless, it should have been possible to open the exhibition in Leeds in its complete state.

Inevitably, and inescapably, audio interference from various works was experienced at all venues: sound is difficult to contain except under very exceptional circumstances when presenting a number of audio-visual works in one space. In Leeds Polytechnic Gallery, however, *Achievers-Strivers-Strugglers-Survivors* by **Anthony Wilson**, and Susan Hiller's installation, were shown on request and not simultaneously, thus avoiding the aforementioned problem. In Oxford, however, the unfortunate placing of **Timara Krikorian's** silent *Time Revealing Truth* compromised its demand for sustained concentration. As a possible introduction to video art, it was perhaps a difficult work. By being situated at the entrance to the exhibition it suffered from heavy gallery traffic and noise interruption. In Leeds, it occupied a more contemplative space and was cordoned off by a red rope which essentially altered the viewer's physical relationship with the work.

The latter concern is also relevant in the case of *K* by **Jayne Parker**, where the curatorial decision had

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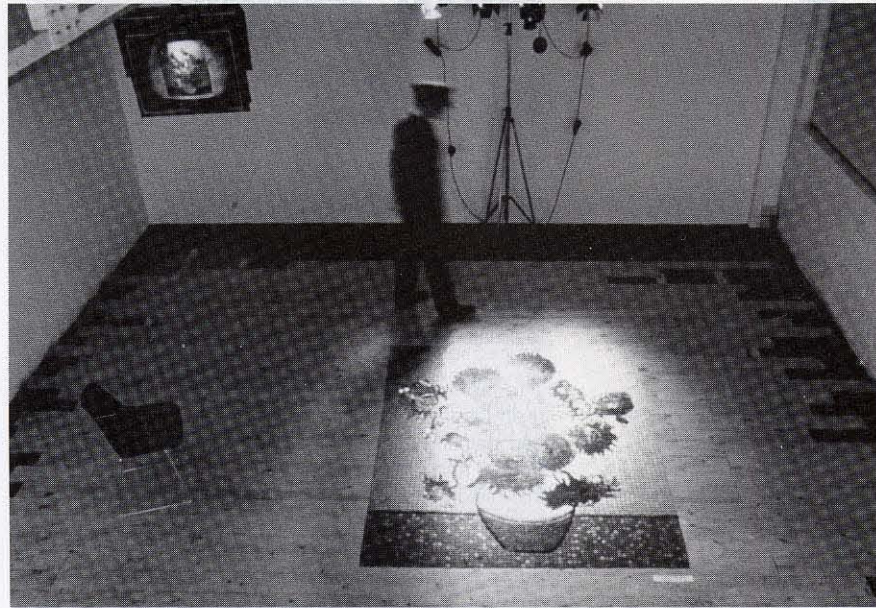


been made to show it as an installation (comprising a video transfer and a large photograph) rather than as a film projected in the gallery. This would have shown the work in its intended and stronger form, which raises the issue of the absence of single screen/projection pieces within the exhibition. From the accompanying seminar which took place on 11 November 1990 at MoMA, an assumption emerged that such work has ample screening opportunity, though it had been intended to show concurrently a programme of films and videos. However, information about the screenings was inconsistent and it is not known whether it ever took place at MoMA. Nor was it included in the catalogue.

Sound work occupied a similarly less central position. It consisted of work by **Hannah O'Shea**, **Stuart Brisley**, and *Sound Moves*, a compilation of audio by women. All the sound work was primarily vocal and because of its presentation (via headphones at a desk) operated in an intimate and controllable way. For the majority of the work this was appropriate, given that *Sound Moves* was accessed via the telephone system when it was originally made. It is a pity, therefore, that sound made to occupy a more extensive physical space was not represented.

Interestingly, it is within *Sound Moves* that issues of cultural position and vernacular language are most overtly and variously dealt with. In comparison with Judith Goddard's use of the 'Celtic lament' as a point of return, which seems appropriate and romantic after electronic feedback and Blake's Jerusalem, the keening in the sound work of **Alanna O'Keely** and **Ann Sullivan** is better considered. They more explicitly acknowledge the purpose and cultural derivation of their particular laments.

The emphasis on political or discurive intent within the work varies. Perhaps it is impossible to separate entirely perception from representation. However, some artists have greater concern with materiality than with explicit meaning. This is not necessarily a perjorative statement. Indeed, in **Chris Welsby's** *Rainfall* it was the refined simplicity of his very material yet illusory image which was so compulsive. However, in the case of *Viridus* by **Holly Warburton** (omitted from the exhibition in Leeds), despite sophisticated and opulent illusion, the confusion of signs within the imagery undermined intended meaning and the work was



Rose Finn-Kelcey *Bureau de Change*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. Photo: Edward Woodman

reduced to extraordinary spectacle. **Cerith Wyn Evans**, who described technology as his site, produced an intellectually sophisticated video work but one that disengaged itself completely from issues of representation. In contrast, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, made in 1984 by **Stuart Marshall**, 'speaks about the experience of AIDS from within the gay community' (Stuart Marshall, catalogue entry, p.47). Its challenge to public perception is as important now as it was seven years ago, but then the promise of the future is always more attractive than the difficulties of the present.

The excitement apparent at the seminar regarding the development of virtual reality as a democratic medium offering empowerment to the viewer/user (!), conveniently overlooked the political implications with which the technology is rife. Even though the viewer is liberated to choose their own narrative, there remains the responsibility of authorship. Choice is not disengaged from cultural, social and economic conditions, either as it is individually made or as it is presented. If authorship is not positioned, once again the non-privileged voice remains unheard. (It is notable that the selection in '**Signs of the Times**' appears very centralised and that all the installation artists are white.)

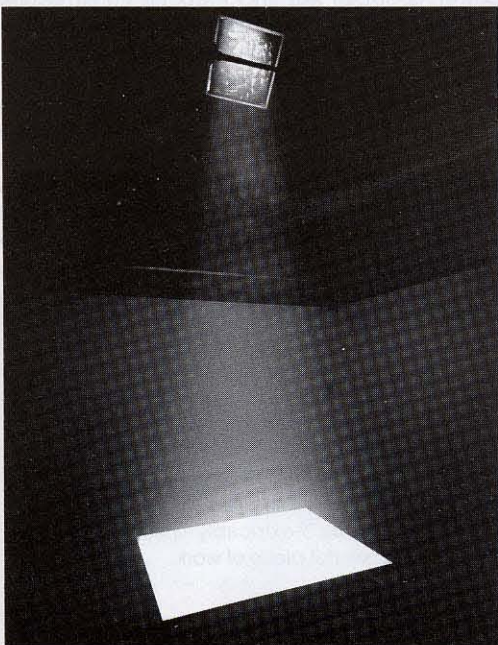
What '**Signs of the Times**' did achieve was to provide a rare opportunity for audio-visual artists to show work (privilege is relative), and to present the possibility of discussion in direct response to the work. It is a shame that it couldn't have toured more extensively.

The museumisation of audio-visual work must exist with the constant irony that it is re-inventing works of a temporal nature which largely were conceived of as non-collectable. The dilemma is either not to re-present it (possibly a decision taken by Rose Finn-Kelcey) and so deny wider access to a whole area of art practice, or to accept and acknowledge that the work is qualified by its changed context.

Even though '**Signs of the Times**' is deliberately not 'a definitive history of video installation in the eighties' (Stuart Marshall, *ibid*, p.16), its consequence as a major exhibition of time-based work in Britain is that it is, and will be, perceived as a valuable historical document.

**Susan Brind and Shirley MacWilliam**

Chris Welsby *Rainfall*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. Photo: Edward Woodman



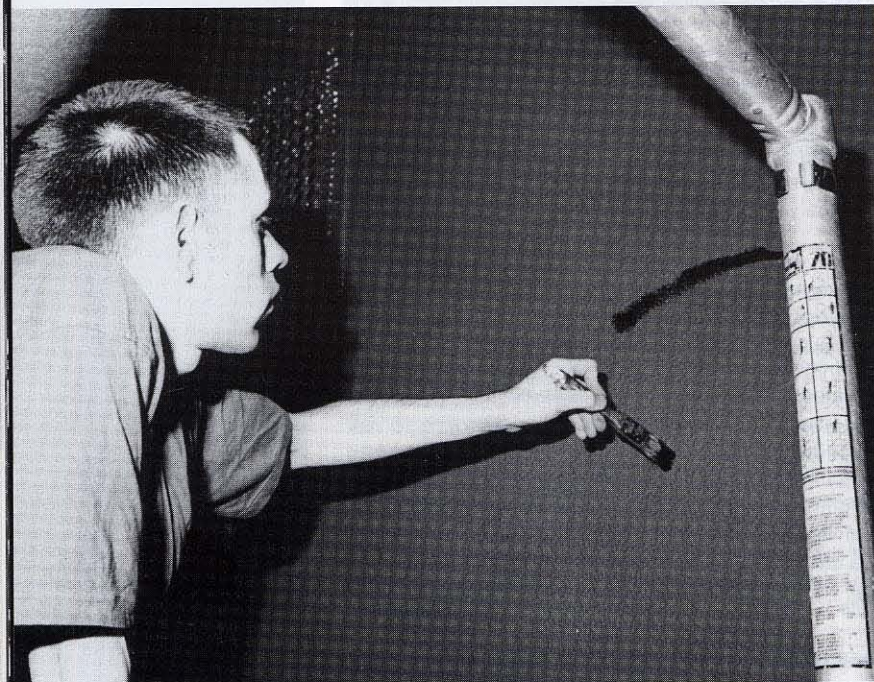
## BRIAN JENKINS:

### *Wound.*

Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow.  
August/September 1991.

**Brian Jenkin's** latest installation work *Wound* continues his commitment to the genre of self-portraiture and within this the possibilities of installation to create new forms of self-representation.

The self portrait as a linear, two dimensional representation within fine art forms such as drawing and painting carries historical baggage in that certain bodies and their lived experience are excluded from this history, invisible and marginal. Such is the case with women. The self portrait which synthesises forms specific to this century, i.e. video, installation and photography, as well as traditional forms such as drawing, a greater power and sophistication to bypass the limitations of these conventions and to create new contexts in which the self can be represented. Such was the case with Brian Jenkins' empowering work *Wound*.



Brian Jenkins at work on *Wound*, 1991, Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow. Photo: Brian McGeoch

A self-portrait is a discourse on identity, expressing visually how one wishes to be seen and making the viewer aware of the act of looking. The self-portrait is an act of communication, of making oneself visible. Brian Jenkins is a wheelchair user and representation of this experience also confronts the marginality of disability. However, to call Brian Jenkins a 'disabled artist', to use a current term, is a way to further marginalise particular experiences and externally to impose limitations on the power and significance of his work. This same sort of distorted logic is often applied to work by women.

Disability is *made* a marginal subject in social and structural ways. *Wound* foregrounds subjectivity and its constructions and does this on many levels of association. Just as the word **wound** is both noun and verb, literal and figurative, the work *Wound* itself is both subject and object. The self-portrait involves all

the physical dimensions of the gallery, the totality of the space.

The work dominates and defines the large space and the space itself becomes a representation of the body of the artist and his physical relation to it from the moment the viewer walks into the room. Entering by way of a ramp, the whole floor of the gallery is built at an angle with an upward elevation. The artist immediately draws the viewers' attention to their physical movement around the space and of consequence the artist's relationship to space and movement through his own physical experience.

The entire room is painted a warm, deep red, with associations of blood and the body, a possible wound. The atmosphere is one of warmth and enclosure. A drawing of the naked body of the artist stretches across the walls and ceiling of the room. This drawing is of a monumental scale and its physical presence itself a resistance to narrow notions of disability. These limited expectations and stereotypes treat people as if they were the problem and not the disabling conditions that are created for them.

The artist is controlling the movements of the viewer, requiring them to gaze around the contours of the space and thereby drawing attention to physical experience and movement of both artist and viewer in the act of self-representation. The actual drawing of the image itself is a statement of the importance of process as well as content in which physical challenges to define the spaces are overcome.

A small room is built at the top of the rising floor upon one wall of which is inscribed the work *Wound*. This enclosed space seems symbolic of the wound or of that which is usually not seen, bodily experiences which are silenced and made difficult and invisible but are part of lived, everyday experience made secretive by others. This room is like an interior within the larger space, itself a representation of the body. This small enclosed space is also part of the body, not separate. Inside, colostomy bags filled with dried flowers hang from the walls. A short video work shows the artist and his mother involved in the daily rituals of cleaning and changing. The artist represents his own reality.

For those whose bodies and lived experience are excluded, the self-portrait is a means of taking back power, a social act and a social construction of subjectivity. In this installation, Jenkins weaves together personal experience with problems of structure. The raised floor and room draw attention by their presence to the structural and physical obstacles which deny many people access to public spaces. These social barriers themselves reinforce limited expectations of individuals who happen to have a disability. Structures, and therefore their meaning and purpose and the interests they serve, don't change if individuals who are marginalised cannot participate fully. The artist's intervention in the space, the way in which it is built up and defined physically, is both a refutation of and explication of the social shaping the personal and vice versa. The entire room is the constructed self-portrait, making himself visible.

It is difficult to think of recent, contemporary work by male artists concerned with self-representation in which the means of production and personal experience are as inextricably linked. *Wound* is an honest and powerful piece of work.

**Lorna Waite**

PROJECTS



# OUTER SPACE

A national touring show, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, 28th September - 17th November 1991.

This exhibition is a step for art into the 21st century. The touchstone for the eight international artists involved was the 'image'; the crisis and non-crisis of representation.

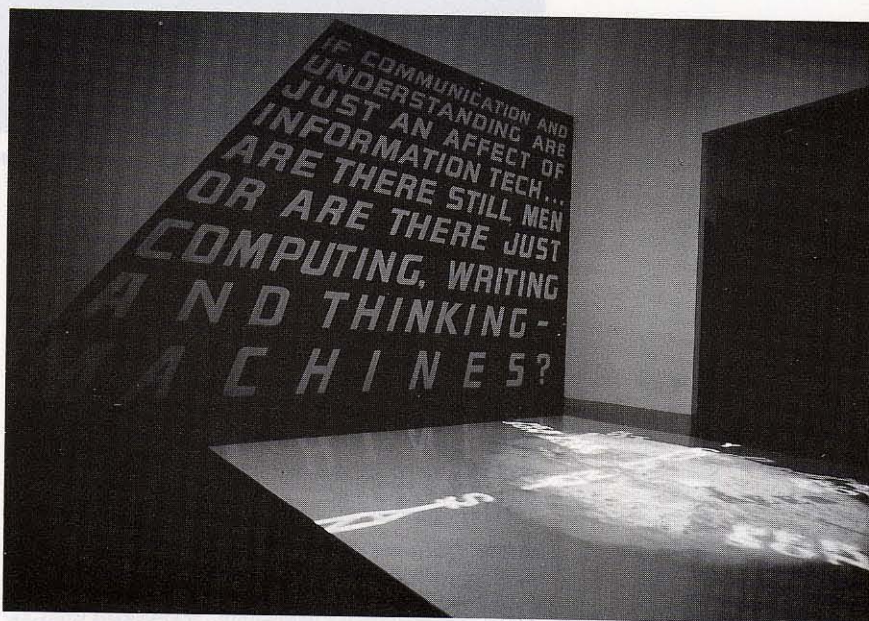
The exhibition is made up of 8 photo-video installations, but in a way this understates the works themselves. Using serial images, slide projections, light-box installations and mixed media, the artists explored the multiple possibilities that photographic 'images' have and hold. For over 2 years the curators **Alexandra Noble** and **Yve Lomax**, herself an artist, travelled Europe, America and Canada to bring together eight artists, whose works are individually distinct, but who disparately have become preoccupied with the impact upon us of reproduced visual stimuli, whether from newspapers, computer, video, photograph, or the satellite image. The exhibition space itself is a vehicle of the artists' expression. In the words of Yve Lomax, the images shown in the gallery "affect and also are affected by the architectural and institutional time and space in which they are encountered".

