variant

ART

IDEAS

PROJECTS U.K.

Post-MODERNISM

LIVE ART: 60s to the 80s
Roland Miller

ALISTAIR MacLENNAN

VIDEO AT THE NATIONAL REVIEW

"AVE '87"

JO SPENCE

CRITICAL REALISM

ANDREJ DUDEK-DURER

EINSTURZENDE NEUBATEN

WINTER
SPRING 88

Variant – Issue 4   Published in Glasgow

CONTENTS

Variant 76 Carlisle treet GLASGOW 21

The artists' items appearing on pages 17, 23, 35 and 39 are an anonymous contribution. They are not illustrations for the articles appearing on those pages.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

☐ Roland Miller is an artist working mainly in the area of live art, and he is co-ordinator of the N.A.A. in England. He lives in Sheffield. ☐ Alex Fulton is an artist and freelance writer. ☐ Jon Bewley and Simon Herbert are organisers at Projects U.K. in Newcastle. ☐ Alistair Dickson lives and works in Stirling. He is a member of the Here and Now magazine group. ☐ Jane Bartlett is an artist who lives in London. ☐ Louise Crawford is an artist who lives in Edinburgh. ☐ Douglas Aubrey is an artist working mainly in video, is a co-member of video artist team Pictorial Heroes. He lives in Glasgow. ☐ William Clark (a.k.a. Billy) is an artist, and is co-ordinator at Transmission. He lives in Glasgow. ☐ Hazel McLaren is an artist who lives in Berlin. She is presently undergoing a 'residency' in a hamburger bar. ☐ Alistair MacLennan is an artist who lives and works in Belfast. ☐ Karen Eliot is a multiple name. ☐ Peter Suchin is an abstract painter and writer who lives in Leeds. ☐ Simon Brown is a painter who lives in Glasgow. ☐ Lorna Waite is a writer and researcher who lives in Edinburgh.

STATES OF BEING ACTUAL

'LIVE ART' IS a term used in the 80's to describe a number of almost specialist artforms which emerged from anti-specialist activities, abundant in the 60's and first half of the 70's, which represented a rupture with the traditional high art forms. The 'live' element implies a more engaging relationship with art object/event and audience through this rupture of normal, passive, viewing conditions. Otherwise known as 'time-based' media, it includes installation forms, media-orientated approaches, non-object art, video, film, performance. Installation is not an art form in itself, but a way of uniting various elements within a specific environment and into a greater whole (the 'installation') – installations may use any of the above. This may not incorporate any 'live' element as such, though there will be an audio-visual element, a time-component and a certain demand and audience reciprocation that might characterise it alongside performance. 'Performance' art will require the physical presence of the artist or others as the motivating element in the construction of an event/art object. The physical presence of the performance artist interacts with three elements; place/location, body/actions, audience/viewer/participant, through the experience of the 'live' situation, the one-off event.

The 'anti-tradition' of performance art can be followed in swerving paths through a number of 'anti-tradition' and/or 'anti-art' manifestations; Happenings, Fluxus, Environmental Art, Body Art, Conceptual Art and Assemblage (in no order of priority). Though all of these attacked the public view and (often) the artists' own view of the artist as an isolated and privileged being in society, they are now well-placed in the tradition of visual high culture. The original political intention of 'breaking out of the gallery' was to engage with real life situations. This is commonplace today, though the radical intention may be confused, if apparent at all, and 'performance' has now found a popularity among the art community that it now represents a genre.

Definitions as to what performance art is are still lacking, and maybe rightly so in something that was perceived by its protagonists in the 70's as anti-category and anti-specialist. It may be said that all art involves an element of performance, or it may be further said that performance is a 'function' at work in the process of the artist's materials. Cultivation of a genre without the critical analysis of art's possible social dimension in a time of capitalist reconstitution (arts funding moving into the private sector, for example) will be a serious error on the part of arts advocators. Though there may be no end product in a performance, it does not presume an intransigence in the face of the flexibility of capitalist ideology, nor does it necessarily subvert commodity exchange values which are continuing to dominate all activity and all experience. To a certain extent, we may applaud the marketing of performance art since it represents an 'efficient' and 'responsible' attitude, and also gets the artists paid, though it fails to address the bankruptcy of present culture. Further breadth and complexity in cultural activity will emerge through a resilient evaluation from that bankruptcy.

Once more, the mode of production of the artist activities are again stressed. This means more than fashionably 'commenting' on political and social issues, or in taking art 'outside the gallery'. Praising this on the basis that more people see it implies that art has a separate power and innate qualities beyond our tangible presence in the world, and beyond the artists' intentions (if they have any). Whilst this illustrates the fact that art galleries as finishing houses for art products are not particularly conducive to more meaningful levels of experience outside everyday, functional activities, art outside the gallery does not change our way of seeing the streets, and is as equally defined by the traditions of gallery convention. The current emphasis on 'site-specific' work and sculpture is illustrative of this (TSWA project, art in the Garden Festivals). 'Site-specific' doesn't guarantee a political motivation on the part of the artist or the curator, nor does it bridge any gap of alienation between 'art' (high) and a non-specialist-art audience, or what is commonly referred to as 'the man in the street', as if all art had a message of wisdom for all the uninitiated. This defuses the radical possibilities for art, with no effective change whilst evoking the characteristics of an egalitarian gesture; the right for everyone to experience art just by looking at it or coming across it in the street. Art does require an audience to challenge. Art is not art simply by declaration. It also requires a critical context in its distribution and in its ideological import. The issue being addressed here then is in how artists perceive their roles which are formed within the enclosed system of the art world, but must, of necessity, be re-identified within an active political/social sphere. This is inevitable in the articulation of a life-process which is – in itself – never free, but always determined by political constraints and social repression.

Art that meant anything at all in the 60's was part of a counter-culture that took art into the streets, the barriers between artist and audience being confronted directly. Roland Miller was the main protagonist in the People Show who involved themselves in ritual and street theatre, combining elements of 'fun', art with often direct political statements. In his article, he provides some historical perspective to such activities and finds the link with Happenings still existant in the work of many artists today, but with particular reference to an 'unofficial' (not institutionally funded) theatrical performance by Sarah Moreell seen in Sheffield in 1986. His article is a complement to 'The Art That Moves: An Exhibition of documents from the development of British Performance Art, from the sixties to the eighties' which has been seen in some regional art galleries over the past year.

'Live art' for many artists is a valid way of working when articulating political sensibilities and creative concepts which may be problematic in other areas. It was the impetus in the 60's and still is today, that 'live art' fuses innovative form with progressive content. In the booklet accompanying the exhibition, Roland Miller writes:

> Art as a form of 'voicing' for the inarticulate; art as a way of passively, creatively, expressing dissent; art as a form of collective action; above all, art as a form of democracy; all these claims can be made for performance.

All of Roland Miller's activities have been regionally based, not relying on the cultural domination of London. This was also the case for the Basement Group (based in Newcastle) which later became Projects U.K. In the late 70's it was the continued commitment of the Basement Group to experimental art which has now provided the support structure, through such organisations as Projects U.K., which time-based work requires (not forgetting Performance Magazine which covered new ground and new work otherwise never heard of through visual art magazines in Britain). It has not simply been a case of popularising performance art and time-based work, but for Projects U.K. in encouraging artists' social concerns, and in creating new work which is issue-based. This has been apparent in 'New Work Newcastle 86' and 'New Work Newcastle 87 On Tour' which the organisers John Bewley and Simon Herbert mention in their interview. As Simon Herbert indicates in his catalogue essay to the latter touring show, performance may well be perceived to be endemic to our media dominated world, but it can also make a significant contribution in our understanding and comprehension of it, thereby engendering a critique of it.

In 'Screen and Projection', Alistair Dickson reviews four performances seen recently in Glasgow. At the outset he admits he is indulging in 'the most detested vice of the critic: theorising after the fact', which three of the artists whose performances he reviewed felt obliged to respond with in their own factual descriptions about their works. The review itself, and the responses, raises questions about the act of first hand observation of performance and the difficulties encountered it writing about it which may misrepresent what actually occurred during the 'real-time' of the event. Such questions lead on to the element of documentation in performance, which in many cases (given that many performances are specific to time and place and thereby seen only by a few) replaces the experience of the live event for its mediation through photographs and video. In his article, Douglas Aubrey criticises the saturation of documentation crews at the National Review of Live Art last year. He then goes on to review the

video element of the Review which he feels was peripheralised to the main programme of performance.

In contrast, video at the audio-visual-experimental festival held for a third time in Arnhem, Holland, this year formed the backbone of the event, with continuous single monitor screenings and a continual turnover of video installations. The purpose of 'AVE '87' was to provide a platform for showing work by young artists working in the area of audio-visual presentation, but also forming international links and contacts between the participants. 'AVE '87' went for an art that was 'difficult' and 'inaccessible', unlike the formality of British events. In contrast to Britain, Europe allows cross-border travel between countries and thereby allows a creative interaction to build up through the proliferation of European festivals.

Berlin-based Einsturzende Neubaten enact a form of ritual theatre operating mainly on the 'rock group' context, though their 'image', lyrics and sound can be related to an art context. Blake's quote could be applied here when he said "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom", Hazel McLaren, in her piece 'Notes on Discord', suggests that the destruction (of self, of art, of societal structures) expressed by individuals from the Vienna Group, to Artaud, to the Situationists, and the anger of early punk records are taken up by Neubaten in the present through their stage performances and the dislocation of structure and narrative in their 'music'.

For Alistair MacLennan art is also the substance of supercession from the 'ugly' social realities in which the individual lives and a way of dealing with them. His more considered analysis sees art as going beyond the secondhand experience which individuals endure in the circle of a shallow survival. Fine art has to rethink what it is doing and move towards the fusion of spiritual, political, social, economic and cultural elements, otherwise it deserves all the attacks currently being made upon it by conservative ideology. His performances involve his presence as the animating focus, which melds together with a variety of objects imbued with strong personal and social symbolism. These are long durational ritual pieces using minimal bodily movement which on first appearance might look like some form of trance state. This is not ritual in the sense of a preoccupation with esoterics or of a mystical sensibility, but like artists such as Stuart Brisley and Joseph Beuys, the work is motivated by a social dimension and informed by a political critique. Here, the art and the political are one and the same thing, from a social process of world comprehension. MacLenna's haunting images resonate long after the real-time performance and all that is left is one or two photographs plus an arduous description of the work from the observer. At which point, then, is a performance complete? In the mediation of a photograph or written review? In the minds of those who attended the event and in what the take away? In the work's ability to engage public discussion after the event? It does involve elements from all these questions, and more, probably. This again reinforces the emphasis on the singularity of an event, on the first hand observation of it. The nature of MacLennan's work cannot be comprehended without this, nor without an understanding that his activity stems from being actual-in-the-world and not separated from it through his role.

Without an audience, is art not just private ritual? Some artists choose to make no distinction between their normal everyday activities (such as eating, pissing or sleeping) and what they perceive to be 'art'. Their art and their perception of themselves are one, they become the art object. Polish artist Andrej Dudek-Durer makes no such distinction almost to the point of parodying himself as an artist in between fantasy and reality. He considers himself to be the re-incarnation of Albrecht Durer and defines his work as 'metaphysical-telepathic activity'. But there is no parody in Dudek-Durer's approach and it is based on the need for deeper levels of communication between individuals. His activity involves prints and drawings, performance, video, photographs and music, and he has for many years been an active correspondent in the international mail art network. The Polish writer Andrej Kolkowski has written that:

> ...he develops or exposes photographs showing his
> own look, juxtaposes them with his person in the
> flesh. He marks this or that with his signature or
> other inscription. He is filling time with his own

existence, multiplying traces of this existence...

The artifacts that Dudek-Durer produces might be seen as the public performance or the public presence of a serious private ritual/ process.

In 'A Polish Story' Karen Eliot uses the story format as 'an entertaining way of putting over an idea' and avoids the conventional review-type critique. The list of activities at the end of the story may, on first glance, seem mundane and irrelevant, but according to Karen Eliot 'the itinery actually re-inforces the real elements of the story and brings the reader firmly firmly back to earth making him/her aware of the actuality of the story.' These 'banal' activities of Dudek-Durer are central to the formation of the whole. The author concludes: 'Without the action of making bread his live correspondence would be incomplete.' This approach and the multiple name or multiple identity concept of Karen Eliot (several individuals all producing a magzine called 'SMILE') is aimed at examining notions of individuality, personality and creativity outside of the cult of individualism or career. What appears as an aberration from the fragmentary indulgence of postmodern art is, in fact, its transgressor.

For a number of years the term 'postmodernism' has been used in the art world to describe current contemporary art practice. The editorial in Variant 3 used a quote from Hal Foster from the intro to the book 'Post-Modern Culture' concerning the need to draw a dividing line between a post-modernism of resistance and a post-modernism of reaction. The former was applied to the work of Art in Ruins and to a lesser extent to Denis Masi. 'Post-modernism', however, is a term which is still largely misunderstood if known about at all, despite references to it in the glossy international art magazines, and in stuffy debates at the I.C.A. Peter Suchin wrote his piece in response to a request from a friend who kept encountering the term in contexts where it was presented without definition, as though "everyone knew what 'postmodernism' referred to." He further explains that it is expository rather than polemical and states that "a critical approach to terminology isn't mere pedantry and it's important to have more than vague ideas about what is under discussion."

'Critical Realism' was an exhibition curated by Brandon Taylor which attempted to go beyond the vagueness and indulgent forms of much post-modernist art. Using the pictorial tradition of Realism, the exhibition set out to examine current 'realities' of today's society (mass unemployment, the arms build-up, the divisions between rich and poor) through their 'representation' in a variety of conventional artforms. The dichotomy between form and content is highlighted here and the role of the artist as an observer (rather than a participant in) the wider complexities of political and social life is enforced. Presenting 'political' work in an exhibition such as this, as products, and commodities, suggests that politics is an occupation amongst others for artists and that art is a definitive activity.

In his review, Simon Brown sees the work of Jo Spence as an exception to the rule of the show, in one instance because her work involves an open approach through an innovative use of the photographic media, and because her work explores the social and the personal that has the ability to involve feeling through recognition when we struggle to apply it to our own lives. As Lorna Waite discusses her photographic work in the piece 'Towards Disrupting the Silenced', the work of Jo Spence is unsettling, she shows us a record of her personal life with its misfortunes and its unrealised potential. By showing us herself and her ways of seeing herself, she us how our lives are represented and fictionalised by and for us.

It becomes apparent when we consider her work that it is the areas of sex and class which are real contradictions in society. She externalises her struggle and the struggles of those around her, through family, race, class, sex, between the personal and the social, between ideology and actuality. This is an ongoing process of articulation, of experiment, of ordering perceptions about the world, of imagination and of keeping the future open. As Jo Spence puts it in her book 'Putting Myself In The Picture':

> ...there is no peeling away of layers to reveal a 'real'
> self, just a constant reworking process. I realise
> that I am the process.

ACTION TIME VISION

A NEW PUBLIC ART MURAL FOR GLASGOW

*A*N integral part of the Environmental Art Course at Glasgow School of Art involves Third year students undergoing a 3/4 week work experience with artists working in specific communities or other broader social contexts.

This year in the first term students have worked with Alastair McCallum, at the Cranhill Arts Project, in photography and silkscreen workshops for local people. Others worked with Hugh Graham at Glasgow Arts Centre on a children's opera. Two other groups worked with myself on two murals. One an interior mural at the Douglas Inch Centre, in Woodlands, and the other an exterior mural on a large gable end in Blackhill/Provanmill. Both groups were assisted by a post-graduate student from Chicago with some mural painting experience.

The gable end mural was a major work in terms of scale, setting and process (not to mention the problems of climate and time of year) which evolved as an almost model example of collaboration. The beginning was significant in that the invitation to do the work came from the local community in the form of the Community Council and the local ub office of the Housing Department. The idea to have a gable end painted with a mural had already been generated and a local exercise had been undertaken involving young people to develop some ideas. I joined the project at this point and, at a public meeting in the local community centre, gave a slide talk showing examples of external murals from other parts of the world.

The aim of this exercise was to encourage a broad view of what a mural could be and to stimulate ideas from the adults of the local community. This proved to be very productive and out of the discussion major elements of the concept began to develop. There followed a series of evening drawing workshops run by myself and three students with the young people, not only to develop their own ideas further but also to establish close bonds between us and begin to establish a team. With all the images and ideas gathered locally we then brought our own ideas to the work and set about setting on a theme and design. These initial ideas were presented at a further public meeting before we finalised our proposal. The central idea that evolved was that the mural should celebrate (local people said it should be 'bright and cheerful') the fact that in Blackhill can be seen and enjoyed (thanks to some enlightened thinking some time in the past by some unknown district council engineer) virtually the lasy remaining part of Glasgow's 'sacred river' the Molendinar Burn. Local history has it that on the banks of the Molendinar first Ninian and later Mungo established sacred buildings which later evolved into the Cathedral and thence into Glasgow itself. The mural depicts a large hand washing away the recent past and reveals, through the windows of the Cathedral, a view of Blackhill and Provanmill with well known landmarks like the burn itself and the legendary rhubarb patch. At the top formal elements of stained glass identify the place as Glasgow and there Mungo does a bit of 'windae hinging'. A melee of transport forms creating a fragmented lower part to the mural. Finally a piece of trompe l'oeil depicts some of the young people, who worked on the whole project from the beginning to the end, painting the mural from scaffolding.

From all this it can be gathered that the mural speakers mainly to local ideas and images - local to Glasgow and Blackhill and Provanmill. Although the process of collaboration, in the evolution and execution of the work, reinforces the notion that people can get involved in making some change to the physical environment the mural itself does not quite grasp the opportunity to say something about the universal human condition. It does however aspire to achieve a magical quality. As Victor Shklovsky, the early 20th century Russian art critic, said, art "exists to restore the feeling of life, to make the stone feel stony." He may also have been the first to articulate the concept of art 'making strange' in that it should act as a counter to habituated experience. Talking to people in Blackhill seems to bear this out.

David Harding, Head of Environmental Art
Joe Matunis, post-graduate Chicago Art Institute
Meg McLucas, 3rd Year Environmental Art
Nathan Coley, 3rd Year Environmental Art
Alan Dunn, 3rd Year Environmental Art
Marie Stewart, Secretary, Molendinar Community Council
Danny O'Connor, Housing Officer, Blackhill Sub Office

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARTISTS FOR SCOTLAND?

FURTHER TO THE item on the National Artists Association in Variant 3 by its co-ordinator, Roland Miller, an 'exploratory meeting' was held on January 19th in Glasgow School of Art to discuss the setting up of an organisation in Scotland which would be linked to the N.A.A. in England through a Standing Conference or associate membership. 28 individuals attended from a mail out of 150, and represented various organisations: Glasgow and Edinburgh Sculpture Workshops, Collective Gallery (Edinburgh), Glasgow Arts Centre, Transmission (Glasgow), Artists Newsletter, NUS National Arts Panel, Open Circle, and Scottish Arts Council. Since there was limited time at the meeting's disposal, it was assumed that those present were in general

Blackhill/Provanmill Mural. Photo: Nathan Coley.

agreement as to the need for an artists' organisation in Scotland, so the implications of such an organisation and how it would be administered could not be dealt with at any length.

The function of the N.A.A. in England is to improve the conditions under which work is made, and by extension to foster a collective identity and representation around all areas of art practice. Artists are, in a real sense, isolated from one another and from the wider structures within society. It has always proved difficult to overcome the 'artist in the garret'/artist as isolated individual syndrome, which arguably has a stronger grip in Scotland given its artistic tradition. Artists are the last section of 'cultural workers' to organise themselves into a coherent lobbying force and political structure. Actors and musicians are Trades Union aligned through Equity and Musicians Union. The problem for artists is further complicated by the fact thayt they have no identifiable work-place, no employers as such, and when they do identify with one another, it is usually through the interest of 'studio' situations.

Associations already exist in England (NAA), Ireland (AAI), Northern Ireland (ACNI), and Wales (AADW). They meet together twice a year in a representative Standing Conference, to discuss matters of mutual importance, and formulate joint policies. The lobbying powers of combined artists' associations can be formidable!

Issues taken up by N.A.A. have been the Exhibition Payment Right (E.P.R.), exhibition contracts, codes of practice for residencies, placements, discrimination in the art world. Payment to artists for public access to their work (E.P.R.) is now accepted as a right by the A.C.G.B. This was recently shelved by the Scottish Arts Council when they lobbied artists for their opinions due to a low and negative response. A representative of the S.A.C. at the meeting held on the 19th expressed difficulty in communicating to artists and S.A.C. are eager to see an artists' association emerge since then they would have 'someone to talk to' with regard to formulating policies etc.

It was agreed at this meeting to organise a joint conference between N.A.A. and a national organisation of artists in Scotland to discuss the possibility of setting such an organisation into motion. A main topic on the agenda will be the need for decentralisation and a network system throughout Scotland. The first conference will be held in Glasgow, the first week of July '88 at Glasgow School of Art Students Union. Conferences thereafter will take place in towns/cities outside the main centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Further information about the conference or items to be included on the agenda can be obtained from:
Karen Strang, 59 Wallace St., Stirling. (0786) 50945 (day), (0786) 73702 (night).
Bob Strange, G.S.A. Students Representative Council, 168 Renfrew St., Glasgow. (041) 332 0691).

There are a few items of interest regarding artists organisation in Scotland available from Variant as photocopies at 50p (plus SAE):
N.A.A., by Roland Miller in Variant 3.
'Platform: Fees to Artists in Scotland' in Alba 3.
Roland Miller on Artists Exhibition Payment Right, from Artists Newsletter.
Conrad Atkinson interviewed by Malcolm Dickson, from Edinburgh Review.

