

# VARIANT

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## Scorched Myths?

timex & postmodern scotland

woman and technology

artists projects

resisting global media



### post politics

cornelius castoriadis

### musical hybrid

steve reich & beryl korot

### third eye centre

a history

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euro music festivals • stockhausen boycotted  
reports insights comment



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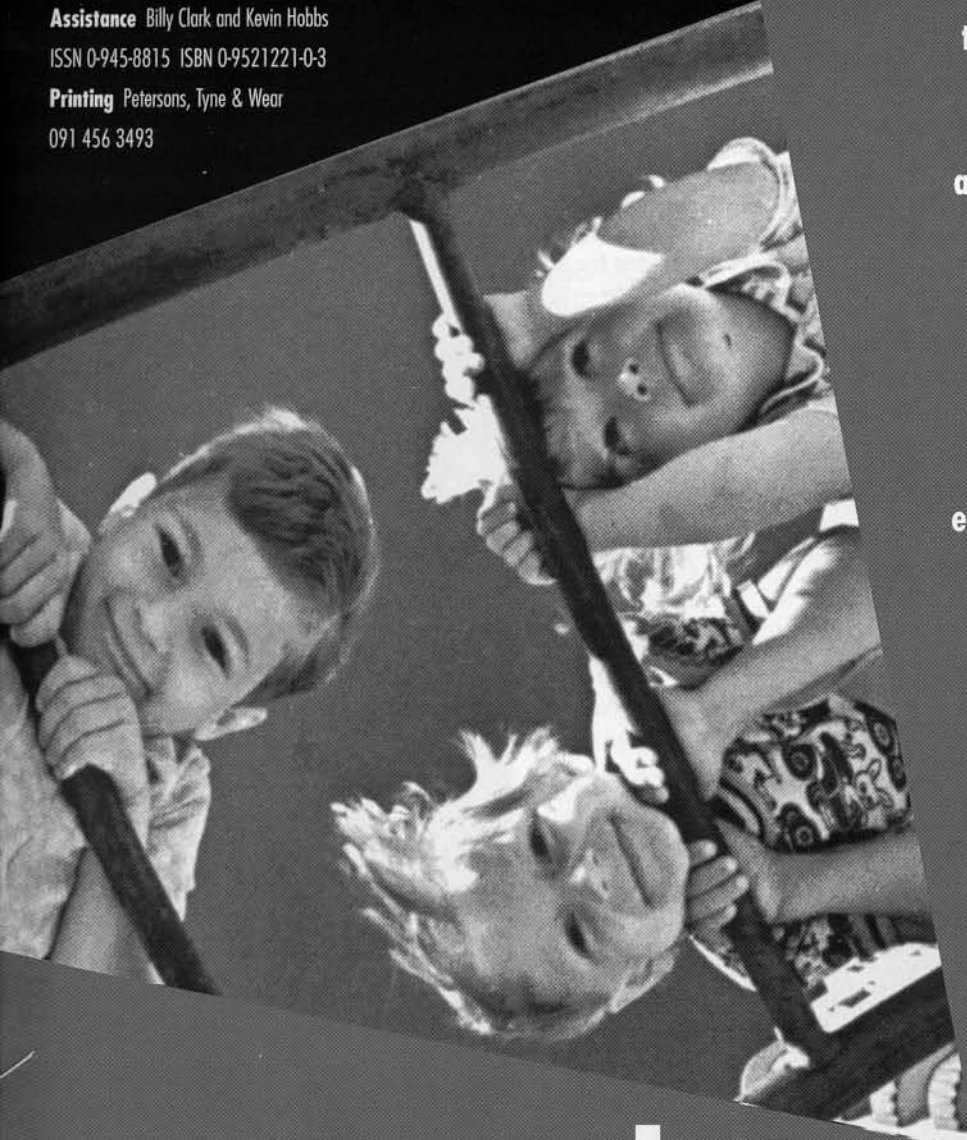
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photo by Harald Leppikson (Estonia), from the exhibition *Borderlands* (see pp35)

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Video Still from *Satellite Dreaming*



"They're keeping their mothers' story really strong"

**VISUALS:** *Rory Donaldson* is a Scottish artist currently living and working in Glasgow. Donaldson's recent work has been exploring the areas of censorship, disinformation and identity. The works reproduced here are *Visibility* on the front cover (mixed media, 6'x4' detail of original 12'x29', 1992); *Autocensorship* on the inside front cover (mixed media, 60"x36", 1991), and on the back page, *Radar Cycle no.4* (mixed media, 60"x40", 1991). ¶ In 1992 he had his one-person show '*Visibility*' at the CCA in Glasgow, and more recently he has shown in group shows including '*Twelve Stars*' (Barbican, London), '*C.A.L.*' (Edinburgh), Arts Council Gallery Belfast, '*Aqua Vitæ*' (Stills Gallery, Edinburgh and Street Level Gallery, Glasgow) and '*Exposure*' (CCA, Glasgow)

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**Technology may be regarded** as a means of reinforcing stasis or as an agent of change, depending on the intentions of the appliers. The information technologies, such as television and the computer, McLuhan claimed, were liberatory, but in the sobering up period since the late sixties—and in the realisation that automation may have ‘freed’ us from toil and made us redundant within the misery of a constructed leisure time—more critical viewpoints have emerged which recognise how such technologies replicate the system by ever more sophisticated means. TV, as Sean Cubitt has argued, is not the source of power, rather ‘the object in play in a struggle over power’, and in this sense possibilities for its use outwith mainstream global TV are vitally important.

One of the aims of the **Channels of Resistance** season broadcast on Channel 4 in early ’93 and the publication of the book of the same title, was to help explode the myth of the ‘global village’ (which is only a Western philosophy): that we all have the capability to access the information highways of the world. If this were so, then we would have much to celebrate in the instant communication facilitated with others in far flung regions, but these highways are dominated and owned by commercial concerns which do not measure human sociality in any means except by profit. For those outside the economic order of the First World, things are also very different. There are no direct telecommunications links between Africa and Latin America, for example; Africa has ten times fewer TV sets than the West. In fact, the North/South divide is epitomised in the distribution of TV’s.

The North’s control over the flow of information predetermines who will use it, what use it will be put to, and what political forms and relationships will emerge and be formed by it. The entertainment industry is helping to narrow the multifarious areas of communication by promoting universal product coaxed on by the media imperialist pressures of the USA.

In *Distress Signals*, a Canadian production within the *Channels of Resistance* season, the dominance of the US, which has entertainment as its second largest export industry, was highlighted as the standard by which all new programming gets judged. In the TV show marketplace (MIP TV), representatives from giants such as 20th Century Fox, Disney and Paramount, will almost give away some of their 2000 hours of ‘glossy’ TV to poor and third world nations and justify this to the buyer as good value for money. Here, the purposes of encouraging a reliance on US homogenous product is served, as is the underlying values of the production. Technological advances are ensuring that this will spread throughout the world at an ever rapid rate. Already, Pepsi and Coca Cola are selling the empty dreams of over-abundance to Russian youth, thereby foregrounding the moving in of the transnational corporations.

‘Mass media tends to obliterate identity’, says **Tony Downmunt**, producer of the series and editor of the ‘*Channels of Resistance*’ book: ‘Not only programmes, but the technologies of production, transmission and reception, the kinds of industrial organisation and patterns of ownership, and the working practices of those involved in making TV, all replicate and sustain power imbalances in world media’. But despite the swamping of indigenous cultures that media brings, the series celebrated the ways and means through which groups and communities combat this domination. In the Arctic and in Northern Quebec, the Inuit use TV and radio to supplant the older oral custom, running their own indigenous satellite station to counter the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s control. In Australia, Aborigines in Ernabella are reclaiming their culture through their own satellite TV station. In Zimbabwe, media activists take a video projector and screen to remote rural villages. In the USA, Deep Dish TV succeed in opening up the satellite systems confined to the large corporations and become a conduit through which the massive anti-war movement against the Gulf War expressed itself. In Israel, journalists in the West Bank are

EDITORIAL



Image from MTV archive, 1991—from the Channel 4 book *Channels of Resistance*

given camcorders to portray everyday reality in the occupied territories. In Romania, a TV station becomes the focus on the revolutionary upheaval.

That this resistance has been made possible by the proliferation of technology within the ethic of the capitalist marketplace is one of the contradictions that capitalism not only thrives on, but cannot eliminate.

**Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi** remarks upon this contradiction that “on the one hand, global transnationals and an industrialised form of cultural production is penetrating across all national spaces—the world is going to dance to the Hollywood beat of 1993. At the same time, the spread of media technologies, video technology, camcorders in the hands of small groups, can potentially create an alternative globalisation, a world public sphere that actually empowers many different groups and different communities” This is echoed in the book also: ‘a cause for optimism is that the same transnational electronics industry that feeds the growth of mainstream global TV also produces the means by which it can be challenged and resisted’ (Downmunt).

A review of ‘*Manufacturing Consent*’ and ‘*The Nation Erupts*’ appears on pp68

# Hanging From The Clock Face Bathing In The Wrong Glow

Pat Kane

**I**n its way, the exchange was priceless; all the end-of-millennium dilemmas of Scottish national life condensed into five minutes of lunchtime BBC Radio Scotland. The subject was the aftermath of the Dundee Timex plant closure, and douce caller after douce caller into Ruth Wishart's *Headlines* show (June 18, 1993), gave voice to the fears of virtual nationhood. "How will the city of Dundee—or Scotland for that matter—ever attract industrial investors when the world sees scenes like those pickets, all that violence... The hate on those faces... Who could blame any company for not wanting to get involved in all that?" Even a slick business-union operator like Gavin Laird (AEEU Leader) had to grant the anger of the Timex women absolute legitimacy—sacked *after* accepting wage cuts and longer hours, resisting the 'sweatshop' economy through legal protest and direct action, rather than via an automatic union sub or a four-yearly robot vote to Westminster. But the contribution from the jowly, media-sensitive young Liberal Democrat on the aforementioned radio programme cut to the core of the issue: "I think the image of the dispute will be more that of another branch-plant company, pulling sticks at their whim, rather than that of a militant Dundee..." But then the crucial, hard-headed caveat: "In any case, I doubt whether the picket-line images had been transmitted to Europe or the Far East, where future investment would probably come from anyway..."

So this is what the socio-economic future of this North European national community might substantially depend on some corporate industrial strategist

Photo Martin Hunter



with a list of cities on his/her lap, turning on SKY or CNN or BBC World Service TV and seeing 'Industrial Unrest in Dundee', and drawing the black marker through 'Tayside'? More than likely, according to the capitalist instincts (doubtless well-keened) of our leading Lib-Dem, and a chorus of supporting views in the labour movement and political classes. Let us give praise to the Free Flow of Capital that Timex didn't *really* turn into Wapping or Orgreave; imagine the image-millstone that would have hung round the necks of the AmEx surfers of Scottish Enterprise, Locate in Scotland, Scotland Europa or the Scottish Tourist Board.

There are no shortages of economic gurus available to tell any unquiet Scot that Visibly Good Behaviour—as citizen, as worker, as democrat—is crucial to external investment in the country. 'Competitive wage rates' and 'stable labour relations' are the key words in any hypester-bureaucrat's brochure, to attract parts-assembly plants in from all over the world, which means an appeal to dig into those reserves of doughty masochism in the national psyche. C'mon, keep the head down, let's not blow it *again*.

It may not all be branch-plant submissiveness in 21st century capitalist Scotland. Might there be a little local design or re-engineering of the product to be done (at least that will begin to keep them here, if we provide some of their intellectual capital for them?) Then our global corp on-the-sniff can also benefit from The Fabled Scottish Educational Culture—meaning bright, *cheap* graduates. But the Asian Tigers—Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia—are pouring billions into education too: and not even the ghost of the Democratic Intellect will stop the 'good', research-intensive companies (like NEC, also in Dundee) from eventually '*quantifying the productive potential of comparative territories*' (as they say), and one terrible day moving along too.

What can be done?, shrug the academicized, post-Marxist Left. You can't put the genie of global economics and industry back in the bottle. It's no surprise that a prime theorist of this scenario—Harvard economist Robert Reich—is now Secretary of Labour in Clinton's administration. A received, Labourist wisdom is building. National economic sovereignty is dead, a fertile, well-educated and flexibly-skilled workforce is all, and the only thing a nation-state can do is to make its residents smart and capable, ready to leap to the service of whatever transnational corporation deigns to land on your soil. Indeed, let there be a Europe which ensures minimum wages, conditions and rights for workers throughout its boundaries—and let us oppose the British government's attempt to unravel this attempted equilibrium (the dream of Delors and Attali) between market and state, society and capital.

But we may not win that soon: so in the meantime, protest but not too disruptively, resist but not in an unseemly manner... Do you want even the low-grade jobs that may come your way now? Then cut out the proletarian, class-struggle, right-on-our-side fantasies immediately. It doesn't look good. No-one likes to see cheap female labour in a fury. Especially on television.

The evident and (at time of writing) sustained resistance of the Timex workers may operate as a negative symbol of what Scottish labour has to offer the world. But I would argue that the anger displayed, works differently in the Scottish popular context—as a symbol of our national frustration of economic and political powerlessness. The fact that much of the efforts of the strike committee is now bent towards organising an international consumer boycott of Timex products, with the assistance of American and European trade-unions—what Ruth Wishart mischievously called in her radio show "*international secondary picketing*"—shows also the commitment of the workers to their struggle. What could have been a local storm-in-a-branch-plant becomes intensified, through the unwavering militancy of the Timex workers, into the flickering beginnings of a genuine international response to capitalist domination. Faxes and modems whirr and chitter to the enemy's disadvantage. Whether it comes to anything conclusive, in terms of saving the Timex workers' jobs, is less important than the fact that an information-guided anti-capitalist resistance is beginning to feel its strength and potential.

Attacking the ethical conscience of the potential Timex consumer turns the increasing 'lifestyle' sophistication of advertising culture back on itself: the more individualised and self-conscious the tastes developed in consumers, the more susceptible they are to appeals to their *moral* self-image. Would the Timex wearer begin to prickle with discomfort if they knew the manufacturer was behaving like a feudal overlord in its global peripheries? Well, perhaps: but a post-modern, media literate labour movement needs to put that information in the febrile consumer's head in the first place, as much as it needs to support direct action at the workplace.

But we come back to the wider, symbolic impact of a Scottish culture of militancy. When even the scions of the Labour Party begin to discern 'Enemies Within', stoking 'violence' amongst the 'otherwise justified protests' of the Timex workers—meaning, primarily, Scottish Militant Labour and the lesser Trotskyist and revolutionary groups—one sees yet again the crucial faultline of Scottish politics, which is no less a matter of culture and images than it is of activists and demonstrations.

Briefly put: the Timex workers' local resistance to a sweatshop economy may be liberating for the participants, and may mobilise international labour to some extent. *But unless it is linked up with the energies of the 'imagined community' of Scottish statehood, this radicalism will eventually drain out of the lives of those who are radicalised by it.*

The levels of ordinary defiance shown by the Scottish working-class (employed or unemployed, actual or generational) around the poll tax, Timex, democracy marches—and, doubtless, in any future water privatisation—shows that Tom Nairn's pertinent critique of Scottish identity (act as a citizen, don't grin as a subject) may already have its answer. There is a widespread

report

willingness to challenge the legitimacy of laws and policies not rooted in popular consent (which may, even as a threat, have prevented the brutal imposition of Tory water privatisation plans). But this radicalism needs the support of a discourse of Scottish sovereignty. The desires and aims for an effective, socialist, democratic Scotland must not be endlessly deferred between the promises of Trotskyists and their eventual revolution, or Westminster parties (the SNP included) resting everything on one last electoral heave. This is a historical waste of political potential.

The link has to be made between the popular resistances of the Scottish people, and the ultimate defender of the gains and aims of that resistance—a Scottish nation-state. The nation-state (despite the assurances of post-national gurus) is still the basic minimum of effective self government for a national community available in world politics. In terms of international investment and authorities, the nation-state still has to be dealt with—territorially, economically, industrially, and in terms of military (and non-military) alignment.

This last power of the state—to determine its level, if any, of militarisation—is acutely relevant to the Rosyth ‘tragedy’: nowhere in recent Scottish politics has the need for a futuristic, non-parliamentary vision of Scottish independence been so acute. “*All the hazards of nuclear weaponry, and none of the jobs to compensate*”: this piece of popular wisdom

punted through the news media as the ‘common-sense’ complaint about the allocation of Trident refitting to Devonport, dominated all political responses to the situation—even the anti-Trident, non-nuclear SNP. Nowhere was the perspective articulated—or even articulable—that there could be a Scottish-national control of a complex, efficient shipbuilding activity like Rosyth, that was *not* dependent on the military-industrial complex. Our ain wee Scottish

Navy and its sonsy frigates, puttering round the North Sea and growling at Norwegian terrorists ready to grab our oil and scoop up our fish, is a shameful rationale for any post ’79 Group Nationalist party to promote.

The real radicalism of Scottish independence should be advocated in exactly these kinds of crisis-moments. The link between the moral vision of the ‘good society’ that the Scottish consensus holds, and the productive innovative powers of a complex modern economy like Scotland, *should be as direct as possible*. In fact, I would suggest that until the idea of a ‘moral economy’ takes hold in Scotland—an economy under the control of its workers and operators, oriented towards fair international trade and a socially-beneficial use of the most advanced technologies: that is, a *futuristic* Scottish economy—we will not have the will, or even the strong desire, to attain effective self-determination in Scotland.

To break into Scottish statehood, given the likelihood of a measure of UK, European, and international procedural process that would be necessary, will require a cultural-moral stamina from the Scottish left majority that is lacking from all current political leaderships and parties.

The opportunity for a ‘new state’ in Scotland is more than just a return to Harold Wilson-Labourism with a Tam O’Shanter affixed: it should also determine exactly how this national community negotiates with modernity, how it chooses to ride the tides of the future (ecologically, technologically, culturally, politically). Is there anything wrong in saying that a national policy for reducing the working week in an independent Scotland (on Andre Gorz’s lines), meaning a wider distribution of work in a high-technology, labour-saving economy, has an *aesthetic* motivation? That the ‘liberation from labour’ which hi-tech can make possible—and only fully realisable under confident and sophisticated state planning (at a Scottish and European level)—can

be rooted in a desire for the Scottish people to have their lives dominated by creativity, reciprocity, sociality, rather than a ‘full days work in an honest country’?

The fixed complexities and resources already here in Scotland—however they are managed and controlled—means that our leap into modernity as a nation-state would not be without skill or aptitude. But I am beginning to think that we become politically and economically *modern*—an effective nation-state—through culturally and socially *post-modern* means. That is, through figures, spokespersons, groupings and movements, arguing for a Scottish polity, society and culture that is futuristic: that links our deepest moral urges—for security, connection, novelty, freedom—to our most practical societal arrangements. Edward Said, in the second of his Reith Lectures on the role of the intellectual, gives the radical potential of a Scottish national liberation a perfect rationale; quoting Frantz Fanon, Said says that the point is not to replace oppressive administrators with benign administrators: the point is “*the invention of new souls*”. And for intellectuals, artists and other political actors, the point is to ‘universalise’ the national crisis—“*to give greater human scope to what a particular nation has suffered, to associate that experience with the suffering of others*”. National liberation, as a means to human liberation.

So, self-determination can mean determination of one’s self: nations and persons can both express autonomy-in-solidarity, with their fellow citizens and the world community. Scotland can be free, if free-thinking; Scotland can be recreated, if its citizens are truly, profoundly, illimitably creative.

And might not the Scottish artist get out of the studio, and start to articulate this New State—prescriptively, descriptively, whatever?

Come on. What else worthwhile are you doing? ∞



Front Line, Timeex photo Martin Hunter



# The Conception

# & Birth

of

# fotofeis



Ruth Wishart and Alasdair Foster  
at the opening of Fotofeis'  
gala launch in Edinburgh,  
June 1993  
photo: Iain Stewart

**T**he struggle for photography's recognition as an artform in Scotland has been a complex process coloured with hesitancy and bureaucratic manipulation. From the early 1960s the Scottish Arts Council showed photography in its Charlotte Square gallery but exhibitions were largely historic incorporating Scottish with international work. From 1976 to '78 SAC invested £27,310 in Stills whose director, **Richard Hough**, would not show Scottish photography until it was good enough. From the genesis of its current resurgence, therefore, a feeling that Scottish photography did not meet international standards persisted, setting a precedent for importing work that might set an example to indigenous photographers. This philosophy has been perpetuated and exaggerated by **FOTOFEIS**, Scotland's first international festival of photography.

The Corridor Gallery in Glenrothes, founded by **Peter** and **Aase Goldsmith** in 1978, did much to redress the balance by concentrating on first time and young Scots exhibitors. SAC started supporting this voluntary organisation in 1986 with a grant of £1,500 ceasing in 1992 with a final payment of £986 in agreement with Arts In Fife who have run the gallery since 1990. As other photographic initiatives came on stream to meet growing demands for workshop and gallery facilities promoting Scots photographers, SAC's expenditure increased and The Richard Hough Bursary of £5,000 was established in 1987.

In "A Policy For Independent Photography", published in April 1987, SAC made a distinction between commercial, amateur and creative photography stating that 'independent' rather than 'creative' or 'art' is rapidly becoming the accepted term. A year later independent photographers **Glyn Satterley** and **John Charity** lobbied SAC for more representation on the Arts Committee. In response SAC set up The Working Party on Scottish Independent Photography in 1989 chaired by **David Bruce**, Director of The Scottish Film Council. Eleven representatives from Scotland's photo-

**Marshall Anderson**

graphic community made up the party and Dr James Lawson undertook the research, writing an 82 page report.

At a cost which would have provided another photography bursary the report made two principal recommendations; that SAC should create a Photography Panel to work with the Arts Committee. That SAC appoint an officer on a short-term contract of three years to promote photography, improve communications with the photographic community and help devise new policies for SAC. In addition the report listed nineteen objectives for action or incorporation into SAC policies—these included:

- SAC SHOULD SERVE TOURING BY PROVIDING FRAME MAKING, SUPPLY AND CRATING AND OPERATE A FRAME BANK.
- SAC SHOULD ENCOURAGE CLIENT ORGANISATIONS TO COMMISSION WORK FROM PHOTOGRAPHERS.
- SAC SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF DARKROOM FACILITIES THROUGHOUT SCOTLAND.
- SAC SHOULD ESTABLISH A POLICY OF EXHIBITION PAYMENT RIGHT.
- SAC SHOULD ESTABLISH A NEW CATEGORY OF ANNUAL AWARD FOR SMALL PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECTS.
- SAC SHOULD CONSIDER THE PUBLICATION AND SALE OF CATALOGUES.
- SAC SHOULD CONSIDER THE USE OF TELEVISION FOR ITS VIRTUES AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM IN RELATION TO PHOTOGRAPHY.

Throughout this pragmatic document Scottish independent photography is seen to be in ascendancy being referred to as 'the present efflorescence' which has stimulated a 'spirit of confidence about the present and future'. It is alleged that the 1989 Report was little more than lip service and that SAC had no intention of following the recommendations through. Indeed, true to form, SAC took a different route altogether after concluding that a separate department for photography would have the distinct disadvantage of being limited to a set budget. Although The Working Party was dissolved its report attracted £30,000 per year over a three year period in addition to ongoing funding to Stills, Street Level, Portfolio, and other projects.

It is not completely clear how the £90,000 was spent but it is known that in the first year, 1989/90, some of it was not taken up. £2,000 went towards a dance/photography commission to Richard Learoyd; £5,000 to taking New Scottish Photography to Houston for its first showing and £7,500 towards a publication for its subsequent airing in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; £7,000 went to Owen Logan for a Documentary Commission; and in 1991/92, £29,000 was given to Phase One of development for what was to become FOTOFEIS.

While photography in Scotland slowly germinated, worldwide it blossomed with international festivals, the first of which was held in Arles in the late '60s. Since then Houston, Barcelona and Venice have put themselves on the cultural world map reaping such benefits as increased tourism and prestige. One can only assume

that the Arts Council of Great Britain felt excluded from this festival elite because on the 31st of October 1989 it wrote to SAC and other UK agencies and cities inviting a bid to stage the 1991 biennial photography conference with an associated international festival.

Although the 1989 Report had not hinted towards an international festival as part of a development strategy it had advised SAC to capitalise on the ripeness of Scottish photography suggesting the time was right to harvest.

Historical analysis may reveal whether the repercussions of events during the winter of 89/90 were bold and opportunistic or rash and ill-timed. SAC decided to "formulate a response based on direct consultation with representatives from the photographic sector" convening two meetings in Manor Place, Edinburgh. The first on the 10th of November 1989 concluded that ACGB's invitation was a viable proposition. This led to a second meeting on December 5th where nine representatives resolved to have a Scottish festival independent of ACGB influence while keeping contact with the ACGB Group which had met on the 30th November to discuss an English, city-based festival. Although the nine thought an international festival too ambitious, their confidence was bolstered by the knowledge that their scheme would be recommended by ACGB for support from the International Initiatives Fund, and as the decision was taken at SAC level it would guarantee core funding. They then invited galleries, local authorities, colleges, community photography groups and individuals to attend a General Meeting on 9th February 1990 in Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee, "to discuss the feasibility of organising a Scottish International Photography Festival".

Twenty-one attended and rather surprisingly perhaps there were no dissenters to the proposal. This may be explained by the somewhat explicit language used in the invitation which said, "An ad hoc meeting of various photography bodies called by the SAC resolved that it would be more beneficial and positive to initiate an independent Scottish event to be based not in one specific location, but developed on a nationwide scale". It goes on to say that the purpose of the meeting was to explore the level of interest and elect a steering group which would have the task of seeking funding, appointing a festival co-ordinator and drawing up a budget etc. Those attending accepted that an international festival on a national scale was going to take place while the few with a knowledge of such budgets reckoned this event would cost around £650,000. Of course such a delicate matter was never discussed because they concluded ACGB and SAC would provide a large percentage of funding between them. Also, by this time, Festivalitis had spread throughout the assembly.

A Steering Committee was formed from willing volunteers who would research a Feasibility Study. The Committee, keen to broaden its representation, co-opted Alasdair Foster, an independent photographer

comment

who had worked with Films of Scotland and curated exhibitions, into its ranks. Regardless of the wording in SAC's invitation to the General Meeting there were further discussions as to whether or not the festival should proceed as a nationwide event. The debate caused some disunity but the Feasibility Study was to consider the following; a nationwide festival or alternatively a city-based one, a possible range of activities, a budget, timescale, staffing and the most viable form of management, and its international definition.

After the published Feasibility Study confirmed in Autumn 1990 that a nationwide event was possible, a Think Tank within the steering committee, including Alasdair Foster, met in Edinburgh to formulate an operational plan. Signed on January 1991 and revised on 14th May, their document, including a thematic structure and budget, was made available to the Steering Committee and submitted to SAC whose main concern by then was the event's structure. When he was interviewed for the post of Festival Director in June 1991, Alasdair Foster had the advantage of this plan of action which so impressed SAC that he was duly employed. (The project had a "semi-autonomous relationship" with SAC, with Lindsay Gordon, then Visual Arts Director of SAC on the steering group. Others included Lindsey Lewis of Stills Gallery and Sue Pirnie of Highland Regional Council).

By the time *Something A Little Different* (written by Alasdair Foster) had been printed in Portfolio Magazine, and the first press release issued from the organisation had been circulated in January 1992, the Steering Committee had selected their choice of themes to suit four specific areas (Highlands and Islands—New Technologies; North East—Interdisciplinary Collaboration; South West—Pictures From A Small Country; South East—The Family), venues had been asked to reserve space specifically for festival exhibitions, and Scottish photographers were puzzled as to how they could participate.

## comment

The Steering Committee agreed to continue as FOTOFEIS (an internationally recognised prefix with a Gaelic

suffix for festival), a limited company with charitable status, constituted on April 1st 1992. A Board of Directors comprising members of the Steering Committee plus others and chaired by Ruth Wishart, broadcaster and journalist, was formed and Phase Two of development was implemented. SAC committed £145,000 core funding from 1992 to '94 to cover salaries and office rental etc. This sum did not include costs for projects; these had to be raised from private sponsors by Foster and his team.

Sue Pirnie, Exhibitions Officer for Highland Regional Council (HRC), who helped compile the Feasibility Study and later became a Board member, sent out a blanket mailing to all on HRC's Artists Register inviting participation. Two replied. Perhaps this is the clearest indication that artists and photographers were confused as to how they were expected to

respond to a particular theme which did not apply directly to their work. Roddy Murray, Director of An Lanntair in Stornoway, writes, "*The stumbling block for most was the New Imaging/New Technology brief for the Highlands and Islands. Most did not have a clear idea as to what this meant or what to do to 'qualify'*".

What was not made clear from the outset was fotofeis's role as broker. A photographer working in a theme applicable to another area should have been advised by fotofeis who would have found a suitable venue. When photographers enquired as to how they could participate they were told to find their own venues and meet their own costs as fotofeis did not have project money, however, once their show was in place fotofeis would include it in their extensive programme. It was hoped too that Scottish photographers would participate in workshops and portfolio viewings held by imported guests thereby implying their participation as secondary.

It was in this atmosphere of confusion and anger that Jonathon Robertson, Head of the Photography Department at Duncan of Jordanstone College, who had been involved in proceedings from the very beginning invited all interested parties in Tayside area to a meeting in the Seagate Gallery, Dundee, in June 1992. His attempts to solicit support were met with hostility. In July Alasdair Foster was invited to address a photographers' meeting in the Crawford Arts Centre, St Andrews, to explain fotofeis's remit. Foster gave the impression that the international event had little to do with indigenous photographers as the emphasis was on bringing in international talent. His attitude caused one photographer to comment, "*fotofeis is not for us!*"

Understandably there is much acrimony towards fotofeis in Scotland's photography community along with grave anxieties for the future. With a biennial festival commitment fotofeis has a perceived monopoly of funding and will continue absorbing huge amounts of revenue for years ahead. Once this year's £six-figure plus celebration is over and reappraisal occurs people will see that although fotofeis has succeeded in achieving its objectives Scottish practitioners may be no better off. There remains only one photography bursary while more graduates are using lens based media in their image making process with insufficient workshop and gallery facilities to cater for their needs. There is not a clearly defined marketing strategy for Scottish photography which might put investment directly into independent talents nor is there a newsletter which would help generate a photographic culture.

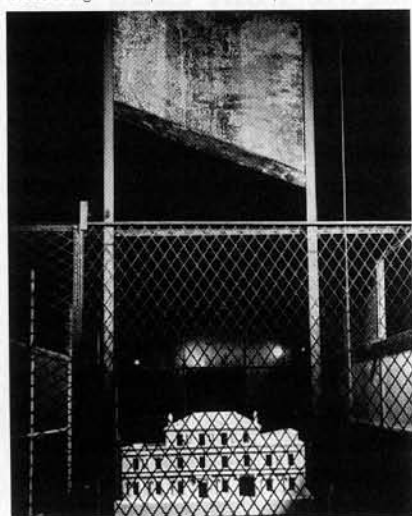
The question we should be asking ourselves in Scotland is not whether fotofeis has been a success but: Is the present SAC strategy towards supporting extravagant exercises in public accessibility with an eye on tourist incentives not detracting from the more fundamental role of nurturing individual requirements which would help improve the basic quality of Scottish art along with artists' confidence? ∞

# Beyond Shame

## 45th Venice Biennale

The phenomenon of the 45th Venice Biennale ambles onto the international art scene with the usual rhetorical claims surrounding it; the principle one of which is that, by Darwinian empiricism, a show of this magnitude represents the great and good of contemporary art practice. Its curator—**Achille Bonito Oliva**—has selected work (either directly or by delegation to a host of international curators) based on a theme that pays insouciant lip service to the alternative art trends of recent years: the ‘cultural nomad’. To actually analyse the successes or failures of how the 800 individual works illustrate this theme is a redundant task: only the train-spotter equivalent of an art critic would bother to point out that artists such as **Francis Bacon** (whose show is housed at the glittering institution of the Ala Napoleonica of the Correr Museum) is nomadic only by dint of the fact that his work is often travelling due to the benediction of the market place. Similarly, those artists selected to represent their nation in the permanent pavilions of the Giardini of Castello hardly qualify

Louise Bourgeois Cell photo Peter Bellamy



as pluralistic nomads; a closer bet might be the younger generation of artists showing work in the alternative Aperto section—at the very least they could be seen wandering blankly around the organisational chaos in the run-up to the opening looking for *something, anything*, even if it was only a screwdriver.

The Biennale, of course, is an easy target, the art show equivalent of the soap opera which everyone loves to hate; yet to rage against the conspicuous bachanalian excesses of its presentation is as pyrrhic an endeavor as ceding that art pearls could be found amongst the art swine. In many ways, it is a poor cousin of the Cannes Film Festival, and about as accurate a barometer for summing up the state of art as the former is of making sane analysis of the film world. Far easier to let the mind invent comparisons amidst the excess: the main commercial operators self-assuredly set up their wares as prestigious display (*‘Richard Hamilton IS the British Pavilion’*), independent dealers, eager for a share of the market, tout their wares whilst stitching up supply-and-demand agreements (*‘Damien Hirst splits a calf in half and pickles it in formaldehyde. From the company that brought you ‘The Shark’*), whilst all the time the curators rubber-neck at the stars (Yoko Ono rather than Julia Roberts), fight like harpies for invitations to embassy openings, and assorted hacks burn off their six hour drinking sessions by rushing frantically around to get a final interview in the bag. The Biennale even had the art-freak equivalent of starlets: **Eva and Adele**, two shaven-headed transexual hermaphrodites who, thankfully, resisted photographers imprecations to show a bit more thigh, preferring to wander around



Eva & Adele

the Giardini dressed in pink plastic, bearing chalice-like globes in their hands. We were informed, *sigh*, that they were performance artists (it occurs to me that the biggest favour a notable performance artist could do would be to die, making it much easier to pronounce that, in terms of judging contemporary performance art, at least *someone* could be spinning in their grave).

Whilst it is easy to dismiss the Biennale as a sideshow—especially when viewed in the context of the frenzied three day *vernissage* opening—it is less easy to discard the empty feeling which results from experiencing work which, by all accounts, was the result of an incredible amount of energy and commitment. There is a feeling that one should be able to pick over the bones and read mystic signals that surrender some secrets about the arcane practice of art-making. The conclusion that one inevitably comes to (and not a particularly new one) is that if this particular patient is not dead, then it is at the very least sick. Beyond the hype, there was a feeling of a rot which displayed itself in both obvious and less visible ways. The monolithic forces of history, prestige and commercial speculation will ensure that the Biennale is wheeled out every two years *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseum*; attendant curators will pronounce it in good health, that after a stressful period the post-modern bypass operation was a complete success, and that the debilitating effects of now redundant art styles have gone into remission.

The fatigue and ennui of the festival will remain apparent, though, as this is not an isolated case. Other patients in the Art Ward are beginning to display the same signs; last year’s Documenta debacle revealed similar

symptoms of overblown confidence and conceptual vacuity; a couple of beds away the curtains have already been drawn around Britain's very own Edge festival (to be buried, apparently, without an autopsy). Perhaps the story, which was doing the Biennale rounds, of how Documenta curator Jan Hoet was surrounded and jeered by many of the invited artists at the opening function, most accurately displays the rebellion mentality that permeates the lower echelons of the art structure; namely, that artists seem to be increasingly suspicious of the way in which their individual works are being subsumed into a neat thematic package in order to illustrate the grand designs of curators. Fragmented aspects of their work are either brought into sharp relief or ignored entirely in order to support the critical vision of the Curator as Hero. Why bother with just presenting a range of work considered to be, for want of a better phrase, of excellence, when you can construct a whole thesis based on a show by rounding off the rough edges?

This is not to suggest, of course, that such a methodology has not worked to the advantage of all concerned in the past, or will be completely redundant in the future. Neither that, in such situations, artists shouldn't be prepared to take the money and run. But, fuelled by disappointment, the inevitable complaints that art is in crisis should perhaps be superseded by an acknowledgement that maybe the crisis lies with the packaging as much as the product.

The huge scale of the Venice Biennale, and the consequent impossibility of welding it into a single holistic entity, also goes some way to excusing its arbitrary approach. But not completely. The simple fact is that the jolly bonhomie evinced by Oliva rings resoundingly hollow when a considered reading of many of the works is made. Much has been made of the fact that countries have been encouraged to invite foreign artists into the sacrosanct spaces; the United States pavillion features **Louise Bourgeois** (France), the German pavilion features **Nam June Paik** (Korea/US), the Hungarian pavilion features **Joseph Kosuth** (US). According to Oliva, this "*Gives expression to the idea of a peaceful 'nomadism' of art which is so characteristic of this fin de siècle*".