**Judith Barry**, the American multi-media hi-tech artist and thinker, explained that her videobeam installation entitled *Maelstrom: Max Laughs 1988* traced "the problems of language, right up to the computer". She mapped out the history of language using a variety of graphic animation techniques as they themselves developed over the history of film, television and computer imaging. The videobeam opened using rotoscoping and stop-action animation techniques. Gradually more sophisticated special effects were introduced, such as a motion-control live-action sequence. A two-dimensional sequence interspersed with video was followed by the highly sophisticated 3-D graphic motion control. Barry has used the communication tools of the 20th Century to create a work which comments on information technologies.

The piece is projected onto the floor, designed so that the viewer walks onto it, thus disturbing the viewer's traditional relationship with images as received and perceived either on television or from his or her workplace experience of computer screens. The 3-D motion control located the spectator inside a 3-D field. Barry is not alone in making use of techniques which Hollywood film studios and the military exploit, but she is also experimenting with its extension into 'virtual

reality'. On either side of the videobeam, large white lettered black billboards read: 'IF COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING ARE JUST AN AFFECT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ARE THERE STILL MEN OR ARE THERE JUST COMPUTING, WRITING AND THINKING-MACHINES?'; and on the opposite wall: 'IN A WORLD WHERE MACHINES ARE AS CRAZY AS THE PEOPLE WHO USE THEM HOW WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY AND DISTINGUISH AN EMANCIPATORY PRACTICE?'

Surprisingly, Barry's piece seems the least site-specific. It comes across as a transitional located work, a sort of 21st century tunnel the spectator passes through. This may be partially intended, but it may be the result of the fact that the work is only one-quarter of the *Maelstrom*. Already having cost \$100,000 to produce *Laughing Max*, Judith Barry is looking to a French or German company to 'complete' the work in which "ultimately the whole space will be video projections".

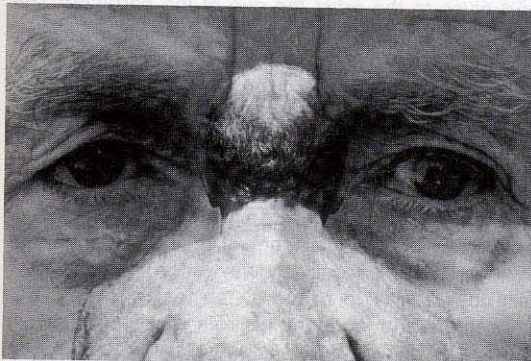


Judith Barry *Maelstrom: Max laughs*, 1988, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. Photo: Erica Bolton/Jane Quinn

In a way the exhibition is hung like that of 8 individual exhibitions in which each artist has imposed their image on their space. This took the form of something as slight yet definable as a black curtain initiating you into a work; a dark room entered by turning the knob of a heavy wooden door; the presence or the lack of sound. The viewer was left with a sense of the multiplicity of spatial existence; encouraged here to understand our 'inner space' by experiencing these 'outer spaces'. The catalogue refers repeatedly to the idea of the viewer as a nomad searching for narrative threads. Each room in the show is 'inhabited' by one sole art work (generally) and one is taken aback by the poignancy of such apparent simplicity. These were focused displays.

On entrance to the show, one is 'encircled' by 10 foot high vertical black and white photographs. In an enveloped space, the Polish artist **Ania Bien** presented images of her family's past. The uniformity of each photograph's shape (194 x 120cm), along with the use in each of a silver menu stand on which the unique image of each photo is placed, provokes a reading of a brutal family history ending in Auschwitz. There is a detached involvement on the part of the artist which evokes a cinematic or dreamlike assembling of clues, of details of a life, and indeed of many lives. The piece engages itself with the present

Genevieve Cadieux *Blue Fear*, 1990, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. Photo: Erica Bolton





Ulrich Gorlich *Fire Action*, 1991, installation with silver bromide emulsion, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. Photo: Erica Bolton/Jane Quinn

generation and how they are attempting to deal with former generations' experiences of barbarity. Items, as miscellaneous as a luggage label, a child's drawing, a scrap of wallpaper, are propped up on the Hotel Polen silver menu stand and the viewer is engaged viscerally; constructing the bridges in the story as he or she would have it read.

**Willie Doherty's** work *They're All The Same* (1991) presented a damning commentary on the viewer's predetermined decision to judge from an image perceived in some public arena, whether it be in a newspaper or on television. The 'image' in question is that of a young man from Northern Ireland, presently in prison in Britain. Once 'branded' by a country's police system, a process of 'dehumanization' rolls into action. No longer will photographs appear of a young man or woman with friends, at a wedding or other social-gathering photo occasion. Rather, it will be the police imposed camera stare and side view photograph which the media will latch onto. In a large parqueted room, the viewer assists at an inquisition with which he or she becomes complicit. On a plain screen, a young man's mug-shot is projected and one listens to an all important sound track. The public hear the voice of the young man, slowly hear phrases like "*I am solid*", "*I am crazy*", "*I am innocent, I am cynical*", "*I am patient, I have a vision*", "*I am decent and truthful*", "*I am barbaric*": shock is solicited. The viewer essentially does not know where to look save at the staring eyes of the youth. To Doherty, himself from Derry, the quality of the voice is very important. In this case he has used the voice of a man from the South of Ireland who has lived in the North for a number of years. There is a softness in the voice at odds with the picture. Much of the text has been drawn from a 1930's guidebook on Ireland which Doherty has intercut, so that we hear about fuscias and the rolling coastal waters and the soft mists and then a phrase like "*I am essentially evil*". The incongruity of the spoken texts was disconcerting and left me wondering

how one deals with received imagery.

A very socially charged piece and very 'site-specific' was the Berlin artist **Ulrich Gorlich's** installation with silver bromide emulsion. In one large room he covered the walls with black and white blown up shots of the recently besieged part of Newcastle. Initial impressions suggested late 1940's war torn Berlin. This pastiche impact of the work is not irrelevant, but rather is part and parcel of what 'images' potently carry. Gorlich told me how he had wanted to "*contradict the traditional gallery space*" by confronting it with these images of the recent pillage of Newcastle. By bringing this theme into the gallery, Gorlich has successfully intimated that there is a need to ponder such social discontent away from the national and local television stations, away from the police loudspeakers, away from the newspaper journalists and microphones. Burnt-out shops now on uninhabited streets are presented on a thin film stuck directly onto the gallery walls. The work is unique and will disappear, fading on the walls and then eventually painted over with white paint, never to re-emerge. The idea that the 'images' need to be seen face-to-face at a specific time and that they won't come back again is very important to this work. The work is not commercial in any sense and gives to the artist the eye of the harbinger, the seer.

*Heavens Gate* (1987/91) gave **Outer Space** yet another major perspective of images, using a video screen suspended horizontally from the ceiling, looking down on a bed of mirrors onto which the viewer is encouraged to walk. The video tape showed a slowly swivelling urn-type shape which changed from spherical to depict a sheet of moving images; the sphere, having become another image, presents itself in another way in brilliant 'techni-colours'. The conceptual and iconographic references of this work are largely derived from two sources: Baroque ceiling

paintings and aerial/satellite photographs of the surface of our planet. The images alternate in the videographic structure Shaw has designed. Shaw is not dealing with the effect of technology in a didactic way as seen in Barry's installation, but he has harnessed the latest video systems as a post-modernist alchemist. Something of a 'nirvana' is the result of this strange amalgam of the spiritually celebratory Baroque imagery and the 20th Century's celestial technical 'miracles', the satellite. The celestial and terrestrial components images move apart and together, reflecting and refracting, crossing centuries of history. It is a work celebrating the achievements of our civilization, not negating them.

There was great visual power in *Blue Fear* (1990) by Canadian artist **Genevieve Cadieux**, an adaption of a work, *Blind Faith* (1990), which was never realized. The work depicts a blue eye stare of an old man and imposed on this is a back view of his torso, balding head and bare back. A portrait, very much so, but so different from what we want a portrait to be. Again, we are forced to question our presuppositions, our fears.

**Susan Trangmar's** *Ancestors III Where Are We Coming From? Where Are We Going To?* (1991) confronts us, using a number of slide projectors clicking simultaneously on the floor and walls showing shots of children in East London at play. The clothing spoke out the cultural mish-mash: "One thing that did interest me was the way in which details of clothing style speak of cultural and gender identity in quite a complex way". The pulse and the rhythm of looking by Trangmar catches the children at play. Trangmar said, in presenting these shots, that she "implicate[s] us in deciding the origin and future condition of these images, these children on the move".

**Krystyna Ziach**, a Polish artist, presented works entitled *The Anatomy of the Big Buddha* (1987), *Shinto*, *The Way of The Sacred Spirits* (1987) and *Infinity* (1987), which were triangular with beautiful grey combed sand and seemed somehow hermetic.

It was apt that Newcastle - the outer reaches of the accepted 'art' capital - had hosted **Outer Space**. But it did have an air about it of the un-nursed plant. The exhibition co-organiser, Alexandra Noble, and many of the artists were on location in Newcastle assembling the show for over a fortnight prior to the opening. The German artist Gorlich actually created his art work in Newcastle. At the Laing, what would appear to have happened was that the gallery became so engrossed in the technical difficulties involved in mounting the exhibition, that it lost sight of the people who could have been involved (students, young people, etc.). Being exposed to the many problems related to the site-specific nature of **Outer Space** would have been invaluable. I should imagine the artists themselves would have welcomed dialogue with the local art students on what the exhibition sought to achieve. Of course, such link-ups in the gallery and in the schools are complex to manoeuvre, but in Newcastle there definitely was a way, given the huge level of interest shown in the exhibition. Whilst the show was attracting the public, the gallery itself did not blitz surfaces with bump; there was no information at all that a catalogue was being produced or where one might order it. Essentially there was no hype about what was a very hyper exhibition. Maybe the fact that so many had visited the show, told by word of mouth, speaks volumes...Still, it smacks too much of London: outsiders 'Marched' in, deposited their load and left. They'll return to de-rig the show and maybe in Hull and Bristol there'll be that modicum of integration, of a based **Outer Space!**

Patricia Scanlan.

## THE LIGHT SHOW

Walsall Museum and Art Gallery,  
November 1991.

Light as an artist's medium holds a contradictory position in terms of its object status within the art market. It is at once the anti-object, the dematerialisation of the art object that the conceptualists sought, whilst at the same time providing the ultimate consumer spectacle.

Both physical and ephemeral; a play of absense and presense, manipulated in the construction of desire. It is this seductive quality which makes light works uncontainable, unobtainable, whilst creating a desire for possession. Transient commodities, bright adverts for themselves. It is this duplicity which has placed artworks which utilise light at the forefront of art market fashionability.

**The Light Show** at the Walsall Gallery demonstrates such an ambiguous position. Comprising the work of 14 artists from various backgrounds, it demonstrates a great diversity of responses to the properties of light, ranging from the conscious manipulation of spectacle to the hedonistic pleasure of light used in its pure abstract form.

The most interesting works, for me, were the ones which explored the conceptual implications of both immateriality and 'objectness'. **Joanna Moss** paints canvasses which create a disparity between the ephemerality of light and the solidity of the source from which it originates. By painting with fluorescent paint, and then displaying the canvasses with ultra-violet light, her images seem to float in the air in front of their support. This seems particularly pertinent in that the images she depicts are computer graphs and charts that display information which is itself becoming increasingly immaterial and transient, namely political and economical information, the stock market crash, property and share values. Phenomena which seem difficult to grasp, but which exert increasing control on our daily experience. Immaterial information which has us as its objects.



Jim Hamlyn *Conversions*, 1991, Walsall Art Gallery.



In *Faces of Light*, **Stephen Dowsing** pushes the modernist ideals of 20th Century abstraction beyond the boundaries of the art object and invokes the experience it had sought to represent. Through projecting a constantly changing wall of colour and sound, he creates the all-encompassing experience of the colour field that Rothko sought 30 years previously. Although utilising the technological hardware of the video projector and computer generated imagery, technology for its own sake is not a concern for Dowsing, it is simply another tool in creating a sensory awareness in the viewer.

Similarly, the work of **Mark Lewis** is a celebration of the qualities of light for its own sake. But, whilst Dowsing's work involves the viewer physically, the viewer of this work is distanced by a construction which only allows momentary glimpses through 'peep holes'. This is a great pity since the sensitive play of light over an abstract gauze shape would have been more fully appreciated from a seated position over a long period of time.

However, as with many works within *The Light Show*, the viewing criterion was established by the audience. The sheer popularity of the show, and the number of visitors it attracted meant that several of the works had to be protected from their own audience. The popularity of the show was both a blessing and a curse, with several of the works having to be constantly readjusted because of over enthusiastic participation by their viewers. One such work was *Balanced Window* by **Andrew Carmichael**, the sensitivity of which invited its own imbalance. This is one of the particular qualities of light works: their sensory quality invokes a need to participate and to touch. The experience of such works can never be possessed entirely, but as such they increase their own frustrated desirability.



## IS MODERN LIFE RUBBISH?

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull,  
August 1991.

Small critical voices may not immediately stem the tide of inert conformism and disengagement which seems to affect today's practitioners. Living up to the intentions of Hull Time Based Arts Ltd to promote works which challenge notions of material as well as social practice, this exhibition has three instances of co-operative development and achievement, and four quite different yet converging points of view.

**Dick Powell**, sculptor and **Mike Stubbs** installation, film and video artist, designate their conveyor belt *Theme Shopping Time Bomb Park*. **Lucy Casson** and **Andy Hazell's** *Wheel*, **Andy Smith (with Cath Shiells's)** *Fear Of* and **Mark Hudson's** *Deathly* touch on the eventual pointlessness of criteria, the 'fear of being unable to see the whole' and the substitution of media

In terms of inviting participation, **Jim Hamlyn's** *Conversions*, were both seductive and threatening, creating a physical space for contemplation and caution through their surreal element of danger. Comprising one light bulb and two strip lights immersed in buckets full of water, they defamiliarised banal domestic objects, in a way which not only posed a threat to the linguistic understanding of those objects, but also to the viewer's sense of physical security. Although the works were electrically 'safe', such an iconoclastic use of objects was unsettling in its relation to commonplace meanings. Hamlyn's work was for me the most compelling here in that it explored the meanings and uses of light and energy, rather than celebrating light as something in itself.