VIDEO

BEING DISTRIBUTED IN Scotland through Variant is Mediamatics, the Dutch produced 'European Media Arts Magazine'. An excellent produced and designed journal with Dutch and English translations, it provides in-depth (textual, philosophical) debate and analysis of European video art. Much coverage is given to European video festivals, the relationship between video, painting and sculpture (the sort of dialogue and probing that doesn't seem to emerge in Britain), on video installations, and the on-going dichotomy of video as **art** and/or video as proto-Television. Mediamatics maps out the forms and ideas that make up video art's heterogenity and accords it with an importance among other artforms and not simply as a stylistic diversion or self-indulgent medium.

Vol 2, number 2 is available (see contents of issue in advertisement in this Variant) at **£3**, plus **50p** postage.

DEADLINES

'Sites/Position': See notice in Variant 3. Deadline for proposals, 31st August 1988. This series of site-specific works to take place in early '89. Funding (allowing for commission of work) is currently being sought by EventSpace.
OUTSIDE/INSITE: Deadline for proposals (see ad this issue) is March 31st.
PROJECTS U.K.: Deadline for proposals for new commissioned work in February 29 (see ad this issue).

VARIANT

PHOTOCOPIED SAMPLES OF 1 and 2 available at **£1** plus **40p** postage. Items include 'Scottish Art Now' and 'Cultural Guerillas' by Fergus More, 'Michelangelo's Socks' by Simon Brown on the creative/destructive, 2 items on Malcolm McLaren and his Situationist influence.
A few copies of issue 3 available at **£1** plus **40p** p & p.
Issue 5: June '88: Deadline for contributions is 31st April. Items on Joseph Beuys and Scotland, 'The Cenotaph Project', Stuart Brisley, Banks and Vowles. Pavel Buchler

VARIANT EDITORIAL GROUP: Interested individuals living in Scotland to contact the editor. Individuals in this group would have specific responsibilities as well as meeting regularly to discuss Variant's direction.

"All mad, drugged or drunk" –

PERFORMANCE ART FROM THE

70s

TO THE

80s

Roland Miller

'Railway Images' Roland Miller and Shirley Cameron, 1970, from 'Environments and Happenings'.

ROLAND MILLER has been practising in the area of 'live art' since the late 60s. He became the main protagonist for the People Show in 1970 (replacing Jeff Nuttall, who has recently re-joined) who enacted forms of ritual street and landscape theatre under the influence of Happenings. With Shirley Cameron, whom he collaborates with today, he founded Landscape Gardening and Living Rooms who made, according to Adrian Henri in his book 'Environments and Happenings', "simple ritual event-pieces in an indoor and outdoor context: one of the most successful was done at the side of a railway line, events to be glimpsed from train windows by the passengers" (see photo). He also formed the Cyclamen Cyclists and the New Fol-de-Rols who appeared at many of the arts festivals in England in the early 70s. In the following article he talks of the public and legal perceptions of one particular piece, the political motivation of live art in the late 60s at undercutting the emphasis on product rather than process, and criticises current subsidy and establishment promotion of live art which he sees has defused its radical intentions.

*A*LL mad, drugged or drunk - this mental, chemical and alcoholic description of a piece of performance art was offered in evidence at Leeds Magistrates Court in November 23rd 1970.

The words were those of a Leeds housewife, and we had been arrested for performing in the courtyard of a block of flats in Hunslet. They were a part of police evidence in a prosecution for disorderly conduct. Our defence, that the 6 of us were actually involved in a painstaking, serious academic exercise in 'environmental sculpture' was not accepted. We pleaded guilty, as advised, and got 2 years' conditional discharge.

The other defendants were Tony Earnshaw, a fellow part-time lecturer in Leeds Poly Fine Art Department, and four of our students. We had been far from disorderly. The 'happening' was a finely structured, accurately timed event, devised by John Goddard, one of the students.[1]

THE PRESS

Alerted by an enterprising local stringer, the national press indulged in one of its periodic convulsions about modern art.

The nation was alerted to this crazy 'happening' by headlines like: ART EXERCISE WAS NIGHTMARE - TRENDY ART EXERCISE - WHAT THE HOUSWIFE SAW - FINE ART SCENE SHOCKS A WIFE - FREAK-OUT IN STREET WAS JUST ROLAND'S ART LESSON - ART COLLEGE'S FREAK-OUT WAS NIGHTMARE FOR A WIFE - ART SCHOOL 'HAPPENING' AT FLATS SHOCKED HOUSEWIFE - ROLY SHOCKS IT TO 'EM, AND CALLS IT ART! - THE STREET STRIP SHOW ENDS UP IN COURT.

There was nothing like a striptease. The reports lacked today's viciousness, even if they tended to sensationalise. Within the same period work by myself and Shirley Cameron, my partner, was dealt with in a sympathetic full-page photo feature in the Daily Express (a broadsheet paper then) (15/10/70).[2] The Daily Mirror did an amiable whole page interview with me (26/11/70).

The press in 1970 had not yet been fired with the zealotry shown nowadays in the persecution of artists.

In 1970 I was performing with the The People Show, for whom I had negotiated their first Arts Council revenue grant. This gave the press the chance to - inaccurately - pin the blame on the luckless Arts Council Drama Department. Peter Bird, at that time a visual art officer, gave the Daily Express the following interesting statement:
"Mr Miller belongs to an organisation called 'The People's Show' (sic) which tours the country and carries out experimental drama to bring the theatre to the people. For this they get a grant from the Arts Council. But what they were doing in Leeds was in no way connected with this. He gets a grant to carry out 'environmental sculpture and art' for the

'People's Show', but not for private happenings in the streets of Leeds."

THE DEFENCE

Barrington Black, our defence solicitor, claimed defiantly that:
"If they did, (offend anybody) they apologise, but they don't apologise for conducting themselves in a way which will improve life, the environment and the outlook of people in years to come."

It is interesting that the social application of public art was recognised 17 years ago, in spite of the Arts Council's unwillingness to extend popular theatre to the Leeds streets.

Our intention was to present a work for people living in the Hunslet flats. Some of the students also lived there, and, on my advice, had prepared the residents with advance warning - fruitlessly, as it turned out. Our performance piece was in part a comment on the car-dominated urban environment. A series of carefully prepared, simultaneous solo performances ended when we were all drawn by white bandages into a parked car. The Guardian saw the point, and called its piece 'Automotive'. Barrington Black's defence statement was reminiscent of the trial in Heinrich Boll's novel 'The End of a Mission' (1966).[3]

Boll's central characters carried out their 'happening', involving the burning of a Bundeswehr army jeep, as a protest against the wasteful excesses of militarism. One of the defence witnesses in the German trial is Herr Bueren, a Professor of Art at a Rhineland art college. (A reference to Dusseldorf, where Joseph Beuys taught?).

Buren is asked to define "this new art trend... or art form now known internationally as a Happening". He describes "...this art which called itself anti-art. It was an attempt...to create a liberating disorder, not form but non-form, non-beauty in fact; but its direction was determined by the artist, or performer, creating new form out of non-form. In this sense, the incident in question was 'without the slightest doubt a work of art'".

Our Leeds events, which ran for a week, used several cars. We kissed and threw confetti over street parked Bentleys, Daimlers and Rollers, we drove round the Ring Road in a bloodied and bandaged VW Beetle, with lumps of meat hanging off it. And we performed the stylised ritual, accurately timed, in the courtyard of the Hunslet flats that caused our arrest. Our performances were a conscious comment on modern society, art on the street, where life is lived.

HAPPENINGS

The original ideas behind performance art - in the 60s - were close to what Boll called 'the internationally known Happening'. The happening drew together the infuence of several different movements - Dada, in the

1920s, and its successor Surrealism (historically dated from 1924 to 1969 by Jean Schuster), and the Situationists in the late 60s.

As a distinct form, the happening is usually traced to the American influences of Allan Kaprow (who saw the happening as 'a logical extension of environments'), with Meredith Monk, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Carolee Schneeman, and many others. These artists and dancers consciously fused different art forms.

John Cage, musician and composer, worked with Robert Rauschenberg, painter, and Merce Cunningham, dancer/choreographer, in England in 1964, when I met them and saw them working. One of Robert Rauschenberg's techniques was to scour the environs of the theatre where they performed, for discarded materials to use in the decor of each show. This was analagous to John Cage's use of 'found sounds'.[4]

Adrian Henri, in his 1974 book 'Environments & Happenings' gives a clear account of these developments, and their influence on British artists. Ronald Hunt, a Newcastle artist, is quoted by Adrian Henri from a 1967 exhibition catalogue: in which he says that 'Surrealism shares with Constructivism the consistent misinterpretation of critics and historians who see only formal or aesthetic end-products in a movement which was aiming at political and social revolution'.[5]

The familiar distinction between a 'process' preferred by some artists, and 'product' beloved of some critics, most curators and gallerists, and all dealers, recurs frequently in discussion of live artwork. At first 'process not product' was associated with the free creative philosophy of the 60s, and the subsequent community art movement. Today the value of making public art accessible through exposure of an artist's working processes - often on site - is recognised by most people. The existence of a 'product', on a site prepared diligently by the presence there of a working artist was not invented by performance (or community) artists. All public on-site mural and fresco work is like this, and the process exposed to public scrutiny gains in social and political impact. The presence, or absence, of the artist, is always important. When the work is finished, the collective public memory contains the process observed. Art made in the studio, and transferred direct to the gallery, thence perhaps to the private collection, does not hold this position. There are advantages and disadvantages in both camps. Performance art in the late 60s/early 70s was exploring the value of publicly observed process, some of its critics could only deplore an absence of product.

The 'revolutionary' intentions of live art have been clearly manifested in mainland Europe from the 20's to the present day. The 60's student uprisings in France and elsewhere had a profound cultural and artistic aspect. The Dutch 'provos' used art events to protest

against their Calvinistic society. The live street-art performances that Shirley Cameron and I introduced into Portugal in 1974 were rapidly associated with a real revolutionary movement to democratise art with the rest of Portuguese society.

Joseph Beuys, whilst eschewing politics after he had co-founded, with Heinrich Boll and others, the Free International University, from which evolved the West German Green Party, was constantly in conflict with establishments of all kinds.

In Poland, in 1981, artists in Lodz supporting Solidarity organised a constructivist/surrealist street event, manoeuvring by hand a huge white cube through the traffic. Much contemporary Czechoslovakian live art is a covert exercise in underground resistance. Some of these examples are recorded in our exhibition 'The Art That Moves', which was on tour in England in 1986/87.[6]

Many of the American happening/events in the 60s and 70s were inspired by anti-militarism. In 1971 artists tried to close the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and attacked Wall Street, re-naming it 'War Street'.

SUBSIDY - A REPRESSIVE TOLERANCE?

Like many other things British in the last 20 years, the development of performance art has been determined by money – by subsidy.

Performance or live art has been a source of anxiety to the cultural establishment, and an easy diversion for the press, but it has not in any real sense been a force for political or social change. Non-art manifestations, like 'Embrace the Base' at Greenham Common, some of the Greenpeace techniques, and the activities of the anarchist 'Stop the City' and animal liberation groups have expressed political aims with happening-techniques. But British culture makes a very clear distinction between art, politics, and crime, and punishes those that break the rules.

The July/August 1976 edition of Studio International was devoted to performance, and carried several articles expressing attitudes to live art at that time.

Some writers feared the 'inappropriate' relation between theatre and visual art inferred by use of the word 'performance'. Hugh Adams (now Visual Art Officer for Southern Arts) in a thoughtful keynote essay/criticised claims that I had made elsewhere for the democracy of form in public-place performance work. I had also written of the possibility of performance artists overcoming the 'commodity' trap of the art market.[7]

In response, Hugh Adams said these claims were not only specious, but lacked theoretical foundation. He quoted appreciatively a reference to "the visual arts as a whole finding 'their natural placement in those structures articulating 'commodity exchange'". This and other opinions are attributed by Hugh Adams

to Stuart Brisley (then and now a lecturer at the Slade School of Fine Art), who as long ago as 1976 was articulating, with Leslie Haslam, a theory of 'Anti Performance Art'.[8]

In another article, Richard Francis (now in charge of Liverpool's 'Tate of the North') described the problems caused by the precedent set by the Arts Council's Art Department. The newly-formed Performance Art Committee (1974/75/76) had committed to its funds to paying artists an annual revenue grant so that they might be free to produce work 'continuously'.

"This...caused resentment amongst painters and sculptors, one of whom complained that it was 'easier to get money by standing on a street corner and playing a banjo' than by painting."[9]

'Dresden 1945/1985 Bradford' event – Refugee figure: Roland miller. Photo © Shirley Cameron 1985.

I was involved then both with the Performance Art Committee and an artists' collective based in Nottingham. What we were asking for was parity with artists and groups funded by the Arts Council's Experimental Drama and Community Art Committees, whose funding was based on an agreed Equity minimum. Equity is a trade union, and of course we were looking for a professional recognition **for all working artists, irrespective of discipline.**[10]

I don't think it was a question of money, more

a desire to preserve the status quo that forced the Arts Council to abandon revenue funding for performance artists. In 1986 the Gulbenkian Foundation's suppressed investigation into the finances of visual artists finally emerged into half-light nearly 10 years after inception.[11] One thing it made clear was the vested interest of well-established artists – often London-based – in the then Arts Council system of subsidy by one-off awards and exhibition opportunities. The notion of paying an artist for continuous work on art was not liked by the older art establishment, who wished to preserve the links between commercial galleries, sales, and publicly funded exhibitions. It had also been a long-established tradition that practising artists really earned their living from teaching in art schools.

Now that part-time art school teaching has disappeared, and the tide is running in favour of artists' exhibition payments as a right (EPR), the scene has changed. Artists of all disciplines are occasionally able to work in residencies and (thanks to Artists Placement Group) placements, at reasonable rates of pay, calculated on an annual basis. Public art commissions now often include time for paid work on site. Unfortunately – in the envious eighties – the political times are not propitious, nevertheless the battlefield on which that 70s performance art debate was

sited should be re-examined.

INTO THE ENVIOUS EIGHTIES

A new element in funding is the introduction of the Performance Art Promoters scheme (PAP) by the Arts Council.

Running now for 5 years, PAP is a very 80s thing. It relies on the existence of quasi-autonomous non-statutory agencies. Like the public art agencies that have also sprung up recently, these promoters are often small concerns, dominated by one or two individuals. They receive funding directly from Arts Council and/or Regional Arts Association sources. PAP initially funded 3, and currently 4 main promoters, of whom 2 or 3 are building-based. The promoters are not publicly accountable, nor are they (yet) regulated by set terms or standard contracts. Choice of which performance artists are subsidised, which not, has been handed over by the Arts Council to a very few individuals. The Arts Council's own monitoring group is small, and not geographically representative, its role is unclear. Typically, the PAP scheme was set up without consultation of artists.

One of the criticisms made by Richard Francis (op cit) in 1976 was that: "(performance artists were) making work which fitted the established funding pattern rather than pursuing an original intention." Another general criticism from **fine artists** within the Arts Council was that performance art was too theatrical. The situation today, under PAP, is more, not less like this. Performance art opportunities have been reduced to the level of 'open' competitions, in which selection is made by self-interested individuals. A mixture of public competition and direct commissioning makes it possible for individual promoters to closely control what work is funded, whilst appearing to throw the process open. There is no longer any debate about the development of new work. No reasons are given for rejection. Even the (competition) rules can be changed halfway through the process.[12]

The Arts Council, and the Regional Arts Associations, have abandoned their responsibility for live art. Much of the funding in the last three years has been spent on packages of repeated performances, touring the country with identical work. The site-specific nature of live art, its immediacy, improvisation, and sense of 'process' are missing. Very little new work can develop outside the circle of established artists who have found favour with the Promoters' group.

In the 80s, the habitual anxiety of official cultural agencies at the prospect of anarchy or disorder has been expressed as a conscious attempt to raise the profile of performance, by hyping it as a sophisticated form of alternative theatre. By linking performance to promotion, live art has been pushed into the gap between public and artist. The poor art, the art that uses discarded materials and abandoned locations, without the sophistication of ticket sales, or stylish publicity, is still closer to the reality of the 'happening' that seeks to intervene in real life situations.

UNOFFICIAL WORK

The following performance piece was produced in Sheffield at Easter 1987, by Sarah Morrell. It was subsequently rejected by the sole selector of the 'National Review of Live Art' (Riverside, London, October 1987) - which is regarded as the main showcase for new live art in the UK. Clearly a performance as site (and date) specific as this cannot be accommodated into a packaged system of promotional touring work, especially when selection is in the hands of a single individual, who must travel the country and see everything in a series of 'mini-platform events'.

This previously unpublished account is as I wrote it at the time. Sarah Morrell's second major event in an empty Sheffield factory - **The Holy Ghost Train** took place on Easter Saturday, Sunday and Monday nights. The building she uses is next to the River Don, just off the city centre. The gantries, piping, sumps and open hearth still in place in the big shed, were all used in this rambling, vigorous event that featured members of **Swamp Circus, Zof,** and 'you' - the audience. .

Divided into Acts, signified by projected titles, the event also used amplified music, film, smoke, and theatre lighting.

'Dresden 1945/1985 Bradford' event - Refugees section by Roland Miller with participants from Sheffield Unemployed Centre.

The audience drifted into the front end of the factory, to see a series of old 16mm films, hand-coloured and drawn on, which were screened throughout, high up above a red-robed drumming band. Various figures stood around, some up near the roof, others at floor level. At the back of the space a fire burned in a hearth, and in a small lamp-lit stall, the skeleton of a horse lay on straw. Broken windows looked out on the waters of the River Don. There were assemblages of junk, a set of wooden organ pipes, and a tall monument made of wheels, circuit boards and TV sets. Hanging fom the roof, a collection of the detritus of society - a dummy arm, a doll, a toy donkey, machine parts, plastic piping, and a sack that was gashed with a hook to let sand sift out of it, falling through a spotlight.

In one corner a polythene shack was used for mid-performance costume changes. From the roof of this shack, a giant translucent figure was hauled upright.

This arena seemed to be filled with performers, some operating independently as though in an anarchic Robert Wilson opera. Five men and women dressed formally, marched, ran, and tumbled back and forth, in ranks and singly.

There were voices, the words barely distinguishable. The main sounds were drumming. A white sheet was drawn back to reveal a stylish couple sitting in a white pit, breakfasting with **The Independent** and their loud Yuppy neuroses. This section was revealed and covered many times over, the white sheet being pulled back and forth by an operative. There were a lot of operatives in **The Holy Ghost Train**, members of the companies whose job was to animate the hardware, let off the smoke, bang the gongs.

One of their more difficult tasks was to roll a concrete sphere, black and round, about the floor. This sphere, head high, was at first covered with newspapers which burst into flame. Flames also appeared on the wire cage that surrounded two unicyclists wearing kitchen foil bikinis.

The entry of the unicyclists marked the pantomimic section of the event. The first half illuminated the factory's built-in features, the 'glamour' of the machinery, the black grease, the echoes and crashes, the **dangers** and sheer scale of the place, and the figures marching and running through it all. The later sections tried to form a story, possibly an allegory.

A May Queen entered, encased in plastic, walking on gondola-boots, armed with a green water pistol. She picked up some of the Yuppy couple's dialogue, stocks and shares, heavy finance, banking. She was either pursued by or commanded a troop of wild creatures, also armed with water. They were addressed as 'ancestors'. This Lewis Carroll-ish creation, with her screeching voice and bullying manner could be Margaret Thatcher - but then so could any strident monster these days.
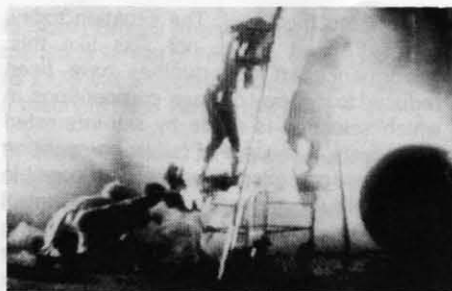
'Holy Ghost Train' Sarah Morrell, photographed from video.

The May Queen was followed by a minion covered in plastic pipes, wearing a Japanese fencer's mask, this minion walked on air boots, so that each step produced a musical note. After much tooing and froing the May Queen was toppled, laid down on a hospital trolley, which was poled like a gondola through the smoke. She was then placed screaming on the monument of wheels, in an approximation to a crucifixion.

That should have been that, except that there was an obligatory audience participation section. In one of the few clearly audible voices of the evening we were told in no uncertain terms that we had to find several pieces of a wooden carving, a tree in a pot, and some other things. These we had to place by the concrete sphere. If you got it wrong, picked up the wrong thing, you get told off. An operative passed amongst us with an impossibly large 'chalice' asking for our spit to water the tree.

When everything was in place - operatives helping the audience to complete their tasks - a surprising torrent of spit was poured onto the tree.

The achievement of **The Holy Ghost Train** was the animation of the place, the decayed industrial context, the orchestration of effects, and the ensemble movements. The plot seemed unnecessary, and some of the best visual effects should have been isolated by silence or darkness. The shadows on a corrugated iron wall of ragged figures pulling and pushing at their monstrous concrete sphere was a superb allegory.

Events like **The Holy Ghost Train** can set important precedents. Sheffield has plenty of other spaces that should be creatively liberated from their post-industrial decay - so has every other city in the North. Sarah Morrell and her Zof performers deserve an empty factory circuit of their own.

Characteristics of the current set of young performance artists are a concern for social activity, for accessible, technically simple but striking visual effects, and for communal music and dance. They are personally involved in the social environment, the post-industrial, post-work city.

Performance art continues to be one of the most exciting and challenging movements in contemporary art, and it will certainly overcome the vagaries of fashions in public spending.

NOTES:

1. For a full account of both 'motor car images' and the earlier 'railway images', see an article by Roland Miller, New Theatre Magazine, Bristol, vol XI No. 1, 1971.

