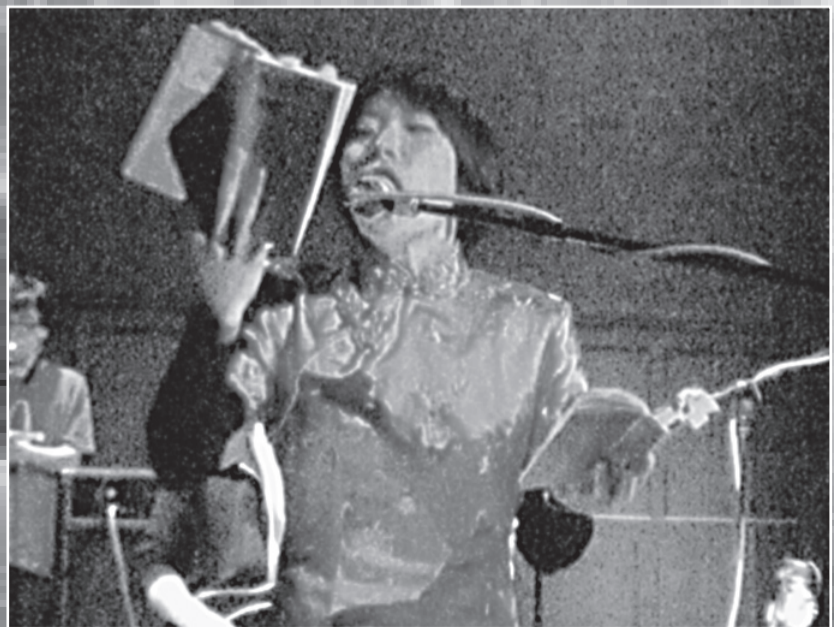


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variant



ANDREW STONE *Bothered (Black Rod)***review**

Crowd Control

Andrew Stones

Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow, 6 May - 7 June 1997

ON ENTERING Street Level, conscious of hope in the air following the general election, it was remarkable to see 'Bothered (Black Rod)', which made direct reference to the symbolic opening of parliament.

I was confronted by an array of black and white video monitors, the type used to display images from surveillance cameras, positioned above head height. The screens peer down at the viewer from both sides of the gallery, like an audience. On each is displayed an identical image of the Queen's face, only her eyes and forehead showing. The Monarch looks out through her glasses, as when reading the customary speech at the beginning of each session of parliament.

Like a gunshot, the silence is punctuated by the hollow ring of Black Rod on the doors of parliament. At precisely this moment, the multiple images of the Queen's face look slightly askance, a sideways glance giving expression to the unease that this sound generates in the head of State.

Multiple readings of this work are possible: however I prefer to deal with the artist's inferred critique of the institution of governmental power. The martial spectacle of the opening of parliament, with the MP's advancing side by side in ranks like a military brigade, is evoked by even such minimal fragments. Concentrating on this ritual, the piece reminds the viewer of the symbolic nature of the handover of power in Parliament. The opening of the House of Commons itself symbolises the hierarchy that places limits on the power of the Commons. Black Rod, the usher of the ancient Order of the Garter, represents the Lords or nobility and the Crown, and by implication the military through the Knighthood. His presence is a reminder of the struggle in the executive between the Commons and the State. Given the loaded significance of the imagery, Stones manages to be subtle. Possibly he is attempting to express the ambiguous relationship between the three elements of the medieval institution of Parliament: Crown, Lords and Commons.

The position of the viewer in relation to the piece is also open to question: images of the Queen are reproduced through the mechanisms of surveillance, but the Monarch stares unblinkingly back, distracted only by Black Rod. The method of replication - black and white television - refers to the first mass television spectacle, the Coronation 44 years ago. Back then, the live broadcast was said to herald the arrival of the new Elizabethan age, echoing the beginnings of English imperialism and conquest at a time when the empire was collapsing. The authority of the Crown extended and reinforced its dominion through myriad television receivers in its subjects' living rooms. The use of a recorded video image, looped through a closed circuit, seems to mimic the changed relationship between Crown and parliament since that time: the supposed democratic power of the people still in thrall to the spectacle of monarchy, yet critically monitoring, watching for any slip in the mask.

Situated in the second gallery space, 'The Nature of Their Joy' seems to share an approach with the first work: that of scrutiny of a face, trying to unlock the emotional significance of an ambiguous expression. At either end of the gallery are two large-scale transparencies, mounted on light boxes, the images follow a con-

cave curved plane, like the surface of a lens.

Superimposed titles inform the viewer that these are images of crowds celebrating in London at the outbreak, and cessation of the first world war respectively. The photographs have been manipulated, the artist framing certain faces from the crowd, picking them out from the mass in the picture field.

I found myself going back and forth between the two, trying to discern any differences in the expressions on people's faces. A fruitless task: there are differences between individual faces, but these are diluted by the crowd, and by the granular distortions of the enlarged images. The artist is exploring the difficulty of interpreting media, in this case the photographic document.

To the right, on plinths ranged along the gallery space, is a series of cases housing portable microfiche readers. They are connected by a loop of transparent plastic tubing, which passes through the projection beams intended to illuminate microfilm. Clear fluid from a large bell jar in the centre of this strange apparatus is pumped around the loop. On closer inspection, the jar is seen to contain tiny negatives. Carried by the current, faces are seen fleetingly, magnified on the small screens. They trace paths across the screens in turn, like figures passing a window, never quite making a clear, still image.

A label on the jar announces 'images in solution'. As the pieces of film are washed, rub against each other and the pipes, they literally begin to disintegrate. Symbolically linking the two polar opposites, war and peace: with an arcane, obsolete apparatus allowing the viewer to inspect and magnify image fragments. The use of mechanisms that simulate scientific processes of observation, analysis and evaluation posit the masses as data. The behaviour of crowds, and of society, the process of history itself as a fluid dynamic, particles in movement.

The soundtrack that accompanies this installation was constructed from two recorded loops, slowwater on a roof and a football crowd. Both are slowed down, mixed together to form a wave like roar. A melancholic ambience fills the space, articulating a sense of loss, of inevitable change and decay. The artist has described this piece as an attempt to express society's loss of control to the machine. The mechanised slaughter of the war replaced humans and horses, allowing the fighting to continue much longer, beyond human limits. He points to the use of redundant technologies such as the 'Commuter II' microfiche readers, replaced by laptop computers almost as soon as they were manufactured, as evidence that this process continues to accelerate. Images, people, societies, are transformed into just so much information.

Despite their apparent simplicity, these are complex, multi-layered works. They act like catalysts for thought - the viewer making links between the images, sounds, materials, and apparatus. As such it would be easy to criticise the artist for leaving meaning too 'open to interpretation', but Stones has focused on a narrow range of imagery, successfully directing the viewer gently towards certain conclusions. Stones is questioning the authority and veracity of the media and image making itself, the impossibility of a fixed meaning in art or science.

It is genuinely refreshing to see an artist working through political issues, yet not succumbing to glib posturing, or single issue tub thumping. It has been some time since I have experienced works by an artist this rigorous in intellect, and conveying a powerful yet subtle political critique.

Chris Byrne

review

Virtue and Vice

Derivations of Allegory in Contemporary Photography

Site Gallery, Sheffield 11th March–10th May

'Allegory means 'other speech' (*alia oratio*), from *allos*, other, and *agoreuein*, to speak openly; it signifies an open declamatory speech which contains another layer of meaning.'¹

The connection between words and pictures has been prominent in western art since the European Renaissance. The Church used symbolism in Religious Art, with the intention for an interpretation by all. This was based on the notion of universal references and the power of propaganda. At the same time, the Neo-Platonic educated minority of the Italian Renaissance used visual allegory to open a range of interpretations, only fully legible by the cultured elite.

The evolution of photography has seen a progression in the autonomous form of image-making. Over the last hundred years, visual language has evolved and the mass saturation of images has been complicated by 'the fact that less than at any time does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality', therefore, 'something has actually to be constructed, something artificial, something set up' in order for it to relate within contemporary society.²

The theory of allegory is concerned with centrally placed objects, persons or personifications intending to represent one thought by way of another. These thoughts open many dimensions. The substance of photographic allegories consist of visual images which encompass an entire entity of a concept and is more than just the reinterpretation of words. The surrealist artists pioneered the concept of creative and constructive photography, yet, allegory has been largely suppressed in modern creative practise. This is redressed in the exhibition *Virtue and Vice* at the Site Gallery in Sheffield. The show includes work from Helen Chadwick, Sorel Cohen, Karen Knorr, Dany Leriche, Paloma Navares, Bernhard Prinz and Olivier Richon.

The work shown in *Virtue and Vice* slips neatly into several categories. Sorel Cohen, Karen Knorr and Paloma Navares explore issues within feminist critical practice. Bernhard Prinz and Dany Leriche demystify the notion of the human form as cultural language. Olivier Richon's concepts derive from historical and literary sources which are then transformed into philosophical and rhetorical statements. Helen Chadwick uses 17th and 18th century allegorical symbols and produces ambiguous compositions that re-present allegory in contemporary photographically based work.

Within these texts, the relationship with a painterly language is always apparent. These constructed images revel in stillness. The compositions are quiescent, captured by the camera prompting an awareness of the optical unconscious with the business of technology recording a segment of time. Yet, the content of the work is firmly based in an established allegorical aesthetic.

The act of looking at an image, which by its very nature is open to alternative readings, is one which can be daunting. It plays on the insecurities of understanding and can be compared to seeing an actual photograph for the very first time. The photographer Karl Dauthendey comments on one of the first forms of photography, the daguerreotype: 'People were afraid at first, to look for any length of time at the pictures (he) produced. They were embarrassed by the clarity of these figures and believed that the little, tiny faces of the people in the pictures could see out at them, so amazing did the unaccustomed detail and the unaccustomed truth to nature of the first daguerreotype pictures appear to everyone'.³

The digitally produced photo-work *Isabelle et Dominique* (1995) by French artist Dany Leriche contains a literal search for truth. Leriche has referred to Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) which acts simultaneously as a double portrait and a memento mori containing a skull in the foreground that only comes into perspective when seen from an angle. In this contemporary reworking, as well as questioning gene manipulation and atomic energy, Leriche has also included a life-size model of a human skull in the form of a digital 3D illusion. This 3D image is supposed to act as a reminder that there are other ways of seeing the world and other dimensions existing within this one. This actual physical 'allegory' has, for myself, posed the question as to whether I can really see the skull image or not and if I cannot see the 3D illusion, am I effectively excluded from the work?

The exhibition at the Site Gallery opened with a conference aptly titled, "I Can't Explain it all Myself". Speakers included Fred Orton, Rosemary Betterton, Karen Knorr, Dany Leriche, Bernhard Prinz and Olivier Richon. The conference aimed to investigate further the notion of allegory in current photographic practise and in doing so, opened up an arena for conceptual conjecture. One of the issues which was questioned was the relationship between form and content. The concept of ideal forms and forms of reality: ideas and images, sign and text. According to Olivier Richon, allegory has 'hidden intentions' in contrast to symbol, which is seen as 'pure and traditionally opens the area of aesthetics'.⁴

Symbol in photography is viewed for itself and for an immediate emotive sensational response. Allegory, then, is a perversion of symbol, a conceptual remote unemotional commentary. Yet, by the very nature of photography, symbol is always present. Olivier Richon's *The Academy* (1995) is a parody of Cesare Ripa's 16th century book. The six-part series includes animal and vegetable objects in a bizarre twist on the theme of still-life, placing it within the discourses of art and art history while exploring the visual statement and its values. An object as symbol, however, will always be viewed as an object, and as part of a composition an object can also be used to represent allegorical meanings.

Angus Fletcher commenting on allegory has suggested that 'while allegorical intention is usually under a high degree of authorial control, means are available whereby the controlling rigours are softened or the simplifying effects of control are counteracted by various devices of complication, chief of which is an ironical gaze turned in upon the work itself'.⁵ This depends on a common system of reference, with the viewer actively engaged in decoding the signs as the site of questioning. It is a rendition from the visual experience to the textual experience and by drawing our own interpretations, variability is increased as well as the aesthetic value of the allegory.

Gay Clifford expresses in his book *Transformations of Allegory* (1974 Routledge) that the very labour of

working things out is a part of the pleasure. This is also based on an assumption that an allegorist has access to an audience prepared to undertake the task, in a desire to know and understand. Mediaeval authors believed it was their function to assist moral speculation and decision through the allegorical interpretations of the Bible and they reached their audience from the pulpit. The Renaissance allegorists used the form in an aridly scholastic mode which was regulated by the literate and cultured elite. The ambiguity surrounding an allegorical style has bred condemnation and denunciation throughout history precisely for its apparent exclusion and substitute meanings.

So what place, if any, does allegory hold in contemporary photography? The works in the *Virtue and Vice* exhibition could be described as catering for a knowing audience, which to a certain extent, is true. Karen Knorr's series *Academies* (1994-95) comments on the status of women within the Royal Academy and follows a general theme which explores rigid ideas of the privileged elite of British Society. Knorr cleverly deconstructs the indulgence of this social and cultural class with such subtlety, the full extent of the irony can only really be appreciated by an 'informed' audience. That isn't to say, alternative readings can not be made. The beauty of allegory is it has no 'one' meaning. The concepts are continually evolving and it is flexible enough to be adapted into postmodernist society. Allegory's historic role in interpreting moral values is passing and is used today predominantly in advertising, placing hidden meanings upon products, with the ambiguity of the allegory revealing the true *Virtue and Vice* of the social norms and values of our times.

Visual images are vastly used as signifiers with constantly changing terms of reference which seem vacant and devoid of context. These images within today's mass media are easily consumable symbols. They are encountered quickly and are disregarded in the same way. A visual language has evolved in the consumer culture, containing stylised images and a generation of stereotypes. Bernhard Prinz invites the viewer to read his images in a 'blatant' allegorical way. Prinz's series: *Blessur* (1996) is the showcase of *Virtue and Vice* and is easily the most accessible work in the exhibition. The images are slick, seductive and have the feel of an advertisement campaign for Benetton or Gap. Prinz takes androgynous young figures and places them in classical portraiture poses. The theme of the series is appearance and skin surface combined with issues of contemporary codes and morality. His models are from the street and are chosen for their gesture and look. The images Prinz creates are blank canvas, so to speak, waiting for interpretations to be added by the viewer. The apathetic protagonists gaze out from the large-scale photographs; this is real life, this is allegory of the everyday.

This play with the attitudes of popular culture highlights a genuine issue in postmodern photographic discourse. Over a century ago at photography's conception, critic Antoine Wiertz proposed that 'When the daguerreotype, this giant-child has grown up, when all his skill and power has unfolded, then genius will suddenly seize him by the scruff of the neck and cry in a loud voice: ...Now you belong to me. We shall work together'.⁶

Has this 'giant-child' grown up? Is there a need to reinvent the language of photography in a more obscure form in reaction to the consumable images of the mass media? Could this language be the form and content of visual allegory, a tradition of Renaissance painting? Current photographic practise is suffused with derivations of this art historical concept. Contemporary photographers Cindy Sherman, Maude Salter, the late Robert Mapplethorpe and others working in the last decade, have openly used allegory in their work. The Surrealist movement and the Avant Guard incorporated allegorical terms throughout their practise. Perhaps this 'pulling back' of creativity in photography, at this point in time, is just a device in order to diversify the medium.

Within the tradition of historic visual allegory, the work of Dany Leriche, in the *Virtue and Vice* exhibi-



SOREL COHEN *The Body that Talks*DANY LERICHE *Isobel et Dominique*

tion, fits closest to the mark. Leriche creates classical compositions using the likes of Holbein, Caravaggio, Ingres and Vermeer as starting points. The large format pale nudes present the female form, as seen by a woman, in a historical setting dealing with contemporary cultural issues. However, the transition from painting to photography changes the perception of these images. As a Renaissance painting, the secondary information acts as a periphery that encases the image from the truest sense of reality. The almost life-size prints by Leriche, force an unnatural truth upon the viewer which is so real, it becomes uncomfortable to view. Nudes in photography have, in the past, had an association with pornography, and the graphic depiction of the naked body in this work can be likened to that association, for the simple reason of realistic photographic representation. Leriche's work is never titillating or frivolous, yet the reality of the *nakedness* exposes questions of voyeurism, exploitation and morality.

Allegory as morality has all but disappeared in its present use. Contemporary photographic allegorists tend to use the idea of morality as a concept to work against. Many of the works in the exhibition feature exotic animals, alive, dead or preserved by taxidermy and Bernhard Prinz, in his series of photographs, includes a large format image of his infant son, an apparent virtue covered in the vice of chicken pox. Like a photograph, the artists in this exhibition have taken something temporary and frozen it in time and it is through inspecting the nature of these photographic objects that patterns and links can be established between them. The *Virtue and Vice* in this exhibition is viewed as a commentary on current social and political norms, of which morality is seen as being just as ambiguous as the allegorical meanings.

There is a strong sense of feminism throughout the exhibition, particularly within the work of Sorel Cohen, Karen Knorr and Paloma Navares. These artists question the representation of the female body in western iconography. The sources of the texts originate within a historical context and are then transformed into the present to personify feminism today. The female models presented by all of the artists in this exhibition are strong, somewhat melancholic liberated women. Cohen, in particular, recontextualises her photo-works by juxtaposing images for multiple visual allegoric readings. The series *The Body that Talks* (1996), is based on a psychoanalyst's couch and the panel that accompany the images are extracts from Freud's *Observations on Transference-Love* dating from 1915. The fact that Cohen herself visits a psychoanalyst, brings to the work an angle on the tangible void that exists between an artist's personal and prolific experience.

Marina Warner in her book *Monuments and Maidens* states that 'Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, and they often do not include who she herself is.'⁷ This is true of all of the female figures represented in the exhibition *Virtue*

and *Vice*. Feminist critique is very conscious in the work and in the attempt to stage contemporary allegories in historical contexts results in a detachment which is evident in all the models, an ambivalent neutrality that prevails throughout, in order for a general validity to be imposed by an audience.

There is almost a clinical fascination with the logistics of the female body in this exhibition, a scientific exploration of the female form which results in an idolisation of women. This is apparent in the work of Paloma Navares whose installation *Light of hibernation* (1995) includes materials such as Plexiglass tube, fluorescent light, display cabinets and transparent plastics. More than anything, the female images represented in the exhibition intend to remember the female body that has been exploited for politics, propaganda and pleasure, and re-address the stereotyped opinions about the female form in western culture.

For American critic Craig Owens, allegory is 'something turned into something else ...one text read through another'.⁸ Indicating that photography as a medium pertains to a visual world removed from itself. This is eloquently displayed by all of the artists included in *Virtue and Vice* in a commentary that stresses interpretation and a particular mode of reading images which is found within the structure of an allegorical text. The embodiment of allegory without personification is present in the work of British artist Helen Chadwick's (1953-1996) contribution to the *Virtue and Vice* exhibition. Chadwick's triptych consisting of two *Wreaths to Pleasure 1 & 10* (1993) and *Mundo Positivo* (1995) explores substance, physical elements and the human body. Moreover, the use of ambiguity obscures typification. In this series of work, Chadwick's source material is expressive and unconventional. Blackberries, bath foam, flower petals and condensed liquids are formed into geometric patterns and photographed as cibachromes. The elements of opposition are always present in the work; repulsion and adoration, beauty and vulgarity, body and spirit. Again, Chadwick has frozen the organic and perishable and forced it into the realm of immortality combining metaphor with allegory. *Mundo Positivo*, itself, is a work based on raising awareness about the HIV virus and AIDS and therefore, is something turned into something else.

Photography is addressed and validated in *Virtue and Vice* as more than a specific practice, it questions the representation, rhetoric and aesthetic of an image. The photography presented is elevated to high art reminiscent of the masterly skill of great Renaissance art. The exhibition explores the relationship between photography and the object. The camera absorbs objects in order to make an image. As an image, these objects become analogical signs and as a sign the object has transcended what it was before and become something else or an allegorical *other*. Terry Eagleton, writing on allegory reminds us that the 'allegorical object has undergone a kind of haemorrhage of spirit: drained of all immanent meaning, it lies as a pure fac-

ticity under the manipulative hand of the allegorist, awaiting such meaning as he or she may imbue it with.'⁹

Virtue and Vice is a thematic exhibition following earlier exhibitions entitled *Hommages & Remakes* (1988), *Grotesque* (1989) and *Minimal Relics* (1992-1993). The contributors here are all working with different methods and agendas which reveal one constant: the same use of an art historical mode capable of subsuming many different genres and forms. An exhibition like this is a representation of the theoretical implications of our time. A comment on the activity of photography, the idea of autonomy and self-sufficiency, received ideas of beauty and taste and the language of repetition and reinterpretation. For the visual texts in this exhibition will nonetheless prevail as photographic images and these texts will always fulfil a didactic function regardless of the obscurity of the allegory.

Currently the *Virtue and Vice* exhibition is showing at Watershed in Bristol until 6 July before moving to Nottingham University Arts Centre and Portalen Køge Bugt Kulturhus in Denmark. Unfortunately, Helen Chadwick's *Wreaths to Pleasure 1 & 10* (1993) will not be travelling and has been returned to Southampton City Art Gallery.