Every exhibition must be viewed in the context of the gallery in which it is presented. Due to promotion of local artists, its local government funding and its connection to the Walsall Museum, the Walsall Gallery has a popular appeal as a local gallery which is unprecedented in most other parts of Britain. *The Light Show* coincided with the annual Walsall illuminations, and as such encouraged a wide range of people who might not ordinarily go to an art gallery to become involved. The vast attendance that the show received is surprising since many of the works were contemporary and highly innovative. The Walsall Gallery managed to create a fine balance between works which had popular appeal and which were at the same time challenging to commonly accepted definitions of art practice, allowing lesser known artists to exhibit alongside big names, and bringing both to an expanding audience.

**Ewan Morrison**

sloganeering for informative intelligence, respectively. All low budget productions, the first exceptionally so because the original work (higher budget) was stolen and an alternative made in a short time, they have considerable combined presence in one of the Ferens' new octagonal galleries. They all make a noise, from the low click of slide projectors, through the whirring of mechanical drives, accompanying music, recorded voices to the irregular and vicious crack of steel against wood and metal. A hissing rush of water completes this aural schizophrenia which, more by accident than intention, is a good analogue of the disparate concerns of ourselves as individuals and of those who lay on services to meet our needs. The pollution of sound is one of the measures of decline in quality of life, and the intrusive message a further infringement.

*Theme Shopping Time Bomb Park* may become 'theme park', a reassuring place to be for those outside green gelatin rabbits rocking on a bed of food; or it may be seen as 'shopping time', and the bulging plastic carriers filling all the space below the conveyor belt would confirm that; but plastic bags, unattended bags, are too close to 'time bomb' for comfort. Whatever is at the end of the line for the rabbits under TV surveillance,

# LES ARTS ETONANTS

Les Fresnoy, Tourcoing, France,  
October/November 1991.

Le Fresnoy is a huge building in Tourcoing, Northern France, constructed just after the turn of the century, serving as cinema, dancehall, rollerskating rink and swimming pool. In eighty years it has undergone many changes of management and use, finally serving as a discoteque and cinema in the '70's before being abandoned. In a remarkable move the regional government are funding the renovation of the building and its conversion into an ambitious school or centre for the arts, due to open finally in 1993 and providing a focus on inter-disciplinary arts practice.



Mike Stubbs *Here Comes Another Jelly Rabbit*, 1991 Ferens Art Gallery, Hull. Photo: Peter Wall

given today's uncertainties, they may never reach it. The anecdote stretches to include a high pitched infant recitation of late twentieth century epigrams such as "once I was owning, now I am owned. I work for money, money works for me. I choose to be alive and I am alive to choose..." Are the rabbits victims of their own economic success and induced consumer blindness, or of over provision by a too caring welfare state?

*The Wheel* is 'manifest in all faiths to encourage the penitent'. It is 'a symbol of hope, of passage, transition and cure, for in its cycle all people's deeds are folly' (Andy Hazell). Twelve feet across, this heavy wooden circle and its metal tyre turns every six seconds. Its many shadows are cast onto buffalo photographed at a waterhole in an arid landscape and onto emaciated gnus: water is synonymous with life. Four beacon towers stand at the cardinal points and mark out the territory of the wheel. A small pink light is reflected in its highly polished metal tyre. Two steel bars in opposed positions forcibly smash into the tyre at irregular intervals, distorting it and its subsequent reflection. The noise is sharp, pneumatic, unexpected.

Individual dilemmas are central to Andy Smith's *Fear Of* and Mark Hudson's *Deathly*. Isolation, inadequacy of knowledge about the present is set against the clarity of one's wishes. *Fear Of* is a material correlative of the tensions and uncertainties existing between those two levels of awareness. Andy Smith equates the first with the eventual and total disintegration of a driver's blurred view of the road in torrential rain. The wishful mind's eye is expressed by a hemispherical screen showing sharp but distorted images of a woman in a field. Distant views are contrasted with massive close ups of a peering eye. The window and the screen are installed side by side. Personal survival is the subject of Mark Hudson's slide sequence *Deathly*. He juxtaposes single handwritten words on the left and uncaptioned visuals on the right. Sequenced to be permanently out of phase, the combinations are given new insights by their random coincidences. The black and white images are of lovers, intimate personal relations, of people in daily life and microscopic details of viruses, AIDS and HIV. Media catch phrases such as 'Aids. Don't die of ignorance' and 'Silence = Death' are fractured and mixed with words from common wisdom such as 'Ignorance is bliss' *et al.* Self protection through self education is essential, but Mark Hudson's argument is that little information is given about the current problem and what is, is soon reduced to meaninglessness by media manipulation.

**Malcolm Cook**

Before the builders and the bulldozers moved into the site the almost derelict halls were used to stage *LES ARTS ETONANTS* - both a tribute to the buildings and a look forward to its future. Artists **Steven Taylor Woodrow** (UK), **Heather Ackroyd** and **Daniel Harvey** (UK), **Matt Mullican** (USA) and **Allain Fleshier** (France) all exhibited major installation pieces, linked, in a sense, by the idea of 'other' magical worlds and our place in them.

Most absolute in this respect is Mullican's *Five Into One* - a series of interlocking worlds designed (but not programmed) by the artist and stored as data that one could explore using the eyephones and joystick controls of a virtual reality system. I'm not sure this is the first substantial fine-artwork using VR but it's certainly amongst them and for now, anyway, separating the inherent properties of the medium from the specific concerns and objectives of the artist is well-nigh impossible.

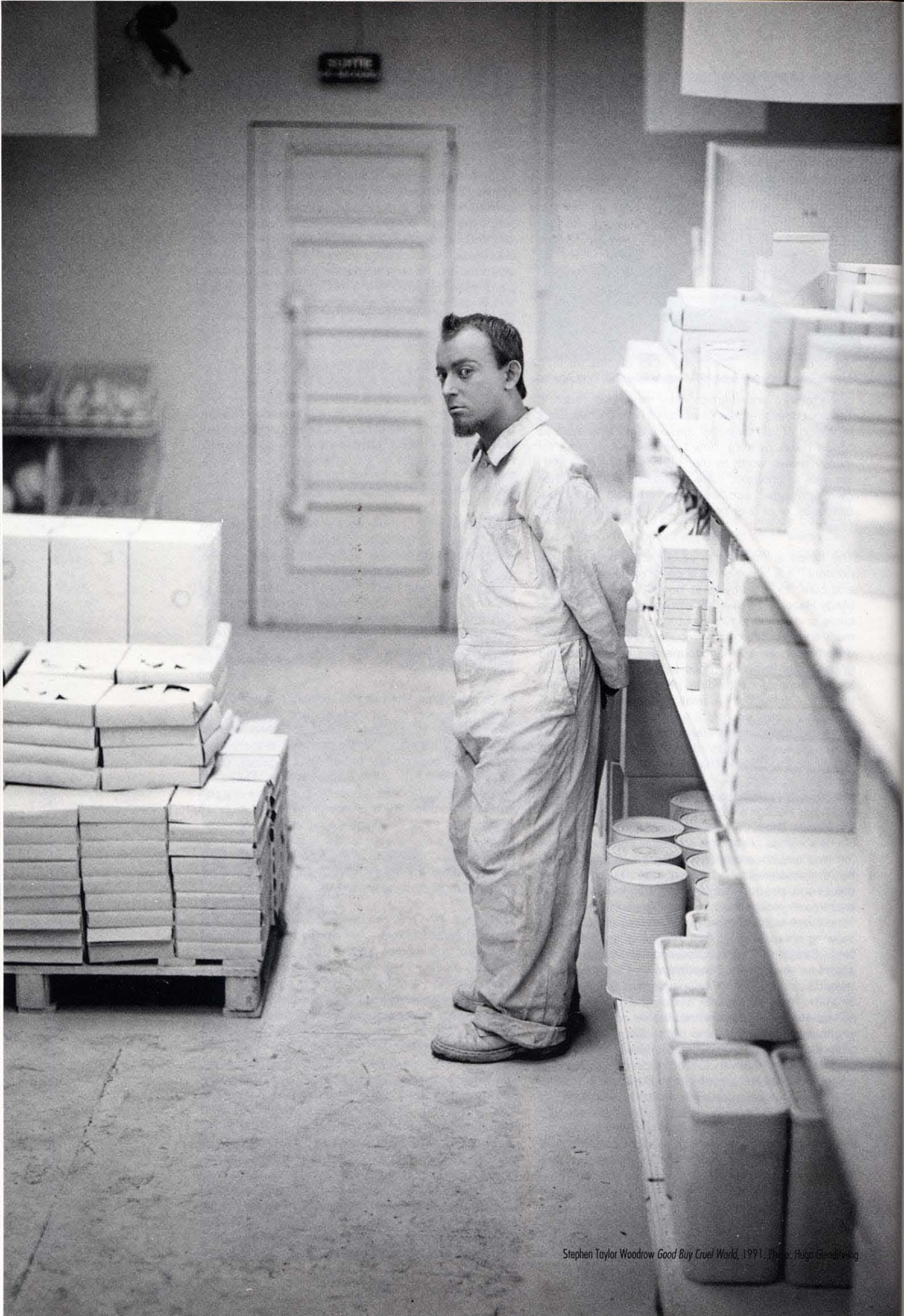
At the very least Mullican has designed a world well suited to showing off VR's agenda and possibilities in an art context. In its military, architectural, and medical applications VR is always strangely bound to the real, to reference, to being of last decades video-games, goalled and competitive. As a fine art medium VR can be in a sense cut loose, freed from any tawdry re-application, allowing a concentration on the most obvious fact - that the frame surrounding art can now be entered or abolished in a new, substantial way. As yet, the visual definition is limited and the hardware doesn't allow for interaction beyond moving and looking but nonetheless it's an extraordinary work.

In *Five Into One* Mullican uses video-bright colours in flat, textureless planes. He allows omnipotence of movement and renders all surfaces permeable - thus one can move through walls, ceilings, shapes and floors. Through a sphere of floating pyramids to an empty city marked out with cryptic corporate logos, from a room in a house to the inside of a further sphere, one is free to move both through, below and above the artificial landscape.

The essence of the medium, and Mullican's concern, is that certainties about space and being are challenged. He's long had an interest in doggedly ascribing life to transparent representations (sticky figures) or to shadows (voices drawn out of himself via hypnosis) but through using VR he can take this process much further - *Five Into One* alternates abstract spaces with referential environments but insists, via formal and experiential consistency, that each is as real as the other. He also merges the abstract and the representational in several direct ways. First the referential environments, already abstracted through







Stephen Taylor Woodrow Good Buy Cruel World, 1991. Photo: Hugo Glandorf

simple textures and colours, are made more abstract in their permeability and one's possible relationships to them. Nonsensical situations like being on a shelf in a room in a model of a house are very much a part of the work. Furthermore one can get into places where although the context is referential, one's view is incomprehensible as such. Try being halfway through a wall, half inside a room and half out of it on a table in a room.

A similar thing could be said about **Heather Ackroyd** and **Daniel Harvey's** *Implanted Spirit*, only here the new place is simply a part of this one, transformed. Taking a series of rooms within Le Fresnoy, Ackroyd and Harvey have grown grass across the walls, ceilings and doors, as though exacerbating a natural process of decay. There's a tremendous, tangible power to the stillness they invoke in two rooms in particular, one with a grass figure and another flooded room (à la Tarkovsky) in which water drips from the ceiling past a mirror reflecting those present as audience - a piece rich with implied traces of strange, distant lives. Walking through *Implanted Spirit*, I was, however, nagged by a certain lack of rigour in the work, especially in its occasional twee puns (grass cut in the shape of skirting boards) and its loose fictionality. Only the final room of the suite truly allayed these doubts. In this place, Ackroyd and Harvey have grown grass from seed on the walls in darkness. The only light comes from a projected image, shining day and night onto a central rectangle of grass. Turning the projector off brings a startling revelation as the image itself is rendered, grown into the grass in shades of green. What's brilliant here is the convergence of process and product, and for a spectator, the way the gorgeous image suddenly makes clear its origins and the simple fact of photosynthesis in grass.

In three separate works **Steven Taylor Woodrow** brings paintings to life (*The Living Paintings*), creates a hospital ward where the patients have sunk forever into their beds (*Going Bye Byes*), and finally animates a listless man and woman inside a building, classical temple from the outside and monochrome supermarket within (*Good Buy Cruel World*).

This latest work is something of a departure for Woodrow since in it the two performers are not fixed into walls or furniture but have free reign within an enclosed space. Although the shuffling, shelf-stacking man and the disdainful till-girl share the levelling monochromatic colouring and clothes of the earlier works, these two are perhaps closer to being full-blown characters through their situation and the dynamics of the unequal relationship.

Although effective and resonant, our immersion in 'magic' can never be total or unproblematic - the key to understanding Woodrow's work is that the strong fictional invocation of place and character co-exists with a clear sense of our presence in real time. Thus the illusionist mechanics of the work, the durational discomfort of the performers, the sense of humans operating within simple rule systems and so on are all acknowledged (not disguised) aspects of our experience.

Woodrow's Humanoids operate within clear constraints (spatial limitation, no speech etc.) but their objectives are often fascinatingly fluid, allowing us room to project concerns and reasons onto them. More concretely, through physical or textual interventions, we can influence his figures; changing their lives, entering their spaces, double-guessing their games. At worst (say,

swamped by nearly one hundred French school children all prodding, running and shouting at the top of their voices) this work can appear like a stall at some hideous avant-garde Euro-Disney of the future. But a look beyond the sound-byte boldness and the ad-man's titles reveals a vision and a set of concerns both distressing and important.

To speak with the paintings, to sit silently at the bedside in *Going Bye-Byes* or to make purchases in the dead green light of *Good Buy Cruel World* is to try to engage with another world, to cross a line, to reach out and behave in what Richard Schecner might call a non-work, non-useful context. Each move anyone makes in respect of Woodrow's figures is a testing of the magical waters, observed closely by all present. Many people begin with a joke: offering a sweet, performing a shrug, or a smile. Typically, interactions develop until the figures reject an advance, or subvert the interaction in some blocking, cryptic way. A woman offers her shoe to one of the paintings and then, after much business, the painting puts it calmly in its pocket, looking away. The woman stands, shoeless, perplexed, washed up on the shores of real time. In *Going Bye-Byes*, it's often simply the closing of the eyes by the bedridden ghosts that dismisses a person or a crowd - a closing of the eyes that speaks both of the performers' tiredness with this particular game and of the patients' terrible, inexpressible private pain.

These collapsing interactions stress an almost existential insularity in our relationships with the other (people, enchantment, art), but at the same time they do give us a brief taste of life in another country, a chance to step away from earth and look back.