2. The 'Photo-News' feature in the Daily Express (15/10/70) described 'railway images' - a four-day event beside the Leeds-Wakefield railway line. See also: 'Arts Bulletin' No. 3, Winter 1971, on Experimental Projects, published by the Arts Council. Article by Lord Feversham.

3. Heinrich Boll, The End of a Mission, Germany 1966; pub. Penguin Books tr. 1973.

4. For an account of the Cage/Rauschenberg visit to England, 1964, see article by Roland Miller, New Theatre Magazine, Bristol, 1964 vol V4.

5. Environments & Happenings, by Adrian Henri, pub. Thames & Hudson, 1974.

6. 'The Art That Moves', exhibition of documents of live art from the 60s to the present, by Shirley Cameron & Roland Miller. Organised by Huddersfield Art Gallery, 1986. Catalogue available from the authors, 49 Stainton Rd., Sheffield S11 7AX.

7. Roland Miller's statement on performance art first published in the programme for the Birmingham International Performance Art Festival, 1974, subsequently reprinted elsewhere.

8. 'Against a Definitive Statement on British Performance Art' by Hugh Adams, appeared in Studio International, Vol. 192, No. 982, July/August 1976.

9. 'Performance and Arts Council Patronage' by Richard Francis also appeared in Studio International, op cit.

10. Stuart Brisley & Lesley Haslam, Statement, catalogue of the Milan exhibition 'Arte Inglese Oggi' 1960-76 London 1976. The catalogue also contained statements by Shirley Cameron, Roland Miller, and other artists, together with photographs of work.

11. Report on the 'Financial Status of the Visual Artist) unpublished, commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation, with research by Andrew Brighton and Dr Nich Pearson.

12. Projects UK, Newcastle, the main promoting agency for live art in the UK failed to select any of the projects submitted - in 'open' competition in summer 1987. Applicants were advised to re-apply in February '88, when new criteria would be set. Neither the indentity of the selectors nor individual reasons for rejecting existing projects were given. Artists are expected to prepare detailed budgets, and give full accounts of their proposals - twice over! and at their own expense.

PROJECTS U.K.

PROJECTS U.K., based in Newcastle, are Britain's most prolific promoters of live art. Alex Fulton speaks to its two co-organisers John Bewley and Simon Herbert.

Bruce McLean 'Breaks on the Bridge', Elswick Swimming Pool, Newcastle, 1983. Photo: Steve Collins. © Projects U.K.

ALEX FULTON Could you say a little about the history of Projects U.K.?

JON BEWLEY There was a predecessor to Projects U.K. which was called the Basement Group, which was formed in December 1979. This was, basically, a basement space, which was administered by six artists. The overall aim of the Basement was to provide a space for the presentation of experimental work at a time when the support structure for this type of activity was virtually non-existent. Our funding was relatively low – artists received expenses and a nominal fee.

A.F. Nevertheless,. you programmed over 450 events, and the list of artists you dealt with reads like a complete 'Who's Who' of time-based artists, including 'big' names such as Stuart Brisley and Bruce Mclean. How do you account for this?

J.B. Well, as I've already indicated, there were an awful lot of artists out there wanting to produce work in performance, video, film and installation, and nowhere to go to with their work. We were also operating politically within a geographical context; we wanted to gradually foster the idea that there was an alternative to London and the South. By starting from scratch it took a while to create a 'history' for the practice, but by being out of the centre of the cultural market we found a surprising openess to what we were doing, not least from our funding body Northern Arts. Artists like Brisley could identify politically with such an initiative, and were therefore more than willing to produce work.

A.F. In 1984 the Basement changed into Projects U.K. What were the reasons behind that?

J.B. After five years of doing two performances a week, bar Christmas and some of Summer, we were pretty tired. The original six Basement members were all practising artists – we were touring our work as a group – and there didn't seem to be enough hours in the day. Also, we felt that we had taken the Basement as far as it could go; we were operating an open-access policy of literally first come first served, which placed us firmly in the role of responders with the prospect of a non-flexible two-year rolling programme. So the Basement disbanded, and Ken Gill and myself formed Projects U.K., an organisation operating purely from an office. We had a telephone, limited programme monies, good grass-root links with other artists and organisation at home and abroad, and a lot of enthusiasm. After our experiences of running the Basement we had two initial aims: to encourage the presentation of live art outside of the 'art space' (which the Basement, to a certain extent, had become) and draw in a potentially larger audience, and – most importantly – to allow artists access to alternate methods of production, presentation and distribution.

A.F. What were the kind of difficulties you had in promoting live work to audiences who were unfamiliar with the medium?

J.B. I think that you have to credit people with more intelligence than to presume that they will be dismissive to something they are unfamiliar with. Looking back it all seemed very easy, which it wasn't, but you select an artist and a venue that are compatible, publicize it, and off you go. Richard Layzell had over 400 people see him at a night-club, Silvia Ziranek performed at Pizzaland, Charlie Hooker created a ballet for cars at a multi-storey car-park, Bruce Mclean worked with synchronised swimmers at the local swimming pool. People became used to these events, and kept an eye out for them.

SIMON HERBERT The other thing to bear in mind is the support-structure that you provide for an artist. For example, you don't programme an artist who walks around slowly with a bucket on his head in a night-club full of 400 pissed Geordies.

J.B. There should always be a reason for programming work other than 'wouldn't that be fun?' As way of example, in 1984 we organised the Touring Exhibitionists, in which ten artists toured and presented short works in six cities – Brighton, London, Bristol, Rochdale, Nottingham and Newcastle – over seven days. The project mixed a wide cross-section of performance activities, ranging from the considered work of Alistair MacLennan to the controlled anarchy of the French artist Joel Hubaut. As a whole, it was designed to establish a series of geographical links and visibility for the practice.

Nan Hoover at the Basement, 1982. Photo: Steve Collins. © Projects U.K.

'The Touring Exhibitionists' – Organisers arranging the evening's running order with the artists on the coach, 1984. Photo: Steve Collins. © Projects U.K.

S.H. That certainly wasn't fun.

(laughter)

A.F. Performance art has made a bit of a come-back over the last few years, appearing regularly at all kinds of venues. How is Projects U.K. currently promoting live work?

J.B. For the last four years the Arts Council have been putting money into the Franchise Promoters Scheme, run by its Combined Arts Department. The current annual budget is £30,000, which is divided up strategically amongst organisations around the country. Applications are annual, and you must have the backing of your Regional Arts Association. Projects U.K. has received money each year so far, and we currently receive a third of the pot. This money is purely for the promotion of time-based work. In the first year, we organised 'New Work, Newcastle '86' in conjunction with the Laing Art Gallery, which show-cased the work of thirteen artists in and around Newcastle.

S.H. Half of these artists were commissioned using the Franchise monies

Alistair MacLennan 'Lie to Lay', Roseberry Crescent Warehouse, Newcastle, 1986. Photo: Steven Collins. © Projects U.K.

to produce new work. In all respect to them, they were less well-established than some figures in the field, so the money was used, in effect, as a 'seeding' source. Up-and-coming artists presented work alongside practitioners with established reputations. The latter were invited.

A.F. What does the selection process for your commissions involve?

J.B. Invitations for artists to submit proposals for a commission are advertised nationally. We run it on an open submission basis. There is a selection panel consisting of Simon and myself, Arts Council representatives, local artists, plus writers or promoters who have extensive knowledge of the field. Oh, and one of the previous year's commissions. Their input is very valuable, as they went through the whole process the year before but from a very different perspective. Applications are accepted principally on merit; it just so happens that the last two years' monies went to younger artists, it's certainly not a rule thumb.

A.F. When the Basement turned into

Projects U.K. one of its aims was to take live art out of the gallery format. Both of your last two festivals were organised in conjunction with the Laing Art Gallery, and the second one toured to the Cornerhouse in Manchester and Cartwright Hall in Bradford. Isn't there a contradiction here, in that you are actively promoting work back within existing institutions?

J.B. I think this really depends on your viewpoint. There were a number of reasons why we approached the Laing Art Gallery, not least of which, to be pragmatic, was that they are major recipients of Glory of the Garden monies. We felt that some of this money, supplemented with our commission monies and our experience in promoting time-based work, could do nothing but benefit the practice as a whole, both in terms of visibility and opportunities for artists.

S.H. For years artists have produced work with no real recognition, and in spaces that have not been technically or conceptually equipped to handle them. This was a way of re-addressing the balance. The Laing people were a little naive in some ways, but that's okay because they were very enthusiastic and supportive. We handled the nuts and bolts, and they made use of their extensive local education contacts pulling sixth-formers in to see events and take part in related workshops. Static shows accompanied both festivals. Certainly no one held a gun to their head and forced them to follow such an initiative.

J.B. Some types of work, though, obviously cannot physically or conceptually take place in a gallery. For instance, in the first festival we invited Alistair Maclennan to make a long-duration work in a sizeable space. Galleries cannot operate under a 24 hour open access (the work was 120 hours continuous) and anyway a gallery space wasn't right for his particular approach. So we found a large derelict warehouse for him and we alternated invigilation over the five days. Last year we brought Karen Finley over from America, a highly controversial artist who deals in very up-front and harrowing analyses of sexual violence. The work was poignant whilst being aggressive, and Karen was nude for some of the time, so we found a controlled separate venue that she felt comfortable with. But to address your question more closely, there is a need, amid the current fashionability of live work, to analyse exactly what the end-results are. Over the last few years we have attempted to set the ground-work for a greater integration of live work into the mainstream, but, given the nature of the medium, this is potentially cvery problematic in terms of the demands being made of the artists. Large institutions are not very flexible, and chances are they employ few people who have a sensibility towards live work – and that ranges all the way from publicizing the work within an adequate context through to ensuring that the equipment is not going to conk out

half-way through a performance.

S.H. In the current climate, up-and-coming as well as established artists seem to be increasingly faced with a specific number of considerations in producing live work which we aren't happy with, i.e. "o.k., you can make a work, but we don't want a mess, the work must be small-scale enough to be set up, presented and taken down in two days, it can't cost a lot as it's only one day's activities out of 365, and for God's sake dont' offend anyone." There are already signs that this thinking is being engrained in artists' attitudes judging by some of the applications we receive. That's not to say such work is not valid, of course, simply that other places can deal with it, and we're not particularly interested.

J.B. We've taken a very different stance with the commissions this year. In advertising them we've made it very explicit that we want proposals that challenge contemporary perceptions of both form and content. The money is there for people with ambition who want to push forward the boundaries. There are artists out there who can do it, but maybe up until now they don't think that there's anyone interested enough to do so amongst the stampede to jump onto the performance art band-wagon.

A.F. Is this one of the reasons why you are increasingly organising works in other formats?

J.B. We're still committed, obviously, to live work, which we also promote to schools and colleges with video and slide documentation packs, but one of the worst things that you can do is to adopt a tunnel vision; the Basement was set up nearly ten years ago – it was great but it's now in the past. We programmed Richard Wilson's 'One Piece At A Time' installation in the Tyne Bridge as part of TSWA 3D, we are currently commissioning artists' sound-works for telephone lines, artists' billboard works for advertising sites and lots of other projects.

S.H. In times of social repression, as now, the boundaries are drawn back and regress. We are an organisation that offers the chance for artists to contact us if they want to cross disciplines and practice. To expand.

J.B. Firstly, because it's interesting, and secondly because good art is not confined to a single practice. It never was. And as long as we continue to operate, we'll try and make sure it won't be.

■ **Projects U.K. are a department of Newcastle Media Workshops.**

SCREEN & PROJECTION
Alistair Dickson

Unlimited Liability: This is a speculative review of several live instllations/performances recently seen in Glasgow. After describing what was seen in each performance, it will indulge in the most detested vice of the critic: theorising after the fact. The artists' only responsibility for this lies in their having sparked off this line of thought.

O N the evening of 3rd October 1978, three artists presented works at **Transmission Gallery**, utilising the basement as well as the ground floor outer and inner galleries.

'Fragments' by Jane Bartlett was presented in the outer gallery and front window. Materially, it consisted of several pairs of shoes constructed from various materials (cardboard, shoe leather, etc). The performance element involved the gallery space being cut in two directions by projector light beams, one projecting shoes on shoes and the other pair of legs. Bartlett took her place in one of the pairs of shoes, trying to match her own position with that indicated by the projected legs. There was no dramatic development, the position just being maintained for several minutes, after which the performance was over.

For **Louise Crawford's 'Marilyn: Modern Icon'**, the inner gallery had been hung in depth with advertising-hoarding sized images of Marilyn Monroe, behind large polythene drapes. To a record of sacred music by Bach and a banal song by Monroe herself, Crawford moved within the space, painting and washing the images, which gradually tore away to reveal American flag images beneath. At the end of the performance, she encouraged the audience to move behind the screen, to where a shrine (candle and crucifix) to the idolisation of Monroe had been set up.

The third performance of the evening, **Sabine Buerger's 'A Prayer for England'** took place in the basement, where three enormous 'paper boats' had been constructed from papier mache. Two of the boats were filled with water and one of them pulled across the floor, while a tape repeated "...and, a boat...and, a boat" with various inflections. The final segment involved Buerger obeying the imperative in the programme notes: "Carry the empty ship on your head. Who will listen to my scream?", a catharsis with perhaps greater significance for the performer than the audience.

While the Tranmission Gallery space was fully utilised by the three performances, it is a pity that they took place in series, with the audience reduced to a kind of tourism, moving from one spectacle to another. Despite the performers having previously worked together, during artists' residencies at Battersea in London, inter-reaction between the evening's individual performances was missing. However, common elements of vocabulary appeared to be present, arising from shared experience; this will be explored later.

'Seduction/Saturation' by Karen Strang/Limited Space, presented three weeks later at the **Third Eye Centre** (as part of the **New Work/No Definition** season), again utilised projected images. Strang sat at a table, reading aloud from a Mills & Boon paperback, flanked by sequences of video images to one side and slide images to the other. Each showed a projection of Dr. David Owen's face, distorted by her body. The limit to the depth of the performance space was defined by hanging frames, which contained clingfilm instead of canvas. The performance lasted 30 minutes (this being the length of the tape of a

'Seduction/Saturation' performance by Karen Strang at Third Eye Centre. Photo: Peter Horobin.

ticking clock which could be heard in the background) and was framed by the scattering of rose petals at the beginning and the cutting-away of the clingfilm at the end.

Because a cold had obliterated Strang's voice, the second night's performance (hereafter **Seduction/Saturation II**) was very different. Of the reading, only the traces survived (on tape), and her actual role in the performance was a retreat into muteness, silently reading her book while Pete Horobin and Ken Murphy-Roud intermittently destroyed the screens and ceiling-hangings (and eventually the book itself). In this version, the performance space had been deepened and the original time structure survived only as the **spacing** between the **events** (the outbreaks of violence); each element heightened the tension of the other.

Consideration and comparison of these installations and performances bring to mind two main subjects: those of the **performance spacing**, the **screen projection**, and the **subject matter.**

The performance spacing exists both as location and time slice. Does performance aspire to the state of theatre? What would make the experience of witnessing a performance satisfactory?

In its location, a performance has the immediate 'choice' between situation inside or outside a gallery. In saying that, the idea of choice has been bracketed because it is largely an   of the social structure. In the first place, a gallery can be the location for irrelevant activities, or a 'haven in a heartless world' in times of reflux; activity outside a gallery can forge new and exciting links, or be as irrelevant as Saturday robot dancing or SPGB soapboxing. Secondly, there is the question of the institutional recognition of the type of activity: the current attraction of performance work in Scotland may well be influenced partly by the tenuous grasp on the subject by the Scottish Arts Council and most other administrators, partly by the implicit refusal of commodification in producing one-off works which are totally unsaleable (although a trade in 'documentation' detritus is a danger).

So each situation has to be judged on its merits. That said, if a gallery space is chosen, the nature of the installation largely determines the relationship between the performer's space and the audience's space.

In Louise Crawford's performance, the demarcation between these respective areas was immediately obvious, leading to problems when the boundaries had to be 'transgressed' at the end of the piece. On the other hand, although a virtual space was created by the projector beams, Jane Bartlett's **tableau vivant** was perceived as establishing no boundaries, existing within the normal gallery space. **A Prayer for England** utilised a space in which the audience was quite literally marginalised. In

Seduction/Saturation I the boundary was quite rigid, whereas much that was exciting about **Seduction/Saturation II** came from its insistent violation of the audience's space; the uncertainties created by overflowing of the acts of violence into what had initially appeared to be the audience's space.

As time-based works, performances veer between minimal activity in a duration outside clock time (which can itself be read as either a refusal of the standardised time of the economic system, or as a celebration of the repitition at its heart) and a theatrical duration.

The former is only really effective when the (non)action is maintained for a very long time, straining audience patience; the latter gives a work a much more familiar shape. The short duration of **Fragments** generated confused audience reactions, while the conventionally dramatic time-forms of **Marilyn: Modern Icon and Seduction/Saturation I** drew strength from the latter aspect.

Running through the performances was the thread of a common vocabulary. Light projection, sometimes occluded by transmission through 'clear' media, and screen images were placed and manipulated in a variety of ways. The perception of the subject matter, although a separate subject, blended closely with this technical aspect.

What is the role of the projection onto the self? What is the role of the idealised image? A common point between the performances was this ambivalent attitude to the imaginary image, that ideal projection of the self which is simultaneously a socialised self, a socialisation of the self, a self-as-other; above all, an attempt to fill a perceived lack, but one which remains insubstantial and is never to be realised. The impossibility of meeting all these criteria is typified in the fate of Marilyn Monroe.

That highlights the necessity to gender this ambivalence, not least because all these performances were by women. None was far from dealing with the ambivalence of the

woman's historic role as object of fascination, destined to be ideal object to another's subject – the path between subjection and subjecthood.

Structurally, projection presents two positions: the viewer and the viewed. In its use on these performances, the positions were multiplied and complicated: the audience viewed the performer as she viewed the projection. "Blurring the boundaries and feeding the ambiguities between the real and the simulated" as the programme notes for **Fragments** described the process. In the case of **Seduction/Saturation**, the performer's acted retreat into romantic fiction was reflected in the relentless desire of her video image 'selfs' to coincide with the romantic ideal; in its second performance, the search for the impetuous romantic ideal man was driven by a desire for passive escape from an impetuous and violent actual man.

One final aspect which can aspect which can be mentioned is the role of the programme notes in carrying a meaning of the performance. The notes vary from the purely descriptive (such as those for **Marilyn: Modern Icon** and **Seduction/Saturation**) to those which carry at least as much weight as the performance itself (such as those for **Fragment**), to those which appear to reject any public meaning (as was the case with a **A Prayer for England**). Unless the visual is to be privileged over the written, there would seem to be no reason why such notes should not be considered as an important part of the performance material.

when it got dark,
we'd stand and kiss
behind the hut

ART IN PERFORMANCE

THE FOLLOWING statements were provided by the artists after reading a copy of the previous piece 'Screen and Projection'. Whilst the author of the aforementioned admits to indulging in the "most detested vice of the critic, theorising after the fact", the artists felt that there was an imbalance in his critical distance regarding the four performances dealt with in the article, but also some mistakes in his factual obervation. This, however, serves the positive end of raising some questions about the nature of some performance work and the problems which arise through written interpretation.

FRAGMENTS

THIS CONSISTED of three tableaux using projection in the outer gallery, and a simulated 'shop window' display of the objects used; her shoe and shirt 'RE-designs' - constructed from cardboard, paper, fabric etc., and **parts of** existing shoes and shirts - in the gallery window.

Inside slides of the shoe 'design' were projected on the two side walls; one small projection on the skirting; and another at eye level projected onto a black and white photocopy of the same shoe, the overlaying and layering of images attempting to give some sort of **holographic** effect. So, you have the shoes and shirts as 'displays'; as narrative; as picture; and finally, 'modelled' a person, here the artist, stands for several minutes in a pose affecting the wearing of the shoe 'designs', slides of legs projected onto her legs. Again the overlaying servingb the purpose in that it allows the interdeterminancy; a 'live fashion plate'.

Jane Bartlett.

'Fragments': Jane Bartlett.

MARILYN: MODERN ICON

IN A dimly lit space, three large photocopied images of Marilyn Monroe (taken and enlarged from postcards) were presented. In front of each one of these was suspended a polythene sheet, serving to create a private space - distanced and separated from the audience - in which the artist could perform, worship and idolise the icon.

3 IMAGES   3 ACTIONS   3 CROSSES

As the artists performed her actions took in religious significance.

1 THE PRESENTATION FOR DEATH

"for when a legend perishes, the cult of myth can blossom..."

To a quietly played Bach recitl the artist; applied make up to the first image (making reference to Andy Warhol's screen printed 'Marilyn'?)

washed/cleansed the image - and then her own face (identification?)
tore out the wet photocopied image.

2 DEATH

"...to transcend beyond the weakness of the normal flesh..."

A painted American flag (reference to Jasper Johns) was ripped from the heart of the next image (to the additional sound of Marilyn singing 'I'm thin with love'*) and buried in a mound of earth below.

"...death feeds the myth and frees the legend to be reborn solely through representation..."

3 THE RESURRECTION

"...the representation becomes the reality..."

The artist carried three large crosses, plastic fruit and flowers through to the back of the space to adorn the image - the 'real' Marilyn.

All quotes taken from 'Death and Glory' City Limits.

Bruce Conner used this soundtrack in his 1975 film 'Marilyn Turns Five'.

Louise Crawford

WATERSHIPS CAN'T CARRY WATER. PAST IS THE GLORY. CARRY THE EMPTY SHIP ON YOUR HEAD.

WHO WILL LISTEN TO MY SCREAM.

A PRAYER FOR ENGLAND, by Sabine Buerger, with sound by G. Salentin.