Michelle McGuire

notes

- 1 Warner, M., *Monuments & Maidens*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1985, Foreword p xix
- 2 Brecht, B., Quote—Benjamin, W., *A short history of photography*, SCREEN, Spring 1972. First published in *The Literarische Welt*, 18th September 1931.
- 3 Dauthendey, K., Quote - Benjamin, W., *A short history of photography*, SCREEN, Spring 1972
- 4 Richon, O., *I Can't Explain it all Myself*—Conference. Held at the Showroom Cinema in Sheffield. 21st March 1997. Accompanying the conference is the *Virtue and Vice* catalogue containing the essays *Allegorical Impulses* by Rosemary Betterton (Jan. '97) and *The aim of allegory* by Mirelle Thijsen (Jan. '97).
- 5 Fletcher, A. *ALLEGORY The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, New York, 1967
- 6 Wiertz, A., Quote - Benjamin, W., *A short history of photography*, SCREEN, Spring 1972.
- 7 Warner, M., *Monuments & Maidens*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1985, p 331.
- 8 Owens, C., *The Allegorical Impulse*, October 12, 13, MIT Press 1980.
- 9 Eagleton, T., *Walter Benjamin: Or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, Verso, 1981, p 6

Open War

12.30, MAY 2, ON A VISIT TO *Material Culture* at the Hayward Gallery I was greeted by a considerable police presence at the door of the exhibition. Insults and expletives were being exchanged on this sweltering day. A bomb scare? No, just some disgruntled Marxist students from Middx. University who on expecting to find in *Material Culture*, at last, an exhibition with a dialectical twist, discovered instead a show about sculpture. Their noisy impromptu protest was short lived. I paid my £5 and went in.

Material Culture promised a survey of British object-based work spanning 1980-97, a period that seemed to have a special significance given the fall from office of the Conservative party the night before. The security guards appeared menacing: nervous and unsmiling, bulges under their left armpits, they watched through the narrow slits of half closed eyes. The most alarming feature of *Material Culture* was not the impression of increased security but an intense feeling of *deja vu*; an effect created firstly by the familiarity of the art works on display and secondly by the customary pluralism of exhibitions payrolled by the big cheeses of the London art world. Special agents Greg Hilty and Michael Archer, the curators of *Material Culture*, attempted to iron out the contradictions and approaches.

The resources of the South Bank were put at the service of the two masters of mis-information. Their numerous acts of propaganda included an affordable catalogue which contained a user's guide explaining the themes of the exhibition. Small, square in shape and containing 45 black and white photographs of artworks from each participating artist, this catalogue was widely sought and read. Not everything went according to plan though. Hilty's and Archer's hidden agenda contained within (the reading of recent artworks through an 80s agenda in support of flagging quasi-formalist sculptural tradition of 'questioning what an object is') was beginning to implode. *Material Culture* received criticism from all manner of publications.

The curators suggested that the exhibition was staged as a conversation between works. An example of one such imagined conversation was described as follows:

"Wilding's *Echo* and Turk's *Pimp*, while not necessarily shown side by side, demand to be compared here. Both are sculptures of highly polished metal, occupying similar floorspace and volume; both cold and highly sensual, they combine transparency and containment, in an emotional and not merely formal sense; both have been made with the help of industrial manufacturers, and both are among the respective artists' defining works."

Hilty's and Archer's conspiracy was beginning to come apart at the seams. The comparison between Wilding and Turk was a desperate choice as Turk is part of a recent initiative among artists to address questions of identity and, in Turk's own specific project, to address the legacy of the readymade and past critiques of the culture industry; while Wilding makes sculptures exploring interior and exterior space. *Echo*, constructed from slotted metal strips, is a sculpture concerned with volume, mass and infinity. By comparison, Turk named a large, black roadside skip *Pimp*, a reference perhaps to the expensive cars with smoke black windows that cruise the streets of London? While Turk's use of this stereotype is alarming, it does place him firmly in a discourse that is a million miles away from Wilding and her fellow travellers (Marcus Taylor; perspex fridges, Rachel Whiteread; negative sculptures of domesticity, Richard Deacon; formalist

garden sculpture, Kapoor; mystical phenomenology). This negative-formalist faction has close ties to the Revolutionary Army of Structuralist Formalism (RASF) whose commander in chief, Richard Wentworth, had a high profile in *Material Culture*. The RASF were strongly represented by Abigail Lane, Damian Hirst, Ceal Floyer, Julian Opie and Simon Patterson. Sitting uneasily along side these artist's work were contributions from Susan Hiller, Lucia Nogueira, Sarah Lucas and Rebecca Warren, but any conversation between the artworks in the exhibition was governed by post-modernist protocol. By placing the various artworks in seemingly random relationships, any shared or contradictory contexts, attitudes and influences were carefully erased: the discourses that have evolved around artists' works over the last two decades were effectively silenced.

Despite the smell of panic in the air the Hayward did feature significant and engaging works. Bill Woodrow's early disfigured consumer objects and Tony Cragg's rainbow plastic floor piece *Spectrum* stood out as did Roderick Buchanan's *Chasing 1000* and *Sinn Féin*. In this latter piece from 1990 Buchanan upset the geometry of a white plinth by inscribing the Gaelic phrase in pencil upon the face of the plinth. The accent above the 'e' creates a ridge on the top of the plinth unsettling a white tea cup which balances precariously.

Sarah Lucas and Rebecca Warren both showed pieces that suggested narratives of domestic life. *Is suicide genetic?* by Lucas presented a motorcycle crash helmet made from cigarettes placed on a smoke blackened arm chair, a burnt offering to her interest in clichés about life, pleasure and life harming habits. Rebecca Warren's *Every Aspect of Bitch Magic* was a spell made out of household debris arranged on a plinth that included a shard of green glass, a bee in a jar and pants stretched around a stiff white envelope. Warren had made an artwork that appeared to be the kind of construction made when bored or when wasting time. A spell that has significance only for its maker? These last two works refreshingly showed little interest in craft, skill or Radio 4 poetics that dogged some of the other works in the show.

Material Culture, however, was not staged to open up these issues but to maintain an uneasy peace. That the exhibition has so little to say and no position on the differences between the works revealed a lack of nerve. The market success and media status enjoyed by some young artists, who have little in common with the likes of Deacon, Gormley, Opie or Davey, has been troublesome for many commentators and curators. For this reason *Material Culture* is a timely, if dismal, failure at attempting to deal with art produced in the last 5 years. Diverse practices have emerged in circumstances shaped by a growing interest in vernacular culture and identity amongst artists (which has unfortunately seen the adoption of stereotypes by some), and an unprecedented media interest in young artists, often seen as unproblematic by many of today's practitioners. This change in circumstances does represent a generational shift of positions and concerns which *Material Culture* was not keen to explore. Others have been more forthright.

Peter Suchin, when writing on *Live/Life*, astonishingly chastised much of the art on show for being amateur and badly made, and praised work whose production values matched the rigours of critical thought. A misguided nostalgia for the 80s and the professionalism of Neo-Conceptualism perhaps? Adrian Searle, writing about the same show worried about beauty and brevity and many thought that too much attention was being given to a scene rather than concentrating on the quality of the work, *Live/Life* being a telling

example of this.

Quality is the issue here. It unites those who might under other circumstances find themselves in opposing camps, and behind this call for quality is a belief that the production of art and culture is an ethical activity. In comparison to *Material Culture*, *Live/Life*, despite its faults, placed an emphasis on the contingencies of recent art production by involving independent art spaces, exhibiting magazines and connecting different generations of artists through collaboration. *Material Culture* had little interest in such a dialogical space despite the claims that it was structured through conversations.

20 seconds of my visit to *Material Culture* will stay with me for a long time. One of the Middx. University students managed to regain access to the exhibition; dressed in denim and wearing Dolce and Gabbana sunglasses he passed easily for a German tourist. The student joined a group being conducted around the gallery by an artist. He listened intently and then raised his hand to ask a question.

His dry lips parted: "A large percentage of the works on show are either owned by the Saatchi Gallery or the property of the Lisson Gallery, I've heard of a one party state but..."

He never finished his sentence. Ten bullets were pumped into his chest raising red craters on his denim shirt. In slow motion he fell against the white wall, smearing a path of red blood as his dead body fell to the floor. Gasps from the group were quickly silenced. All exits were sealed. Two security guards stood motionless, arms outstretched holding objects of highly polished metal, occupying similar volume: both cold and sensual. They had delayed shooting only for a second and then carried out their duty, just as they had been instructed. One guard, his mouth covered by a bushy ginger moustache, raised his radio to his lips and croaked: "Dead terrorist in gallery one." Within the hour the only trace of the event were the small blood speckles that now decorate Richard Deacon's *Art for Other People*. It never made the papers.

David Burrows

review

Duane Hanson (1925-96)

Saatchi Gallery, London April 1997

THE SECURITY GUARD in the gallery leans awkwardly against a wall. His eyes are not vigilant but distant, reflecting, perhaps, on the miserable existence which has led to his present state of being. Not far away, an American couple, kitted out in the garish colours of their Summer clothes gaze upwards to an exhibit, their faces belying no emotion other than boredom. To this extent they are like many tourists, force feeding themselves with culture for which they have no genuine interest but which they will enjoy talking about in retrospect in the comfort of their own home while passing the photos around. It's Sunday: it must be the Saatchi Gallery.

If you follow the tourists' line of vision, you will notice that there is no exhibit in front of them. They, like the Security guard, and 15 other life-size characters are the exhibits: sculptures made from varying combinations of polychromed bronze, polyvinyl, fibreglass and everyday accessories. Duane Hanson's ordinary Americans are frighteningly realistic replications of people whose complacency with their own meaninglessness has bypassed angst to arrive at a condition of accepted pre-mortal purgatory.

The resemblance to real people is so acute that one

feels uncomfortable looking at them closely, as though one is invading their personal space. Unlike most works of art which, when put in a gallery, are emphasised as being just that, Hanson's figures blend unobtrusively with the often unanimated visitors. The tourists, the guard and the cleaner fit into the environment very easily but even the sunbather, with her subtly reddening tan, is such a presence that it is easy to exclude the gallery environment from the overall effect. Most of the visitors - cultured types of course - ignored the stare of the flea-market vendor and peruse, from a do-not-touch distance, with fidgeting hands, the books on her table. This is quite different from the hyper-real parade of stars at Madame Tussauds. Static sculptures cannot be animated, so Hanson has overcome this obstacle to his pursuit of Realism by depicting people who have become, through the weariness of life, unanimated. For this reason, the baby in the stroller, too young to have lost her soul, is the least effective of the pieces.

Hanson's attention to detail was enabled by making full body casts of his subjects and extends to the tiny lined squares on the skin which we only notice on ourselves if we peer closely and, apparently, to the genitalia, although the most intimate glance I got was of Rita the waitress's breast and bra cup exposed by an undone button on her overalls.

Apart from admiring Hanson's extraordinary 'craftsmanship', we must question our intentions in visiting this exhibition and the unquestionable satisfaction in doing so. These ordinary people are not unlike the ordinary people we have sat with on the

tube and walked past on the street in order to come to the gallery and pay £3.50 to see more of the same. And, for the financially insane, a £15 catalogue to see photographs of models of people. One reason, after overcoming the initial embarrassment of offending an inanimate object, is that we can confront them at point-blank range and scrutinise them with the intensity of a philatelist as we have probably never done to a living (or dead) human being.

It is not the age-stretched elbow skin or the jogger's veined and freckled balding head which declare the humanity of the sculptures, but the forlorn expressions of people consumed by their mundane jobs and routines. Even the young shopper, laden with bags of new clothes, looks quite unmoved by her day out. The old couple on the bench sit quite apart, looking as though they left each other years ago. The jogger, who is keen on keeping his health and the only exhibit which is not overweight, is going bald, needs glasses, is about to become sunburnt and has had his run curtailed by a blister.

These are unheroic mortals who have been made immortal by being frozen in a moment of time, yet their expressions are unafraid, ready for death whenever it may arrive. If the sculptures were aware of their entrapment in this permanent moment one feels they would not care.

Matthew Lewis

report

LEAF: Liverpool East European Electronic Arts Forum

12-14 April 1997

Alexei Shulgin, the first speaker at the conference organised by Iliana Nedkova for the Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology, described himself as "the director of a fake organisation I established myself". It was a good introduction to the East European world of electronic media arts, a combination of rough pragmatism - being 'director' of anything is a godsend for visa applications - and unreality which pervaded the debates and presentations of this two-day symposium over the first weekend of Video positive 97.

Shulgin's astute classification of net art into those that respond to the net and those that intervene in it - his examples were JoDi and Heath Bunting's irrational org - was the thin end of a very large wedge. We are still at the beginnings of genuine internet, and the US domination of the scene has closed our eyes, especially in the UK, to what options other traditions can open up for us. Perhaps this is the legacy of the cold war. We never knew, or scarcely got a chance to find out about, the massive surrealist cultures of Eastern Europe. We were told by our own cultural commissar that socialist realism ruled the roost, that we wouldn't be interested, that it was all escapism and propaganda. As a result, we only saw those miserable movies by Wajda and Zanussi, and never saw the glorious surrealism of Wojcek Has. Svankmajer was the only representative of Czech surrealism with a rep in the West, and that really only after the beginning of the velvet revolution. Our sense of Eastern Europe has been tarnished by our artistic customs officers: galleries, museums, critics, distributors. The net begins to change this, perhaps, but only if we can reorganise our mindsets to grasp that there is something quite different, quite novel, quite surprising and, to use one of the conference's buzzwords, quite estranging about the emergent East-West relation.

Shulgin comes from a delirious legacy of anarchistic nihilist comedy, and authentic and living Dadaism, of which punk's po-faced situationism was only a pallid shadow. This kind of reverent play, this artful cunning, a million miles removed from the fatuous postmodernism of Koons and the neo-dada of the wealthy and fashionable galleries, kept on re-emerging in the oddest places. Tomas St. Auby presented his project for an International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPTU). The real International Union allocates the electromagnetic spectrum on an international basis in the interests of trade and governance. The IPTU sees this as Big Brother, and itself as Big Sister. In place of the promotion of consumerism, it calls for a general strike of consumption, seeing in the deaf-blind the new core of a new humanity. Taste, you see, has not much to do with it.

Marko Peljhan, arguing that Bosnia is currently the most surveyed patch of ground on the planet, proposed a counter-surveillance based on the military principles of the 'peace-keeping' force, the weak learning from the tools of the strong. Strategy, command, control and communications, surprise, initiative, mobility and the simple goals of an army: these would be the watchwords of an independent satellite communications network. Serious? Or a dark comedy? Both, especially in what, from the floor, was described as the commodification of space in the nation state.

Nationality too was a central factor in the new Europe. As your correspondent began to learn something of the difficulties and opportunities facing our colleagues, some of the mists began to lift. About the Soros Foundation, and the network of centres it has established across Eastern Europe, for example. George Soros, the billionaire trader, has set up centres where training and access, and the possibility of achieving substantial works, have become available to a large number of participants. But in certain cases, notably in Croatia, the centres have become the targets of verbal and occasionally physical attack. They have

been identified as invasive purveyors of ideologies and attitudes at odds with the nationalist ideologies of power blocs and political formations, leading youngsters away from traditional cultures and values.

You have to sense a certain ambiguity among even the beneficiaries of the Soros Foundation. Is it true that the West is driving a vast wedge of individualism and exploitation through the narrow wires of the internet? Eric Klutenberg from Talinn raised these questions poignantly, critiquing the February 1995 Cyberspace Declaration of Independence penned by John Perry Barlow and published by the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Their attack on the US Telecommunications Reform Act in the name of a post-national, post-legal, post-political individualism was naive, simplistic, reactionary, even Cartesian, linked to gnostic hatred of the body, and profoundly anti-social. These values, too, have a claim on Eastern Europe, where freedom has become an almost theological category of thought, something perpetually demanded, yet never experienced.

Conflictual intellectual traditions demand new modes of cultural evolution. If 'communication' was, under the old regime, synonymous with propaganda, and the 'public sphere' with the state, what can be made of a new order in which the commercialisation of the media means that papers will not run stories critical of advertising or advertisers? Where the old state supports for artists have crumbled, but no new commercial infrastructure has come about? In which, after all, the state TV is often the best channel for the distribution of new work, despite everything that it has been associated with in the past?

What else has been lost? A number of speakers made pointed calls for a recognition of the changed experience and role of women in the old Comecon societies. Nina Czegledy noted the loss of women in public life; Mare Tralla noted the loss of an old, paternalist and tokenist but nonetheless effective Communist Party commitment to women's representation. Now, she identifies a 'culture of silence', in which representation in the political sense is replaced by representation as 'toys' and 'spinsters', leaving open only an ironic space for women's engagement in public culture. Without, as Nina Czegledy again put it, "a conceptual apparatus to name what I would now call gender politics".

Geert Lovink traced us a history of 'independent' and 'alternative' media, arguing that the former came to an end in 1989, when the samizdat logic (whereby cultural power was inversely proportional to economic scale) became a victim of its own success. 'Alternative' media was always a journalistic tag. In their place, he called for a tactical media, democratised, flexible, diffuse, semantically defined and independent of platform, demanding a kind of sharing of resources which neither corporate nor individualistic models can offer, and requiring a plurality of financial models. In the case of Bulgaria, investigated by several speakers, there exists a software infrastructure. But the authoritarianism associated with being Comecon's central economy for software development also led to a culture of hacking and copyright theft (not to mention viral programming). On the one hand, this allowed a thriving electronic music culture, seen as innocuous by the authorities. On the other, it leads Luchezar Boyadjiev to another Dadaist art-plot: why build new networks and online exhibition spaces when you can hack into the Virtual Louvre and hang your works there? Why defend human rights alone, when the internet is clearly the beginnings of a trades union movement for computers?

Speaker after speaker, especially on the second day, offered insights in the form of demonstrations, performances and screenings. Janos Sugar voiced a doubt many of us felt, and feel at such occasions: were we building a new East/West, rich/poor paradigm, an impoverished and stereotypical multiculturalism? The best argument against this doubt was the work that followed it. Ryszard Kluszinski showed pages from a group project which included some of the most intelligent hypertext I have yet to see, a graphical animation stack of e.e. cummings' 'leaf' poem. Kathy Rae Huffman and Eva Wohlgemuth talked about their online dinner parties, which take the convivial space of women's talk and the form of the recipe book as cultural record to build new feminist technological connectivity. Representatives from www.opennet.org talked about the importance of Real Audio in the fight against state censorship of the airwaves, Lev

Manovitch described his Diamat Productions, with their Theory plug-ins, and Melentie Pandelovski presented an interactive net project based on the premise that Alexander the Great survived long enough to secure the bases for a unified Empire, neither Christian nor Judaic, East of the Bosphorus. The site raised questions of nationalism again, especially in the heated zone of dispute between Greece and Macedonia (FYROM): the map excludes both territories, and asks about a Europe whose heart is neither Mediterranean nor Atlantic.

But perhaps of all the screened works, the one that made the most immediate and perhaps the most lasting impression was the talk by Enes Zlatar, who showed two pieces. The first was a banal piece of home video, two lads skiing down a street to the accompaniment of some dweebing pop tune. It was only as Zlatar explained that the music hid the silence, punctuated only by machine gun fire and cannon, of the height of the siege of Sarajevo, that the street should have been busy with shoppers but was covered with snow, and that skiing was an expression of longing for hills and pleasures put out of bounds by the war, that his exordium made sense: 'Video became our dream'. By contrast, we then watched a tape of a guy talking to camera, outdoors, about his desensitization to the suffering of the war; cut to scenes of hospital wards and fearful amputations; cut back to the monologist, now indicating a prone figure behind him in the middle distance of the shot: 'You know, I don't even know if that body is alive or dead, and I don't seem to care. And you know what's really strange', he added, with a pause both chilling and exhilarating, 'I feel GREAT!'. For Bosnians, even after the war, there are only three countries you can visit without a visa and all the hassle that goes with them. In this context, the internet takes on these dimensions of the siege: of the dream of escape and virtual travel, and as the site of an intensely local working-through of the particularities of a very specific culture —one from which the artists had already fled, leaving the people to make their own art.

Discussions raged, over drinks, in bars, through the night, at performances and at the special screening of work from Eastern Europe held as part of the festival at the Cornerhouse, Manchester. As Mike Stubbs from Hull Time Based Arts said on the second morning, "This is the first time I've woken up on a Sunday morning saying, Oh Good, the conference is still on". You felt that the moves between political platforms and computer platforms was moving the ground under your feet. Screened works like Czegledy's 'Tryptych' and Peter Forgacs' 'Wittgenstein Tractatus' would blow your socks off one way; the interplay between artistic ambition and pragmatic doggedness in the establishment of the Maribot women's festival would blast them back on again. Not a penny dropped without the floorboards being removed first. We have a huge amount to learn about the relations between nationalism and art, internet and communication, software theft and dadaism.

Perhaps nowhere more than in the UK, or more specifically in its little nations, do we have need of these experiences, where the ingrowing national ideologies of Little Englanders and the more kailyard wings of Scottish Nationalists have come so close to power. An early contribution from the floor suggested that the transnational, the parochial and the individualist need to be rethought in a new way: as the translocal. We have so much to learn. and we need to offer help gracefully. PDQ.