They also give us a series of insights into power and how it operates in a spatial dimension. Paradoxically the fixed, constrained beings of *The Living Paintings* and *Going Bye-Byes* are more intimidating than the free agents of *Good Buy Cruel World*. There's something about the paintings' strong position high on the wall, combined with a culturally ingrained mistrust of anything inanimate that has acquired life (usually by dubious means) that leaves us suspicious and (rightly) unsure of their intentions.

The beds on the other hand are people on the way to objecthood, receding like the TV dot at closedown, unable to enter any tactile or active relationship. They are utterly powerless, of course, and the brutality of some spectators defies expectation. Perhaps that's why the beds are frightening too - because they force us to confront our own power, our own health and mobility, because the sight of another human as a passive object awakes a part of us we'd rather not address.

By freeing the performers spatially in *Going Bye-Byes* and making them individuals rather than part of a more or less identical set, Woodrow is taking us into new and not wholly successful territory. New, essentially theatrical issues arise out of the mobility and the more complex fiction that he hasn't quite worked through to conclusion. It's still very challenging work.

## Tim Etchells

## 'FESTIVAL OF LIGHT AND SOUND - BERLIN STYLE'

The sound of Frank Sinatra crooning *Stangers in the Night* permeates the small dark cinema. The only light comes from the screen where a scratch artist has adapted some footage of two respectable men having a conversation. The scratches are skilfully animated to set the two gentlemen up as potential lovers. The audience cheers and falls about laughing as the unlikely couple are used to carry an important message about choosing your partners carefully and using condoms. At last, an AIDS warning with humour! We are packed into the Kino Eiszeit, the **VIPFilm** Festival's main venue, for the Gay/Lesbian night. **Cathy Joritz's** *Give AIDS the Freeze* further injects the already electric atmosphere. As I look around the audience from my cramped position on the floor, I know that this is what it is all about: a huge party where everybody gets together with the sole intention of escaping into an orgy of film.



Cathy Joritz *Give AIDS the Freeze*, VIPFilm 1991

Not all the films were of the up-beat variety. Even the Gay/Lesbian night, for all its joviality, had a more serious side. A good example of this came in the form of a VHS tape from the USA. **Keith Holland's** *Bunny Tap Dancing* opens with a shot of feet clad in patent shoes tapping. You prepare yourself for a home-video of somebody's little girl dancing. Slowly you realise that not only is Bunny a grown man but he is disabled and scantily dressed in drag. It's not often that you see a disabled body so exposed. On the one hand you're curious and on the other it is difficult to watch. A

strange tension grew in the audience as Bunny stared at us unremittingly while tapping out an endless rhythm. Very confrontational. The kind of film you learn from and only 3 minutes long.

There was a break in the programme after which we were presented with *Sex Garage* by **Fred Halsted** - 'a hardcore film of the intelligent kind'. I sat for 20 minutes looking for intelligence, but none was forthcoming, so I joined the mass exit and left the last 12 minutes themselves. I glimpsed some of 'There Was a Young Boy From Nantucket Whose Dick Was so Long he Could Suck It' and decided I was happy for the boy from Nantucket but I was going home. By then the party had truly split up and only the 'hardcore intelligensia' were left.

The Eiszeit's easy-going environment created a perfect venue for the festival. It was originally a squatted cinema but now occupies a permanent space where it still carries some characteristics of its predecessor. It has a make-shift bar, tickets are sold over a table and the seats in the cinema are rigged on a stand. You get the impression that the whole gig could be dismantled and relocated with great haste and little effort.

As is often the case with these festivals, the organisers were themselves filmmakers. The air of 'anything is possible' that characterised the festival came through in a lot of the German work.

**Michael Bryntrup** shot his film *Liebe Eifersucht und Rache* on Super 8mm and later transferred it to 16mm. "I didn't want to wait for the money to shoot it on 16mm", he explained, "I just wanted to get on with making the film, so by shooting it on Super 8 I could do that". The camp visuals marry well with a light-hearted telephone conversation between two characters who discuss all the different languages of films. The conversation, potentially pretentious, is very amusing. There is an element of flippancy in the film which probably resulted from an effort not to over-play and kill the scenario. The final result is a film which, seemingly without effort, catches the audience's imagination and tickles them. A great film to see but a difficult one to write about.

VIPFilm did well to exhibit a diverse selection of work over the four nights. Films from places like Japan, Norway, Estonia, Australia and the Philippines helped to make the festival something of an international event.

There were two French films included in the programme. **Angela Melitopoulos** filmed *Transfer* in the Paris Metro. Her video unobtrusively explores the relationship passengers have with each other and with the vehicles they travel on. Images of low-lit expressionless faces are immediately familiar from our own experiences of travel. Everybody in the video takes on the appearance of a ghost-like dreamer caught in a cog of machinery. All isolated but all still emotional human beings. A lot of the images were enlarged to give a grainy picture, introducing a feeling of uncertainty. The pace of editing and the camera movements were restless, which added to the overall feeling of discomfort between passengers and their environment.

The bravest work I saw at VIPFilm was *Fields* by **Christine Dabague**. Originally from Beirut, she now lives in New York where she made the film on 16mm. *Fields* explores how mourning develops into the final acceptance of death. A murdered man's body is being cleaned before his burial while a young woman is haunted by images of death. Two worlds... or fields. The film progressively weaves these two worlds

together until life and death have almost become one. The woman's movements become one

with the movement of the dead man's cleansing. The imagery and development of *Fields* is powerful. The editing is extremely manipulative, but is not at all intrusive to the sombre mood of the film. This vulnerability becomes an intrinsic part of the work. I saw this film in the larger venue, the Babylon Mitte, which was fairly busy. After the screening a still hush hung over the audience. Not a twitch.

As well as 10 general programmes and the Gay/Lesbian night, there were programmes of films from Ireland, Venezuela and Romania. This provided us with an insight into cultural influences on filmmaking. The Romanian programme seemed an appropriate inclusion amidst the chaotic excitement of the reunification of Germany. Most of their films were reminiscent of 60's music films, which would appear to be their main import from the west at present. The one that stood out was a very simplistic film by **Dan Cureau** called *The Egg*, in which a sculptor sculpts an egg from clay. The film reflects the artist's relation to the egg of his inspiration. Totally understated. A peaceful and poetic film.

**Lorna Able.**

## NOTES FROM BERLIN

**Berlin:** thriving city of arts and culture, dynamic meeting point for East and West, site of spontaneous expressions of a radical arts practice...?

Some Glasgow film/video makers had the opportunity recently to find out. The occasion was the ninth annual Berlin film and video festival, **VIPFilm: Video Installation Performance FILM**. **Chris Byrne** reports on the context of VIPFilm and related activity whilst **Lorna Able** reviews some of the works screened there.

First impressions of VIPFilm are, to say the least, encouraging: a programme of 120 films and videos, covering an incredibly wide range of techniques and subject matter were screened in the comfortable surroundings of cinemas Eiszeit and Arsenal in West Berlin, and the slightly dusty splendour of Babylon in the East.

As well as a large number of German productions, also on show were films from all over Europe and beyond, including animation from newly independent Estonia; experimental films and film-makers from Romania (their first visit to the West), Australia, Venezuela, Hungary, Eire, and a fairly sizeable contingent from Scotland. After the first mammoth evening of screenings, I began to wonder why there were no installations or performances in evidence. The explanation sounded chillingly familiar: funding cutbacks. The Berlin Senat has reportedly slashed the culture budget by DM 30,000,000 (over £10,000,000) from previous levels, in the wake of unification. There was even talk of this being the last VIPFilm. This would be a great shame, given the festival's long and impressive history. Over the past ten years, amongst the unknowns, works have been screened by more famous names, including Derek Jarman, Lars von Trier, Wim Wenders, Jean-Luc Godard, and Sam Fuller. **Heinz Hermanns**, one of the organisers: "we have tried to provide a glimpse at the independent, alternative film scene. The festival

would like to present works and people who remain outside the Cannes/Berlinale Festival scene and in whom TV is seldom represented. This festival depends, however, on the will of the Berlin Senat."

VIPFilm has its origins in the squatting movement (of the early 80's) in West Berlin. It's a tradition that has continued, slightly diminished, ever since. This is especially so since the opening of the Wall - many groups have found premises in the East, left vacant by the previous regime.

I came across an event organised in such a space, barely 300 yards East of the famous Checkpoint Charlie: Berlin's first **Electronic Arts Syndrom**, a computer art show covering three floors of a former Embassy building and a large portion of a nearby cafe, formerly a hairdresser's.

The show comprised the work of nearly forty artists, of several nationalities, all living and working in Berlin. The work ranged from prints and photographs to video, real-time computer animation, interactive programs, and multi-media installation. The scale of the show was ambitious, and judging from the opening night, well attended.

The idea sprang from a conference on computer art in Frankfurt last summer. It was here that **Axel Atta Maikath**, one of the organisers, met like-minded artists and gained the interest of the shows main sponsors, Commodore, who loaned 20 Amiga computers to the Syndrom. Axel explains the thinking behind the event: "Many artists of the E.A.S. are coming from the rock n' roll scene. . . For us the computer is just a new instrument. Visual music and sounds. We are working outside the official 'art machine'. Others are coming from film and video. We intend to organise the E.A.S. as an annual festival. Next year we'll be opening the door for international participation. The future will bring a mixture of everything."

The Electronic Arts Syndrom is merely the latest in a series of projects realised through **BOTSCHAFT**, an artist's group which donated the space. Since its foundation in 1990, events have included **Mausegang**, an installation in a tunnel between two subway stations, and **Fax The Embassies**, an international project which took place during the Gulf War. At the time of writing, a project entitled **Dromomania** has been organised, concerning traffic, the city, and architecture.

BOTSCHAFT would seem to be part of a new phenomenon in Berlin: "There's now a turbulent scene of no-budget-artists and groups taking advantage of the situation after the two-Berlins-status, creating new spaces, sometimes arty, sometimes trash and sometimes trying to produce their own domain, aside of vernissages and obsolete manners of exhibition", explained **Pit Schulz** and **Florian Zeyfang**. They see a definite role for the group: "interdisciplinarity, connecting the 'two cultures' (east/west, science/art, theory/practice, 1/0). We are twelve young and optimistic boys and girls from different disciplines with a motivation to do more than work on our special field (film, art, music, craft, philosophy, computer science, graphics, psychology). Reaction and interaction with situations and structures that involve us, learning from others, finding a way of expression in a life of interdependency. Intervention in the process of a media-informed image of the world."

**Chris Byrne.**



# ART AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES CONFERENCE

Ileana Tounta Contemporary Art Centre  
Athens, Greece. 26-27 September 1991

Along with the dynamic and multi-levelled impact that new media technology is having on the way most of us run our lives has developed the parallel realisation that these products also possess a symbolic value for creative use. Whether in the positive environment of work/art practices (word processing, faxes, computer-aided design, video production, music, animation, photography, printing, etc), or in the negative factors of surveillance, direct mail marketing, data accumulation, advertising, etc, information technology has taken root in present Western culture to such an extent that it is now recognised as a primary currency of that culture's value. As such these commodities are increasingly being seen as a new set of tools for artists to investigate and manipulate.

Recognising this, the **FAST** (*Forecasting and Assessment for Science and Technology*) programme of the XII Directorate of the European Commission co-ordinated a two day conference in association with the Ileana Tounta Contemporary Art Centre in Athens and the Greek Secretariat of Research and Technology. The objectives of the conference were:

1. To review the state of art activity in new technologies of the twelve member states.
2. To assess the possibilities for a timetable of initiatives that combined areas of common interest.
3. To promote the establishment of inter-regional and intercountry collaborations.

Unfortunately Italy and Portugal were unable to attend the Conference, however the remaining ten members took to their task in what was at times a quite passionate series of debates. Viewing the progress of the discussion as a practicing artist the contributions and backgrounds of the participants were certainly varied both in their understanding of art and its relationship to technology and the demands of artists struggling to get to use 'new' technology in whatever hybrid form suits their ends.

It was the issue of technology that created the most confusion at first, with the majority of viewpoints seeing computer graphic imaging as the frontier medium of expression, and as such that the training of artists in programming techniques would be a desirable and useful initiative. This proposition was presented in various ways by Spain (**Lluís Pérez Vidal**, a computer scientist at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia), France (**Pierre Henon**, of the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel and organisers of the 'Imagina' computer graphics festival), Greece (**Mathieu Santorineos**, director of the Art and New Technology Department of the Ileana Tounta gallery), Luxembourg (**Jean-Paul Thorn**, of the Centre Européen de Recherche d'image de Synthèse Cerise), and to a limited degree by Germany (**Alex Jarczyk** of Siemens). This motion was articulated with most clarity by **Wim van der Plas** from Holland representing the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts (ISEA) in Groningen. His concern centred upon the dominance of the United States and Japan in the area

of computer visuals and felt the time had come to define a European approach and evolve some solutions to this cultural imbalance. Quoting from his paper 'The European Situation - A Practical Approach':

*'In contrast to other 'new techniques', computer technology demands a very different approach from the artist: instead of concrete materials, he is manipulating information... It can be said that information technology provides revolutionary new opportunities to the artist ...*

*"American culture (including academic culture) is much better equipped for the development of electronic art, than the European. Still, I think it is not too late for Europe to take a stand. Europe should realise culture is not only conserving the old, but also developing the new. Europe, if it really is the flagbearer of the Western cultural tradition, could take hold of the situation and guide it in the right direction... Direction is necessary because there is a revolution going on."*

Wim van der Plas/ISEA 1991

Dr Jarczyk, although supportive of many of these points, made an interesting presentation concerning the concept of Computer Supported Co-operative Work (CSCW). He talked about the phenomena of Virtual Reality, Hypermedia and Multimedia as areas of technology which in the future will allow artists and scientists and technicians and galleries and industry and commerce to all communicate and collaborate in associated areas of creative thought and practice as part of a global network. This linked to a proposition put forward by Mathieu Santorineos who envisaged a future situation where artists would be able to function within a 'virtual studio', accessing and exchanging various elements of data and information through the advances in modern telecommunications media. Along with further contributions from Ireland (**Michael Foley**, director of the Audio Visual Centre, University College Dublin) who spoke of possible access for artistic material on the Eurostep satellite link, and Belgium (**Marcel de Munnynck**, director of the Centre Culturel Jacques Frank), the conference seemed to be losing sight of the artistic element of the discussion. In a tactical alliance between myself and Denmark (**Steingrim Laursen**, director of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art), we launched a counter-offensive against the narrowing of the technology issue to simply communication networks and computer training. It was suggested that these proposals ultimately help only the institutions involved and promise possible benefits for future generations but provide little for the development of present contemporary creative practice. Furthermore, the objectives of computer training and education are fine in themselves, but the student is very likely to seek the more lucrative avenues for his or her skills in commerce rather than investigating the creative potential of computers for art-making; especially in the current global economic climate.

From these initial discussions were distilled a list of sixteen key points for further analysis. These were then grouped into three active clusters and individuals allocated to small working parties to develop strategies around them: Education and Documentation, Research and Cooperation, and Money. In terms of priorities, Research and Cooperation won the support of the Chair and the majority of delegates - the twin objectives being the establishment of an electronic mail (E-mail) network and pursuit of the concept of the 'virtual studio'.