THE PERFORMANCE took place in the basement of Transmission. People were compressed in the narrow space. A tape repeating with my voice (joyfully) "...a ship and a ship and..." and so on. Three huge paper ships and the blown-up face of Maggie Thatcher as poster, the sink, and myself standing at the wall. The audience in the middle of it, everywhere; useful was the churchbench, found in the space. People could sit on it.

I start the destruction of two paperships by filling these with water. They leak. I pull the ships through the space, first the dry, the empty one. An iron bucket underneath changes a paper-grey ship into an iron-grey ship. Then the two watersships who can hardly move. After the action has been carried out, slowly and with concentration, they stand in one row; the navy pointing at me.

Change of sound, light goes out, I stand in a slide-projection of myself with bound legs, hands lifted in adoration. Turning round I am writing into the projection 'a ship & a ship & a ship...' and so on, covering the whole projection field. The writing is fast and brutal. In the following I sit down, put the paper ship onto my head. Another tape, my voice speaking "If it were silent I would scream, if you were listening I could get rid of my scream" dictates my action. I speak with the tape; I scream, gurgle, spit out the words, I try to articulate myself. If not speaking I am gesturing with my arms, sitting underneath the ship. The action is emotional, desperate, and ends with my complete exhaustion. Throwing off the ship I leave the room. The audience remains in darkness.

'A Prayer For England' performance by Sabine Burger at Transmission. Photo: Peter Horobin.

AVE '87

William Clark

The Audio-Visual Experimental Festival, held annually in the town of Arnhem in Holland was instigated by a small group of students 3 years ago with the aim of presenting new work in audio-visual means from various art schools in the Netherlands. The festival quickly developed in scope and intention and this year 9 countries were represented in over 8 different venues. Run by about 60 volunteers, the festival maintains an atmosphere conducive to contact and developing experimentation. As the November issue of Mediamatics put it: "AVE's main objective is the presentation of some unknown art and not the attempted detection of potential celebrities."

*M*OST events at "AVE 87" tended to centre around the Filmhuis which contained two halls which hosted continuous screenings of video, Super 8 and 16mm work. The foyer art-space of the filmhouse was given over each day to as many as 6 or 7 different video installations, slide arrangements, and performances. The rapid turnover was enabled by hardworking technical assistants, mostly artists, who maintained the continuity with enthusiasm and technical adaptability. Some of the installations were impressive and elaborate: arriving from Scotland on the second day of the festival, we saw the work of Spanish artist **Fernandez Suarez Cabeza** being assembled to form an installation which combined sound and video work with multiple slide projections, sequenced to reflect and refract their light with a revolving and partly mirrored glass onto the spectators.

On many occasions the film halls were given over to lectures. The most informative and best illustrated of these was given by **Wim Van Der Plas** on Computer Animation. Remaining friendly and informative throughout, he pointed out that although computer facilities are fast advancing in rendering convincing artistic techniques, almost all the work is being done by 'technical people' (i.e. not artists). Similarly, since computer time can cost around **£5000** per second, images tend to be used by corporate giants to advertise their products.

The sheer volume of single screen video work made it impossible to view everything, and anything commented upon must be erratically selected. Work tended to be shown grouped by nationality. The work of **Raul Rodriguez** discovered an exotic quality in daily life, and outshone most of the other Spanish videos. Rodriguez's feel for the qualities of light and atmosphere of an arid agrarian cultural landscape conveyed a sense of documentary and emotion. One scene, a tracking shot at ground level of an old peasant woman walking endlessly over the rocky terrain of her home is particularly memorable.

Unfortunately, I seemed to have missed the bulk of the English videos and catch bad examples when I was in attendance. An exception was **Carol Lynn's** short and poignant 'Megallanic Clouds'. One part of this video featured swaying colours which in stages of clarification revealed themselves to be the most brutal scenes from a slaughterhouse. This work contained a powerful sense of putting aside effects to reveal a harsh, but hidden, reality; it handled very well material normally used gratuitously.

In retrospect the German films, particularly those from Berlin, were the most impressive, being more expansive and 'professional'. **Frank Behnke's** 'Feitico' was adapted from a William Burroughs short story with music from Terminated Alien and This Heat, and demonstrated an outstanding grasp of his

Hans Jurg Gilgen, music performance at AVE '87. Photo: Chrysta van Kolfschoten.

Puberty Institution 'Antehyperaesthesia', 'AVE '87'.   Photo © Variant.

material and how to translate it into film.

PERFORMANCE

The film theatre was the venue for Berlin's **Tempel der Freiheit** who 'performed' "Bolero Babylon", a cacophonic, shambling, musical deconstruction of order, chance and chaos, overlayed with projected images of political troublemakers, from Beuys to Luxemburg. Later in the evening **Huns Jurg Gilgen** - a Swiss - animated various contraptions to create Cage-like musical nonsense. This seemed to be taken too seriously by the performer at the expense of the true magic and daring of free improvisation. It did, however, provide an oblique form of 'entertainment' as he proceeded to elicit noises from an assortment of rubber bands, goldfish bowls, biscuit tins and turntables.

A short distance from the Filmhuis is the **Oceaan**, a squatted art space which proved to be extremely flexible and provided an invaluable addition to the festival. The Oceaan seemed more suited to the more atmospheric performances and installations, as the **Puberty Institution's** "Antehyper-aesthesia" proved. This marked another collaboration between Craig Richardson and Douglas Gordon from Glasgow School of Art, and was an extension of their 'tradition/ debilitation' performance (with Euan Sutherland) seen at the National Review of Live Art and at Glasgow's 'New Work/No Definition' event. Puberty Institution presented one of the few works to draw poetically from the cultural/historical inscription of the site of Arnhem. A table spanning rows of coal planted with candles over the floor of the space was occupied by two seemingly anaesthetised figures, wandering slowly, yet held in quiet desperation. They appeared youthful yet aged, wearily absorbed and suspended in painstaking ritual enactments while steeped in radio static, overlayed with nostalgic music from the 40s and the evocative timbre of a lamenting Scottish pibroch.

The Oceaan also played host to the Belgian artist **Trudo Engels**, who used several collaborators, seated at microphones beside tall columns upon which swung lightbulbs on long flexes a short distance from their heads. The performers' quiet rhythmic murmurs, combined with the revolving bulbs, were intermittently amplified and illuminated from a mixing console leaving starkly powerful trails and echoes in the darkened space.

Another artist-run space, The Hooghuis was another venue for the festival and contained the work of **Markus Ambach**, German, and **Odine de Kroon**, Dutch. In the darkened basement, Ambach projected film loops through slits, stencilling the light onto banked corner pieces creating minimal kinetic sculptures. In the contrastingly light and open space upstairs, de Kroon had positioned a cruciform audio-visual installation into which the spectator entered, being baptised with the sound of rushing water and images of gently unfurling scroll-like paper.

The Gementmuseum was perhaps the most challenging space to deal with. **Hanneke Raybroeck** tackled the problematic nature of the space by presenting an installation/performance which was indistinguishable from the Museum's cafe. This piece was centred on 'representing' the afternoon ritual coffee break of Dutch 'housewives'. Raybroeck had constructed furniture, some of which was inset with display cases, video monitors, mirros and small cibachrome images. An overall soundtrack provided a range of sounds from babies crying to the sound of coffee cups 'clinking'. Raybroeck herself served coffee to spectators, mimicking the role of a waitress contributing to the work's overall tone, incongruous in its banality, of mocking, of satirising the mores of the older generation. Her critical perception of her subject matter seemed to have steered her into a role of merchandising herself/her art on the same level as the sale of a cup of coffee.

Trudo Engels' performance at 'AVE '87'. Photo: Chrysta van Kolfschoten.

Entering into the language of the prosperous bourgeoisie was tackled a little differently by **Linda Pollack**, also from Holland, with her performance in the Filmhuis "Susan Smith is a Business Woman". Pollack, dressed in a grey business woman's suit, started by irritating an already surly audience with taped business deals and a video of an American game show, whilst strutting briskly round the hall distributing American Express leaflets while wildly proclaiming that she "accepted it". Further exhortations came from her to play the game we were watching on T.V., the answer to the question being 'State of Emergency': this seemed a very slight ending to the proceedings. Curiously, her use of images of slick consumerism and marketing techniques seemed to be aimed at the audience to elicit some type of response, a provoked reaction which just nearly worked, yet her pretence of being 'in character' asked us to suspend our disbelief. This combination seemed as much conditioned by the virtual reality of T.V. as any part of her subject matter. To what extent Raybroeck, Pollack and the less effective Swedish **Paperpool** (Stephan Karlson and Mata Olsson, who pretended to be representatives of an imaginary bureaucratic company) challenged the authority of their subject matter and engendered a critical awareness within the spectator poses certain questions on the authorship of their content. The fascination with the many faces of affluence seems at time to conspire into a crypto-alliance or even pantomime.

The consternation amongst those trying to raise issues of sexuality away from a fixation on the female as a passive sexual object was added to in **Galina Voronel Aas'** video installation 'Growing Blue'. This was a six monitorred wall draped in silk-like cloth and surrounded by gently billowing cloth hangings of various sizes. These surrounding hangings and the videos shared the imagery of a naked woman in various reclining poses caressing herself. Although essential, the multiple repitition of a lone figure bathed in blue light and soft music did give the foyer the cold aura of an artistic sex shop. Nudity (for the hell of it) has always abounded in performance since the days of Yves Klien – later in the evening **Marcel Nijmeijer with**

'An Interaction with a Monitor and a Prostitute', presented us with an attractive girl dressed in see-through silk underwear, provocatively facing the audience, with pouting lips and whip in hand whilst a video monitor relayed images of her face. The girl (and audience) seemed extremely uneasy about the whole affair, which itself resided between embarrasment and titiliation. In putting this work together, Nijmeijer seemed to have used the girl as little more than an object of humiliation for the consumption of the unusually large audience.

An attempt to regain some element of control over authorship yet still deal with stereotypes, was present in **Hattie Naylor's** performance 'Cowboys'. Returning to the overtly direct format of storytelling, she read a monologue

Galina Varonel Aas 'Growing Blue' installation at AVE '87.

Photo Chrysta van Kolfschoten

revolving around little boys' fascination with guns. Her portrayal of the media revealed it as the lowest common denominator of stereotyped attitudes, stood up as less of a fiction, less rhetorically dramatic than mere mimicking.

The crossover ground between 'experimental theatre' and performance and the creative interface which is evolving was demonstrated uniquely by **Piotr Nathan** and **Elena Horme**'s 'a very long and unbelievably boring piece'. This was an elaborate and multi-facetted performance, intensely driven by some peculiar inner logic and schematic plan. Seemingly endless, it ranged over changes of costume, atmosphere and activity, paralleling and reversing stages in the life of the male or female protagonists involved. At one point, Nathan and Horne engaged in a Duchamp-like transcription of awkward sexual activity; balancing a veiled window frame between their legs while spraying one another with aerosols, folding up pages from a pornographic magazine into

paper aeroplanes and aiming them at the audience. The performance utilised a multitude of accessories which included a saxophone, mirrors, suitcases, a ladder, and various personal effects and artifacts which formed a mutant portable interior, the setting of absurdly cruel translations of the banal processes of life.

In conclusion, with a festival representing such a vast amount of work, the problem for both the audience and the organisers is simply finding the good and challenging work. Next year a stricter selection procedure will be implemented. This might go some way in avoiding the over-representation of some English work, mostly all selected from Newcastle Polytechnic and Slade School of Art, some of which was of little substance. Scotland, in facing the opposite problem of under-representation, perhaps inspired the very few that were there to organise a larger Scottish contigent next year.

Piotr Nathan and Elena Hormess: 'a very long and unbelievably boring piece' performance at 'AVE '87. Photo: Chrysta van Kolfschoten.

VIDEO:

DOCUMENTATION

A N D

INSTALLATION

A T T H E

NATIONAL

REVIEW

O F

LIVE ART

Douglas Aubrey

Video:
Live Art's poor relative

THE National Review itself is an excellent event to go to and witness some of the best and new live work going on in Britain at the moment - this actually does include video.

Judging by both the profile and the status to which video was afforded at the event, the serious performers (and administrators?) generally regarded the medium as an OK way to document the 'proper' stuff, or as a tag on the end of the National Review bill, alongside some brilliant, much mediocre and some atrocious live works.

Video Documentation:
A case of too many cooks...

THERE is obviously a need to document live work, however there was a considerable overload in terms of documentation at the event (at times there were 5 camera crews floating around recording virtually anything and everything that moved - when they could get the cameras to work properly and make sense of the spaghetti of video cables in the central foyer area).

On a more serious and disconcerting note was the sensation of wondering whether at times performances were being staged for the cameras - rather than for a live audience, (in this respect one consolation seemed that some of the best performance work on show defied documentation).

This whole area of documentation was one which raised much interesting discussion and debate among many of the video makers present. At a lively but short discussion, the point was raised by artists working with video as a 'main' medium whether documentation of live works could and should merit large budgets specifically for such uses, especially when considering the difficulty in working with the medium directly as an artist.

A valid conclusion that arose was that performers themselves should consider how their work is documented and whether they are going to work **for** or **with** the camera and even if video is the most effective means of documentation. This whole area is one which merits much discussion and development. One possible solution to the problem is the potential for more direct collaboration between performer and documenter in the recording and interpreting of such events.

The Poor Relatives
Reviewed...

IN terms of works commissioned - specifically video installation, a thread which ran throughout was the active attempt by the artists concerned to use performance as an integral element.

In some this is more self-evident than in others, in particular Zoe Redman and Francis

Alexander's **Room of Clocks** which left one with the feeling of having missed the performance - of viewing the props, the situation of the performer, rather than the performers themselves. This in itself gave the work a timeless feel, but which like much of Redman's other work depends on her presence as a performer and poet.

Simon Herbert's work **Totem** more successfully captured this sense, relying on a childhood experience of watching a family drown in their car in a freak accident. Powerful images which have in effect become commonplace in the late eighties were combined with a highly charged monologue read by the artist himself, seen at times keyed through images of a Vietcong being executed and a number of other potent images from the twentieth century (all framed in place of the usual family snaps on the mantle above a constructed fireplace which formed the focal point of the entire work). The performance element relied on the artist's role as a witness, helpless yet able to comment and exorcise his fear and horror on seeing such an event.

Using the same idea of trauma, though in this case actual rather than observational, Mike Stubbs' **the Myth of Speed** falls severely short of its potential (Stubbs was involved in a serious road accident a while back). This work could have had the kind of impact that something like J. G. Ballard's 'Crash' has on its readers. Stubbs' concerns became lost by the poor presentation and lack of clarity of the imagery in which he deals, but then maybe some experiences are best forgotten...

Cat Elwes' simple two-screen piece **First House** dealt with the experience of mother-hood; as a male I felt somewhat like a voyeur, looking into the house on the security and relationship between mother and child which this simple construction (a time-based 'Wendy House') explored.

The sound from this work also eventually became extremely tedious when trying to become involved in the other work taking place in the space, a problem due more to the containment of all the video works in a relatively small space.

8x5

POTENTIALLY the most effective and innovative works in the entire festival were presented over a self-contained five screen, five source format.

Confusion was the order of things here, with some artists making work to be viewed in a more conventional installation sense, where the viewer comes in, watches for as long as they like then leaves as was the case in my work with Alan Robertson as Pictorial Heroes: **The Great Divide**, whereas something such as Andrew Stones' **Salmon Song** demanded that the viewer sit and watch for 40 minutes before being confronted by a work such as that presented by Kate Meynell's **A Book of Performance**, which only utilised 2 (or was it 3?) screens.

8 works were programmed in such a manner and ran continuously throughout the day – for the audience this created a hit and miss affair, with viewing of specific works being determined by chance.

However, if you had the time and patience to view all of these works it would prove a rewarding experience, ranging as they did from the visually beautiful piece by Marion Urch **Out of the Ashes** to the (over) glossy comment and assault on the Yuppie mentality **Social Games and Group Dances** presented by Simon Robertshaw and Mike Jones which utilised the Quantel paintbox. Another work which effectively used the Paintbox was Chris Rowland's piece **Home on the Range**, dealing as it did with images of violence – particularly of death and conflict by the bullet, set against a shooting gallery and funfair type environment.

Both these pieces would have benefitted from a little more clarity and resolution in terms of issues addressed and a little less concern with technology and presentation, a major problem confronting any artist given the opportunity to work with such technology. Rowland has subsequently added a further section to his piece which I have yet to see.

Dealing with similar issues as Rowland to some extent, Steve Littman's **Street Life – Something of the present** dealt with the ideas of living with the gun and the type of Rambo-type mentality dominant in contemporary culture. Littman's intentions may be honourable but become lost in an orgy of violent and exploitative images – many seen in other Littman pieces (namely 'Smile' and 'In the name of the gun'). Overall the

point where imagery ceases to be obsessive and starts to become repetitive is an issue which arises here.

Throughout all the works with the exception of Stones' 'Salmon Song', which tended to deal with the medium itself and is one of a number of new works emerging which seem to be reviving the seventies pre-occupation with the processed image, and the notion of a 'pure video', a number of themes and key concerns emerged, such as the idea of cultural/social division and exile (as in the case of 'The Great Divide', which dealt with the idea of North and South Divide/Haves and Have nots and Janusz Szecerek's **Open the Box** which contained the divide between Eastern Bloc and Western Culture and the interpretations of world events through Television in the Global Village (or should that read ghetto?).

Another consideration was the very obvious concerns of both the male and female artists involved – the women tending to look inward and deal with uniquely feminist issues (which in some cases such as in Marion Urch's work) contained their own kind of violence whilst the masculine tended to look outward, dealing with more broadly based cultural and political concerns, ranging from the more obvious instances of male violence (which were criticised unreasonably by many women artists present) to explore and probe conflict and class hierarchies.

On the basis of thise works, apart from the more obvious considerations, there seems to be emerging certain styles and techniques which characterise work produced by both sexes, Urch's and Meynell's work tending more to the filmic and poetic, whilst for

example Rowland's and Robertshaw/Jones's work tending to be more definitely 'video' in its use of effects and multi-layered imagery. Likewise, Steve Littman's Pictorial Heroes and Janusz Szecerek's relied on what could be seen as a 'harder' use of video effects and scratch style editing.

Whether this is a deliberate or accidental trend will have to wait to be seen, in the meantime it is apparent that all the artists involved had something worth showing and saying – and they did so, effectively, beautifully, violently and most of the time chaotically.

Overall the inclusion and profile of video at the event was down to the hard work and efforts of Steve Littman.

Unfortunately due to both technical and organisational problems a similar event at Glasgow's Third Eye Centre turned into a badly installed side show which nobody knew existed. This in itself didn't do the work – nor any championing of video – any favours.

Problems aside, let's hope that at next year's event in Glasgow that Video is not seen as the poor relative of performance and that the organisers are aware that in staging any work in this area don't forget what's been happening in Scotland or with typical London-style arrogance think they can dictate and control output.

Taking such an event out of London is both creditable and worthwhile – the problems begin when considering the whole context and validity of decentralising – but then that's a whole new argument to be considered...

NOTES ON DISCORD:

Einsturzende Neubaten and the Destruction of Structures

by Hazel McLaren

"Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life. The urge to destroy is also a creative urge."[1]

CREATIVE destruction is a means of clearing out redundant ideas and ideology, it means the physical destruction of the structures and values of this society. Certain forms of self-destruction symbolise in microcosm this attack on society, but also serve as a means of self-discovery and a celebration of individuality. There is a traceable line of thought between those who have dealt with these issues broadly and who operated on the fringes of culture and society, mainly from the late 19th century to the present day. This line of thought includes Friedrich Nietsche, Michael Bakunin, Antonin Artaud, the Dadaists, the Futurists, the Vienna School (Arnolf Rainer, Herman Nitsch, Rudolf Schwartzkogler, Otto Mull, Gunter Brus), to the Situationists, Gustav Metzger, Punk Rock in the Seventies and, since 1979, **Einsturzende Neubaten**. All of the aforementioned have dealt with ideas of creative destruction through various forms, be it in the visual arts, sound, writing and in political activity. All of them opposed the dominant structures and values of society, were anti-authoritarian, either partly or in total against the whole notion of authority. The most contemporary of the above, Einsturzende Neubaten (translated 'collapsing new buildings') make direct connection with Artaud, Nietsche, and the Vienna artists, though more specifically with Futurism. Neubaten have stated their aims in a directly political expression as being the representation of the breakdown of social structures through the breakdown of musical structures. The destruction of the body is a metaphor intended to catalyse the exploration of the subconscious through its use in the production of their 'sound'.

Neubaten are based in West Berlin and have been working together since 1979. They believe that destruction is a positive force which results in the birth of new space in which creation can occur spontaneously. They work within the discipline of noise and outside 'popular music', and it might be described as practising an updated version of Russolo's 'Art of Noises'. Their vocals are in German, their native language.

They are notorious for various acts of violence against the buildings in which they perform, particularly in an attempt to dig up the stage at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1983, during a performance called 'Concerto for Machinery and Voice'. They openly embrace violence as a method of creating.

"If I try to tear down this house in a gentle way it takes a long time and someone's going to build up another house while we're trying to pull down this one. Life is vandalistic. I think real emotions are vandalistic."[2]

The idea of catharsis, the breaking down of and destroying certain barriers is important to the work of Neubaten, every attempt to reach back into the subconscious means the breaking down of a myriad of social and mental barriers.

"The reaction I like to provoke is when something happens for myself. I think after a good performance I should have the feeling that I've broken through a certain point in myself and I've had the feeling of having been alive for at least a second..."[3]

"To break through a certain point you haven't reached before."[4]

It is through this pushing to extremes that discoveries are made. It involves the discovery of, and the destruction of, barriers that have been set within us precisely to prevent the acquiring of self-knowledge by a society that conditions and controls us.

"Although it is a characteristic of noise to recall us brutally to real life, THE ART OF NOISE MUST NOT LIMIT ITSELF TO IMITATIVE REPRODUCTION. It will achieve its most emotive power in the acoustic enjoyment, in its own right, the artist's inspiration will extract from combined noises."