END NOTE: Edited proceedings from the LEAF97 conference are available at <http://www.personal.unet.com/~gas/leaf.htm>, complete with hotlinks to sites and contact addresses. The next major event discussing these issues will be Ostranenie, to be held in Bauhaus, Dessau. It is hoped that there will be a major Eastern European strand at ISEA98 in Liverpool and Manchester.

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Surplus Bodies

The Real, The Virtual and the Work of Witkin

Virtual Reality: the place where flesh goes to die and the electronic body struggles to be born at the fin-de-millennium...¹

In this essay I want to think about the fascination contemporary culture, particularly photography, has with the visceral and virtual body. The body is now in a very real sense 'hot' property. No longer marginal it lies at the very centre of scientific and cultural discourse and political and ethical debate. Kroker and Weinstein's definition of VR (cited above) as a transitional space might be as good a place as any from which to consider the current status of the human body and technology. New technologies, that is optoelectronics and their application in science and culture, which increasingly becomes a merging field, raise fundamental questions about who we are, and how our world might be. The body is, along with cyberspace, perceived as a final frontier and increasingly what the body is will depend on how it is represented; on how it is understood; on how we negotiate meaning.² This means not just thinking about how we are positioned by discourse, but how we might position ourselves within discourse.³ It means taking responsibility for the knowledge we produce. Moreover, if we are to provide knowledge adequate to the demands of the present then it is in the here and now that we should begin.

Current discourses about the body and technology are for the most part fetishistic and reductionist accounts of the present; it is not accidental that biological essentialism has been superseded by a facile genetic essentialism which is rarely questioned. Similarly, visual work that takes as its subject 'the body' is on the whole assumed to be politically progressive. I am as wary of this as I am of the critical or historical writing that accompanies the exhibition and publication of such images. This is to say that within postmodernism such questions are repressed. However, they are important if we are to make some sense of the ways in which responses to what are called 'new' (although more accurately not so new technologies) run simultaneously in opposite directions: a projection into the future and a regression to the past.

Few would dispute that we live in a period of rapid social change which has produced a crisis in the real; in representation. If the present seems 'out of control' one assumption is that if we are not in control of the present, then at least in employing the latest electronic technology we can be involved in directing the future. We can be masters of a virtual universe. This is a question of power. It is the mark of a lack of political imagination and a naive faith in the emancipatory qualities of technology that computers have been seized upon as if a postmodern life-raft, a Star-ship Enterprise to beam us out of the present. Within the realm of visual culture a long-discredited essentialism of political commitment has been resurrected arguing yet again that in the right hands, if the right people are wired, freedom is just around the corner.

At the very same moment there has been a plea for a return to the past, to a craft-based master photography as if we can escape from the present through a naive, nostalgic and regressive return to the authentic experience of the photographer-as-sovereign-author working in a pre-postmodern garden before the Fall. These positions are two sides of the same coin. Both are marked by 'nostalgia' whether for future or past. Both share in common the desire to transcend the present by swiftly dispatching all those tiresome economic, political, philosophical and ethical questions that haunt our times, which we seem unable to think about, let alone answer. In this essay I want to explore the ways in which our present postmodern culture is

haunted not just by fantasies about the future, but by pre-modern, that is medieval beliefs. I take as my examples medical imaging and art photography. While bodies and technologies have no origins, they do have histories and these need to be traced.

I want to argue that what is repressed in medical imaging returns in the realm of contemporary art. As medical imaging has become more abstract, less meaty, art has become more visceral; more bodily. The techno-futuristic realm of medical imaging provides a framework in which to consider the photographic images of Joel-Peter Witkin. The first epitomises a nostalgia for the future and the latter a yearning for the past. Both are characteristic of post-modernism. Witkin (and many others) exercise tight authorial control. It would, for example, be impossible for the critique that follows to appear alongside his photographs. This is undoubtedly a form of censorship. I primarily focus upon his work and his use of cadavers and body parts as a means to discuss what is a more general trend within the art market. Broadly, the arguments presented here could be applied to other artists such as Hirst or Serrano; to recent publication of photographs from medical and police archives or to artists' illegal acquisition of body parts from morgues in order to make work. Witkin's work is only distinguished by its extremity. Whatever way you look at it there is a market, a trade in bodies and they are not virtual.

This might tell us something about the present popular fascination with medical images of the human body. Medical images, especially abstract images produced by such methods as photomicrography or radiography have largely been ignored by historians of photography. Where they are used by historians of medicine, these images are usually treated as unproblematic illustration. These images have been located in archives; their authors are usually anonymous; access is restricted. Recently, however, computer generated medical imagery has become widely circulated to a keen viewing public. Ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging, tomography are remote technologies with a history rooted in techno-military warfare. The images they produce are seductive and because they offer us so much to see, we marvel at their beauty and so tend to overlook what has been excised. On closer inspection we begin to notice that all traces of bodily disorder, mess, chaos are removed. The desire here is for clean-cut, flattened, soft, seamless imagery. The result is a highly sanitised, orderly vision of the body. A simulated depth is complemented by, which is to say aestheticised by, the use of electronically generated colour, providing an almost hallucinogenic quality. Moreover, vessel, cell or gene is isolated from its ground so that the object in view seems to float alone in space and allows our eye only to focus on this or that element as if totally unrelated to the body. Flesh is reduced to abstract information. It is no longer that the body is fragmented but rather it is dematerialised (technologies such as x-ray and electron microscope played an important role here) and finally disappears, as if the visceral is what we most fear. We could describe this as a kind of postmodern flaying where we are now eager participants in such disciplinary processes and therefore medical images once circulated to a private audience can now be safely shown publicly. They appear in everyday culture as a display of power, not of humans but of intelligent machines. It is the body that becomes a ghost while its pictures are living, teeming with life, even after death.

This more anonymous context is important to an understanding of Witkin's work. He argues that he wants his prints to "look like old photographs that

have been hidden in someone's attic and suddenly brought to light".⁴ To this end he employs formal theatrical props of nineteenth century photography: the proscenium arch; the use of the curtain, the fetishistic techniques of a dark photographic and fine art printing. The space within the frame is compressed, congested with detail, depthless. This is further emphasised by the use of collaged backdrops. In neo-medieval, or neo-neo-classical spectacle, he conjures up the spectres of Dürer or David, as if to flatter the viewer's art historical knowledge, but also to make us intelligent consumers of what has already been consumed.

This formal ordering is combined with a grotesque content of sutured foetuses, stumps and cadavers in various states of decay thus producing a powerful mingling of the aesthetic and the medical which verges on the pornographic. What once coalesced on the anatomy table, now congeals in the bloody tableaux created in Witkin's studio. This work has a history in anatomical dissection (a more adult version of infantile sadism), religious iconography (with its simultaneous elevation and degradation of women), and pornography (the body as meat). But it is a history of which Witkin cannot speak. Such a history can, however, be traced in wax Venuses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The pose of these female dolls closely resembles that of swooning saints, as well as the standardised pose of pornographic models. Laid out on velvet, satin or silk, like toys they could be opened up and the viewer could see the mysterious organs of the interior, particularly reproductive. For Witkin, the past, like the body can be cut just how one wants. Witkin is also an editor of privately printed books: *Masterpieces of Medical Photography*, 1987; *Gods of Heaven and Earth*, 1989; *Harm's Way*, 1994. In a process of representational asset-stripping, images are wrenched from archives of police, medicine, asylums. Re-assembled and re-contextualised they are beautifully re-printed on matt art paper, bound in cloth and produced in 'limited' editions of 5,000. Witkin is keen to display his academic credentials and commissions scientists, art historians, medics to write essays which lend a specious credibility to his art. Those who had remained below the threshold of vision until the nineteenth century; those classified as 'other' were brought into view so that they could be made to disappear into 'ignoble' archives in what was an act of representational liquidation. Here they are resurrected. What was once tragedy becomes farce. The dead or merely different return not as subjects in their own right, but only as so much grist to the mill of art.

Witkin's preferred technique is to gouge, lacerate, scratch the negatives; the prints are then toned, death is warmed up, faux-foxed, spattered with potassium cyanide, which gives the appearance of decay. The result is a stained and abused image. It shares this distinguishing mark with the pornographic image. Finally, with the use of encaustic the prints are redemptively polished in a bogus act of reparation and sanctification.⁵ This simulates the fate of bodies. Witkin becomes a kind of textual anatomist. The skin of the photographic emulsion stands as metaphor for human skin. Bodies once wounded, bound, masked or gagged, are finally killed and chopped up like so many pieces of meat.⁶ This is a metaphoric and literal scavenging; a cannibalisation of styles and bodies; a chilling universe in which bodies are collapsed into texts; reality into fantasy.

But bodies are not texts; aesthetics are not ethics any more than virtuality is reality. The bodies and cadavers come from the geographical margins and the recently deregulated markets of eastern block coun-

Surplus Bodies

continued

tries which have recently become a sort of playground for Western artists.⁷ Bodies become commodities, articles of trade, like any other. They are easy to come by for those with money and power. These bodies, cadavers or human remains, alive or dead, are objects with one last value which can be bought whole or in part. There is a trade in bodies, whereby the poor, while still alive, are forced to sell their organs, their bodies, their children, sometimes their lives. What Witkin produces is a system of representation that reinforces the mercenary logic of a global market economy which is little more than a form of corporate feudalism.

The lie of voyeurism is, of course, that the object agrees to its exhibition. These 'other' surplus bodies, with heads laterally or literally severed can't look back. Those who were once subjects become objects, and in an act of subjugation are made to bear the burden, the sheer material weight of corporeality and finally death so that the artist, and the viewer, can have eternal life.⁸ In the killing fields of central Europe, or central America, maiming, torture and death are all too close to home and so we prefer our corpses, like history, dressed up.

This is the final irony: Witkin's world is a universe where all boundaries are gone and yet such a world can only exist in one of the most hidebound of institutions: the art gallery, which in the late twentieth century is little more than a showroom for the art market. This market is one with a voracious appetite for indelicacies. The 'waning of affect' as we approach the end of the millennium has led to an increased and as yet unsatisfied demand for butchered bodies and strong meat, so long as it is well hung. We should be more critical.

Roberta McGrath

notes

1 A Kroker and M Weinstein, *Data Trash*, 1994, p162

2 See D Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', *Socialist Review*, no. 80, 1985; R Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 1994

3 See S Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation', *Framework*, no. 36, 1989

4 Interview, *Border Crossings*, Winter 1990, p17

5 It is Witkin's wife who carries out this last rite.

6 Witkin is keen to emphasise that he does not tamper with the bodies, as if the process of choice of object is not part of the process of making work.

7 Witkin claims his 'moral and ethical stringency' in obtaining access to bodies. Permission, where it cannot be agreed by the person because of reasons of insanity or death is always sought and agreed by doctors as 'representatives of the State'. J-P Witkin, public lecture, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, October 1995. These are bodies which no one has claimed; *Head of a Dead Man* was a victim of police brutality in Mexico City. More recent pictures are of asylum inmates in Budapest, Hungary. This exhibits a truly remarkable lack of moral judgement and artistic responsibility.

8 '[T]ruthfully they are aspects of my own self', *Journal of Contemporary Art*, op. cit.

p112. There is a world of difference between trying to understand the self as other and the narcissism of viewing others as part of oneself.

Art, Science, Economics and Nuthatches

Gavin Jones

Introduction

This essay morphed (cool, I'm in with the under fives) out of the research Marc Lambert and I did for the Edinburgh International Science Festival lectures. Rather than cack-handedly present a précis of all ten lectures, I thought it more appropriate to focus on one of the "emergent structures" of the lectures, a sub-text that ran through all: the epistemological divisions within science. On the one hand there were those whose work seemed to me more akin to the artistic (i.e. assimilative, analogical and essentially—as opposed to peripherally—interdisciplinary). On the other, there were those whose work was firmly embedded in the laws of (as Richard Dawkins terms it) 'hierarchical reductionism.'

This dialectic (examined in the first part of this essay) is far more applicable to art and artists than any naive description of science's gizmos and weirdness. Boy's toys may be fun for some, but they are best fiddled with behind closed doors.

The distinction between a rationalist determinism and libertarianism has underpinned economic debate for over 200 years now. One of the most curious aspects of the science/arts debate over the last 20 years is how the most vociferous proponents of scientific, hierarchical determinism have tended towards extreme conservative libertarianism in economic areas (Matt Ridley being one of the best examples of this tendency). Visual arts provision, and in particular in the public arts, would appear to be an exact inversion of this tendency: state sponsored libertarianism. In the second section, I argue that current practice would be improved by a lessening of the current pseudo-competitive environment in which the public arts function.

1. Beauty is the Beast

"Art does no longer serve any institutions; it has become autonomous. I can not describe the new situation, since art can not be described. It proves itself only in its performance. First of all, I can feel that something is expected of art and of me, some sort of hope."

Gerhard Richter *Interview in Noch Kunst*

"So what is reflexivity?...Social scientists have long been concerned that their discipline is markedly different from natural science because the very act of observing economic and social life changes what is being observed."

Will Hutton paraphrasing George Soros
The State To Come

"...the hierarchical reductionist believes that carburetors are explained in terms of smaller units ...which are explained in terms of smaller units ...which are ultimately explained in terms of the smallest fundamental particles. Reductionism, in this sense is just another name for an honest desire to understand how things work."

Richard Dawkins *The Blind Watchmaker*

HIERARCHICAL DETERMINISM is merely a procedure. It is not, as Dawkins points out akin (in itself) to baby eating or sin. As a procedure it is morally neutral. When applied appropriately it has proven an invaluable tool for our understanding. It is however not the only intellectual process, nor is it the summation of everything that is intrinsically human. In discussing the interface between art and science one needs to be aware of the pitfalls of such an approach. One needs to be aware that whilst morally neutral in itself, the implications of hierarchical determinism are political in the extreme.

In its end oriented, obsessive and exclusive application of the truth, (the truth in this sense being the method of observation as opposed to the observed) the mechanistic wing of the science sect displays its limits. This approach, whilst providing the logos necessary to cohere seemingly disparate phenomena and observed magnetic phenomena), proves hopelessly inadequate when applied to self-reflexive phenomena (things which "bite back": artists for example). John Barrow's floundering (though *honest*) attempts to *understand* how visual art *works* in terms of our inherited aesthetic preference for certain landscapes is an eloquent testament to this. The determinism is exemplary: art ...artist ...artist's propensity for certain aesthetic judgements ...artist's evolutionary lineage ...genetic basis for artist's production. This approach, of course, explains nothing beyond a tautological elucidation of its own procedures.

As proof for his argument Barrow examples only works showing traits of his argument. This kind of selectivity of evidence would be a mere curio were it not symptomatic of the wider problem in science's approach. By a generalisation of the particulars of artistic production (in any way that is meaningfully scientific according to Dawkin's rules of hierarchical reductionism) one fundamentally misses the importance and veracity of any visual culture, composed as it is of constantly shifting significance, both personally and historically.

It is this peculiarly "general" nature of the determinist process, which both underpins the success of science writing (it is easier to sell a commodity if the spin is generally applicable), but has also proven the *bête noir* of determinism itself. Whilst science is great at building planes, for example, it is singularly incapable of understanding the particularities of the complex vortex mechanics that enable it to fly. Art also relies on the particular: each and every human has their own artistic inclinations and motivations and this is the capitalist realist logic lying behind the quote of Gerhard Richter cited earlier. On this level the form of science in question can be illuminating if only to throw into perspective the deeply moral, political and economic heuristics of the artistic approach. In highlighting the difficulties of a process which has led humanity so wildly astray in so many areas, one can easily fall into the trap of a nihilistic rejectionism. The creative possibilities of recognising a valid pluralistic counter-ideology are great and offer a positive alternative to such nihilism, albeit one far more

difficult to sell to a public weaned on sound bite polemicism, and, whose idea of anti-science stops at such inanities as the X-Files. Just to stay true to my 'hypocritical oath,' here are a couple of polemic sound bites for you.

*Two outcomes of determinism:
mass slaughter and great writing.*

Mary Midgley recently told me of a thing she witnessed at a science and theology conference in Oxford. An eminent biologist delivered a speech in which he decried the teaching of subjects which, as he saw, offered non-scientific "falsehoods". A kind of scientific correctness. Certainly, whilst this is an extreme example, there is a pervasive fundamentalism at the heart of the world's most influential ideology: scientism. (If you want to get irrationally worried about this inexplicable and seemingly amoral new sect, the Gulf War did happen, the erasing of Basra and its people did happen, and it was an "achievement" of science.

Compared to the scientific fundamentalists, the various nationalists and religionists are but pups in arms).

Since the mid-late 1970s science has had more than its fair share of eloquent spokespeople. From Carl Sagan, through Richard Feynmann, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Steven Jay Gould, E.O. Wilson, etc. These were not the eccentric boffins of yore plying their wares on the OU at 3 in the morning with Kipper ties. These were multimillion copy selling authors, lean marketing dreams, on the cutting edge both of science's ever advancing new dawn and of popular culture.

Such a marketing phenomenon has not happened in art writing. Indeed, for reasons quoted previously, it may prove impossible. The political fall-out from this however is that art, such a potentially and essentially *hopeful* endeavour, may be forever marginalised somewhere between pop-videoism and client led fascism.

Not wishing to play the role of excuser for bad writers, there are real problems for anyone wishing to "sell" art. Paradoxically, chief among the problems is art's great strength: namely its *particular* nature. Whilst science writers can appear coherent by applying general principles across the board, art writers have no such luxury. The tendency, therefore, is to concoct general principles (to play the science game. My own possible hypocrisy), or to get bogged down in terminological semantic/pedantic arguments, pat historicising, or vain attempts at neutral description. All these approaches may be (but rarely are) interesting in themselves, but they miss the point. Art is analogical and assimilative, concepts and arguments are drawn together (as opposed to analysed or dissected). Art exists in dialogue only. This communicative (discursive) principle has been largely ignored by art writers (scientists and economists have however long been fascinated by it: David Bohm, Noam Chomsky, Danah Zohar, Will Hutton to name but a few). Considering the central role it plays at all levels of artistic production/dissemination such an omission is surprising.

In the second section of this essay, I wish to focus on the system within which, in Scotland at least, most contemporary art is shown, namely the public gallery. The implications I draw could equally be applied to science's equivalent to these spaces, i.e. the research department.

2. Towards a Stakeholding Arts Community

"Mechanism stresses hierarchy. It structures existence according to ever-descending units of analysis. Molecules are more basic than neurones, atoms more basic than molecules. We structure power and organisation in the same ladder of ascending and descending authority."

Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall *The Quantum Society*

"Mechanical methods and models of simple causal explanations are increasingly inapplicable as we advance to such complex phenomena. In particular, the crucial phenomena determining the formation of many highly complex structures of human interaction,

i.e. economic values or prices, cannot be interpreted by simple causal or 'nomothetic' theories, but require explanation in terms of the joint effects of a larger number of distinct elements than we can ever hope individually to observe or manipulate."

Friedrich Hayek *The Fatal Conceit*

PUBLIC GALLERIES are in a curious position at the moment. Ostensibly they are publicly funded bodies whose income is allocated by a quasi-governmental organisation, and who have to unofficially compete for funding whilst officially keeping up the pretence of autonomy. This means that all competition takes place well out of the official channels: a cosy but none too dynamic situation. To further understand the problems and implications of this a general overview from a neo-Keynsian perspective proves illuminating. Firstly however, a word about nuthatches.

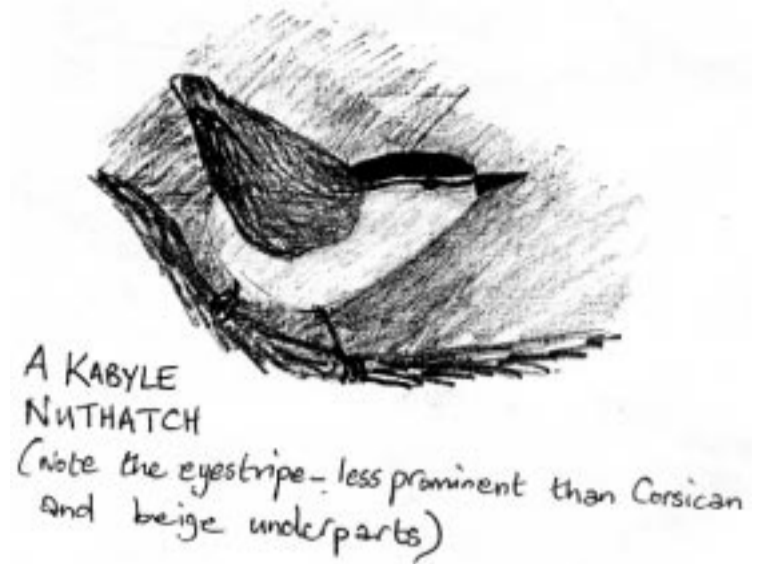
High in the Petite Kabyle Mountains of northern Algeria, in pine forests that form the upper limit of the tree zone, there lives a small and incredibly scarce bird: the Kabyle Nuthatch. It was discovered in 1975 and is one of the rarer birds of the world.