The intention behind both the establishment of an E-mail network and the setting up of a 'virtual studio' was seen as allowing artists to talk direct to other artists and experts around the world and exchange views, discuss ideas and develop cooperation on projects. It is assumed, however, that any artist interested in the electronic arts will already be equipped with a decent personal computer and modem to allow them access to the E-mail network by linking up with a nearby university or large corporation. Similarly with the 'virtual studio', it will rely principally on centralised hardware and operational access based within institutions and businesses.

So in conclusion, it seems fair to say that after two days of discussion the issue of art and new technology went the way of communications technology. This situation has unfortunately left artists with no direct benefits from the discussions as a lot of assumptions were made about their position within the general academic and cultural environment as well as their personal economic abilities. A full report on the *Art and Technology Conference* is being produced for presentation to the EC Commissioner for his consideration, after that the wheels of bureaucracy may start to turn, but as I have outlined earlier the direction these wheels are pointing is not towards the pockets of artists but to the benefit of various institutes, research laboratories, large galleries, colleges and universities.

**Alan Robertson**

## BRAVE NEW WORLD

**Blue Skies:** a conference on art and technology. 25th-27th October 1991. Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The conference focused on the development of 'Blue Sky' research and the implications this held as a source of 'creative' production for artists. The pamphlet accompanying the conference defined the general scope of the conferences' concerns: *'How can the results of this 'pure' research be harnessed by artists? What are the drawbacks, implications and possibilities for art and artists?'*

Given such a brief, the speakers demonstrated an eclectic range from the technologically competent such as the Dutch based artist **Jeffrey Shaw** to the self-proclaimed 'street-Luddite' informed level of **Genesis P. Orridge**. Other speakers included **Stelarc** (Australia), **Mark Pauline** (USA), **Rose English** (UK) and **Roy Ascott** (UK). All the speakers gave talks on their works with the exception of Roy Ascott, who read a paper outlining his own insights into the nature of technology and artistic usage.

The international range of speakers was refreshing although the absence of **Kristine Stiles** (the artist and theoretician) was regrettable in terms of the critical insights she may have made on the conference. The presence of Rose English and the chair **Annette Kuhn** took on greater significance as they were the only women on the conference panel.

Over the past few years, technology has become a key curatorial exhibition concept (e.g. *The Aesthetics of the Future* at the ICA). The tendency informing this 'bandwagon' approach has led to what could be described as a 'fetishisation' of the technology at the

expense of foregrounding or deconstructing particular issues/themes or ideologies embodied through the development of the technology itself. The result has been, in this country at least, that the level of public debate concerning artistic uses of technology has been largely restricted to the halcyon confines of key specialist magazines. It was with this reservation in mind that I attended *Blue Skies*. Was this a conference by which critical issues of debate, hinted at all too cryptically in the accompanying literature, could be openly debated or just another excuse for the stand-back-in-amazement at the appliance-of-science routine?

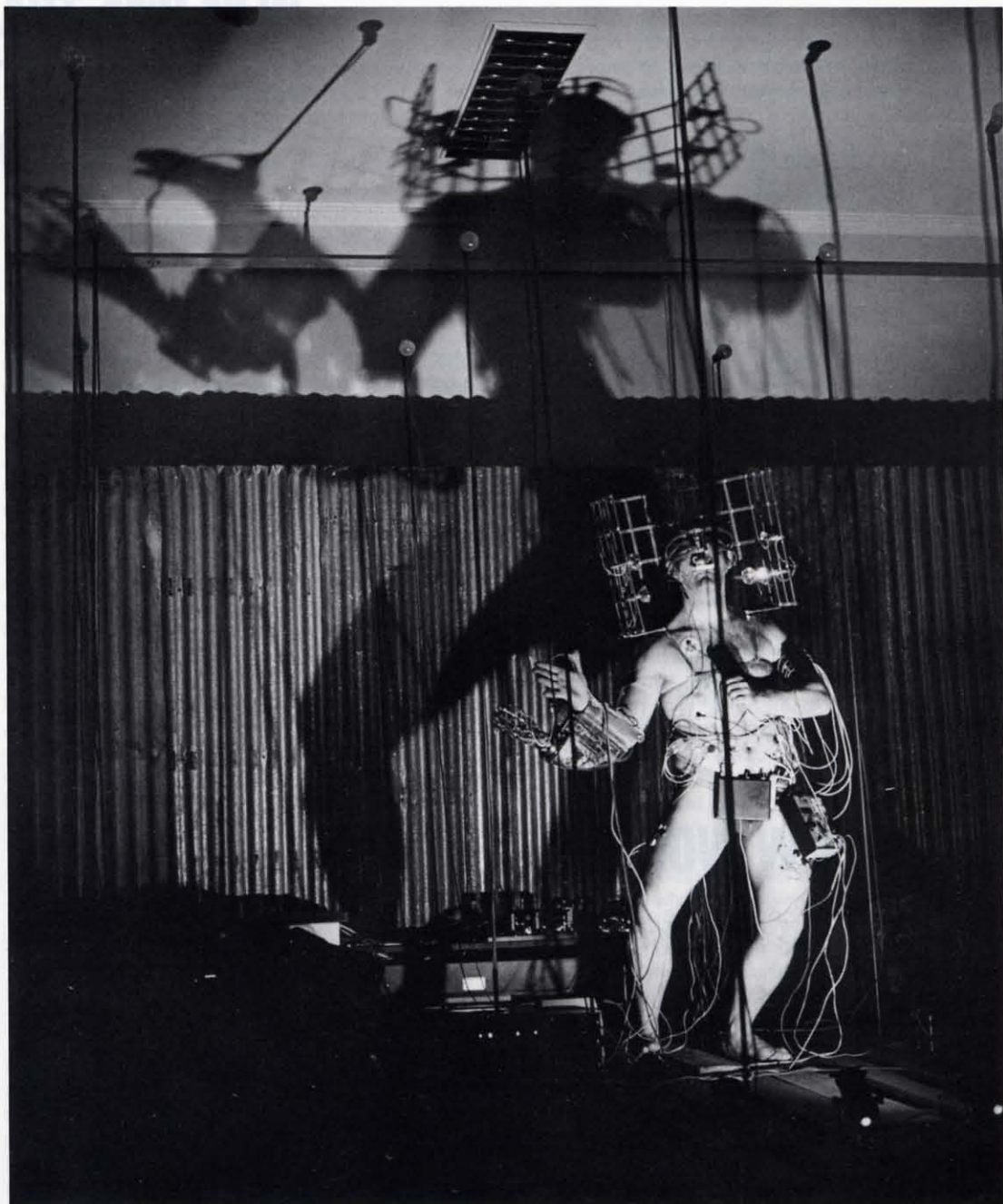
As happens with most conferences, issues raised from the floor were wide-ranging and not necessarily within the limits of the agendas posed. Within the context of an arena normally inhabited by intellectual terrorists of the most specialist kind, this proved a refreshing antidote and marked a point of easy accessibility for most delegates. More material, such as a bibliography or articles on artists' work might have been provided by the organisers to avoid the kind of alienated intellectual limbo that may have occurred.

The positive insight that went some way towards mapping-out the significance of technology as providing a new visual mode and 'tools' of exploration was highlighted in the work and talk by Stelarc and by Roy Ascott's academic presentation. Essentially, Ascott's argument of a 'new connectivism' centring on unmediated lines of electronic communication (a connected world of disparate electronic/computerised forms) posed an epistemological break with previous artistic canons of representation. Ascott rightly reminded us that technology offered the means of creating whole other worlds, a 'new nature' unhindered by issues of representation and culturally loaded codes, conventions and ideologies. This position was implicit in the work and approach of Stelarc who stressed the 'structural' basis in his use of electronic/computerised technology as inherently linked with the processes and physiology of 'the body' and therefore outside the concerns of culture and ideology.

Enticing though such 'Brave New World' declarations are - or as Jeffrey Shaw pointed out, how 'seductive' the uses and play-value embodied by technology - such perspectives are potentially retrogressive. First, the negation of the ideological aims and objectives underpinning the Blue Skies research in America, namely military research, needs to be challenged and addressed. The source of origin of such technologies and its primary military use is an integral part of the thinking informing the development of electronic imaging systems in the form of surveillance and weapon devices. Stelarc staunchly advocated the neutrality of technology, pointing out that his use of technology originates from Japan, a so-called militarily dis-empowered state. However, Genesis P. Orridge pointed out the naivety of such a position commenting "...the label you stick on it (any technological device), whether it's 'pleasure or pain', it's just a label. You can use it for whatever you want".

Mark Pauline entered into this fracas alongside Stelarc by undermining my second point of contention regarding the supposed neutrality of technology, namely gender, although this point was generally underdeveloped and consistently bypassed by certain male speakers. In what appeared to be bids to disarm potential criticism of his 'parodic' macho-machines of aggression, Pauline repeatedly asserted the non-gender-specific nature of technology and his work, underlining how women also participate in SRL





Stelarc, *Amplified Body, Automatic Arm and Third Hand, Ballance Art Gallery, 1990*. Photo: Polixeni Papapetrou

(Survival Research Laboratories). In spite of such 'valiant' attempts to assert gender balance, this clearly overlooks the basic issue that technology is itself an arena which has developed around issues and processes of working/thinking over the past two hundred years to the systematic exclusion of women. Annette Kuhn pointed out the difficulties surrounding the current level of debate concerning technology and gender: *"When I say that technology and masculinity are linked, this has nothing to do with who makes it or uses it. I was talking about a series of cultural discourses. So a woman who happens to be a computer programmer is coded as masculine"*. The argument that women's work in technology denies the apparent masculine gender bias is to an extent obsolete. Kuhn was careful to try to avoid the essentialist perspective on this problem, which posits a binary opposition in terms of 'masculine' (technology/science/ rationality) and 'feminine' (nature/intuition) as the means of negotiating the way around this problem.

Technology is not, therefore, neutral, it reflects certain power structures and is couched in highly gender

specific terms. The level of debate around this issue is woefully inadequate but as a recent publication points out: *'Technological change is a process subject to struggles for control by different groups. As such, the outcomes depend primarily on the distribution of power and resources within society.'* (1)

Given that the contemporary technological domain is 'masculine' - the result of a scientific heritage shaped and dominated largely by male practitioners - this is not a moot point within the context of a conference on how artists use this knowledge and shape this as a new form of practice. Vast generalisations aside, the use of technology by contemporary artists does reflect these gender biases. In spite of the fascinating range in the artistic applications of technology, the fact that this new form is a break with the stranglehold of representation and attendant artistic codes and conventions, this has tended ultimately to result in a 'toys for boys' scenario, a desire to succumb to the fetishisation of technology and the art object. Clearly, there are women artists who utilise technology within their work as a means of criticising mainstream ideologies (Judith Goddard's piece in the recent *Video Positive* biennale bears

witness to this). However, the extent to which the fetishisation of technology within artistic production will persist remains to be seen and certainly needs to be challenged in order that this supposedly 'neutral' situation in art production moves onto a more critically edged approach.

Significantly, Copyart is not a white gallery space. It is a working environment where people come and go all day or may in fact be there for the whole day, every day. Some people would come in specifically to see the installation while others were there primarily to use the centre's facilities. Although this situation opened up a number of possibilities for these two quite particular audiences, there were problems too. This 'dual audience' situation was prone to cause some feelings of awkwardness for individuals who came specifically to see the show as there was a vague feeling of rudely intruding on a working environment. However, all the work for the installation was constructed and copied at Copyart and certainly on one level the installation served as a glorious example of the potential of copiers when manipulated by knowledgeable hands to produce large scale, vibrant and challenging artworks.

This recent installation which Pawson constructed from literally hundreds of source images, produced a saturated visual bombardment which was genuinely kaleidoscopic and mesmerising. The wall space, mainly between the many windows, was filled with a variety of different thematic copy blocks, utilising images from diverse sources such as packaging/copying instructions for recycled photocopy paper, though to pious copyright warning notices, repeated on top of one another until they resembled the desperate and meaningless symbols they are. Images of de-construction/re-construction abound. Scalpel blades duel with legions of stylized copiers while giant "paper-jammed" symbols joust with distorted litter warnings. Through this process of 'compare and contrast', Pawson transforms meaningless individual fragments into tiny icons of potential transformation.

The ceiling was by far the largest uninterrupted area and was suitably engulfed by a complex series of mutant and bastardised paisley pattern designs of the kind that adorn 'thirtysomething' braces and boxer shorts. These designs were attached in combinations of crosses, distinguished by copying on recycled (slightly off-white) and 'clean' paper. Pawson's current trademark text, "AGGRESSIVE SCHOOL OF CULTURAL WORKERS", adorns each fragment of the design alongside the acid-dripping test tubes, cartoon bombs and skull n' crossbones which amongst other images construct the different segments.

Interestingly Pawson does not have a traditional fine-art background but took a sociology degree at London City University where his final thesis was written on the subject of Mail-Art (see his essay in Variant no.7 pp. 9-12). Pawson has been an active member of the International Mail-Art network for many years and he produces many artworks/cultural artifacts/propaganda utilising the popular currencies of T-shirts, books, badges, stickers etc., as well as participating in and organising many other events and projects. To this end his recent show seems to function like a strobe photograph, a frozen image of a fluid and organic art-practice. Pawson produces small but potent pieces of ammunition for use in the cultural war of attrition. Contrary to a current apathetic vogue, his work is evidence that this conflict is on-going against the stupefying malaise induced by the fantastic banality of transnational global culture.

**Ross Sinclair**

*(An ironic postscript to this review is that if the government's proposed channel-tunnel rail terminal at Kings Cross goes ahead, Community Copyart and homes for over 150 people will be demolished to make way for the high-speed Euro-link.)*

Ascott's claims that artists should enter the 'real' world by no longer being 'ghettoised' by art and its exclusivist connotations through attempting to 'lock' into technology as a new mode of visual art practice (connectivism) is commendable if not a little underdeveloped and naive. My point here is that culture and ideology need not represent a 'rear-view mirror', as Stelarc stipulated, to then be dismissed in order to promote some technologically routed artistic vanguard for a new futuristic way of living. Genesis P. Orridge, in his closing remarks of the conference, bore a seminal note of caution for future developments in the artistic use of technology: "I think technology is mirroring us - unless we look at who 'us' is...then we are just going to continue reflecting the same negative mess". To negotiate the future one must first negotiate the present and the past.

**Helen Cadwallader**

1. Judy Wajcman: 'Feminism Confronts Technology' (p.23), Polity Press 1991.

**MARK PAWSON**

Community CopyArt, London,  
7th October to 8th November 1991.

Community Copyart is a collective of five workers who run an arts resource centre which is situated within the sprawling complex of Kings Cross/St. Pancras rail stations in London. This resource centre houses the very latest in black and white/colour copying and also offers Macintosh desk top publishing technology, all of which is available for use by the public. Also offered are a range of services designed to compliment the resource centre, such as training, graphic design, art workshops and exhibitions.