If such a border-busting concept was truly essential to the expression of the Biennale, one wonders why it has not been applied with an appropriate moral rigour to, if not all aspects of the festival, then at least to the Giardini as a whole. Good old Britain, imperiously situated at the scenic head of the main walkway, has been allowed (as have most of the pavillions) to circumvent this supposedly fundamental paradigm, by exhibiting a **Richard Hamilton** retrospective which looked critically tired when it was doing the rounds in England. What would Oliva make of the reaction of a contingent of Irish artists who saw the work, not only dog-tired of Hamilton's painting *The Citizen* (as one artist said, not without some irony, an example of "*shite on a canvas*"), but thoroughly fed up with the more recent sequels of *The Subject* and *The State*. In conjunction with the equally banal painting of blood dripping from a television set transmitting computer images of the Gulf War, one can only presume that Hamil-

ton does not have the kind of friends who have the courage to tell him that he is politically naive. Or Oliva.

Nevertheless, Oliva is on a spiritual roll. "*The presence of the post-Apartheid South Africa is also assured, marking the end of that tragedy*", he proclaims. Surprisingly, few spectators could be seen running ululating through the milling throngs, grateful to art for righting wrongs and setting Africa back on the right track.

Unfortunately, such contestations actually paled into insignificance when measured against another example of the moral corruption and disingenuity of the festival. The Yugoslavian pavilion has been ethnically cleansed with far more efficiency than the concerted efforts of certain nomadic tribes. One might have hoped that it had been allowed to remain closed, to stand as some form of mute testament to the horrors that were taking place only a few hundred miles away. But space is money, and the pavillion is now known as 'ex-Yugoslavian', featuring a range of work curated by the Italian curators Paulo Ugolini and Laura Kerubini, at Oliva's invitation. Maybe British artists Tony Cragg, Julian Opie and Shirazeh Houshiary felt that they were supporting Oliva's vision of the "*peaceful nomadism of art*" (a representative of their British dealer, the Lisson Gallery, was not as convinced; when asked about the gallery's involvement in the pavillion, she took pains to point out to me that the gallery merely acted as an information conduit between the curators and the artists. I wonder if this means that the gallery won't acknowledge this show on its future CV's?)—yet the final effect was one of revulsion. The importance of this seemed to pass by the majority of art punters, who, with no apparent sense of irony, wandered into the pavillion clutching this year's hot fashion Biennale freebie, a carrier bag decorated with a skull from the French artist **Jean-Pierre Raynaud**.

Well, poor old Oliva would probably say that you can't satisfy all of the people all of the time. In this respect, he is right. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between sifting through the sublime and the ridiculous in a massive group show, and pretending that the moral imperatives that supposedly weld all these elements together is anything other than the most hypocritical pap. A whole generation of artists could paint a different picture, informed by genuinely resonant compulsions and explorations into the social fabric of society, but it is doubtful that their work would fare any better if co-opted into this zoo. Anyway, judging by the amount of British artists who visited Venice out of their own pocket, and were not allowed into the British Council function because it was over-subscribed by a host of visiting dignitaries on institutional expenses, they would probably not be welcome anyway. Perhaps, in an unguarded moment, Damien Hirst summed up the spirit of the Biennale best of all. While sat at a Venetian cafe, his dealer was explaining to his entourage that he didn't have enough money to cover the drinks tab. Hirst's riposte: "*That's because you haven't sold the fucking cow yet!*" ∞

insight



*Sound and Syntax*  
Tom McGrath 1977

*Dancers in Theatre*  
Opening Day May 1975  
Annie Griffin 1988

Insight suggests that Glasgow's THIRD EYE CENTRE was waiting to happen. The mid 1960s had seen a notable troubling of the waters in the realm of what it now seems right to call human creativity. Neo-Dadaism, Existentialism, Cybernetics, Psychedelia, CND, a host of influential writers and individuals from Joyce and Beckett to Roszak, Ginsberg, Laing and Trocchi; the publication of 'On the Road' and, not least, the founding of International Times with the intention of furthering the idea of a cultural revolution: one or all of these elements caught the imagination of a generation hungry for beliefs and not averse to experiment. The first edition of International Times, or IT as everyone called it, carried André Breton's obituary—"and what could have been more apt?" recalled its editor years later. "From then on IT reflected the whole London vortex; Mark Boyle's light shows, Julian Beck and Living Theatre, Takis, events by Yoko Ono then known only as an artist in her own right, the influence of the Provos in Amsterdam. In one issue we demanded the release of the Round-house—for a massive event with sound and light to which everyone came from Antonioni to Paul McCartney: we had people actually dancing to Stockhausen".

Who now remembers that IT's first editor was not some far-out hippy refugee from strait-laced America but a young Glaswegian, Tom McGrath, who was later fated to make his presence felt in his native city as the first director of Third Eye Centre? But that was ten years on. Back in the early '60s, as a school leaver, McGrath's own bent was for writing and jazz. Then the discovery of Allen Ginsberg turned him on: "Hearing this wonderful, real voice cut across 15 years of schooling: after that T.S. Eliot could never be the same again". But it was at the great Writers' Conference, brainchild of John Calder and organised at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, that McGrath met the notorious expatriate Glaswegian, Alexander Trocchi; heard him (as we all did)

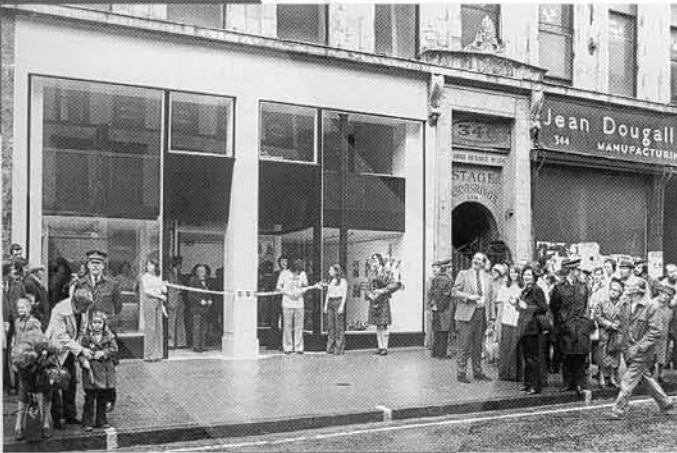
stand up to an angry Hugh McDiarmid; and became a convert to the idea of a creative revolution as against "the Marx and Trotsky thing". London seemed the obvious place to be.

Later on in the '60s, believing that what had been happening in the metropolis must eventually be reflected in Glasgow, Tom McGrath knew that he simply must be there, on the ground floor, when that happened. So back he came, went to hospital to be cured of drug addiction, got a degree at Glasgow University and began to work, as a musician, in the fast-developing music theatre which had its early peak moment in The Great Northern Welly Boot Show, making friends with people like John Byrne and Billy Connolly along the way. So, when the working party set up by the Scottish Arts Council to create a Glasgow Arts Centre at 5 Blythswood Square—the large town house newly bought from the Society of Lady Artists—advertised for a director, Tom McGrath thought that, if he didn't even apply, how could he justify complaining when things didn't go as he wanted. Nobody was more surprised than Tom when he actually got the job. Inevitably, McGrath's concept of what such a Centre should offer his fellow citizens burst the bounds of the douce, classical building in Blythswood Square. "I know you can't go back to the piper at the crossroads in Ireland", he said at the time, "with people coming together from all around, to dance and sing, tell stories and just talk. But I do think that, in an urban situation, you ought to have a place for that rough-and-tumble sort of thing. So let's say that I'm interested in a breakdown between compartments in the arts—an international present and a local situation".

Not surprisingly there was an informality about the organisation, and indeed, about the place itself, that contrasted sharply with the same gallery when previously run directly by SAC, and this tended to offend some of the 'regulars'. On the other hand there were new audiences queuing up for film shows, popular music, discussion

a history of

# the third eye centre



Cordelia Oliver



and, indeed, for the very first public concerts by **Adrian Shepherd's Cantilena** and the newly formed **Baroque Ensemble** (50p bought a ticket which also included a substantial bowl of vegetarian soup). An early recital by the legendary **Allen Ginsberg** filled the place to capacity and McGrath in collaboration with Platform Jazz, brought other major events to the city—**John MacLaughlin's** Mahavishnu Orchestra played in the Kelvin Hall Arena; **Morton Feldman** brought his orchestra to the Haldane Building at Glasgow School of Art and on one unforgettable evening, **Duke Ellington** filled the huge Apollo Centre on his last appearance in Glasgow before his death. It soon became obvious that 5 Blythswood Square was incapable of housing contemporary art exhibitions on the appropriate scale for the times. In 1970, the first year of the new enterprise, when a major **Mark Boyle** exhibition was being planned, it became necessary to look for a more spacious venue. As it happened, the Kelvin Hall, during the SNO Summer Proms season, proved ideal since the exhibition included one of Boyle's light shows as well as some of the early items in the Boyle Family's *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*. Nonetheless the problem remained. In 1974 a large disused warehouse with a showroom on Sauchiehall Street became available at a very reasonable price, and SAC was firmly lobbied to investigate its suitability for a greatly enlarged and enhanced Glasgow Arts Centre. As it happens, the whole of the block in question—Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's Grecian Chambers—might have been bought for a derisory sum, and had the opportunity been taken up by the Arts Council, space would have been available for artists' studios and workshops as well as offices for related organisations. But, as things were, when SAC finally agreed to acquire the part of the building which was internally re-modelled to open in May 1975, as Third Eye Centre, McGrath and his committee thought themselves lucky. Two

adjacent properties were assimilated at a later date.

In retrospect it is mildly surprising that the name suggested by McGrath and his administrator, Harriet Cruikshank, aroused even mild controversy. 'Third Eye', indeed, was a counter to several more mundane proposals and unless my memory plays me false, some persuasion was needed to gain its acceptance by the whole committee. Happily the day was won and the accuracy of Tom McGrath's prophecy was soon proved—that with the success of the enterprise the name Third Eye would come to be taken for granted without question.

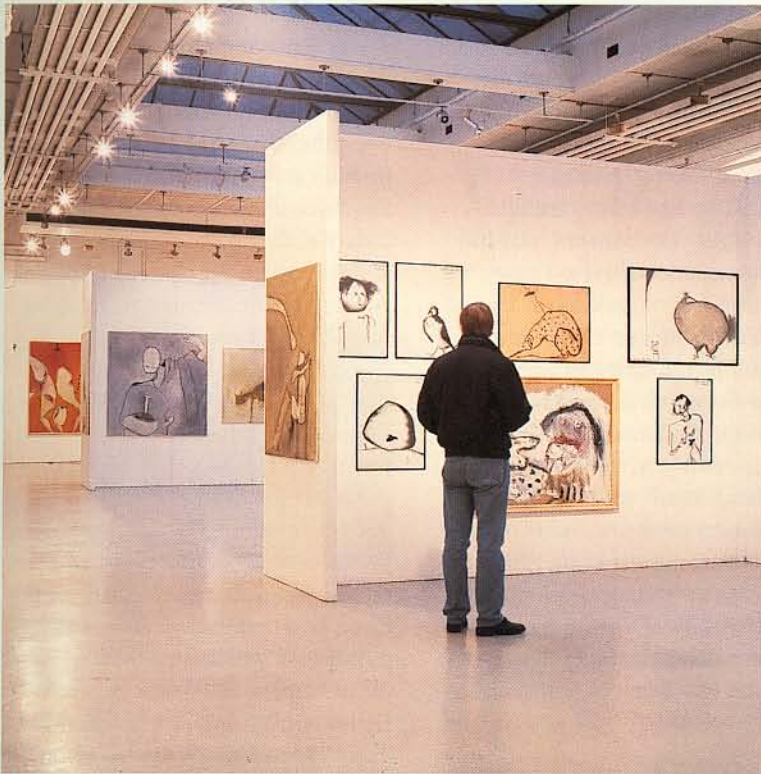
Success came quickly. Third Eye opened its doors on a bright morning in May 1975 when Glasgow celebrated its 800th anniversary as a city with its own Royal charter. The then Lord Provost, Sir William Gray, who had made no secret of his interest and who, indeed, became Third Eye's second Chairman after the late John Boyle, briefly halted the official procession in order to cut the ribbon and formally declare Third Eye open. Four thousand people passed through the doors in that first week and, by the end of the year, more than 100,000 heads had been counted. The original Certificate of Incorporation is stupendously wide—open in the scope it offered to those who would run Third Eye Centre. Every possible contingency was provided for in a document of intent which ran to no fewer than 23 clauses. That document was drawn up and signed in August 1976 by which time the Scottish Arts Council had hived off responsibility to a board of trustees on which SAC continued to be represented. The main funding, however, still came from Charlotte Square although Third Eye was expected to look elsewhere for extra finance, not least from local government. It continued to do so without notable success. In 1985, in the run-up to Third Eye's tenth anniversary, this was still creating a problem. In a brief draft history of the Centre, written at the

time, I put this problem into words: *"It took Glasgow District Council more than two years after the creation of Third Eye to come to the point of offering a very modest grant of £5,000, no doubt because the Centre was regarded as the Scottish Arts Council's 'baby' and therefore nobody else's responsibility. Indeed, after ten years in which Third Eye has never failed to provide a stimulating programme of great variety and worth, the level of support from local government at district and regional levels (for the fact cannot be overlooked that Third Eye also serves Greater Glasgow and Strathclyde) still remains derisory in spite of all attempts at persuasion. Third Eye belongs to Glasgow... it was not a 'gift' from SAC (which, after all, is merely a service organisation paid for out of our taxes) but was the brainchild of a group of Glaswegians determined that the need for such an undertaking should be met."*

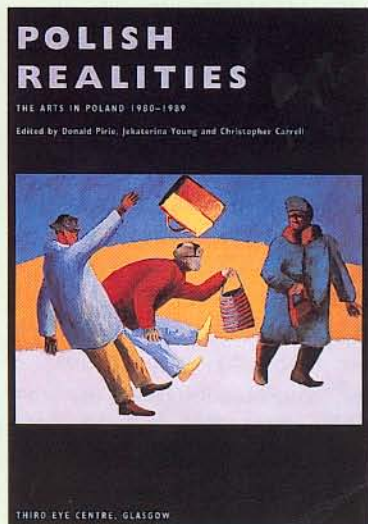
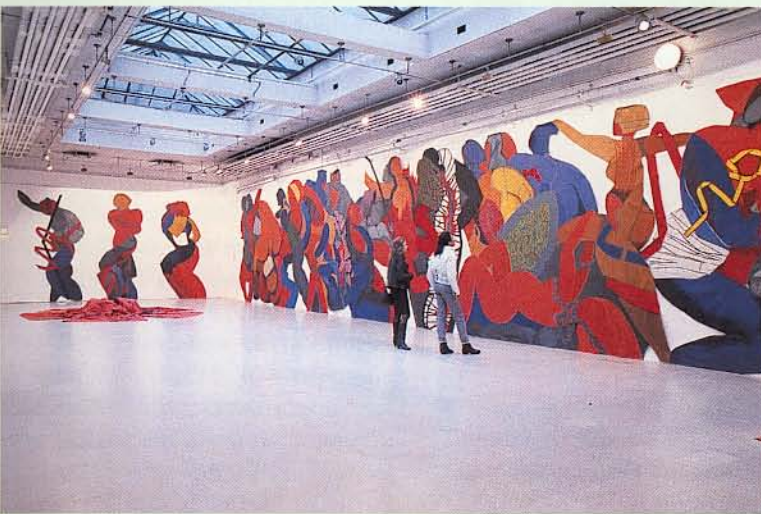
Back in the '70s, however, optimism was rife. In his three years as director of Third Eye (as, indeed, in his previous regime at Blythswood Square) McGrath made no secret of his determination to see no holds barred. There was no limit, he felt, to the beneficial effect of cross-fertilisation. In one of the periodic free-sheets issued during the early '70s (NUSPEAK occasionally mutated into NUSTREAK or even NUSQUEAK, and issue 8 consisted only of **Edwin Morgan's** minimalist concrete poem '?!') was the statement *"Art is what you can get away with"*.

At one of Cantilena's informal Sunday lunchtime concerts two performance artists, **Roland Miller** and **Shirley Cameron**, were brought in to inject an element of surrealism into the Sunday normality—not, of course, during the concert itself. Film and video were early concerns. In 1976 Third Eye collaborated with SAC and Glasgow Film Theatre to hold a symposium, *Video—Towards Defining an Aesthetic*, with Third Eye hosting a week of related events during which **Tamara Krikorian** and others created what must have been the first video installation to be seen in a Glasgow gallery. Another exhibi-





Pat Douthwaite: 1988; Sam Anstie: 1987; 1990 Prospectus; New Moves: 1991; Paul Nash 1981; Polish Realities: 1989



tion which, in a very different way, burst the normal boundaries of expectation, was *The Ring Net*, Will McLean's visual and aural celebratory investigation into the tradition of ring net fishing on the west coast of Scotland. And *Musical Graphics*, from the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, demonstrated the visual excitement, and the abstract beauty often as not, to be found in musical notation ancient and modern. This, in October 1977, was an excuse for a number of related events, concerts of contemporary music by the **New Music Group of Scotland**, **Logos** and other ensembles. As in the years that followed, there was always an attempt to enrich the exhibition programme with related events, lectures, discussions and performance where appropriate.

Another strand in the web which started early on and was never really broken was that of poetry in performance by the artists themselves (this began, of course, with Ginsberg at Blythswood Square). *Sound and Syntax*, an international sound poetry festival, brought to Glasgow poet-performers like **Lily Greenbaum**, **Henri Chopin**, **Franz Mon** and many others to join Edwin Morgan, **Tom Leonard** and Tom McGrath himself in a rich three-day event. That was in 1978, and some years later the experiment was repeated with *Poetsound*. But more conventional poetry readings were a continuing feature.

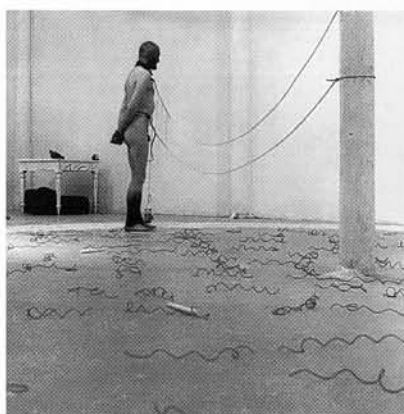
Although his intention to diversify was never in question, Tom McGrath didn't neglect the need to offer a platform to local visual artists. The inaugural **Joan Eardley** exhibition was deliberately chosen to avoid any suggestion of giving preference to a living painter. But afterwards, in fairly swift succession, came a John Byrne retrospective (during which, Billy Connolly gave the Centre a financial boost with an unforgettably hilarious benefit performance); a selection of recent paintings by **Colin Cina** and solo exhibitions by **Tom McDonald** and **Carole Gibbons**, two Glasgow artists rightly thought to be seriously under-estimated by the estab-



ishment and the market. Another element in that first year, a show of work by the convicted murderer **Jimmy Boyle**, presaged the continuing connection with the Barlinnie Special Unit, something that culminated in a book about the influence of art therapy on the work of the Unit which was published by Third Eye in 1982. This strain of exhibitions beyond the norm, events intended to persuade people to look closer at the results of off-beat creativity, continued over the years in Third Eye's relationship with disabled artists (Project Ability was virtually born at 350 Sauchiehall Street) and with the arresting work of mentally disturbed, but unquestionably gifted creators like **Wolffli, Aloise and Muller**, seen in 1978 in the exhibition, *Another World*. There is little doubt that Tom McGrath, though quick to learn, was never entirely at home with the visual arts. Yet, when he decided to resign in order to pursue his own career as playwright and jazz pianist, he was rightly seen as a hard act to follow. His successor, **Chris Carrell** who had, with benefit of an art training, previously run the successful Ceolfrith Centre in Sunderland, came to Glasgow full of plans, ideas and abounding enthusiasm – too much so for the more cautious members of the Third Eye board who, as I remember, were unhappy at his determination to act as publisher and to open a bookshop on Sauchiehall Street.

In fact his success in both instances is a matter of history. Carrell's blend of enthusiasm and diplomacy (not least the fact that he proved to be a workaholic) succeeded in winning over the doubters. The bookshop immediately brought new visitors into the Centre and, indeed, grew to be among the best of its kind in the city, while Third Eye Publications succeeded in filling a gap in local arts publishing which had remained empty since William McLellan ceased operating in the 1940s (McLellan himself wasn't forgotten: an exhibition on his work as publisher was mounted in 1987). It wasn't just that the exhibiting artists found themselves, for the first time, with substantial, decently illustrated catalogues, but that other important

with little boys in tow), **Hengler's Circus** (an eye-opener that was to many Glaswegians, a visual history of the once-famous circus that occupied the space between Mackintosh's art school building and Sauchiehall Street) or the fine didactic displays of Paisley Shawls and American Patchwork Quilts. An important element was a focus on Glasgow's multi-racial culture and, indeed, on Glasgow itself, in exhibitions like *Garnethill* and *Dear Green Place*. Nonetheless the primary purpose of the Third Eye galleries was never allowed to become submerged in a deliberately populist programme. Third Eye remained, in essence, an arts centre albeit with education central to its policy and youth forever in its sights. Opera for Youth, Scottish Ballet workshops, circus schools, bagpipe workshops as well as clown and puppet shows catered for juvenile enthusiasms. But nobody lost sight of the fact that the main function was to provide, for Glasgow and the West of Scotland, a window on the best, the most interesting, and the most stimulating work being done by contemporary artists in all the fields of activity, here and elsewhere. It was on that basis that Third Eye made its name, in Scotland and beyond, as an organisation built on energy and initiative. And not the least important factor in sustaining that reputation was the gradual formation of a web of contacts both in Britain and in Europe – eventually, of course, in Eastern Europe and Russia with the formation of the related organisation, 'New Beginnings'.



areas were covered, for example *Dear Green Place*, a history of the Glasgow novel by **Douglas Gifford**, and *Noise and Smoky Breath*, a rich anthology of Glasgow poems compiled by **Hamish Whyte** and illustrated with images by Glasgow artists.

On the face of it Chris Carrell's regime made no sharp break with what had come to be tradition: the same wide range of style, content and subject matter was maintained both in exhibitions and in other events whether related or autonomous. Exhibitions continued to be planned to cover an even spectrum of interest, from manifestations of avant-gardism in the UK and abroad to celebrations of Scottish Football (now that was one where eager grandfathers could be seen

*The Ring Net* was the first of the Third Eye exhibitions to go on an extended tour but, once begun, the practice continued not least when **Mike Tooby** was appointed Exhibitions Organiser. Not all Third Eye shows were built for touring, of course, just as not all exhibitions seen there were home grown. Indeed, collaboration with galleries elsewhere brought many worthwhile events over the years. A season of *Irish Contemporary Arts* in 1982 included memorable actions



From left to right: Allen Ginsberg at Blythwood Square, 1973  
Alastair MacLennan, 1982:  
Lys Hansen, 1984  
Bruce McLean, 1980

by Alastair MacLennan and Nigel Rolfe (highly controversial, these were, because of the element of nudity involved) as well as the exhibition *Hibernian Inscape* plus evenings of Irish music, song and



dance and other related events. Artists outwith Scotland whose work was well displayed in Sauchiehall Street include Carel Visser, Tim Head, Norman Adams, Gillian Ayres, David Nash, Paul Neagu, Felim Egan, Stuart Brisley, David Finn, Helen Chadwick, Susan Hiller and the late Winifred Nicholson whose first major touring retrospective at the age of 86, was organised by Third Eye (though first seen at SAC's Edinburgh gallery) and selected by myself, long before her posthumous "re-discovery" by the Tate Gallery. Other memorable exhibitions—far too many to list—celebrated the great German theatre director/designer, Piscator, the remarkable Foksal Gallery in Warsaw (that came, courtesy of Richard Demarco, with a Witkiewicz exhibition and an action by Warpechowski) and the brash psychedelic energy of transatlantic modernists in *Who Chicago*. Scots artists, expatriate and otherwise, continued to enjoy a shop window at Third Eye. Indeed, one of Chris Carrell's first projects was the exhibition, *Crawford and Company*, devoted to the work of a remarkable teacher, Hugh Adam Crawford, and some of the Glasgow artists who had been his students at Glasgow School of Art in the '30s and '40s—a list that ranged from Merlyn Evans, Norman McLaren, Colquhoun and MacBryde to Joan Eardley and Bet Low. It was also Carrell's idea to bring together, in

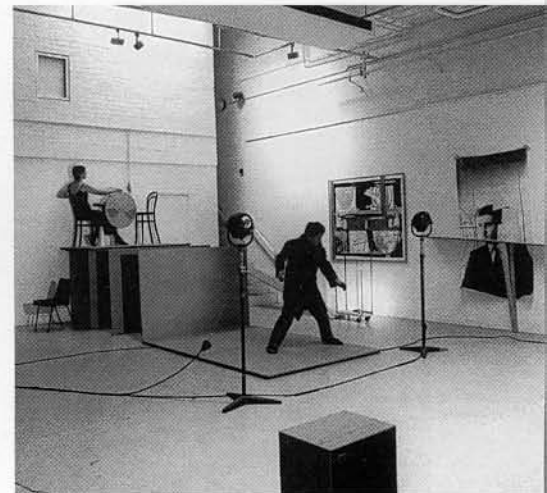
*Cross Currents 1979*, the work of some of the most promising graduates from the four Scottish art schools, David Mach being one—although I seem to remember some slight controversy about his choice of contribution. The much-hyped "New Glasgow Boys" were also given an early platform in a *Young Scottish Contemporaries* show.

Glen Onwin's *Recovery of Dissolved Substances* had its Glasgow showing at Third Eye, as did *Watermarks*, the twin exhibition by Robert Callendar and Liz Ogilvie. Bruce McLean occupied Gallery One with an exhibition-based action, as did George Wyllie with his *Day Down a Goldmine*. And John Bellany, John Taylor, Lys Hansen, Bet Low, Kate Whiteford, June Redfern and Samantha Ainsley are among the local artists afforded major solo exhibitions.

Women, you will have noticed, whether as exhibiting artists, conference attenders or entertainers, have never been overlooked in the programming at Third Eye. I myself was responsible for selecting an exhibition called *Seven Scottish Artists*, a title that set out quite deliberately to conceal the fact, in prior publicity, that all seven participants were female. That event, originally planned as an invited exchange with The Women's Building in Los Angeles, was refused funding by SAC—inexplicably in view of its quality—the contributors were Pat Douthwaite, Carole Gibbons, Marilyn Smith, June Redfern, Jacki Parry, Kate Whiteford and Fionna Geddes. Women performers, too, loom large in old Third Eye programmes: even at random you will find names like Annie Stainer, Annie Griffin, Rosemary Butcher, Sorayal Hilal and Marina Abramovitz as well as popular local figures like Liz Lothead, Elaine C. Smith, Marcella Evaristi and Siobhan Redmond. This element of performance and entertainment goes back to the very beginning, with jazz and folk and rock music in the cafe which was, by intention, centrally placed while touring companies like Wildcat, The Mediaeval Players, Shared Experi-

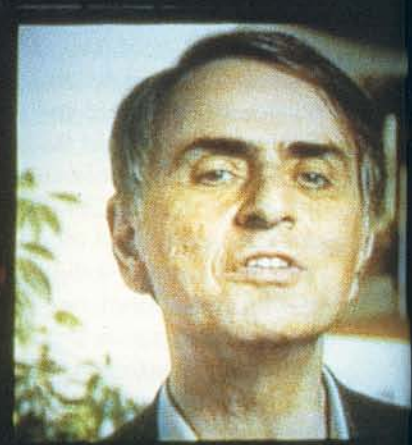
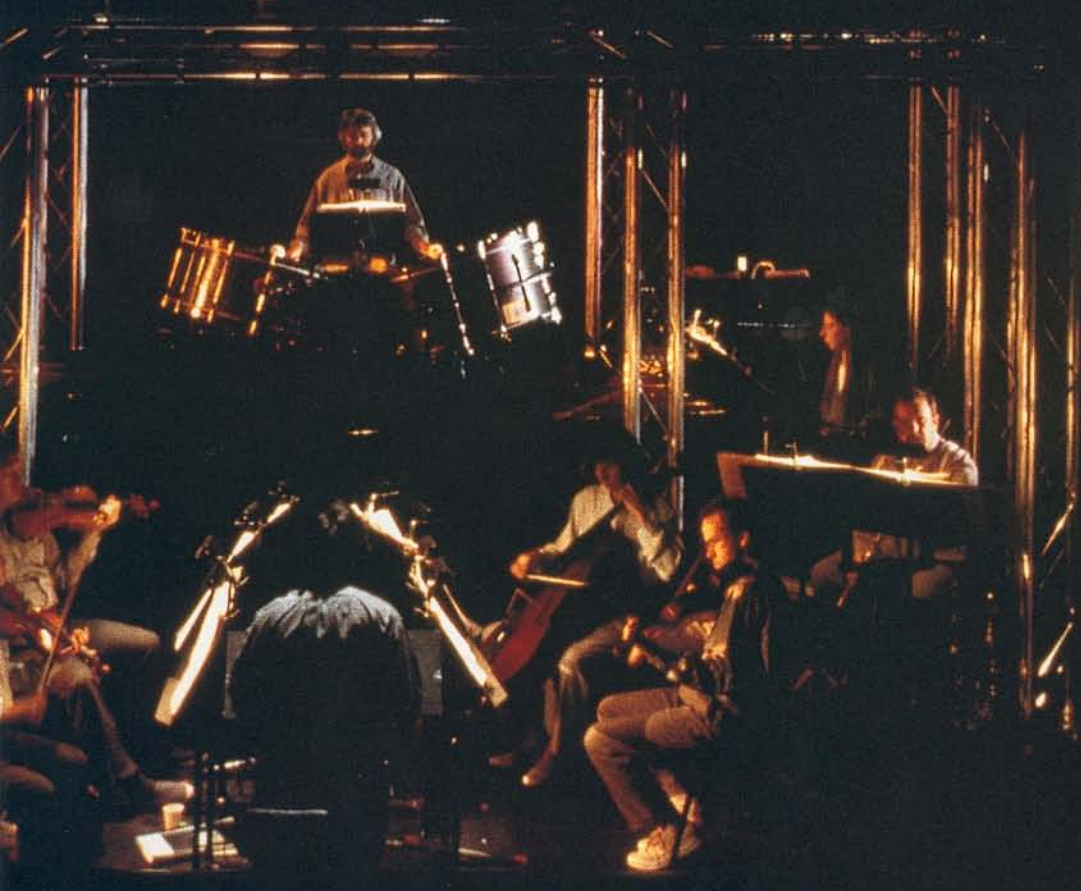
ence, TAG and others occupied Gallery One in the brief intervals between major exhibitions. But the creation of even a tiny, well equipped theatre space (no smaller, after all, than the original Traverse) gave Glasgow a venue for some of the best small-scale performances during annual festivals like *Dance Umbrella* and, later on, *Live Arts*; not least, of course, Glasgow's own MAYFEST which brought, for example, the brilliantly encapsulated *Hamlet* from Teatr & TD, Neil Bartlett's *Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* and, not least, the wonderfully funny Whoopi Goldberg in the days before her rise to superstardom.

Other experiences swim back into memory as I write. Photogra-



phy has had its place at 350 Sauchiehall Street from the start, in exhibitions that ranged across time and place—Thomas Annan, Weegee and Atget among the individual subjects while *A Moment in Time* surveyed the place of Scotland in the history of the craft. But most memorably there was the revelation, in *One Man's World*, of the range and quality of the work of Oscar Marzaroli. And the whole of Third Eye's history was vividly recorded by another fine Glasgow photographer, George Oliver: a rich and vibrant history, to be told at length and in detail some day when the dust has settled on the circumstances of its premature demise. ∞

All Photos © George Oliver





T H E R E is an argument for saying that Steve Reich started the rap music revolution. Back in 1965 he recorded a snippet of a nineteen year old Harlem black youth who'd been beaten up by the police. The words "I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them", graphically communicates race violence and the attendant disbelief by the authorities. Reich, obsessed at the time with tape music possibilities, got this sentence and looped it into edited fragments until, over a period of time the actual syllables created a disoriented kind of music. Today, Reich's music is itself sampled by Ambient House musicians The Orb, who themselves owe much of their popularity to black rap and Chicago House. The connections run deep, a lot deeper than those interested or disinterested in the surfaces of so-called Minimalism would have us believe.

¶Reich's new *gesamtkunstwerk* is titled 'The Cave' and again highlights text as a tool for exploration in music. Here spoken passages from the Bible and the Koran are used to trigger music of a vast diversity. Utilising five huge video screens, the speech patterns of various talking heads are re-animated by the canonic phrases of Reich's familiar brand of repetitive music. Forgetting the type of music that Reich is associated with and looking at the interplay between text and sound in his works gives us a deeper understanding of his contribution to late twentieth century culture. ¶As well as attending the prestigious Julliard conservatory with Philip Glass, Reich also studied philosophy at Cornell University. Poets like William Carlos Williams were touchbases for early composition but it wasn't until he studied in San Francisco, and actually played in Terry Riley's first ensemble recording of 'In C', that he realised the importance of phase shifting and how this could be put to great use by tape machines. Again found text was inspirational. Back in New York Reich made 'It's Gonna Rain' and the aforementioned 'Come Out' direct from the streets. ¶Brian Eno and Cabaret Voltaire were just two of the English avant-garde influenced by these '60s experiments in 'process music' as it became known. Reich himself veered towards African music, and after splitting with Philip Glass, with whom he had played, immersed himself in alternating Ghanaian rhythms and vocals. Back then it was odd to see the long-haired Reich,

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surrounded by a tiny bunch of followers in some New York loft-space, enunciating African syllables into a mike. Yet, time would bring this kind of experiment to the world. ¶After the much publicised and successful study of Balinese gamelan music, where layered rhythms in drumming are emphasised, and the subsequent commercial hit that was the 1976 recording of 'Music For Eighteen Musicians', Reich returned to text in 1979 when he went to Israel to study Hebrew cantillation or chanting. This was itself an outcrop of biblical studies Reich had done in the previous three years with video artist and wife Beryl Korot and would have a direct influence on the evolution of 'The Cave'. Those still unsure of the importance of words to Reich's oeuvre should look to the albums 'Tehillim' from 1981, which used excerpts from the Book of Psalms, 'The Desert Music' from 1983, which built up an impressive symphonic soundscape based on the poetry of William Carlos Williams, and of course the groundbreaking 'Different Trains' from 1988 where documentary speech excerpts generated music for The Kronos String Quartet to play. ¶The latter overdubbed themselves four times for a Grammy Award winning composition which brought together Reich's memories of American childhood train journeys with the pained reminiscences of Jewish holocaust survivors. All it needed was pictures. And that's what Reich's music has got now. Far from the 'minimal' / 'hot tub' tag of old, Reich's music is today one of 'maximalisation' out of complex and often disparate means and sources. For 'The Cave', \$1m was made available by various organisations including the fairly embryonic Andy Warhol foundation, for Reich and Beryl Korot to film in Jerusalem, Palestine, Egypt and America. Questions were posed to volunteers on the significance of various figures in the Old Testament and The Koran. The answers were edited into a multi-screen process out of which came speech melodies from which the composer created the music. ¶The work took four years to complete and is now the toast of the European and American festival circuit, being heralded as a new form of documentary music theatre. In concert, 'The Cave' is audio-visual music in the purest sense of the term as opposed to any conventional Opera. Even the words music-theatre fall short. Divided into three parts, one is initially taken aback by a flood of Biblical text arraying itself across five huge (8' by 10') video screens. But after a while one cannot stop looking. At the end of the first 'act' the music and visuals interlock. The cameras pan the interior of the mosque at Hebron where the cave is situated 25 miles south of Jerusalem. As a singular place of dual worship for both Moslem and Jew, this interior constantly resonates with the sound of prayer. The note of this resonance is an A-minor drone and that is what is replayed by the ensemble. ¶In one flourish Reich dispenses with the notion that Ambience is somehow boring for here the effect is hypnotically tantalizing. Integrated with the multi-channel video conceptions of Beryl Korot, Reich's form of modern music is far richer and more stimulating than any of Minimalism's original detractors could have predicted.