Taxonomically it is very similar to the Corsican Nuthatch, varying only in the markings of its cap. Both are examples of divergent evolution in closed gene systems. Isolation is the key to their species status, it could also be the key to their extinction in years hence. Isolates are constantly under threat of extermination from environmental change. If gene pools are small, they are also highly susceptible to genetic ossification, i.e. the entropic propensity of any closed system: in this case a heterogeneous species. Such a situation makes the "sufferer" far more likely to succumb to an inherited disorder. Mutations of this sort multiply rapidly through a small population. The effects can be devastating. In human group dynamics, whether on a personal or economic level, factionalism can have just as destructively an ossifying effect.

Economically, of course, factionalism cuts two ways. In a competitive environment it can be beneficially motivational. However, in sectors reliant on the nurturing of creative endeavour, the effect will be similar to that of isolation for a species: potentially catastrophic. And herein lies the problem with the current quango led pseudo-community public art system. The problem is one of emphasis at the funding level. Instead of engendering a "malicious/competitive" climate, the funders should be no less than *demanding* the creation and maintenance of an open community policy in the arts, where stress is laid firmly on the interdisciplinary and the inter-organisational. Only by doing so will the arts move away from the 1980s, in which they have remained, along with much of British "industry". The key to such an approach is that of social sanction and motivation, a principle which can only succeed if built upon bonds of trust within a community. A digression is important here to set this in a wider context.

In the past, and in certain cutting edge industries today, similar interests have built up around each other. London is a working embodiment of this principle. The City, Fleet Street, Soho, Westminster, all are areas designated (by the invisible hand of the old market) to a particular "industry". This does not happen by magic. Business is conducted by people. People talk, that's how business works at its best: mouth to mouth. Businesses are built on related businesses. Such networks prove more efficient if they are proximate. In the 1980s this simple logic, under pressure for fast dividend return, was rejected. However, what was gained in short term "competitiveness" has been more than matched by what has been lost, namely the communication infrastructures, the social and commercial accessibility of related industries and businesses, and possibly more importantly, the workforce security.

Of course proximate industries are not the only ones where the vitality of interaction is an essential prerequisite to success. Within any given sector, the



possibilities are there for communities (i.e. groupings of companies sharing information for the common good of all) to arise. The public arts and the research sciences are two such "communities".

In loosely affiliated interest groups there are two forms of motivating and regulating principles: competition and social sanction. The first as explained earlier, is reliant on division, distinction, leading to a disintegration of services (or an increase in choice depending on your personal inclinations in spin-phrasing). More importantly, it is reliant on a separatist view: us and them. For the second to work, separatism is anathema, bonds of trust must be created and built on. Both organisational principles have their place. Competition motivates industry and retail in ways that the old collectivist principles simply couldn't. In publicly funded organisations and in research, however, social sanction is more appropriate: competition is far too brutal in "its" treatment of failures. People must be provided the space to fail in: this is the key to innovation. "Fail again, fail better" as Beckett would say.

Where there is no share pressure (e.g. in the publicly funded cultural industries), the creation and maintenance of the underpinning of bonds of trust should be a priority. Once instigated, those in their communities of production should explicitly utilise the benefits offered, by talking and working together. Without such crossover, communities are rent asunder as surely as if they had been bulldozed. And that brings us neatly back to the cultural debate and to nuthatches, a long digression but necessary.

The arts "community" in Scotland, and this applies to Britain as a whole, because of the peculiar "fictive free-market" within which it operates, seems to exhibit many of the features of the nuthatches: namely, small isolated groups of mutually antagonistic factions. Interesting in themselves, but with so little contact between them that any innovation in one is seen as a threat by the others. There is no cross-pollination of ideas, no serious "joint initiatives". Pride and puerility keep the factions apart. If the potential of all is to be realised, a little humility must be exercised by all. No single faction or individual has in its grasp *the* panacea, *the* way towards a cultural utopia. We learn from each other or we cease to learn. The factionalism in cultural quarters is, to an extent, inevitable if left unchecked. The public funding bodies have in the past been far too lax at regulating their market. The result is, as an outsider, obvious: far too many individuals seem to be crassly following the narrow dictates of their own career paths, heedless to the needs of artists and public alike. They appear not to care whether they hold a stake in Scotland's future cultural development. If, as Pavel Buchler intimated in *Variant 2*, (Vol. 2) such development does look bleak, the primary reason will be because it is in the hands of people unwilling to talk without bitching, or to act without backstabbing. It would indeed be an unnecessary shame; what a waste of a valuable asset.

High in the Kabyle Mountains of northern Algeria is a dwindling population of reasons why the individuals who live by factionalism should have a rethink.



This image, from 'Lies of Our Time' (May 1994) shows Allen Dulles, CIA Director 1961

review

The Clandestine Caucus

(Anti-socialist campaigns and operations in the British Labour Movement since the war)

Robin Ramsay

Published by Lobster, 214 Westbourne Avenue, Hull HU5 3JB Price £5 (32 pages)

"The plea in extenuation of guilt and mitigation of punishment is perpetual. At every step we are met by arguments which go to excuse, to palliate, to confound right and wrong, and reduce the just man to the level of the reprobate. The men who plot to baffle and resist us are, first of all, those who made history what it has become. They set up the principle that only a foolish Conservative judges the present time with the ideas of the past; that only a foolish Liberal judges the past with the ideas of the present."

Lord Acton, *Inaugural Lecture On The Study Of History*, Fontana, 1960

The point of view that the modern Labour party has 'sold out' its socialist beginnings, while being a common enough accusation, is not the starting point of the *Clandestine Caucus*. Its analysis of secret and semi-secret groups and factions within the larger political party provide an insight which casts serious doubt on the Labour Party ever having had much of a socialist foundation in the first place:

"The history of Britain's union and Labour movement is one of continuous conflict between socialist and anti-socialist wings; and within that conflict the bit of the story that is usually not told is that describing the relationship between the anti-socialist section of the Labour movement and British and US capital and their states."

This relationship, which is comprised of elements which remain largely suppressed in modern history, begins at the period just after World War I, alongside the origins of the British state, particularly in the context of the state's response to Bolshevism. It is identified in the various groupings which comprised the early British corporate movement, around the period of 1918 to 1926. That movement's failure to produce a more integrated society; a society which could prevail amidst the emergent struggle between domestic capital and international finance capital, is, it is suggested, the basis for the initial co-operation between the state and the British Trades Unions, principally the TUC.

The TUC, or more accurately, the political beliefs of its leaders and their factions, formed something of a 'praetorian guard' against the left, and were increasingly motivated by fear of a communist conspiracy. Links - one could easily say partnerships - developed between the TUC and state agencies, particularly with the Foreign & Colonial offices. This was extended with the first two Labour governments and 'solidified enormously' by World War II and the coalition government.

"Into this domestic anti-Communist climate came the USA's loans - and the people and ideas, the strings attached to the money."

While early post World War II history is usually summed up by the catch-all phrase the 'Cold War', what actually happened in the take over of Europe carries with it complex covert political, military and economic drives (which still continue), all amidst the general chaos of a destroyed Europe. This is complex and murky ground. Robin Ramsay, while avoiding a debate on the origins of the Cold War, focuses on the origins on the Marshall Plan. He identifies the *Council on Foreign Relations* (CFR) as the main vehicle (albeit somewhat informally) for co-ordinating the US take over of non-communist European countries via covert means; the British Empire having lost its imperial strength in the post-war years. In defining the 'strings attached to the money,' we have the CFR as some form of overseeing body: working alongside it, engaging in psychological warfare operations was the *Economic Co-operation Agency* (ECA) and alongside them the *Office of Policy Co-ordination* (OPC).²

"What we think of as the CIA, that is the covert operation, intervention arm of US multi-national capital—the post-war bogey man supreme for the left—began as the enforcement arm of the Marshall plan, engaged in operations against the left and the trade unions of Europe, communist or non-communist. The OPC was the US administration's recognition that the ECA alone couldn't 'get the job done'."

The 'job' in this case includes the US post-war penetration of the British Labour Party and Trade unions. One key point in the text relates to the extent US labour attachés developed influential contacts with the Labour leadership, particularly Hugh Gaitskell. Here the distinction between whether the attachés were CIA agents or not becomes academic, both would report to the same boss, the State Department. It should also come as no great surprise that such close associations were formed, the Americans were after all perceived as allies, but then again so were the communists.

Ramsay shifts slightly at this point to provide parallel information on the survival of UK 'private sector propaganda organisations', such as Aims of Industry and the Economic League; noted here because of their networks' pumping of anti-left, anti-nationalisation briefings into the British press. These resurrected the propaganda systems and organisations of the period surrounding the general strike. This section also serves to introduce the *Information Research Department* (IRD), a key organisation in unravelling the State's own covert operations and whose layers Ramsay has peeled back over the years:

"IRD was a triple layer. On the surface was its formal cover within the Foreign Office as an information and research department. Beneath that was IRD's role as a propaganda organisation, dispensing white (true) and grey (half true) propaganda in briefings to journalists and politicians. But beneath that was the third layer, the 'black' or psychological warfare (psy-war) tier."

He presents convincing evidence that at about the same time IRD came into existence, the union leaders themselves willingly nudged closer to the covert world and the right, and again, through a shared and mounting commitment to anti-communism, instigated various more or less interlocking projects, such as the avowedly clandestine AEU's 'club', *Common Cause* and the *Industrial Research and Information Services* (IRIS), the latter being set up in the Headquarters of the National Union of Seamen.

Among the embarrassments of IRD are:

"1. The extent to which the British print and broadcast media of the 1950s and 60s recycled IRD material. When IRD was formally closed in 1978 it still had 100 British journalists on its contact list, including correspondents for the *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *the Observer*, *Sunday Mirror*, *News of the World*, *the Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *the Guardian*, *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Soviet Analyst* and the *Economist*.

2. The revelation that IRD was a full-blown Political Warfare Executive, with all that implies, despite the fact that no government—no Cabinet—had ever authorised the creation of such an organisation.

3. Most sensitive of all, IRD used 'black propaganda' in 'political warfare'.

Ramsay's tentative and careful analysis of the IRD, has been confirmed and extended by fairly recent (official)

revelations. The same could be said of his interpretation of the revelations of Colin Wallace: an ongoing assessment going back some ten years. Wallace worked at 'Information Policy', long maintained to have been an Northern Ireland based Army press office in the 70s, but identified here as the last sighting of IRD in its 'black' role:

"Information Policy was constructed in the same way as IRD, concealing the psy-war role behind the cover role of a propaganda unit, which in turn, was concealed by the formal information role ...Disinformation was planted in the media; foreign journalists were taken into back rooms and shown 'secret' documents - diaries, leaflets, minutes of meetings; some genuine, many forged. IRD tried, yet again, to establish the insurgents as part of the Soviet global conspiracy, but after the re-election of the Wilson government in 1974 they also began to try to show support for the IRA from a Labour Party influenced by the CPGB."

Information on IRD's operations in the mainland is not only scarce but (naturally) riddled with disinformation and evasion. To penetrate the fog has required tenacious research and evaluation. Ramsay makes the important observation that his initial research looked for MI5 operations, he now accentuates three British Intelligence agencies:

"There was a group of MI5 officers, led by Peter Wright, who were plotting against the Wilson government and, for example, trying to use the Information Policy unit in Northern Ireland to spread disinformation about Wilson and other British politicians whom MI5 regarded as 'unsound'; there was also a group of ex-SIS and former military officers, led by former SIS number two, the late George Kennedy Young, operating as the Unison Committee for Action; and there was the Crozier-IRD subversion-watcher network."

The main 'influence' on the work seems to be Richard

Fletcher's work.³ This is most evident in his focus on the rise of the Social Democratic movements, which again show the insidious nature of the right-wing of the Labour Party. The movement centring around Gaitskell and the CIA funded *Congress for Cultural Freedom* (CCF), was massively overburdened with individuals and organisations with connections to the secret state and its operations; too many people taking the money and not asking too many questions. While aspects of the CCF were exposed in the 60s, Ramsay would seem, by putting the emphasis on Brian Crozier, to indicate how its operations (in more than just the capacity of a 'news agency') survived, developed and continued. A picture emerges of interlocking organisations—'private sector' intelligence operations. The preceding accounts of 'anti-communism' among the union bosses connects with 'anti-communism' amongst agents of the secret state through several organisations such as the IRIS. Crozier's publication "British Briefing" (re-running IRD material on subversion and funded by the Industrial trust) was published by the IRIS, thus:

"What began a quarter of a century before as an anti-Communist caucus among the AUEW's senior officers, had ended up fronting for Britain's leading anti-socialist psychological warfare expert ...Three anti-socialist, senior trade union leaders, fronted the clandestine production of an anti-socialist bulletin, written and edited by former intelligence officers, financed by British capital. This anti-socialist *mechanism* also involved the connivance of the Charity Commission which allowed the Industrial Trust to operate in a breach of the charity laws."

It is here Ramsay takes an overview of the period, noting that if we can still partially see the remnants of these operations in 1989, we must question how large the whole operation was in the mid-70s; we must question its nature and the role of what are perceived to be solely propaganda operations, such as Aims of Industry. Furthermore he calls for a clear-sighted

approach by the Labour left towards the commonplace mechanism of British Capitalism to fund its opponents with a view towards subversion. What all this comes down to is that whatever evidence to the contrary, a significant part of the British right;

"...in the propaganda organisations of capital, the state and the Conservative party, believed that the CPGB was part of a global conspiracy, directed and financed by Moscow, which was working in the union movement and wider society to undermine capitalist democracy in Britain. And it is no longer self-evident that this was complete nonsense."

The latter part of that statement relates to fairly recent discoveries in Lobster and elsewhere concerning the "Moscow gold" issue and in tandem with this the issue of "secret" communist Party members in high places. Hitherto regarded as fictitious, it transpires that the CPGB was to a limited extent funded by the Soviet Union: as a form of compensation, after a large drop in membership as a result of Soviet foreign policy. The money came in the form of used notes which were amateurly laundered into party funds. While the mainstream media touched on this as a tidbit from a bygone era, Ramsay has - using the similar example of the American Communist Party's relationship to the FBI - discovered something widely overlooked:

"In the 1970s, the anti-subversion lobby, orbiting around IRD, and presumably informally briefed on the reality of the 'Moscow gold' by MI5, took the picture of real—and arguably, increasing—CPGB influence on the trade unions, and added KGB/Soviet control. To this theory the Communist Party contributed by occasionally boasting of its influence on the Labour Party; with the Labour Party itself unwittingly adding the final touch by abolishing in 1973 the Proscription List of organisations - mostly 1950s Soviet fronts - that Labour Party members could join, thus convincing the paranoids on the right that the mice were in the pantry. Unaware of the 'Moscow gold' evidence, the left dismissed the right's Soviet angle as manifestly nonsense."

He makes the key observation that MI5 had been aware of the 'Moscow gold' almost as soon as it began, and further knew who the intermediary was: Reuban Falber. One of the interesting passages in SMEAR! (The book written by Ramsay and Stephen Dorril) drives a coach and horses through Peter Wright's account in *Spycatcher*, of an MI5 break-in to a house where CPGB files were kept, he picks this up again here:

"Wright tells us that MI5 planned to burgle Falber's flat but their plan failed - and leaves it there! To MI5 the proof of the Moscow gold must have had something of the status of the Holy Grail; and we are to believe that having located it they made only one attempt to get it? Wright really wants us to believe that for 20 years, aware that the CPGB were getting actual cash money, MI5 were either unable to detect the pay-offs in London, or, having made one failed attempt, just gave up? This is simply not credible."

His main point is that had the existence of Soviet funding been revealed in the late 50s, the CPGB would have been perhaps irreparably damaged. For MI5 this 'secret' link to the Soviet Union became an increasingly useful weapon to use against the left in the UK, particularly the Labour party. These are his concluding remarks:

"Since so much of the British Left came either from, or in opposition to, the CPGB, it is impossible to even speculate convincingly how the British Left - or British politics - would have developed if the 'Moscow gold' had been exposed in the late fifties. But it certainly is possible that the anti-union hysteria of the late 1970s, leading to the catastrophe of Thatcherism - and the subsequent collapse of the Labour Party into its current vacuity - could have been avoided."

notes

- 1 The CFR is totally ignored in most official and semi-official versions of events; John Ranelagh's long work on the CIA, *The Agency*, Sceptre, 87, completely fails to mention it in this and any other context. He has the OPC as the work of Dean Acheson (p116), then as Kennan's proposal, "...after George Marshall and Dean Acheson had both backed it." (p113); then the case for covert action is stated to have been made by Dulles "...and some other influential men outside the administration" (p134). Christopher Simpson in *Blowback*, talks of members of Kennan's Policy Planning Staff (PPS): "...Officially a somewhat egg-headed institution." Dedicated to planning US strategy for 10 to 20 years in the future. Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks' *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, gives something of a revealing account of the relationship with the CFR in their reproduction of the 'Bissell Meeting' from 1968. This is a talk to The CFR by a top CIA executive and reads like a shareholders meeting.
- 2 The CIA themselves were bitterly fought against by these and other Intelligence agencies in the US, particularly Hoover's FBI.
- 3 Fred Hirsch & Richard Fletcher, *The CIA & The Labour Movement*, Spokesman Books, 1977. Another influence is Phil Kelly's essay in *The Leveller* (a now defunct radical magazine), which aimed to detail links between the CIA and the Social Democrats, although Ramsay is critical of its claims.

Paper jam: call engineer

review

The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles

Hillel Schwartz

Zone Books, New York, 1996, 565 pp

HILLEL SCHWARTZ must be impossible to live with. In *The Culture of the Copy*, he manages to crowd over five hundred pages with enough facts to found a new planet. The sheer energy of the text is exhausting, the number of examples and anecdotes cumulatively overwhelming.

The book opens with a chapter on the Real McCoy and Schwartz treats us to a thumbnail biography of one Elijah McCoy:

"...born 1843 into a community of African-Americans who had escaped from slavery in the South. Taking ship to Scotland, McCoy apprenticed to a mechanical engineer. Upon his return across the Atlantic, the job he found with the Michigan Central Railroad was a fireman, stoking the engine, but between 1872 and 1900 he was awarded patents on automatic engine-lubricating devices of such reliability that they were known to the industry as 'The Real McCoy'. He became a patent consultant to the railroads and moved to the Detroit area, where after a long life he died alone in an infirmary in 1929."

This seems totally convincing until Schwartz introduces his next contender for the title—Bill McCoy, who is quickly followed by Kid McCoy aka Charles McCoy aka Norman Selby. The Kid, married ten times (four times to the same woman), was successively a boxer, an actor, a bankrupt, a diamond dealer, a superintendent of the National Detective Agency, a car salesman, a racing driver, a boxer, a bankrupt, a smuggler, a car salesman, a soldier, a film maker, a three-time jealous murderer, a model prisoner (pardoned) and a suicide.

So much for the preface. This vertigo-inducing prose never lets up and the characters Schwartz describes in passing only get stranger. As the book progresses, however, it becomes clear just how important the author's style is to the subject matter. The very idea of a copy, replica or duplicate seems to spark deep anxieties in our society while, at the same time, we breed reproductions on a dizzying scale. Schwartz points to the inherent paradox of our culture in which: "The more adept the West has become at the making of copies, the more we have exalted uniqueness. It is within an exuberant world of copies that we arrive at our experience of originality." The amphetamine rush of his text parallels this "exuberant world of copies" and simulates the mental upheaval we experience when confronted with an exact copy of an 'essentially' unique object.

One of the great shocks of the book is the extent to which the copy and the technology of copying has permeated our culture. Schwartz touches on the obvious landmarks, such as identical twins, photocopiers, mass productions, forgeries, photography, plagiarism, virtual reality, recording, self-portraits, doppelgängers, decoys, models and carbon copies. Beyond this, however, he multiplies the everyday acts of copying we perform—memorising faces, events or telephone numbers, pressing the save key on a computer keyboard, wearing spectacles to standardise our vision.

The ubiquity of the copy is humbling and in danger of disheartening the reader. To counteract this possibility, Schwartz peppers the text with a series of beautifully researched biographies of the key players in the

culture of the copy. Whether it is the skewed imagination of the book's author or sheer luck, many of these characters led lives Fellini must have scripted.

Take Chester Carlson, for example, a bumbling lab worker, crippled by spinal arthritis. One of his early diary entries reads "Pa gone crazy 1924-26". Later in life he contemplated writing an *American Dictionary of Quacks and Fakes* and eventually he invented the Xerox out of his frustration with the need to copy specifications for patents of his other inventions.

Other, better known, characters also appear in Schwartz's story but in new, unexpected guises. L. Frank Baum, writer of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, surfaces in a chapter on shop dummies where he is revealed as editor of *The Show Window* and author of *The Art Of Decorating Dry Goods Windows*. Schwartz then interprets the Emerald city as a large show window, creating a sudden and plausible source for the Tin Man and the Scarecrow as fantastic mannequins. Deeper in the text we come across Martin Luther King Jr. carefully 'integrating' passages verbatim from the theologian Paul Tillich into his thesis after his academic adviser explains that "all modern theology which is competent is essentially derivative."

These biographical snapshots are deliberately quirky, emphasising the finicky, irreproducible eccentricities of a multitude of individuals. Each bizarre detail of their lives is quietly celebrated by Schwartz as another example of a world untouched by the copy. In his use of biography he is consciously arguing for the value of the individual voice and the positive rewards of tolerating difference. Coming to the heart of his argument he states that:

"Telling true spirit from false has never been simple. Our culture of the copy further discourages discernment, unless it be a kind of doubling back. The more we attempt to tell things apart, the more we end up defending our skills at replication. The more intrepid our assertions of individual presence, the more makeshift seem our identities, the less retrievable our origins. There may come a point of no return."