The idea that Neubaten begin from has its origins in Luigi Rossolo's 1913 manifesto on 'The Art of Noises'. Neubaten have used a traditional 'anti-art' structure to try to destroy musical structures akin to the Futurists in their day. Neubaten use the full scale of Russolo orchestration as well as the additions from technological advancement (pneumatic drills, television sets, amplifiers, guitars, keyboards, etc). The destruction of 'New built musical structures' was their aim in the beginning through the use of ideas first proposed in 1913, altering it through the application of modern technology. 'Noise' is not a new tool in popular music, Hendrix used feedback from his guitar, though Neubaten were one of the first groups to apply noise from any found source with a direct echo in Russolo's orchestration, with traditional anti-art aims (with a relationship to Dada) of the destruction of mediocrity and the destruction of established forms. Russolo's manifesto was written at the height of an industrial age when physical effort still played a major part in the industrial process. Neubaten give the image of an epic effort in their somewhat romantic physicality in the manual production of their sound. Though Russolo was talking of building machines as instruments for the 'futurist orchestra', in the 1980s Neubaten produce their sound by physical effort. At a time when most music is synthetically produced, from pop through to Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson, Neubaten return to a physicality to reconnect more directly with the world around them.

Russolo states six main categories in his manifesto. Firstly, the noises of impending doom and destruction in the process of happening, rumbles, roars, explosions, crashes, splashes, booms; these noises carry with them a feeling of foreboding and oppression. Neubaten use these to suggest the sounds of the functioning of the human body, pulse, heart beat and blood flowing. Russolo's noises are in fact sometimes supplemented with the sounds of the human body, from recordings, as in a foetal heart detector in 'Neun Arme'.

The second category is whistles, hisses and snorts. These irritating sounds deliberately prevent relaxation and provoke a reaction from the listener. Neubaten do not leave their work open to an indeterminate reaction.

Whispers, murmurs, mumbles, grumbles, gurgles are vocal noises which Neubaten at times use to imitate animal noise, or as an expression of pain and emotion. They are similar to the use of phonetic poetry as they bear no resemblance to words but carry feeling. Screeches, creaks, rustles, buzzes, crackles, scrapes are yet more noises out of which screeches and scrapes feature the most in Neubaten, caused through the rubbing together of metal surfaces. 'Das Schaben' (the Scraping) is made entirely from the noises caused by the friction between two metal surfaces and is reminiscent of the American minimalist composer Glen Branca.

The backbone of Neubaten's sound is percussive noises on various surfaces. This is the physical contact with the substance of their work, which denies the mediation which is the essence of wider control in society. The final group bears a resemblance to the third in that it is the voices of men and animals, but used in the creation of noise rather than as speech and this again bears a relationship to phonetic poetry, in releasing human voices from the constrictions of language to a more direct emotional expression.

There is a strong comparison between the visuals and sound used by some members of the Berlin Dada group, through the ideas of montage and phonetic poetry, to the noise which is the basis of Neubaten's work. Through photomontage, the Dadaists used fragments of everyday images assembled collectively to create a new meaning and to decode the political hypocrisy of the times.

"This 'gluing on' could be used in many other ways: against stupidity and decadence, to lay the world bare in all its abtruse insanity."[6]

Neubaten layer noises in a similar way to the Dadaists' layering of meaning in photomontage. Their noises are everyday fragments combined together to create a greater whole. These are fragments of a post-industrial society, and Neubaten combine them into representations of the isolation and alienation of wo/man within a society in which they see themselves as being slowly and subtly destroyed..

"Here as in Zurich, total liberation from preconceived ideas and previous relation-ships created new possibilities. Chance, acclaimed as a miracle in Zurich, became in Berlin an article of daily use. It has abolished logic; so much the better. Whatever came along

would do - and was preserved just as it was."[7]

The use of 'chance' elements are also important to Neubaten, as it is used in phonetic poetry. In Neubaten's later work, 'Halber Mensch', squeals, screams, screeches and other human vocal noises are used with great attention to volume, duration and breath, and they are used in the general feel of the sound, rather than in the sung qualities. In 'Sehnsucht' the words which are used are repeated over and over again and because they are in German they are more like sounds (to non-German ears) than words, and it is in their repetition that the relationship with phonetic poetry is made, rather than the meaning of the words.

Does Blixa Bargeld see himself as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, as death in particular? He certainly seems to have some assocations with a 'hound of hell' in the agonised wails and screams of his vocals, and is, through his lyrics, very aware of his own mortality. In the song 'Death is a Dandy' is "A lungsdrag deep in the void" a reference to Nietzsche's abyss between the human and superhuman, in 'Zarathustra'? Bargeld is prepared to push himself physically and mentally to extremes, not giving a thought to future complications through the use of various stimulants, not content until he has pushed and broken down another barrier.

**"Last Beast (in the sky)" in its original German is "Letztes Biest (im Himmell)", and Himmell translated means both sky and heaven, the 'last beast' being a reference to the devil, this images also doubles up as the sun,
"Risen in the East, the East is Red and set in the West."[8]**

The sun and sky are important in Nietsche's 'Zarathustra'. What is the meaning of the sky and sun to 'Zarathustra'? Is the sun contentment and the sky freedom through the lack of gravity? Is the last beast in the sky chaos and destruction? God is no longer in heaven and has been replaced by destruction. Or is it the actual demise of God?

"I am drying out; my light is dying out."[9]

It could also be another reference to the mortality of Blixa Bargeld, as hinted previously on the album. It refers also to the final destruction of everything, Armageddon.

"A burning question: are the volcanoes still active?"[10]

There is an obvious reference here, a wish for some natural forces of violent change and destruction to still exist and be threatening. In a volcano the pressure builds, the lava rises, it pours down the side of the mountain in rivers,

burning anything in its path. It gives an entire clearance of the past, and this leaves space for the future to be born. The fire imagery is all about creative destruction and it occurs frequently in the songs, as fire, burning, burnt and inflamed, flames and scorch. It usually represents destruction in progress, something nagging for an act to be committed, within the person, 'Seele brennt' (soul burns), an urge that by necessity has to be carried out to its very end and no matter what the result.

"The act I'm talking about aims for a true organic and physical transformation of the human body. Why? Because theatre is not that scenic parade where one develops virtually and symbolically - a myth: theatre is rather this crucible of fire and real meat where by an anatomical trampling of bone, limbs and syllables bodies are renewed and the mythical act of making a body presents itself physically and plainly."[11]

"Free our souls of fungus! and if that sets the city alight... well. That's our torch! let's scorch our souls!"[12]

It can be argued that the deliberately repressive nature of our society causes frustration and anger which then gives rise to consciously realised destructive actions which are of a cultural or political nature... The destruction of a structure or barriers, removes impediments against the creation of something new, ideally spontaneously, in its place. It acts as a catharsis. Neubaten's use of an old structure in Russolo's 'Art of Noises' is effective because it is still an unfamiliar structure, whereas the use of a very recent basic set-up as employed in punk rock groups made it easy for any threat to be reabsorbed quickly back into the dominant culture because of its inability to transgress the 'norm'.

Noise not only destroys the banality and meaninglessness of pop music but can negate the alienation the individual suffers in our culture as a whole. Just as phonetics releases the voice from the restrictions of conscious control and the restrictions of language, the use of body in Neubaten's performances acts as a catalyst for the release of the subconscious in the violent production of their sound.

1. Michael Bakunin.
2. Blixa Bargeld (Einsturzende Neubaten), Zigzag Magazine.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. Luigi Russolo, 'Futurist Manifesto'.
6. Hans Richter, 'Dada Art and Anti-Art'.
7. ibid.
8. Einsturzende Neubaten, 'Letztes Biest (im Himmell)' on L.P. 'Halber Mensch'.
9. ibid.
10. Einsturzende Neubaten, 'Armenia' on L.P. 'Drawings of O.T.'.
11. Antonin Artaud, 'Artaud Anthology', p. 169.
12. Einsturzende Neubaten, 'Abfachelin', on L.P. 'Drawings of O.T.'.

ALISTAIR MACLENNAN

OUT THE IN

A National Review of Live Art commission – revised

ISSUES REMAIN:
ETHICS – AESTHETICS
THE 'OUTSIDER' – POLITICAL/SOCIAL
INSTITUTIONS – RELIGIOUS/POLITICAL
BIGOTRY – INCLUSIVE TOLERANCE –
'DERILICTION' AND PUBLIC/PRIVATE
RESPONSIBILITY – OPPOSITIONAL OR
CONSENSUS MEANS OF POLITICAL/SOCIAL
IMPROVEMENT – PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT
DEATH-DECAY
NEW LIFE AND MUTATION
TRANSFORMATION

THE WORK INVOLVES:
LOCATION-DISLOCATION
PLACEMENT-DISPLACEMENT
TIME BEING-TIME EDITED

UNDERLYING ISSUES ARE POLITICAL, SOCIAL
AND CULTURAL.

The art community in the North is small, though growing.
Consequently, one feels one's contribution might make
some difference. With the political instability here, art
which addresses politics, directly or indirectly, can have
more meaning, may count for more, than in a politically
stable society. As life and death issues are in constant
focus, it makes one examine more stringently *what* one's
art is about, *who* it's for, and how *effectively* (or not) it
functions. Living here makes one critically reappraise the
poor relationship between art and society (in Britain and
Ireland), between visual 'culture' and visual art.

Bridgebuilding seems necessary. In the North, on both
sides of the cultural divide, is a down-to-earth
unpretentiousness. I welcome this. In spite of 'the
troubles', and attendant horrors, I enjoy living here.
There are few distractions, which helps to intensify one's
work.

The Holy Grail falls at our feet as holes in our socks.

A hook is a noose by whatever name.

A clock ticks time, be it cheap or expensive.

*The wish to 'leave something behind' is the will to cling to
what passes. Height reverts to foundation. Depth fills in.*

To learn patience, study rocks.

Alistair MacLennan,¡N. Ireland 1987

'Out the In' performance, Alistair MacLennan. PS2.

INTERVIEW

'Out the In' was presented in the new Performance Space 2 on the top floor of the Third Eye Centre's premises in Glasgow as part of a season of performance and 'new theatre' work called 'New Work/No Definition) last October. The 'detached' position of this space (entering up an unrenovated side staircase allowing the audience to come and go without passing through gallery space) was well suited to Alistair MacLennan, who took total command of it with his evocative installation/performance which lasted 3 days. In this interview, MacLennan - a Scot now resident in Belfast where he teaches in the MA Fine Art Department at the University of Ulster - talks about this work, about his commitment as an artist and teacher, and the sensibility that informs his work.

He was interviewed by Malcolm Dickson and Billy Clark.

BC I read about you studying Zen, in a previous interview. What is your mental state when you're doing the performance?

One concentrates on what one's doing as one does it, to 'fuse' with the activity, at the same time keeping the mind open to the potentiality of what might develop. One can, by remaining 'receptive', make ongoing alterations, as appropriate.

MD Your eyes were closed most of the time, from what I observed, as, if you were in a trance state.

It may appear as trance, but isn't. One's very aware of the physicality one's in. I'm not transported to a 'beyond'. We're in the here and now. 'Entertainment' as art attempts to take spectators out of their situation and transport them 'elsewhere'. It's a form of escape. I want people more alert to the actuality we're in.

MD Are you conscious of the audience being there in the room? There were several occasions when there was no one there.

One's conscious of when no-one's there, or only one person, besides oneself. The activity has it's own momentum. Does breathing stop if not seen?

MD Did you actually deprive yourself of sleep?

From time to time I dozed.

BC Certain aspects of the objects in the installation seemed loaded with, not so much symbolism, but the attitude towards symbolism. Some appropriate things had been brought along, but it is interesting to relate this to the glass case, it does look as if things have escaped from it or exploded on this barbed wire landscape. How do you choose these objects, this debris?

There are several reasons for using the case. This work, 'Out the In', is an extension of the one made at Riverside Studios, London, called 'In the Out'. There were certain elements I intended to use here, but through a misunderstanding, two crucial items were not available. This threw me back. I chose an empty case to display 'presence' of absence in protective glass. It became focal.

BC Is this related to the notion of art objects?

Yes, but in reference to life. It's like a fish tank. What might fish represent to an ecologist?

BC It's obviously being used as a symbol, but there is the rotting element.

I'm interested in decay, where it constitutes the discrepancy between ideology and actuality. The fish is a Christian symbol. It's also a symbol for subconscious mind and and subterranean levels of awareness not usually manifest in 'waking' reality. Then there's pollution and 'dead' matter. Fish smell and rot, as do religious/political ideologies (locally and globally).

MD Those elements of life and death were very strong in the work. I found it quite disturbing to be within the installation/performance. The discarded children's shoes, for example, the X-Ray photographs on the windows suggesting the fragility of the human condition. The sound tape combined seagull cries with Irish pipe music being played backwards, possibly, and then there was the sound of what could have been a baby's wails, on first entering the world. And then you have the fish rotting in real time.

BC In some sense the backwards music was like tourism in reverse. What was possibly 'quaint and Irish' becomes disturbing. It's the same with the confetti on the floor; there's a sort of celebration, the funereal kind of thing. It ties in strongly with the Irish context.

I'm living there. I don't subscribe to making art in a vacuum, or to art's being an hermetic activity whose life depends on being contained within gallery walls. Aesthetics alone is effete. As well as grace there's the

'...brutality of fact...'

MD You seem to combine an emphasis into a deeper insight into our 'selves' with a social and political commitment.

It's essential.

BC It's a spiritual and political thing.

To have both feet on the ground, exactly where we are, is useful. Fusion between spiritual and political/social/cultural facts of our lives is important, not as hand-me-down 'beliefs', but as directly discerned, first hand.

BC Has that attitude been formed by living in Ireland, or has that been integral to your work for a long time?

Some of it grappled with (as a student) in Dundee. There I learned various art skills, but faced the resulting dilemma of questioning the worth of it. - On leaving college, students faced a massive wall of indifference to their work. They had to 'make sense' of this and act on it. Many gave up, relinquished their creativity, and joined the swollen ranks of the Deeply Asleep. I saw the artist as a spiritual 'salesman', cut off from an anchored function in society. - Through committed perseverance one evolves a discernment of art's real worth. Pat answers don't cut it.

BC But it's not enough for art to reflect the de-spiritualised state of society.

No. That's only one feature.

BC You have talked about 'wholeness'...

Wholeness embraces everything - positive and negative.

BC Artists like to think of themselves as being outside society.

The artist isn't outwith society. One may feel alienated from many of its values. The public is a collective of individuals. You're a member, as am I.

BC It's one of these characteristics that has come into being so that the artist can get exalted; you denigrate one aspect of society to exalt another...

Individuals are empowered to 'unstop' their own creativity. Unfortunately, from an early age, we've been mentally conditioned to Not Know. Damage done through education (so-called) disconcerts. Through blind and 'knowing' ignorance, many parents and teachers rape and castrate the imagination of children, before they're seven. A few escape. Most don't. It may be disturbing and disorientating to temporarily suspend judgement and 'lift the lid' of accrued values, to see what's deeper, to uncover what's below private/public veneer. Art can heal.

MD It means addressing all of those things that people have repressed within themselves to make life tolerable. That, in itself, seems an important function of art at the moment. But it also seems that the amazing, unpredictable and spontaneous elements in everyday life seem to be disappearing through the reductionism of our present culture...

It happens through streamlining, unitising and subliminal repetition.

MD ...So art should propose an 'imaginative resistance' to these forces.

Yes. Information is so controlled and manipulated through the distorting agents of television and press (gutter or other). Forced reliance on business funding and private sponsorship places substantial pressure on art groups to generate products which reflect the values of sponsors. It's hard to imagine effective art, openly critical of government policies, being sponsored through business. That puts increased pressure on 'difficult' work during this reactionary, most conservative decade.

MD Do you think there are enough people aware of that to be able to resist it in some sort of way?

I'll resist it and I'm certain others will. In the 1980s there's precious little evidence, nationally or internationally, of ground-breaking, innovative art of social conscience being seen. Is it being made? Many venues showing 'difficult' work are closing, unable to keep going financially. We need them to counter the prevailing fodder of Mixed-Hash, Mish-Mashed aesthetic redundancies, strutting cockily (headlessly) as 'chickened out' market art of the '80s.

BC On the one hand you have people doing things, learning and changing things and on the other hand you have a lot of oppressive forces moving in.

There's conflict. It's up to artists not to get downtrodden, but to retain 'edge'. We're innovators and instigators, individually and collectively and shouldn't allow 'outside' manipulators to dictate our development. Art groups unable to get exhibitions in accredited institutions can house their own, and/or find alternative venues and methods of exhibiting

Alistair MacLennan at Rochdale Art Gallery, 'Touring Exhibitionists' 1984. Photo: Steve Collins/Projects U.K
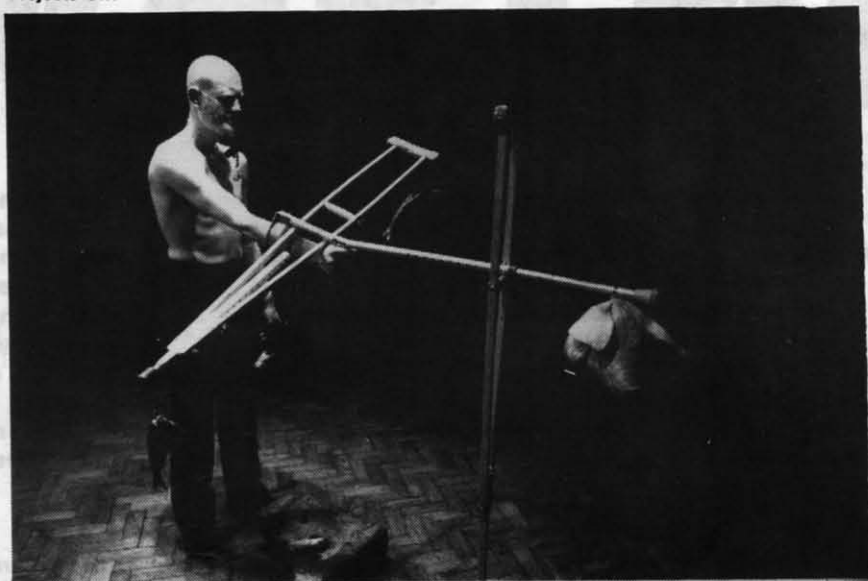
Alistair MacLennan, the British Art Show, South ampton, 1985. Photo: Steve Collins. © Projects U.K.

inside or out of gallery circuits. Art groups in the '80s could intervene far more practically and effectively than hitherto in political, social and cultural arenas.

BC It's taking the whole situation into your own hands.

Government's attitude to the arts will worsen. If a gallery won't give me a show, I can put one on myself in my studio, where I live, or in the street. I'll invite friends. They can invite me to theirs. Before long, essential art may bypass official institutions and operate another circuit, run by artists. There are precedents. In numerical terms, an operation, though miniscule, can yet be effective. One simple network may map new worlds.

MD That involves an element of failure You need failure as well as success, otherwise the art just panders to institutional thought.

We learn to walk by falling, crawling and picking ourselves up (in life and art).

MD It is difficult to determine what these successes or failures might be. With a lot of live work it takes a long period of time to 'judge' a performance, the element of memory.

It takes weeks, months and years for images to 'settle', for resonance to fully evolve in mind...or less than a second...to 'see' beneath societal Facelift.

A POLISH STORY

by Karen Eliot

IN 1969 Andrzej Dudek sat in a full lotus upon a rug in a small room in Wroclaw. Grey streaks of Polish dawn filtered through threadbare curtains into the cluttered interior which hosted humble furnishings including a small one-man bed and hundreds of books. A total peace occupied Andrzej's head. A gentle smile teased the corners of his girlish lips and gave his smooth hairless face a particular beauty and calm. In this suspended state, like a deep pool awaiting the intrusion of its first ripple, his body and mind were completely void and therefore completely vulnerable. His lightly closed eyelids twitched imperceptibly as though a wee optic nerve sought to focus upon a vision that was not quite recognisable. As the nerve pulled the inner image into a form, Dudek's whole inner space was filled with the presence of something far greater than his own. First, absolute blackness overwhelmed his brain, accompanied by a chilling, heart-crushing, bowel-quaking sense of evil. Rapidly this awesome terror was usurped by its complete opposite which slowly melted into a feeling of heavenly warmth and golden perfection. After bathing in this glory and self enlightenment for an incalculable time, Dudek's eyelids snapped open to reveal bright staring eyes which took in the room's contents like those of a petrified hare searching for a bolt hole. It was at this precise moment that Andrzej Dudek realised he was the reincarnation of Albrecht Durer and that his being was full of Durer's haunting portrayal of the horsemen of the apocalypse.

Karen Eliot opened her/his eyes. It was dark and bloodhot. The air was thick and pungent with musk. Beneath the covers in a grey gloom Karen could discern a familiar landscape of skin and muscle: not her/his own. S/he moved her/his listless hand over the comforting slopes of flesh in a stroking motion towards north. This unconscious action precipitated a response. The geography of carnal companionship stirred. Karen Eliot pulled down the duvet and simultaneously straightened her/his body thereby in one gesture propelling her/his head outwards into the cold pale light of a wintry november dawn in 1987. Two small hands pointed to a seven and a six. The bus from London was not due until 8:40. Karen Eliot did not need to rise until 8:10 thereby giving her/himself fifteen minutes to piss, wash and dress, plus five further minutes to put on outer garments before leaving the attic at 8:30. It took precisely seven minutes to walk to the bus station. There were forty minutes remaining of bedtime. Forty minutes in which to stimulate the juices. Forty minutes in which to reach the peak of another orgasm.

APOKALIPSA BEZ ŚMIERCI   SERIGRAFIA 1984

METAPHYSICAL-TELEPATHIC ACTIVITY © ANDRZEJ DUDEK DÜRER 1471 – ?