#### IS 'THE CAVE' A NEW WAY OF PRESENTING YOUR MUSIC?

STEVE REICH: Well, I wouldn't call it a presentation. I've been asked to do operas from time to time and I've responded by saying: 'Thank you, but I don't do that sort of work'. With this I'm saying I'm a citizen who is interested in other things and wants to bring them into the music. Of course you can do it with vocal music but why not also do it with video tape. Hence the collaboration with Beryl Korot whose work has been seen at Castelli, Documenta and major galleries around the world.

GIVEN THAT THE BULK OF 'THE CAVE' IS BASED ON THE BIBLE AND THE KORAN, WILL PEOPLE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE ACTUAL TEXTS BE ABLE TO GET INTO IT?

We asked people simple questions like "Who For You Is Abraham?" or "Who For You Is Ishmael?". Out of their answers came the libretto, literally word for word. The musicians basically double what the images are saying. I've always found it interesting that the biblical characters or Koranic characters either live in the minds of people or they don't. In the third part, The American part, people like the sculptor Richard Serra and a Hopi Indian give very different responses. To the question about 'Abraham', Serra responds with "Abraham Lincoln High School, high on a hill—top midst sand and sea, that's about as far's I trace Abraham". The third part deals with ignorance and removal while the first two 'acts' go outside the CNN or ITN view of Christianity and Islam. I think people will see themselves differently after spending some time with these characters.

WHAT SIGNIFICANCE DOES THIS CAVE HAVE FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

Hebron (pronounced Hevron) is older than Jerusalem and is contemporaneous with the older cities of Egypt. Abraham ended up there and before he died he purchased a burial chamber from the Hittites, now situated on the West Bank. Because that part of the world has precious little top-soil they had to dig a small inlay in soft limestone to make a sepulchre. 2000 years later, in the time of Christ, Herod built a huge wall around it which today is the only free standing Herodian structure intact. Then in the 8th century the Crusaders built a church on top of the wall. And in the 12th century the Moslems came and built a Mosque on top of that. So today all of this stands in a place that the Israelis claim is part of Judea and the Moslems claim is part of Palestine. It is a very tense situation as it is the only place on earth where both sides pray under the same roof. You see, Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael are considered the fathers of their religions, Judaism and Islam respectively. So it's a focus point.

AND ONE TIME YOU SPOKE ABOUT THE UNIMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY BUT WITHOUT IT WOULD 'THE CAVE' HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE?

Well, there's an enormous amount of technology here. The five screens, the thirteen musicians and four singers. Paul Hillier conducts, I'm at the mixing booth. The pre-recorded video material is all on laser disc. In order to be exact you can't rely on tape so the laser discs are synchronised by computer, programmed by a guy from the MIT lab.

MOVING AWAY FROM 'THE CAVE' DID YOU REALISE THAT YOUR MUSIC IS NOW BEING SAMPLED BY HOUSE MUSICIANS LIKE THE ORB WHO RECENTLY DID A VERSION OF 'ELECTRIC COUNTERPOINT' IN CONCERT?

It's good to hear that. I knew about David Bowie and Brian Eno in the old days. I hope there's always a two-way street going. Bach wrote his jigs and sarabandes and people were dancing then. He didn't invent them but he didn't turn a deaf ear to them either. If popular music can take something from me, I can take something from them like the sampling keyboard. I'm not interested in electronic music in a laboratory kind of way. But once it hits the streets it signifies a number of things—one, that the machines work and two—that it has become part of the folk culture which gives it resonance. I'm happy to be part of the ongoing stream of things rather than being off in a corner. In the end there are three kinds of judgements on people; the popular judgement which is very important, there's the critical judgement which is less important and then there's the judgement of the musical community, which is the most important of all, because they're the ones who will decide whether your music will live or die.

AT THIS POINT IN TIME, DO YOU THINK THAT STYLISTIC DISTINCTIONS ARE QUITE FALSE? IS MUSIC NOT ALL IN FLUX NOW?

I like distinctions myself, but understand what you're saying. Though there's a lot of cross-fertilisation doesn't mean that everybody has the same background or thinks about the same body of work as a source for their work. I not only think about the history of Western music but also about things like the polyrhythms in Central African music. At the same time House musicians don't rely on notation but on improvisation in playing. In Africa the written tradition didn't exist but the oral tradition did, and you can't beat that for passing on wonders of rhythmic complexity. On the other hand the intricacies of harmony didn't occur in African music. So now each culture is trying to make up for its own by taking from other cultures and that's wonderful but it doesn't mean they are all the same. Here we are talking about traditions of writing versus oral traditions and each has its strengths and weaknesses and it's important to keep those distinctions.

YOU'VE NEVER LIKED TAGS LIKE 'MINIMALISM' AND WOULD PREFER THAT COMPOSER'S STAND ON THEIR OWN FEET, YES?

I don't think that anyone has ever confused me with Stockhausen! It's understandable and it always happens but we always talk about Impressionism and people refer to Debussy, Ravel, Satie and other people in the same space. But on closer inspection Ravel is a kind of classicist and Debussy a kind of Romantic and so forth. If you love music then labels seem very superficial and if you don't care about music then it really doesn't matter. With 'The Cave' one can see precedents in the way Janacek wrote down speech melodies when he was walking around Prague or in the way Bartok transcribed European folksong. The English language with its irregular rhythms spawned rock and roll. Even Frank Zappa fooled around with this kind of thing. So what's new? ‡

B E R Y L K O R O T  
INTERVIEWED AT THE BOURSE, AMSTERDAM

SUMMER 1993

IS 'THE CAVE' AN INNOVATION IN VIDEO PRESENTATION?

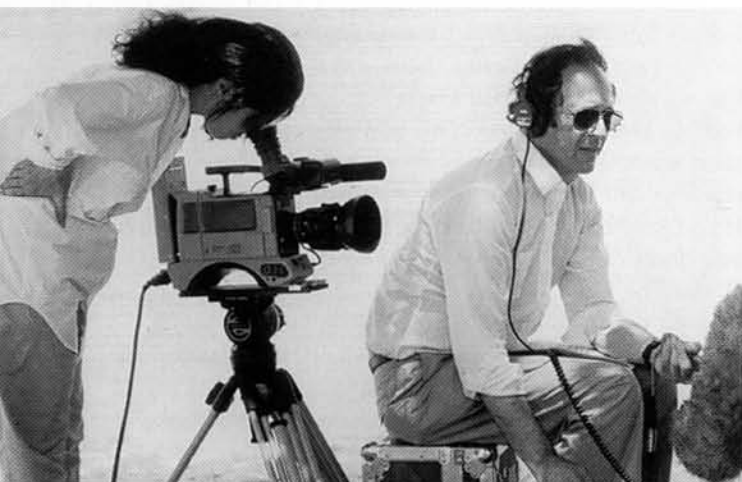
*BERYL KOROT:* The multiple screen genre has never been fully integrated into performance before. People do video sculpture which always seems to exist within an art or museum context. During the late 1960s video was always in a multi-media or environmental situation. There was talk then of the relationship of film to video. What I wanted to do was break up the screen into multiples and take these multiples and focus on them very directly.

WAS THERE AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT IN AMERICA AT THE TIME?

Well Ira Schneider, who was working a lot with time-delay, so that you could really see something in relation to itself, was a big influence. Also Frank Gillett, who worked with Ira when they did a ground-breaking work called 'Wipecycle' which was frontal and incorporated pre-recorded material and different time-delays so that when you walked into it you could see yourself in different contexts. I was also allied to them in being the editor of a magazine called Radical Software, which was the first alternative video publication.

COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOURSELF?

For years I thought I was going to be a poet or a writer. When I graduated I got a job on the New York Review of Books. From there I met Ira and started the magazine. It was at the time that the first porta-packs were coming out and people were beginning to experiment in video but there was no way of communicating ideas. Radical Software started as a blueprint but ended up with a circulation of 10,000 copies. After that



Beryl and Steve filming at Hebron  
Photo Maryse Alberti

experience I began to start work with the camera and multiples. I became fascinated with programming and met a woman who drew a comparison with the loom and how it works off numerical patterning – how its line by line structure is similar to the way the video image is divided into fields. And as books also reveal their information line by line it's natural that I ended up doing 'The Cave'. The combination of the very modern (video technology) and the very ancient (weaving and script) was very exciting for me.

VIDEO WAS VERY POPULAR IN THE '80s. WERE YOU INVOLVED?

There was quite a video community in New York who pooled resources and whose work attracted a lot of interest. I remember meeting Brian Eno a couple of times and he was definitely checking it out. But I had left the field by the late 1970s. I'd had numerous exhibitions but I felt the technology wasn't in it to go forward. Remember this was in the old days of grease-paint and pencil. I painted for ten years, had a couple of good shows but I was still better known as a video artist. What brought me back to it was the computer and its ability to abstract images and really work with something in a graphic way.

IT SEEMS YOU WERE QUITE SELF-TAUGHT, WAS THIS A PROBLEM?

When people are self-taught they go about things in a different way. It can take longer for them to get things together but when they do it is usually extremely original. I usually have to find out things by working backwards. When I got out of video I did so because back then I'd have to go into a television studio to do the things I wanted to do visually. I couldn't work with a technician because I had to have hands-on control with the equipment. Now, with the available computer graphics programmes, I can work at my own pace, finding things out from day to day. It's not as difficult as it seems, I mean after one consultation I did all my own editing for 'The Cave' in a week!

NOW, YOU ARE MARRIED TO STEVE. WAS SEEING HIM USE TECHNOLOGY A STIMULUS FOR YOU TO GET BACK INTO VIDEO?

Yeah, the day 'The Cave' opened in Vienna was 19 years to the day since myself and Steve met. Before he did 'Different Trains' in 1988 we had talked of collaborating. At that point he had got a commission from the Kronos Quartet. He was using samplers and didn't want to write a conventional piece so he produced a complex speech oriented work in the end. Steve was also getting back into computers, writing all his scores on Notator. So it was around the house.

ON THE SURFACE 'THE CAVE' MAY SEEM VERY JEWISH/AMERICAN TO THE OUTSIDER BUT ISN'T THERE QUITE A LOT OF OTHER MATERIAL DEVOTED TO ISLAM AS WELL?

During the second act everything you hear comes from the Muqris or the holy chanters of the ancient text of the Koran. There we could not fool around with it. Arab advisors had advised us that the only way to deal with The Koran is to present it with no music. The chanting is the music. Outside that, all the other material is Moslem/Palestinian/Lebanese. You see within Judaism there is no problem in making up your own melodies to the Bible. This was the first act. In the second, Steve had to resolve the problem of the Koran by having the ensemble music precede the text. In so doing he added another dramatic possibility.

TECHNICALLY HOW DID YOU DO ALL THIS?

Once we got the vocabulary down we engaged a technical advisor, Ben Rubin, who told us what equipment to buy. He wired our studios together so that when Steve composed something it would be directed into my machines via SMPTE code—just his sampler to me. Using a Macintosh I was able to work on five simultaneous video tapes, all numbered, all individual but synchronised. For the concert everything, even the typed text, was transferred to laser disc but you must remember that all the visual material originated on video. It's just straight copy.

SOME PEOPLE WOULD SAY THAT THIS KIND OF IDEA HAS ALREADY BEEN APPLIED. FOR EXAMPLE WHEN PINK FLOYD USED CIRCULAR DISHS FOR THEIR 1973 PERFORMANCES OF 'DARK SIDE OF THE MOON' OR THE PRESENT USE OF VIDIWALLS ON U2'S 'ZOO TV' TOUR. WOULD YOU AGREE?

Well it's not the same. With 'The Cave' every single image, every single melody came out of the documentary material that myself and Steve recorded together. I know that MTV is in our culture but this is taking it in a different direction. The rock and roll multi-screen thing came out of the '60s multi-media thing, that whole gestalt that was happening back then. 'The Cave' is very focused, very flat, very frontal. It's using multiples to read one and not the confusing kind of thing you get with, say, U2. ∞

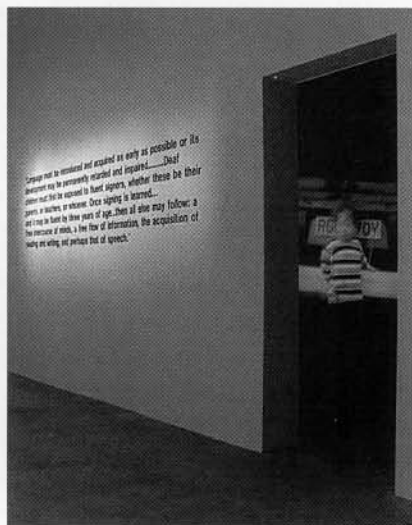


# The Morning after the Eighties

## Elsie Mitchell, Birmingham Billboard Project and Intermedia Gallery

Ross Sinclair reports on three new artist-run projects

Elsie Mitchell *Language*  
16mm film loop and text  
Tramway 1993



In much the same way as serious rock bands like the Rolling Stones, U2 and R.E.M. serve their apprenticeship to stardom in the gritty reality of the club circuit, before gaining mainstream acceptance, the artist initiated project has become almost a pre-requisite for success in the current, post-entrepreneurial atmosphere of nineties art practice. Tucked away in the biog. of many current art-world darlings are the details of their formative artist initiated projects, and how they provided the springboard for their previously undiscovered talents. While these kind of shows/projects may have served a useful purpose in the late eighties, the climate has changed and so have artist run projects. Certain things have, however remained static. Provision for publicly funded spaces certainly hasn't improved, and the number of private galleries has probably decreased, so there still is the same incentive for getting out there and doing it yourself.

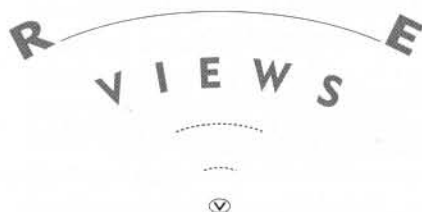
The following is a report on three new projects which could roughly be termed 'artist-run'. One is a temporary exhibition space, one a residency and one a billboard project. Each project has benefited from a first hand knowledge of the highs and lows of earlier projects, and in different ways has expanded the contextual base from which an engagement with the work begins.

Over the past year **Elsie Mitchell** has been artist in residence for the Glasgow South and South East area. Nothing new there of course. Residencies for artists go on all the time in a wide number of situations, some dynamic and some very boring. What is slightly different is the way in which Elsie Mitchell contrived her year in residence. The self-determined aims of this project was to improve access to contemporary visual art for people who fall outwith the mainstream art education

system. She viewed the works—initiated through a series of workshop situations in the Gorbals and Castlemilk—as collaborations with the individuals concerned. She rightly eschewed tired notions of permanent site-specific works and therapeutic 'hand skills' in favour of a more flexible and innovative approach. Unique to this residency was the fact that Mitchell had been invited to show the results of this year of collaboration at the Tramway, in Glasgow—a traditional 'high art' gallery space.

Most of the works, including books, tape-slide presentations, videos and light-boxes, were conceived and executed with the exhibition in mind. In that sense, Mitchell and her cohorts worked in the same way any group of artists would prepare for a show. In this exhibition—*Work from a Residency*—Mitchell has exhibited the fruits of the workshops alongside new work she has made herself, in a bold attempt to democratise the gallery space. The new piece she exhibited was titled 'Language', a 16mm film installation using projected images of people using British Sign Language. The work observes the development of B.S.L. from the first words/signs of a deaf child communicating with her mother, to the fully developed language of an adult signer. Mitchell saw this work paralleling the development of a visual language in the people she collaborated with during her residence. In her introduction to the catalogue she says, "*Language is the basis of power and to deny equal access to it deliberately keeps people from realizing their own potential*". This idea of empowerment appears central to the premise of her residence—quite the opposite of creating a dependence on the artist as is so often the case in community art.

I don't know if I was completely convinced by the premise of importing



- 28• Locate  
Rose Frain
- 30• Intervening Spaces  
Mark Little
- 31• Lost and Found  
Jo McNamara
- 33• Public and Private  
Lorna Waite
- 35• Borderlands  
Mark Durden
- 36• Tyne International  
Louise Wilson

the results of the residency into a gallery context, using materials and techniques normally associated with blue-chip gallery art. It was a little confusing and difficult to tell where the display of documentation ended and the art began. The two demand a very different viewing engagement, and if you exhibit art in this gallery context then you must expect the work to be viewed and criticised with the same rigour as any other exhibition. For the viewer to adopt an overly sympathetic position would be patronising—and by this criteria, some of the pieces inevitably look flawed.

During the course of the residency, Mitchell exhibited a piece of her own work in an empty shop unit at Castlemilk shopping arcade. This proved to be an extraordinarily successful venture, proving that regular members of the public are interested in art, given half a chance. While most city-centre galleries attract about the same number of people that would normally comprise a bus queue, over 1000 people came to see Mitchell's piece in 10 days.

This impressive statistic pales slightly, however, when assessing the potential impact of the **Birmingham Billboard Project**. Its creator and co-ordinator, **Graham Fagen**, informed me that a recent survey indicated that the vehicular traffic passing the site on the Snowhill Queensway in the centre of Birmingham was 750,000 weekly, with the pedestrian count totalling 150,000.

Fagen's project appears to have been modelled to some extent on the *Bellgrove Billboard Project* organised in Glasgow by Alan Dunn in '90-'91. Like Bellgrove, the Birmingham project lasted for 12 months with a different artist contributing a work each month. In contrast to Bellgrove's particular location in an unmanned train station in the east end of Glasgow, Fagen's project was smack in the middle of Birmingham, directly across the road from the Headquarters of the infamous West Midlands Constabulary.

Fagen moved to Birmingham two years ago, just in time to see the beginning of the city's attempt to move away from its reputation as an unwelcoming concrete jungle, epitomised by the Bull Ring, a massive concrete shopping centre at its heart. Over the past couple of years, the city has commissioned a

glut of permanent public works, designed to re-focus the mental image of the city centre on Victoria Square, a kind of piazza style area stretching from the Conference Centre at Centenary Square to the City Hall. It's rumoured the city has spent £6m. redeveloping the area and it's apparent that a good chunk of this budget was spent on public art. Some of this work is nothing short of appalling, particularly near the Conference Centre. Patronising works celebrate the city's industrial history with predictable clichés and formal disasters. The worst offender is Raymond Mason's *Forward* sculpture, looking more like a slab of melting butter than the celebratory statement one would assume it was meant to be. Dhruva Mistry fares much better with his hybrid civic formalism incorporating a massive fountain piece by the city chambers. One of the reasons for its success undoubtedly being that Mistry worked with the architects from the beginning on his ambitious project for the square. Anthony Gormley offers a monumental and unfathomable leaning figure, 40ft high, rusting away in the piazza like a bad impersonation of the leaning tower of Pisa. Gormley's work was not paid for by the city, it was commissioned by the Bank that likes to say 'Yes!—I wonder if they like it?

Fagen's intention with the billboard was not implicitly to criticise this typically selective redevelopment of the cities image, but to join sincerely in the debate about the possibilities and potential of public art in Birmingham. After all, the project is partially funded by the city council. Showing both local and international artists, he wanted to make available a space in the city where artists could have slightly more freedom and autonomy to add their voice to the debate in progress.

Many of the works in the project reassess different forms of language. Some address dominant mass-media languages while others focused on a political agenda. **Roshini Kempadoo** addressed 'Fortress Europe' in a work entitled *ECU* and the implications for the black communities under threat therein. **Art in Ruins** constructed a work inspired by a Palestinian Intifada song, *My Homeland Is Not A Suitcase*, which expanded this concern through utilising a different formal syntax. This formal style appro-

riated what Barthes describes as, 'Encratic Language'; i.e. the prevailing language disseminated under the protection of power. In other words, Art In Ruins' work (and many others in the project) mimicked the kind of sophisticated visual languages usually employed in advertising and public visual culture. This strategy often affords a much greater possibility of engaging the viewer in a genuine dialogue, even for a few seconds, before s/he realises they are contemplating an artwork and may choose to switch off.

In contrast, one of the Birmingham-based artists, **Sylbert Bolton**, worked directly on site utilising his knowledge of the city centre to create a piece in which he responded, through the formal use of materials, to his experience as a Jamaican-born resident of 'the world culture which is Birmingham'. Bolton's work also provided a break in the relentless monotony of the dominant visual narratives.

As was the case in the Bellgrove project in Glasgow, the Birmingham Billboard on the Snowhill Queensway was erected specifically for the duration of the project and a year later disappeared. How many keen-eyed commuters will sense an imperceptible difference in the visual horizon of the Queensway now this space has gone, as they head for home after a day in the city?

**Intermedia Gallery** in Glasgow initially reflects the most easily recognisable form of artist run activity, that of the temporary gallery space. But on closer inspection it differs considerably from a pre-conceived view of a bunch of scruffy young artists mucking in to show their work in some old warehouse. It differs too from the equally familiar proposition of professional career-orientated artists displaying slick works in novel non-gallery settings for the inspection of dealers and critics.

Intermedia was born out of discussions with Glasgow funding bodies dating back almost two years. Initially it was to have been housed in a disused Victorian market, but transformed through many proposed venues and management until earlier this year when the management of the project was offered to artist **David McMillan**, when suitable premises were finally located in the heart of the Merchant City at 65

Virginia Street.

McMillan then invited proposals for the space and assembled a committee of artists to select the programme, which was scheduled for 4 months, from May to August 1993. It is interesting that Intermedia's funding is a mixture of 'culture money', and business incentive cash that has facilitated the transformation of the space into something resembling a large uptown private gallery in New York. McMillan has done a thorough job in re-fitting the space and it would certainly be worthy of a permanent programme of international exhibitions and events.

The space is funded by the **Glasgow Development Agency** and Glasgow District Council. Additionally, the organisation Breathe has put some money into the last part of the pilot programme. Breathe is a new artist run initiative currently organising a series of exchange projects in Europe and North America. The first of these exchanges is a collaboration with Danish artists who were involved with *Tpko* in Copenhagen, and this exhibition forms the fourth show at Intermedia.

The shows so far at Intermedia have been varied, though perhaps lacking a certain edge. They have functioned as a platform for some of the most interesting young artists working in Glasgow at the moment, rather than as particularly coherent group shows. Maybe the problem is that most of the artists participating would have been quite capable of tackling the space on their own, and it's possible that four substantial solo shows would have been more exciting and empowering for both artist and viewer, than four shows of six or seven artists. It appears the understandable pressure for this approach came from the funders, a restriction which precluded artists working outside Glasgow from showing. It appears that there is enthusiasm, however, from funding bodies to enable Intermedia to continue after the initial four month period. It's probable though, that this could be in a different space as commercial properties become leased and vacant with the ebb and flow of the recession.

I spoke to Fiona Meechie at the GDA, about the aims of the project, and the response so far. She informed me that the agency has been delighted at the success of Intermedia so far and

there appears a firm commitment to continue this sympathetic attitude with plans afoot for sculpture courts and gardens. She added that the basic aim for the GDA, was simply to get people coming back to the Merchant City, utilising vacant premises in an attempt to give artists an opportunity to show their work. At the District Council, Pamela McMahon reinforced this satisfaction with the initial profile but added that she would like to see the space develop into what she called a "*gallery without identity*", implying a greater access to the space for a much broader section of the community. This appeared to be an implicit criticism of the type of work shown so far in the space and should sound a note of caution for those at Intermedia interested in establishing a serious contemporary art space in the city to compliment Transmission Gallery, C.C.A. and Tramway. There is a danger for Intermedia if its public funders decide that things are not progressing to their satisfaction, that it may in fact cease to operate as an artist run project. It could continue, though, with the funding bodies assuming more direct control over the programming. At that stage, the project 'Intermedia' could be made available to facilitate any kind of project those holding the purse strings may consider worthy. Presumably it would then cease to exhibit *contemporary* art and would no longer contribute to the evolving dialectic within the Scottish art world.

It would be unfortunate to say the least if Glasgow—given its size & energy—was unable to support a second artist co-ordinated space, particularly one with such potential. In keeping with most long-term gallery projects, the test for an initiative like Intermedia will be whether it can consolidate its funding position and grow in reputation as an autonomous exhibition space.

The fact that three projects of the scale and ambition of those outlined above have been active over the past year (alongside, of course, many more) indicates that young artists continue to be far from satisfied with the existing infrastructure of the arts in Britain. It can only be reiterated that the lack of money for public galleries and the simple lack of private spaces means that artist initiated projects will continue to make an important contribution to the

geography of the British art scene for the foreseeable future. Artists are *still* interested in circumventing some of the baggage normally associated with the existing structure of the art world. They want to see what happens when you have an exhibition in a shopping centre or when you erect a space for artists on a public thoroughfare passed by one million people a week. They operate professionally, attracting funding from agencies normally associated with business development—and make a gallery out of it, giving other artists the chance to exhibit in a vital and engaging context. And as long as artists continue to do so, I'll gladly endorse these attempts to push back the boundaries of accepted public discourse and keep my eyes peeled for a healthy dose of imagination and idealism in a climate where I might be least expecting it. ∞

## LOCATE Public Bodies—Private States

Jane Brettle, Ruth Stirling,  
Wendy McMurdo, Sally Rice  
June 12–July 15 1993  
Collins Gallery, Glasgow

Collaborative, interdisciplinary, the project *Locate* has included a conference drawing on leading professionals from the practices of Law, Theology, Architecture and Healthcare; weekend courses in filmmaking and in computer generated imaging and an exhibition at the Collins Gallery by the four artist-photographer organisers.

The theme of *Locate* is the cultural construction of the body, and the ways in which this is codified and controlled, constantly evading identification. A group of three photo installation works and one sensory text work within the Collins and photo-banner works on Stirlings Library façade seduce us, the viewers, into a series of spacial/temporal propositions in which to consider the structural underpinning of subjecthood. **Wendy McMurdo**, continuing her investigation of the viewer as voyeur, (369, Studio Artists Space, City Arts Centre Edinburgh, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow) creates an ennui where we may seek in vain for a protagonist, a plot. Her tinsel props and simulated windows endlessly signalling un-reality, reference collective nostalgia culled

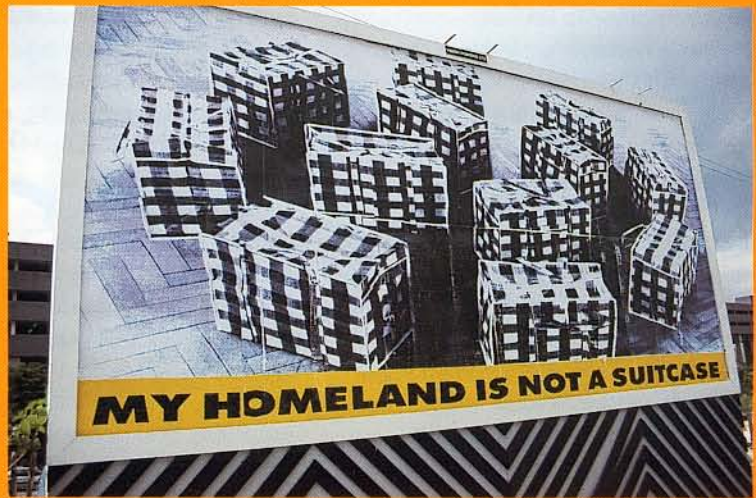


Intermedia Gallery, Glasgow



Roshini Kempadoo ECU

see Birmingham Billboard Project on pp27 for related text



Art in Ruins: My Homeland is Not A Suitcase

from movie culture invite us to construct a fantasy narrative. Views from the faint windows, using photo-based and printmaking mediums, suggest a gaze forever unsatisfied.

*There's no place like Home Dorothy* quips the text on the wall; but what can Dorothy's shoes, Judy's body, mean to the female gaze other than the endless dance of fetishisation? In a semi-libidinated nostalgia, and endless state of longing in which the lost object is forever unattainable, the pleasure is in the waiting. Possibilities of adventure, of meetings, locations, but no chance of attainment, no immediacy and always with the compulsion to repeat; this is a simulacrum of dis-satisfaction. In *Big Space*, stereo perspective dual landscape images leave us a wider, more literal space. Here we can project ourselves into the centre; the empty middle allows for immanence and a warm light supports this.

Ruth Stirling's Photo Sculpture works are situated in the entrance gallery, presenting initially complex viewing. Sumptuous Cibachromes of ecclesiastical interiors, architectural decoration and symbolic textual codas and three dimensional elements reference womens' contribution to the seventeenth and nineteenth century vernacular church in Scotland. Stirling has celebrated these histories, constructing icons; in *Space For St Maura*, who in the seventh century founded an independent school for women on the Island of Cumbrae; she literally creates spaces in the image and inserts seeds. In other works the 'genius' of the architect, the prohibition of women "...to sit on or

occupy the form used by men" are referenced.

Sally Rice, consummate writer, who has previously worked in collaboration with Jane Brettle of *(Re)Current Allegories*, now locates her text in the place of pre-language; pressing through blue velvet layers, the viewer negotiates the furthest reaches of the corporeal abyss. On the one side, language, the law of the Father; on the other, the interior, velvet place, Bellini blue, maternal semiosis invested with an excess of love, of bodily encoding. Inside, the viewer stands alone, signifi-

cantly non-viewing in the dark textual sensory chamber touched by sound, interuterine noises, joining with tissue traces of the early language of an undifferentiated space, an earlier state now re-incorporated.

"Love is the fulfilling of the Law" Rice tells us and re-entering language, in the outer gallery, four triangular projecting texts present the patriarchal Word, metonymically overlaid with tender strokes: screen printed biblical texts, poetic overlays, on precious papers; indicating in this presentation that we must shift position in relation to

Jane Brettle (dis)Location 2



language, refuse to be fixed—no chance here of a humanist centring. Commandments which continue to undermine, destroy, must be re-negotiated. Currently the collective voice of society has demonised the mother (and particularly the lone mother) who, along with the adolescent male has become a scapegoat. The Law which abominates woman as protagonist: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" and disallows her representation in the symbolic, has constructed and pathologised a myth of masculinity which has turned upon itself.

Referencing Lucy Brown's magnificent construction in the SSA a couple of years ago, Rice's work is a healing work for the viewer. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (Stills Gallery, *Public and Private*) concurrently signals with photo clues, this culturally foreclosed matrix. Only the artist, Kristeva tells us, can exist outside of the symbolic order; and remember—the mother who gave us life, also gave us language.

Jane Brettle's installations (*re*) *Current Allegories* (369, Studio Artists Space & Street Level Glasgow 1991) serve as notes for this assured presentation. Economical, telling, Brettle dissects the architectural idiom of the city, particularly the neo-classical cities of Edinburgh & Glasgow. Urban crisis, upheaval and disintegration create deep fissures, throw up shredded history. Brettle's thesis is that these fragmentary archaic and contemporary structures elude a single reading, allow for shifting representations.

*Fabrication*, 3 black & white images of archeological fragments presented leaning on the floor and wall and marked as part of an archeological site, solicit our consideration of lost narratives. Freud is quoted here and again subtly referenced in a sandalled foot—is this Gradiva, now fallen? *Site work*—libidinised fragments, red, warm; our bodies, textually bound, revealed/concealed; how then is feminine subjecthood to be constructed? *dis(location)*: Light boxes with double imaged brave daughter, urban protagonist, extra skeleton of scaffolding. Red/Gold/Black gates, columns in a dramatic dyptych, bolted, shattered, expose an eloquent drama.

Here is evidence of a fastidious intelligence at work, a triumphant

maturation of intent and accomplishment. Outside the gallery space at Stirlings library, Queen Street, her bannerworks lean/leak into the grey pillars, palimpsest suffused with colour, reminders of present myths and dangers.

The functioning of discourses, the health of the body in social production: *Locate* connects us with the responsibility we all have for the systematic replacement of an outgrown hegemony of power with new representations, new stories. There can be no death of the subject/author where subjecthood has been dis-allowed, and now body-coded males are also learning to speak so as to change the shape of the discourse on the level of language and of the libidinal economy.

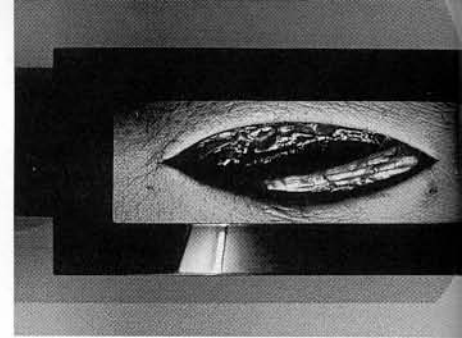
This exhibition should tour—see it if you can. ∞

Rose Frain

### Intervening Spaces Darlington Arts Centre 20 March—1 May 1993

*Intervening Spaces* commissioned new work from five of the North East's leading women artists. Common to their work is the idea of the body appropriated as a locus of knowledge—sexual, religious and medical. While these concerns have been central to women's (particularly feminist) art practice for over twenty years, most of the work attempted to break out of more conventional strategies of production and dissemination by splitting the exhibition space between gallery and non-gallery sites.

Lynne Turner achieved this by the distribution of leaflets through local GP's surgeries. These took the form of pseudo-medical literature, which on closer examination turns out to be a critique of archaic gynaecological theory, and in particular the link theorised by Ellis between the acquisition of knowledge and sexuality. The leaflets are supported within the gallery by the installation of text and images. 'She was in fact a feminist' is flanked on both sides by large photographic images which explore the 'gaining of knowledge'. On the left, a woman in a man's suit studies a



Alexa Wright  
*Intimate Reflections* Photo Paul Nugent

document in a panelled library. The engendered ambiguity of the body opens up a dual reading—of the woman as man, acquiring knowledge through privilege and education and of the woman as lesbian, fostering her sexuality (according to Ellis) 'due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence'. Ellis did not suggest that lesbianism was directly caused by movements toward the independence of women but suggested that knowledge produced a dissatisfaction with the world of men and a tendency to develop alternate sexual orientations.

The text suggests that despite the received implications of Ellis' theories, lesbianism can in fact be part of feminist struggles for emancipation, that all readings of the image must be tempered by the knowledge that the woman is a feminist. On the right of the text, an image from a childrens book from the '60s (?), shows a girl trying to wrest a book from out of the hands of a boy; a graphic representation of the struggle to retrieve control of the site and conditions of intimate knowledge from the hands of male institutional power.

Alexa Wright's *Intimate Reflections* goes beyond the surface into the private spaces of the body itself. On a visit to Banff, Canada, Wright was given access to an operating theatre in which plastic and reconstructive surgery was performed. The photographs taken there form the base for her piece, although once again she contravenes the gallery space by moving part of the work (a text, produced out of a collaboration with patients) into a local hospital. In the gallery, the piece is split between two rooms. In the first a copper plate which has been beaten and cut into three parts has been stitched back together with copper wire. It is juxtaposed with a large cibachrome of a deep scalpel cut into flesh with a small bead of blood emerging from the

bottom. In the second room, two polished surgical steel light boxes flank another polished plate with text. The first holds an image of an open suture revealing muscle and tissue and screws embedded in bone. The second shows the wound closed, bound shut with thread. The polished steel reflects the viewer physically inviting them to reflect mentally on their relationship to the piece and to the hidden spaces of the body. Metaphorically they represent the procedure of "opening up" both as a physical act and as a point of recognition and naming. On the central steel plate is inscribed 'these endless openings where words congeal, this mute alliance of container and contained, these lines drawn into themselves'. Parallels with menstrual symbolism are also easy to make; what is perhaps more interesting is the meditation on the invasion of the corporeal space by technology (steel itself is an amalgam). The body is thus constructed as a space for technological intervention, admitted through the pervasive language of normality and beauty. The textual piece (with David Hopkins) considers the feelings of the patients themselves to the breaches made into their bodily integrity.

The other pieces in the show are by Veronica Slater (a site specific work in an old pumping station) and a collaborative piece by Wendy Kirkup and Pat Naldi. Of these the Kirkup/Naldi piece is the most successful. By utilising electronic bulletin boards accessed by modem, they establish dialogues with other users. The anonymity of the system allowed them to invent identities and change gender while understanding that there was no guarantee that the user with which they communicated was not doing the same. The conversations were saved and the computer print outs are collected into a booklet which constitutes the work. The result is a witty and often disturbing collection of texts. It is remarkable how quickly seemingly ordinary conversations are turned towards discussions of sexuality, and Kirkup/Naldi cleverly and humorously play off their nebulously gendered character against their counterparts to subvert the banality of the compu-speak and open up the agenda.