To illustrate just how makeshift our identities can be, Schwartz cites Kid McCoy's accidental meeting with Charlie Chaplin in a courthouse. While McCoy was there on a count of murder, Chaplin was suing an impersonator who had imitated his character and costume. While Chaplin could defend the creation of his costume, the creation of his character was a different matter and he testified that "I'm unconscious while I'm acting. I live the role and I am not myself."

The difficulty in pinning down any 'essential' personality runs as an undercurrent throughout the book. In a fascinating discussion of artists using photocopiers to produce work, Schwartz describes male artists approaching the machine as an instrument of salvation only to confront existential crises, as in George Mühleck's black works *Copy of the Moon* and *Copy of the Stars* - made by leaving the copier glass open to

the night skies. In contrast, he points to women artists' use of the copier to celebrate multiple identities or to question imposed identity as in the work of Pati Hill who praises the copier because: "It is the side of your subject that you do not see that is reproduced..."

Schwartz obviously takes Hill's comments to heart in the construction of his own book. After 382 non-stop, fact-filled pages the main text finally rolls to a halt. Flip the page and you are then faced with 'The Parallel Universe'—a further 150 pages of endnotes, a glittering display of reference and arcane comment that provides almost as much enjoyment as the earlier prose.

Philosophically, the endnotes also question the originality and 'essence' of the main text, acting as a critique of Western Scholarship while encouraging the reader to delve further into a plethora of detail beyond the book's own framework.

In the end, perhaps, the book itself serves the reader best as a reference tool. Taken as a series of micro-essays on a wide array of subjects each meditation can stimulate a whole field of work. Taken as a whole, in one sitting, the reader's head may explode.

Francis McKee



Hal Foster Interview

Originally we (Leigh French, Peter Suchin and Billy Clark) had prepared a formal interview with Hal Foster. We met him after his lecture at Glasgow School of Art recently, which mainly focused on the work of Robert Gober, and on his request decided to adopt a less structured format which would incorporate more of an exchange of opinion.

Billy Clark: Your talk struck me as very aesthetic and psychoanalytical. My expectation was that it would be a lot more political.

Hal Foster: Yeah. This is just one talk. What I said was what I thought might be relative to concerns here. I think that there's interest in the subject: the traumatic. I was interested in how that might be worked out differently here, but if it wasn't I thought I might be able to bring a little news. I have a fairly authentic—which I hope is not to say non-rigorous—take on critical work, which is that presented with a problem you also have to construct, presented with an object I have to construct and it's not necessarily given beforehand how you do it methodologically. I'm also at work on questions to do with visual culture, questions that are much more institutional, they're much more political than psychoanalytical. I want to do a series of texts, maybe a book, on developments in art, also developments that are technological, very critical of psychoanalysis. I think there's an enormous inflation of the image and the imaginary with psychoanalysis that abets rather than resists.

Peter Suchin: You mentioned this in your talk about having 'doubts' about psychoanalysis: you seem to rely on it quite a lot on *The Return of The Real*.

HF: Yeah I do, I use it as a way to think about historical narrative, as a way to re-think avant-garde temporality, but I don't think I rely on it too much. I take up the concept as an analogy. I don't feel I work within the psychoanalytical model, I'm not a Lacanian or a Freudian. I'm not in a church and that's precisely the difference for me. I take theories as broken tools and you do what you can with them in relation to what objects you want to work with, it's not given beforehand.

BC: So one could admire the scientific rigour of Freud, how he brought that rigour to bear on a certain subject, but not the whole thing?

HF: Yeah, but the reason I'm sensitive to your remarks is I think we limit the culture of psychoanalysis. Even though I think Freud is under massive attack—this is the thing we can talk more about—the terms are just colloquial now. The people on the streets in New York will talk about how 'hysterical' they are, how 'repressed': everyday people. They don't say that about (*laughs*) ideology critique, they don't talk about political economy in the street. There's a funny way in which the language pervades everyday thought. But the real question that interests me is *what counts?* And I'd like to hear you guys talk about it—what counts as structure in art now? What counts as a valid model theoretically, methodologically? I think the modern masters are in full flight: Marx, Freud, Nietzsche. The returns to these figures in the 60s, that structured my generation and the generation before and after: all these things are in real crisis now. It's hard to know what way of thinking has much validity.

PS: I think you use the word "toolbox" of critical thought—a kind of bricolage: you are inventing models, not willy-nilly, but from different models that are already in circulation.

HF: There are two problems, or, there are two versions. One is the theory of pastiche, which we all know and love and hate (hate mostly). The other is this model of bricolage.

PS: One might take some of Marx and think that's still valid now, and other bits aren't. And you might take bits of Freud—and I don't mean certain bits that are fashionable. They might seem to explain something—but not the whole edifice.

HF: I wonder if we can still do it in these ways. The people who really want to hold on to these characters do so in a very funny way. Marx is turned back into a philosopher or Freud is turned into an art critic. The clinical dimension or political dimensions are dropped out. So maybe there is a need to not worry so much about master models. Invent more and bricolage less.

PS: That's a very difficult task though because we're trapped in a way by the weight of these models.

BC: It's what they engaged in themselves though. You used the phrase 'constellations' in a way that reminded me of Walter Benjamin.

HF: Yeah, he did invent out of other pieces, some wacky pieces. He had this real soft spot for the marking of evolution—characteristics that our parents somehow developed in the environment—wacky stuff. It's a time when you can, or should speculate theoretically, because it's not clear that given models work. I think that's true of our experience. What do you all think about this idea of a 'post-medium age'—it's a question of what you do in it?

BC: Could you try to clarify what you mean by post-medium: are you saying that certain mediums don't have the same shock value?

HF: This is my take, and again my take is very situational. After the war there was an insistence on a very restrictive idea of modernism that was mapped onto mediums, disciplines of mediums. This aesthetic field not only took parts of modernism, but it stood *for* modernism. It was a very delimited field. Precisely because it was so delimited, one could work against that. There were transgressions that happened. When the transgressions went flat one could also do deconstructions. Every transgression re-inscribes limits too: to be John Cage or Robert Rauschenberg or Fontana or whatever; but there's a way in which those mediums are preserved in cancellation—preservation through negation. So that they needed to be deconstructed. That was a project of serious work in the 60s and 70s. But now it seems that the field has become so entropic, the work is so ad hoc. I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing—far from medium specific, work is debate specific or discourse specific or even just context specific.

Leigh French: Going back to your talk and *The Return of The Real* and the artist as ethnographer. Again it comes down to the individual confessional—the artist is ethnographically plotting their own existence. Maybe more specifically in the UK more than in the States: an artist comes in to whatever kind of community and represents it in some way. Yet on the other hand you have (in the UK) within a certain young British art scene, very much the confessional of the individual, it's almost a kind of ethnographic mapping of the individual.

HF: This is why there is this desire for structure that would not be so idiosyncratically personal. I think you're right, there is this funny way in which the confessional or the traumatic, or the ethnographic or the contextual come together, because the desire to go out into the community, into other sites not identified as art spaces is a kind of way to get out of personal limits, identity or style. Because often these projects are very provisional, artists are parachuted in, there's no connection with the community. It's more a self-portrait in disguise at the site.

LF: The thing you also talk about in the book is the pressures on museums to go out and develop and attract new audiences—which is very much a pressure in the UK, in Scotland.

HF: How is it worked, what are the manifestations of it? In the States it means—and this is not all bad by any means—it means that education departments become very primary in museums. We've all come to see international shows where the curators really become the stars. International curators are hired to mediate among artists that are parachuted into a place. That's like the grand version of the problem. In the States it's about a sense of the demand for relevance. I assume here, there's also a tradition of Socialist pater-

nalism, where there's a sense that there are cultures that need to be represented: that's part of the multiculturalist's paternalism. Is that part of the mix, how does it work out?

BC: In Glasgow it has taken on completely lunatic proportions. And I mean lunatic. The arts in Glasgow: 'culture', this word has become used to mesh with economic redevelopment, in the sense that you make the city a tourist venue.

HF: That's what those site specific shows are, the national ones, they're really tourist trips.

BC: A classic one would be when there was a meeting of heads of the EC in Edinburgh. They sealed off the streets, moved everyone away. Basically, as they drove down to where they were meeting it was all lined with artworks, mostly to do with light—all sponsored by things like arms industries—specifically for the people just to look out of their car windows and see an artwork: that's it. It had no other relevance to anything other than that. Now that's been writ large upon Glasgow as a whole.

HF: In terms of the redevelopment of Glasgow over several years?

BC: Which has plummeted to the depths—the whole thing has collapsed, but it still carries on.

HF: Why has it collapsed—the money?

BC: Well, when they had the Year of Culture in 1990 there was massive fraud. You're talking about a very 'corrupt' town council that's suddenly given all this money—and they get these massively inflated ideas. It's just gone berserk, and they keep on doing it.

HF: But there must be positive aspects, progressive ones, no?

PS: Perhaps because culture when it is packaged in such a way, the artwork cease to be able to be read in the way the producers might want them to be.

BC: I'm talking about a wider scale, rather than just the artwork, I'm talking about the actual community, the people of the city. In Scotland and in Glasgow you have a notion that our culture is not valid—it's a very colonised country. Culture 'has' to be imported. My voice 'isn't' a 'proper' voice, my accent 'isn't' a 'proper' accent—it's as bad as that. So there's no notion of a nascent or intrinsic culture in their equation at all: yet we have a 'renascent' project in the city. They were actually trying to ban books. There's a book called *No Mean City* it's about Glasgow in the past, the 'violence' and so on. They tried to ban that, it was published in the 40s or something, that's just one example. A faction of the artists took no part in the 1990 'celebrations' and they were castigated for even daring to criticise it; yet they are the artists. All it was was just massive cultural administration, all the money is in consultancy, administration and spectacular events that mean nothing. OK some people get money but that's it.

PS: This reminds me of that old Situationist slogan where they describe art as the commodity which sells all the other ones—everything else.

BC: "To make the city a showroom," they actually talk like this. "To make the city into a supermarket" that's their avowed ambition.

HF: But is it? There must be an edge there. If you feel in a bizarre way that you're in a post-colonial situation...

BC: Not so much of the post actually...

HF: Well I wonder about the post in post-colonialism. But that must give an edge to a project for artists that are so inclined.

BC: Well there's still some sort of 'underground' feeling in Glasgow—because the culture is literally repressed...

HF: Is there not enough difference, or is the difference so eradicated that you cannot use it as a way to generate positions?

BC: The main line that they are trying to do is to make art a de-politicised zone.

HF: Who?

BC: Funding bodies: the gatekeepers.

Hal Foster Interview

continued

PS: Where I live, in Newcastle, it's just come to the end recently of The Year of the Visual Arts, which is a big promotion of art in the North of England and that was basically, again, a spectacle. You get the tourists in, the local people who don't normally go to art events. You get them in and you give them some art. It's a very patronising thing. Then the money stops and the people who've benefited are not curators really but administrators. It sounds like a gripe, but the point is culture is controlled.

HF: Yeah, it's so tricky. I mean that sounds bad. I still want to get back to this sense of an edge that you might have in colonial relation to say, London. In the States it's so different. Your problem—you've got the state, the bureaucracy of culture, there is this administrative level. In the States we often long for 'the state'. There is private money but it's very fickle, and contemporary art is now associated with pornography as much as anything. So even it is pulled away. As a result we have these brand new museums in major cities: in Boston, Atlanta or LA. But you feel like you're in the mansion of a private family without an invitation. There's no sense of a public culture.

LF: I think this is something that Bordieu talks about: the difference between what actually exists and what is actually presented as disinterestedness. The fact is that it does go on, that it is a family, that it is constructed on similar terms. Except it's also presented in terms of disinterestedness. So the paternal funder is also the cultural banker—but present themselves in a very specific way, while still controlling both production and dissemination.

HF: Right. It's almost total in the States, whereas before there used to be the residue of the idea that the museum was part of a public sphere and that a curator, say, was also, however feebly a (*laughs*) guardian of public culture. No such thing exists.

PS: Hasn't that function been taken over by the media, the culture is unified by the media.

HF: Sure, you don't go to the sites of the residual public sphere to be socialised. But my point is how different it is. I mean you resent the presence of the state—without putting too fine a definition of it—and we long for it as some point of intervention in this otherwise private party.

PS: Moving on from that, but connected with it, talking about the world of curating. I can't think of any examples off the cuff, but it seems that a lot of curators put together a show, and then they find the artists to prove the point that they're trying to make in the show. It sounds like the curators have become the artists—the makers of meaning. And perhaps it was like that for a long time.

HF: That's a specific development within art too. Many artists have taken on a curatorial role as well.

BC: On the rise of the artist professional: there's an interesting article in *After Image* [Jan 93 'The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public, Grant Kester] about the history and development, the political drives of all this. They'll go for an electoral base: so maybe they'll fund the arts because they're democrats and they want to go for the working class; the Republicans aren't bothered with that so they're quite happy with art remaining as corporate entertainment.

HF: But for me it has also to do with this anthropological model of post-modernism say.

LF: You could go back to the Second World War—the Nazi's say, with the setting up of the anti-art exhibition. It's exactly the same—an anthropological exercise—to do that. The thematised show is not new. The idea of mapping an anthropology onto that work is not new.

BC: Look at Barr in *The Museum of Modern Art* with his little graph of modernism—a Darwinian tree.

HF: That's not exactly what I meant (*laughs*).

PS: Who makes meanings in culture? Is it the curators, is it the artists? You were talking about the idea of an avant-garde. Is that a constructed avant-garde by the market? Is there scope for an avant-garde? The art market needs new commodities doesn't it? We need an avant-garde in that sense.

HF: No, well, I think it's too quick to dismiss or reduce problems to the 'commodity', the 'market', 'global capitalism'. Obviously these things are there and they structure our lives. I think the model of recuperation is too easy. Work can get out, even within a horrific festival of the arts in a city: it doesn't damn the whole thing necessarily. If you begin in a defeatist way you get nowhere.

BC: Our description of it is to promote resistance to it really. You're saying there must be some acceptance of all this. Yes, there's a human level which is beyond it...

HF: When I say I want to hold on to this idea of an avant-garde, I do so with real reservations of course. But I also think it is an idea—there are all kinds of myths associated with the avant-

garde, as we know, and they're critiqued well at this point. The idea of the avant-garde stands for articulation of the aesthetic and the political that should not be given up. It's too easy to give up to other people. You know who wants us to give it up: the Right wants us to go away, it's not the Left.

PS: That seems to go against the idea of a political avant-garde art practice; would be counter to that plural culture we seem to be in now: that kind of 'anything goes' art world, which you've written about in *Recordings*, that it's a meaningless set of practices.

HF: Yeah, that's why I think there is an urgency around this question of what counts as structure in art, what counts as an edge in cultural practice. If you go back to your question: "who or what makes the meaning happen?" It's a hugely complicated deal. But if we do not have enough in common in the description of the major problem, then we're all fucked basically. There is a way in which this diffusion, this dispersion of different projects is terrific. There is a way in which work almost has to be ad hoc, because it is debate specific, site specific. And there's also a way in which that makes it very difficult to begin to have a sense of where anything is. I know that as a critic—and I wonder about how you feel about this—but my experience is that I go from studio to studio or show to show and I have to scramble for the terms, the languages. I do feel like an anthropologist. It is in part, because we feel that we work in an expanded zone area called culture.

PS: It's like that Wittgenstein thing of private languages, by definition not common and no coherent set of values.

HF: Yeah, on the one hand yes, on the other hand there are all these connections: we are driven towards the same questions: what is the status of the body, what counts as an image, why this imperative to work in a communitarian way? The answers are difficult and the institutional frames are different, but they come up in Glasgow, New York, Copenhagen.

LF: One of the things I'm interested in, and haven't thought through, but needs mapping in some way is the position where 'once upon a time the personal was political' and a development from that, to the aspect of the personal as promotion. Also we have the development of political correctness (however vague a term, however misused). How from not being able to talk about anything other than personal experience, you've got from one stage where you cannot talk for anybody else: from 'this is my opinion', through to something which is a lot more defensive. I don't know where that actually leaves those debates around the body. Maybe we need to step back and explore what's happened historically.

HF: This is one thing I want to know from you. There was an enormous interest in the 60s around precisely these questions. I think if you could trace what you want to trace, everybody would want to know, because that is crucial. To be glib about it, I think that where the model used to be: 'the personal is political', now the model would be: 'the political is the personal'. This assumption is made, it's reversed, I mean literally turned around its value. One point in between that 30 year trajectory—this is how I'd begin to map the field that you want to trace—is that there is a moment when this idea of a constructed subject came into play, which in a way displays that first moment of its insistence on bodies: on an essential femininity (God knows an essential masculinity was not the point). But when this idea of the constructed subject came in, we began to think about how we were constructed symbolically, socially, in a way that wasn't so physical. But, at a certain point this idea of the constructed subject, however aesthetically important and politically incisive, at a certain point it became a consumerist idea. This idea of the performative too—which is related to the constructed—that we can change our gender or whatever as if it were a costume. You know there's a certain way in which that was disruptive and it has become absolutely consumerist—you just get the right look. That's one reason why I think the art world and the fashion world have come together *mad* today. They both believe in a certain idea of performativity that is fundamentally consumerist (*laughs*). And I think that the one reason why artists have begun to return to the kind of brute matter of the body—if there is such a thing as brute matter—is to look for things that are not simply constructed, that are not simply *fashioned*.

PS: So there's a notion of the authentic again, isn't there?

HF: Yeah, well, I think these terms come back with a whole other meaning. You're right, there is this sense of authenticity, experience. You know we all hate it because we were told by the French to hate it, that it was gone: the 'lived' is no more, the 'experiential' is no more. It's back in an absentee way, this is

what I meant by the authority of the traumatic. You have this absolute authority but you're not really there as an 'I' to have it. All these terms have come back, and aesthetic terms too like specificity, autonomy, but what they mean is up for grabs.

PS: But they've got to come back in an informed way, haven't they, as opposed to a cliché?

HF: Oh yeah. If they just come back in the old form it's a reactionary return. That's one thing my book is at pains to at least sketch, that all these different kinds of returns that are at play: which ones are really inventive and which ones are just reactive, just calls to order.

BC: Just to pick up the threads here. We were still talking about notions of the avant-garde. I don't know what you think are the main texts, there's surprisingly few, but take Renato Poggioli: he talks partly about reconnaissance, another military metaphor—troops who identify the position of the enemy. That has a lot of meaning as regards art. To pick up on Leigh's point: people are saying, 'well society at large, it's us who make it', it's an inner voyage if you like, rather than a political avant-garde. Now what is being brought back, who is the enemy, who is it being brought back to, how is the enemy being spotted—how are we a vanguard? Do we all just go along to another show and come back a better person? Is art a priesthood after all?

PS: Who makes the avant-garde? An avant-garde is only an avant-garde if it is a leading group that others follow.

HF: I think there's an avant-garde of resistance—this is one thing that I wanted to argue a long time ago in *Recordings*. Its position need not always be research and development. It can also be resistant, but I'm not sure if I would insist on it in the same way. I think it's good to be sceptical of this idea of the avant-garde. I'm not paranoid. Everything is a conspiracy when it seems like institutions—however you want to name them—tell us what to do and what to think. My stance is that the avant-garde has returned, as I say in the book, from the future under the pressure of contemporary practice. To be honest it's not that I thought surrealism, for example, was intrinsically of wild interest. I felt compelled by recent work to think about it because it was there that a certain problematic of sexuality, difference, a certain relation to politics, theory—that were all concerns of the present—drove me back to think about surrealism: because the present made it important. I think artists that feel paranoid or conspiratorial do not see how they drive the big press. There may be some smart critics out there, smart curators, even one or two intelligent directors but their press—I think the agenda comes from somewhere else, mostly from below. I mean that may sound sappy but...

BC: There's a monstrous form of popularism in Glasgow being used...

HF: That's a different force, the pressure of artists is only one of many—and it might not be the most important at any given moment. The popularist pressure.

BC: Well it's just used. The big institutions will put on a very liberal façade—they wouldn't put on a far-right exhibition, maybe really they should, if they're so liberal then they should represent that as some kind of notion of freedom. There is I suppose a different notion of freedom in America: you can do what you want if you're prepared for the consequences. Anyway, there's this notion of Liberalism put forward in a modern contemporary art gallery, but the higher up you go, if you look at the people on their boards, they become more and more right-wing. So they have no fear about this at all: they actually promote it, they're not threatened by it.

HF: Well look, I think avant-garde culture historically needed a fairly confident bourgeoisie—not just to shock—but there was a way in which the bourgeoisie wanted to be tested too, wanted to see its values worked out another way.

BC: As Gombrich said they wanted a 'crunchy diet'.