The fetid stench of death and decay lingered in his nasal memory leaving an obnoxious taste at the back of his throat. Albrecht Durer has fled his hometown of Nurenberg in July 1494 using the outbreak of plague as a pretext. Ringing his his ears, like a campanologist's nightmare, were his wife's acidic taunts, the real reason for his hasty exile, which now threatened to destroy the peace and singular solitude of Padua. His father's idea of a marriage for financial convenience was to Albrecht a hellish inconvenience and bothersome imposition on his personal lifestyle. Durer preferred the homosocial atmosphere of the stuben and its creative polemic to that of domestic tittle-tattle. Laying his drawing materials aside Albrecht stretched out to gaze up at the great ultramarine ceiling of a Renaissance sky, interrupted only by the dark stippling effect of leaves that grew on the olive boughs under which he lay. His golden shoulder length

tresses interlaced with honey scented flora and his head crushed sweet perfumes from trapped herbage. An expression of complete ease and contentment painted his girlish features. His full red lips drew a subtle smile. As A.D. tumbled headlong into more subterranean levels of consciousness dark visions danced behind his retinas. Satanic shapes merged with half recognisable mythological animals cajoling his imagination into inventing more substantial creatures. Out of his plague-ridden landscape, populated now with screeching harridans, four monumental beings reared into full view. Such was the power of their presence that Albrecht could feel the heat of the horses' breath and smell the musty sweat from their frothing flanks. Their equestrian counterparts shouted cryptic messages to one another then wheeled to gallop over the cringing figure of Durer lying prostrate beneath a clouding heaven. With a loud
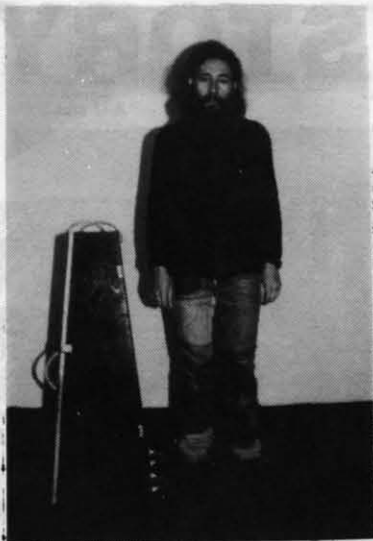
scream he awoke sitting abruptly up, erect and damp with perspiration. The four riders of the apocalypse had consumed his internalised space and would never be forgotten. When he returned to Nurenberg in 1495 Albrecht Durer worked passionately for ten years. During this time he completed The Apocalypse, the first book ever to be designed and published exclusively by an artist.

A 35mm camera, like a stork's eye atop three legs, recorded the small room's cluttered interior in Wroclaw. An odour of pickled beetroot and damp body musk was being heated by an old-fashioned looking water-filled radiator. A makeshift silk screen table stood against one wall. Homemade inks and pigments occupied various recycled containers stacked neatly on well-stocked shelves. Prints of delicate designs hung from a string line attached by wooden clothes pegs. Obsessive images on the theme of self-examination juxtapositioned with those of Albrecht Durer. In a previous time space Andrzej Dudek Durer had learnt to make sitars. Now three self-made examples of this intricate instrument shared his cramped quarters. He had not left the room for ten months. He would remain in the close confinement of his cell for one year. He would not leave Wroclaw for five years nor Poland until 1979. Since his awakening in 1969 life had become a performance. Everyday rituals occupied his time. His days were full. Visitors were few but sufficient in number to sustain him through the darker passages. He fasted. He ate a strict vegetarian diet. He made his own bread. He grew his hair and beard, uncut since 1969. During extreme moments of total self-awareness he could feel it growing (hear it) in the room's dimness and crushing silence. By observing this rigid lifeart he balanced his inner harmonies and telepathically communicated. In 1976 Andrzej Dudek Durer stopped painting to concentrate his creative energies on his first mail art project which was confined to his native Poland. By 1978 he had joined the legions of international mail artists thereby placing his Wroclaw cell on the global map of the correspondence network.

A firm breast, kissed golden and pipped with a brown erect nipple, filled Karen's eye. S/he naked too, had her/his head at such an angle as to squish-up blind her/his left eye thereby allowing her/his right to sightsee. A shocking black on white banner headline glared out from among the stripey towelling and ambre solaire: ELVIS EST MORT. Drifting as though on a lazy breeze, hearing muted sounds of seaside frolics, Karen Eliot suspended her/himself in a sunsoaked vacuum. Jonathan Richman's roadrunner lyric filled her/his mind's ear. S/he was in touch with the modern world. Karen Eliot had not eaten for three days. S/he had travelled non-stop by hitch-hiking from the north of Europe to feel the heat. Her/his skin prickled as the late afternoon sun seared out of the blue flawless agony. S/he left the beach and floated away into another dimension altogether. During this transportation by an abstract power, Karen encountered a

Andrej Dudek Durer in the Data Attic, Dundee, November 1987.

In performance at the Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, November 1987.

Making bread in the Data Attic, Dundee, November 1987.

All photos: Peter Horobin.

concept. At first it was imperceptible. Virtually unseen yet barely visible. After some moments the concept moved towards her/him like an asteroid approaching slowly through the void of internalised space. At first Karen did not recognise it and although it held her/his attention for a concrete period of time it was until s/he opened her/his eyes that its form took on meaning. The telepathic

journey had put Karen Eliot into direct correspondence with hundreds of likeminded souls whose kinetic energies met and danced on the astral plane to the continual global beat of collective consciousness. As a result of this sartori in St. Tropez Karen Eliot began to mail her/his art and work tirelessly for the following ten years.

Karen Eliot stood behind and slightly to one side of the figure who was clad in an ex-GI parka, patched Levis, multi-repaired brown shoes and black shirt while a tired but cheery busdriver lugged baggage out from the cavernous rear end of the bus. A large wooden box on castors resembling an oversized metronome case were unceremoni ou sly lumped onto the oilstained tarmac. The thin tramplike figure bent to lay a hand to the wooden box's handle. Karen Eliot stooped to lift a pale grey and blue nylon holdall at the same second, which also belonged to the possessor of the strange box on wheels. Their eyes engaged for the first time and although they had never met nor before spoken to each other there was an instant exchange of great warmth and familiarity. "Good morning" said Karen. "I trust you had a pleasant journey." "Very good" replied Andrzej Dudek Durer as their smooth skinned hands stretched out to touch each other in that age-old gesture of greeting and recognition.

In 1987 Andrzej Dudek Durer visited Scotland for the first time at the officia¹ invitation of The Dundee Resources Centre for the Unemployed. Thus was part of his fifth fifth European tour since 1983 during which time he did the following:

03:11:87 arrived in Dundee
04:11:87 began to install his exhibition of graphics and photographs in the DRCU
05:11:87 completed his installation at the DRCU and produced an edition of xeroxed books
06:11:87 performance at the DRCU
07:11:87 dismantled his installation at the DRCU and visited Rockhead
08:11:87 made bread and pizza
09:11:87 travelled to Glasgow
10:11:87 began to install his exhibition of graphics and photographs at Transmission
11:11:87 completed his installation at Transmission
12:11:87 performance at Transmission after which he dismantled the installation and travelled to Edinburgh
13:11:87 began to install his exhibition of graphics and photographs in the Demarco Gallery
14:11:87 completed the installation, did his performance and dismantled the installation at Demarco's. Made bread and pizzas
15:11:87 travelled to Dundee and made bread
16:11:87 made video in the Data Attic
17:11:87 travelled to Stirling
18:11:87 travelled to London

POST-MODERNISM AND THE 'POST-MODERN DEBATE IN BRITAIN':

AN INTRO-DUCTION

by

Peter Suchin
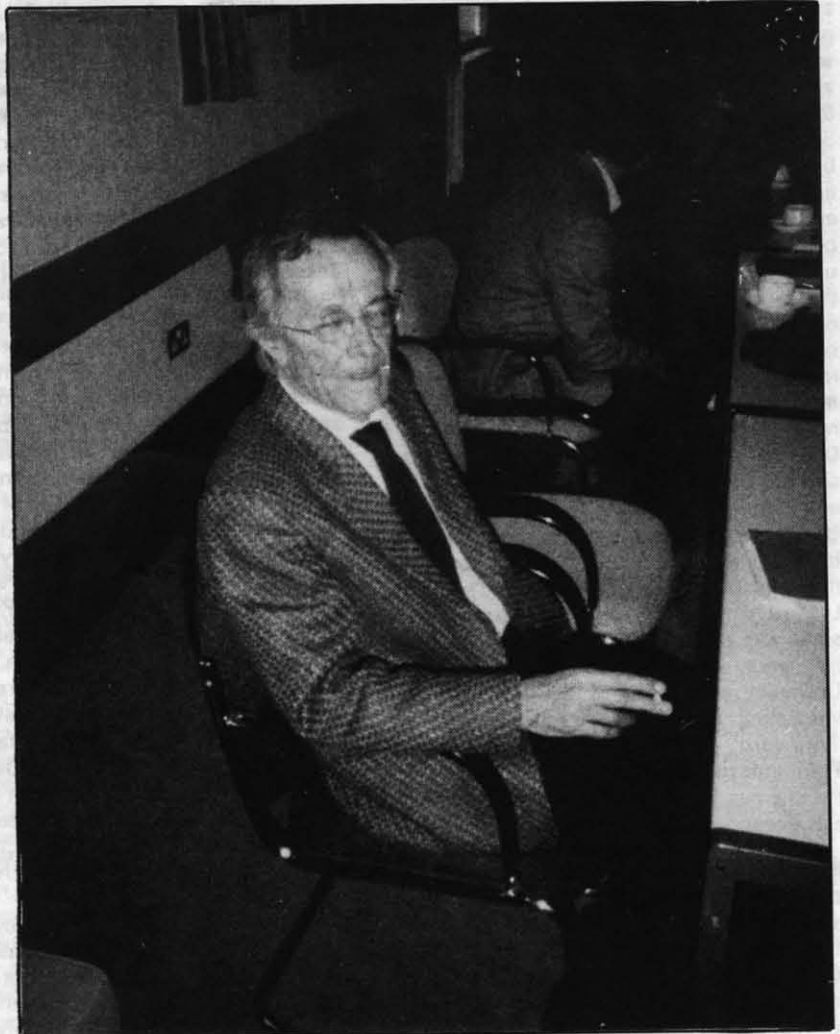
Lyotard at University of Warwick, February 1987.   Photo: Paul Crowther

THE FOLLOWING is an unedited paper presented by Peter Suchin to an audience at Warwick University in February 1987, though it was "presented outside the academic institution". Resisting the fashionable references to 'post-modernism' which appear in visual art, architecture and philosophy areas, Suchin clarifies the context out of which the term has arisen.

I am going to concentrate my talk[1] upon the wide-ranging cultural changes which are the subject-matter of the so-called 'Postmodern Debate', a debate which has formed itself in Britain within the last two or three years. This phrase was actually employed in the title of a two-day conference which took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in May 1985: 'A Question of Postmodernity: The Philosophical Dimension of the Postmodern Debate'. Such a title suggests that there was already some sort of fairly coherent discussion about Postmodernism ongoing in Britain before the conference took place. It appears that the 'debate' 'took off' in Britain in 1984, with the publication of two relatively short texts - 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' by the American literary theorist Fredric Jameson (which appeared in the July/August issue of **New Left Review**), and the book **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. These works became available in America at the same time as their publication here but whereas in the USA they were merely further contributions to an already ongoing discussion, they took on, in this country, the status of initiatory texts. Some of Jameson's material had already been made available in America in 1983,[2] and Lyotard's book first appeared, in a French edition, in 1979. I am not suggesting that the concept of 'Postmodernism' was entirely unknown in Britain prior to the appearance of these two essays but it was with these that discussions of Postmodernism here really began. **New Left Review** published three replies to Jameson's piece and **The Postmodern Condition** provoked a considerable response. At least two commentators, Philip Derbyshire and Geoffrey Bennington[3] suggest that it is Lyotard's name which is most closely linked with Postmodernism in Britain. Indeed, Bennington explicitly states that the impetus for the ICA conference was the appearance in English of Lyotard's book. Lyotard himself was in attendance at the ICA, as he was at another conference devoted to his work which was held at Warwick University at the end of last month.[4] It is interesting too that Jameson supplied a 'Foreword' to the translation of **The Postmodern Condition**, in which some of the themes of his own **New Left Review** essay reappeared.

It would be naive to presume that the 'debate', such as it is, was entirely spontaneous. The potential of the term 'Post-Modern' as a 'buzzword' which could be used to sell books was obviously recognised by the publishers Macmillan when they placed an advertisement in the ICA conference booklet under the heading 'MACMILLAN TEXTS FOR A POST-MODERN AGE'. And in 1985 Pluto Press published a collection of essays entitled **Postmodern Culture**, a book which had in its previous - American - incarnation been called **The Anti-Aesthetic**. Other titles such as **Reflexivity The post-modern predicament** and the glossy pamphlet **What is Post-Modernism?** have recently appeared.[5] One

might also mention in passing that the erstwhile scholarly term 'Post-modernism' has now reached the 'general public', being the subject of a series of articles in **The Guardian** last December as well as being fleetingly referred to within the television series **State of the Art**, currently being shown on Channel 4.[6]

'Postmodernism' is a label which refers, in its most comprehensive sense, to the cultural products and relations which accompany the arrival of a new type of social organisation, variously described as 'consumer society', 'media society', the 'society of the spectacle' (in Guy Debord's phrase), or 'post-industrial society' in that of Daniel Bell.[7] It is also the tag attached to a number of distinct stylistic features within the particular fields of architecture, painting and literature. For the most part I intend to use the word in its more general sense, that as an umbrella term describing what Jameson has called 'a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features.'[8] These features include - and Jameson is not alone in presenting them - a breakdown between previously distinct relations (the country and the city, the public and the private, 'high' and 'low' cultural forms, 'truth' and 'fiction'); a novel involvement with history, both at the personal level and at what might be termed that of whole ways of life; and a new type of human subject, usually described as 'fragmented', 'schizophrenic' or 'split'.

An important point to note about Postmodernism is its intimate relation to Modernism proper. Though Postmodernism apparently constitutes a radical break with Modernist culture it is nonetheless parasitic upon it, and any understanding of the former depends upon one's view of the latter. On the one hand Postmodern culture may be defended as populist and liberatory whilst the 'difficult' works of a Joyce or a Picasso are condemned as elitist; on the other, it may be viewed as the taming and recuperation of the critical tradition of Modernism. In this scheme Modernism figures as the authentic, if somewhat aggressive, culture, an attempt to realise 'Utopian' values which failed in its task of transformation. 'Modern Art', erstwhile **the** critical, radical form of culture finds itself well-established but dead, buried in the museum as tourist spectacle and stripped of its power to provoke change.

But if it is accepted that we have now entered a phase of culture which has gone beyond that of Modernism (whether or not one sees Modernism as a progressive movement) it is still necessary to distinguish between two different approaches, between what Hal Foster has labelled a 'postmodernism of resistance' and a 'postmodernism of reaction'.[9] Postmodernism in its 'resistant' form attempts to develop further the radical critique of culture which its protagonists attribute to Modernism, whilst the 'postmodernism of reaction' takes as a central task the return to traditional values

and representations. From this latter perspective the modern movement signals an acute cultural and moral decline.

Before I go on to discuss in some detail those things presently subsumed under the concept of Postmodernism a few words about the history of the term.[10] It was first used in 1934 in a Spanish rendering by Frederico de Onis to describe a slightly reactionary form of Modernist poetry. Here the application figured as a classification within literary criticism. The first usage of the term to refer to an entire epoch or period was made by the British historian Arnold Toynbee, in the volumes of his **A Study of History** which were published from 1954 onwards. In this work Toynbee suggests that a new phase in Western history began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the decline of the modern period, the **post**-modern period being an age characterised as anarchic and transitional, and lacking in a clear direction.

The first appearance of 'Postmodern' within the arts in recent years is again within literary criticism, in an essay by the American Irving Howe entitled 'Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction' and published in **Partisan Review** in 1959. The idea of a new type of literature, and even a new type of culture becomes quite widespread in the 1960s and '70s within the work of critics like Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag, Harry Levin, Lionel Trilling and George Steiner.[11] Steiner's numerous references to the concept of a 'Post-Culture', that is to a social system where artistic products no longer intrinsically display or reproduce a unifying bond of moral and scholarly values, matches fairly closely that view offered within the discouse of Postmodernism which equates contemporary culture with a slackening or decline, 'a sort of sorrow in the **Zeitgeist**' as Lyotard puts it in one context.[12] Here it might be appropriate to mention too Adorno and Horkheimer's important essay on the 'culture industry' (first published in 1944) which makes many points relevant to the concerns of the Postmodern critics; Adorno's famous remark - made in a more recent piece on cultural criticism - that 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' precedes both Steiner's and Lyotard's comments on Culture loss of a moral, critical thread.[13]

I have referred to the idea of a radical break with which the period of Modernism closes and at which point we enter into the Postmodern era. 'Our working hypothesis', writes Lyotard, 'is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age.'[14] He goes on to attribute the period of this rupture as being around the end of the 1950s, an estimate with which Jameson concurs. But though both writers focus upon the late '50s as the end of Modernism their respective conceptions of exactly what it is that has ended differ considerably. Lyotard's view is the more extreme. A concise account of his position can be found in an interview which he gave in 1985. The Postmodern is, he says:

'...based fundamentally upon the perception of the existence of a modern era that dates from the time of the Enlightenment and that has now run its course; and this modern era was predicated on a notion of progress in knowledge, in the arts, in technology, and in human freedom as well, all of which was thought of as leading to a truly emancipated society: a society emancipated from poverty, despotism, and ignorance. But all of us can see that development continues to take place without leading to the realization of any of these dreams of emancipation.'[15]

It is, then, the end of an entire age, of an entire way of life. In contrast, Jameson's interpretation appears to classify the transition as one from the period characterised by the decline of realism in the arts (circa 1890) to the beginning of the 1960s - a period of only some seventy years. Nevertheless, the key reason given for the break is the same in both cases: the introduction and rapid development of nuclear and electronic technologies since the Second World War. Jameson provides a Marxist account of the transition to the new technology by citing a short passage from Ernest Mandel's book **Late Capitalism**, first published in English in 1975.[16] In this work Mandel divides the history of Capitalism into three distinct stages, each determined by the appearance of important developments within the evolution of machinery:

'The fundamental revolutions in power technology - the technology of the production of motive machines by machines - thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century - these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the "original" industrial revolution of the later 18th century.'[17]

We have thus entered, if Mandel is correct, what Jameson calls 'the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas...a new and historically original penetration of Nature and the Unconscious'.[18] Mandel's three phases can accordingly be linked to the three cultural phases offered in Jameson's analysis: realism, Modernism and Postmodernism.