Overall, *Intervening Spaces* perhaps does not hang together as a concept. This kind of show hardly breaks new ground in womens' cultural production. Saying that, however, the quality of the individual pieces is on the whole high and there are definite traces of the development of new strategies for the exploration of womens' issues outside of the often restrictive discourses of some feminist perspectives. ∞

Mark Little

### Creation of A New Self-Image

Collective Gallery, Edinburgh

June-July 1993

### The Hazel McLaren Portraits

Various Sites—Glasgow

June-July 1993

### Lost and Found

Pearce Institute, North Glasgow College & Springburn Museum, Glasgow July 1993

*Lost and Found* is the title of a community based sculpture project currently on view in Glasgow and in a sense this notion also permeates the two projects reviewed here and which are incorporated within Fotofeis (Scotland's International Festival of Photography). All of these works are concerned with ways in which those on the margins of society can claim access to the sites of power.

Artlink is an Edinburgh based organisation that aims to make the arts accessible to people with disabilities and the project *Creation of a New Self-Image* is their contribution to Fotofeis. It is the product of a year long collaboration between photographers, artists and a

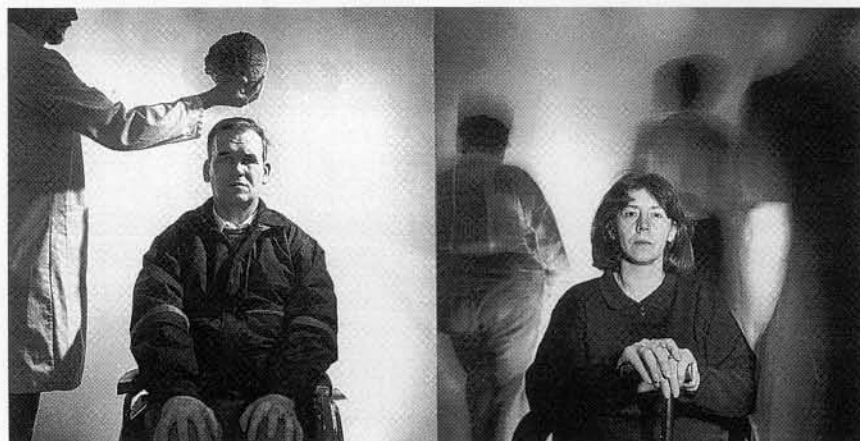
group of people with different experiences of disability but sharing a common purpose. The title is to a certain extent self-explanatory and although the collection of photographs at the Collective Gallery and the Princes Street poster campaign are closely interrelated they differ in their emphasis on concepts and representation of disability.

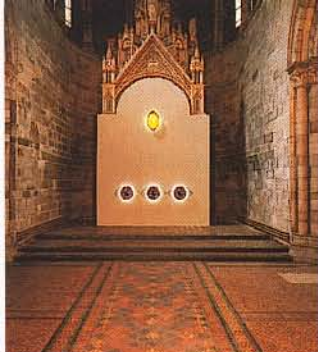
The seven black and white poster images are confrontational, enigmatic and in some a sense of the absurd filters through. Each image is accompanied by a single word—voiceless, sexless, redundant, excluded, brainless, invisible, powerless, and at each end of the series the viewer is challenged by the slogan 'Your frame of mind is our disability'. However, artist and photographer **Brian Jenkins**, who played a key role in this project, asserts that it was not primarily about disability: "Disability is an abstract concept. What is disability—well what is sex? This project was always about making images". Feed-back indicates that they have succeeded in their intention to stimulate awareness, provoke discussion and dispel the negative imagery of charity advertising.

The psychology of advertising and the ways in which information is interpreted are well researched by ad agencies who target their markets through highly sophisticated techniques and vast budgets. By comparison, the use of billboards to challenge ideologies rather than to sell them is in its infancy and although these images may attract attention, those not familiar with debates on representation of disability may be somewhat perplexed by this presentation.

*Brainless — Invisible* Project in collaboration with David Barnett,

John Connelly, Ian Fraser, Brian Jenkins, Ian Lyon, Kevin MacLean, Sarah Munro, Franki Raffles and Evelyn Ramsay





Helen Chadwick  
Eat Meis  
photo: maclean & scott



Patrick Raynaud  
Vanitas  
photo: maclean & scott

valuable complement to the provocative imagery of the poster campaign—focusing on their private world, sense of self and personal experience. Several of the Fotofeis themes resonate through these works. The Family—its interactions and power relationships are examined by **Evelyn Ramsay** who uses her body as a surface on which to project images from her family photograph album. This device, hinting at the passage of time and its concomitant shifts in power relations, is echoed by **Ian Lyons** who explores aspects of his relationship with his

mother now disabled by age. **John Connolly** used to be a boxer and it is tempting to make a metaphoric reading on his images of clenched fists, bodies locked in combat and victory salutes. But he has other concerns and also records his garden, its inorganic clutter, empty bench and collapsing bird table. Each of these photographers communicates a highly personal perspective and domestic tensions may have inspired **Ian Fraser's** juxtapositions of china cabinet, kitch and fishing rods and flies. Occasionally the use of camera angle is suggestive of physical disability and the portraits of **David Barnett** address this most directly. They are undeniably powerful and their impact derives from his direct gaze which communicates intense energy and humour.

This exhibition clearly demonstrates the medium's accessibility and potential to empower as these works are technically and conceptually accomplished. The gallery visitors book is confirmation of this but the disgruntled author of the only negative comment (*'why is this second-rate photography being given wall space?'*) would do well to read the introduction to the Fotofeis catalogue by Alasdair Foster, who states:

*"In a world so heterogeneous and diverse we cannot assume that photography has a single canon of excellence. We must learn to recognise quality of its kind and to value each area of practice on its own terms."*

A further theme of Fotofeis is New Imaging, which refers not only to technological developments but also to access and control of media forms. In an essay entitled *The Great Conversation: on the ethics of appropriating business media for inappropriate ends*, Sean Cubitt (Reader in video and media studies at John Moore University, Liverpool) argues that 'media guerillas' are morally charged with accessing the conduits of communication. The purpose of this challenge to our political and cultural masters is not just to develop an understanding of the world but to change it.

This task is implicit to another Fotofeis venture—*The Hazel McLaren Portraits*. The series of seven black and white portraits by **Anne Elliot** is displayed on thirty non-illuminated bus shelter advertising spaces around

Top three images relate to Public and Private review on pp.33



Jane Mullinger *Within Hindsight, Within Earshot* photo: maclean & scott

Conventional messages are projected from a single frame but in this case the key slogan is separated from the images. The overall intention of the campaign only becomes clear if the viewer's attention is sustained or reinforced over a distance of several hundred yards, but in Princes Street there is fierce competition from a plethora of objects of desire. **Sarah Monro**, Projects Co-ordinator at Artlink, acknowledges that the campaign has some limitations but they will be addressed by the next phase in which a revised small-scale format juxtaposing text and images will be widely disseminated in several Scottish cities.

The work of the five photographers exhibited at the Collective is a



Nicola Atkinson-Griffiths  
*The Teaspoon Chandelier*

Glasgow. Passers-by are presented with the striking image of a woman who conforms to none of the usual stereotypes or clichés of advertising. She is not selling a product but asserting her

individuality and right to inhabit a public space. The lack of text plays on serial advertising techniques frequently used by major companies but in so doing encourages a wider set of responses allowing viewers to



attribute their own meanings to the images. The absence of female stereotyping was equated with maleness in the mind of one respondent who wondered if this was a transvestite, however she also appreciated the positive imaging. Interestingly, there were far fewer men waiting in bus queues to debate with but those questioned found it difficult to relate to these images. It is not easy to assess the impact of this type of intervention but Jan-Erik Lundstrom in writing about marginalisation and photography in the catalogue posits a cultural version of Chaos Theory to inspire the continued efforts of 'media guerrillas':

*'We fantasize, hope and know that art, photography and cultural practices, may work like acupuncture—that one peripheral intervention will make the larger system change its course, that one tiny disturbance at the edge will summon the centre to redress its ways and make it evolve in another direction'.*

The notion of redressing the balance of power also informs Nicola Atkinson-Griffiths' city-wide project *Lost and Found*. Her style combines large-scale sculpture with community interaction and demonstrates a viable approach for those working in a community context. During a two month period she visited homes, schools and work places over a six mile

route between Govan and Springburn collecting teaspoons and buttons. The former were fashioned into a chandelier hanging in the Pearce Institute and the latter filling a tower of 480 glass jars in the North Glasgow College. Both these areas have been abandoned to their post-industrial fate yet they were vibrant communities whose skills and energy helped forge the infrastructure of an empire. Through a painstaking process of collection, structuring and labelling, the artist's intention was to create two site-specific works that would reveal a semblance of the communities' character and to recreate a sense of identity.

*The Button Tower* shares some of the qualities of its stained glass window backdrop and also echoes the stacking arrangements of tenements and tower blocks. The jars are named and their contents encapsulate the history, memories and diversity of these communities—Margaret Mary Fitzgerald, Arturo Chuez, Mr Crawford, Ross Hassan. Their buttons are leather covered, gilt encrusted, threaded with wool to make a child's toy or inscribed—The Kings Own Scottish Borderers. This assemblage of commonplace objects elicits a profound human response.

In the sombre mahogany panelled gloom of the MacLeod Hall, *The Teaspoon Chandelier* scintillates. Views from living room windows line the walls like icons and recorded sounds from streets and houses create an atmosphere that is far from prosaic. These domestic objects represent the structure of social interaction and evoke the shared experience of individuals and communities. The process of collection was paramount in the creation of these sculptures which have a valid aesthetic in their own right. Discussions with the artist explored notions of community and contributors responded enthusiastically to the eccentricity of the idea.

*Lost and Found* is the latest in a series of conceptual works by Atkinson-Griffiths that integrate the detritus of human existence into highly structured artifacts. Her structuring does not impose authority on the participants but offers creative possibilities and reveals facets of their lives that are also pertinent social comments. ∞

Jo McNamara

## Public and Private

Mansfield Place Church, Edinburgh

June–July 1993

## Intimate Lives

City Centre, Edinburgh June–July 1993

Organised as a collaboration between Stills Gallery and the Institut Francais d'Ecosse and curated by Alain Reinaudo, the city wide exhibition *Public and Private—Secrets Must Circulate* suggests to the viewer in its title the multiple possibilities of enigma and transgression. It hints at the revelation of covert knowledge with the pleasure of the expectation of *knowing*. The exhibition was concerned and framed within the philosophical premise that it explored, *'the notions of voyeurism, exhibitionism, family secrets and media fictions and the complex relationships between the public and private nature of the work of art, between the artist's meaning and the viewer's interpretation'*. This stated lack of centre, of the fracture between intention and effect, artist and viewer, public and private indicates the tensions between the role of an artist, the function of art and the complex web of social relations which circumscribe the 'reading' of photographic imagery. The latter point is intrinsically related to the nature and form of 'secrets' if we liken it to Foucault's idea of *silences* or Freud's observation of the unease inherent in culture. In Foucault's use of the term, *'silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to say; the discretion that is required between speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies'*. The interesting and paradoxical context to the exhibition is that here the work is positioned as being self-conscious of such silences and visually able to articulate such understandings in the form and content of the image. Is this liberatory or sustaining the illusion of liberation?

Whilst the work on show was situated in various spaces throughout Edinburgh, one venue was outstanding for its symbiotic relationship with the work placed within it. This was Mansfield Place Church, an old,



disused Catholic Apostolic Church in East London Street which has its own secrets to circulate. Uncovering the social history of the building simultaneously adds further elements to fragmented Scottish history. The Edinburgh Social Union formed by Patrick Geddes in 1884 counted among its decorators Phoebe Ana Traquair who in 1893 was commissioned to paint the vast interior of the church. Celtic inspired floor tiling and figurative religious murals fashion a historical and decorative inner space which is both mythic and socio-cultural. This resonates with, illuminates and indeed multiplies the associations and emotions which spiral outwards from the work in this specific and quite special place. This is most evident in work by the artists Helen Chadwick, Patrick Raynaud and Jane Mulfinger.

Helen Chadwick's photo-installation *Eat Meis*, a symbolic altarpiece fashioned from mythological symbols, is a mandorla, a mediaeval christian image of contemplation and reconciliation, a healing unity of opposites. Physically, it is a structure of monumental size which straddles the opposite points of the altar. Upon this expanse of white space protected by clear perspex is a simple arrangement of almond-shaped forms. At the bottom lies a row of three metaphorical eyes with rungs of dried flowers and a space-like blackness forming the pupil and iris. Above this and placed in the centre, like the seventh unseeable chakra, is an almond/vaginal shaped form with an oyster at its centre enveloped by folds of yellow dried flowers. The mandorla is the segment that arises when two circles partly overlap, the fusion of heaven and earth, the ego and shadow. The evolution of Christian thought has sadly led to metaphor interpreted as historical fact and this has silenced the expression of female desire and the degradation of physical and spiritual properties of the female body. All human experience is grounded on the first separation from the female body, that which gives life to all human life and thought. Helen Chadwick has restored this first point of reference in all mythologies to its central significance and reaffirmed the potential of

the photographic image to achieve this visual and spiritual harmony.

If it is the gaze upon the female which is the primary point of departure for Chadwick, it is the gaze upon the nude male body which concerns the work of the artist Patrick Raynaud in his installation *Vanitas*. This comprises a series of large and small steel boxes which are placed throughout the floor space of the church and are left open to reveal their illuminated contents. The viewer looks over and down upon images of naked men with their eyes closed, questionably sleeping or dead, contained and confined, looked at but lacking awareness of this look. Carrying cases or coffins, these containers of male bodies, the physical body as distinct from the spiritual body, weaves ideas which concern the splitting of the body/soul, life/death, divine/human.

*Within Hindsight, Within Earshot* is the title of Jane Mulfinger's specially commissioned installation. In a small, enclosed, private part of the church, the artist has created a work which meditates upon properties of the senses and their relation to our construction and interpretation of experience. It is as if the artist is playing the role of conductor of an invisible symphony orchestrated by the sense of sight, touch and hearing. Chairs are arranged in a circle upon which are stacks of books written in Braille. A circle of fans surrounds this creating currents of air which are constantly turning the pages of open books. Projected onto the moving pages are images from found photographs; seagulls, clocks, a storm, an aeroplane which suggest the constant movement of space and time, the seamlessness and illusions of cinema. The narrative is never complete and dependent on meanings gained from the total sensory experience. That this is different in individuals depending on which is their primary sense makes clear the particularity of subjectivity in relation to physical reality which is never all-knowing.

*Secrets Must Circulate* as seen in the Mansfield Church is an intriguing and intelligent exhibition strengthened by its lack of polemic and curiosity with the theoretical possibilities of photography.

It can easily be said that the theoretical contribution to photography made by the late Jo Spence revolutionised thinking on the relation between imagery, the family album, autobiography and the role of photography in depiction of this. Curated by the City Arts Centre, the photographic exhibition *Intimate Lives; Photographers and their Families*, also came under the Fotofeis banner.

After Jo Spence, the ways in which the self is represented in



Maud Sulter: Elsie, Dewar, Madge, Dave from *Significant Others* 1993

relation to the family is a complex psychological and political task in which idealisation and the bourgeois notion of the family are exposed as phallacies. *Intimate Lives* is as interesting for what is not there as to what is. Of particular note in the show is work by Nan Goldin, Maud Sulter and Julie Millowick.

For Nan Goldin, the family is chronicled not as the stereotyped nuclear unit but as the folk with whom we have affectionate bonds and ties. These are depicted not in idealised form but with emotional directness. Images of a friend crying, sleeping, looking tired and unglamorous, 'real'—the banality and drama which is the nature of 'relationship'.

The family album is the source of imagery for Maud Sulter's installation *Significant Others*. Large black and white images of the artist's family past and present are framed within black borders with a blackboard surface upon which is handwritten text; dates often with a question mark. This work centres on the nature of psychological

past memory, of love and the identities, gendered and racial, of the significant others who nurture this.

In Julie Millowick's *Familiar Stories*, images and handwritten text are a visual, autobiographical diary reflecting on childhood memory, mothering and significant events like a death in the family. They are a narrative on domestic life and relationships told with frankness and a sense of humour. This encircles all her themes which capture the laughter, love and tragedy of family stories. *Intimate Lives* affirms the idea of autobiography as a creative fiction, a fashioning of a story, subjective and with multiple meanings in which the photographer can suggest, not control what is revealed and what remains hidden. ∞

Lorna Waite

### Borderlands

Contemporary Photography  
from the Baltic States  
Cottier Theatre, Glasgow June–July 1993

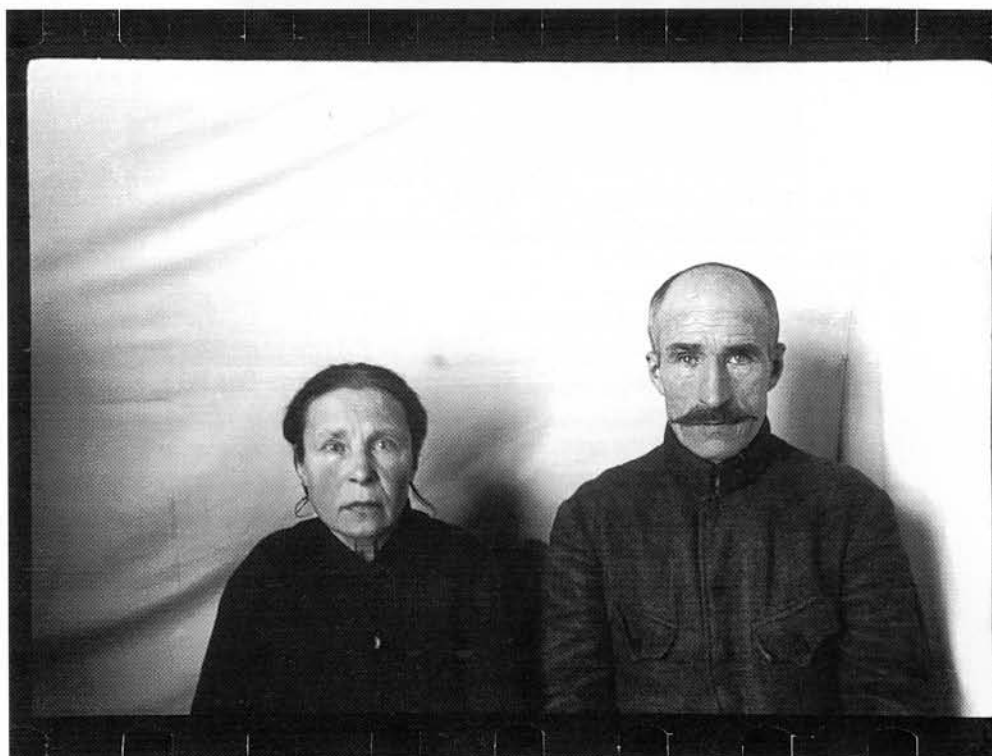
A former church converted into an arts space, Glasgow's **The Cottier** provides the rather unusual site for *Borderlands*, an exhibition of 17 contemporary photographers from the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. After half a century of Soviet occupation, the Baltic States gained independence in Summer 1991. The present exhibition marks the first substantial review of photography from these lands, a photography which grew out of the amateur photography clubs allowed during Soviet rule.

Much is made of the past in this exhibition of contemporary photography. Entering the former church one encounters a sequence of 6 large-scale photographs by the Estonian artist, **Peter Linnap**, paper prints from old negatives which are simply tacked to the wall. They are images of shootings, prints which show uniformed soldiers aiming guns, military exercises, a posing and playing up to the camera. But what first appear as figures of power, on further consideration leads us to think about disempowerment. The photographs were taken in the Summer of 1955 by Linnap's father-in-law while on national service. Are these, then, Estonians in Russian uniforms?

But what stands as the most haunting and effective re-use of old photographic images is that by the Lithuanian artist, **Vytautas Stanionis**. His father was a passport photographer and Stanionis, in a unique collaboration, makes prints from his father's original negatives. What is extraordinary about the portraits he reprints is both the way in which they were taken and the original context for which they were made. Taken just after the end of World War II, film shortages meant two people had to be pictured at a time,

it would take something away from him. And this is very much the case with the Lithuanians portrayed in Stanionis' work. The taking of their photograph is in effect taking something very important away, their very identity as Lithuanian citizens, since the passports they are paired up to be photographed for class them as Russian subjects.

**Peter Tooming** makes photographs in the exact sites found in old photographs. In 1987 he tracked down the locations visited by the Estonian postcard photographer Carl Sarap in



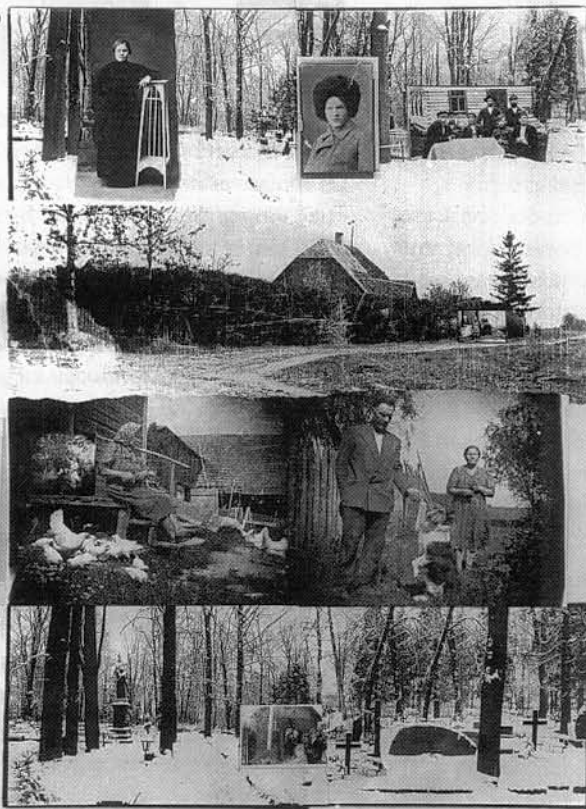
their portraits blown up separately for each passport photograph. Stanionis' appropriation of his father's pictures gives us portraits about appropriation itself. The end of the war marked the beginning of Soviet rule for Lithuanians. The war was thus not really over for those pictured but would continue for another half century. And the portraits attest to this. The subjects refuse a smile, meeting the camera with a considerable degree of trepidation. Brought together before the camera, there remains little relation between them, each is isolated from the other. A sense of subjugation is underlined by the fact that the portraits are hung below our eye level. So the story goes, the great French writer Honore de Balzac was very reluctant to have his photograph taken because he believed

1937. Pairing his photographs with reprints of Sarap's, Tooming's work allows us to compare the changes—not necessarily for the better—that took place over fifty years, a time before and a time during Soviet rule. **Eve Linnap's** work is also concerned with change, edged by numerical columns logging the years, her photographs involve a layering of images gathered from family albums, chronologies of the changing living places and final resting places of Estonian people.

The Latvian photographer **Valts Kleins** presents portraits of homeless adolescents, each bearing a text inscribed by the sitter telling us of their wants and wishes. **Gvido Kajons** follows a more conventional documentary line with his street photographs of Latvia from the late 1980s. His pictures provide

Vytautas Stanionis Image c 1946

1896  
1900  
1905  
1910  
1915  
1925  
1930  
1935  
1940  
1945  
1950  
1955  
1960  
1965  
1970  
1975  
1976



Organised by  
Street Level,  
Borderlands included  
17 photographers:  
Peeter Linnap,  
Eve Linnap,  
Harald Leppikson,  
Juri Lukys,  
Remigijus Treigys,  
Gintautas Trimakas,  
Saulius Paukstis,  
Vytautas Stanionis,  
Valts Kleins,  
Gvido Kajons,  
Inta Ruka  
& Andrejs Grants.  
Borderlands Travels to  
Impressions Gallery,  
York in January 1994

Eve Linnap  
Estonian Home 1993

visually striking records of the ubiquity of Soviet propaganda, of icons of the communist regime amidst daily details—a land invaded with signs.

However, not all the prints on show are so clearly marked by history. The Lithuanian photographer **Alvydas Lukys** makes enigmatic prints about private rituals—an embalmed body, an empty bed, a chair pushed towards a wall to which is pinned a square white cloth. Unlike Treigys', the photography of **Gintaras Zinkevicius** involves comic rather than sinister rituals. He takes the (communist) notion of 'art for the people' to an absurd extreme, presenting photographs of the bizarre sites of his exhibitions—a line of prints in the river, a series of pictures strung upon a line in a field of sheep. Zinkevicius' work, viewed from the perspective of a traditional Western history of art, appears more akin to art of the 1960s than the early 1990s. Indeed, much of the photography on show carries with it more than a degree of familiarity. In the end what the diverse work of *Borderlands* brings out is the power of the more straightforward (and less aesthetic) deployments of photography—Stanionis' restoration of the full image behind Soviet Passport photographs in the mid-1940s and Kajons' street photography in the 1980s. ∞

Mark Durden

## Time and Tide

The 2nd Tyne International Triennale,  
Newcastle June–Sept 1993

Three years on from its inception, when artists were offered the interiors of newly-built houses on a National Garden Festival site, the Tyne International in '93 centres its activities around Newcastle's Quayside area for a three-month exhibition of contemporary art. *Time & Tide*, curated by Swiss-born Corinne Diserens (latterly of IVAM, Valencia), utilises a number of extraordinary buildings and sites in close proximity to the river, including some previously mined by the likes of Projects UK and Edge 90 for temporary artists projects. The Quayside area has been chosen by Diserens principally for its accessibility and the anticipated hordes of people who would visit the Tall Ships Race (in addition to the presence of a river 'full of the ghosts of workers') The centre-piece for the whole exhibition, a Grade II listed C.W.S. warehouse, of which just three floors are used to accommodate work by some of the fifteen participating artists, mixing videos, and borrowed and commissioned works in a surrogate gallery

One of the highlights of the resulting incoherent exhibition, is undoubtedly Vito Acconci's *Virtual River* in which water is pumped up from the

Tyne to fill a boat-shaped basin dug into a gentrified stretch of Quay. A small rowing boat floats impotently on this newly-manufactured mini-river, producing a quietly ironic and playful piece.

Acconci's work is well-represented, with one floor of the CWS warehouse given over to a mini-retrospective containing performance documentation, models for urban projects and two specially re-created installations from the mid-seventies. These latter pieces translate refreshingly well into the space particularly *VD Lives/TV Must Die* in which the ferrous/concrete columns of the building act as supports for two massive rubber slingshots holding back two bowling balls, restrained by steel cabling in a state of unbearable tension. The balls are aimed directly at suspended T.V. monitors, on one a roving camera scans an orgiastic scene from a pornographic magazine whilst on the other mostly grey screen, images of genitalia suddenly appear and disappear. An incoherent soundtrack of gunshots and speech completes this unsettling and powerful scenario.

The other piece which successfully utilises the warehouse space, taking its historical usage, yet mindful of the etiquette of viewing prevalent in traditional galleries (and warehouses), is the installation by Readymades *Belong to Everyone*. This is the first UK appearance for the agency (founded by Phillippe Thomas in 1987) which offers clients the possibility to buy into project authorship. A simulated office/workshop is enacted, creating a narrative of production and distribution in which photographs of museums are carefully wrapped; cardboard boxes, emblazoned with the agency's trademark signature, are filled with polystyrene chips, and left stacked onto palettes and industrial trolleys awaiting collection in the existing loading bays.

Aside from the obvious art quotations, the piece contains jokey self-references, pointing to the agency's position in the art market—computer bar and pie charts dissects its financial successes and inserted underneath a photograph of art collectors at Venice, a Readymades

postcard of Van Gogh's chair proclaims 'Become a great artist without the pain, anguish or poverty.' (Maybe not surprising that in International round-up shows like this, US artist Sam Samore was prompted to wish for the existence of a league table placing the top ten artists!)

Samore's own work consists of an installation within the elliptical interior of the All Saints Church with adjectives gathered from fairy tales, legends, religious whose sources relate to the histories of the Church and the region affixed to each of the window panes. A discrete and subtle piece, with arbitrary taxonomies of human

behaviour formed as the text is scanned. An opening night performance in the same space was cloying in comparison as actors – narrating re-worked fairy-tales, Celtic storytellers, Northumbrian pipeplayers, harpists et al provided hours of

self-conscious 'folksiness'.

Chilean artist Gonzalo Diaz also used textual juxtapositions in his installation *The Debatable Lands*, sited in Central Station's disused buffet hall, and arising from a three-month residency in the region meeting local representatives from shipbuilding unions, coal miners and so on. Against a photographic frieze of blue sea, the names of ten North East coal mines whose closure he was told would be the most painful, were re-classified in terms of the celestial hierarchy, producing, for example, *The Angels of Murton*; *The Archangels of Seaham*; *The Principalities of Easington*. The potential of this poetic strategy however, is sadly undermined by the form of the installation with its aesthetic border of sand and fluorescent tubes, for example, only serving to dislocate meanings, which dissolve any notions of radicalism.

Perhaps the usage of broadcast media might have been more effective, as it was underpinning certainly Pat

Naldi and Wendy Kirkup's *Search* video piece. For this project, the artists worked with Newcastle's recently installed urban surveillance system, consisting of sixteen cameras relaying unedited images of the city's commercial centre 24 hours a day into Police Headquarters. Segments from a coordinated walk starting from two different locations and recorded by these cameras, were broadcast during twenty 10 second advertising slots on Tyne Tees Television. Whilst being already familiar with the work, the effect of seeing one of these broadcasts without prior notice was still surprisingly disturbing, and shifted the piece away from mere technological fetishism.

Other more traditional detective techniques were engaged within Christine Borland's *A Place Where Nothing Has Happened*. A piece of semi-derelict wasteland behind the law courts was combed for traces of human activity and these samples subsequently displayed in a PortaCabin erected on the same spot. Whilst the anticipated forensic analysis was unfortunately unable to be realised, this collection, denoted using police techniques and frozen at an inconclusive stage of investigation, nonetheless provides a thoughtful and genuine site specific response to a location in transition.

Unfortunately this was not the case with several of the other site specific installations; the work in the towers of the Tyne Bridge, for example, simply do not compete with the overpowering architecture of these structures. Tunga's *Seeding Mermaids*, with its promised 'macabre, dreamlike memory' is unintentionally comic as his trademark copper wire sprouts from an erection of a hanged man (cast in iron) to form the scalp of a suspended head, whilst high above, a headless and naked female form (cast in rubber) 'swims' along an iron girder.

Rodney Graham's *The School of Velocity* attempts more successfully to 'activate' an eighteenth century room, latterly used for music practice in the old Sallyport Tower. Notes from a Yamaha disklavier grand piano punctuate the serenity of the space as a performance of Czerny's piano exercises, decelerated in proportion

to Galileo's time—squared law is played out, lasting one solar day.

Over in the North Tower, New York-based Orshi Droznick explores her feelings of being 'haunted by the 19th century' in Newcastle by making a circle of coal. This facile use of material extends to iron and glass to complete an extraordinary flippant piece of work.

Two pieces stand out as providing much-needed soul to an exhibition curiously lacking any: John Adams' video installation *Goldfish Memoirs and The Think Tank*, provides a wonderful evocative personal treatise into the nature of memory through the combination of a story about smart drugs, interviews and neurological soundbites with the two monitors viewed through a large tank of oil. And Nan Goldin gave a tape-slide performance of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* in which her personal photographic diary is revealed as essentially a catalogue of loss, tracing her family and friends over the past 18 years.

Unfortunately, however, the overall impression left by the 1993 Tyne International is one of missed opportunities; the astounding lack of publicity and inadequate signage which marked its chaotic start have still yet to be rectified if it is to attract new audiences, assuming that was one of the intentions. Similarly, the extensive education programme and information centre promised early press packs, which had not materialised over half way through the show. Whilst the Tyne International states one of its aims being to 'develop a centre for exhibitions and critical debate in Newcastle', it is therefore surprising that no dialogue or channels for debate have been established with artists living in the region.

Louise Wilson



Christine Borland *A Place Where Nothing Has Happened*  
Photo: Stephen White





imagining society —

*cornelius*  
**CASTORIADIS**

INTERVIEW

**T**he Greek-French economist and psychoanalyst **Cornelius Castoriadis** has been one of the most productive thinkers on the Left since the Second World War. In the late 1940s, having been condemned to death *in absentia* for failing to return to Greece to serve in the Greek army during the Civil War, he co-founded, in Paris, the journal and group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. While refusing to give up the idea of revolution, Castoriadis, writing under a number of pen-names, developed a penetrating critique of the bureaucratic nature of the Soviet Union. The managerialism of the West was paralleled—replicated in fact—in the East. Castoriadis and his colleagues went on to propose ideas of “*autonomous action*” and of socialism as “*worker management of production and the collective management of all social activities by everyone who participated in them*”. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* created a space for radical thinking about society which was as critical of the Soviet Union as it was of Western capitalism and which was not limited by the defensive certainties of Trotskyism or Anarchism.

*Socialisme ou Barbarie* ceased publication in 1965. Nevertheless, it had a profound influence on the ideas of '68. It had an impact in Britain too, where much of the writing was translated and published by the *Solidarity* group. Castoriadis himself stopped working as an economist in 1970 and began to train as a psychoanalyst. He has continued, however, to think and write about society and to be a public intellectual of the Left. (In fact, before 1970 his public political activities were limited because he was not a French citizen, and could have been deported at 24 hours notice).

Our conversation took place on a mild, drizzly winter evening in London in early '93. Earlier in the day, at a lunchtime meeting in the ICA, Castoriadis had responded to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who had read from his recently published essay on racism—*The Great Migration* (*Die Grosse Wanderung*).

There's less time than expected. In the afternoon Castoriadis had visited his old *Solidarity* comrade, Chris Pallas, in hospital. Later in the evening he is giving a talk on his perspective on psychoanalysis. Castoriadis, looking like a more rotund Michel Foucault, spoke English in a wonderfully rich Franco-Greek accent, the sentences often ending in a melancholy fall. Though whether this was because of the state of the world, because of having to give another interview, or both, I cannot say.

*Present at the conversation were Paul Anderson, John Barker, Martin Chalmers, Kevin Davey and Peter Kravitz. The conversation was transcribed and edited by Martin Chalmers.*

QUESTION: DO YOU KNOW ENZENSBERGER?

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: Yes. I have known him for more than ten years now. I formed almost a kind of united front with him against Gunter Grass, who was more or less a fellow traveller twenty years late (*i.e. at the time of the anti-nuclear arms movement in the early '80s—Grass supported Communist Party positions which were uncritical of the Soviet Union*)... What Enzensberger has written in *The Great Migration* is very good. Of course, he doesn't provide any solutions.

AT LUNCHTIME YOU TALKED, IN A JOKEY WAY, ABOUT TELEVISION, REFERRING TO "THIS TELEVISION MASTURBATION..."—IS IT WORRYING THAT RADICAL SOCIAL THOUGHT SO OFTEN SEEMS TO BE SIMPLY ANTI THINGS. IT COMPLAINS ABOUT RAMBO BEING WATCHED IN THE PHILIPPINES AND IN BRAZIL, THAT HOLLYWOOD IS DESTRUCTIVE OF PEOPLE'S THINKING... ARE THERE NO POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN THE SPREAD OF TV ALL OVER THE WORLD? WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE POSITIVE ELEMENT, AS OPPOSED TO THE MASTURBATION—IF THERE IS ONE?

It depends, but if you take tv as it is just now, then apart from some exceptional things, at least three very serious criticisms can be made of it. The first is the content, which is 90% sheer stupidity. It flatters—not even the base instincts of the public—it just flatters intellectual inertia. That's why I call it masturbation. The second thing is the very structure of the medium. It's not the usual point against Marx, it's not that the instruments are good, but the bloody capitalists put them to a bad use. It is that the alienated structure of society is embodied in the technology, it's embodied in television, and you can very easily see how it's embodied in tv as it is now in the sense that tv is a uniculture emitter with a passive, dispersed public. This is the ideal of political alienation and manipulation. So what a really interactive tv would be, how this medium could be put to another use, that is not just a question of changing the content of the films, of the news, it's a matter of inventing, creating new ways by which people can intervene. The third thing, of course, is the sheer ideological role of tv today, which is quite evident most of the time.

DO YOU FEEL ANY SENSE OF SCHIZOPHRENIA MOVING FROM THE LUNCHTIME TALK TO THE ONE ON PSYCHOANALYSIS?

It's not the same subject, of course, but it's the same universe in a sense.

CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS, AUTHORITARIAN ONES, SEEM TO HAVE A GREAT FEAR OF PSYCHOANALYSIS.