**Mark Pawson's** recent exhibition was an installation of immense proportions, covering 2200 square feet, using over 1600 b+w A3 photocopies. These copies crowded every available inch of the centre's wall and ceiling surface. At the close of the exhibition the installation was removed from the wall/ceiling and the sheets of paper assembled into an edition of 80 books, approximately 24 pages each, numbered and with an extra page showing overall views of the completed installation. These books were intended to be enjoyed in their own right or possibly de-assembled for re-use and plagiarising.

This recent approach to formal exhibition differs from Pawson's earlier work, shown last year with **Ben Allen** at Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Pawson's concerns then seemed to be centred around the construction of hundreds of individual - and indeed unique - pieces made from coloured copies. These pieces were made by copying repeatedly in many different colours, layering over and over again to produce dense and lavish images. In his recent show at Copyart he has returned to a more conventional multiplicity of identical images: an installation of *wallpaper* where the images are not intended to function individually.





# Review

## TOTALLY WIRED

This section marks Variant's first coverage of publications in the comics field. By rights, this should be marked by a brief history of the comics medium, as is almost mandatory when a critical eye is first cast upon graphic art forms. Comics are a contemporary growth industry, and although most of the profits go to the big American corporations the 'big two' are Marvel and DC, purveyors of the stock (and immensely profitable) superhero genre the industry has expanded enough for alternative concerns to be presented. Simon Herbert looks at a few recent items.

Comics were first realised in protean form with the adventures of *'The Yellow Kid'* in William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal (eliciting the epithet "yellow journalism" that Hearst's accusers levelled against him for his sensationalist journalistic practices)... the "funny papers", i.e. the cartoon strip sections of U.S. periodicals, rapidly proved popular, and artists such as Windsor McKay were quick to demonstrate the surreal potential of melding image and text in his series *'Little Nemo'*... the 30's gave birth to iconographic *Urbemensch* in Superman and Batman that remain vital over 50 years later... in the 50's, Dr Wertham convinced a nation in the throes of McCarthyism that comics such as EC's *'Shock Suspense Stories'* so threatened to pollute the precious bodily fluids of U.S. youth that a self imposed comics code effectively retarded the medium for decades after... meanwhile, without such restraints, the European comics scene metamorphosed into the ground breaking visual narrative techniques for adults rather than pimply adolescents... the sub culture of the swinging sixties fed into underground comics, in the U.S. via *Weird* and *Zap Comix*, in the U.K. with *Oz* magazine and the subsequent media and legislative witch hunt against drug and sex related comics throughout the land... in the 80's the growth of specialist comic shops changed the demographic targets of comic publishers, who consequently produced more sophisticated "graphic novels" for post adolescents (in reality, comic retailers

embraced an adult market by the inclusion of tits n'ass, graphic violence and gore; most 'adult' product is about as sophisticated as a Schwarzenegger video...).

The following comics directly feed from some of these histories, whilst consciously ignoring others. The small independent press is usually a labour of love, comparable to the efforts of the independent cinema network which produces material outside of the regulated money earning potential of the Hollywood 'concept movie'. Unfortunately they sell negligible units; comic stores tend to be populated by people more interested in whether the Hulk is stronger than the Thing than in finding out how the medium can embrace more mundane, and resonant world views.

**Nocturnal Emissions**, by **Fiona Smythe**, is immediately marked out as an independent work, for its central character is a woman, and not a generic one in seam bursting bra clamped to the leg of a steroidal male hero (within the mainstream comics industry, artists refer to this stock character as 'Mirage' as more often than not, she only appears on the cover). Smythe consciously embraces the underground legacy of hallucinatory panel structures. Most pages contain a single panel (rather than the mainstream narrative of many panels) creating a series of tableaux populated by crammed ephemera that sum up a state of mind, rather than relying overtly on narrative exposition. The central character is Gert, also known as The Manequin, who introduces herself as 'every woman', someone 'made of fibre glass' and who can 'change everyday'. Her hollow frame cannot keep up with the pace of city life, represented by claustrophobic tower blocks, a groping seducer with a hard on, and a backdrop of numerous alcohol bottles and ampules. Gert moves to Dog City, Nevada, generic small town America, a cozy town with only 560 people with 5 babies on the way. As part of her process of self reinvention she gets a job as house keeper at the local nunnery, the sisters of Dymphna Convent. Her potential new lifestyle is soon interrupted, though, by the arrival in town of 'Worry': a crotch bulging, flare clad, ray ban wearing male archetype, whose presence immediately threatens to subvert her efforts by appealing to her (hidden) appetite for the perverse. The whole story, to be continued in the next issue, takes place in only eight pages and embodies a playful rendering of superficial sexual stereotypes with a hint at the unsavoury under currents of an American Dream gone sour. *Nocturnal Emissions* wears its content, like Smythe's frenetic renderings, on its sleeve.

Definitely not playful, and far more ambitious in scope, is **K.L. Roberts' *The Teroress***. The title character, Andrea, is that real life cliché of the embittered individual who just can't take it any more, and consequently embarks on a shooting spree that results in 50 people dead in a shopping mall. The language she uses whilst raking the mall with automatic gun fire is straight out of the early 70's school of female liberation comic cliché dialogue ("*Die you ass licking ignorant cattle*"), yet Andrea turns out to be capable, at least, of remorse. Rather than killing herself as the forces of law and order move in, she gives herself up after realising that her anger has disappeared immediately after the act.

The subversive intent of *The Teroress* is, of course, that the standard gender of the sociopath has been reversed. According to Roberts he 'didn't want not to use a woman because it would'nt be politically correct'. Whether granting equal opportunities to crazed remorseless killers is politically correct or not seems more than a little weird to me. However, where the comic does succeed is that the consequent abuse that

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Andrea encounters raped by a police officer in the back of the arrest van, beaten up by large dyke cell mates, exploited by her lawyer who plays on her emotions in order to ride the legislative gravy train, pestered by studios such as Monster Productions for exclusive movie rights raises questions about systematically passive representations of women generally in the media. At times far too naive for its own good, *The Terroress* at least hints at deconstructive analysis of the media, especially on the back cover which features a signed cheesecake pose of everybody's favourite sociopath.

Continuing the theme of women in comics, **Ceasefire** is the first issue of an ongoing British comics anthology collectively titled *Fanny* and initiated by **Cath Tate**. This first issue features contributions by twenty women writers and artists on the theme of the Gulf War. As could be expected, the works range from sophisticated observation and outrage through to tedious agit prop. However, with no contribution longer than six pages, *Ceasefire* allows the reader to take the rough with the smooth, and connects the individual sections to make the sum greater than the parts.

The invention behind US veteran artist **Trina Robbins'** Gulf War board games comes as no surprise, and **Julie Hollings** comfortably switches her vitriol from her usual target of sex (in *Deadline's Beryl The Bitch*) to that of chatty 'friendly fire' scud missiles ('my name's Sam the Scud' the missile tells a fleeing victim). The highlight of the issue is **Carol Swain's Spoils of War**, which depicts a seventeen year old's entry into the first stages of dehumanising military life, at the same time as a major's speech, delivered to the media, disguises the horrors of war behind the bland rhetoric of statistics. Not only simultaneously touching and subjective, it is beautifully rendered, using black and white to great effect.

Mixed with some piquant observations in the single cartoons of **Sharon Rudahl** and **Lesley Ruda**, and an irreverent belly laugh by **Barbara Nolan**, the first issue of *Fanny* is a welcome addition to the current comics scene.

It is a shame that the same cannot be said **Graham Harwood's If Comix Mental**, which also takes the Gulf War as its subject matter. Announced as Britain's first computer generated comic, its glossy 35 pages delineate the events that brought a Gulf War vet from being the pride of the air force down to a dispossessed street bum.

The intentions are worthy, but the whole narrative is handled in a heavy handed manner: the pilot in question decides to shoot down his fellow cohort CAPTAIN CAPITOL, ditches in the sea, is disfigured by oily sludge, and is rescued by a seemingly benign corporation who in reality are selling off his remaining body parts. Realising this, he regrows his body by stating his tacit rejection of everything, and lives a squalid life in the shadows of Waterloo Bridge.

Although the inherent machoism and misogyny of the military fighter pilot is foregrounded by the character's language, its articulation is that of a Class War acolyte, replete with onomatopoeic references to capitalist structures. It is very difficult to believe that this creature would ever have been initially accepted into a military elite typified by conservative values. The publisher **Stefan Szczelkun**, of Working Press, announces *If Comix Mental* as a 'dark satire', yet fails to recognise that satire, to be effective, must utilise the credible language of its target. A case of 'cyberpunk' without the 'cyber'.



**Dead Trees** is another anthology format comic, which is produced in Glasgow. The second issue weaves the image of trees through a number of the stories. *Leaves From The Chimera Tree*, by **Graham Johnstone**, utilizes leaf motifs, substituting their natural veined forms with shades of the social bioorganism: leaf 8, 'controlling operations', features a male individual with thoughts transmitted from his head along the leaf's structure. Less profound, but a lot more fun, is **Harry Healy's Dead Trees On The Freeway**, in which a group of teenagers are forced to come up with novel and tangential uses of personal possessions, in order to clear the road of some trees that have blocked their path (the strip is also gently satirical of generic cartoon teenagers I was almost sure that someone was going to say to them 'if it wasn't for you darned kids those trees would still be there'). With its focus on illustration rather than narrative, and an unerring analysis of the mundane, *Dead Trees* has a tendency to look like a collective bolthole for ex art students and print makers. This shouldn't necessarily put you off, as much of the work such as **Colin Forrester's Long Distance Information** is inventive. I get the feeling that Graham Johnstone, the editor, needs more material to choose from, which would iron out some of the weaker work. Worth the price of admission alone for Healy's *Today's Highlights*, which combines microcosm and macrocosm, personal life and anthropology in a single page.

**Simon Herbert**

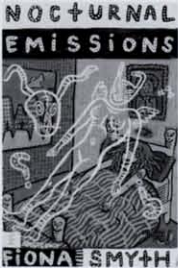
*Nocturnal Emissions*: \$3.00 plus postage from Vortex Comics Inc. PO Box 215 Stn F. Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4 1T0.

*Terroress*: \$2.50 plus postage from Helpless Anger Productions, c/o Tom Roberts, 333 S. East St. Avenue, 209, Oak Park, IL 60302. Available in the UK via Counter Productions, PO Box 556, London SE5 ORL.

*Ceasefire and Fanny*: £2.60 from Cath Tate, 39 Kingswood Road, London SW2 4JE.

*Dead Trees*: £1.75 from Graham Johnstone, 1/1, 4 Melrose Gardens, Glasgow G20 6RA.

*If Comix Mental*: £4.50 includes free record and poster from Working Press, 85 St. Agnes Place, kensington, Lndon SE11 5SB



PRINTED MATTER



# Review

## ON THE MASS BOMBING OF IRAQ AND KUWAIT, COMMONLY KNOWN AS 'THE GULF WAR'. WITH LEONARDS SHORTER CATHECHISM.

Tom Leonard.  
AK Press in association with Edward Polin Press. £1.95. ISBN 1873176 25 2.

Inasmuch as this is an examination of the conduct of the war at home, it is towards Parliament and the parties of Opposition that the weight of the criticism is levelled in this pamphlet: politics were suspended for a 'de facto Government of National Unity', which stifled within itself any attempt to reflect the division and outright opposition towards the war, expressed by so much of the population.

Tom Leonard's examination of that Government's language reveals a function and strategy which is utterly disingenuous: a deceit. It translates it into understandable language (characterised by an angry black irony) which follows the abandonment of the purpose of Parliamentary, representative democracy into offering free reign to total control of the media and the press by the M.O.D. A short step from bingo to jingo for some.

*'The Observer, like many other 'qualities' found time to praise Mr. Majors 'Tone'. Now one knows what tone should be adopted by a British prime minister when his troops are firing cruise missiles into civilian cities.'*

Describing the T.V. reports as indistinguishable from those normally associated with military regimes such as El Salvador and Chile, the bombardment of 'anti-language' is set out initially as the construction of a demonology around Hussein - a primer for things to come - and a protective silence around any judgement of the economic transaction taking place: this builds into a view that critical investigation of the reality of the war has been suppressed and exchanged for cosmetics. With the Government hiring a public relations firm to 'sell the war', normality becomes total censorship under the M.O.D. The writing - completed over a short period of time - contains the emotional drive of an immediate response balanced with a scrutinizing monitoring. It reverses the perspective of the fate of a late night radio report, which conveyed the U.N. envoy's discovery of 'major and dramatic' cause for world concern, namely the plight of refugees fleeing into Iran after suffering the effects of Allied bombing and devastation and which advocated the lifting of the embargo on vital food and medicine. The later early morning T.V. news, which Leonard stays up to watch, contains no mention of the report, yet a clear imputation persists that the refugees had been napalmed by Hussein's forces.

He shows propaganda extending into past, present and future, forming the ludicrous logic of the politics of the war: the creation of Kuwait itself, the noblesse oblige of its monarchy and any notions of there being either democracy or freedom to defend in the first place.

The second part of the book - the subtitle is a poem in itself - takes a complementary format in countering the anti-language of censorship: a catechism of questions and answers other than those learned by rote through the repetitive cycles of the T.V. and radio broadcasts. The hypocrisy 'normally' ignored is illuminated through revealing comparisons and cross reference: the high principles of U.S. foreign policy and their respect for international law becomes clearly dependant on whether or not they are an ideological weapon or a nuisance.

In a recent article by John Pilger - prefaced by the same excerpt from Leonard's *Radical Renfrew* - he stated that '*Legitimate inquiry journalism has been criminalised*': a State which enforces its belief that certain information should be kept secret so as not to aid the enemy, makes an enemy of the people of that State, particularly when it comes to masking what, according to this enquiry, we know enough about to call 'Political mass-murder'.

Billy Clark

## GARDEN OF ASHES

Cookie Mueller. Hanuman Books, ISBN 0937815 36 5. Price £3.50 + 0.30p postage. Distributed in the UK by Counter-Productions, PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL

The ten stories contained here are short, sharp and witty. The prose style has a hint of irony and thankfully few adjectives. Mueller's voice, a very convincing first person narrative, is clearly defined and says what is what in a down-to-earth way; the result is the feeling of being addressed by another human being saying, *this is what I honestly think*.

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Some important political points are made directly and sub-textually, though I have problems with a couple of them. A rather strange homage is paid to the virtues of the homeless and to homelessness itself, which is seen as the ultimate and most efficient form of recycling; ergo, the best strategy for saving the planet. And along with this, not too unexpectedly, is a fair whiff of Malthusianism. Something I find rather weird.

A green/New Age slant runs through most of the stories at one level or another and Mueller is not scared to take the piss out of it. This is what makes the booklet extremely enjoyable to read. Any story opening with the sentence, 'One day in the park, a helicopter swooped in and dropped little pills of LSD on everybody' deserves to be read.