HF: (*Laughs*) I think, you know, the classical idea of the avant-garde that we have now, of these extraordinary movements in Paris, they required a bourgeoisie that was informed enough to press them—the artists. I think there was a way in which a version of this relation is all that's needed. That's what I don't see. It doesn't come from the States, it doesn't come from a few rich people. I think there is enormous withdrawal from contemporary culture, just in general, for all kinds of reasons in the States. So those old conditions of avant-garde culture have to be replaced by other ones. Whatever the other conditions are they're never particularly happy—there's too much state; not enough; too much private interest; not enough. These are all in there by default. By default of a self-critical bourgeoisie.

PS: Presumably we're talking about a notion of the avant-garde. Something that one wants to bring with this notion is the idea of political change. Not simply a new set of artists who happen to be the ones who get discussed in all the articles for a while. You want something that's more 'radical' for want of a better word.

HF: Yeah. The avant-garde, again, is this term that in the past articulated the artistic and the political. I don't think that necessarily you go seek out the political in this neighbourhood or that province. I don't think it's ready-made in any community. I think sometimes it happens in form. I'm modernist enough to believe that you can still be political within the materiality of your own work.

PS: Well in a sense it has to be in terms of art practice, that's what it must be surely. Otherwise it's just politics layered on.

HF: Yeah, like it's illustrational. There's a lot of problems: there's theory illustration, there's political expressionism. There's lots of problematic formulations it seems to me right now. Maybe the pressure to form all these things together in work that is also innovative in its own terms is too much to ask.

BC: The grand unification theory of the avant-garde.

HF: I don't think that's a grand theory—it can't be guessed beforehand, I think it happens.

PS: But that's a very different position from a modernist position of De Stijl or some sort of group like that, where they're trying to make the future happen in a certain way.

HF: No, that's beyond us, thank God.

BC: You're talking about the rediscovery of past artworks. I think there's an industry about destroying people's reputations, but even just re-readings. One is constantly surprised though by the facts. I remember finding out that Jackson Pollock's tutor was Thomas Hart Benton. Early on you'll see Pollock making these big floats for political demonstrations with stereotypical capitalist effigies. Then again you have this thing that when the state did intervene in the arts in America with the WPA, that gave rise to this massive grouping which was then again taken up by the state through the Congress for Cultural Freedom and all that: it was done twice. Is that what you long for?

HF: (*Laughs*) Not exactly. I don't see the early work of

Pollock as that divorced from the later work. For me there's not a huge divide between those moments in Pollock. There is a moment where the political, the aesthetic and the institutional come together in the work. It's obviously canonical, classical now, but there's a way in which Pollock really knew where painting was at that moment. He saw that innovation in form could also be political in the sense that there was still enough of a structure to old ideas of painting that if they were messed with, that would have political ramifications. I think it did, liberating ones at least. That's an example, obviously a very privileged one, but I don't think it's unique and I don't think it will never come again.

BC: It's fundamentally presented as some kind of aesthetic leap, as if it's some sort of scientific breakthrough. If you look at his work, OK he does break, but he's also coming back to something, it's still drawing.

HF: But not at that time. Smithsonian is another example of a person who 'leapt' in this league, gathered up all these different forces in ways that could not be expected. Those are two heroic examples, I think you could find humble ones too.

LF: The thing about photography and the use of attempts at justification through the use of a painterly language: Pollock talking about drawing or anything else can be as much about a sense of justification—in the same way that photography went through, and still is.

BC: But it's also very, very hyped. That film he made, the Time magazine article. And it's the same with Duchamp and the urinal: who took the photograph?—Stieglitz. Who's show was it?—Stieglitz's, he put up the money. Duchamp even wrote the 'scandalous' article. What did he set up afterwards? The Société Anonyme—taking all that money from little old ladies and ambassador's wives (laughter). I'm not condemning it, don't get me wrong, I'm drooling with jealousy. But there has to be these readings too.

HF: (*Laughs*) Oh sure.

BC: Lets not get too romantic about it.

HF: Oh I'm not romantic about it at all. That's what I meant about my longing for a proper bourgeoisie. It may sound absolutely perverse but...

PS: It's like Hegel's master slave dialectic, you need a bogeyman to have an avant-garde.

BC: Well look at those Yves Klein photographs, the ones with the naked women and that extraordinary audience.

HF: Yeah, there was a great moment when Benjamin Buchloch, in *October*, a long time ago, reproduced the image of Klein's audience with Malevitch and Lissitzky and students headed to Moscow, and this very different sense of a practice collective etc. His whole deal, Benjamin's, was a before and after: this is real collectivity and this is spectacle. But there's a way in which this is true. That's his story—of massive precipitous decline, you know. I think the other way is to see other possibilities. I think it's important to be grim, as grim as possible, but there's always possibilities.

PS: Because if there weren't presumably culture really would be sewn up by the powers at be.

HF: Yeah and we can all go home.



IMAGE: TEEHAN & TEEHAN

review

Women on Art Symposium

Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow

The passage of the last century has been a long journey in the history of the writing of the consciousness of women. This consciousness is both historical and particular, recurrent and mutable, heterogeneous, in relation to the particularity of the political, cultural and economic contours of the inscribed mores of women's lives.

Every struggle, language of resistance, so to speak, is of its time and place, an echo, a continuity with past struggle, but reactive, responsive to other external forces which do not solely originate with questions of gender; but with other categories of identity which shape the expression and reception and production of power in myriad forms in public and private life.

The articulation and evolution of feminist thinking this century is often a fragmented story, always being found again and restored to a significant place which may ensure its recovery and endurance but perhaps not. Structural inequalities which effect women's lives remain persistent despite obvious changes in their form and maintenance, Virginia Woolf's assertion that women require 'a room of one's own and £500 a year' still holds true but perhaps translates into the contemporary equivalent of 'a right to a house, no glass ceilings, support for carers, job security and decent wages for work'.

The desire to discuss the contradiction between historical progress by women and the success of the women's movement set against the persistent presence of the institutionalised sexism was the premise of the *Women On Art Symposium* held at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow. The Symposium, it was claimed, would be the place to discuss such continuing inequalities and gendering of power relations within 'cultural industries' which undervalue the major contribution of women's labour, to their social, economic and cultural function and value. It would aim "to address a number of key challenges for women working in the cultural industries at the present time. The main areas of debate would cover areas such as:

- *Gender and segregation; why certain jobs within the cultural industries are automatically sanctioned as 'female' and others, frequently those with greater promotional prospects, creative input and financial rewards as 'male'.*
- *Working within the cultural industries in Britain today in relation to other European countries; are women forced to adopt a male pattern of working life which does not accommodate their roles as primary carers? Research has shown that the majority of women are*

demanding a personal/professional balance to the quality of their lives; what are the steps towards changing this culture?

- *The importance of creativity and lateral thinking for women within their own professional cultural environment; are women influencing methods of training and education within this field to the extent of changing the working culture? Can we look at role models for women within cultural industries from outside Britain, in particular the USA and Southern Africa.*

The creation of a public space to debate such questions concerning women is necessary, particularly given the promise of the socio-economic analysis which underpinned the rationale of the symposium. However, before discussing some of the features of the symposium, the socio-economic audit of gender equality must be applied to the symposium itself. Simply put, why was it so expensive to attend? How many women working in Glasgow and other locations in Scotland could afford to attend the conference when the fee was so prohibitive? If one purpose of the symposium was to form some continuing forum then it ought to have striven to include the participation of as many women as possible in as many roles and relationships to the arts and particularly from within the city to which it has civic responsibilities. Attendance fees of this sort smack of the spectacle of a middle class philanthropy which eschews the economic and financial austerity, funding cuts and under-resourcing which characterises the working lives of people in organisations the symposium was meant to target. The symposium therefore excludes those with the least economic resources. An ironic fact.

Anyway, if you somehow could afford to be there, the essence of the symposium's themes were perhaps most effectively and interestingly explored in the contributions of Sue Innes, Carol Becker, Angela Kingston and the Goat Island Performance Group.

Sue Innes' talk, *Widening the Cracks and Avoiding the Chasms*, was a scholarly presentation of a sociological analysis of the types and forms of social change which have happened in the working and domestic lives of women since the advent of suffrage. This was set against both the cracking face of the dominant hegemony, male defined, with which it is in conflict and its recurring features of exclusion despite advances by women to break down its appearance. She quoted from her book *Making It Work*,

"what has changed least...is the habit of measuring things against a male defined standard; we still use definitions of work and progress, what counts as success, the place of caring, and appropriate behaviour along a false axis of reason to emotion, which are a consequence of male pre-eminence (dominance) in the public sphere".

The split between public and private life is still con-

sidered the role of women to resolve. State legitimisation of equality issues has the face of ineffective equal opportunities legislation exacerbated by the continuing lack of flexible, adequate childcare and employment practices which take account of the care responsibilities of its employees. Despite this discrimination, women's relationship to themselves, she argued, "had changed but an awful lot hadn't, re women's family work and responsibilities and access to resources (low pay etc.) and also questions of backlash and the 'crisis of masculinity'".

Paradoxically, the grater presence of women in the labour market is synchronous with the redefinition and redistribution of capital and the creation of the flexible, multi-skilled, multi-part-time, contract culture of the present pay-as-little-as-you-can labour economy. Economic differentials between women have been exacerbated and there is a widening gap between women defined by class, ethnicity, age, and motherhood and use value of their particular occupation.

Despite the contradictions of the economic evidence, Sue Innes argued there has been an 'epistemic shift' which had seen perceptions and values change and spaces, psychological and material, where women could assert new values which are neither drawn from traditional prescriptions of 'femininity' nor from uncritically adopting male personae in working life which alienates other women.

This latter point—of the nature of female behaviour in positions of power—is the meeting place of the public and private self for women. The qualities, tensions and relationships between the inner self and internal authority and the external self and female expressions of leadership were one of the areas of analysis undertaken by Carol Becker, Dean of the Institute of Chicago, in her inspiring talk which, for myself, was the key contribution of the symposium.

The power of her thesis lay in the importance of a psychological analysis of institutional behaviour by men and women and the exploration of the symbolic meaning of those institutions to the identity of its community. It is one of the tasks of a feminist project to encourage imagination of leadership roles, yet in a manner that does not collude with patriarchy nor use power in an unconscious, unhealthy dynamic to repair unacknowledged wounds which result in bullying, harassment, emotional abuse at work, hierarchical non-nurturant ego-laden environments in which people in power project onto others their unresolved conflicts. If women and men were to be good leaders, they must be conscious of their own symbolic role. What is a psychologically healthy working environment for a woman to create? It was essential for women she argued, to develop a public self. A woman in a leadership position must demonstrate her lack of fear of men to other women. She must show other women her comfort with her own authority, owning her decisions and responsibilities. She must not be the 'psychoanalytic monstrous mother' for women will look to her for guidance of how to be comfortable with their own creativity and through this her own sense of entitlement, a giving of psychological permission to be, to develop power and creativity.

Carol Becker articulated her thoughts on leadership with reference to her working class background and her relationship with her father. It was for her more significant in an adult sense: the assumption of equality which characterised her father's treatment of her. In her conjoining of the psychodynamic and the public, her work is reminiscent of Valerie Walkerdine and Carolyn Steedman, work through which women from working class backgrounds can find themselves included.

Other highlights of the symposium were contributions by Angela Kingston and the Goat Island Performance Group from Chicago. In her paper *Brushing Sindy's Hair*, Angela Kingston informed her ideas on the interiority of 'girlhood' from a psychoanalytic perspective, tracing the lineaments of female identity in its totality as expressed, rehearsed and displayed in the act of play. This centredness of identity was not of an essential femininity, but a deeply sensual and active engagement with the meanings of imaginary places in which the self kept order, was in charge and effective, had power. The sustaining of this sense of self-assurance and efficacy can be difficult for women to do, the obstacles to healthy self-esteem are numerous. It is important for childhood parts to be integrated into the adult woman to create the good mother internal object which it is vital to feel if you

wish to mother your own creativity and sense of value despite the fact this does not translate into economic well being for most women.

Lin Hixson and Mathew Goulish of the Goat Island Performance Group from Chicago articulated the phenomenological, philosophical method to the theory and practice of their group. They explore the aggregates of consciousness; sensation, perception, association are the objects of subjective analysis, the constructed unconsciousness the source for the taking apart, digestion and rebuilding of ideas which generate performance work. This 'first principles' approach to creativity eschews an essentialism which interprets experience as solely prescribed by gender and was a contribution to the symposium which had its intellectual and linguistic roots in phenomenology and spirituality.

The symposium featured contributions from many other women across diverse fields of interest; Janet Paisley talked of her life in balancing writing and motherhood, Paddy Higson displayed a shocking lack of preparation and any interest in even thinking about womens' issues in relation to the economy of film and television, Sam Ainsley talked of the lack of women teachers at Glasgow School of Art.

Women On Art is to be welcomed because the paucity of public and political spaces with power which are effective in the elimination of inequalities requires some form of initiative, action, forum for analysis at least. The economic rationalism and the turning of all processes of culture into products in a market place has dominated the economy of the arts, education and health; has created new forms of pover-

ty, inequality, criteria of value. The inequalities in distribution of wealth in the arts merely mirrors the broader societal context in Scotland within which it is located. Curiously, the symposium felt placeless as the particularities of the social, political and economic base of power in the arts in Scotland and the consequences of not having a parliament did not feature much in discussion. If there is to be any radical change in eliminating discrepancies in power, the wider political picture is of great significance to women living and working in Scotland. The potential for a new social and political formation in a Scotland with a parliament should have excited greater enthusiasm in the minds of the organisers.

Lorna J. Waite

Tales of The Great Unwashed

WITH THE GREAT UNWASHED being a free house, and one of the few remaining, we've been feeling the pinch this last wee while.

Over a century we've been here, and a good few bob has passed over the counter down the years, enough at any rate to raise several families and see them alright. So when things get pushed as they are now, it's all hands on deck and never say die and all that.

Just around the corner there's yet another new 'Irish' pub opened, with 'genuine' old posters and chests of drawers standing in the middle of the floor and old hats and shoes and bootlaces and you-name-it hanging here and there. Packed it is already too, and that's it open only a month.

So—bold strategies are called for. I've pledged to peg the price of a pot of stew for the next year at least, and I've extended the lunchtime menu from Pie & Beans, Sausage Roll & Beans, or Bridie & Beans, to include the same things, but with a twist - now my customers can have any of the aforementioned pastry products solo i.e. without the beans, for ten pence cheaper, and mighty popular it is proving. But that surely is the essence of change—assessing the customer's needs and adapting to them.

And the Karaoke is another invention which may yet help us see off the interlopers. On Thursdays we get *Bobby Elbow's All-Star-Roadshow* in, and a fine range of tunes he has on his big discs. Most of the regulars enjoy stretching their cables once they've had a couple, and none more so than Joe 'Doghead' Ryan, who has won the first prize (a token for a half-bottle of his choice) for the past three weeks.

Because Joe has few of his own teeth left, it is difficult for him to sing without releasing unpleasant rasping splatteroid noises whenever he reaches for notes of higher type, or attempts lyrics containing many Esses, but he was advised recently by Bobby Elbow that by cutting a small banana-shape from a normal beer-mat and winding it between his remaining choppers, the dentally-challenged delivery can be much improved.

And so Joe has done this, with great success. Now he can launch himself into heartfelt renditions of his favoured Roy Orbison classics with confidence, as I expect he will tonight.

There being a sensation of change in the air what with elections and all that, I expected that some scintilla of optimism might be detected in the songs chosen by my loyal and trusty regulars, but it seems that they don't care too much for it all—whether it is change they fear, or perhaps just that they don't give a tom-tit either way, I cannot truly say, but I had hoped there might be more of a buzz about it all.

Bobby Elbow kicks the night off, as ever, with a hearty version of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* which is his signature tune and sets a suitably claustrophobic tone, it being hot and sticky and not a little malodorous what with all the crusty old souls packed in.

Next up is Sippy Pat from the Wynd, who never takes her Afghan off and treats us to Bohemian Rhapsody: 'Nobody loves me!' she caterwauls, and the entire company screams in reply, 'She's just a poor girl from a poor family!' and she starts crying 'Let me go!' and we all scream 'No!' and eventually she tears her Afghan open and axe-grinds her way towards the crescendo with much yipping and ya-hooing from all present. Joe is already on his feet by the puggy, banging his approval of Sippy's efforts on the heads and shoulders of those seated before him, and his enthusiasm duly sparks a small disturbance which I'm forced to quell with a few short blasts of the fire extinguisher.

But Joe is man enough to replace those drinks ruined by the dusty spray, and soon we all settle down to enjoy 'Jarler' Callaghan's outrageous treatment of the obscure Primo Detroit Ensemble's 1964 top-ten heartbreaker I'm About To Burst, which just gets better every time.

By half-eleven we're pretty much as full as we can be, the bar jammed with aspiring chanters demanding request slips despite cautions that they've little chance of performing tonight.

Bobby Elbow is due his well-earned mid-session break after belting out *Down Down Deeper and Down*, but Quo's most stirring of anthems sets Joe off again, and this time I have to allow the brawl to take its natural course as I'm too busy with the paying customers.

But then it all goes wrong. A trio of well-oiled, well dressed punters enter, and with them comes a scent of trouble. Two men and a woman who look familiar, and have an air of authority which my regulars sense and recoil from.

The strangers buy White-wine-&-peach schnapps 'Blinders' (the house speciality), demand a receipt, and have barely touched the drinks when the smallest of them catches my eye.

'Are you the proprietor sir?' asks this little fellow, and a sinister type he is too with his baldy red head and great tufts of white hair sprouting from his ears. I nod, whereupon he produces a large plastic identity card and holds it up to my face.

'Sergeant O'Lally,' he says then, 'Operation Grumblebust. We have reason to believe that you have been allowing these premises to be used for the gratuitous encouragement of behaviour liable to cause gloom and general downheartedness.'

'Well you've had a bum steer,' says I, and the other chap pipes up then—he's another shifty one, with a straggly grey beard grown to partially conceal the awful debauchery writ large on his pasty features.

'Make it easy on yourself,' he says low and mean, a dangerous smile playing about his thin cruel lips: 'We know all about it. Patsy Cline stuff, early Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash.' He pauses, and I see the disgust flick across his face as he whispers, 'Two Little Boys? Do you take us for fools?'

'Who sent you?' I ask, and the woman shuffles nearer the bar, staring at me through her milk-bottle

gazers. 'That's immaterial,' she says, her neck wobbling like a gigantic parson's nose as she chastises me: 'Everyone knows Elbow's been at it for years. Cohen, Jim Reeves, the works. You expect us to believe you don't know the type of filth he peddles, the misery he's caused?'

'Look about you,' says I, and they all do. I follow their gaze to find that Joe has mounted the stage and is making final adjustments to the dampened strip of beer-mat which will act as a temporary upper-set. Bobby Elbow is preparing to launch part-two, and its a cert it'll be a Big O weepie. I have a mental picture of myself, suited and shaved, in the dock, being charged with Assisting in the Supply of Woebegoneness by Means of Musical Media, and have resigned myself to early-closing when Elbow's tones rise high and loud through The Great Unwashed. 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you, thrice champion, the one, the only, Jeooooooooo Ryan!'

The small baldy fellow pulls a tape-recorder from his pocket and presses it on, smiling at his cronies. Joe unbuttons his donkey jacket and spreads his legs, mike cupped in his hands, a washboard frown developing, his eyebrows twisting into inverted commas of sadness. And then he erupts into 'I was walking, down the High Street, when I...'

My mind races. It's not Orbison. It's *The Laughing Gnome*. God bless you Doghead! The Sergeant flicks off his recorder and the woman huffily slugs what's left of her Blinder. The bearded one fires me a look of stinging contempt as he leans across and snarls: 'Don't think for a minute that this aberrant piece of Bowie whimsy can get you off the hook.'

But there's method in Joe's madness. He stays on-stage, defying all others to remove him, and launches into *Kisses for Me* as Elbow exhorts the massed regulars to sing along. By the time Joe gets to the end of Dolce's timeless *Shaddapayaface* the trio has clearly had enough.

'Now, have you tried around the corner?' I ask, and they stare blankly. 'There's those new places. Genuine Irish pubs they are,' I say, 'and no end of wanton miserableness in there what with ballads about sailing away to Amerikay and never coming back, and awful dirges about tatty-howking and banshees chasing folk around. God bless us and save us and soap us and shave us, it's enough to make a grown man weep so it is.'

They frown and glance at one another, then move silently towards the door as the first chords of *Agadoo-do-do* bring all to their feet.

Joe has earned his half-bottle tonight and no mistake. I pour myself a pint and raise a hand in reply to Bobby Elbow's wink, then join the rest of The Great Unwashed, pushing the pineapple, shaking the tree.

Ian Brotherhood

Party Swings and Roundabouts

As The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) Visual Arts Department appoints Sue Daniels, former director at Oriol Mostyn, as the new Head of Department, following on from Andrew Nairne's resignation of the post and his installation as Director at the new Dundee arts centre, the department is holding *consultative* exercises on its proposed Support for Individual Visual Artists: Draft Action Plan. The Draft Action Plan and supporting material addresses what the SAC Visual Arts department feel are the "...key issues facing visual artists in Scotland". The responses to the document, through a consultative system, are intended to inform future SAC policy decisions on provision for artists. I suggest further, that through conscious reflection, it could also aid in the development of the SAC's own operating structures. In all, there are four such consultative meetings taking place throughout Scotland in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dumfries, and Inverness.