Yeah, after all, you have a massive example in Stalinist Russia, where psychoanalysis was a forbidden subject, as it also was in the GDR and all those countries. But you know the Hungarians and the Czechs managed to do a bit semi-clandestinely... and in the Nazi Reich there was an attempt to do a kind of 'German' psychoanalysis.

DOESN'T CALIFORNIA PRESENT A PROBLEM FOR THAT KIND OF ARGUMENT, IN TERMS OF THE OVERKILL OF ANALYSIS AND THERAPY?

Yes, it's true, but there is a sort of typical American deformation of psychoanalysis. For example: you don't love your wife, you come to therapy and you will love your wife. You hate your children, you come to therapy and you will love your children. You hate your boss, that's a non-resolved Oedipus Complex, you can love your boss and so on and so forth—that's ridiculous.

YOU HAVE A NUMBER OF PATIENTS OR CLIENTS EVERY WEEK. DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL, OCCASIONALLY, SUDDENLY TRANSFORMED BY AN IMAGE A PATIENT BRINGS TO YOU?

To say transformed would perhaps be saying too much, but elated, if one can use the word.

DO YOU HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THIS HAS HAPPENED?

I can't tell you just now, but there are dreams which are fantastically creative, beautiful and deep, where there is an interweaving of the imagination beyond rationality and logic. Yet you also have logic used as an instrument in order to enable this imagination to function. Or you have the reappearance of problems which had been discussed, and which you thought were resolved, but which were resolved only at a superficial level, and then they appear again and the patient him/herself discovers other aspects of the thing.

DO PEOPLE COME TO YOU ALREADY AWARE OF YOUR WORK, ALREADY RADICALLY POLITICAL IN SOME WAY?

The people who come to me are aware of my work, I certainly don't have people who are politically reactionary among my patients. I wouldn't throw out somebody who was—as long as it doesn't interfere with the analysis. The point is not to inculcate perfect ideas, it is to make people become self-critical, reflexive, critical of others—though not critical in an irritating sort of way—to open their eyes, especially about their own motives, and to encourage them to be autonomous. I think this is both the main aim of analysis and the prerequisite for social change.

THE IDEA OF AUTONOMY IS ABSOLUTELY CENTRAL TO EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN WRITING ABOUT. PERHAPS IT CAN BE SEEN AS A CONTINUATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT THAT GOES THROUGH ALL YOUR WORK IN *SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE*. DO YOU STILL UNDERSTAND THE REVOLUTION, CONSIDERED IN THE SAME WAY AS WHEN YOU WERE WRITING IN *SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE*, AS THE END OF YOUR PROJECT, THE ONE THAT YOU ASSOCIATE YOURSELF WITH?

The project which I support and pursue is of radical social transformation. This is what I call a revolution. Of course, a revolution not necessarily means barricades or storming the Winter Palace. It is the fact that people decide to change fundamentally their institutions.

YOUR WRITINGS, THOSE THAT WERE PUBLISHED IN BRITAIN IN THE 1960S AND '70S, WERE VERY INFLUENTIAL. TO WHAT EXTENT WAS PSYCHOANALYSIS A MOVE IN ANOTHER DIRECTION? PUBLICLY, AT LEAST, YOU CEASED TO BE INTERESTED IN ISSUES LIKE ECONOMIC PLANNING WHICH YOU'D WRITTEN A LOT ABOUT.

Well, economics was never my main interest. My main interests were politics and philosophy, and economics was only important—of course also because it is an important part of the real world—because of the tremendous weight it had been given in Marxism. Now, when I started coming out, getting out of Marxism at the beginning of the '60s, a process in part marked by texts which form the first part of the *Imaginary Institution of Society*—the section called Marx and Revolutionary Theory—then by the same token, the economic dimension became very much more limited from my perspective. The main problem for me, from then onwards, was what I called the imaginary element in human history. The fact that all these tremendous varieties of societies and then of types of institutions can by no means be explained by differences in the mode of production. I mean, you have perhaps 200 primitive hunter-gatherer societies one next to the other and each one has different totems and taboos and matrimonial rules and so on. This conclusion leads in a totally different direction from Marx's rationalistic, economic positivism—as I see it. This coincided, accidentally or not, with a renewed interest on my part in psychoanalysis and the two things more or less coalesced. When you read *Marxism and Revolutionary Theory* you can see that the break with Marx does not only take Freud into account, but also attempts to go beyond Freud, because Freud also, as it were, commits the sin of trying to fit society to a singular psychology, which to my mind doesn't hold water. Nevertheless, I thought that psychoanalysis was very important. It was as if with it you could see human, radical imagination working live, and that's why I decided to take it up after I stopped working as an economist.

DO YOU RETAIN ANY SYMPATHY FOR OTHER TRADITIONS? I'M THINKING PARTICULARLY OF ONES EMANATING FROM ITALY AND OF A THEORIST LIKE TONI NEGRI. DO YOU HAVE ANY SYMPATHY FOR THE WAY THEY HOLD ON TO A RATHER POLITICISED CONCEPTION OF AUTONOMY?

Well, I met Negri in Paris many times. We have, I think, a good deal of personal sympathy for one another. I don't have much sympathy for his ideas and way of putting things. I think, despite whatever he says, underneath his post-modernist trappings he is still what I would call a palæo-Marxist. He still thinks in terms of *the capital*, *the proletariat* and so on, and for me these are dépassé categories. They are not important things.

A MINUTE AGO YOU USED THE PHRASE "COMING OUT OF MARXISM", AS IF MARXISM WAS SOMETHING YOU HAD TO BREAK FREE FROM IN A SENSE. COULD YOU PERHAPS BRIEFLY SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO MARXISM BEFORE THE EARLY '60S

...AND WHAT YOU HAVE STILL KEPT FROM THAT TRADITION SINCE THEN?

Well, it's a complicated question... I adhered to the revolutionary ideas of Marxism at a very young age, a ridiculously young age. And I always tried to understand, first of all what it really was about, and secondly to behave responsibly. It became clear to me at an early stage that lots of things needed to be revised. That is to say the least. But the question was, how to revise them whilst keeping the inspiration and the framework. This is all part of a longer story, which is recorded there in two thirds of the number of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. In them there is a revision of what socialism is, of the role of technology; the analysis of why Marxian economics will not hold, what modern capitalism is, and why the proletariat in any concrete sense of the term, cannot be given the messianic mission which Marx wanted to entrust to it. Finally you reach a point, and that's the first part of the *Imaginary Institution of Society*, where you see that the theoretical framework itself is rotten, that it belongs to the capitalist imaginary. Marx thinks that if only productive forces were developing rapidly enough, the problems would be solved.

THE CRITIQUE OF MARXISM IN *SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE* ENDS UP BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THE CRITIQUE OF KEYNESIAN DEMAND MANAGEMENT—THE KEYNESIAN WELFARE STATE, IF YOU LIKE. NOW IT SEEMS THAT SINCE THE MID-'70S THAT HAS FALLEN TO PIECES, AND ONE OF THE QUESTIONS THAT ARISES IS, HOW FAR THE MESS WHICH WE NOW FACE IS TO DO PRECISELY WITH THE COLLAPSE OF THAT CONSENSUS. DO YOU THINK THAT SOCIAL DEMOCRACY WHICH SEEMED TO HAVE CREATED A STABLE CAPITALISM UP TO 1975, HAS ANY HOPE OF REGAINING THAT POSITION?

No, I don't think so, because what happened in the thirty years from '45 to '75—in French they call them the '*trentes glorieuses*'—contained, to use a Marxian phrase, the seeds of its own destruction. It was never possible to solve the problem of price stability and wage stability simultaneously—relatively, external equilibrium and full employment. There was always a contradiction between these, and there was bound to be, and this exploded after 1974 and 1978 with the two so-called oil crises. This, in turn unleashed, again in traditional Marxist terms, a counter offensive by the conservative strata, Reagan and Thatcher and all that. The socialists, or the so-called socialists, have not been able to respond. There are two things which we can note in this respect. First of all, there is the tremendous poverty of the neo-liberal ideology. I mean compared to all these bastards, John Stuart Mill or Adam Smith are transcendent geniuses, which they are, in fact. I mean, the Chicago Boys are just ridiculous, they're nothing. But at the same time there's the appalling poverty of the political imagination of the activities of the official Left, who are not able to respond. What did the French socialists do? After one year of repeating stale demagogic slogans they became the best implementers of liberal capitalist policies and that's all. The only differ-

ence to Thatcher is that they tried to maintain much more of the social safety net in, of course, the well understood self interest of the system. Thatcher was ruinous for British capitalism and not only for the British working class. She has ruined British capitalism and British industry... She brought in the Japanese and all the rest of it. I mean, we don't care about that, but one should see the degree of mental and intellectual decomposition, both of the ruling strata and of the official opposition, in order to understand the mess we find ourselves in today.

WHERE, BRIEFLY, SINCE '89, DO YOU SEE THE IMPORTANT EMANCIPATORY OR LIBERATORY PROJECTS TODAY? ESPECIALLY SINCE '89, SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR.

I must confess, not in many places—that's the understatement of the century. There is the PT (Workers' Party) in Brazil which has some elements which are hopeful. In France there has been a movement, I don't know if you've heard of them, called the Co-ordinations, involving people who are fed up with the official trade unions and who created organs of co-ordination, the nurses, for example, the railroad workers, the Air France workers and so on. I'm not implying, of course, that this society is a dead society; but for the time being it's a sleeping society. There's no doubt about it.

WHERE WOULD YOU EXPECT, IF EXPECT IS THE RIGHT WORD, THINGS TO SHOW THEMSELVES?

I don't have the answer and I don't think there is one... As you know, I have experience as an economist. When I was working as an economist, it was very easy to predict what would happen to the GDP in Britain, in the next twelve months, in France and the United States and so on as long as things were going smoothly. You were following a trend, you could say that the trend would repeat itself next year, so there would be 3% growth etc. The things which were consistently missed were the turning points: when the boom busts or when the bottom of the recession has been reached and things start going up again, and I think the same thing is true of history. I mean, if nothing happens then one can foresee increasing cretinisation of the whole population. But history is precisely the field where things do not repeat themselves. Now, how and when this will happen is the question, I mean, May '68 was a total surprise, especially in France, a total surprise.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING TO HAPPEN IN FRANCE IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS IN TERMS OF POLITICS?

The same ridiculous things. In May the right wing will win the election, will form the government. Mitterand will carry on his usual manoeuvrings, trying to put banana skins under their feet etc. In '95 there'll be the presidential elections and probably the right wing will win. Now what will they do? They won't do anything

very much different from the socialists. They may be a bit more authoritarian and strict on immigration, throw people out, but even that is not so certain, but they would probably try it, in order to please the right wing. I don't think they can touch very much, like the social security funds. However, they will not be able to cope with the economic problems. There are about three million unemployed now. I don't see how they can cope with it; unless there is a major American boom, followed by a Japanese boom which lifts the whole world economy and gives it momentum and I don't think there is going to be such a thing.

DID YOU VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM?

I did vote in the referendum and I did vote Yes, reluctantly, very reluctantly, after very long thought, despite all the objections which you can imagine I have. I was voting as an ordinary citizen, who today votes essentially negatively. He votes against. The Americans voted against Bush, they wanted anybody but Bush. And in France, who was against the positive vote? It was Le Pen, it was the right wing of the RPR (the Gaullists), it was the Communist Party. So...

ARE YOU SAYING IN A WAY, CAPITALISM CAN'T AFFORD SOCIAL DEMOCRACY ANYMORE? WOULD YOU SAY NOW THAT IT WAS SOCIAL DEMOCRACY OR BARBARISM?

I wouldn't say that absolutely objectively it can't afford it. I say that in order to have social democracy of the 1950-1975 variety in Europe, you must have new ideas on a new situation, and the Social Democrats are unable to produce these new ideas, that's absolutely clear... I mean, it was fantastic what happened in Britain. The Labour Party no longer has popular support. After this eleven year orgy of Thatcherism... I was absolutely flabbergasted!

DO YOU FEEL YOURSELF TO BE A CHAMELEON BECAUSE OF THE DIFFERENT AREAS...?

No, I don't see myself as a chameleon. I see myself as someone who attempts, perhaps in a certain vague and unsatisfactory way, to rise up to the challenge of the present period. I think all the fantastic specialisations, such as politics, psychoanalysis or even science, which have been going on have extremely negative effects. The task is to dare and to think, even if one is deluding oneself—not to make a system, that's not the problem—to attempt to show that we are not totally lost in this world and that philosophy and science are not as divided as they say. And psychoanalysis has very important contributions to make to philosophical theory and so on. ∞

**I thought that psycho-analysis was very important... Human, radical imagination working live...**





Maggie Nicols outside Euston Station  
Photo: Rob Jacobs

**First** came *Fiume*, a concert organised by the London Musicians Collective (LMC) at the University of London on 18 January 1992. Based in and around a swimming pool, and featuring nine acts, this bizarre event attracted a full house and unanimous acclaim. Its success prompted the setting up of *London's Secret Spaces*, an ambitious, on-going project conceived of and organised by LMC members **Nathalia Berkowitz** and **Nick Couldry**. Like *Fiume*, *Secret Spaces* is concerned to present the LMC's range and depth of talent in improvised and experimental musics to a wider audience outside the back rooms of pubs which, mainly due to economic necessity, have become the somewhat cloistered habitat for most of its activities.

This reaching out to a wider public largely ignorant of experimental music, and doing so in unconventional venues, can be seen as the resuscitation of a neglected British tradition that goes back at least to the end of the '60s, to the likes of AMM and the Scratch Orchestra. The latter, who also encouraged the participation of amateur musicians, performed in town and village halls, parks, churches, on an island, a lake, Kings Cross station forecourt, on the cliffs at Beachy Head and so on.

Mindful of, but not subservient to the work of these important precursors, *Secret Spaces* seeks to extend this tradition by discovering new and potentially stimulating venues relevant to the interests and personalities of the 1990s London based experimental scene. *The Wayside Shrines* series, organised by *Secret Spaces* under the unlikely umbrella of the London Jazz Festival took place in the Euston and Kings Cross areas of the city. By all

accounts vocalist **Maggie Nicols** improvised magnificently in the gatehouse of Euston railway station amidst the appropriate temple designs of textile artist **Maddi Nicholson**. Acappella vocal group **Voices From The Crypt** (Grahame Scott, Michael Ormiston, Sianed Jones, Ken Hyder, cris cheek, Viv Corringham and Alquimia) followed this with a week of performances in the passageways of St. Pancras station. Early evening on Saturday 22 May they were to be found at Stanley Buildings in Stanley Passage, a discreet, Mediterranean-like terrace a stone's throw from Kings Cross station, which is where I caught up with the group and the series.

The 45 minute piece began on the rooftop balcony (apparently the same rooftop used by Mike Leigh for the final sequence of his 1988 film *High Hopes*). *Voices From The Crypt* have been keen to supplement established extended vocal techniques with Tibetan chanting and Siberian throat-singing, so it wasn't long before the air was filled with a rich and mysterious polyphony. Gradually the singers descended, imaginatively using the building and its five balconies like a tiered theatrical set; sometimes disappearing into its interior, their unseen interactions were relayed to us via the multi-speaker system positioned in the Passage. Attired in dressing-gowns, heads turbaned in bath towels, cris cheek and Sianed Jones enacted a sort of domestic drama on a theme of "Are you going out tonight?" It was comy, hilarious, banal, intensified by some fervent gospel style call and response, and the only premeditated strand of an otherwise improvised performance. The enthusiastic audience was mainly LMC derived, though a dozen or so inquisitive 'general public',

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# London's Secret Spaces

Wayside Shrines 14–23 May and  
The Institution of Rot  
8–12 June 1993

by Chris Blackford

including a local hooker, wandered in to see what the noise was all about. The least they should have been was astonished.

**Paul Burwell** is one of the relatively small number of musicians, in recent decades, to have shown a sustained interest in taking experimental music to the general public. His percussion group, Bow Gamelan Ensemble, has presented outdoor concerts around the world. Fitting, then, that he should be at the centre of things when Secret Spaces moved on to the heart of Kings Cross station the following evening.

A cluster of large, customised oil drums had been rigged up to a scaffolding platform on a bridge about 100 metres downtrack from the ticket barrier. For their part British Rail had agreed to keep public announcements to a minimum during the hour-long performance. Trains arrived and passengers were greeted by the dense polyrhythms of five drummers overhead. You can never predict how people will react to this sort of situation. At least there were only a couple of pairs of forefingers jammed in ears. Many looked hesitant or non-committal, perhaps in case this was some kind of elaborate student prank. For a few young, dishevelled blokes reduced to cadging foodscraps, it was 'business' as usual.

The drumming was mostly one-dimensional, of the muscular variety. Drummers seemed to want to dominate the demanding acoustics which soaked up everything and gave back an unfocused, echoic roar. Unfortunately, there was little in this improvised performance to suggest an interest in striking up a sensitive rapport with the existing mechanistic and natural environmental sounds. A greater range

of percussion instruments might have given some much needed timbral variety.

109 Corbyn Street, London N4, is odd by anybody's standards. One of its residents is sculptor, image maker and sound artist **Crow**, whose principal work is this house which he calls *The Institution of Rot*. Ask a thesaurus what 'rot' is synonymous with and it will tell you *decay, absurdity, disease* or words to that effect, like *malignancy, trivia, junk, corrupt*. Crow's house is packed with objects which blur the semantic boundaries between these words and the different worlds they imply. Many of them are ready-mades, some are indescribable assemblages that leave you wondering what on earth it is you've been looking at. The decor draws heavily on Gothic convention: an ornate candelabrum in the hall, black walls in the upstairs rooms, crumbling masonry, and soil underfoot. I am reliably informed that he has been living like this for years, that the atmosphere has only been 'heightened' for the installation.

In the kitchen there are smaller objects on shelves; grimy looking bottles with indistinct things inside, "Marquis de Sade" champagne, a yellow volume on interstitial lung disease etc. A few glasses of red wine later, and that slim, droplet-covered egg-plant upstairs on its patterned cushion, has become a glistening phallus; the straw-like material stuffed into silvery stilettos now resembles pubic hair. A white door marked 'Surgery' is locked. Musicians (**Paul Obermayer, Richard Barrett, Nick Couldry**) improvise unseen in the cellar or leap about in the garden in the rain (**Adam Bohman**). The austere soundscape they produce is piped through (by sound engineer **John Greenough**) to the guests who number about 30.

*The Institution of Rot* is the world of the insatiable Victorian collector, the obsessive postmodern bricoleur, the secret society with its perverse, forbidden, even absurd pleasures. But what's missing from this aural/visual complexity is *smell*. This is odourless rot, a contradiction in terms perhaps. The objects and their surroundings excite visually (we also had an interesting 'meal' to stimulate the taste buds) but smell of nothing in particular. There

are no smells to suggest the transformation of matter, a state of desuetude, of unease or revulsion; no strange and lingering perfumes to enhance the surreality of certain objects. It's a disappointing omission but not one to beef about too much in the light of what is certainly an unusual and stimulating installation.

Again and again as I made mental or written notes for this review piece, I found I had to modify or abandon the sort of expectations one usually takes to a performance. It has been said that improvised music produces more information than any one individual can accurately process, hence the sometimes widely differing interpretations of what has been happening. These Secret Spaces events celebrate this type of information overload. Placing improvised music in a more active aural/visual context than the usual low-key surroundings of the pub/hall venue, produces an event of even greater complexity and ambiguity.

First, we are reminded of the primary inseparability of performer and performance-space and how the latter influences the former. Attempts to record these events (especially those outdoors) on video and/or audio tape, thus removing them from the physicality of their original context, would be virtually pointless except perhaps as a reminder of who was there. The 'what happened' can only be appreciated in its rich and sometimes confusing complexity by those who are actually present. Secondly, the 'performance-space' itself is not easily circumscribed since 'uninterested' persons are constantly wandering between audience and performers, redefining the meaning/function of that space. In addition to the sounds produced by musicians there are, of course, many other environmental sounds and sights competing for the audience's attention. Filtering out these 'distractions' quickly becomes a mind-consuming process and, anyway, doesn't really face up to what Secret Spaces is essentially about, namely an attempt to create a multi-dimensional aural/visual experience which expands the nature of what constitutes an 'artistic performance'. Consequently, it's one of the most exciting projects happening in the UK. ∞



The Institution of Rot. Photo Rob Jacobs

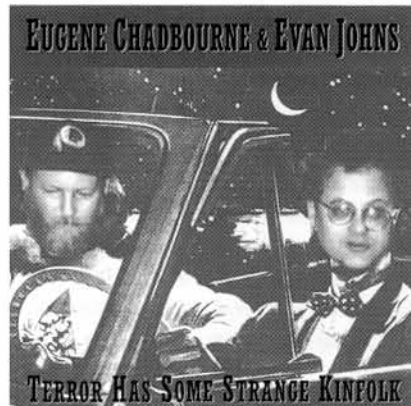
## Recent Record Releases 1

**Strings** (Intakt CD 025) and **Songs** (Omtakt CD026) are solo recordings by the American guitarist and singer Eugene Chadbourne, taped over a couple of days in Zurich and capturing well his unique blend of song and improvisation. Chadbourne's music exists at a point where reliance on memory (recalling jazz standards and folk obscurities alike) and the ability to extemporise (wildly, more often than not, extending and enhancing the structured material), are finely balanced within an often extraordinary, illuminating expressivity. The recordings—of self-penned numbers, Monk, Mingus, Ochs, Willie Nelson—inevitably lack the inspired flow of his live performances, but are nevertheless urgently direct, humorous and roughly elegant. Also recently released is **Terror Has Strange Kinfolk** (Alternative Tentacles, Virus 119CD), a group work, with guitarist Evan Johns adding his fluid country style to Chadbourne's spiky banjo and whining vocals on a variety of rocking downhome numbers—aggressively distended C & W.

Superficially similar to Chadbourne, but more limited in its points of reference, is **First Aural Art Exhibition** (VOTP, VOCD 921), a collection by British virtuoso guitarist Billy Jenkins. This provides snatches from Voice of God Collective releases over the last decade with a variety of line-ups taken through their paces in a series of tight, toe-tapping instrumentals. Ultimately the relentless "good time" crowd-pleasing feel of the recording, with its unequal mismatch of flamboyant, limpid guitar licks, whimsically unstretched jazz horns and largely banal percussion, proves curiously unsatisfying, the whiff of kitsch hanging in the air when the turbulence has subsided. It's fine in small doses on a summer's afternoon, but not nearly as meaty as one might wish.

If Jenkins tries a little too hard, Stock Hausen & Walkman on the other hand declare their intention to down tools entirely with **Giving Up** (QRM CD1), an extended foray into found sound objects, musical detritus, flotsamples a plenty. The hour long work, a composition which incorpo-

rates improvisations, is divided into sixty tracks—allowing random play to enhance the listener's sense of disorientation. At a concert given by the group I overheard someone scoffing at SH&W for "not knowing what they were doing"—which comment alone, stuck in my memory like a knife in butter, palms, or back, tempts me to think they must be on to something. SH&W illustrate McLuhan's dictum *art is what you can get away with*, but fail simultaneously to maintain the keeping a straight face which Warhol said was his greatest achievement. Still, "not knowing what they were doing" might be taken in certain circles as a positive comment, especially at a time when free improvisation is often increasingly self-referential, clichéd and tending towards the

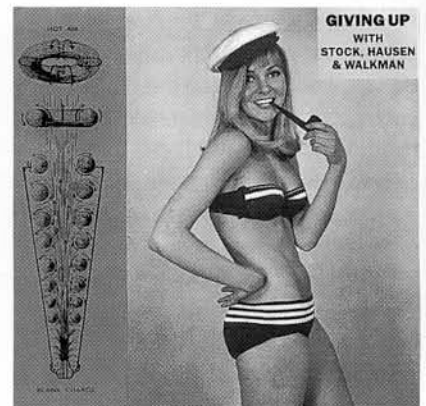


predictable. SH&W seem to feed off this state of entropic involution, and if they seem a little too pleased with themselves, that is only to be expected. What they fail to achieve structurally, they engineer superficially, the result being a (not po-mo but) *no-mo* series of displaced sound bites.

Paul Pignon and Raymond Strid's **Far From Equilibrium** (Alice Musik Produktion, ALCD 007) is nineteen fine improvisations from the eminent Swedish reeds and percussion duo. Pignon's view of improvisation as '*music of the whole mind*' is substantiated here both by the recordings and by some thought-provoking and intelligent sleeve notes concerned with what he sees as the non-goal-oriented core of 'free' music. Pignon's speculations draw on theories of thermodynamics, delving into states of instability, even temporary insanity. Problematic and

contentious, they touch upon not only the philosophical dimension of creating self-organised music, but attempt also to differentiate formally between the states of '*unstable far-from equilibrium*' on the one hand and '*plain disorder... maximum entropy*' on the other—between good and bad improvisation, one might be tempted to suggest. It's well worth obtaining.

Theory of a quite different sort characterises Tom Johnson's excellent **Music for 88** (Experimental Intermedia Foundation, XL 106), in which the minimalist composer and critic strives for a clarity which allows—demands—that the explanation of the musical structure becomes part of the music. Johnson reveals the mathematically precise design of his compositions as he plays them. Thus **Mersenne Numbers**



follows the sequence defined by the seventeenth century mathematician, with Johnson playing and counting off a sequence of 1 note, 3 notes, 7, 15, 31 up to 511 notes, then back down again. Sounds a little predictable? Johnson would perhaps argue that that was the whole point, but his rigid and 'blatantly didactic' performances have a certain charm, expressive of wit as well as relentless logic, that makes for a singularly pleasurable listening experience.

While Johnson argues for a music stripped bare, Morton Feldman's **For Bunita Marcus** (LondonHALL, docu 4), played by John Tilbury, features music committed to '*the muscular, physical and essentially sensual qualities of the art of performance*'. Johnson reacts against '*complexity and obfuscation*', whereas Feldman recoils from what Tilbury call '*reassuring familiarity and respectability*'

**Various Recent Records 2**

and kicks up an apocalyptic storm.

For those in search of something less demanding, unreconstructed hippie Dævid Allen is found in the company of William Burroughs and Mark Kramer on the optimistically titled *The Death of Rock* (Voice Print, VPI14CD); but the interesting cut on this compilation is one devoid of celebrities—*Switch Doctor*, a scissors-and-paste tape collage from 1965,

which shows not only its age (charmingly) but Allen's musical roots in structured experimentalism. It's half an hour of hypnotic psychedelic 'sound art', all loops, echo, fragmented text, rumbling noise: Allen's *Number 9*, irritatingly lacking in technical or explanatory information of any kind. Allen's fellow Soft Machinist Robert Wyatt meanwhile breaks one of his studied silences with *A Short Break* (Voice Print, VPI08CD), five brief home-recordings. Spare, inchoate songs, their distillation of Wyatt's favourite melancholic motifs only really takes substance on the final piece, *Unmasked*, which has a curious lyric and a moving, dramatic pace—an uncanny half-formed narrative which throws into relief the rough sketches that precede it.

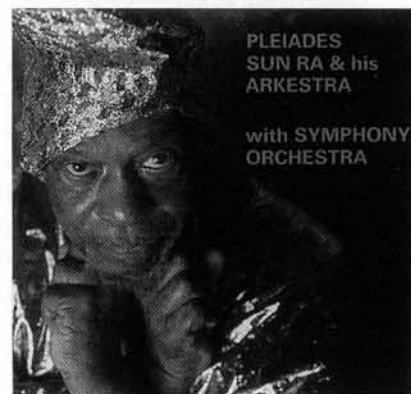
'No studio cosmetics' Wyatt's sleeve notes proclaim, which allows me a glib contrast to Holger Czukay's *Moving Pictures* (Mute, CDSTUMMI25), a work overwrought on a baroque scale in terms of production values, restrained in most other ways. Stately and measured, it eschews rock tempo in favour of 'cinematic' sweeps and meticulously engineered ambience. Can's Jaki Liebezeit and Michael Karoli are to hand, but sadly as journeymen only; and they are unable to prevent the album from getting bogged down in some truly twaddley lyrics and finally sinking, strangely, in its own delicately incidental atmospherics. ∞

Ed Baxter

Sun Ra's *Pleiades* double CD (Leo Records CDLR210/211) appears likely to occupy a special place in the mass of his recordings. It is probably the final record released in his lifetime and is distinctive in its use of an orchestra to supplement the Arkestra. This does merit the release of the record by Leo Records. However, as with many of Ra's live recordings, often recorded informally, *Pleiades* has a strange sound balance. In this case, whether by accident or design, the solo violin and tabla players are brought to the foreground and the main Arkestra is cast into the background. The resulting lack of middle range in the recording detracts from listening.

A feature of Sun Ra's concerts after the mid-1960s was the suspension of musical development for long periods, while attention focussed on dancers, film projections, etc. Without the visual performance element, such episodes appear very static on record. The producers of some records (such as *It's After the End of the World*) avoided this by heavy editing of the concert material; others allowed the dance and chant interludes onto the record. Thankfully, *Pleiades* does lack the chanting.

"Jazz-with-strings" has often denoted a shackling rather than an opportunity. So approaching *Pleiades* for the first time brings the intriguing question of how Sun Ra would cope with the dubious opportunity provided by the unidentified "symphony orchestra" at this 1990 French concert? The main orchestral passages on *Pleiades* occur on compositions familiar from Sun Ra concerts in the musical backdrop role. Some others, particularly



Inside cover: Robert Wyatt—A Short Break

and 'attempts at expressive reduction and control which our conservatory training operates'. For Bunita Marcus is a measured, soft, repetitive work, at times bordering on silence—best listened to at low volume in the quiet interlude between late night and early morning.

A world away, and meant surely for consumption in the overwhelming din of the contemporary metropolitan working day, is *Ground Zero's* debut CD, also called *Ground Zero* (God Mountain, GMC 002). This features Japanese turntable manipulator Otomo and American saxophonist John Zorn, playing noisy, hyper-energetic group compositions with strong elements of musique concrete amid the jazz and post-punk motifs. It's impatient music which veers between enigmatic, inconsequential turntable-scratching pieces to lush forays into speedy distorted swing.

On *Itsofumo* (New Tone, nt 6710), Ben Neill's 'mutantrumpet' and Don Yallech's tympani and electronic percussion provide a setting for David Wojnarowicz's positively livid reflections on the politics of AIDS. Like *God Mountain* (and this is about all they have in common) it's distinctly urban music, something reinforced rather than contradicted by the use of background voices taped at the US National Hollerin' Contest. Exhausting yet exhilarating, *Itsofumo* is methodically composed to articulate the themes of acceleration—sensual, viral, political. Socially aware music of some depth, this is compelling, intelligent

*Mythic 1 & 2*, set the orchestra and Arkestra on long interwoven lines which discard the forward-impetus and structural opening provided by pulse beat in favour of a ponderous chromatic heaviness. The use of the orchestra is much more successful when Ra pulls particular orchestral usages into his worldviews, for example on *Sun Procession*, which recalls film incidental music. So *Pleiades* is of interest, but really as a supplement for those already interested in Sun Ra's music; beginners shouldn't start here.

Sun Ra was among those who brought new instrumental voices and combinations to the jazz-based music of the '60s. One such voice was that of the bass, which took on a more active role, providing plucked and bowed textures and interplay with front-line musicians. **Reggie Workman** is one bassist who came to prominence during that decade, appearing on such influential records as John Coltrane's *India*.

Like *Pleiades*, *Altered Spaces* (Leo Records CDLR206/207) is a concert recording featuring prominent use of a Violin, but this time in an evenly-balanced small group setting. It presents a reminder of the promise inherent in the structural freedom opened by '60s free jazz before it was closed down, first by jazz-rock banality and then by neo-bop classicism. (As the sleeve notes indicate, commercial pressure makes it difficult for a musician like Workman, in demand to play neo-bop, to maintain opportunities to work outside.)

The ensemble instrumentation is unusual: violin, voice, clarinet, piano, bass and drums. The music moves forward, sometimes on rhythmic chains of impulse, sometimes on lyrical lines of melody. The deployment of the instrumental voices is predominantly spacious and contemplative.

Some of the musicians from the Reggie Workman record have been regular members of **Anthony Braxton's** group and appear on *Coventry 1984* (Leo Records CDL204/205), the definitive recording of the Quartet's 1985 tour. (Leo Records have also released records of the tour's London and Birmingham concerts.) The musical demands are very different here. Whether due to fidelity to Braxton's compositions or familiarity of improvising musicians playing together regularly,

the concert presents a high order of precise ensemble playing.

**Marilyn Crispell** was the pianist on the previous two recordings. Another recent Leo Records CD features her *Piano Duets with George Grauwe* (Leo CDL206/207). The piano duet is an awkward mode—clarity of interplay can disappear as the voices merge together. Successful examples, such as Paul Bley and Bill Evans on *Jazz in the Space Age*, have been those where economy of line maintained the senses of conversation and forward motion. Parts of the first disk of *Piano Duets* do reach that state. On the second disk, a different approach is used—the two pianos have regained their separate voices by having been detuned.

What might be considered as a



mainstream tradition of British free jazz is represented on **Elton Dean's** *Vortex Tapes* (Slam Records CD203), a CD of performances by various combinations of musicians at the Vortex Club in 1990. Proximity of location makes it possible to overlook these musicians, but the CD again presents some fine examples of group interplay.

Like the Workman disc, the recording of *Level Two* by **George Haslam** (Slam Records CD303) features a range of sound textures. These tend towards the lower end of the sound spectrum by the combination of baritone saxophone, trombone and bowed bass. The music is improvised, based on the players' mutual knowledge, and is partly programmatic in its chosen reference points.

The idea of an avant-garde, a "cutting-edge" or what have you, amounts to little more than a market-oriented progressivism. The attention of the cutting-edge mythologists has passed on to other areas - mediating the supposed "otherness" of metropolitan marginal sub-cultures, polymorphous perversity, etc. In the case of *Level 2*, the self-understanding as 'completely natural music, with a beauty

akin to that of country scenery' approaches an English pastoralism which would horrify the mediators of Otherness. Music like *Level Two*, and the other records reviewed here, continues in the conversational mode, operating on principles of self-management in its internal musical form and in the organisation of playing situations. ∞

Alastair Dickson

## Recent Record Releases 3

**Barry Adamson** was involved in some of the most original music of the last decade or more, his distinctive bass style adding the rhythms to Magazine and giving punch to the epic sagas of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, but for the past few years has been forging ahead with his continual pursuit of the perfect soundtrack. Starting in 1988 with *The Man with the Golden Arm*, followed by the classic *Moss-Side Story*, the Carl Colpaert-directed *Delusion*, through various shorts to last year's award-nominated *Soul Murder*. *The Negro Inside Me* (Mute Records CD Stumm 120) continues his driving obsession to make angels weep. Six slices of Heaven to lift you above the "everyday". Sumptuous soundtracks for non-existent films. Sensual basslines bearing the Adamson hallmark pound through *The Snowball Effect* with its soaring jazzy keyboards and answering machine voice samples, slowing to a seductive grind in *Dead Heat*, then into a sublime version of *Je T'aime*, breathy vocals and beats with a mission. Finally, bidding you bon voyage with the sultry cocktail tones of *A Perfectly Natural Union*. Perfection.

Also from fellow Bad Seed and one-time Birthday Party member **Mick Harvey** comes *Alta Marea* and *Vaterland* (Mute Records Ionic 6 CD), featuring the soundtracks to these two films plus music from three European television productions. *Alta Marea* is a haunting score, steel style guitars, sounds of the sea and soothing keyboards floating around a counterpoint based on Albioni's Adagio in G minor. *Identykid* offers three brief themes from the Ed Cantu directed short; vibes and guitar flow easily into pounding industrial noise with a threatening heartbeat. This

prepares you nicely for the opening credits of *Vaterland*, co-scored with Alex Hacke (Einstürzende Neubaten), driving drums and sustained chants set the pace for this very European soundscape with strong Arabic elements interwoven. *Totes Geld* is a big production, large scale pulsion noise with epic piano, too short by far. Finally, *The Real Power of Television* blends an orchestral approach with guitar playing reminiscent of Mexican ballads and the lonely folk songs of the Hungarian people. Now that I have heard these works I intend to seek out the films. A very emotive collection.