For Jameson, then, Postmodernist art is the art of multinational capital, aesthetic innovation having been generally integrated into commodity production. This is not to imply that 'culture', a once autonomous or semi-autonomous sphere has been

extinguished. There has been, rather, an 'explosion' of culture, an aestheticisation of everyday life which has made it almost impossible to distinguish the 'cultural' from the 'social'. And if such differences are abolished then so too is the possibility of distinguishing between reality and image. 'Criticism', wrote Walter Benjamin over sixty years ago, 'is a matter of correct distancing.'[19] Today it is precisely the ability to distance oneself from media representations of 'the real' which is lacking. One lives, rather, in a half-world fashioned largely from stereotypical 'pictures' offered by the media as natural, neutral images. Yet since an ideology of 'realism' predominates and unifies the jerky flow of pictures and sounds which we call 'mass culture' the quotidian world takes on a surrealistic tint. Lyotard notes that cinema and television stabilise meanings in such a way as to give the (very powerful) impression of a jet-set 'lifestyle' as desirable and 'natural':

'Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is ieasy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the 'taste' of the patrons... But this realism of the 'anything goes' is in fact that of money... Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all 'needs', providing that the tendencies and needs have purchasing power.'[20]

Those who don't lead such a free and easy existence are at least expected to crave for something like it. But at the same time as such self-indulgence is paraded as normal the 'real' tendency is toward fragmentation and dispersal. Jameson employs the figures of parody and pastiche to characterise different modes of behaviour within Modernism and Postmodernism. If in Modernism one encounters artists who deliberately adopt the stylistic features of another artist in order to caricature or ridicule them, in Postmodernism one finds that such mimicry has been replaced by a flat, as it were indifferent copying of form. Parody operates in a context wherein some linguistic or visual norm acts as a background to, first of all, the idiosyncratic mode of a 'Modernist' and then the exaggeration of that mode. Parody assumes that a norm has been transgressed and it takes that transgression further and makes fun of it. Pastiche, by contrast, comes about when any norm there might once have been has long since broken down. It is therefore a case of borrowing the stylistic features of a given mode but without the ulterior motive of mockery or criticism. Since there is no consensus about there being an authentic style, no sense of a clear tradition, one finds amongst Postmodern artists a predilection for collage, as though

the narrative of History had come to an end and one was only able to fabricate 'new' works of art by patching together the superficial features of many different practices and styles. The move from parody to pastiche has its resonance in the way that in recent years there has been a pluralisation of social codes and jargons, ethnic, gender and racial groups, and minority political parties, all however ostensibly unified by the bonds of eclecticism to which Lyotard refers. Individual lives, too, are put together like the collaged pictures to which I have just referred. The following remarks by Michael Newman need not be seen as only applicable to contemporary art: 'Postmodern parody', he writes, 'is closer to the cynical nihilism of fashion and the mass-culture industry... involving the implicit assertion that if everything is permitted then it makes no difference what we do and nothing is worth anything.'[21]

It is of some interest that Newman connects contemporary nihilism with an important component of Lyotard's complex account of Postmodernity which I have up to now neglected in any detail. This is the theme of what he calls the collapse of the grand narratives of legitimation. I have quoted Lyotard talking of the failure of the Enlightenment project; it has become, in his estimation, clear that developments in science are no longer defensible in terms of the benefits the human race stands to gain from such 'techno-sciences'. Science has been used to increase misery and disease rather than make manifest the Utopia inherent within the modern narrative of the Enlightenment, a narrative which it was presumed **must** culminate in emancipation. But we no longer have faith in the project - Lyotard cites the death camps of the Second World War and the horrors enacted in the name of Marxism as proof that we have left the modern period, with its belief in the inevitability of salvation, behind.[22] Arguments about the importance of scientific research no longer legitimate themselves by the 'metadiscourse' of Reason or Freedom - instead one finds justifications presented in terms of performativity, that is, in terms of the efficiency of the system. Lyotard takes Wittgenstein's concept of 'language-games' as the model for the basis of Postmodern society.[23] Wittgenstein considered that language was made up of a multiplicity of 'games', each requiring adherence to a particular set of rules - different types of utterance are required in different games, and the failure to produce the correct type of utterance within a given game counts as an illegitimate move. Sometimes such a novel move can result in the transformation of the rules of that particular language-game, but this is a rare occurence. Lyotard's analogy reads the social totality as a collection of similarly disposed games, each demanding a specific type of utterance or mode of behaviour. 'Science' constitutes one of the more important games on the Postmodernist map because it is the form of life which is most closely linked to the ideology of realism to which I have referred in connection with

the mass media. Science as a particular field or game is concerned with particular types of action, particular moves. These moves are legitimate when they comply with the rules of the game, regardless of their correspondence with what might be termed 'the real world'. It is a somewhat incestuous affair; Lyotard makes the following observation:

'The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy convey with them one of the rules which supports their possibility...' This is 'the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments.'[24]

The partners to whom Lyotard is referring are the 'experts' who make up the 'scientific community'. Doing science has become a matter of playing the game in a manner which is complicit with the views of the experts. Yet this very specific language-game has the status of attributing the boundaries and conventions which make up 'the real'. Truth becomes an effect of the best performance. With the introduction of computer technology the issue at stake in science is no longer one of knowledge as an end in itself. It becomes, rather, something to be traded. 'It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information,' writes Lyotard, 'just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour.'[25] Whatever cannot be translated into computer language will cease to be considered as valuable information and will be abandoned. The question of access to computer languages and networks of communication becomes a political issue. In this scheme of things the moral imperatives associated with, for example, Marxism, do not carry any weight. As Lyotard explains towards the end of **The Postmodern Condition** the postindustrial system is severe:

'Rights do not flow from hardship, but from the fact that the alleviation of hardship improves the system's performance. The needs of the most underprivileged should not be used as a system regulator as a matter of principle: since the means of satisfying them is already known, their actual satisfaction will not improve the system's performance, but only increase its expenditures.'[26]

Furthermore, the system is terroristic; refusal to accept the rules prescribed for each game results in the threat of elimination from the game and thus marginalisation. 'Science' is only one of the multiple games which make up the social fabric but its interrelation with the media and the economy gives it a somewhat privileged position. Yet Lyotard concedes that it is possible to disrupt the imposed consensus by a sort of foregrounding of minority games.[27] It is nevertheless possible to see the impact of such struggles being dispersed c   'e

easily in a culture in which scientific validations are themselves the result of an accumulation of fragments rather than the product of a totalising narrative.[28]

I should point out that Lyotard has in recent years abandoned his formerly Marxist stance. This is consistent with his view of Postmodernity as the collapse of grand narratives, one of which would be the Marxist concept of Historical Materialism. Jameson, as I have suggested, holds to a Marxist view. It is his contention that the grand narratives have not broken up but have, as it were, gone underground, to re-emerge, one supposes, at some later moment.[29] Jurgen Habermas has called Modernity 'An Incomplete Project', a point on which Lyotard has commented quite sharply, accusing him of a nostalgia for an Hegelian totality which it is no longer possible - or even desirable - to achieve.[30] Peter Dews, a prominent British supporter of Habermas has argued that Lyotard's claims for Postmodernity are over-hasty, suggesting that the terrors of the twentieth century may signify (as do crises in the arts) fundamental problems within the Enlightenment project but not the end of the project as such. That the death camps and Stalinist purges still appear to us as terrible crimes is proof enough that the moral movement implicit in the Enlightenment narrative has not been dissolved.[31]

Lyotard does use the term 'Postmodern' in another way, which doesn't simply act as a label for the period after Modernism (when Modernism is equated with the project of the Enlightenment). This second usage concerns a moment or phase within the arts which recurs throughout history. It is more a condition of the arts than a stylistic feature and by it Lyotard refers to a situation when artists are working blindly, that is, without rules; 'rules' are formulated for this **practice** after the event. The Postmodern in this sense would be that which 'puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms'.[32] Lyotard considers the recent return to 'expressive', 'painterly' practices as being an example of mannerism in the arts. This view is not inconsistent with Jameson's ideas about the loss of a 'subversive' edge in the art of Postmodernism. Such mannered work is, for Lyotard, complicit with the 'realism' of the mass media - everything is in its place, including the human subject, who will be able to 'arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity'.[33] Lyotard contrasts the philosopher with the 'expert'. The philosopher, like the artists of whom Lyotard approves, works blindly and the subject becomes, to use a phrase from Julia Kristeva, a 'subject in process'.[34] The work of the expert is, on the contrary, limiting and repressive. The techno-sciences which Lyotard concerns himself with in **The Postmodern Condition** also destabilise the human subject and it is clear that this rigorous 'shaking up' of the apparently fixed 'bourgeois' subject is seen by Lyotard as a positive move. In his final contribution to the booklet based on the ICA conference on Postmodernity Lyotard makes reference to 'the pop viewer or spectator...

who is is a product of...the commodity'.[35] As a method of resistance to the culture industry he proposes the making of television programmes or work in other forms 'which produce in the viewer...an effect of uncertainty and trouble'. I think Lyotard hopes to initiate a reflexive rather than passive reaction in the viewer by this method - yet it is not clear how the schizoid subject which Jameson appears to be criticising as a product of Late Capitalism compares with or differs from the 'radicalised' subject discussed by Lyotard. The virtues and vices attributable to such fragmented subjects alter in status according to one's interpretation of fragmentation as either liberatory or oppressive.

I have said hardly anything about the forms of architecture associated with Postmodernism. Jameson attributes his own conception of Postmodernism to the influence upon him of the very vigorous debate surrounding the rise of certain stylistic features within the sphere of architecture. Quite aside from the 'playful' and again stylistically eclectic surfaces of Postmodern architecture which contrast with the Utopian high-seriousness of the 'glass boxes' of Modernists like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, Postmodernist architecture exhibits what Jameson calls 'something like a mutation in built space itself.'[36] Focusing his analysis upon a particular building, the Bonaventura Hotel, built in Los Angeles ten years ago by the architect John Portman, Jameson presents this building as one which displays - and as it were constructs - a wholly novel relation to space, a sort of complete city compressed into one building. Jameson admits to having some difficulty describing this typically Postmodern structure. He writes:

'I am...at a loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself, the experience of space you undergo when you step off (the elevators) into the lobby or atrium, with its great central column, surrounded by a miniature lake, the whole positioned between the four symmetrial...towers...and surrounded by rising balconies capped by a greenhouse roof at the sixth level. I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these last are impossible to seize. Hanging streamers indeed suffuse this empty space in such a way as to distract... from whatever form it might be supposed to have; while a constant busyness gives the feeling that emptiness is here absolutely packed, that it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume.'[37]

The description and analysis of this new relation of the human subject to built space is carried on in Jameson's **New Left Review** essay for some pages. It is an important part of his analysis because when coupled with

some of the other themes he discusses the result is a presentation of Postmodernism as not merely a new style or set of appearances but an absolutely novel condition – which of course echoes Lyotard's title and theme. Jameson's consideration of the physical space within Postmodern architecture fits neatly with his reading of Mandel's theory of the three distinct stages of machine production. For the third stage, which concerns electronic and nuclear devices, cannot be 'thought' with the old symbolism applied to, for example, the motor car or streamlined train, that is, as literal and visual representations of speed. The computer's outer shell has no 'emblematic' appeal. This would seem a trivial point but for the fact that Jameson wants to 'suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are...but a distorted figuration of...the whole world system of multinational capitalism.'[38] He terms this new physical and mental relation to the world the 'postmodern sublime',[39] and concludes his many-levelled analysis with an appeal for the making of new maps with which to orient ourselves within the Postmodern space, devices which would be able to 'respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic' and allow us to 'begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects.'[40] The idea that it is difficult to conceptualise the totality of the extension and limits of that space. It does seem that Jameson is correct to characterise the Postmodern world as a world in which particularities of space and temperament are being effaced and replaced with cultural forms which are peculiarly American.[41] At the risk of making some fairly crass connections one might suggest that the prominent aspects of Postmodernism – the juxtaposition of disparate styles, the absence of a sense of history or tradition, and a concern for what might be called the trivia of everyday existence – are all features which imply that American imperialist strategies, both cultural and military, have succeeded.[42] American art and architecture would then be the cultural accompaniment to what that country is socially, an amalgam of different races and styles of life, all somehow pressed together into a 'New World'. In the 'new world' of Postmodernism, History appears to have come to an end, an event which would connote that the past can be treated as a museum, the contents of which relate to each other on equal terms.

I have concentrated upon the descriptions of Postmodernism put forward by Jameson and Lyotard because the theories these two writers offer cover all the important features of the debate as it stands in Britain. At least their work does not seem to have been superceded by any accounts which give to the discussion a radically new direction. Whether or not we have entered a completely new phase of history is a question which would seem to be answerable at this point in time. Some people, like Lyotard, are sure that we have. Even so, and despite the very clearly defined work he has produced he leaves the question of exactly what it is that we have

entered into open. As he said in 1985, the debate surrounding Postmodernism 'is a discussion...that's only just beginning. It's the way it was for the Age of Enlightenment: the discussion will be abandoned before it ever reaches a conclusion.'[43]

NOTES

1. This paper is the essentially unrevised text of a talk given privately on Friday 13th of February, 1987. The notes are a later addition.
2. In a note at the beginning of his **NLR** essay Jameson makes reference to material published in Foster (ed.) – see bibliography and note 5 – in **Amerika Studien/American Studies** 29/1 (1984), and to lectures.
3. For Derbyshire see bibliography. For Bennington see his 'The Question of Postmodernism' in Appignanesi (ed.).
4. The Warwick conference was held from January 31st to February 1st and was entitled 'Judging Lyotard'. The contributions are to be published.
5. By Foster (ed.), Lawson and Jencks respectively (see bibliography).
6. The **Guardian** articles appeared from Monday December 1st. See also 'The **Guardian** and Postmodernism' by Paul Kerr in the **New Statesman** for December 12th 1986 (Vol. 112, No. 2907). **State of the Art** ran from Sunday January 11th, 1987, for six weeks.
7. Guy Debord - **Society of the Spectacle**, Black and Red, 1983. Daniel Bell - **The Coming of Post-Industrial Society**, Heinemann, 1974.
8. **NLR** 146, p. 56.
9. Foster (ed.), p. xii.
10. This account is based upon that offered by Matei Calinescu in his book **Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch**, Indiana University Press, 1977, p. 132 and following.
11. See for example Hassan's 'POSTmodernISM A Para-critical Bibliography', in his **Paracriticisms** (1975); Sontag's 'The Aesthetics of Silence', included in **A Susan Sontag Reader** (1983); Levin's 'What Was Modernism?', in his **Refractions** (1966); Trilling's 'On the Teaching of Modern Literature', included in his **Beyond Culture** (1966); Steiner's 'In a Post-Culture', in his **Extraterritorial** (1972).
12. See 'Defining the Postmodern' in Appignanesi (ed.).
13. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer - 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in their **Dialectic of Enlightenment**, Verso, 1979. Theodor Adorno - 'Cultural Criticism and Society' in his **Prisms**, MIT, 1982.
14. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 3.
15. Blistene, p. 33.
16. Published by New Left Books. For a lengthy review of this work see 'Late Capitalism' by Bob Rowthorn in **New Left Review** 98 (July/August 1976).
17. Quoted by Jameson in **NLR** 146, pp. 77-78.
18. **NLR** 146, p. 78.
19. **One-Way Street and Other Writings**, New Left Books, 1979, p. 89.
20. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 76.
21. 'Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism' in Appignanesi (ed.).
22. See for example 'Defining the Postmodern' in Appignanesi (ed.).
23. See for example Ludwig Wittgenstein, **Philosophical Investigations**, Basil Blackwell, 1981.
24. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 77.
25. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 5.
26. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 63.
27. See for example p. 82 of **The Postmodern Condition**.
28. For a critique of Lyotard see Sim.
29. See Jameson (1984 - 'Foreword' to Lyotard) and also Jameson's **The Political Unconscious**, Methuen, 1981.
30. See Habermas text in Foster (ed.).
31. See 'From Post-Structuralism to Postmodernity' in Appignanesi (ed.).
32. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 81.
33. **The Postmodern Condition**, p. 74.
34. Julia Kristeva, **Revolution in Poetic Language**, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 22.
35. 'Brief Reflections on Popular Culture' in Appignanesi (ed.).
35. 'Brief Reflections on Popular Culture' in Appignanesi (ed.).
36. **NLR** 146, p. 80.
37. **NLR** 146, pp. 82-83.
38. **NLR** 146, p. 79.
39. I have slightly altered this term (see p. 88 of **NLR** 146).
40. Both quotations are from p. 92 of **NLR** 146.
41. Jameson notes the Americanness (sic) of Postmodern art - see **NLR** 146, p. 57.
42. See Kenneth Frampton's pieces on 'Critical Regionalism' in Foster (ed.) and Appignanesi (ed.). And NB note 41.
43. Blistene, p. 35.

Postmodernism and the 'Postmodern Debate': Some Literature

Appignanesi, Lisa (ed.) - **Postmodernism**, ICA 'Documents' series (double issue: 4 & 5), 1986.

Blistene, Bernard - 'A Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard', **Flash Art**, No. 121, March 1985.

Davis, Mike - 'Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Post-modernism), **New Left Review**, No. 151, May/June 1985.

Derbyshire, Philip - 'No Resolution', **Camerawork**, No. 32, Summer 1985.

Eagleton, Terry - 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', **New Left Review**, No. 152, July/August 1985

Foster, Hal (ed.) - **Postmodern Culture**, Pluto Press, 1985.

Harris, Howard amd Lipman, Alan - 'Viewpoint: A culture of despair: reflections on 'post-modern' architecture', **The Sociological Review**, Vol. 34, No. 4, November 1986.

Jameson, Fredric - 'Foreword' (in Lyotard (1984))

Jameson, Fre··· - 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', **New Left Review**, No. 146, July/August 1984

Jameson, Fredric - 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' (in Foster (1985)).

Jencks, Charles - **What is Post-Modernism?**, Academy Editions, 1986.

Latimer, Dan - 'Jameson and Post-Modernism', **New Left Review**, No. 148, November/December 1984

Lawson, Hilary - **Reflexivity The post-modern predicament**, Hutchinson, 1985.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois - **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, Manchester University Press, 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois - 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime', **Artforum**, April 1982.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois - 'Argument', **Camerawork**, No. 32, Summer 1985. (See also Lyotard's contributions in Appignanesi (1986)).

Morris, Meaghan - 'Postmodernity and Lyotard's Sublime', **Art & Text**, No. 16, 1984.

Sim, Stuart - 'Lyotard and the Politics of Antifoundation-alism', **Radical Philosophy**, No. 44, Autumn 1986.

Appignanesi and Foster are wide ranging anthologies. **Camerawork** contains other material on Postmodernism as well as that by Derbyshire and Lyotard. The texts by Howard and Lipman and by Jencks concentrate on architecture. Lawson is concerned with the 'postmodern' aspects of the philosophers Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida (an introductory account). See also the special issues of **New German Critique** (No. 33, Fall 1984) and the interview with Jameson in **Flash Art**, No. 131, Dec/Jan 1987.

the old gang hut

CRITICAL REALISM:

Britain in the 1980s through the work of 28 artists

(A Nottingham Castle Touring Exhibition)

SIMON BROWN

'Union Organiser' Ken Currie (1986/87).

Paradoxically, Thatcherism has made a massive contribution to the politicisation of our cultural life, sexual life, family life, ethnic identities, health and education.

- Juliet Steyn, from the exhibition catalogue

THE marginalisation of artists in the twentieth century, while not necessarily turning them into political radicals, has tended to detach them from allegiance to the ruling groups in society and from establishment values. Probably most artists who think politically at all – apart from a few time-servers, society portrait painters and conscious eccentrics – would admit to the ideal of a more just and humane society than the one we presently enjoy.

During the period from the end of the Second World War up to the mid-Seventies, it was possible, and indeed quite usual, to believe that society was gradually evolving in the direction of this ideal: the Welfare State would abolish poverty, the Arts Council would make the products of high culture accessible to everyone; the old puritanisms seemed to be on the decline, and there was a growing tolerance for non-standard behaviour in sexual and other spheres. The latter part of this period in particular was a time of optimism and this-worldly utopias.

Today, anyone who still subscribes to this belief is certifiable. The dominant political culture no longer even bothers to pay lip-service to these ideals. In a world whose criteria of value are purely commercial, and where openly avowed greed is once again respectable, under a government which increasingly imposes its will by open force, anything so useless materially as art, and anything so suspiciously libertarian as creativity, automatically becomes an act of political dissent.

Conscious political dissent in art can take various forms. Some depend on hijacking icons of the dominant culture and subverting them to new meanings. Others, like the pro-Green activities of Joseph Beuvs, aim to **dissolve the barrier separating art from political action: the creative is** political. Critical Realism, however, rejects this monophysite position; here art and political consciousness co-exist, two natures in one body, separately and without confusion. Its formal means are those of nineteenth-century naturalism and early twentieth-century expressionism. Its roots go back into pre-industrial times, as Brandon Taylor points out in the catalogue. It is, in fact, an old liberal art (liberal of the Tom Paine, publish-and-be-damned variety), assuming the artist as an unattached individual, not involved – as artist – in the social and political processes depicted in the work, but looking on as a sympathetic observer. It also assumes a public able to make moral judgements and having a certain amount of power to effect social change. This makes its relevance to social change. This makes its relevance to the contemporary sitation somewhat problematic.

The artist's status as outsider has a number of advantages. For example, it allows the artist to claim a superior insight into a situation than that of the protagonists themselves. The artist thus presents herself as a kind of sociologist of knowledge, or seer-through of false consciousness, or at least someone able to see the typical case and not merely the individual. False consciousness is one of the exhibition's main themes: the reality behind the plausible facade, as in Elizabeth Mulholland's paintings of the 'nice' little town of Dollar.

Democracy isn't freedom of press, property or even thought. It is freedom to know the truth. Some truths are hard to know. But what truth can there be in Thatcherism, propagated by the gutters of Wapping and the fastidious public school ethos of the 'respectable' media? Thatcherism is an attack on the struggle of the great mass of people to understand their lives and learn the political skills to control them.

- Edward Bond, quoted in the catalogue

The catalogue describes the section called 'Satire of the Middle Classes' as being about people **'constructed by culture rather than in true possession of it'**. For example: the photographs of Paul Reas. Images of B & Q – a firm whose activities, by driving smaller traders out of business and creating a near-monopoly, contribute to the standardisation of house interiors and restriction of consumer choice (so much for free market economics). House exteriors also: **Spring, Barratt Estate** shows the house with its carefully nurtured flowers, and the proud owner lovingly cleaning his car. A car is an inherently dirty object whose exhaust fumes, by their lead content, cause mental retardation in children, and everyone who drives one must bear partial responsibility for this. But this is not part of the automobile mythology. Other parts of the show also deal with myths: those of football, machismo, militarism; and the elaborate ideological structures, replete with insignia, rituals and martyrologies, of the Loyalists of Northern Ireland. And finally there are the culturally dispossessed, the ethnic minorities forced to inhabit the insalubrious corners of other people's myths (Tam Joseph, Sutapa Biswas). .

Most of the works on show have, inevitably, a negative bias: they are, after all, supposed to be critical. Some, however, make an attempt at positive, affirmative images. These are not reassuring. Many realist artists are much exercised with the problem of 'accessibility'. With Joan Dawson's Heroes, I am not sure if irony is intended or not; but in either case I am reminded of the social worker who took elocution lessons in order to speak with an

acceptably working-class accent. The painting – by its technique, not its content – is frankly condescending. Ken Currie's **Union Organiser** and **Welder** show the ambivalence of the pride that people employed in traditional heavy industry take in their nevertheless alienated work. Here the human beings themselves look like industrial castings, and the technique of mass-production is reflected in their standard-issue noses (or is this a case of Lukacsian 'typicality'?). We seem here to be in the business of making and perpetuating myths rather than debunking them. Honour by all means those whose lives were, and are, spent in mines and foundries and in the shadow of shipyard cranes. But to present them as hero-victims, in paintings reminiscent of religious icons, does them no honour at all. And surely the whole concept of the Hero, or Type, is hardly conducive to the realisation by 'ordinary' people of an identity which will be their own, and precisely **not** a cultural stereotype given down to them by someone else, whether or not he or she claims to speak on their behalf.