The characters described seem to be outside the mainstream, like John Waters, drug users, underground thespians and Divine. But the idea of these stories being just about a counter-culture outside of the mainstream of American life is tiresome. They are about much more than that: as the introductory quote, from that famous nineteenth century Scot, Dr. Peebles, says, 'It is important that you recognise that there is no experience that comes into your life that is below your dignity.'

Jim Ferguson.

of U.S. policy in Central America, plus a general analysis of how the withdrawal of Soviet deterrence effects U.S. policy in global terms.

The Panama escapade was important for two very crucial reasons. For U.S. policy makers it 'helped clarify the **new** national consensus on 'the circumstances in which military intervention makes sense'. And secondly, taken in conjunction with the Soviets walking off the pitch, the U.S. was free 'to be more unconstrained in its exercise of violence'. The implications of these two factors came to horrific fruition in the attacks on Iraq and Kuwait. This book gives essential background on how it became so easy for the U.S. and its allies to launch the most ferocious bombing campaign in history.

At the time of the Panama invasion, U.S. policy in the Gulf was very different to the present (the only constant factor being the pursuit of cheap oil). In fact, with reference to Iraq, 'they've just announced again, right in the middle of the Panama invasion, that they're relaxing loan sanctions'. This is a far cry from mass bombing and unremitting sanctions covering basic foodstuffs and medical supplies. Indeed, it constitutes a U-turn of almost unbelievable magnitude. It seems obvious that one major reason for the delay in starting the war was to give the propaganda machine time to swing into action.

Herbert Marcuse puts forward the idea of a permanent Enemy as a way of controlling the activities of the population inside the advanced 'pluralist' societies:

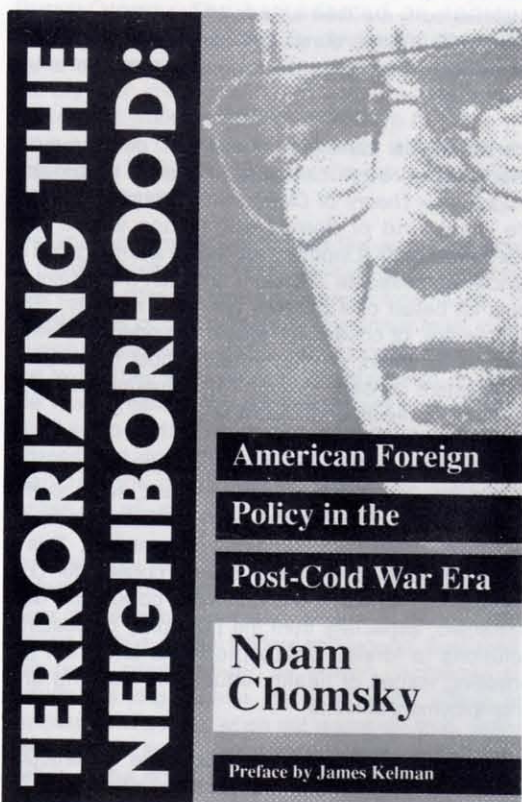
# TERRORISING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA.

Noam Chomsky  
Pressure Drop Press/AK Press,  
3 Balmoral Place, Stirling, Scotland.  
£3.95. ISBN 1 873176 00 7.

Media Control: **The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda.**  
Noam Chomsky. Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, P.O. Box 2726, Westfield, New Jersey, 07091 USA.  
Distributed in Britain by AK Press. £2.00.

**T**errorizing the Neighbourhood is an excellent introduction to Chomsky's political thinking. It is the annotated text of a lecture given in Edinburgh in January 1990, just after the invasion of Panama by U.S. troops. There is a preface by the writer James Kelman and an introduction by Linda Gray of Scottish Education and Action for Development, the organisers of the lecture.

No matter whether or not people agree with Chomsky's philosophical views, particularly those in the field of linguistics (and their metaphysical implications), his political analysis is as important as it is annoying to the rich and powerful. Here he gives a thorough analysis



'Neither the growing productivity nor the high standard of living depends on the threat from without, but their use for containment of social change and perpetuation of servitude does. The Enemy is the common denominator of all doing and undoing. And the Enemy is not identical with actual communism or actual capitalism - he is, in both cases, the real spectre of liberation' ('One Dimensional Man', p.51).



Re

*Media Control: Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (March 1991), looks at specific instances in the history of the U.S. where the Enemy has been manufactured and demonised through the use of newspapers and, to a lesser extent, other media. The starting point for this is the Creel Commission, a government propaganda agency formed in 1916 by Woodrow Wilson 'which succeeded, within six months, in turning a pacifist population into a hysterical war-mongering population which wanted to destroy everything German, tear the Germans limb from limb, go to war and save the world. That was the major achievement...'. The lessons learned by the ruling elites in the U.S. from the success of the Creel Commission were not allowed to go to waste. A similar strategy was employed after the war to whip-up the Red Scare, which was/is fairly successful in undermining trades unions, unruly elements in the press and people who held/hold subversive political views. Dissent was pushed to the margins, to go unreported or to be vilified, while from 1917 until the early 1980's, the Russians were always about to invade the Land of the Free and the Brave. The ideology of the Superman cartoons and films makes absolute sense within this framework. A further interesting point here is that the U.S. war-mongering propaganda was based on information and invention from 'the time, as they put it in their secret deliberations, "to control the thought of all the world"'.

Chomsky argues that 'State propaganda, when supported by the educated classes and when no deviation is permitted from it, can have a big effect. It was a lesson learned by Hitler and many others, and it has been pursued to this day'. Ruling elites, of whatever sort, are then able to impose their ideology and values on the 'dumb masses' and only give out information that suits the objectives of the elites themselves.

The ideological framework of the U.S. 'democracy' is described through criticism of Walter Lippman's *Progressive Theory of Democratic Thought*, in which the ideal kind of democracy is one where 'the bewildered herd' (Lippman) are led by a small group of people who execute decisions and run the Affairs of State on behalf of a passive, spectator majority. The masses are, of course, too stupid to understand what is good for them, so propaganda must be used to manufacture consent. This is what Lippman called 'a revolution in the art of democracy'.

Given that it no longer makes a great deal of sense to invoke the Soviet Threat, new demons, such as the pineapple face Noriega and the great Satan Saddam, have been given the full propaganda treatment. This is part of the process of manufacturing consent for U.S. aggression. It keeps the domestic population duly distracted, especially from the possibility of peaceful solutions to foreign policy problems and from the pressing issues of health, education, housing and unemployment at home.

Of the list of propaganda exercises here, a particular point concerning the Gulf War deserves attention:

*'When Scud missiles hit Israel, nobody in the press applauded. Again that's an interesting fact about a well functioning propaganda system. We might ask, why not? After all, Saddam Hussein's arguments were just as good as George Bush's arguments... Let's just take Lebanon. Saddam Hussein says that he can't stand annexation. He can't let Israel annex the Syrian Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, in opposition to the unanimous agreement of the Security Council... Israel has been occupying Southern Lebanon for thirteen*

*years in violation of the Security Council resolutions that it refuses to abide by. In the course of that period it attacked all of Lebanon, still bombs most of Lebanon at will. He can't stand it. He might have read the Amnesty International report on Israeli atrocities in the West Bank. His heart is bleeding. He can't stand it. Sanctions can't work because the U.S. vetoes them. Negotiations can't work because the U.S. blocks them. What's left but force? He's been waiting years. Thirteen years in the case of Lebanon, twenty years in the case of the West Bank.'*

Chomsky is at his best here, when highlighting the hypocrisy of those in power. He provides vital information for the struggle against oppression and greed. Indeed for the class struggle. He raises the spectre of liberation, the spectre all ruling elites despise.

**Jim Ferguson**

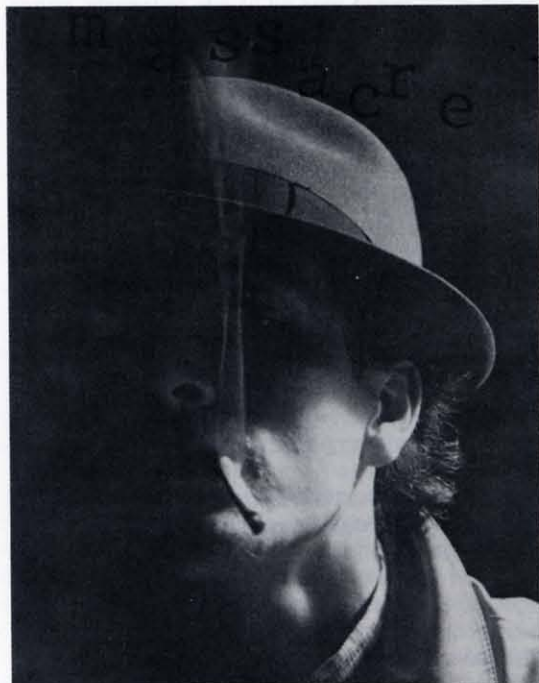
## MASSACRE 2

Edited by Roberta McKeown  
Indelible Inc., BCM 1698,  
London WC1N 3XX.  
Price £4.00. ISBN 0958 - 1154.

**J**ust as I was sitting down to scribble a few words about **massacre 2**, I was interrupted by the sound of the buzzer at the tenement close door. A disembodied Liverpudlian voice entered my ear asking "Would you like to talk about God?" I answered NO, with what must have sounded to him like a disembodied West of Scotland voice. He, however, continued, "Are you disillusioned with religion, with the state of the world today? Religion has been responsible for a lot of tragedy in the world, what is it about religion that you disagree with?"

There's an endless list of things, I said, unable to think of a single one.

"Oh", he says, "there's a man trying to get in the door here, I better go, bye."



PRINTED  
MATTER



Bye, I said, put the handset back on the wall and sat down to start writing. Which is what I'm doing now, though, of course, by the time this comes to be read, writing this will not be what I am doing. So arrives THE GAP; THE ABSURD; THE FRAGMENTATION; UNDERMINING AND/OR DISCARDING OF PLOT; and several OTHER existential conundrums, which reside in the contents of *massacre* under the headings of Prose, Parody, Perspective and Pictures. And these contents are, indeed, not without humour.

The five prose pieces are well worth reading. In fact, as the quality of writing is consistently high (and very entertaining) it seems unfair to single things out for special praise. However, the parody of Mickey Spillane by **Perry Natal** in *The Deconstruction Set* is marvellous; the right-wing attitudes and Red-paranoia of the intrepid Milan Spickey don't suffer at the demise of the cold-war. Spickey's posture is so macho, that one cannot but laugh at the stupidity. And he sure does smoke a lot of Luckies, kitten.

The Perspective section has a rather serious essay on the *Theatre of the Absurd* which looks at the dramatic work of Beckett, Genet and Adamov. It comes from the standpoint of Camus and Martin Esslin and stands against Sartre's idea of 'man as event and man as History within the event'. The only thing I found disappointing about the essay was a total lack of reference to any of the novels these writers produced. I for one would have been interested to read something about Beckett's novels as well as the plays, since the plays are too often talked about and the novels not talked about enough. As for the Pictures, *Meryl Streep's Mouth* takes the cake.

**Jim Ferguson.**

## POSTCARDS FROM POLAND

Jola Scicinska and Maria Jastrzebska  
Working Press, 1991, £6.99.  
ISBN 1870736 060.

**V**ery occasionally one can pick up a book and read many of one's own thoughts and experiences. The same images impressed in one's own mind crop up. However, such a gelling of ideas can make it difficult to be objective: concepts which seem perfectly clear to one reader may be obscure allusions which produce confusion verging on contempt in another. So who is this book particularly aimed at - the graphic artist, the compatriot, the gay activist or the culture tourist? We have to consider the design, the historical analysis and the small and big P politics.

The format of this book is simple: generally each leaf is designed as a postcard image in the upside of the page, with text on the underside. The book divides graphically in the middle, emphasising the chronological order of experience/events as past/present. Indeed, the schema of the book

suggests symbiotic polarity: image-text transforms into moral conundra; black and white imagery feeds off and feeds the stark pattern of words on paper.

The division between East and West is powerfully reconstructed by this style and helps to overthrow the common misconception that Poland was and still is in Eastern Europe: Poland's history is such because it is neither east nor west but a European territorial battlefield. Neither should it be mistaken with *mittel-Europa*, which internally is a much comfier, inward-looking situation where conflicts are ousted from the cosy chatter of a Viennese *Kaffee Haus*. The images here are too hard-cut, ideas are sheered into sharp divides. If I have any qualms about the Political allegory with the Personal one, it is made obvious within the glossary, where *Section 28* sandwiches between *Ghetto Uprising* and *Katyn*.

What best describes Poland's cultural anomaly? Torn at the edges by the disturbance of settlement, Poland has many jagged contours, rather like Jola S's imagery. These include elements which have influenced Polish people throughout history: paganism, the Ottoman, the Orthodox, the Jewish and more recently the predominant Latin culture which gives us Catholic images.

The history of the paper-cutting technique (*wycinanki*) is relevant: *while a fin-de-siecle Europe demands a new interest for the up-and-coming bourgeoisie, a peasant cut away with her sheep-sheers on scrap paper to create symbolic imagery to decorate the home*. This provocative image comes through in Jola's work. Jola is an Anglo-Polish artist and member of the Bigos Group. She has adopted an approach accessible to most people by developing the craft of wycinanki, ironically, to a fine art. Polish people can identify such imagery with their common past, and this makes her work particularly evocative to those who have a Polish background. But even without knowing the origins of Jola's technique, the focus on symbolic contract is easily read.

The images complement Maria's text well. The poetry is more difficult to appraise, because of its subjectivity and the multifarious levels of analysis it demands. The simple lines of Jola's imagery give initial relief in their illusion of simplicity, particularly as one picks through the text. They then takes on a nightmarish quality as the viewer realises that the images are more complex. Furthermore, the repetitive design suggests the obsessional drive to imprint on space. This need to elaborate the demon lurking within the imagination strikes one as very Polish, from Grottger to Witkiewicz.

Subtexts flow through this collection. One such issue is feminism; others anchor on this, particularly in the case of belonging/otherness, whether in the national or sexual context. Polish folklore and legend, illustrated in this book, seem imbued by women, victorious and voluptuous (e.g. Syrena, the siren of the Vistula and emblem of Warsaw); when not portrayed thus, women are depicted as the mainstay of society (e.g. the tulip seller of the book cover, supplementing the family income). The usual description of a Latin/Catholic culture sinks into the virgin/whore dichotomy. This is not the case here, but an overall evaluation of Polish culture, with its downside, could be optimistic in the context of this book. The fact that a culture accepts a woman's sexuality as a robust, powerful and threatening device gives scope to being unafraid of accepting one's own sexuality.

**Karen Strang**



# LOOKING BETWEEN THE LINES

'The Missing Text'.

Edited by Marysia Lewandowska

Chance Books, 1991. Cost £10.