Emotion is something that **Einstürzende Neubaten** have always managed to capture in their recorded works and *Malediction* (Mute Records Beton 206 CD) is no exception. Being the final section in their triptych of releases presented in what has to be amongst the most luxurious packaging I've seen in a long time. A full colour triple fold digipak with lavish booklet housing a very extended play CD single. Three of the six tracks have been conceived for the innovative performance outfit *La La Human Steps*; *Blume* (3 versions) sung in English, French and Japanese is a delicate piece—fragile vocals (the English & Japanese) perfectly match the intricate instrumentation of guitar and constructed percussion. *Ubique Media Daemon* is four minutes and thirty-one seconds of sheer thunder and glorious chanting captured forever. You can almost see the dancers throwing each other around the stage to this. *3 Thoughts* and *Ring my Bell* are fine examples of how far Neubaten have taken experimentation and pushed away the barriers of preconceived notions of music. Specially devised instruments salvaged from shopping trolleys, to plastic tubing all combine to make music that demands you dispose of all your conventional record collection. Start with this and you will never look back.

Packaging has always been an important part of the vast majority of 'independent' product and the French label *Sordide Sentimental* has always been at the forefront of such notions. Early releases from the likes of *Psychic TV* and *Joy Division* featured folders, booklets, postcards & 7" singles. The current two releases carry on that

tradition but in the digital domain; handsomely presented 3" CD singles in large (10x8) folders in glorious colour. **Rosa Crux** gushes forth as harbingers of pre-millennial chaos, warning us of a surge of evil, inherent in societies' vision of itself. Huge slabs of guitar crush through monoliths of drums, 15 minutes of apocalyptic noise in *Ecouter Tres Forts* (SSMCD 04) that will sure as hell be ringing in your ears as the skies flood with fire. **KrakHouse** with *Comes Alive* (SSMCD 05) however, come across like the bastard sons of Captain Beefheart and *The Residents*, and their main aim would appear to be making a wedge out of their nightmarish narratives. Guitar discord, freak chants and walls of playtime percussion drive it between the two halves of your brain splitting it apart, leaving you as schizophrenic as they are and in a state of utter confusion. Post-Millennial Funk—you know it makes sense.

**Scanner** (Ash International Ash 1.1) takes the narrative one step further. With the help (!?) of a scanning device, they have logged into mobile phones and recorded the conversations and taped the crossed lines. I remain sceptical as to the authenticity of these 'recordings'. Some appear too clean and are reminiscent of TV broadcasts. *Miss Ball Breaker* is plainly a telephone sex line as it is one dimensional whilst the majority of the conversations have some degree of response that can be heard. *Hear the man who uses his teeth to castrate sheep* was amusing the first time round but on repeated listenings starts to wear thin. The feeling that you are intruding on these people is I'm sure a major factor in the appeal and ultimately selling point of this CD. The press release mentions a 'haunting soundtrack—*Stockhausen in a trance*': I found white noise, repetitive rhythm and enough static to make your hair stand on end. I approached the label for more details and was sent a series of slogans. At £11 it's almost as much as a quarterly line rental so you decide. *Hype* or *Hyper Space*.

Still on the theme of technology is **Richard H. Kirk's** *Digital Life Forms* (Touch TO:21). Richard has been making music as part of the seminal *Cabaret Voltaire* and as a solo artist for over 15 years now, so any new material is always worthy of attention. This CD

continues Kirks' original approach to his craft. *Cabaret Voltaire* were always ahead of their time and so too was Richard's solo work. Experimental percussive rhythms and voice sample loops were being recorded and released when the techno kids of today were just twinges in their parents' groins. *Digital Life Forms* contains some very smooth dance rhythms with intricate pulses threaded through a weave of lush sounds. The vast majority of dance originated recordings never work outside of a club environment where volume can mask a lack of originality; not so with this work, listening to this in the garden on a hot sunny afternoon added another dimension to the day. Fast paced beats give way to slow, delicate layers of keyboards and almost indefinable voice samples, calling to mind the likes of *Orbital* and *Polygon Window* and dare I even mention *Tangerine Dream*, *Neu* or even *Klaus Schulze* (if you think that's unhip, just check out how much of this stuff is being reissued and how much it is being cited as an influence by many of today's technophiles).

**Konstruktivists** *Forbidden* (OGPU 002 CD) don't so much use technology as abuse it. Lumped in as part of the 'Industrial' scene (sic) they have been digging their own groove for the past ten years and unfortunately not managing to break the shackles of restraint such a label as *the natural successors to Throbbing Gristle* (as a recent magazine feature ran) brings with it. With the recent demise of various independent distributors and the reluctance of shops to carry anything different, *Konstruktivists* are one of those bands that thrive on direct contact with people of a like mind. Their music is as uncompromising as it ever was, pushing their inimitable style of distorted vocals, deconstructed guitar and booming bursts of percussive dissent. A band with an attitude, a band that gets you in the mood, to paraphrase *Madonna*. Their back catalogue fetches very high prices so get this before it joins them.

After so much technology it is good to come down with something a touch more mellow. After recently



Einstürzende Neubaten, Malediction



being introduced to the music of Mari Boine Persen who hails from the northern part of Norway, it was with excitement that I rushed home from the Variant offices

clutching a copy of the Norwegian sampler *Ur-Rauten* (d'But Recordings). A rather strange collection, not the relaxed folk/world music I expected but rather a bizarre hybrid of New Age experimentalists. This CD contains elements of Negativlands' cut-up approach to sound, with Waldemar Hepstein, divine vocalisations from Ane Heiberg and exquisite dulcimer and ghatam/pot drum playing from Green Isac. Some of the material was too avant garde but as an introduction to the new music of another land it is a delightful compilation, and highly recommended. ∞

Rob King

### David Cunningham: VOICWORKS

CD EVA WWCX 2041. 48'40". 1992

David Cunningham will probably be familiar as a founder member of the Flying Lizards, who had a top ten hit in 1979 with their deadpan and highly ironic reworking of the Beatles' song 'Money'. Throughout the '80s he worked with Michael Nyman, producing the music tracks for most of Peter Greenaway's films as well as Nyman's other projects. But besides this work Cunningham has made a number of sound and video pieces of his own, collaborating with the bass player John Greaves and the video artist Steve Partridge.

Cunningham is particularly interested in art as material process and in systems-generated work. These concerns have their roots both in the anti-object stance of the sculptor Robert Morris and the anti-expressionism of John Cage's aesthetic strategies, and were doubtless nurtured during his period as a student of David Hall at Maidstone

School of Art, where Steve Partridge was a contemporary.

It is important to distinguish his use of systems from that of artists like Kenneth Martin or Philip Glass, who employ them in a pure, frequently mechanistic manner. Cunningham's approach is 'softer' in that he brings composed elements into conjunction with systemic devices. Once coinstantiated, these systems are allowed to run-out unhindered. In this respect his work is truly experimental.

*Voiceworks* is Cunningham's most recent CD, and features the singer Susan Belling. The recurring device in *Voiceworks*, besides vocal sounds, is the "noisegate". Indeed one way of approaching the album, albeit a very reductive one, is to see it as an extended exploration of this piece of technology. At its crudest the noisegate is used by DJs when speaking over records. Their utterances trigger the gate to cut the volume of the record so that they can be heard above it. But although the noisegate is central to the soundworld of *Voiceworks*, it would be wrong to suppose that the work is 'technology led'.

Cunningham uses the device in conjunction with drones, chanting, sung melodies and sparse instrumentation.

The pieces on the album are arranged into four groups. In each, the balance between the various elements shifts. *Masks and Voices* begins with *Siren Sign*, a high-pitched, ethereal drone. Although the sound is very synthetic, a human voice gradually emerges from the slowly fluctuating mix. In the rest of the group, different interchanges between sung and played sounds are explored. On *Engine Shadow*, voices are heard between gaps in the instrumental sounds. These gaps are opened up by the noisegate which in this instance is activated by the instruments. *Magic Words* has voices which initially coincide with the beat, then gradually move off it. *At One Remove* has two superimposed fractured chants, while in *Engine Definite* a ponderous bass and drum pattern is superimposed over treated voices. This pattern is then taken up

and shared by two pianos.

It gradually dawns on the listener that the source material for these fragments is 'found' singing: choral, probably sacred, music. Part of the intrigue of the work is that while one recognises certain characteristics that suggest this, the identity of that material remains obscure. At the same time what Cunningham effectively does is create new tunes from it, thus adding another layer of meaning to the layered strands of the work itself.

In *Mass and Canta*, by far the longest pieces at seven and eight minutes respectively, heavily processed drones and short loops of singing are superimposed to create turbulent, fluctuating waves of sound and channel phasing effects. The texture, though busy, is serene compared to the fitful rhythms of *'Masks and Voices'*. The *Canta* pieces also make different demands on the



listener. Whereas in *'Masks and Voices'* one struggles to hear what is going on in terms of how one strand interferes with another, here one is listening for longer-term shifts in the pattern of sound.

In *Four Songs*, 'song' is interpreted very widely to include an orchestral-like ensemble of voices and instrumentation, and two melodies sung by Susan Belling, who is accompanied by simple phrases played alternately on piano and vibes. The third song in the sequence: *Belgrano*, sets a famous speech by a politician against a fast bass, drums and piano accompaniment. The speech is highly fragmented by noisegate treatment but after two or three listenings it is possible to identify the speaker and the occasion. This act of identification is similar to the Gestalt process of recognising shapes or faces by extrapolating from small details.

*The Two Solos* are the closest Cunningham comes to pure systems-generated work; two simple phrases—sung in Idiolect, played in Invisible—are looped, echoed and run together so that they move in and out of phase like ticking clocks. ∞

Nicky Hamlyn



*Vinyl Requiem—String Section Performed at Tramway, Glasgow 1992 Photo Kevin Low*

At a time when Britain's crumbling 'new' and improvised music infrastructure is in need of (and is attempting some sort of) repair, it is useful to take a look at some of the many models that exist in Europe. A whole constellation of festivals exist to support music on the fringes of jazz and contemporary music and that which defies easy categorisation. British Musicians have long since given up the idea of earning money in their home countries; instead they look to festivals such as *Moers*, *Victoriaville*, *Van d'Oeuvre*, *MIMI*, and *Vilnius* as sources of income.

*Tatklos* is one of the more attractive options in the Euro-festival calendar offering artists decent accommodation, decent pay and, by no means least, three concerts to large audiences over three consecutive days in cities with under one hour's travel between them. If you're lucky enough to get a commission you get paid to write and rehearse too. Yet the festival isn't excessively state-funded; it's success is due to a consistently high level of quality programming. Over the ten years of its existence it has built up its substantial audience by shrewd programming decisions.

This year *Tatklos* celebrated its tenth anniversary with a whole batch of newly commissioned works. In Zurich the weekend kicked off with the **London Jazz Composers Orchestra**—the old men's improvising band (25 years old in '95). Composing for improvisers is a question of exploiting rather than suppressing the unique musical personalities at hand and in *'Portraits'*, leader Barry Guy chose to provide a specific environment for the musicians to solo in. So soprano saxophonist Trevor Watts' locale was suitably melodic and Afro-tinged, baritone saxophonist Paul Dunmall's robust and drummer Paul Lytton's scratchy and percussive. Significantly, the evening ended with two improvised duos **Misha Mengelberg/George Lewis** and **Irene Schweizer/Han Bennick**. All four are world class players from the original school who really do the form justice and turned in some of the best performances of the weekend.

Anarchism has always been implicit in improvised music, mirroring as it does the breakdown of imposed structure and the reasserting of unmediated individual creativity. In the sixties the music was overtly leftist but now there is a tendency for the anarchism to be increasingly explicit. **Phil Minton** and **Veryan Weston's** commission for improvising choir used text based around the life of Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno. *'Makhno'* included large unscripted passages relying on group improvisation to carry the piece and the high calibre group (Minton, Weston, Maggie Nicols, David Moss, Dorothea Sohurch, Sylvia Hallet, Vanessa Mackness, Dean Broderick) easily met the challenge with **Maggie Nicols** working herself into a tear-provoking trance: "*fear... courage... what's it all for... sensuous dissidence, celebration of resistance.*"

In terms of tantric balance **Elliott Sharp** brought us a darker vision moving us from bliss to agitation with his spindly digits hammering out harmonics on his double-neck bass and electric guitar. The evening ended with local rock band **Alboth!** joined by a squealing Swiss sax troupe. It's a conscious part of the *Tatklos* programming strategy to be open to different musical forms and to mix audiences. Rock in the context of **God** and **The Ex** (both on the bill last year) makes good programming sense but **Alboth!**'s combination of pseudo-exorcism and dodgy art-rock seems a



*Joëlle Léandre Photo Leonhard Mühlheim*

**Tatklos Festival** Bern, Basel & Zurich  
Switzerland 24-28 March  
**Time Festival** Ghent  
Belgium 27 April-7 May 1993

**1993**  
**Phil England**

**European Ex**



waste of time. The saxmen gave the impression of being purely jobbing and half the audience left.

Michel Seigner's 'Am Rand Der Zeit' commission was a rather austere post-Cagean orchestration featuring wide musical vocabularies but no forward motion or sense of shape. Percussionist Paul Lovens had the greatest



Han Bennink. Photo Manfred Rindersacher

expressive, textural and dynamic range and served as the only real point of interest. By contrast, double bassist Joelle Leandre's series of short commissioned pieces for herself, pianist and violinist was a highlight of the festival. Working within a similar contemporary classical terrain these warm, colourful players had fun with their austerity, and brought vitality and expressivity to the abstract language.

*Time* as a festival was a more rambling affair. Spread over two weeks with music, theatre, dance, performance, plastic arts, lectures and film in a variety of venues around the Flemish city of Ghent. Audience cross-over between these disciplines was not overly encouraged as many of the events were programmed simultaneously. The music was perhaps the strongest element with music-theatre venue Vooruit responsible for the programming.

The proceedings kicked off with five nights of Phil Jeck and Lol Seargeant's ambitious *Vinyl Requiem* project. Jeck's 'turntable orchestra' consists of 180 dansettes, whitewashed and stacked vertically to create a giant projection screen for Seargeant's visuals. It's a hypnotic, slowly shifting work built up from the layered loops of doctored records. Over four years of development the work has become an intricately scored audio-visual interaction which is full of detail.

The rest of the festival revolved around Fred Frith and a few of his many collaborators. Frith has worked in so many different contexts (Pan-European progressive rock, New York avant-rock, pop songs, ad-hoc improvising combinations internationally, work with The Residents, compositions for string quartet, guitar quartet, music for film, etc) that *Time* considered him the embodiment of what the festival intends to represent: the breaking down of musical barriers.

On top of two richly vibrant improvised concerts (one solo and one with the ever-creative endlessly energetic, Han Bennink), Frith presented two larger projects. *Que de la Guelle*—fifteen previously unemployed rock musicians from Marseilles played music they developed with Frith for the opera 'Helter Skelter' as well as their own compositions for the group. Two offshoots of *Que de la Guelle*—*Mais Bon* (adventurous jazz rock with Naked City spice), and *E Perigoloso Sporgersi* (weird industrial ramblings) also played a free concert in a central bar.

Frith's graphic scores 'Stone, Brick, Wood, Wire' precisely interpreted colour photocopies of photographs of buildings, etc.) were played by a mixture of local and international musicians, to an attentive and appreciative audience of some 400 people. The complex and controlled structuring of group dynamics made for some dramatic music.

Czech singer and violinist, Iva Bittova, appeared in the rock club Democracy—your standard black box "full of beer and tension" as Fred Frith would have it. Her delicate songs charm you into a passionate and childlike world whose vulnerability is its strength. A real coup to capture such an unlikely audience into hanging on her every note.

Sample-manipulator Bob Ostertag, performed his excellent 'Burns Like Fire' suite—using material he recorded at a "queer riot" in San Francisco—in the superb acoustics of the sadly marginalised venue, Logos.

The current high standard of programming indicates that this bi-annual festival (only in its second edition) can only go from strength to strength and continues to develop its young, alert, inquisitive audience for vital new music. And since the whole is embedded in a convivial (and civilised) drinking culture and takes place in the relaxed city of Ghent, it's an attractive option to pencil in for a holiday in 1995. ∞

report

# Experimental Music Festivals

# From the OffBeat... to the DeadPan

Graham Johnstone on  
Comix Culture

Working on popular corporate-owned characters, **Alan Moore** produced meta-comics which turned assumptions upside down and conducted fascinating experiments with form. He also imbued his work with a libertarian, socialist, feminist, ecological sensibility, and most amazingly became hugely popular in doing so. **Eddie Campbell** came from the opposite direction: quietly writing and drawing his autobiographical comics, which he photocopied and sold to friends, whilst having a day job in a factory. Moore had wanted to work with Campbell for years, and with *From Hell*, a slow-paced dialogue-oriented story, he found the right context.



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Strip from Darryl Cunningham's *Dark Tales* comic

The cover of the second issue shows a statue of Queen Victoria with a gull on her shoulder, which cleverly sums up the contents. The image is taken from a painting by Walter Sickert, who has been linked to the 'Jack the Ripper' murders, which are the focus of this story.

In the previous issue we saw Annie, one of Sickert's models seduced by an incognito 'Prince Eddy'. Inevitably she ends up pregnant, and the powers-that-be have her kidnapped to a mental hospital, where she is lobotomized by The Royal Physician, Sir William Gull. The current issue begins with the third chapter (of sixteen), called *Blackmail, or Mrs Barrett*, after one of Sickert's paintings. The woman in question is one of several of Annie's friends who are receiving threatening demands for protection money, far in advance of their prostitutes' earnings. Desperate, they use the only other source of power they have, and attempt, via

Sickert, to blackmail the Royal Family.

Chapter 4 unsurprisingly begins with Victoria despatching Gull to kill them, in response to which he enlists Netley, a cab driver 'more familiar with this class of person and their habitat'. For the greater part of this issue we follow Gull and Netley as they visit various significant places, including Battle Bridge where Bœdicea was killed, William Blake's grave, and various typically sinister Hawksmoor churches. The purpose of this within the story is for Gull to captivate Netley with the power of freemasonry—presumably the most effective means to his obedience and silence. Gull is inspired by the city to discourse around the Dionysian architects; the bicameral nature of the mind; the religious significance of the sun and moon; the subsumption of Paganism by Christianity; and, the relative power of men and women in history. It has been suggested that Sickert in his painting was pointing the finger at Gull as Victoria's agent, and the careful disfigurement of the bodies would support the idea of a surgeon being the culprit.

'The Ripper' story seems to capture the essence of the England in the 1880's, which in turn, Moore argues, 'contains the seeds of the 20th Century not only in terms of politics and technology, but also in the fields of art and philosophy'. He presents a convincing case both in the story and in his extensive annotations.

Eddie Campbell's early work used letratone—mechanically printed tones on self-adhesive film—in an innovative and highly painterly way. In contrast, he draws *From Hell* in brush and flexible nib, creating an effect halfway between period engravings and Impressionist



Cover: *From Hell* by Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell

paintings. It occasionally looks clumsy and inept, but is mostly effective and sometimes brilliant. In any case drawings which were too resolved or polished would tend to draw too much attention to themselves, like an inappropriate solo in a piece of music. In both *Alec* and his later *Bacchus*, Campbell dealt with long narrative monologues with a combination of metonymy and 'flashback' techniques—often depicting events through different eyes. He avoids such Modern devices here, relying instead on well observed body language and use of the setting to dramatise the text.

A brief note on the publishing context may be of interest. At the height of his critical and financial success Moore quit mainstream publishing and set up *Mad Love*—which publishes *From Hell*—in association with *Tundra*. *Tundra* are **Eastman** and **Laird** who made a fortune as creators of *Those Turtles*, and now in the manner of *The Beatles'* Apple Corporation wish to support worthwhile and fairly acommercial work.

**Darryl Cunningham** continues to self-publish, although he has previously appeared in seminal UK small press flagship *Fast Fiction* (a large scale Canadian independent), and in an obscure Glasgow-based anthology. *Dark Tales* is an anthology containing some interconnected stories and others with a similar mood. The title is true enough, there's cynicism, determinism, pessimism and outright cruelty in these pages. I'm sure, though, that the author would argue that, like Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* or J.G. Ballard's 'terminal ironies', he is portraying the world as it is, not as he'd like it to be.

Many of his stories are, or might be, set in 'Jaracanda'—not so much a fictional city as a city of fictions. The protagonist of *Into the Mirror* has the power to see a few pages ahead, and discovers that his lover is going to be killed. He 'sees' a man in the building opposite, pierce her mouth with a genital-looking blade growing from his body, yet does nothing.

*(Stopping it) would place too much stress on the delicate balance the city holds. So I've been told to... let this rogue storyline run its natural course and tie up the loose ends.'*

*Poison* is narrated by a Howard Hughes style character who, horrified

and revolted by the outside world, hides in a protective, but brutalising accumulation of power. The story is encapsulated by a scene where a fly penetrates the air conditioning: "I watch it buzz around for a while before summoning someone to spray it. They carefully sweep it up and throw it away."

The drawing matches the vitality of the prose with lots of 'hand-held' camera' and strange perspectives that suck you into this disturbing but compelling world.

**David Shrigley's** *Merry Eczema* is published by Black Rose in Glasgow. Perhaps it's a book that would seem incongruous anywhere, as it certainly does beside their other offerings of Bolan archifacts and Celtic Cards. It is a collection of strange and humorous single panels with—usually—deadpan captions. A tabloid editor would call them 'gag cartoons', but I doubt if Shrigley would be happy in such low-brow company.

I hesitate to use the word 'surrealist', but Shrigley does seem to be trying to make chance or non-rational connections, to achieve a greater level of communication or resonance. It's a comedy of incongruity, both within the picture, and between picture and text. Two men find a figure in the boot of a car: "It's the Deacon!" The rabbit jumps out of the hat and bites the magicians hand. Occasionally he creates humour out of the congruity: 1st Spider—"Name the first three words that come into your head": 2nd Spider—"Web, Fly and Hairy". When he stops trying to be funny he often hits a disturbing truth that lingers with us and which we can't explain. But then we don't need Freud to tell us that a joke disappears if you analyse it. A tiny man stares impassively at you, out the top of your soft boiled egg saying, "You are almost exactly as I imagined you."

Finally, I would like to point out that there is surely a drawing missing from this collection; the one which says "With a name like Shrigley, David knew he must become a cartoonist."

*Great Pop Things* collects **Colin B. Morton** and **Chuck Death's** strips from the NME and elsewhere, and presents a convincing case for being the best single-volume overview of rock and pop available. Actually, it's less about the music than about the image,

marketing and hype. The authors even admit this—in a roundabout way—when they say in the Rolling Stones episode: 'during the '70s and '80s they did nothing of interest, only made records.'

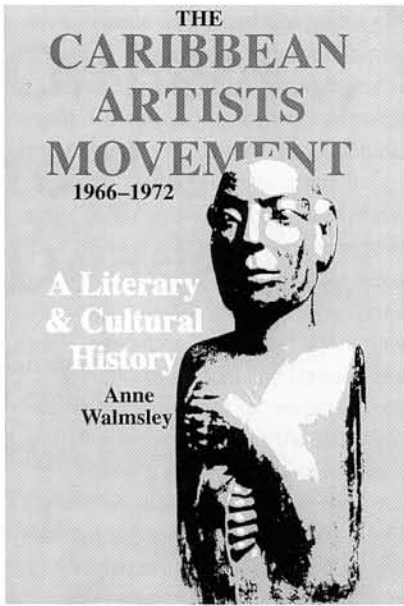
It starts with Bill Haley ('The first white man to invent Rock 'n'Roll') and proceeds to jump between times and fashions at random, or at least at whim. Each set of four tiny panels explodes with ideas, references and jokes. They are inspired and incisive as often as they're clever for the sake of it or just plain daft, although everyone will have their own view of which is which.

'Elvin (sic)Costello—*The Far from Mellow Fellow*' reveals that the naturally timid Declan is actually the son of wrestler Mick McManus, who only agreed to let him be a singer if he 'sang vitriolic songs with a proper (ie. electric) guitar'. He goes on to rename himself after Elvin P and comedian Lou Costello, in the hope of having the wit of one and the voice of the other. Bongo (sic) turns out to be the son of Cher and Sonny Bongo, which explains why he named his band after their hit "I got U2 babe."

Reading them all in the one volume you get to appreciate how references reappear and they make jokes about their earlier jokes. One of the first strips deals with how The Clash tried to change the world by wearing trousers with words on (not 'destroy', but 'nevertheless', 'toast' and 'putty'). In a much later episode about the Manic Street Preachers (a band 'influenced by' The Clash) we hear how The Clash sold out by advertising trousers without words on them. The picture shows them with 'Solders' written across their back pockets, which is also a joke on Joe Strummers first band the 101'ers. There is so much detail and and so many quotable examples I could go on for ever, or at least until it went out of fashion.

*Great Pop Things* interests me more as an observer of popular culture, than as a comics critic or creator. The work does suit the form though: the drawings are always wittily out of key with the text. Like the three-minute-pop-song, the four panel format provides a valuable discipline, and Morton and Death make every note count. ∞

Graham Johnstone



**The Caribbean Artists Movement  
1966–1972 A Literary & Cultural History**  
by Anne Walmsley  
New Beacon Books Ltd  
£15.95 pb; £35 hb

**CAM** starts by saying that liberation begins in the imagination—‘We don’t have an official membership. We don’t have officer responsibility but worker responsibility. People find this structure hard to grasp’. (John La Rose). The Caribbean Artists Movement lasted from 1966 to 1972 but its impact was far-reaching. ‘The concept behind its informal structure was that of a community’. Its founder members recognised one fundamental issue, that for the artists of a marginalised culture there is little or no assessment of their creative output. Genuine criticism will not exist within a context defined by the dominant culture. Even where such creative output is noticed by the dominant culture it remains subject to it, judged by its criteria of what is ‘good’.

Ultimately the sure basis for critical recognition by the establishment is assimilation. The greater the distance you place between your art and your culture is the extent to which the guardians of the dominant culture will grant you that recognition. Assimilation does not guarantee reward but it sets you on the trail. If you exercise your freedom of choice to reject assimilation you will be rewarded by critical neglect, not to mention a dire lack of dough.

During the 1950s and ‘60s West Indian art was not unknown in mainstream circles, particularly its literature through the work of writers such as V. S. Naipul, George Lamming and Derek Walcott; perhaps Sam Selvon and Wilson Harris. But other artists were around and a critical context was missing. One of CAM’s founder members was the poet and educator E K Brathwaite whose published work had received almost no attention whatsoever, neither from the dominant culture of the ruling British elite, nor from his own West Indian community: ‘Our problem is that we have been trained for over 300 years to despise (our) indigenous forms.’ Brathwaite had worked in Ghana during the period of Nkrumah and Independence and become ‘immersed in the rural community life and traditional culture’ of West Africa.

At the first public meeting of CAM he argued the case for ‘a jazz novel’, that there was ‘a correspondence between jazz and contemporary Caribbean culture... the basic elements of word, image and rhythm; the nature of improvisation, of repetition and refrain’; and that the ‘oral tradition provided a model for West Indian literature... suggestive of an indigenous aesthetic for West Indian creativity and criticism.’

The influence of Caribbean music was crucial. A later public meeting was devoted to ‘Sparrow and the language of the Calypso’ and another founder member, the poet and publisher John La Rose had already written on kaiso and calypso. From an early age La Rose had been politically active in Trinidad. Former General Secretary of the Workers Freedom Movement, he later held the same office for the West Indian Independence Party, at the same time ‘producing *Voice of Youth*, a fortnightly radio programme’. Still in his twenties he was forced into exile.

The third founder member was Andrew Salkey who often met La Rose at the same protests and demonstrations in London. Salkey was a free-lance broadcaster (interviewing Martin Luther King on three occasions) and had a very wide network of contacts. As a student at London University he also ‘devised an alternative learning plan’ for himself: ‘I damn well wanted to talk to Jamaicans about

Jamaica in the long poem I was hoping to write.’

Of the broader political agenda Salkey makes a key comment in relation to the different formations that existed during the 1960s—including the Black Power groups—that ‘no one group had it all, and I figured I’d serve nearly all and be useful to all’. CAM was always a MOVEMENT But it would be a mistake to place too great an emphasis on the founder members; they were acquainted with a circle of committed individuals, many artists among them. One of the impressive aspects of CAM is the number and multiplicity of its participants (ages ranging from C L R James to the young Ngugi and the even younger L K Johnston). It was an extremely ambitious project and, given the nature of its structure, could not have succeeded to the extent it did without such commitment.

CAM began quite simply as a means by which ‘writers, artists and people interested in literature, art and culture’ could come together. Literature was the predominant artform but painters, musicians, sculptors and theatre workers were also involved. From informal gatherings held in the homes of members it was broadened out to public meetings and ‘included talks and symposia, readings and performances, art exhibitions and films... and a newsletter, bookselling and contact network.’ At its first conference the historian Elsa Goveia argued in her keynote speech that artists have a choice

“between the inferiority/superiority ranking according to race and wealth and the equality which is implied by one man one vote (and) until then we cannot be really creative as individuals because our energies are going to be absorbed by the terrible job of working from two completely different sets of premises...” She also established the point “that the creative arts were at the forefront of... social change.”

This raised all kinds of questions, e.g. ‘the sort of art the committed artist should produce... which art forms were most effective... how the artist communicates and to whom’ etc. The painters Aubrey Williams and Clifton Campbell who ‘both worked in predominantly abstract styles were concerned to defend

it as no less socially committed than figurative painting... 'Williams 'asked for freedom for the artist to explore his own style: 'If our painters must grope and search and forge ahead, we do not as yet know the language they should speak'. He spoke of his doubts on 'narrative painting' as 'hand-me-down missionary art', in danger of becoming 'tourist representational art'. The response from the audience to the work of the visual artists under discussion forced him to 'conclude that the level of visual art appreciation among intellectuals is very, very low...'

The conference was such an exciting and unique event that how to follow it was a major problem. John La Rose was moved to write to Brathwaite that 'CAM is a movement... not a structure. We... have struck a chord. With such things in my experience, people take out of it what they are looking for and bring what they must give. Then the commotion is over. And it lives; and we inherit it; and it passes on. The vital spark of life and spontaneity, as I have discovered, in my own life, is not long-lasting. Glowing embers remain and we mistake it for fire. I mention this only that we would know what to expect.'

That was in 1967, some five years before CAM's eventual demise. It is impossible to do justice to the impact and legacy of the Caribbean Artists Movement, both culturally and in the broader political context, perhaps also to its organising influence in the struggle against racism throughout the past 20 years. Anne Walmsley's book is seminal—it should be required reading for any artist or activist. ∞

Jim Kelman

## Cassette Mythos

Editor Robin James

Autonomea 0-936756-69-1

£9.95



'An insiders look at a phenomenon that has galvanised and revolutionised contemporary culture', is the proud boast of *Cassette Mythos*. Divided into five sections: the cassette, legends, networking, the imagination and the mythos, it certainly has its peaks and troughs. Since about 10% of it is interminable gibberish and one or two episodes actually unreadable there really should have

been a sixth section called cassette bathos. Just exactly what it is about this collection which could be said to convey a revolution in contemporary culture is difficult to ascertain; not the layout for sure which simply struggles to convey.

Despite the emphasis on disclosing methods of production throughout, all matters relating to the production of the book itself—the selection procedure for instance—are conspicuously absent, no doubt this conceals a multitude of at least five of the seven deadly sins. Despite the repetition of the 'absolutely infinite possibilities inherent in the network', the editor, **Robin James**, is offering us something of a gang-hut. The intention was to offer a popular-mechanics-type handbook for home-tapers—a manual for enthusiasts by enthusiasts—and that could well have been an original idea, but given that most if not all of the better, more important contributions have appeared elsewhere, words like 'lashed together re-hash' start springing to mind. It is hard to believe that the 'contributors' were offered any real say in their part in the compendium. Someone seems to have re-written **Steve Moore's** *the recording studio as a musical instrument* (hopefully him). It almost deliberately seems to lose the dynamic of the network it chose to represent through 'little things' like no addresses being given for any of the contributors, even though the virtues of immediate communication with the artists is set forward as the mainstay, the whole purpose of the network.

One definition of the cassette network, provided via an academic paper by **Steve Jones** (a professor in a Department of Journalism), sees it as existing in opposition to the traditional music industry and aiming to empower those without access to the mass media. We are brought through a history of the development of recording cartridges in the '30s, the ill-fated production of the 8-track cartridge in the '60s (ditched by the punters but still used by the radio industry for those snappy jingles) and the development of the compact cassette by Phillips in '64. The emphasis of the lecture shifts into the breakthroughs in home recording, at first with the 4-track open reel to reel in the '70s (when the bottom

dropped out of the quadraphonic market) latterly with the 4-track cassette deck with built-in mixing boards offered by Tascam and Fostex. Jones couples this technical history with a commentary on the Record Companies' strenuous efforts to blame the home-taper for the stagnation in their sales and lobby the US congress to 'amend' copyright law and slap a megatax on blank cassettes. Their rage is now psychotic with the arrival of DAT and its clone-like replications, here they seem to want a mission-impossible type auto-destruct button built in to all DAT equipment, which activates any time someone attempts to deprive Michael Jackson and Bubbles the chimp of their royalties.

The corporate media are blamed (quite rightly) for every conceivable sin and folly in respect of deliberate disregard for artistic standards in several other more personable articles, or as **Dan Fioretti** puts it: '*Young MTV fan turns on yon TV, is mucho impressed with fabulous babe on the screen, runs out and buys the LP—and for this reason you can't buy a copy of Amon Düll II live at Arnie's Bowl-a-Rama.*'

Although the US viewpoint tends to predominate, some attempt has been made to illustrate more global uses of the cassette: this becomes paradoxical in one case, which is written as an "ethnomusicologists" assessment of commercial cassette recordings of traditional music in Java, ostensibly concealing what is one more contribution to an overabundance of white, male, western, slightly arty and truculent viewpoints. Undoubtedly the Corporate Media product sucks the sweat off a dead man's balls as our American cousin's would put it—but that promise of an insider's look at revolutionary galvanisation has to yield up a bit more than just the insiders and their crusading rhetoric for any edifices to crumble and fall.

More modest and open writing can be found however; **Eugene Chadbourne's** 'my recording career' is self-explanatory and pragmatic enough even to survive being dubbed a legend by Robin James. **Steve Peters/Rich Jensen's** 'the tape recorder as audio camera', although conveying a sense of loss, fights back against the paranoia about recording engendered by the

Corporations:

*'Photography has never forsaken its amateur users—people who participate in the making of images (mostly of a documentary nature) for their own enjoyment. Meanwhile, amateur sound recording has moved in almost entirely the opposite direction. People now use the equipment in their houses almost solely for the playback of pre-recorded, commercially produced cassettes. If the record button is ever used, it is usually to tape songs from records, ironically re-consuming a product which has already been once consumed.'*

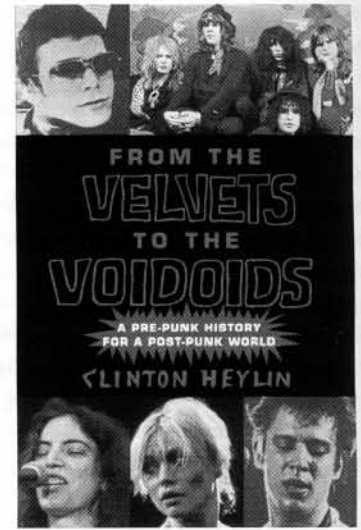
Uses of the cassette are not of course restricted to music. Its use as a dramatic tool is seen in the account of **Peter Flik**, who while driving home from his job at a radio station and feeling suitably depressed, started talking into his walkman about his own personal hell. He sent the tape to a friend who recorded his own highly personal reply, which Flik decided to broadcast on his radio programme to thousands of listeners. It was a success and a second tape was produced with the intention of being even more intimate—supposedly climaxing in the listener's masturbatory orgasm. This was broadcast on Dutch National Radio (where else?) at prime time. A series of 'horror plays' followed with a group of individuals recording their innermost and worst fears. Other ventures included a psycho-geographical tape for car radio.

Pioneer publications and practitioners are identified throughout the book. *OP* magazine ('81-'84, although dates differ) in the US seems the contender for the first 'major' magazine deliberately (although it seems to have happened by serendipity) acting as a stimulus and an exchange forum. Needless to say, the magazine split into factions, which resulted in *Option* (which features more well-known alternative music) and *Sound Choice* (more devoted to contact addresses). 'Smaller' publications such as *ND* and *Factsheet Five* (which itself seems to have changed direction) are also given their place on the rostrum and a laurel wreath tucked behind their ears. Influential European practitioners cited include Faust and Throbbing Gristle in terms of their development of a network without the help of a major

label. TG also produced an early newsletter, soliciting all that was outré and released early tape-only works by the likes of Clock DVA and Cabaret Voltaire.