Lukacs, to whom we owe the term Critical Realism, set great store by the **completeness** of a work of art: the idea that the art-work, by being (within its own privileged space) a unified system where each component part stood in comprehensible relation to all others and to the work in its entirety, imaged a world in which the present fragmented mode of perception and experience had given way to a consciousness of all-embracing totality where everything has its place within the Whole: an **understood** world in which people could freely build their own destiny. And in this lies the chief difficulty of making directly political statements by means of traditional art-forms, which is what most of the artists in this exhibition are attempting. A political statement implies, by its nature, a situation of incompletion, non-satisfaction, the possibility and desirability of change – qualities that contradict those of closure and resolution that Lukacs rightly saw as essential characteristics of art-works, at least in the traditionally understood sense. There is thus, ironically, a kernel of truth in the conservatives' reiterated complaint that 'political art cannot be good art'. The Northern Ireland lithographs of Anthony Davies eloquently show the contradiction between aesthetically pleasing form, allied with impressive craftsmanship, and an ugly reality. This can result in a pleasant sense of solidarity with the artist, the feeling that you and the artist are one in your political convictions. The work arouses emotion, but also satisfies it – like a plastic equivalent of the 'Aristotelian' drama that Brecht set his face against. It reassures, where it might be better to disturb. And to a greater or lesser extent this applies to most of the works on show.

The few works which do have the power to disturb complacency and provoke thought are precisely those which do not use the 'closed' traditional media, and are not easily
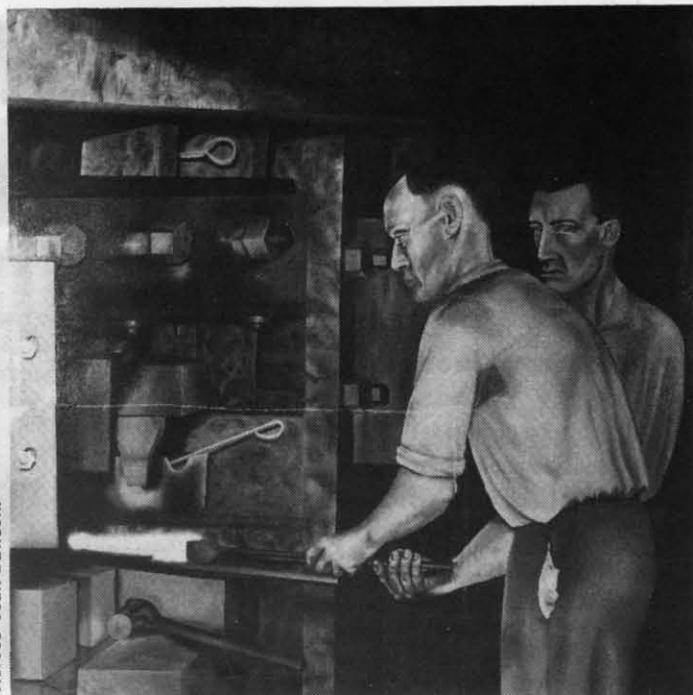
'Heroes' Joan Dawson.
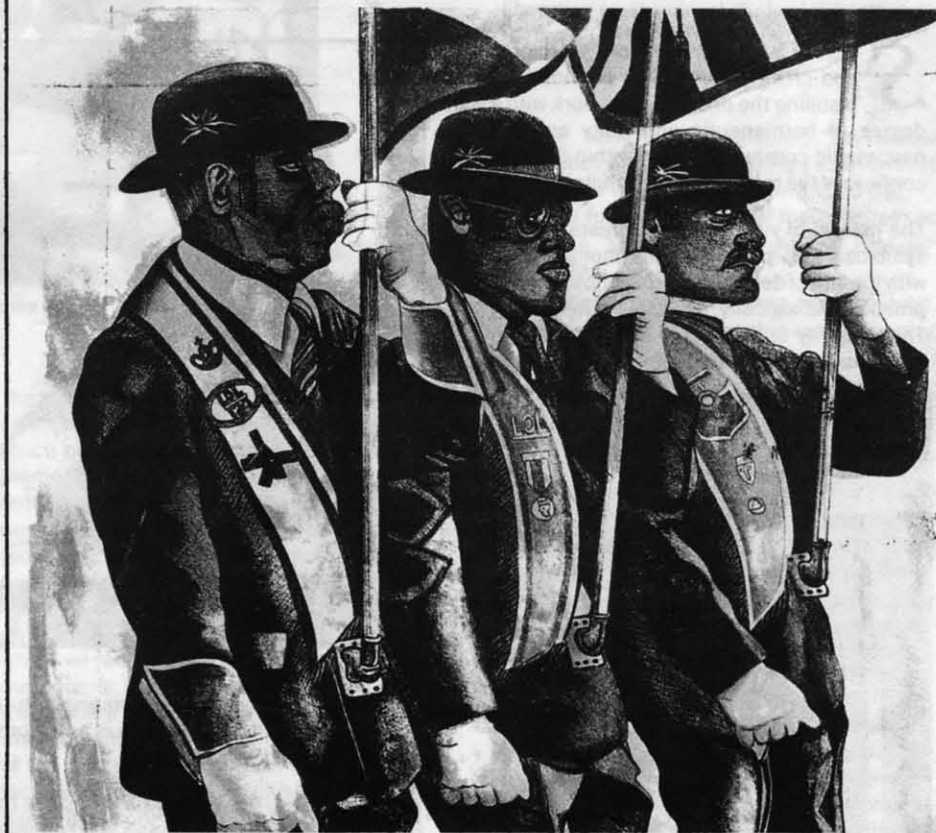
'No Surrender' Anthony Davies (1986).

judged by traditional aesthetic criteria. I am thinking here partly of J. Kirkwood's photomontages, but more especially of **The Minefield of Memory** by Spence and Martin. This series of 14 photographs can be baldly described as being concerned with the socialisation of children, exploring the interface between the social and the personal. But it does this in extraordinary depth, because it is a **reliving** of the socialisation of one child in particular - the one buried inside the mind and body of the adult Jo Spence. (Not for nothing is it

described as 'phototherapy'). Here there is no typicality which excludes the personal: it is excruciatingly personal, **but the spectator also feels it as such**, and is forced to face his or her own past with all its concomitant shame and embarrassment. Catharsis of a different kind: not one done for us that will confirm us in what we were before, but one we are invited to carry out for ourselves, that will leave us changed. Like non-Aristotelian drama, perhaps art, to be politically effective, must be non-Lukacsian.

The face, that image of self, according to Goffman, delineates itself in terms of approved social attributes. The face symbolically seeking the social sign of approved presentation is one form of necessary catharsis. Inverse photographic catharsis, the sign as producer of personal identity, exists in the work, photographic/cultural, of Jo Spence whose 'Minefield of Memory' phototherapeutic images were recently seen as part of the 'Critical Realism' exhibition at the City Art Centre in Edinburgh.

TOWARDS DISRUPTING THE SILENCED the images of Jo Spence

by Lorna Waite

'The Minefield of Memory' Jo Spence and Rosy Martin (1987).

SPENCE'S work questions, explores and crosses the gender boundary by instilling the photographic work with a degree of hermeneutic ambiguity and not narcissistic compulsion from within the safe confines of the role of 'feminist' photographer.

The margin of visual safety is created by the symbiosis of photographer/photographed with the aim of demythologising photographic practice and logically, one's own subjectivity. The disparity of consciousness between the photographer and photographed aims not to magnify the effects of 'self conscious' signification but to trace the continuum of gender and explore gender boundaries by recreating and reworking the effects of the other dominated observer aesthetic. The photograph is merely one snapped moment of psychic time which has resonance beyond the image presented. The absorption of the image decontextualises the image itself as our gaze depends upon the prior beliefs, values attached to the visual presentation which are themselves continually questioned.

Jo Spence has manipulated the visual language to deconstruct gender and reconstruct herself as the central defining characteristic of woman's/her individual identity in our society by sharing with us her own individual biography - as good/bad daughter, lover, High St. photographer, cultural worker, woman with breast cancer. She/we have an extensive repertoire of selves to exhibit, challenge, fuse and entertain through inner strength - a journey to secure an inner truth value which is inescapably ours.

The visual language of Jo Spence's ideas has an assertive and hetergenous quality, overcoming ironically the bittersweet visual polemic viz a viz Judy Chicago. Woman as symbol versus vaginal archetype? The language feels, communicates directly and challenges the illusions of our own histories. Who constructs our visual histories?
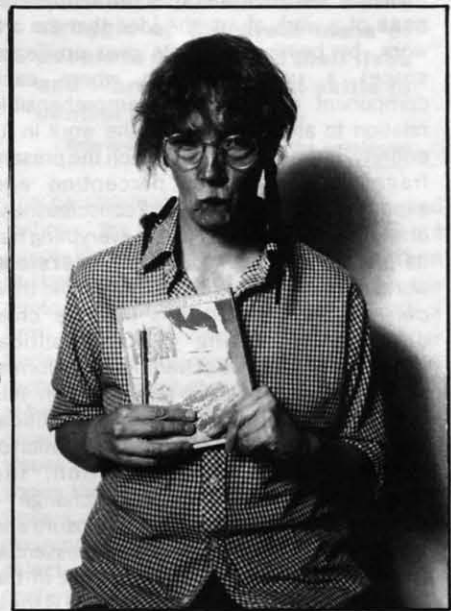
Rejuvenating the practice of feminist cultural thought, the work of Jo Spence is a welcome paradigm of and about change.
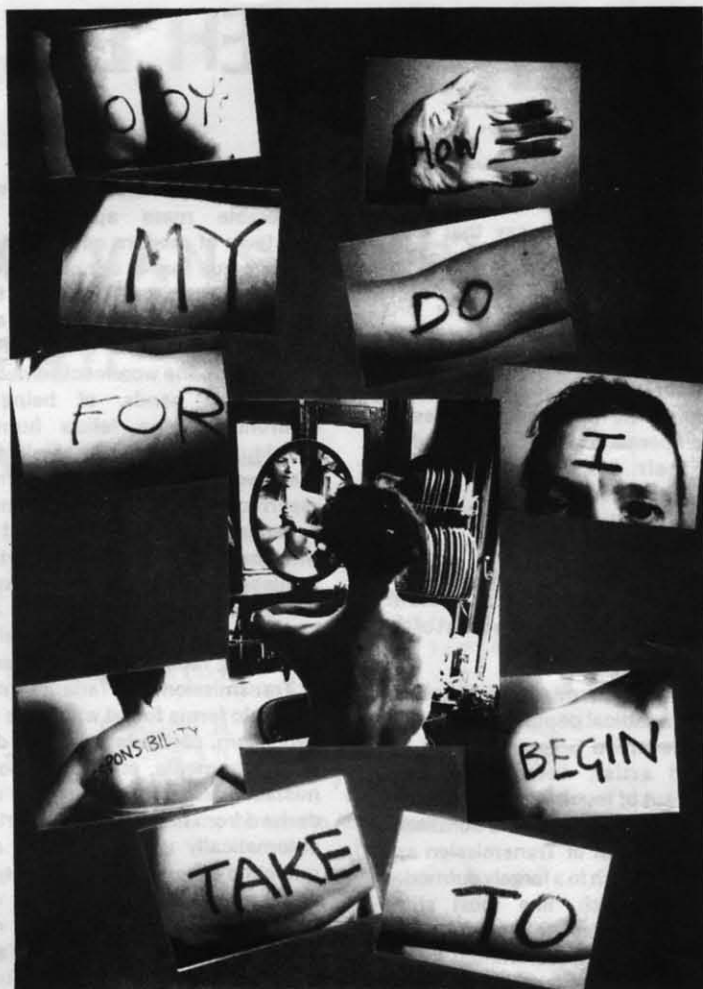
Twenty-five years have now passed since the publication of Betty Friedman's The Feminine Mystique, one of the major literary landmarks in the recording of woman's experience. She delineated the cultural conditions of "the problem with no name" - that ineffable, vacuous metaphor of the empty woman who assumed the unrecognisable facade of the compliant actress, unaware, somatised and feminine. Have the metaphors changed?

The ways in which feminist theory uses metaphor gives clues to the supposed ideological understanding. Ideologically, understanding feminism results all too often in conceptual confusion if we perceive the ideological to be a nonunitary complex of social practices and systems of

representation which have political consequences. No ideology is homogenous yet feminism has this tendency to ideologise itself - perhaps no language intrinsically captures the discourse between woman as subject in revolt against patriarchal society![1]

Symbolically, language and class increase the difficulty of escaping the masculine and feminine positions we assume in the structure of society. Spence's photographs illustrate and capture strains and pain involved in these positions whilst describing not prescribing, remaining panoramic and ambiguous. Her photographs are metaphors for herself, metaphors women can easily interpret because we recognise what they feel like.

Jo Spence's work acts as a retort to the female instinct popular feminism which is essentially a reactionary response to the traditional concepts of womanhood within male-

Jo Spence from her book 'Putting Myself in the Picture'.

culture and not one in which the processes are explored in their own right. How do we move from the 'private' world of the family with its paucity of self imagery but plethora of mass produced imagery into the world of state, industrial and economic power."

New connections must be made which start with the reappropriation of the camera - to create a dialogue with ourselves, a type of decensorised visual diary keeping.

To disrupt the silenced entails redefinition, re-imagining ourselves. Jo Spences photography democratises how meanings are produced in images in order to become creators of our own meanings as the process of representation concords with the subject of representation. That is, ourselves. The photograph as emotional mask escapes from the hidden feminism of the universal woman yet illustrates different perspectives on common stages of development - dealing with parents, authority, imposed adolescent stereotypes etc. Reliving these silences and disruptions in this way is a methodological liberation for the visual study of the self.

NOTES

1. See Mary Kelly's chapter, 'On Sexual Politics And Art', in Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85.
2. For a fuller discussion of these issues see Lynne Segal's 'Is the Future Female?' (Virago, 1987).
3. 'Putting Myself In The Picture: A personal, political and photographic autobiography' by Jo Spence (Carriclen Press).

dominated culture for the last two hundred years. The celebration of woman/mother as unique icon of femininity and protector of humanity, ideas prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century find their twentieth century equivalent in the writings of Dale Spender and Adrienne Rich - indicative of an orthodox liberal feminism which re-enacts the superiority of the female and logically celebrates the biological differences between men and women. A reworked feminist myth of the old biology is destiny axiom which informs the apocalyptic basis of much current popular feminism.[2]

Gender remains yet gender and femininity are continually in conflict with themselves - changing, crossing boundaries, varying in expression according to race, age, class, sexual orientation and individual biography. Jo Spence's photohistory is the problem with no name - the personal and historical identity crisis for women, feminism and men. She continually goes beyond - the female stereotype, the family album, the false selves we internalise, continuously reworking feelings, myths and symbols.

Jo Spence's book 'Putting Myself In The Picture' published last year has a chapter entitled 'Beyond The Family Album' which is central to her views on theory and practice.[3]

The family album acts as a sort of celebrated time capsule capturing the snapshot reality which pretends to be the private icon of our memory of identity, multifarious images remain static concealing the larger parts of our childhoods, despising the power (economic and political truths perhaps) of our nonfictional lifestory. The depiction of our lives presented in the family album depends on the absorption of the condoned ways in which we record the hopes, wishes, desires of our parents, our childhood. The creativity of the camera obscures by depoliticising the imagemaking process to compose the activity of the mother/father/son in the acceptable face of conformity. The illusion of familial harmony is achieved by the creation of myth - to substitute the unwanted for the yearned for.

Consequently, the photographer is disengaged from the photographed which demands the posed, adorned, arranged. The smiling, happy, feminine look clicked and secured by a Kodak Instamatic. Structure, function, composition and protagonist create the safe method of photographic alienation from ourselves. Jo Spence states in 'Putting Myself In The Picture', "How comfortable it is to accept the few threadbare old cliches on offer at every level of signification which encourage us to be consumers and not critical producers of imagery from the word go, involved as we are in a product based

LETTERS

Ken Currie
32 Nithsdale Dr.
Glasgow
29th Nov '87

Dear Editor/Malcolm Dickson,

With reference to your article 'Redundant Aesthetics and the Cult of Failure' in Variant 3.

I resent your attempts to 'rehabilitate' me within your cult of failure. The notion that I have somehow redeemed myself by working on a public commission in order to 'counterbalance' my 'tenuous link with the art world' is beyond contempt. Now it seems that, after your tiresome declamations concerning my alleged 'sell-out' in the pages of 'Edinburgh Review', you are attempting what amounts to a u-turn on your opinion of my integrity as an artist. This feeble retraction of those hysterically self-righteous allegations does little to convince me that you are prepared to admit a major error of judgement. If you were to simply and clearly admit that you were wrong, and that your long awaiting denunciation was in fact premature, I would not now feel the need to respond. Instead you pay lip service to my undertaking of a public commission and then proceed to associate me with a group of younger artists with whom I have nothing in common, but whom you admire and feel that my credibility can be reconstructed by including me within their group.

Elsewhere in Variant 3 familiar overtures about a continuing 'debate' can be heard and to which I now feel I should respond. The success of 'New Image Glasgow' dramatically polarized opinion in the city. We saw many young artists in reaction to the show, particularly the alleged hype, suddenly forging high principle and artistic integrity. They immediately rallied round the ideological barricades of both Transmission Gallery and Variant magazine. At last they had found a comforting environment in which to wallow in a kind of suffocating mire of self-pitying puritanism. Neal Ascherson, whom you dismiss, remarkably, as an establishment figure, accurately described this phenomenon as a 'cult of failure'. Here, according to Ascherson, 'integrity lies in failure and deliberate underachievement is a revolutionary act'. He then pointed out how this attitude, this mindless detestation of artistic success in any form was a crucial element in Scotland's inability to construct a world-scale national-popular culture; where blatant 'sour grapes' is frequently disguised as polemic and bitter envy hidden behind grandiloquent 'criticism'. Your own characteristically pedantic attempts were immediately dismissed as they so obviously embodied those very features. It is frankly laughable to suggest that they were ignored because they were politically uncomfortable. In fact it was the utter predictability of the criticism, as well as its breathtaking naivete about the reality of the art world, that guaranteed little response from those under fire. One could only conclude that it was the axe-grinding of someone isolated, out of touch and more than slightly hurt by his marginalisation in the whole phenomenon.

In light of all this I must say that I get depressed by the tendency of so-called political artists toward self-imposed ghettoization, be it in community arts workshops, artists run galleries or in the refusal to be associated with 'the market'. They bask in their own insecurity and fudge decisive action in the meandering dullness of 'collective co-operation'. Political artists often neutralise their impact by attaching debilitating preconceptive labels; creating little islands of integrity within the system and playing at being radical without getting their hands dirty. I believe that one must fight a 'war of position' within the system, challenging the market in the very heart of the beast itself.

I feel that much of Transmission and Variant, far from being a radical popular force, in fact reinforces widespread prejudice about the self-obsessed artist, detached, lonely, alienated and out of touch with the everyday reality of people's lives. There is a bombastic stridency about much of Transmission and Variant that owes much to a largely outmoded punk aesthetic, which, like most street originated culture is, in the end, transitory and rather fickle. It has committed you to presenting a boring and largely incoherent mish-mash of dated art practices from the seventies – video, performance, installations, time-based site-specific 'stuff', etc, etc, mostly pursued in the name of expanding the boundaries of appreciation, experience and accessibility of art. In fact, without doubt these particular mediums are among those most responsible for alienating the public. The art and ideas of Tranmission and Variant are obscure, esoteric, often embarrasingly pretentious, cold, cerebral and above all presented with toe-curling self-importance. They have no wide circulation among those sections of the populace capable of undertaking social transformation, namely the organised working class and its allies.

So what's it all about then Malcolm?

Clearly, you would love to see the demise of figurative painting, of that profoundly humanistic urge to paint the image of the human figure. If the market is the motor force behind the ascendanscy of diverse national schools of figuration in the eighties then it is our responsibility to assert the hegemony of a democratic figurative art that advances genuine social and political issues in contrast to the moral vacuousness of this international phenomenon. We must fight our battle of ideas and images at the heart of things, not in safe ghettoes, not among ourselves and attempt no less than to produce an art that has the potential to inspire the imagination of millions of people. Walter Benjamin argued quite correctly that painting was in no position to compete with the power of the collective experience of cinema, nor the inexorable mass appeal of the great spectacle of modern capitalism. However, I would argue that in our present day world of shallow, transitory images that flicker constantly in our lives, there is an awesome power in the fixed image. The aura of uniqueness, the wonder of something crafted by human hands, of being physically confronted by a fellow human being's individual vision is a feeling we must preserve. This is not an argument for the resurrection of outmoded forms of artistic experience, nor is it connected in any way with the values surrounding art that are so ruthlessly exploited by the market. It's about the determination to fight for human and social values in art in opposition to the increasing vacuousness of modern life. Much of Transmission and Variant's imagery seeks to mimic forms found within the spectacle of capitalism, particularly images derived from the mass media, such as video. There is a mistaken assumption that by using forms derived from the media, one's art is somehow automatically up to date and an accurate reflection of contemporary reality. In fact, the effect of the flickering images of some big video installation are as empty, monotonous and unmoving as a bank of tv screens in a High Street shop. Personally, I'm one hundred percent committed to figurative painting, be it on a private gallery wall or in some vast public space. I believe I can contribute effectively in the cultural struggle for social change within that area. Others may have their own solutions, and there may be disagreements, but in the end, the objectives should unite us all.

I have no illusions about recent Scottish art. In fact I agree with most of your observations – the ridiculous hype, the absurdity of the notion of a Scottish Renaissance, the ruthless falsification of history, the promotion of non-existent movements, the idea of the 'Vigorous Imagination' as a comprised survey rather than an argument, or what Timothy Hyman recently described as the 'anxious fudging of every issue just to keep the bandwagon rolling'. But the fact that you and many of your contemporaries were not in any of the exhibitions is not my problem, nor does it worry me. I participate because I believe that the wilful marginalisation of one's art in order to remain pure suits the establishment well.

I propose to continue having 'tenuous links' with the art world in order to pursue my inalienable right to earn a living. I object to your implication that I have somehow redeemed myself of that fact in public service. If you intend to continue to sit in judgement of other artists' work you would do well to have the courage to admit errors openly.

Yours sincerely,
Ken Currie