Having participated as facilitator in the Glasgow meeting, I am left questioning the informative role these exercises have. Not just in the scope of the exercises themselves (the actual consultative structure; the problems of the representation of a broader community by a limited number of individuals; only one afternoon to discuss the breadth of issues facing the plethora of artistic communities in the Central Belt; the scarcity of such events as ongoing exercises of communication) but in the actual SAC receiving structure, how this information is potentially fed back into the SAC and acted upon by individual Officers, and what effects it has on the SAC's own mechanisms of working. There is a feeling that such consultative exercises simply fulfil the role of making *visible*, and thereby proving, in a limited way if not only for the SAC's own reference, the existence of a benign, democratic organisation, the worry of participants being, they are taken through the motions to a pre-ordained conclusion. The histories of previous exercises inform this sentiment. To grasp a positive element from the proceedings, I welcome my opportunity to play witness to and participate in the event and, being engaged in drawing up the consultative group, invite others to participate who might not have had the occasion otherwise. It was an opportunity to become privy to explanations possibly not so forthcoming in the otherwise *everyday* circumstances of the running of the Department. In view of this, the SAC Visual Arts Department's openness and approachfulness has to be challenged, as should the present limited *client* representative consultation structure, in the expectation that other ways of representing and supporting a multiplicity of practices can be explored in an ongoing exchange of ideas. Within the meeting I attempted to raise the issues of what the present and future roles of the SAC are considered to be, outside of any one departments' manoeuvring within its prescribed, narrow categorisation, in relation to the Governments reduced capita for Public Sector Funding (PSF) of the arts, the Lottery and the *encouragement* for arts organi-

sations to attain private sector funding.

The Support for Individual Visual Artists: Draft Action Plan *converses* in the language of capital economy. The whole tone of the document is the recommendation of the twinning of private capital with public subsidy. This comes with the now inevitable continuation of an inherited Conservative Government funding policy of encouraged private *investment* in the arts with the continual erosion of Public Sector Funding (PSF). To receive Lottery funding (the replacement system for PSF by any other name) relies on the applying organisation finding a discretionary percentage of funding from 'other sources'. Forget previous Lottery promises this is, after all, *New Labour* with new promises. Camelot, the company who presently run the Lottery for the Government, hold the commercial reins until 2001, when its franchise is to be reviewed. In the meantime, the Government is making loud noises in public on the changes it intends to style from the present commercial set-up to a non-profit making system come 2002. Against the backdrop of years of Tory cuts; two years of *frozen* Government funding to the Scottish Office for the SAC to come (under Labour's committed spending promises) and its *replacement* system, Lottery funding, to decrease with Labour's alternative spending plans for the money raised by the Wednesday Draw (*more* justifiably using the money for Education and Welfare), what was *on offer* at the consultation was a discussion on the prioritising of artists' needs. Ultimately this was how to cut what can only be a diminishing cake in response to the artists' practices the SAC wish to, and feel they can, support. In the light of this continuing funding crisis, the SAC expressed the desire to redirect funding away from *administration* within the visual arts to *individual* artists as one possible *solution*.

Amongst other things suggested, this could take the form of: moving funds around to make more money available for individual SAC artists' project grants; organisations/ galleries creating more fellowships and residencies in association with the SAC; the SAC insisting that revenue funded clients implement Exhibition Payment Rights (EPR - a fee for artists showing their work over and above the costs of the exhibition, hanging, invites, catalogue, etc.). It is suggested that such recommendations would be achieved at different rates, from easily achievable to long term goals. The merit of these recommendations have to be assessed both individually and in relation to their overall effect. Initially, however, what needs to be looked at is how the very document actually came about, the time scales, applicability and relevance of the SAC research and development exercises that went into creating the suggested solutions. There is no point in developing and consulting on policy that is potentially outmoded even at such a draft stage, never mind in five years time. To take Exhibition payment Rights as one example. The SAC endorsed the National Artists Association (NAA) Code of Practice document in 1995, which includes the implementation of EPR, and participated in the original research exercises in association with the NAA. While the research and resulting documents have allowed the NAA to campaign for EPR from a relatively persuasive position, EPR as SAC policy looks none the closer. While a few galleries in Scotland presently manage to pay EPR, e.g. Street Level Gallery, The Collective Gallery, through their individual commitment to the scheme and financial balancing acts, the scheme was developed in relation to a specific way of working and is biased towards the one or two

person gallery show. In the light of contemporary practice the EPR scheme needs overhauling to be more inclusive of other ways of working. The principle of EPR is otherwise compromised through its hierarchical payment structure, defined against the backdrop of the commercial gallery system and applicable to only a few. Projects which often show groups of *emerging* artists in *alternative* spaces in relatively short sporadic intervals, would not be able to give their participants equivalent support under the present recommended EPR scheme. In the eventuality of EPR being *implemented* (that is, not just in SAC revenue funded spaces but across a wide range of practices which engage with a range of publics), it could potentially allow for a greater number of organisations to make their *own* 'qualitative' judgements and endorsements. That is not to say that those funded by the SAC would not still feel the effects exerted by the SAC's own 'qualitative' tastes, which encompasses overtly bureaucratic assessment procedures where validation means conformation to specific forms within pigeonholes that fit present departmental remits or the *current* round of concerns, e.g. 'education and interpretation'. Some of the suggestions within the Strategy Document do *potentially* increase financial support from the SAC for a greater number of individual practitioners which is a constructive action, but that is not to say that this will not in some way affect provision for the facilities for the *making* of work, as production facilities are potentially described as *administration* and where extra funds will be sought from.

In the meeting, participants spoke primarily from an individual geographic and personal basis. In itself this is not necessarily negative provided the consultative structure allows for frequent and broad community representation. However, it did prove problematic for a discussion on the wider National implications of moving funding to artists away from administration, visualising where these changes would take place and who they would have most impact upon. While I understand this was not the intention of this specific consultative exercise, these broader concerns have wide reaching implications for the production of work and ultimately influence any SAC funding policy decisions made. Perhaps other reasons why a broader discussion of *the general picture* didn't emerge are because of the differences and complexities of the cultural scenes within Scotland; the specific focus and concerns of any one individual/ group present and, paramount, the internal competition for limited funds. The effect of such competition is manifest throughout the visual arts, no more so as in the education *industry*, as witnessed at a recent opening of an exhibition in Glasgow. An Art School head of department was giving an opening speech and, unable or unwilling to talk about the work on show, followed close on the heels of the Conservative's election tactics of negative campaigning by 'bringing into disrepute' the workings of another department. I far from expect ideological homogeneity in the arts, arts education, art magazines, critical journals, etc. but such *petty* bickering is self-defeating. I wonder how much Tory divide and conquer policy has been absorbed over the years and how much it ever needed encouraging. This myopic scramble for funding and *academic* accreditation inevitably impacts upon the potential for any intelligent debate and discussion.

Over and above the SAC's grand plan for Centres of Excellence (designating specific regional areas in Scotland with *quality* provision for a specific artistic medium), which was not discussed at any length at the meeting, we have to understand how individual artists and organisations manage to survive and produce work in the present funding climate, what the nature of those organisations are, their historic development, and what support they also provide for a broad range of practices. Artist Run Spaces may well be a sweeping term but most *employ* artists in some capacity, however underpaid for their work. Overall, the contemporary gallery structure employs artists in a variety of positions, both paid and voluntary. One *trend* which has a strong emphasis in the Strategy document is the

employing of trainees in arts organisations. This emphasis on training, however differently structured, is discussed in an anonymous letter in the Spring 97 issue of Circa magazine, Dole Fraud and the Arts. It states: "Firstly, and paradoxically, practically all full-time positions within the arts are filled temporarily by trainees. This has been the only way that theatres, art centres etc. have managed to function, but the result is that there are no jobs - they are all filled by trainees." Out of financial necessity many arts organisations employ voluntary staff. This has taken on a new dimension at Glasgow's Museum of Modern Art, where the voluntary Gallery Guides are asked to become Friends of the Gallery, for a 'standard' fee of £15, before being *allowed* the privileged task of instructing the public on the art within the building. I don't think its too much to claim that such schemes can, in the present economic climate, produce and add to an environment of structural unemployment, especially when looked at in the light of the recent staff redundancies at Glasgow Museums.

The close relative to training within the document is the SAC's now familiar mouth foaming zeal for *professionalism*. Professionalism here is seen to be the art of contractually liaising with business; in having contractual relationships the artist is believed to be somehow *empowered*, in control of their own destiny. While this gets away from the view of the artist-as-victim, it doesn't explain the actual power relations at play in the field of cultural production and the direct influences of corporate sponsorship. Business sponsorship of the arts is described in Culture as Commodity; The Economics of the Arts and Built Heritage in the UK, Bernard Casey, Rachael Dunlop, Sara Selwood: "Businesses sponsoring the arts normally expect certain benefits in return. These include promotion and advertising opportunities, such as entertaining clients and VIPs, access to specific markets, the enhancement of their corporate image by association with a prestigious event, and the possibility of boosting staff morale by providing free or discounted tickets. Sponsorship is generally regarded as part of a company's promotional expenditure and is normally allowable for tax purposes." An Art School's student handout on writing company sponsorship applications describes What Companies May Want Out of a Sponsorship as, "an event which is high profile, *media* worthy and reflects *corporate values*...; a deal capable of *future exploitation*." [writers emphasis]. So it's hardly worth writing to Shell asking it to support artists' works on human rights violations in Nigeria, or is it? As Chomsky asserts, democracies, while far from being democratic, actively and visibly encourage and tolerate open dissent/ criticism, as do multinational corporations. While private businesses benefit from a direct correlation between themselves and the apparent freedom of the arts, reciprocally the perpetuated myth of the 'free-market' is also used to naturalise the administered hierarchy within the arts market. Through *business* education at college level and training thereafter it is believed 'professionalism' will be achieved. This linear model of practice is the result of a 'traditionalist' model of art history and the attempt to lay a specific capital economy grid over the breadth of contemporary art practice. It's not by chance that it also reflects the Conservative *vocational* educational policies of the 80s and 90s. (In London, the art department of Camberwell was closed and Central and St. Martins were amalgamated, a more up to date euphemism would be down-sized, by Government decisions taken in the late 80s because they couldn't justify their existence *vocationally*. In reality these acts were symptomatic of the Government's paranoid projection and attempts at the destruction of the *left* within public institutions.)

The SAC's Visual Arts Department's apparent desire for administration cuts also conflicts with the present private *managerial* system that is developing, that of devolved/ private Lottery facilitating companies and the SAC's own policy study into an independent/ private arts education body (a private body to administer artists working within education). As more funding

facilitating organisations *appear* to *negotiate* on organisations' behalves the contradiction of the SAC's will to shift funding from *administration* to *artists* changes from a mere rip to a gaping chasm in realistic policy possibilities, despite the conviction of some SAC Officers and Committee members, as it flies in the face of the effects of Government Arts policy. But, *administration* is a broad encompassing term, the actuality is that certain forms of *administrative* structures are being encouraged over and above others. Presented within the document is financial encouragement from the SAC to be given to individuals/ groups for setting up private dealer organisations, an administrative body.

I believe the SAC put forward a Darwinistic notion of artistic practice, a system of natural competition and selection that 'sorts the men from the boys'. The SAC present an idealist representation of the *creator* as a *pure* isolated subject and the SAC as being in a position of disinterestedness, mere observers removed from the fray. In the introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's The Field of Cultural Production Randal Johnson writes: "We would be naive to assume that it [the structure of authority in the field of cultural production] is innocent or disinterested. As Bordieu writes '...Every critical affirmation contains, on the one hand, a recognition of the value of the work which occasions it...and on the other hand an affirmation of its own legitimacy. All critics declare not only their judgements of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art.' There is, as Bourdieu has said, an interest in disinterestedness." What is camouflaged is the actual regulation of the manufacturing as well as dissemination of cultural production by the SAC. The mechanisms of 'qualitative' judgement is the belief system that sustains this apparent natural system of the selection and promotion of artists. Part of the notion of *professionalism* contains this naturalised, unspoken concept of *quality* and *value*, which is disseminated throughout the art world.

The SAC operates in a reactive capacity, it is *familiar* with and able to validate that which is already sanctioned and confirms/ accumulates that accreditation. Through such a methodology it cannot, or is unwilling to in its present incarnation, support innovation and experimentation as it contradicts its system of judgement. The SAC must therefore develop *its* own supportive and communicative structures in response to contemporary artistic practices *if* it is to truly advance its provision for artists. One suggestion in the Support for Individual Visual Artists: Draft Action Plan is that a bursary be given to an existing, unstated UK/ International arts magazine, I presume based in London as it is the concentrated market centre, to support Scottish writing on Art. While its heartening to eventually see a glimmer of *encouragement* for critical writing, if that *is* what is sought, running to the familiar and sanctioned within London is still a poor substitute for the development of independent activity within Scotland.

Leigh French

Freedom for Freedom of Expression rally

Istanbul, 10–12 March 1997

THIS THREE-DAY event was organised and hosted by the *Freedom of Thought* initiative, a 200-strong group of artists and activists. There is a multiple trial in progress in Istanbul; writers, musicians, actors, journalists, lawyers, trades unionists and others are being prosecuted by the State Security Court. Twenty-one international writers attended the rally; most are members of PEN but three travelled on the invitation of Amnesty International (A.I.), including myself.

More writers are imprisoned in Turkey than in any other country in the world¹ but “the real question (is) not that of freedom for a writer. The real question is that of the national rights of the Kurds.”² The annexation of Kurdistan, the attempted genocide and continued oppression of the Kurdish people are three of the major scandals of this century. Historically, the British State, if not prime mover, has had a pivotal role.³ At one point ‘we’ needed a client-state “to secure (‘our’) right to exploit the oilfields of Southern Kurdistan,” and so ‘we’ created a country, gave it a king, and called it Iraq⁴. ‘Our’ active participation in the assault on the Kurdish people continues to the present where ‘we’ retain a leading interest in diverse ways, e.g. client-state of the USA, member of NATO, member of the European Union, etc. Turkey itself “is now the number two holiday destination for U.K. holidaymakers thanks to superb weather, great value for money accommodation, inexpensive eating out and lots to see and do”.⁵

Prisoners are routinely tortured and beaten in Turkey, sometimes killed. Rape and other sexual violations occur frequently. In the Kurdish provinces the mass murders, forced dispersals and other horrors practised by the security forces are documented by a variety of domestic and international human rights’ agencies. People have been made to eat excrement. From Kurdish villages there are reports of groups of men having their testicles tied and linked together, the women then forced to lead them round the streets. There are files held on children as young as twelve being subject to the vilest treatment. This from a 16-year-old girl detained not in a Kurdish village but by the police in Istanbul:

They put my head in a bucket until I almost drowned. They did it again and again... They tied my hands to a beam and hoisted me up. I was blindfolded. When I was hanging I thought my arms were breaking. They sexually harassed me and they beat my groin and belly with fists while I was hanging. When they pulled down on my legs I lost consciousness. I don’t know for how long the hanging lasted... They threatened that they would rape and kill me. They said I would become paralysed. The torture lasted for eight days.⁶

The young girl was later charged with being a member of “an illegal organisation”. Germany, USA and U.K. are among those who compete to supply war and torture implements to the Turkish security forces, who learned about the efficacy of the hanging process from their Israeli counterparts. A student we were to meet later at Istanbul University was once detained for twenty-four hours and during that period she too was tortured.

There exist “152 laws and about 700 paragraphs ...devoted to regulating freedom of opinion”. The Turkish Penal Code “was passed in 1926 ... (and is) based on an adaptation of the Italian Penal Code ... (Its) most drastic reform was the adoption in 1936 of the anti-communist articles on ‘state security’ from the code of Mussolini. Only in April 1991 were some changes made through the passage of the Law to Combat Terrorism.” Before then, and up until 1989

court cases against the print media had reached a record level with 183 criminal cases against 400 journalists... at least 23 journalists and editors in jail with one of them receiving a sentence of 1,086 years, later reduced to 700 on appeal. The editor of one (well-known journal, banned by the Ozal dictatorship) was prosecuted 13 times and had 56 cases brought against her. She was in hiding at the time the journal *7* appeared in July of 1990. One of her sentences amounted to 6 years, 3 months. Despite international appeals and protests the Turkish government refused to reverse her sentences. No left-wing or radical journal was safe from arbitrary arrest, closure or seizure of entire editions. Police persecution extended into the national press and included daily newspapers. Authors and publishers of books were victimised. In November 1989 449 books and 25 pamphlets were burned in Istanbul on the orders of the provincial governor... (and up until) 1991 189 films were banned...

During the following two years came

the liquidation of journalists, newspaper sellers, and the personnel of newspaper distributors, as well as bombing and arson attacks against newspaper kiosks and bookstores... (In 1992) twelve journalists were murdered by ‘unknown assailants’ (and) in most cases, the circumstances point to participation or support by the state security forces. (In 1994 writers and journalists were sentenced to) 448 years, 6 months and 25 days... There were 1162 violations of the press laws (and) a total of 2098 persons were tried, 336 of whom were already in prison... The security forces interfered with the distribution of press organs, attacked their offices, and arbitrarily detained publishers, editors, correspondents and newspaper salesmen.⁸

Shortly before the last Military coup, in the spring of 1991, I took part in a public meeting organised by the *Friends of Kurdistan*.⁹ I intended publishing a version of my ‘talk’ in written form but it never worked out. In the talk I looked at parallels in the linguistic and cultural suppression of Kurdish and Scottish people, and that was a mistake.¹⁰ Parallels between the two may be of some slight functional value from a Scottish viewpoint but when we discuss the Kurdish situation now and historically we are discussing the systematic attempt to wipe from the face of the earth a nation of some 30 million people.

It is doubtful if any form of oppression exists that has not been carried out on the Kurdish people and I think the scale of it overwhelmed me. I combined some of the elements of my talk with those of others of the same period, and published an essay.¹¹ I now give an extract from my notes for the talk, as a brief introduction to how things were for Kurdish people before the September 12 military coup back in 1980:¹²

“The Turkish Republic set up its apparatus for the repression of the Kurdish people soon after it was founded. Following the War of Independence, during which they were acclaimed as ‘equal partner’ and ‘sister nation’, the Kurdish people found their very existence was being denied. The authorities have since sought to destroy everything which might suggest a specific Kurdish identity, erecting an entire edifice of linguistic and historical pseudo-theories which supposedly ‘proved’ the Turkishness of the Kurds, and served as justification for the destruction of that identity.

These theories have become official doctrine, taught, inculcated and propagated by the schools, the universities, the barracks, and the media. The authorities banned all unofficial publications that tried to even discuss the sub-

ject. Historical or literary works, even travellers’ tales published in Turkish and other languages, were all removed from public and private libraries and for the most part destroyed if they contained any reference to the Kurdish people, their history or their country. All attempts to question official ideology were repressed.

It is estimated that 20 million Kurds dwell in Turkey and the Kurdish language has been banned there since 1925. In 1978, of all Kurdish people over the age of six, 72% could neither read nor write. The publication of books and magazines in the language is illegal. The Turkish authorities purged the libraries of any books dealing with Kurdish history, destroyed monuments and so on. All historical research into Kurdish society was forbidden. An official history was constructed to show the Kurdish people were originally Turks. Until 1970 no alternative research could be published. Thus officially the Kurds are purest Turk.

*The Turkish authorities have systematically changed the names of all Kurdish towns and villages, substituting Turkish for Kurdish names. The word ‘Kurdistan’, so designated from the 13th century, was the first to be banned; it is regarded as subversive because it implies the unity of the scattered Kurdish people. Among the literary works I presume proscribed in Turkey is my 1949 Penguin edition of Xenophon’s *The Persian Expedition*. In his translation Rex Warner not only refers to ‘Kurdistan’ but he refuses to suppress Xenophon’s encounters in 400 BC with the ‘Kardouçi’.¹³ Remember that Kurdistan is colonised not by one country but by four, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria; and Xenophon’s account also would have been anathema to such as the Syrian authorities whose Chief of Police*

published a Study (in November 1963 which) set out to ‘prove scientifically’ that the Kurds ‘do not constitute a nation’, that they are ‘a people without history or civilization or language or even definite ethnic origin of their own’, that they lived ‘from the civilization and history of other nations and had taken no part in these civilizations or in the history of these nations.’ (He also) proposed a 12-point plan: 1) the transfer and dispersion of the Kurdish people; 2) depriving the Kurds of any education whatsoever, even in Arabic; 3) a ‘famine’ policy, depriving those affected of any employment possibilities; 4) an extradition policy, turning the survivors of the uprisings in Northern Kurdistan over to the Turkish Government; 5) divide and rule policy; setting Kurd against Kurd; 6) a cordon policy along the lines of an earlier plan to expel the entire Kurdish population from the Turkish border; 7) colonization policy, the implantation of pure and nationalist Arabs in the Kurdish regions to see to the dispersal of the Kurds; 8) military divisions to ensure the dispersion; 9) ‘collective farms’ set up for the Arab settlers who would also be armed and trained; 10) a ban on ‘anybody ignorant of the Arabic language exercising the right to vote or stand for office’; 11) sending Kurds south and Arabs north; 12) ‘launching a vast anti-Kurdish campaign amongst the Arabs’.¹⁴

Media organs are the property of the official language in Turkey, and the Kurdish people are kept starved of outside news. Kurdish intellectuals are expected to assimilate, to reject their own culture and language, to become Turkicised. A person from Kurdistan cannot be appointed to fill a post without the prior approval of the political police. Kurds are not nominated for jobs in the Kurdish provinces; the authorities try always to separate them from their own country.