In its attempts to provide a historical overview, *Cassette Mythos* exudes an all too convenient atmosphere of fin de siècle, or to put it another way—cashing in on something that Autonomedia thinks might be hip. The kind of people who drool over *ReSearch* might snap it up and indeed it all comes across as an ideological convenience store for people who haven't got the time or the inclination to actually participate in all this. An important distinction to make is that although the collection is bad, as a project in its own right, some of the writing, inasmuch as it reflects the activities of certain artists—however it ended up in here—is interesting. Some of the more successful artists have moved to CD, but have taken the 'spirit of the network' with them. In a few cases this has engendered revealing skimishes with the Corporate music Barons, usually ending up in the legal quagmire of alleged copyright infringement. **John Oswald's** article *Plunderphonics* (which appeared in *ReRecords* some years ago) and is reproduced here, is a worthwhile examination of the artistic ramifications of all this corporate greed, censorship and paranoia. Oswald is well qualified to speak out in this department: as the producer of a CD containing manipulations of music by the Beatles, Michael Jackson and so forth, all scrupulously credited, and with all 1,000 CD's given away free to offset potential prosecution, he still managed to fall foul of the Canadian Recording Industry Association, who—as the villain of the piece—deemed that all distribution should cease and that all remaining copies should be destroyed. And they got their way. But all such victories are contingent, and here the Cassette underground—which can spot a cause célèbre a mile off—came to the rescue, taping the CD and distributing it to all who chose to care. We can only echo their detoured rallying cry "*Home taping is killing the Music Industry—and its so easy*" ∞

Billy Clark



**From The Velvets to the Voidoids:**  
**A Pre-Punk History of a Post-Punk World**  
*Clinton Heylin*  
 Penguin £9.99

This is a book about American punk. As the blurb notes, it's the first overview of the US scene. Clinton Heylin kicks off with the Velvet Underground and divides the musicians he deals with into 'arties' and 'rockers'. The author doesn't pay much attention to background details and ignores a lot of material that would greatly strengthen his argument about the art input into punk. Perhaps the most obvious omission is any mention of Henry Flynt, who stood in for John Cale at a number of Velvet Underground gigs. Flynt also organised the protest group Action Against Cultural Imperialism with Tony Conrad, the man whose apartment was used by the Velvets as a rehearsal space. Likewise, Flynt was an associate of La Monte Young who greatly influenced Cale and both these men played an important role within Fluxus, which again goes unmentioned by Heylin. In my opinion, Flynt was the single most interesting figure on the New York avant garde scene of the sixties and it is a great pity Heylin fails to deal with him. Flynt's 'radical avant garde hillbilly music' is infinitely superior to anything the Velvets ever achieved with their conventional rock instruments. If you can get hold of a copy, check out *You Art My Everlovin'! Celestial Power* issued on cassette by Edition Hundertmark. Apart from the Velvets, the acts given

most space in this book are the MC5, Stooges, Modern Lovers, Suicide, Patti Smith, Television, Blondie, Ramones, Heartbreakers, Voidoids, Talking Heads and Pere Ubu. Personally, I could do without the coverage of MOR groups such as Talking Heads—but on the whole the book is interesting. However, for reasons best known to himself, Heylin treats Richard Hell as a 'serious writer'. Hell is one of a number of New York punks whose artistic pretensions are simply comic. While Hell came up with a handful of good songs and some great fashion innovations, the reverence with which Heylin treats him is ludicrous.

Where this book really falls down is when Heylin deals with what he terms the 'fuck art, let's rock' acts. He is particularly vicious about the Dead Boys. A few paragraphs in the book are given over to the Damned's first US gig, at which the Dead Boys were the support act. Heylin comments: *'The Damned wrote better songs, played faster and were a lot funnier than their Cleveland cousins.'* I saw the Dead Boys support the Damned on a winter 1977 British tour and in my mind there's no doubt about the fact that the yanks wiped the floor with their Croydon cousins. Stiv Bators was great, he had on a really cheap pair of plastic trousers which ripped about two songs into the set so that his cock was hanging out of them. To crank up the outrage, he strangled himself. Finally, when the chants of "I'm so bored with the USA" became too much for Bators, he started smashing up equipment. The Damned's roadies immediately rushed on stage and beat him up. The Dead Boys were hilarious, their synthetic psychodrama was pure punk.

Heylin would have written a much better book if he'd been more sympathetic towards the Dead Boys, the Dictators and Wayne County. What we need are more specialised works, at least one devoted solely to the art connection and several about the 'rockers'—and not only US groups but British punk acts such as Eater, Slaughter and the Dogs, the Lurkers, Raped, the Cortinas, Cock Sparrer and the Pork Dukes. ∞

Stewart Home

## Contemporary Scottish Painting

by Bill Hare

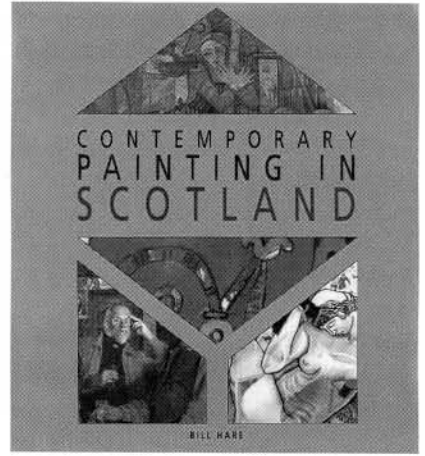
Craftsman House, Sydney, Australia £32.00

*Contemporary Scottish Painting* is a generous hard back volume which takes the work of forty eight artists to represent its subject. It begins with a substantial introductory essay followed by the artists in alphabetical order (Reinhard Behrens to Adrian Wiszniewski), each with text and, usually, an artist's comment. At £32 it feels expensive, a feeling increased by some poor photography and printing: the sections on **Fred Crayk**, **Dennis Buchan** and **Henry Kondracki**, for example.

The author presents an account of Scottish painting which is as tenable as any. It has the truth of familiarity. I recognise the image of Scottish painting which emerges, but without much pleasure. Every author has a right to tell his own story in his own way, so my response has little to do with who is left out. It has more to do with the lack of conviction, the sheer lack of interest, of so many of those chosen.

Whether or not the author believed that a truthful account must be a balanced one, with fair representation for all factions, this assembly is made for conflict. There are some improbable bedfellows. What could bring that old master of West Coast sword fencing, **David Donaldson**, into the company of **Tom Lawson**, who couldn't shake a brush at a canvas in Donaldson's terms? Or **Duncan Shanks** and **Callum Innes** for that matter? Or **Frances Walker** and **Glen Onwin**?

'Contemporary', it seems, is used in a very commodious way. 'Recent' would have been better, for none of the work is new and most is familiar. More seriously, in what way, without doing violence to the meaning of the word, can the work of Donaldson, Shanks or Walker—or **Kate Downie**, **David Evans** or **Barbara Rae**—be called contemporary? Issues of quality aside, stylistically their work is as old as the hills. Is 'contemporary' not about new (or practically, very recent) developments, even at the risk of the merely novel? Taking its title at face value, this book is out of touch. This doesn't mean, though, that what **Bill Hare** has written and selected shouldn't be of



concern. It should. He is too honest a student of his subject to dissemble its weaknesses. His useful and wide ranging introduction goes a long way to explaining the book's bizarre inclusiveness. What it doesn't do is make this reader at least any happier with the condition of Scottish painting as he lays it before us. There is a rationale for the selection, though of a dispiriting kind.

It follows a long section charting the tortuous cultural history of this stateless nation. By the way, though I have every sympathy with his politics, in how many countries need a discussion of contemporary art begin in 1603? This is followed by a balanced evaluation of the (generally mediocre) work done in Scotland until the 1960s. The author then argues, in a reworking of the antique academic genre system, that this system can still be used to define the characteristics of contemporary painting in Scotland, in the absence of any stylistic criteria. In effect, much Scottish painting, he says, remains in thrall to the values of academic taste.

His argument is correct to a degree: any number of exhibitions will confirm it. The academicism which bedevils Scottish painting is an effect of factors such as the limited economy of art, the smallness of the art world and its consequent if sectoralised chumminess, the still powerful position of art schools and societies, the privileging of painting (though this last is as much cause as effect). What it doesn't provide is a substantive case for describing painting in Scotland in national terms. Our home-grown painters may be subject to the ravages of the academic virus but not all have succumbed. In any case, several of the

artists selected do not share this cultural history and others have fled Scotland. It is not uniformly shared or accepted. Efforts to circumscribe contemporary cultural practices by the language of nationhood are futile and, I think, undesirable. Sort the politics and let culture take care of itself. To borrow Tom Lawson's quote, "*Stories are better told in the pub than on the walls of a gallery.*"

Whatever the value of the genres, the fact remains that the bathos of academic taste is widespread and many of the artists here are damaged by it. Such work is undistinguished, conservative in a threadbare modernist way, repetitive, very often derivative and very, very polite. Some even manage to be all of these. Examples? The bogus expressionism of **John Houston** for a start. The etiolated politesse of **Elizabeth Blackadder**. The malodorous stuffed shirts of **Stephen Conroy**. **John Mooney's** ridiculous graphic frivolities. **Alison Watt's** pasty, glabrous mummies. The facile ditherings of **Russell Colombo**. The constipated epiphanies of **David Evans**. **Peter Howson's** Scotch beef stews (or are they just plain old mince?) **Fred Pollock's** paintings are the last a skilled craftsman would produce. Kate Downie uses coal dust in a picture of... a coal yard! Well, **Dennis Buchan** has painted the same picture for twenty years. **Jack Knox**, an intelligent artist, was knocked out by a horseshoe thrown by Philip Guston and never got over it. Don't they ever get bored with this reheated stuff?

The worst of Scottish painting lies in tame echoes of other movements, other artists. It is that art which has settled for the domestic recycling of big ideas into small ideas, for weak reflections and modest borrowings. It is contemporary only in the sense that its perpetrators are not yet dead, whatever the state of their art. Too much ought not to be made of it in public. Let it, with decency, be hauled to the basement which awaits it and put quietly away (but this, a small voice tells me, is likely to be called the Gallery of Scottish Art). I fear Bill Hare has been too kind.

Academicism is general throughout the Scottish system and reluctantly, I'm forced to agree that he has a point: this is it, like it or not. Although the virus is not localised, fully one third of the painters

here are more or less closely associated with the Royal Scottish Academy and most of the others, I would bet, aspire to be. Few have set fire to any heather. That some foreign fields may soon be ablaze is surely incredible.

I think also that isolating painting in this way has some uses, but cut off from commerce with other media, it is trapped in the ghetto of luxury products. Perhaps it forces a confrontation with the lurking Other, the academics of the meretricious and genteel. There no longer is an exclusive discourse of painting. Whatever future painting has, it will be in some sort of dialogue with other media, not all born in the fine art stables. On the evidence of this book, Scottish painting has barely stuck its nose out of the stable door. Unless it is bolder it may soon find that it can't come out at all.

The book is not filled, fortunately, by the pigmentally challenged. There are good to very good, serious painters of real achievement here, whose work is inescapable in any account of painting in Scotland. Artists who, though sometimes deep inside the institutions, have not lost their discrimination. Their work has a fuller sound than the feeble pipes and squeaks of the others. And among them? **John Bellany** and **Alan Davie**, though their best work is long behind them. **Ken Currie**, free now to really paint, though apocalyptic horrors. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, **Alexander Fraser**, the most purely gifted painter of his generation in Scotland, too little known. Tom Lawson, though this format can't make sense of his project. Glen Onwin, who has always made intellectually serious but visual art. And in their different ways **Stephen Campbell**, **Innes Kondracki**, **Peter Thomson**—these and some others are the light in the author's Manichean system. As a system it embraces both good and bad, inseparably, but let's not pretend that the bad is anything other than just that.

Perhaps Bill Hare, to paraphrase Gombrich on Ruskin, has laid the explosive charge which will blow the academic edifice sky high. Well, one can hope. At the very least young painters should read this book and learn. If they can afford it. ∞

Euan MacArthur

## The Future of Ritual

Richard Schechner  
Routledge £27.50 hb

## The Decadence of the Shamans

or; Shamanism as a Key to the secrets of Communism  
Alan Cohen  
Unpopular Books £3.00

Don't expect to find a neatly laid out logical argument in *The Future of Ritual*. What you get instead is a collection of independent writings reworked into a book which has the air of someone thinking aloud. This is in keeping with the author's view of things: '*My writing isn't finishable... Of everything it must be said, there is no final saying.*' Jayaganesh Richard Schechner is clearly at home with uncertainty and change: professor, theatre director, a New York Jew who converted to Hinduism in order to be admitted to Indian temple ritual. He is not one of those who think of 'the truth' as something to be grasped once and for all, or that it can be Possessed. Those who do take that view will find both his thinking, and the fluidity of his own identity, either irritating or repugnant.

While the chapters all resonate with one another, each one is a study in its own right. Their subject matter ranges from Indonesian shadow-puppet theatre, and the influence on it by Western scholars who tried to 'purify' the genre and return it to its classic form (i.e. static and incapable of developing in response to changing social realities) to the Lenten ritual plays of the Yaqui people of western Mexico and south-western USA; and, most fascinating of all, to the *Ramlila* of Ramnagar in India, where for a month each year an entire town becomes the re-enactment ground of the sacred epic of Ram and Sita, as told in the *Ramayana*: where physical space is changed into sacred geography and the young boys who play the roles are transformed—without ceasing to be what they already are—into gods, and are venerated as such.

This transformability is taken up and examined in an extended meditation on the nature of play, the field '*where the ultimate positivist distinction between "true" and "false", "real" and "unreal", cannot be made.*' Schechner



appeals here to Indian thought, where what we call reality is called *maya*, illusion; and creation is seen as the play (*lila*) of the divine, whose image is Shiva Nataraj, the Lord of the Dance dancing the world into being, whose dance is the world. Playfulness is creativity; seriousness is fixity (which is the real illusion). As Bakhtin said:

*'Old authority and truth pretend to be absolute... therefore their representatives... are gloomily serious. They cannot and do not wish to laugh... they do not recognise their own ridiculous faces or the comic nature of their pretensions to eternity and immutability. And thus these personages come to the end of their role still serious, although their spectators have been laughing for a long time. Thus play also has a political face, explored—although it needs a sight more exploring'—in the essay, 'The Street is the Stage'.*

And what is ritual anyway? While not attempting to limit the illimitable with a definition, Schechner throws out a few suggestions. Rituals are 'bridges—reliable doings carrying people across dangerous waters. It is no accident that many rituals are rites of passage'. A sublimation of violence—to "purify" violence, i.e. to "trick" violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals"—the effect being similar to the katharsis of ancient Greek drama. And ritual does collectively what art does for the individual; it provides a defence against undifferentiation—the irruption of the unconscious primary process, feared as a collapse into chaos, is tamed by the ritual, in which the action is over determined, exaggerated and made rhythmic (which causes the brain to release anxiety-reducing endorphins). Schechner speculates that ritual, which is after all ubiquitous, may indeed have a biological foundation; that in *the ritual Process itself* a pathway is being opened up between the old 'reptilian' brain and the neocortex, a *coadaptation* of genetic and cultural information.

And the future? Schechner cites the work of Jerzy Grotowski, who, with his group of collaborators, tries to dig down to a 'basic' layer of ritual actions underlying culturally specific forms, especially through the study of 'traditional', i.e. non-Western, sources. This 'objective drama' then becomes a

Way of Knowledge, analogous to yoga or shamanism. It is not very convincing, having a distinct flavour of European nostalgia for the 'primitive': Schechner himself criticises attempts to harvest the world's cultures as (in the present state of things at least) an expression of Western hegemony; we have to throw out the notion that some humans are more 'primitive'—or 'aboriginal'—than others. Biologically and culturally speaking, all *Homo Sapiens* have been on earth for the same amount of time, and all have undergone continuous historications. Although, as Freud believed, the child might be the parent to the adult, the so-called primitive is not the child to the so-called civilised.

The author of *The Decadence of the Shamans* has no such caveats: he freely uses examples of the spiritual practices of contemporary 'archaic' societies in support of his own historical myth. He is one of a line of thinkers, like Marcuse and Norman O Brown, who wish to make a complete theory of the human condition by reconciling Marx and Freud—a tempting project, given that both saw human beings estranged from their own 'true' nature. And of all the Procrustean beds on which Karl Marx has been made to lie, this must be one of the strangest.

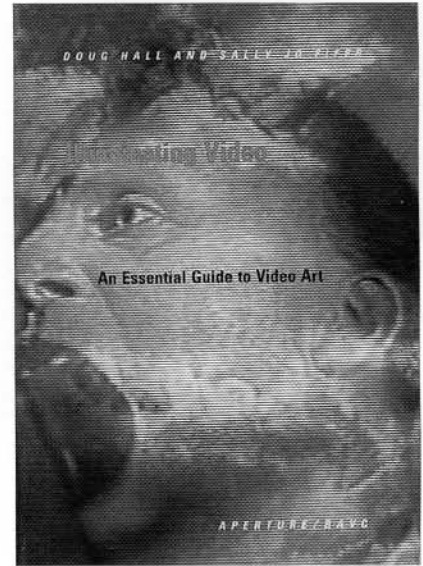
The book began as a paper written for the International Association for the History of Religion Regional Conference on northern and circumpolar regions (Helsinki, 1990). Its main theme is that the division of soul and body (shamans leave their bodies behind when going on their spirit-journeys), like the split between 'man' and nature, is made necessary by the conditions of economic scarcity that have hitherto applied. But with the establishment of communism in the post-scarcity era these divisions can be healed, and the spiritual richness of the old shamanic societies, up till now discarnate, can be restored 'at a higher level'.

All this is fine, and not entirely unfamiliar to anyone who has read Blake, but it is certainly not implicit in either Marx or Freud. When Marx wrote of the 'resolution of the conflict between man and nature', he almost certainly meant the complete subjugation

of nature by (technological) 'man'. And Freud believed that repression, for all its terrible exactions, was the necessary price to pay for any worthwhile kind of human existence.

In his eagerness to reconcile Marx and the spiritual, the author can be fairly breathtaking. For example: *'...realising one's Buddha-nature—which is just another way of describing the total universal development of the productive powers of the individual'*. Quite. ∞

Simon Brown



### **Illuminating Video:**

*An Essential Guide to Video Art*

Edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer,  
Aperture/Bay Area Video Coalition,  
New York 1990

UK distribution by Robert Hale (London)  
ISBN 0-89381-390-7 £14.95

### **Video By Artists 2**

Edited by Elke Town

Art Metropole, Toronto 1986

ISBN 0-920956-20-3 £13.95

Sometimes a new cultural product gets a worldwide launch and instantaneous sales in fifty nations. And sometimes it's about video. In this instance, the ugly duckling of the artworld is nested in two remarkable books, one from the US, the other from Canada, which have only leaked across to the UK several years after their initial production. Interestingly enough, *Video by Artists 2* places itself in a landscape of publica-



*Illuminating Video illustration*

tions almost none of which have had significant UK distribution, John Hanhardt's *Video Culture*, which was occasionally available, and Peter d'Agostino's *Transmission*, which I bought in New York and have never seen here (though a new edition will be available from Sage next year).

To some extent, this slow transatlantic passage isn't so important, as it usually takes a similar amount of time for tapes, and even longer for installations, to make it across the water, despite our unflinching belief, in the teeth of the evidence, that we live in a postmodern world of instantaneous communication. Only the wealthy, the powerful and the banal are instantaneously communicated: the weak, the peripheral and the interesting still have to travel by mule train. Both these titles are well worth the wait, and will be particularly handy as we prepare for a series of major retrospectives of US video artists later this year and early next.

The **Doug Hall and Sally Fifer** collection is a big fat book with nearly

40 contributions divided into sections marked Histories, Furniture/Sculpture/Architecture, Audience/Reception: Access/Control, Syntax and Genre and Telling Stories. A healthy proportion of the authors are artists—**Chip Lord, the Yonemotos, the Vasulkas, Viola, Hill, Birnbaum, Rosler, Muntadas...**—while others come from the small band of curators and critics that have built up the US culture into a comparatively secure area of work—**Margaret Morse, John Hanhardt, Maureen Turim and Marita Sturken.** All the pieces are specially written for the collection, and the mix of artist's statements and documentation with critical surveys and theoretical argumentation is sensitively and successfully negotiated. The historical essays in particular are fascinating for the way in which some shared sense of the birth pangs of electronic media arts seems to be gelling in North America.

But this, in a sense, is the problem. The title, to start with, is slightly misleading, unless you honestly believe that the 'essence' of video art is North American, since there's no writing on or by anyone else, and little enough, beyond **Coco Fusco's** extremely useful essay on Latino media arts, on the non-white art practices even in North America. I find myself caught in a double bind here, because I loved the book. It's informative, challenging, feisty and infuriating, just like a good anthology should be. And yet it seems at the same time to represent something that I see as a terrible danger for media and electronic arts; the formation of a canon.

I suppose to some extent this is a necessary phase through which video has to travel. In order to gain access to the machinery of the art world, to get the grants, the subsidies and the sales, you have to mark out a terrain in recognisable terms: here is a list of the major works, these are the stars of the video firmament, now sponsor a retrospective. But it goes so against the grain of what should surely be the first art form to arrive after the collapse of

canonical art history. And when the canon seems to be being formed on the same principle as the artworld's usual exclusions of non-white, non-Northern cultures, we're in trouble. What's even more frightening is that not a single author in the collection wants this to happen, and many argue actively against such processes, including the editors. It's as if the formation of a tradition of Great Figures is spontaneously generated from the culture, despite the contributors' best efforts.

That this doesn't happen in **Elke Town's** collection is perhaps a function of two aspects of her anthology. First, it doesn't aim to be essential, but to be part of an occasional series of Art Metropole collections, explicitly supplementary to other available texts, and therefore freed of the necessity to cover the main bases. And second, it's a Canadian collection, from a culture that has great difficulty in distinguishing itself from its Southern neighbour, but which nonetheless experiences itself as marginal. *Video by Artists* is then forced into a kind of freedom. European and North American writers jostle, and the sense you take away is that this is an area of non-integration, of frictions and multiple experimentations on mutually contradictory lines—in fact, a diverse cultural field whose strength is precisely that it continues to diversify. Though just as blind to non-white arts, Town's collection is less of a blockbuster, less of an 'essential' purchase, and more temporary, more open therefore, and more democratic. Perversely, its not such a good book, though serious video buffs will want a copy.

We do all need a copy of the Hall and Fifer book, damn it. But we also need to take it carefully and surgically apart, and to understand why no-one is going to do a similar thing for European video, or why it would have to be quite utterly different, much more like the Canadian series, ongoing, always ready to be corrected. ∞

Sean Cubitt

**INFO**

**COMIX INFO...**...From Hell Volume 2 is published by Mad Love Publishing in Association with Tundra Publishing: 320 Riverside Drive, Northampton, MA 01060, USA. \$5.95. Available in comic shops in the UK for around £3... **Dark Tales** (£1.75) and **Invisible Comic 1 and 2** (£1.25 each) are available from Darryl Cunningham, 63 Whin Knoll Avenue, Blackhill, Keighley, West Yorks, BD21 2HY. Add 25p each for P + P... **Great Pop Things** is published by Penguin at £5.99... **Merry Eczema** is available from David Shrigley: Apt 1/L, 23 Bentinck Street, Glasgow G3 7TS... Most books reviewed here are available from good bookshops... **New Beacon Bookshops** at 76 Stroud Road, London N4 (Write for catalogue)... **Unpopular Booktitles** and **Autonomea** material are available from **Counter-Productions**, PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL—extensive catalogue available

## ***Is technology encoded in gender specific terms?***



*The perceived bias of **technology** operates on a number of levels, from precluding easy access to women to reinforcing certain social relations in the acquisition of knowledge and use of technologies...*

### ***But the prospect of discussing***

*this area in these terms is flawed, marred partly by the lack of language developed around the ideological, and therefore cultural implications of technology, and partly due to the application of particular feminist templates to resort to reductionist politics and, therefore, immutable positions...*

# *Gender*



article one

Video Still from Judith Goddard's *Garden of Earthly Delight*, composed on a Quantel Harry



It is in light of this conundrum and in response to recent developments in feminist thinking by commentators such as Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant, whose article *Beyond the Screens: Film, Cyberpunk and Cyberfeminism* was printed in issue 14 of *Variant*, that Catherine Elwes has written her article. These two pieces formed the basis of presentations delivered at the seminar *Gender and Technology: Short-circuiting the System* held at Tate Gallery Liverpool. Other speakers included Sara Diamond, a practitioner and head of the TV and Video Programme at The Banff Centre for the Arts (Canada), Susan Collins, an artist using advanced technologies and Delta Streete, a video and performance artist.

Both Sadie Plant and Catherine Elwes explore the issue of technology in terms of sexual difference. Essentially, Sadie Plant suggests both women and technology converge as marginalised sites designated in the role of servicing a mainstream culture which is predominantly patriarchal. For Sadie Plant, women, like technology, are beyond nature pushed to the sides of culture and as such represent a 'virtual reality'. The development of connectivist and advanced technologies offers a site through which women can adopt the guise of the cyberfeminist and thereby bring about the demise of the patriarchal text. At the risk of making crude distinctions, Catherine Elwes adopts a socialist feminist perspective couched in terms

of pragmatic materialism to raise a cautionary note around the possibilities of technology for women and female identities. For Elwes, technology is positioned very much within culture which is patriarchal yet which is also the site of struggle and contestation marked in terms of gender, class and race.

Sadie Plant's article and the following form part of a new series by *Variant* to address this issue. By so doing, it is hoped that the debate generated through these follow up articles will contribute towards the language and conceptual framework in negotiating the relation of technology and gender and culture.

Helen Cadwallader

T E X T B Y C A T H E R I N E E L W E S

My mind is still reeling from the apocalyptic vision of the future that Sadie Plant, Donna Haraway and a timely Channel 4 series have beamed down to me over the last couple of months. Through the familiar taste of my morning coffee, I envisage a world in which the difference between men and women have dissolved, humans and machines merge, time and space fuse. As I argue with my son about his unfinished homework, I speculate about my unrecognisable great-great-grandchildren, custom-made, undoubtedly blonde and blue-eyed and completely reliable about homework. I then nervously negotiate the school run and begin to worry about the future criminalisation of technology. Each new development will spawn new crime "even before it hits the streets." Returning to feed the cat, I see in her rhythmical purring the first stirrings of a race of super-felines ready to take over once humanity has finally been annihilated by its own inventions. The Revenge of Nature. I open the final demand for my phone bill and reassure myself that this surely won't happen in my lifetime. I then settle back into the everyday anxieties of an everyday single parent.

But it's not so easy to dismiss these futuristic visions. Sadie Plant's Cyberfeminist theories claim that somehow all this is going to be good for me as a woman, as a feminist, perhaps even as an artist, so I now attempt to respond to some of her ideas, not in order to refute or even confirm Cyberfeminism as the new orthodoxy, but to contribute another, somewhat fractured perspective on the issues she has raised.

Much computer technology was developed to promote and speed up global communication and yet somehow the effect is one of disconnection and distance. Individuals are increasingly locked into the isolation of their homes (it isn't safe to go out) and they only make contact with the outside world through

telecommunications and networked computer-information systems. Not so much distance learning as living at a distance. The cybernetic future that Sadie Plant describes similarly conjures up distance and a flight from the existential present. Escape from reality into Virtual Reality, escape from the body, escape from the difficulties of inter-personal relations, escape from biology, escape from history and most significantly perhaps, escape from difference. This is a complicated package we are now being offered and I shall attempt to tease out some of its implications. I do not subscribe to the view that the escapism we are witnessing is a transcendental urge to break the boundaries of the body on a spiritual quest for the divine. Although the compulsion to do what has never been done is undoubtedly a factor, virtuality is also an inability to face the social, political and ecological present. Cyberfeminism could itself be an escape from feminism. Sadie Plant characterises Patriarchy as "a self-destruct mechanism with no history, no political project." We have to admit that in spite of modern feminism, the lot of women, taken globally, has not significantly improved. So, we may indeed find it easier to wait for men to destroy Patriarchy for us rather than ourselves find new political initiatives. In this way we may also disown history or rather her-story beginning with the pioneering work of the suffragettes, down to current campaigns for abortion, childcare, equal pay and so on. In escaping our history, we may also escape our mothers. We can dismiss the partial victories of '60s feminists and denigrate the female biology that they celebrated. This uncomfortable biology still binds us to our mothers and with Patriarchy proving so very resilient, many women do indeed experience biology as destiny. It isn't surprising therefore, that a disillusioned younger generation may be looking for another way to throw off their biological shackles. In this context, the limitless out-of-body experiences of virtual reality



become an attractive proposition. There is the promise of new identities. A simulated world can be experienced from the central position of masculinity. Every possible permutation of any lived experience can be safely tried on for size with no physical consequences. As Sadie Plant points out, disguise is nothing new to women who have played the female repertoire of virgin/whore/mistress/mother since time began. But it is also not new for women artists to challenge the limitations of these roles and assume new identities. In the 19th Century, Rosa Bonheur dressed up as a man to gain access to the horse farms that were the subject of her paintings. Performance artists like Linda Montana have assumed and played out other selves, to extend the boundaries of female experience. Even now, the artist Orlan is undergoing plastic surgery and systematically transforming herself into key female ikons from the history of art. Unlike Cyberfeminism (as I understand it) these disguises do not deny difference. They are expansive, cumulative, enriching and redefine our concept of femininity whilst offering new creative possibilities for women. Virtual Reality reduces difference to what Sadie Plant calls "*a mere tactic of infiltration.*" But once the uniqueness, the otherness of the female body is lost, the biological base that underpins the transgression into 'unladylike' qualities and actions is also lost. The lady is thrown out with the bath water.

As has often happened in the past, there is a confusion here between difference and value. It isn't difference itself that oppresses women. The problem lies in the value that is placed on that difference. Femininity has negative value relative to masculinity, white skin is valued above black skin and so on. We might hope that cyberspace is free of these hierarchical judgements, but I wonder how different things really will be out there in the data stream?

Jeffrey Shaw has remarked that technology acts as a mirror to contemporary society. "*We live in a materialistic society*" he says, "*our virtual reality will also be materialistic.*" Contemporary society is Patriarchal, Racist and divides people according to class and age. It seems likely that our cybernetic future will be fashioned out of the same mould. I find it hard to believe that an egalitarian set of moral codes will be burnt into the "*grid reference for free experimentation*" that characterises Sadie Plant's vision of the future. In this new experimental world, will some cyborgs be more equal than others?

Here, I get bogged down in some logical problems around difference that I have, so far failed to resolve. As we have seen, Cyberfeminism heralds an escape from difference. The old dualities break down into what Inez van der Spek calls "*a fruitful or frightful pollution of naturalness and innocence.*" We will be able to tap into any reality and check out when we've had enough. But the experience of masculinity and femininity is based on difference and if difference has been abolished, what will it mean to press the button marked 'man.' Everything is relative. It is only interesting to try out masculinity if your experience until now has been that of a woman.

The physical, psychological and social experience of being a woman is built up over time. Since no-one will be obliged to stay in any one state for very long (perhaps only as a punishment) then the novelty value of being someone else will be minimal. But perhaps I'm missing something here? They say we will be able to plug into the life experience of any individuals in the data base—including their memories—so, as long as we are able to retain the information in the next 'life' we choose, the contrast will make it worthwhile. We will have to retain the experience of each 'trip' in order to enjoy the pleasures of contrast and comparison. But since femininity is at some level an experience of marginalisation, it can only work if there is no residual sense of self from our previous trip as a man... Do you see my problem?

For any of this to work at all, we need an extensive data base of 'real' lives, and maybe this is where the single mother struggling with the school run comes in. As contemporary artists is it not now our duty to provide samples of what it is to be a biological mother, homosexual male, black activist, politician, poet etc.?

In order to do so efficiently, we would have to live our lives untainted by 'other' possibilities. We are the raw material of future virtual realities. To liberate women now would surely involve the loss of that 'other' dissonant, transgressive voice that arises from the experience of social, political and sexual oppression. If the future is not to be a bland colourless affair, we must maintain the status quo and religiously record it for cyberposterity. In this sense, Cyberfeminism means the death of feminism and a post-political world.

I can even envisage a time when artists' colonies would mean literally that—places in which old-style humans are maintained in their natural-differentiated states for the rest of cybersociety to study. Psychic samples of individuals would be culled at intervals to replenish the databanks that posthumans use to construct their realities. Outside these colonies, would art continue to exist? Art grows out of a need to mark the passage of individuals through the time-space of a human life, and perhaps it is also a product of the struggle of certain groups to make themselves heard through repressive political systems. In the future, we would be infinitely reproducible and infinitely variable, so the artistic impulse might be reduced to a free-floating manifestation of circulating desires, continuously satisfied and re-kindled with no other object than the next virtual fix.

Perhaps the cynical historical and cultural montages of post-modernism have given us a foretaste of things to come. As the world slides towards its cybernetic destiny, we are making the shift towards the surface, playing with the infinite possibilities that were once experienced as life. Superficiality and a kind of cyclical stasis is what we can expect. Donna Haraway says she would rather be a cyborg than a Goddess. Given the choice, I suppose I would rather be that indefinable, difficult, contradictory, painful, resilient, political and deeply creative entity called WOMAN. ∞

# Channels of Resistance; 'Manufacturing Consent' & 'The Nation Erupts'

Malcolm Dickson



Video still from 'The Nation Erupts'

**From the book 'Channels of Resistance'** (BFI Publications, £12.95 pb), Martin Lucas and Martha Wallner give a background to the *Gulf Crisis TV Project*, transmitted and distributed by Deep Dish TV. In the events leading up to the Gulf War, and throughout it, a series of programmes were transmitted which questioned the disinformation of the American media who were nurturing the psychological basis for war on Iraq. The pro-

Paper Tiger/Deep Dish TV can be contacted at 339 Lafayette Street, New York NY 10012, USA  
 Necessary Illusions: Mark Achbar/Peter Wintonick, 4371 avenue de l'Esplanade, Montreal, Canada H2W 1T2  
 Not Channel Zero: Thomas Poole, 50 West 47 Street, New York NY 10025, USA

grammes illustrated the groundswell of domestic opposition to the Gulf War.

Paper Tiger were the media collective behind the Gulf project and were the first group in the States to galvanise the public access movement in the USA. They succeeded in going beyond 'narrow-casting' (specific local programming for a specific local audience) and created a national network, bringing together many different groups—peace campaigners, media workers, artists, community groups—and established a coalition between many different media which is contemporary and radical. The programmes were also distributed to schools, community centres, festivals and to other cable channels. In the UK, the edited down version *Hell, No, We Won't Go* was broadcast by Channel 4, to a wide and engaged response.

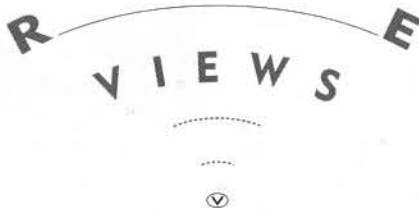
Paper Tiger have been working since the early '80s, producing alternative cable programmes that had as a feature guest presenters deconstructing media items: Alexander Cockburn reading the *Washington Post*, Herb Schiller reading the *New York Times*. The latter paper also came under the scrutiny of Noam Chomsky, whose analysis of the political economy of the mass media forms the basis of *Manufacturing Consent*, an unconventional documentary film which was broadcast as part of the *Resistance* season.

As the NYT is the major newspaper in the States, Chomsky develops a convincing argument about how this shapes the world for the politically educated classes: in effect, how it shapes history by what it chooses to report on and obviously what it doesn't. History is a process of selection and what is archived in their library is what the world is for those who will utilise it. One appeal of Chomsky's is his ability

to instill in people the very question of why certain questions are asked and others are not. With the major media setting the agenda and the local media following, consent is manufactured by "the selection of topics, distribution of concerns, emphasis, framing of issues, filtering of information, bounding of debate within certain limits". In addition, the media also "select, shape, control, restrict, and serve the interests of dominant elite groups". The film gives Chomsky's critics an airing: David Meyer, the editorial writer for the NYT merely endorses the need for citizen scrutiny when he says that "Legislation is like a big sausage—the less you know about how it's done, the better for your appetite".