In the opening and contextualising section of *The Missing Text* **Martin McGeown** and **Marysia Lewandowska** offer a cursory summary of the concerns circumscribing this work, the second volume in an ongoing series of publications issued under the general heading of **Sight Works**. 'This volume', they write, 'presents itself as a timely disruption. Not a generalized disruption, but a specific contestation of the habitual oppositions of text and image, theory and practice where the assumptions implicit in their habitual distribution are thrown off balance' (p.11). A few lines further on they propose that 'the notion of a collection invites interrogation of the textual compatibility of different parts, so that the divergences and differences may play against the cohesion. At the same time they allow for the emergence of temporary and unexpected allegiances.' It is these 'temporary and unexpected allegiances' which one finds as one flicks through, or reads closely and carefully this assemblage of essays, images and short, sometimes enigmatic texts. The unusual juxtapositions are a product of the book's inventive structure, which breaks away from the orthodox format of neatly fixing images and texts together in order to reinforce a single unit of meaning, a meaning made up by glueing together a single image with a single text. What we have here is, on the contrary, a running group of images, placed throughout the book in such a way that in following a given sequence one finds that an image from a particular group 'finds itself' aligned with a diversity of texts. Thus the eight parts of **Tania Kovats' Blind Paradigm** are successfully placed next to the opening pages of writings by McGeown and Lewandowska, **David Reason**, **Eric Wear**, **Graham McCann**, **Susan Foale**, **Elspeth Probyn** and **Paul Buck**, with the last of Kovats images facing the head of the list of contributors at the end of the book. Kovats' work might read as photographs of a rectangular surface floating in front of, and obscuring to different degrees, an intensely bright source of light. The eight pictures appear to propose a kind of abstract narrative, each part of which may be seen as reflecting or refracting the text it faces. It is not a question of the same image placed against different texts but rather of two sequences arranged in a complex relation to one another. Other groups of obviously related images are similarly disposed about the body of the book, sometimes actually on the same pages as large chunks of writing; then again some of the visual work is to be found compressed, again sequentially, into the space of just a few pages, the images interspersed with a text designed by the author of the visual work itself (**Jonathan Dronsfield's Posted, near a front** combines grainy, ghostly photographs taken in the Eastern Block with paragraphs from imaginary postcards).

This arrangement of the visual and the textual can, however, lead to an acute confusion if one tries to approach *The Missing Text* with conventional categorisations of text and image in mind. But this awkwardness itself raises interesting problems. The whole issue of how one reads, how one makes meanings from texts and images, whether singly or in combination, has been explored to a considerable

degree in the work of a number of French theorists over the last twenty-five or so years. The influence of writers such as Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault is apparent throughout *The Missing Text*, in the theoretical essays that refer the reader directly to their work, but also within the project of the book as a whole. Barthes' *Roland Barthes, Empire of Signs*, and *Camera Lucida Reflections on Photography* all offer novel ways of thinking about, and putting together images and texts. Derrida's novelistic meditation upon the sending and reception of signs (The Post Card), as well as his general concern with the keeping and the breaking of boundaries, is called to mind not only in a fairly direct manner (e.g. with Dronsfield's piece) but also when one thinks about the 'philosophy' behind the production of *The Missing Text* - that one should not only open the book but open it out, unfold it, let its space dissolve into other spaces. At the same time one is constrained by the particular format of the printed, mass-produced object. McGowan and Lewandowska offer Mallarmean observations that direct the reader to a consideration of the book's own structure: 'The binding of a book is meaning's adhesive' (p.9); 'Books are full of themselves, but what kind of reading would be their undoing?' (p.10). Unlike those books which are bound to fall apart because not bound at all but merely (and temporarily) held together with glue, *The Missing Text* is a sewn paperback (which as such holds together), the openness of which must therefore come about through the reader's collusion.

The emphasis upon the active participation of the reader or viewer of a work is taken up in a number of essays, notably those by Graham McCann and Elspeth Probyn. Of the five theoretical essays McCann's *Distant Voices, Real Lives* is by far the most critical of the Barthesian death of the author/birth of the reader theme, arguing that academics have taken the implications of French theory to a ridiculous extreme, allowing themselves to dismiss anything in a text that may locate it in a specific, historical niche or context. McCann suggests that outside the academic institution 'progress in all spheres of life occurs through the clash of conflicting opinions. In that clash, views do not simply persevere unaltered; on the contrary, the development of knowledge is dialectical, it is a social process, and appear to the text under discussion as a vital part of that process.' (p.63). His various remarks on the responsibilities of critics are welcome now that the erstwhile radicality of French theory has largely been reduced to a trendy, and often vacuously deposited set of references. Unfortunately, Probyn's piece appears to tend toward this category. Here is a passage from her *Après le texte qui vient?*: 'One of my favourite places from which to consider postmodern dilemmas is in a certain kind of restaurant (well actually, from the textual perspective of a certain kind of restaurant review of a certain kind of restaurant). Here the arrangement of the food speaks both of appropriation (global poaching) and of the hesitancy before historical and architectural audacity and authority. Here, as elsewhere, we can see, or taste, both the "crisis of legitimation" as well as the explosion of "texts"' (p.106). This writing seems to me typical of a style of academic prose that carries along with it all the 'correct' terminology but says not very much at all. Earlier on in her article she stresses that meaning (now we've all read Barthes) is not fixed - as though it ever really was from the point of view of the reader - but then refers us to a photograph by Robert Doisneau which shows a man, seemingly unobserved by someone who may be his wife, looking at a painting of a semi-naked woman. Probyn calls him 'the lecherous husband' (p.105). What's objectionable about Probyn's presentation of this photograph is that she looks to the openness of interpretation as a progressive force for

social change, yet she can fix a meaning fairly arbitrarily when it suits her, though the photograph can in fact be read in a variety of ways. McCann's attack on academia is all the more to the point when one reads it with Probyn's article as a (no doubt involuntary) foil.

I have only touched on a small number of the contributions to *The Missing Text* - some seventeen contributors are listed in all. The different works contained in the book hold together through a constant concentration upon language, upon the language in, around, or 'missing' from the practices of art. It's difficult, sometimes, to assess some of the pieces included. From a certain perspective the short text by **Douglas Gordon** 'Ludwig Wittgenstein:- you'll never walk alone' (pp.41- 43) might well be dismissed as vacuous or silly. On the other hand, the photograph taken at his presentation of work at the Serpentine Gallery earlier this year, showing the words 'WE ARE EVIL' affixed to the ceiling of the building, as though having spontaneously materialised there, together with a splash of a substance giving, at least in the photograph, the impression of a blot of blood, holds the mood of a ghostly manifestation: in any case something strange and provocative.

Whatever one's personal views of the particular contributions to the book, the virtue of Lewandowska's editorial approach is that it gives artists and writers the chance to produce work for a format and context not usually accessible to them. The traditional approach of the anthologist is to stick within a narrow terrain, whereas Lewandowska has here included the work of artists, theorists and a poet (Paul Buck) in a combination that encourages the reader to rethink conventional manners of reading. The first volume of *Sight Works* emphasised the specific context of the work of art; *The Missing Text* focuses upon the book as a distinct medium and format; the third volume is currently in preparation. Given the general narrowness of current artistic ventures, this experimental, open approach to standardised categories is not only welcome but a virtual and pressing necessity.

Both *The Missing Text* and *Sight Works Volume One* (also edited by Lewandowska) are available in London bookshops or directly from the publishers, Chance Books, 45a Redchurch Street, London E2 7DJ, and are priced, respectively, at £10 plus 85p p&p, £5 plus 50p p&p (£15 plus £1.10 p&p if ordered together).

**Peter Suchin**

# THE BIGGER TORY VOTE (THE COVERT SEQUESTRATION OF THE BIGOTRY VOTE)

Nick Toczek.  
AK Press. £2.95. ISBN 1 873176 20 1.

**T**he subtitle of the book infers the Tory Party's willing complicity with far right, neo Nazi and racist groups, an assertion somewhat at odds with their popular image. The writer has assembled old and new information following the trail of certain individuals in and out of various groups, making visible in detail a world of covert associations

and political manoeuvring. This extends similar research begun elsewhere, notably in **Lobster** no. 12 (is **Nick Toczek** the mysterious 'Jack Ma Honey' cited as that article's mysterious source?).

His findings lead him to categorise the *Society of Individual Freedom* (SIF) as providing British racism with its leading lights, many of whom centered into integral positions of influence in Governmental decision making on major national issues, aiding the formulation of what has come to be known generically as 'Thatcherism'.

The book claims that in the 70's the SIF could claim nine members of the Heath administration including Nicholas Ridley, Teddy Taylor and Reggie Maudling. Later contributors to the cause included Nigel Lawson and Kenneth Baker. Lobster's editors, Robin Ramsey and Steve Dorril in their own book *Smear*, map out comparable infiltration of the Wilson Government, claiming that there were four CIA agents in the Labour administration. Those were troubled times for the non parliamentary right and a great deal of skulduggery became expedient, yet this para political dimension is practically invisible in our social history and everyday reception of Politics.

One startling passage from Toczek reveals how far the invitation extended for the far right to penetrate the mainstream of the Tory party, with the recruitment of one Anna Bramwell to the Centre for Policy Studies:

*Here we have a woman with long standing and currently active neo nazi affiliations being appointed director of a think tank which Margaret Thatcher had set up and from which she had drawn and was continuing to draw many of her speech writers and personal advisors...policy initiatives and programmes.*

The groups discussed here target areas other than Government, one case in point being that of Robert Moss (one of those Thatcher speech writers) who together with Brian Crozier ran purportedly independent institutes to act as a front for the propaganda operations of hidden intelligence agencies and corporate sponsors; these planned to rival news-gathering agencies such as Reuters and UPI. Crozier's (or rather the CIA's) *Forum World Features* mutated into the *Institute for the Study of Conflict* when his cover was blown, this in turn became the *Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism* under the guiding hand of Paul Wilkinson (who wrote for the Glasgow Herald until a few months ago) maintaining the laundering of anti communist propaganda coated in a veneer of academic respectability, while using the dis informationist tactic of attributing one's own project to the enemy thus seeking to justify counter insurgency and in certain cases State terrorism. Their reports are received as genuine by the general public, specialist academics, policy makers, police officials and military commanders. Small Press publications such as this play an important role in exposing these activities

Some quibbles could be raised on the quality of information implicating George Kennedy Young as the eminence grise behind so much, similarly some descriptions of Ross McWhirter are fairly speculative or predicated on the disclosures of participating Secret Service operatives. Omissions are inevitable given the necessary abridgement of the format, but one surprising one was Moss' involvement with the *Heritage Foundation* (he was a founder of their Policy Review journal) and it's role as an umbrella organisation for a variety of Right wing institutions and out right terrorist organisations, funding Crozier's





*International Freedom Fund in England*. But the book certainly contains enough cogent and vigilant information to support its central thesis, that the 'New Right' is neither unique nor marginalised in our society but has a long, entrenched and insidious history of fomenting the bigotry, hatred and lies needed to support both authoritarian and allegedly liberal governments.

**Billy Clark**

## ART CRITICISM: A USER'S GUIDE

by Joseph Darracott, Bellew Publishing, London, 1991. 132pp, incl. Notes, Bibliography and Index. 16 B+W reproductions. £14.95. ISBN 0 947792 39 2.

**T**he author's vast experience in both art and design education, research and curatorship gives this book its range, by which it differs from all other books on art criticism. The book, divided into ten short chapters (1017pp. each), is a pioneering work. The author aims at a work that will help readers to make better use of art criticism, which he presents as an indisputable subject field, different from art history and appearing in various writings on art: surveys, monographs, catalogues, personality profiles, solo and group exhibitions reviews, interdisciplinary papers and articles. These are examined in chapters 26, and give the book a 'sitespecific' structure. The last three chapters deal with the constituent elements of art criticism: description, interpretation and evaluation. Although the last paragraph of the book cites the condemnation of the subject by the Futurists "*Art critics are useless or harmful*" (p.120) the tenor of the book is **Darracott's** belief that there is something to be learned from those who write art criticism, namely, how to improve one's own relationship with visual art.

Darracott aims clearly at a general reader, which in turn puts demands on him, different from those an art historical book would present. The book is not aimed solely at other art historians, but in a sense at someone like a general visitor to an exhibition in need of professional assistance: "...*the useful and helpful functions of art criticism will receive preference in the choice of what is quoted and discussed*" (p.2)

Darracott decides to split art criticism from art history at least to some extent: '*The guards on the frontiers between art history and art criticism shoot neither intruders nor escapers*' (p.5), he writes, and at the

same time notes that the two were nearer each other at the time when Lionello Venturi wrote his *History of Art Criticism*.

Consequently, Darracott perceives art criticism as a '*preparation for an aesthetic event*' (p.9), a thought worth having in a culture which splits its young populations into 'academics' and the less intelligent 'artists'. If then the public is deemed to need assistance with its aesthetic experience, the artist is given a better status, and the art critic a useful job to do. Not surprisingly, the book starts with a substantial quote from L.N. Tolstoy. Darracott does not allow the possibility, favoured by some writers, that the viewer needs no preparation for an encounter with, say, a painting. The daily practice of people walking with tape recorders and guide books along the corridors of the world's museums supports Darracott's view, including the condition of preexistence. Each chapter produces some functions of art criticism, as Darracott examines each chosen type of writing from the point of view of the benefit for a '*future encounter*' with art. Among the functions he names: exchange of perceptions, the life stories, the personal encounter with an original, the enjoyment of looking (which Pointon perceives as a core of art history), the who, what, when and why of a work of art, and learning to perceive which questions the work of art itself suggests for further investigation.

Having decided to leave many areas untouched, assumed unproblematic, sections of the book are irritating: for example, he quotes J.S. Ackerman on communication between a viewer and art object without a cautious reference to Wolheim, Donohue or Rosenberg. Even a note that some artists abolished objects to some extent or for some reasons would have helped here. There are some inconsistencies as well, as in when he is discussing the problems of scale and of viewing in relation to sculpture only. Or where he has a good idea and sells it short, e.g. in the sections *Critical paths* or *Vesatile Artists*. These, from the point of view of the aim of the book, are minor irritations and are outweighed by the book's positive attributes. The book is eminently good reading, contains enough to make one want more and is helpful both to the layman and the young student alike. There I see its main strength: it informs the reader about various types of writing on art and cautions against the limits of each. It is like a good map helping you to navigate.

Moreover, almost as if not expected, often a brilliant observation, insight or idea sparkle on the page, e.g.: Darracott starts a taxonomy by recognition of '*reflexive art criticism*', of '*selective critical comment*', '*scrupulous examination of visual evidence*', '*conversational essay*' and '*an account of the merit of a work of art*'.

Although the three constituents of art criticism are discussed in separate chapters (7-10), Darracott understands their mutual interplay: in the captions under the plates, more often than not, the 'evaluation depends on interpretation' thus signalling that neither description nor interpretation are epistemologically weak and independent of the set of values contained in the work and subscribed to by the viewer. And that's the point where the problems start mushrooming, and it's the point where this guide book leaves you on your own, pointing to the promise of future harvests. A suggestion of such continuity appears on the cover two palettes are having an argument, an echo of James Ensor's painting *Ensor and General Leman talking about painting* (1890).

**Slavka Sverakova**