*Manufacturing Consent* draws upon a range of material collected over 3 years in lecture tours, discussions, workshops, and debates across Canada, Europe and Japan. What makes it unconventional is the format in which Chomsky is not explained by the mediating voice-over of the producers. It is novel and accessible and utilises a range of innovative techniques and graphic sequences. Produced by Necessary Illusions, the film is intended to open up debate on media and democracy.

One of Chomsky's beliefs is that "propaganda is to democracy what violence is to a dictatorship". Democracy, or what we know of it, sustains itself on indoctrination and through what Chomsky calls the creation of 'necessary illusions'. This is not to say that the cops use bananas as truncheons, but perhaps what is further required is the realisation of how many people experience a different reality from others. If we allow ourselves to be moulded by what the news reports, then our perspective is determined by those aspects of



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selection and framing identified by Chomsky, in other words the viewpoint of the establishment. In news and current affairs, you never get to see the *means* or *relations* of production and you never, with very few exceptions perhaps, get to hear the viewpoint of the embattled minorities, or for that matter the marginalised majority. Imagine a scenario where half the news was given over to citizen report teams, autonomous from the corporations control, choosing and editing their own material.

*Not Channel Zero* is a project under the wing of Black Planet Productions, a 3 year old media collective who set up in New York in response to a lack of media production and representation for blacks and latinos. Their production *The Nation Erupts* was produced in the aftermath of the acquittal of the white police officers caught on video beating up black motorist, Rodney King. This was merely the tip of the iceberg which has as its basis an inherently racist judicial system based on white supremacy. The dismissal in court of the most vicious part of the assault on the basis that it was out of focus points to an embedded and blatantly irrational bigotry which has shaken the myth that Americans live in a just and good system.

Like *The Gulf Crisis Project*, *The Nation Erupts* had the effect of documenting the discontent at the heart of American society. Through a nationwide call for entry, the 55 minute video captures the voice/s of the public—black, latino, white, Asian—whose overriding message seems to cry *'This Far and No Further'*. It also embraces the reality that racism is a white construct of the establishment to promote the lie that people of colour are all divided: this, combined with the invisibility of blacks to the mainstream culture and their construction as 'other', helps justify racism from a white perspective. As one contributor says, "I can explain to my kids why people loot, but I can't explain racism. You tell me that?"

The video is interspersed with quotes and graphics, for example, *Not Channel Zero's* Top 11 reasons to loot or riot, or their paraphrasing of the Situationist commentary on the

Watts riots of 26 years previous: *'Looting is the response to a society whose only abundance is that of commodities'*. The effects of the King trial and the resulting riots also induced another Situationist turns of phrase, that of the 'Reversal of Perspective', away from the perspective of power and towards the consciousness of total change, or at least, the necessity for it. Ironically, the video was due to be transmitted by Channel Four in the *Resistance* series, but copyright problems prevented this.

The limitations of broadcast have to be addressed and other distribution methods developed. Censorship restrictions or professional engineering standards should not prevent the free circulation of media. Multiplication of the sites of struggle is heralded by the availability of new technologies, which was the inspiration for the series. In addition, the book develops many of the themes within the programmes with a dozen or so informative articles.

It is not so much a question of 'to everyone their own camcorder or cable station', but in getting information out and of speaking out for the truth. *Channels of Resistance* helped contribute to an affirmative culture rather than simply an oppositional one (that which defines itself always in opposition is subject to dismissal and assimilation). Participatory media is not just a proposition, it is being enacted. As for the self-determination of culture and language, perhaps there is lots to learn from the Inuit. ∞

Malcolm Dickson

### Semblances

*Producers; Fields and Frames, 1993*

*Semblances* is a touring package of video and new media works by women artists. Subsidised by the Scottish Arts Council, the selection of women artists extends beyond Scottish boundaries as this package includes work by established artists such as Judith Goddard, Kathy Rogers and Cathy Vogan, alongside work by artists recently graduated from the Scottish-based Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, including Nicola Percy and Jo Pearson.

This package is a timely reminder that 'all-women' programming is still a necessity, not a misguided detour into the realm of tokenism. The accompanying marketing material self-consciously addresses this sex-specific strategy of packaging work by women artists as exemplifying a 'positive and pro-active selection', not a 'women's ghetto'. It is a sad sign of the times that such positive attempts to promote women artists work have also to self-consciously counter the all too expected criticism that is usually railed against women-specific programming.

Compiled under the umbrella title *Semblances*, the works deal with a range of connected themes such as the dream—the imaginary and the visceral.

Both *Speed of Life* and *Bedful of Strangers* by Cathy Vogan combine abstracted computer-generated imagery and sound, along with more derivatively constructed material. Both are segmented into sequences constructed around the centre of the televisual frame which becomes the primary site by which all editing changes are motivated. In *Speed of Life*, the imagery and sounds spill forth from this central vortex in rapid succession, moving from the initial sequences of darkness ("In The Beginning Was Light...") to the lighter, pastel colours of the later sections which play with images of Eastern deities and draw on images of the sea as a metaphor for life. *Bedful of Strangers*, dealing with the scenario of the nightmare and death, combines editing changes around the centre of the frame with the fragmentation and overlaying of computer



Nicola Percy  
Video still from  
*Bitter Root, Sweet Fruit*

generated imagery with actuality footage to conjure up a bizarre spirit world of ghoulish phantoms and paganistic gods. The issue of morality is underwritten through the more outrageously ghoulish, seen at one point where a skeleton outstretches its arms, to the use of actuality footage where the artist herself is seen skirting the fringes of the sea. Both pieces operate as an electronic visual analogue of some stream-of-consciousness experience. Whilst **Jane Wagman** explores similar subject-matter, this theme is tackled in more literal terms in *The Task of Dreaming*.

Whilst the operation of these works depends on the phantasy scenario of the dream or the surface phenomena of actually dreaming, the interiorised world of the psyche and the subconscious is tapped as a damaged source of trauma in **Claire Jones'** *But Daddy You Promised*. The analysis of a young woman's troubled childhood relationship with her father is explored through a constant stream of questioning, analysis and unresolved conflicts through live-action monologue. Using standard televisual codes and conventions of the fade-in, camera pans left to right and overhead shots, this very exacting and carefully constructed piece is made strange as the monologue, delivered in the guise of a young woman, is in fact uttered predominantly through the voice of a young girl.

The coherency of the viewing experience and the position of the spectator, so carefully established in Jones' work, is radically challenged in both pieces by Jo Pearson—*Unfit* and *Do What You Like, I Don't Care*—which deal with abortion, epilepsy and control respectively. The intense speed of the edits and repetition of the imagery along with the sound presents a visual and audio system which challenges not only the notion of a coherent viewing experience but also reiterates a loss of control articulated through the body. This informs the visual imagery in both pieces seen in *Unfit*, where a woman's naked body becomes part of a medical scanning system; and in *Do What You Like*, a woman tries to control a bouncing ball. Pearsons' work is at once provocative, challenging and visually innovative.

The notion of a hermetically centred spectator and a coherent system of meaning, is, to an extent, similarly challenged in the highly impressionistic work *I Love This Place—Keep Driving* by **Magali Fowler**. This piece explores the activity of non-stop car driving, US-style, as a somnambulist exercise where the boundaries of the self become blurred, like the landscape. "It's like looking through a magazine... you pick out... maybe one detail or two... all these places look the same... it's like a face you can't remember". The various narrative voices reiterate the uncertainty and lack of focus of the visual track.

It is this act of looking and the specific pleasures derived from this which informs *Bitter Root, Sweet Fruit* by Nicola Percy. The theme of 'the look' constructed as a source of male voyeuristic pleasure is established in the opening sequence of the work which references the art-historical genre painting of the female nude. Here, live action tableau-vivant reconstructions of classic nude paintings by Ingres and Velasquez with their backs to the viewer (and therefore unaware of being 'looked at') are visually disrupted as the video monitors framing these images topple and crash precariously within the frame. The gaze of the viewer is returned by a contemporary nude who proceeds to tear up a nude photograph of herself. This act of defiance is echoed later as the once motionless art-historical nudes turn to face the viewer. An alternative code of visual pleasure is constructed in the closing sequences of the video. Here staged scenarios of lush, sumptuous fruit which ultimately decompose are juxtaposed with hands cupping, overlaid images of seeds, blood and a white rose in full bloom. Images of fecundity and fertility combine the pleasures of the visual and the tactile.

The works collected in this package explore the hidden world of the psyche and the imaginary, predicating the (female) body through these interiorised concerns, thereby posing a challenging range of viewing experiences from the coherent to the visceral and experiential. ∞

Helen Cadwallader

## Live on Public Access in Amsterdam

In a time when well-equipped TV hobbyists can produce relatively slick-looking programmes for access TV, some artist initiatives have begun to add a more anarchistic element to the Amsterdam cable by going live for long chunks of time. These marathon length programs are produced on an almost improvisational basis, and reintroduce many of the quirks and roughness of early cable experimentation.

Although in Europe most cable TV networks are exploited by state-run "public" corporations, most of these tend not to bother with public access at all. With some access policy for grassroots producers for about 10 years now, Amsterdam has had a rather uniquely accessible local cable network. An open channel was established in a time when cable pirates hacked into the freshly installed network with low-budget softporn interrupted by hand drawn advertising for unpainted furniture and the likes. In a rather typical move, the authorities co-opted a popular breach of the law by offering pirates a chance to "go legal" on the open channel before being taken out of the air altogether (after all, regulation rather than suppression has been the Amsterdam way of addressing legal issues like drug abuse for some time now).

The official policy for Kanaal 4, officially operated by the SALTO Foundation since 1988, is to give access to any organisation producing programmes of local interest, stimulating local participation, or representing the pluriformity of the Amsterdam community. Any form of organisation fulfilling one of these criteria has the right to broadcast non-commercial programming for about \$75 per time-slot of at least 2 hours (depending on the time of day). Often SALTO provides access to basic production facilities at very low rates, sometimes it will provide financial support to program makers. And in spite of a somewhat rocky history, the channel has grown into a respectable blend of local, cultural and minority programming, also drawing a great number of viewers with Turkish and





Arabic spoken programmes addressing a large audience of immigrant workers in greater Amsterdam.

Before the formalization of the Open Channel experiments from the media arts found their way to cable TV, organisations like Time Based Arts have taken a lively interest in cable as a medium of expression, and various programming formats have been explored by artists. While Kunstkanaal has been providing rather comprehensive arts coverage since 1987, Park TV started with their 1-hour midnight transmissions of "pure sound & image" only a year ago. Also the artist-run gallery WI39 found its own format to show its art on cable.

*Kanaal Zero* is a monthly program, co-produced by the Association of Media Artists (V.M.K.) and Montevideo/Time Based Arts, aimed at producing new work for cable as a sort of Cable Gallery: an extension of a gallery that might contain media arts installations, and thus might conceive of the TV receiver as an "installation" in the home. At the moment *Kanaal Zero* is in its second year in operation.

Recently, the format of live cablecasting from various locations has returned on a basis rather less self-conscious and premeditated than most artist initiatives have become. The most consistent has been *de Hoeksteen Live*, cablecasting once a month from

the SALTO studios for 10 hours straight all through Saturday night in a sort of sexually ambivalent phone-in chat-show format with guests from the local cultural and not-so-cultural scenes. It has managed to do a couple of "special editions" from locations such as the WI39 gallery and a theatre organising a "live magazine"; expanding the format without,

however, attempting to smoothen out the rough edges.

The live cablecasting from *The Next Five Minutes* conference on tactical television, co-produced by StaatsTV Rabotnik, can also be seen in this light. For a marathon twelve hour stretch, interviews and discussions with participants were cablecasted live from a basic studio on location in Paradiso, allowing international tactical TV makers to partake in an Amster-

dam cable event. Most found their way around in the highly improvisational format without too much trouble.

For the KunstRAI (the biggest Dutch art fair) in June 1993, a new format has been experimented with by *de Hoeksteen Live*; three minutes per hour live cablecasting from location for the entire five days of the art fair, in between regular programming. The format has already been labelled *Inprik Televisie* after the Dutch verb for clocking in. Although some of the necessary improvisation was eliminated by having time to set up, this meant that sometimes more complicated set-ups would be prepared, and some vignettes turned out to be more "conceptual tv" than regular updates. Figureheads from cultural politics were interviewed in front of the camera in the regular Hoeksteen style (sometimes literally pulled in from the corridor), while at other times artists used the cablecast to do live performances from the middle of the art fair.

Whether it can still be classified as media art is hardly a relevant question. As a phenomenon it underlines a resistance to the consumer technology designed to copy the look of mainstream media on an 'amateur scale'. It asserts a right to exist in its own right, without aspiring to a legitimate formulation of what television is supposed to look like, and uses the limitations of improvisation to its advantage. ∞

Lennart van Oldenborgh

## Blue Black Permanent

Director Margaret Tait; 1993

*Blue Black Permanent* is Margaret Tait's first feature film. Since graduating from the Centro Sperimento Di Cinematografia in Rome, she has been working with film in Scotland since the 1950s, establishing a permanent base in Orkney since the '70s. Drawing upon her environment, the surrounding landscape and the Scottish literary and music traditions, Tait's work is acknowledged for its enigmatic and lyrical qualities. Working on short 16mm films, her practice enriches Scottish culture as well as placing her within a historical context alongside other Scottish

Women filmmakers such as Helen Biggar (who worked together with Norman McLaren producing the magnificent *Hell Unlimited* in the 1940s) and Jenny Gilbertson (who worked on the Shetland Isles before emigrating in later life to Canada).

Considering the continuous neglect and erosion of our own culture in favour of an imported one, it is not surprising, but a sad fact all the same, that Margaret Tait's work is rarely screened here and even to those working in the independent sector, unfamiliar. She distributes most of her work herself and on one occasion when asked why her films were not to be found in the Scottish Film Archive her reply was that her films are to be



watched and enjoyed, not used for research purposes.

In more recent years Margaret Tait has been concentrating on writing and developing scripts, *Blue Black Permanent* being the first of these to go into production. In its structure it marks a break from her earlier 16mm work.

Anchoring itself in the present through the character of Barbara, the story spans three generations, cutting continually from present to past and past to present, focusing upon mother/daughter relationships. Barbara, an independent free-lance photographer based in Edinburgh is caught up in the memories of her mother, Greta, trying to understand the nature of her mother's creativity and events which led to her taking her own life, by walking into the sea.

Lying at the heart of this story is a deep sense of loss and a feeling of absence. Greta's character is a romantic one. Ill-suited to city life, her creative sensibilities are expressed through her attachment to the sea and the landscape of her childhood. Greta, like her



mother before her, is between two worlds, the creative and the domestic; faced with the dilemma of wanting a more creative input into her life but constrained by her family and social responsibilities of being a caring wife and mother.

In this film, the sea acts as a metaphor for the irrational free spirit and presents the woman/nature duality. Women, creativity and destiny in their association with the sea are familiar representations used within literature and film; in the latter of particular interest to the melodrama genre. Bubbling under the surface these representations along with the additional dualities of life/death; presence/absence; urban/rural; past/present; creativity/domesticity; retain a delicacy and subtlety, woven through the fabric of the film. The drama is downplayed allowing the potential for the story with all its complexities to evolve and present itself to the viewer. This is not fully achieved. The film suffers from an imposed narrative structure similar to a TV drama format which flattens and suppresses the most lyrical, elegiac moments of the film.

The cinematography is good, capturing the quality of light in Northern Scotland, with the controlled rhythmic movements of the camera as it records the flow and ebb of the sea and the wonderfully slow, thoughtful pace with which the camera meanders over mantelpieces and lingers around windows. Your attention is drawn to domestic details and their composition within the frame. This delicacy and poetic structure which is the hallmark of Margaret Tait's film work suffers greatly under the weight of such a rigid narrative construction, which is flawed in its timing, dialogue and naturalness. It confuses the story and appears incongruous with the ideas and the images deployed. A voice-over or narrator for example could have been a more suitable device instead of the awkward and at times poorly delivered dialogue.

Hopefully in Margaret Tait's next film these difficulties will be resolved and we will see either a greater adeptness and confidence with the narrative structure or a more inventive one which will better accommodate her ideas and images. ∞

Louise Crawford

### Hedgehogs and Megabytes:

New Directions in the Interactive Media  
(Towards the Aesthetics of the Future)  
ICA, April 1993

**Who** does the ICA have in mind when they organise these conferences? If the targeting of 'a lay interest' group and 'those seeking a wider debate' outlined in the brochure is to be believed, then we must conclude that these two groups are incompatible. For a lay audience seems to have a familiarity with interactive media that is beyond many of the critics in this conference, and the level of debate rarely got above lukewarm for this reason. Upstairs in the Nash rooms ARTEC, the Islington based multimedia workshop and training centre had set up a series of presentations of interactive publications, games and hardware. A show of hands one day revealed that over three quarters of the full-to-bursting auditorium used computers in their daily lives and that about a quarter had played a video game within the last week. Yet against this background of unprecedented computer literacy the conference proceeded along as though interactivity was still a backroom curiosity.

The main strategy of the event seemed to be to juxtapose speakers from the interactive media and games industry with artists and critics who would then make clear the deeper issues involved and suggest some alternative approaches. But on the first day after a succession of predictions about amazing new technologies about to change our lives were challenged by various other speakers and audience alike, we had to conclude that we can never really trust whether any of the reports we hear about new media are true or not. Then token media commentator Robbie Stamp from Central Television set a dismal tone by beginning his critique of interactive media systems by quoting at length from Neil Postman. Honestly, anyone from the media that bases his opinions on the work of this reactionary American writer whose views can be summed up as believing that tv is the work of Satan is in the wrong job.

It is, of course, a characteristic of technological media that economic and social factors are even more important

in their evolution than whether what we want to do is technically feasible or not. Julian Lynn-Evans from Philips Interactive Media (UK) stated an important problem in the perception of computers by many sections of the public—that if it's a computer, it won't work. This may explain why only adolescent obsessives got off on computer games while the rest of the world had to wait for Sega and Nintendo to produce the dedicated "games console". Now they have a market that is already two-thirds of the total prerecorded music market in the UK and may overtake it in the near future. However, after a few rounds on one of the Sega Megadrives in the games room upstairs I was pleased to discover how inferior the games console was to playing games on my home PC. The main advantage of the consoles is that they are about ten times cheaper than a computer, although there are about a thousand times more things you can do with your own computer, such as writing your own games for instance. The Sega/Nintendo systems are 'closed platforms' which means that only authorised developers can write games for them—they cannot be reprogrammed. Added to this the shift away from text input and towards the Apple Mac style graphical interface has meant that the games industry is losing its creative base of young programmers and is having to professionalise its product development.

The most successful session was the final one that presented various games developers and commentators, chaired by *Mediamatic* editor and long time computer user Willem Velthoven. During the audience discussion period a question by Judith Williamson raising 'The Gender Issue' sparked off a series of accusations aimed at the all-male panel that their products were all macho shoot-em-ups. Apart from the fact that most popular games actually involve little or no *widespread* carnage, the general solution of panel members was that if people still did not like the games that were on offer they should write their own. Ian Hetherington, author of *Lemmings*, pointed out that the availability of higher level programming and scripting languages did not make this as daunting a task as it once

was. "TV programmes you, you programme multimedia", added David Collier from Trip Media, the creators of a 'virtual nightclub'. But this avenue remained unattractive to many present.

In the Sunday morning "New Tools for a New Art" session, we were expecting to witness how our artistic torch-bearers were making their own uses of the interactive media that "will have as great an impact on the arts as the invention of photography". What we actually got were some well established video artists who just showed some tapes of their latest non-interactive installation work. In the cinemathèque next door Judith Goddard had restaged her *Garden of Earthly Delights* three channel video piece whose only relevance to the conference seemed to be that she had used a Harry (a digital montage—composing video editor) to do the montage work. Panelist artist Rita Keegan's statement that "I don't want to learn to programme" combined with views like Christine Van Assche's, from the Pompidou Centre, that Virtual Reality systems are all "anti-social", painted a bleak picture in attitudes towards technological art where people, whether through straightforward ignorance or not, would complain rather than act. When new media like interactive systems that are based in popular cultural forms are analysed by the art world, it is quite frankly embarrassing to hear comments like these that demonstrate the gulf of knowledge between the two. Britain does still have artists working with interactive media and artificial environments who could have given a much broader idea of the potentials and opportunities that are possible. But perhaps they would have been too far ahead of the limited perceptions of the organisers of this conference. Or perhaps they just don't drink in the right pubs.∞

Richard Wright

Fabian Tompsett

# Summer Solstice Lewis, 1993



Callanish Standing Stones photo Margaret Ponting

**O**n Stomoway Quay we looked for likely candidates for Calanais as they emerged from the ferry boat. Old hands had left their luggage, making a bee-line for the one taxi-cab which could take all five of our party—and more. In fact it was a minibus. The transport secured, we needed to make up the numbers. We soon recruited a Scottish-born American who had never heard of Calanais. They were spending the summer mooching through the highlands and islands. A parent and child dithered before jumping in the minibus—they were unsure where their friends were.

The coach ride from Inverness to Ullapool traverses a range of countryside, from rolling hills to mountainous terrain, and finally the sea loch at Ullapool. None of this prepares the traveller for the radical scenery of Lewis. The road from Stomoway to Calanais crosses a flat plateau consisting of peat bogs pitted with lochs of various shape and size. It was ten o'clock in the evening. The grey sky and the grey mountains, shadowy in the distance, evoked an illusion of an unchanged Neolithic landscape. The effect is artificial—the Vikings burnt down the forest in a piece of ninth century comparative vandalism.

The mid-summer light enhances the illusive qualities of the landscape. Although well below the Arctic circle, Calanais is sufficiently far north that the sky is never really dark on a summer's night. At astronomical midnight there are still strangely coloured patches of blue in the sky. Subtle hues transfuse the whole sky. The prominence of these hues combined with linguistic poverty when it comes to naming them, highlights the blurring of consciousness with unconsciousness caused by the lack of an identifiable period called night.

Forty hours camped out on the windswept hillside. There is a communal fire in one of the most sheltered spots. A continual diet of wind and rain. This year there's about forty people. Saturday evening a group of locals come to the camp. They pass around cans of beer and Buckfast wine. Our comrade from the Archaeogeodetic Association remembers them from the Winter Solstice. This evening it's old rock songs. Sunday evening it's folk music. A piper arrives, but has to rest before they can summon enough energy to prime the pipes.

This gathering is centred around the Calanais stones, a stone circle, with an approach avenue and a cairn in the middle. There are over half a dozen other known stone circles in the immediate vicinity. Others may remain to be found. Its importance can only be compared with Stonehenge, Avebury and Carnac. Analysis of the alignments reveals that it is based around the lunar cycle of 18.61 years. At the major standstill, the full moon barely rises, skimming the distant mountain tops before disappearing. Such an effect can only happen at this latitude. Margaret and Ronald Curtis, who run a local museum in their conservatory, have this recorded on video.

The avenue of stones leads slightly east of north to the Post Office. The London Psychogeographical Association (LPA) had selected this as the site for the publication of Asger Jorn's *Open Creation and its Enemies*. It was only possible to issue fifty copies as our baggage was already over-loaded with camping gear. Fortunately we were able to do this before the Isaac Newton Institute issued their claim that Fermat's last theorem had been proved. (Jorn's text calls for *Situ Analysis* to introduce disorder into geometry, something that was subsequently achieved by Chaos theory. Founded last year, the INI has been using this theory to model "measle epidemics").

For the LPA, this trip brought to a close our first cycle of activity. Aside from the public trips to Roisia's Cross, Winchester, Oxford, Ceme Abbas and Calanais, other visits have been made to Edzell, Mayfield, Cambridge and Francis Bacon's old home at Gorhambury. Of course, consistent if mundane work has been done in London. The current turbulence in bourgeois culture fuels the LPA's resolve to sharpen its grip on the cutting edge of social disorientation. ∞

insight

The LPA can be contacted at Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS. A London edition of Jorn's *Open Creation and its Enemies* will shortly be made available by Unpopular Books (See pp62)

# Scorched Myths



Photo of Bill Douglas © Jane Brown



## Bill Douglas and Scottish Film

Colin McArthur

Contemplating an *auteurist* account of Scottish cinema, that is, one stressing the recurrent stylistic and thematic features of particular directors, three names spring immediately to mind: **Bill Forsyth**, **Murray Grigor** and **Bill Douglas**. Forsyth has the highest public profile: two engaging, low-budget feature films, *THAT SINKING FEELING* and *GREGORY'S GIRL*, followed by the popular success *LOCAL HERO* which led to the massive construction of the Bill Forsyth phenomenon in Scotland (interviews and features in the press, radio and television, Forsyth's face on the covers of magazines, even a lager commercial the slogan of which was 'Support your local hero'), culminating in a career in Hollywood.

Forsyth's work is complex and interesting and there is room for a good book on it. However, both Grigor and Douglas have as good a claim to *auteur* status, but partly because their sensibilities are less close to the contours of popular taste than Forsyth's, they have been assigned to critical ghettos, Grigor to 'films about art', Douglas to 'art house cinema'.

Bill Douglas died in 1991 aged 57 leaving behind a slender body of work which (apart from a few shorts) consists of the *Tilogy* (*MY CHILDHOOD*, *MY AIN FOLK AND MY WAY HOME*) which was highly autobiographical, and *COMRADES*, an ambitious film about the Tolpuddle Martyrs and their transportation to Australia. The purpose of the book *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account*—is partly memorial, to celebrate the man and his work, partly analytic, to describe how the films function as films and social texts, and in particular, to account for Douglas' small output and his relative lack of critical recognition, not least in his own country, Scotland.

The volume consists of a memoir and an account of the making of the *Tilogy* by **Andrew Noble**, the scripts of the *Tilogy* films, an account of the making of *COMRADES* by **Duncan Petrie**, a review of the *Tilogy* from the point of view of the present by **John Caughie**, a piece relating the *Tilogy* to specifically Scottish concerns by **Andrew O'Hagan**, one on the representation of women in the *Tilogy* by **Joyce Macmillan**, and an account of working with Douglas by **Mamoun Hassan**, head of production at the BFI when *MY CHILDHOOD* and *MY AIN FOLK* were made.

If there is such a thing, Douglas was a born filmmaker with a seeming ability to think and feel in images. His cinema (particularly *The Trilogy*) is austere and demanding, making no concessions to what a popular audience would regard as appropriate, either in terms of narrative construction or pace. Among his particular gifts was the capacity to convey an incredible intensity of feeling realised in specific gestures, movements and acts. Douglas' dialogue is taut and spare. Relationships are signalled by visual means, as when the crazed mother's covering of her face with the bedsheet in *MY CHILDHOOD* is reprised later in the film by her desolate, bastard son.

Everyone who came into contact with Douglas in the film-making (as opposed to the social and film-teaching) situation testifies to how obsessive,

perfectionist, thrown and difficult to work with he was. This was undoubtedly a major factor in his low output, but rather more interesting are the attempts of several of the contributors to assign institutional blame, a process that usually says more about the contributors than about the institutions in question. Andrew Noble's venomous hatred of Marxism, and his attachment to romantic conceptions of creativity, are legendary to those familiar with the industry. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that he should ascribe the meagreness of Douglas' output after the *Trilogy* to shifts of policy and personnel inside the BFI, specifically Peter Sainsbury's taking over from Barrie Gavin as head of production and Sainsbury's interest in forms of cinema additional to those of classical narrative. The situation on the ground was rather more complex. As it happened, as a member of the BFI Executive at the time, I was on the interview board which appointed Sainsbury. Unquestionably, an element in my advocacy of Sainsbury for the job was the shift in the balance of power towards the left his appointment would bring to the BFI Executive, but equally important was the lucidity of his conception of production policy (a lucidity, incidentally, which permits Noble to argue with that policy retrospectively) and his sheer ability as an administrator in seeing projects through from start to finish, an ability he had displayed so conspicuously as Barrie Gavin's deputy. It was these latter qualities which commended Sainsbury to the interview board of six, five of whom could not be remotely conceived as sympathetic to the left.

Noble reproduces a letter from Forsyth Hardy, then Director of Films of Scotland, turning down Douglas' request for funding for *MY CHILDHOOD* in these terms: "...It is only fair to say without delay that it is not a subject in which the Films of Scotland Committee would be interested. One of our main concerns is to project a forward-looking country and although it is no criticism of the film as a film this would not do so."

Andrew O'Hagan glosses this letter in his assigning of institutional blame: "On reading the original script, the parsimonious lips of the Films of Scotland Committee had clamped tight... Dismissively, they raised a bureaucratic finger: 'Not a penny!'"

Apart from being factually inaccurate—it was Forsyth Hardy and not the Films of Scotland Committee who responded, and he made no judgement on the film's quality—O'Hagan seems to have been swept up in the view that there was some kind of film institutional prejudice against Douglas. What there were, in fact, were institutions with explicit policies, highly debatable and limited though they might have been, but policies nevertheless. In the case of Films of Scotland, it might be argued that its policy sat too cosily with the interests of commercial institutions, that it failed to recognise contradictions within Scottish society and, perhaps most damagingly, that it served to inhibit the growth of an indigenous, fictive Scottish cinema. However, Forsyth Hardy cannot be criticised for—with commendable candour and lack of pussy-footing—turning down Douglas' request for funding in the light

of Films of Scotland's explicit policy at the time. John Caughie also deals with the question of what he calls 'institutional guilt': "*Mistaken when the films first appeared as yet more British humanist realism, the Trilogy slipped through the theoretical and political net which many of us trawled in the '70s... Film theory in the '70s chose as its object the institution of cinema rather than the uniqueness or excellence of individual films. This is not to renounce the work of a critical theory which I would still defend as foundational for the academic study of film or television, but to recognise the blind spot which it created, and which made it difficult, in Britain in the '70s, to see the cinema which Douglas' Trilogy pointed towards... In 1982, when a group of us tried to build a polemic to attack the debilitating traditions of kailyard and tartanry, we 'forgot' Bill Douglas...*"

Speaking as a member of the group Caughie refers to, I would not go as far as he does in self-immolation. The *SCOTCH REELS* book and events were deployed as broad scythe strokes polemically assaulting tartanry and kailyard. Inevitably, we concentrated mainly on artistically defective texts. It could be argued, indeed, that Douglas' omission was a recognition of the complexity of his work. On one point, however, Caughie is correct. We devoted some space to films which we argued deconstructed the dire discourses under attack, films such as Murray Grigor's *CLYDESCOPE* and Brian Crumlish's *THE CALEDONIAN ACCOUNT*. It was in this context, as a film deconstructive of the kailyard tradition, that we might have included parts of the *Trilogy*. The issue of the artistic merit of the films we looked at was simply not on the agenda of *SCOTCH REELS* and no apology is necessary for that.

Caughie's reasoned self-critique—and his relating of Douglas' work to a dimension of Brecht other than that which attracted '70s British film theory, that which speaks of *gestus*, complex social conflicts condensed into single actions—is infinitely to be preferred to the anti-Marxist crowing of some of the cinematically illiterate johnny-come-latelys in this volume. By their way of it, the 'Scottish theoretical Marxists' were so blinded by ideology that they failed even to notice Bill Douglas' films. As evidence to the contrary, I would refer them to my own appreciative review of *MY CHILDHOOD* in *Tribune* of March 9, 1973.

The best pieces in the volume are John Caughie's (its title *Don't Mourn, Analyse* echoing Wobbly activist Joe Hill's injunction on the eve of his execution, *Don't Mourn, Organise*) and Duncan Petrie's, which offers both a production history and a critical analysis of *COMRADES*. The political resonances of Caughie's title and the fact that both his and other pieces deal substantially with Douglas' *mise-en-scène*, indicate that the usefulness of Douglas' work to a new generation of Scots filmmakers is as an exemplar of a cinematically rich, but resource-poor, film practice, a standing indictment of the demented 'Hollywood on the Clyde' policy currently in vogue in the Scottish Film Council and the Scottish Film Production Fund. ∞

comment

**Karlheinz Stockhausen** composes modern classical music that is highly regarded by consumers of 'serious culture' and very rarely performed. Recently, the clarinetist **Ian Stuart** has been touring Britain with a show that includes a rendition of Stockhausen's *Harlequin*. Despite the status accorded to Stockhausen and Stuart as representatives of 'high art', their activities are completely vacuous. Ken Rea, writing in *The Guardian* on 21st May '93, had the following to say about *Harlequin*: 'This extraordinary solo requires him (Ian Stuart) to dance while playing the clarinet... written in 1975 as a showcase for Stockhausen's partner Suzanne Stephens, the composition was so taxing that she collapsed after the first performance... It is notable enough to see a classical musician play a 45-minute solo from memory, but dancing in lycra tights at the same time is another matter.' What impresses 'critics' of 'serious culture' is the technique required to perform the piece. Rea leaves his readers with the impression that because giving a rendition of *Harlequin* is physically challenging, this validates the composition as a work of art. Clearly such a supposition is nonsense, *Harlequin* functions as 'serious culture' because Stockhausen and Stuart have successfully negotiated their way through a complex set of social and institutional practices. Put another way, *Harlequin* is 'high art' because those in positions of cultural power say it is a 'great' composition, while simultaneously treating other forms of music—for example Oi!—as worthless trash.

To draw attention to this state of affairs, the Neoist Alliance decided to disrupt Ian Stuart's performance of *Harlequin* at the Pavilion Theatre, Brighton, on 15 May 1993. This was not the first time Stockhausen had been targeted as a particularly obnoxious representative of 'high art'. Armed with placards bearing the slogan 'FIGHT RACIST MUSIC', Action

Against Cultural Imperialism picketed his concert at the Judson Hall, New York, on 8th September 1964. Likewise, during the early seventies, **Cornelius Cardew** instigated a vociferous critique of idealism in culture that culminated with the publication of *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (Latimer, London 1974). Although the Neoist Alliance does not agree with all the points raised in these previous critiques of Stockhausen and his music, we felt the Ian Stuart concert provided an excellent opportunity to take militant action against the cultural faction of the ruling class.

The first thing we did was produce a leaflet asking the public to 'BOYCOTT STOCKHAUSEN'. A press release was also circulated in which it was stated that the Neoist Alliance would levitate the Pavilion Theatre during the concert. As a result, a story appeared in the *Brighton and Hove Leader* on 13th May '93 entitled 'Composer Is Set To Reach New Heights'. There was also coverage on Festival Radio, including a brief interview with a Neoist Alliance spokesperson. Stockhausen has claimed that much of his music is dictated to him by beings from a superior civilisation who live in a distant galaxy. The propaganda of the Neoist Alliance was designed to expose the mystical aura in which the composer shrouds his works as a blatant fraud.

As the Neoist Alliance and its supporters gathered outside the Pavilion Theatre prior to the Stockhausen concert, they were met by a counter-demonstration organised by the Temple Ov Psychic Youth. The TOPY activists were worried that if we successfully levitated the Pavilion, "a negative vortex would be created which could seriously damage the ozone layer". Neoist Alliance members were dressed in dark suits and ties, which contrasted sharply with the scruffy casual wear of the counter-demon-

strators. We'd also brought placards. On one side of these there was a cartoon of a bomb and the words 'DEMOLISH SERIOUS CULTURE', on the other, a pyramid capped by the all seeing eye and the message 'WE'RE BACK'.

As the handful of individuals who'd decided to cross the picket line arrived for the concert, they were met with chants of 'Boycott Stockhausen' from our ranks, to which the TOPY activists replied with cries of 'Stop The Levitation'. The counter-demonstrators pleaded with concert-goers to remain outside the building so that they could participate in a set of breathing and visualisation exercises designed to prevent the levitation. Once the concert began, the two sets of demonstrators prepared themselves for a psychic battle outside the theatre. These street actions drew a far larger crowd than the Ian Stuart recital inside the building. Passers-by were reluctant to step in front of the waves of psychic energy we were generating and soon much of the street was at a standstill. The *Brighton and Hove Leader* of 20th May '93 quoted one shaken concert-goer as saying, 'I definitely felt my chair move. It shook for a minute and then stopped.' The Neoist Alliance also received reports of toilets overflowing and electrical equipment short-circuiting, although these went unreported by the press.

While TOPY were adamant that their actions prevented the Pavilion being raised 25 feet into the air, the Neoist Alliance considers the protest to have been a complete success. The campaign against Stockhausen is part of an on-going struggle that will continue until the last apologist for decadent 'high art' has been silenced! Actions like the one we undertook in Brighton chip away at the confidence of the arts establishment and expose 'serious culture' as a monstrous fraud perpetrated by a self-serving elite. ∞



Stewart Home Our Tactics Against  
**Stockhausen**