All business is conducted in the language of state and Kurdish speakers must use interpreters. Literature produced in exile, beyond the Turkish borders, is not allowed into the Republic. Kurdish writers and poets have had to write in Turkish, not simply to ensure publication but

State Security Court, 12/3/97



because they were unfamiliar with their own forbidden language and culture. The Turkish novelist Yasar Kemal, whose books are to be found in just about every library I've ever entered, is actually a Kurd.

A group of Kurdish students once published a tract demanding that incitement to racial hatred be made a punishable offence and were charged with having claimed that there was a Kurdish people, thereby undermining national unity. They published the tract in response to various anti-Kurd threats made publicly from right-wing sources, including one nationalist journal implicitly threatening the Kurdish people with genocide.

For a brief period a group called the organization of Revolutionary Kurdish Youth (DDKO) was tolerated by the authorities; this group set out to inform public opinion about the economic, social and cultural situation; organizing press conferences and public briefings, publishing posters, leaflets etc., focussing attention on the repression within Kurdish areas; its monthly ten-page information bulletin had a print run of 30,000 which was distributed amongst Turkish political, cultural and trade union circles, as well as in Kurdish towns and villages. Eventually 'news' about what was happening to the Kurds filtered through to the media and the public and there were protests against the repression. Six months before the military coup of March 1970 the leaders of the Organization were arrested and after it all 'left-wing parties and organisations were outlawed'.

But from 1975 new youth organizations formed, known generally as the People's Cultural Associations (HKD), concentrating on educating their members and helping peasants and workers who were in conflict with the authorities in one way or another. A policy of terror and ideological conditioning was implemented by the Ankara Government which in the words of Turkish sociologist Ismail Besikçi managed to "make people believe he who announced 'I am Kurdish' was committing a crime so heinous that he deserved the death penalty". Dr Besikçi was put on trial for the crime of 'undermining national feelings' and 'making separatist propaganda'.

In the same talk I drew attention to an interview Ismail Besikçi had given while in prison awaiting yet another trial. He had remarked of the German prosecution of the Kurdish Workers' Party (P.K.K.), that the one thing established was the existence of a "secret agreement between the NATO alliance and Turkey, in relation to Kurdistan". Germany has now fallen into line with the Turkish State and has declared the P.K.K. an illegal organisation, even to sport their colours is a criminal offence. The victimisation of Kurdish people has spread outwards, it is as though we are witnessing the attempted criminalisation of the entire diaspora.¹⁵

Throughout Europe there are incidents being reported by monitoring agencies. In November in Belgium "100 police and members of the special intervention squad ...raided a Kurdish holiday centre ...The Ministry of Justice claimed (it was) used by the P.K.K. as a semi-military training camp." Nobody at all was arrested. But forty people were deported to Germany. on February 2 of this year (1997) "the Danish television station, TV2, revealed that the Danish police intelligence service (PET) had written a 140 page report on meetings of the Kurdish parliament in exile which took place in Copenhagen in March 1996 (and the transcript ...ended up with the Turkish authorities."¹⁶

Here in the U.K. Kani Yilmaz is halfway into his third year in Belmarsh Prison, London. He came from Germany in October 1994 at the direct invitation of John Austin Walker M.P., to meet with British MPs and discuss cease-fire proposals between the P.K.K. and the Turkish armed forces. In a shameful act of betrayal the British State responded by arresting him.

Germany wants him extradited and Turkey waits in the wings. Sooner or later they will find a way to sort out 'the extradition problem', thus the British can hand him back to Germany who can hand him back to Turkey. or else they might just cut out the middle man, this would be their ideal situation.

Olof Palme of Sweden was assassinated more than 10 years ago; it so happens he was also the only European leader who ever confronted the Turkish State at the most fundamental level, by "recognising the Kurdish people as a nation and (committing) himself to attaining recognition of their rights."¹⁷ It would be comforting for some people to suppose that the British and other European Governments and state agencies act as they do through sheer cowardice. Unfortunately I doubt if this is the case.

Clearly the Turkish State has in place the means of authoritarian control for which many of our Euro-state authorities would cut off their left arm. In certain areas they begin to draw close, for example in matters relating to asylum and immigration, their punishment of the most vulnerable of people; the beatings, the killings, the torture that takes place in prisons and police-cells. And not too long ago

on 14 February 1997, the (British) government attempted to introduce a private members' bill, the Jurisdiction [Conspiracy and Incitement] Bill, which would have had the effect of criminalising support for political violence abroad. It was only defeated when two left Labour MPs, Dennis Skinner and George Galloway, unexpectedly forced a vote on the third reading and caught the government unawares, as they were relying on cross-party support for the Bill.¹⁸

In October 1996 came the *Lloyd Report*, published "with very little publicity and only a brief press-release, an inquiry into counter-terrorist legislation ...set up jointly by Home Secretary Michael Howard and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Sir Patrick Mayhew. Such is the terrorist threat," says the report "that not only is permanent legislation desirable to combat terrorism, but past powers need to be further widened and strengthened." The expert commissioned by Lord Lloyd "to provide 'an academic view as to the nature of the terrorist threat' (was) Professor Paul Wilkinson of St Andrew's University" and his 'view' provides Volume 11 of the report whose

new definition of 'terrorism' is modelled on the working definition used by the FBI: 'The use of serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public, in order to promote political, social or ideological objectives.'¹⁹

No later than one month after its publication, "amid allegations of financial losses" the *Mail on Sunday* named the professor as "Terrorist expert in college

cash riddle". Then came the more interesting information, that Professor Wilkinson was 'believed to work for the British security services and the CIA.' There is one thing established by the fact that Wilkinson is still commissioned for work as sensitive as the *Lloyd Report*, this is the contempt held by the British State not just towards the public but its elected representatives.

It was something of an open secret before this and readers of *Lobster* magazine have known of his pedigree for at least ten years, in particular his "inept role in the state's attempt to discredit Colin Wallace in the 1980s."²⁰ This was when "disinformation was run into the Channel 4 News office" by Wilkinson, two members of the UDA plus "a former colleague of Wallace" at the Information Policy unit in HQ Northern Ireland.²¹ Notwithstanding any of that his credibility is undiminished and as I write,²² one of Scotland's two 'quality' newspapers, *The Herald*, features his 'academic view' that "to defeat their terrorist tactics, British and Irish security must target the god-fathers of the IRA's crimes" and not give into such tactics as "bringing a complex transport system to a halt... Any group of clever dicks in an open society could achieve that..."

The juridical system in Turkey may be complex but its central purpose seems straightforward enough, it sanctifies the state and protects it from the people. Following the 1980 coup and throughout the next decade changes in the law took place, the mechanisms for the suppression of Kurdish people altered. For the Kurds it became one nightmare after another. The level of state-sponsored terrorism degenerated to a point where sometime between 1981 and 1983, in Diyarbakir prison, forty Kurdish youths were tortured to death for refusing to say "I am a Turk and therefore happy."²³

We have to respect the fact that it was not until 1984 that the Kurdish Workers Party (P.K.K.) began its armed struggle. If we do not then we play into the hands of the Turkish propaganda machine. The new Constitution came into existence in November of 1982 and an indication of the potential repression is available there, eg. this from the opening Preamble:

no thought or impulse [may be cherished] against Turkish national interests, against the existence of Turkey, against the principle of the indivisibility of the state and its territory, against the historical and moral values of Turkishness, against nationalism as defined by Ataturk, against his principles, reforms and civilising efforts

Not only is the possibility of democracy denied at the outset, it is illegal even to think about something that might be defined by the Constitution as "against Turkish national interests". The system is so designed that any Turkish Government, courtesy of the Constitution, is in thrall to a higher authority: the National Security Council (i.e. the Military).

Freedom for Freedom of Expression rally

continued

Some might argue that 'Turkish-democracy' is designed solely to suppress the Kurdish population and it would be presumptuous of me to argue the point, especially with Kurdish people. But if justice is ever to be achieved by the Kurds in Turkey perhaps it will come about only through the will of the majority of the people, and the majority is Turkish. Münir Ceylan, one of the contributors to *Freedom of Expression* in Turkey, also makes the point that

if you analyse the Anti-Terror Law carefully, it is obvious that (it) is intended to destroy the struggle for bread, freedom and democracy not just of the Kurdish people but by our entire working class and working masses."

It seems unquestionable that among Turks there has been an increase in solidarity with the Kurdish people, and also a willingness on the part of many to confront one of the world's most ruthless state-machines. The courage and perseverance of Dr Besikçi surely have been crucial in this. Next to Abdulla Ocalan, president of P.K.K., the National Security Council of Turkey appears to regard this sociologist and writer as its most dangerous enemy, perhaps even more dangerous than the so-called 'Islamic Threat'. He is not Kurdish, but Turkish. Since 1967 he has been in and out of court and has suffered "arrest, torture, jail, ceaseless harassment and ostracism".²⁴ Now 57 years of age he has spent nearly fifteen years of his life in prison. Each time an essay, book or booklet of his is printed he is given a further term and so far the aggregate stands at more than a 100 years. Under Turkish law his publisher is prosecuted simultaneously and so far has received sentences in the region of 14 years. Less than two years ago the two men "were abused (and) physically assaulted while being conducted from prison to the court ... (and their) documents ... rendered useless..."²⁵

Obviously there is a distinction between the people of a country and its ruling authority. The Turkish State is not representative of the Turkish people and neither is the British State representative of myself and Moris Farhi from England who was there in Istanbul on behalf of PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee. My invitation to the *Freedom for Freedom of Expression* rally came from Amnesty International (U.K.), by way of Scottish PEN. Although not a member of either body I was glad to accept. There were twenty-one foreign writers present and each of us would have been conscious of the relationship to Turkey held by our individual countries: Netherlands, Germany, U.K. and Sweden supplied two apiece; one each from USA, Mexico, Canada-Quebec, Palestine, Finland and Russia, while seven came from Israel. The multiple trial of writers, artists and others which is now in process derives from January 1995 when

Yasar Kemal was tried in Istanbul's No.5 State Security Court regarding one of his articles which was published in *Der Spiegel* magazine. On the same day, intellectuals gathered outside the court in support (and) decided to collude in the 'crime' by jointly appending their names to (that and other) articles and speeches alleged to be 'criminal'. The "Initiative Against Crimes of Thought" was born (and) a petition started. Within a short time the signatures of 1080 intellectuals from various fields had been collected (and they) co-published a volume of articles entitled *Freedom of Expression*. Under the Turkish Penal Code Article 162: Republishing an article which is defined as a crime is a new crime, and the publisher is to be equally sentenced...²⁶ On 10 March 1995 the 'co-publishers' voluntarily presented themselves before the State Security Court to face charges of 'seditious criminal activity'.

Thus the state authorities were challenged at a fundamental level, leaving the Turkish Government "with the old dilemma: either democratise the law and the Constitution or face the opposition of Turkish and world democratic opinion, and the stench of another major scandal".

There is scarce room for bureaucratic manoeuvring in the Turkish system and if a 'crime' has been committed there is little option but to prosecute. If not then the Prosecutor himself is open to prosecution.²⁷ So far the *Freedom of Thought* initiative has forced the hand of the authorities to the extent that the State Security Court has had to bring to trial one hundred and eighty four people. It is known as the 'Kafka Trial' and has been described as "the most grotesque farce in Turkish legal history". Even so, the state makes use of its power and "for the accused (it is) likely to result in twenty months' prison sentences". Some of them are already in receipt of suspended sentences for earlier 'criminal' thoughts or statements and their periods of imprisonment will be even longer.

The next step taken by the campaign organisers was to produce an abbreviated form of *Freedom of Expression*, and then invite international authors to sign up as 'co-publishers'. In principle the repressive nature of the Turkish legal system does not allow foreigners to escape the net, even on foreign soil. By using a network based on PEN International Writers-in-Prisons and other human rights' agencies the campaign's organisers managed to obtain the signatures of 141 writers as 'co-publishers' of the booklet. But this time the State Security Court declined to prosecute "on the grounds that (they) would not be able to bring (the international writers) to Istanbul for trial...because such an 'offence' does not exist in US or English law".

So the campaign organisers took it yet another stage further, they invited some of the international writers to come to Istanbul in person, then present themselves at the State Security Court. Again using the network of PEN and other human rights' agencies they asked that invitations be issued on their behalf. In all there were twenty one of us present; poets, filmmakers, novelists and journalists. Interest in the 'Kafka Trial' has escalated within Turkey; at each public engagement there was a full-scale media presence.

On Monday morning more than half of us were in court to witness the trial of an actor, one of the 1080 Turkish writers, artists and others who signed as "publishing-editors" of the original *Freedom of Thought* in Turkey, the collection of writings by authors either already in prison or due to stand trial. Yasar Kemal has received a 20-month suspended sentence for his own contribution to the book. But the actor's trial was postponed until May, presumably when no international observers will be present. Meantime he continues rehearsing a joint production of Genet's *The Maids* and Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* and hopes to be at liberty to take part in the performances.

Following the postponement some of us were due at Bursa Prison; the authorities were allowing us to visit with Dr Besikçi and his publisher, Ünsal Öztürk. Others were scheduled to meet Isik Yurtçu, a journalist imprisoned at Adapazara. Then permission was reversed by the authorities, we could make the journey if we wanted but we would not be allowed to speak to the prisoners. It was decided we would send a 'symbolic' delegation and a majority of us volunteered to make the journey, but places were limited to three and two went to Bursa Prison. Louise Gareau Des-Bois was nominated to visit Adapazara. She is Vice President of Canada-Quebec PEN and also speaks a little Turkish; seven years ago the Quebec centre seconded a Kurdish PEN resolution concerning Dr Besikçi. When she arrived at the prison the authorities reversed their previous reversal and she was allowed to talk with Isik Yurtçu through a fenced area for nearly twenty minutes. What disturbed her most was the great number of young people behind bars, some little more than boys.

We were in court for a second occasion with Moris Farhi who was signing his name to the abbreviated *Little Freedom of Thought*. The State Prosecutor dismissed his declaration out-of-hand. The third time we arrived at the State Security Court a dozen of us were there on our own behalf. But a heavy contingent of police had been instructed not to let us enter the gate.

The prosecuting authorities were refusing to accept our statements, not even if we sent them by registered post. We held a Press Conference outside on the main street and signed our statements in front of the television cameras. Münir Ceylan was there with us. He is a former president of the petroleum workers' union and from 1994 served twenty months imprisonment for making statements such as the one quoted above.

Recently he received a further two year sentence and expects to be returned to prison any day now. His case has been taken up by A.I., supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress. He and others walked with us to the post office, in front of the television cameras, where we sent our signed statements by registered mail.

If the authorities continue to refuse our names alongside those of the Turkish writers and other artists who have been on trial already then the initiative's organisers will attempt to have the State Prosecutor charged with having failed "to fulfil the constitutional commitment to equality of treatment". It is a bold campaign and puts individuals at personal risk; some have been threatened already, some have experienced prison, others expect it sooner or later. On the same afternoon we had a public engagement at Istanbul University. A forum on Freedom of Expression had been organised by students and a few sympathetic lecturers. About twenty young people came to meet us then escort us to the campus; four of their friends are serving prison sentences of 8 to 12 years for 'terrorist' activities.²⁸

Every day at Istanbul University between one and two hundred police are on campus-duty and the students have their bags searched each time they enter the gate. Along with us on the bus came Vedat Turkali,²⁹ a famous old writer who spent seven years in prison for political activities many years ago, and is now domiciled in England (and remains a socialist). When we arrived we discovered not only had the forum been cancelled by the Security Forces, they had shut down the actual university. More than two thousand students had gathered in protest outside the university gates. We were instructed to link arms and march as a body, flanked by students on either side, straight to the gates of the university.

Hundreds of police in full riot-gear were also present. I could not see any tanks although they have been brought in on other student-protests. When we got to the gates they circled and sealed us off. Some student-representatives, lecturers and the media were allowed into the circle with us. The cancelled forum had become the focus of a mass student demonstration, the underlying concerns being the current withdrawal of subsidised education and the continued victimisation of the student population. Some held banners, an act of 'terrorism' in itself, and were requested to fold them away, not to provoke the situation.

After negotiations with the Security Forces it was agreed that an abbreviated Press Conference could take place with the international writers and that statements might be broadcast to the students via a loud-hailer. Demonstrations are illegal in Turkey unless permission has been granted by the Security Forces. Many people have given up seeking permission; instead they organise a Press Conference and invite everybody. A female student opened the meeting then Sanar Yurdapatan³⁰ spoke, calling for everyone to stay calm, no blood should be spilled under any circumstances. Pelin Erda, lawyer of the four imprisoned students, spoke next (one of her own relatives was raped during a period of detainment). A dozen or so international writers was present, each of us was introduced, but the situation was very tense and time restricted; two of us were delegated to speak, Joanne Leedom-Ackerman (Vice-President International PEN) and Alexander Tkachenko (President of Russian PEN). Then we had to leave at once, linking arms and returning quickly the way we had come.

There was no news of any bloodshed although we

did hear that a disturbance and arrests had taken place in the area of the post office, after we had left the scene earlier in the day. That evening we attended a reception held for us by the Istanbul Bar Association. A few lawyers are among those openly expressing their opinions on the issue of *Freedom of Thought*. We met Esber Yagmurdereli, lawyer, writer and playwright, at present “appealing against a 10-month sentence (for referring) to the Kurdish minority”. He is also under suspended sentence from an earlier case; if he loses the appeal he will face “imprisonment until 2018”.³¹

It was at the same reception we heard that Ünsal Öztürk, Besikçi’s publisher, had just been released from prison. He came to our last official engagement, described as “a meeting of writers and artists organised by *Turkish PEN*, *The Writers’ Syndicate of Turkey* and the *Association of Literarists*. However, there was little opportunity of a meeting as such. Twelve or more people spoke from the platform during the two hours, including some of the international writers. For some reason Öztürk was not invited to speak. Nor for that matter was Vedat Turkali. I mentioned to a member of *Turkish PEN* that it might have been worthwhile hearing what Turkali had to say and was advised that in Turkey there are ‘thousands like him’, whatever that might mean.

I thought it also of interest that Sanar Yurdatapan was not invited to speak. Yurdatapan and his brother, his secretary and a translator, were our four main hosts and escorts throughout the 4 to 5 day visit, ensuring we remained together in the various awkward situations. He is one of the central organisers of this campaign and has served a previous term of imprisonment. He also led an international delegation to probe the notorious Guclukonak massacre of “eleven men travelling in a minibus”. According to official sources they were killed by the PKK, but the “investigations left little doubt that government security forces carried out the killings”.³²

We also met Ünsal Öztürk socially on the last night, his wife was with him. They sat at our table for a while, giving information through an interpreter to Soledad Santiago of Mexico-San Miguel PEN; she hopes to take up his case through the PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee, given that Öztürk is not himself a writer. Like Münir Ceylan and others, Öztürk is liable to re-arrest at any moment and I found it difficult to avoid watching his wife who seemed to be doing her best not to watch him too often and too obviously.

The next morning it was time to fly home to freedom and democracy. For the flight into Turkey I had been advised to take nothing that might be construed as political - in particular ‘separatist’ - propaganda. For the flight to Glasgow via Amsterdam on Thursday afternoon I was also careful. I did buy three English-language newspapers from a local vendor. One carried a report on the introduction of torture in USA prisons; the other had a front-page-lead on the arrival of a new prison-ship off the south coast of England, which may prove good news for Turkey’s justice minister, who recently complained of

a negative atmosphere about Turkey. But now we will monitor human rights in Europe. The only thing Europe does is criticise Turkey. However, from now on we will criticise Europe.³³

In a previous essay³⁴ I drew attention to the *Statutes of the Human Rights Commission*, in particular Article 18, referring to ‘ethnic groups’. I was arguing that the language itself is exclusive and that the victims are not being empowered: ‘we’ may have “a duty to encourage ethnic groups” whose culture is under attack but not to stand aside and let ‘them’ fight back in whatever way they deem necessary. I would much prefer it if ‘we’ were advised that ‘we’ have a duty not to interfere when ‘they’ (the ethnic groups) try to resist the oppression. At a public meeting³⁵ I quoted Rajani Desai of the *Federation of organisations for Democratic Rights*³⁶

There are certain basic differences between human rights, civil liberties and democratic rights. Human rights is a term best left to refer to what the United Nations has incorporated in the Charter of Human Rights and to understand the motives within that Charter. It relates to the notion that certain atrocities should be objected to on grounds of humanity. But if you actually look at its history and practice, it has been associated with the determination of the imperialist countries, or the more advanced countries as they are called, to use the human rights’ issue in order to negotiate better terms, or to impose something on third world countries or on one of their own members with whom they may be having some problems. (Civil Liberties) are mentioned in the Constitution of India which is actually an 80% replica of the British Act of 1935 for colonial India, which Nehru said at the time was a document for imposing slavery on the Indian people.... The “fundamental rights” in the Constitution of India are not available to 95% of the Indian people today...

Genuine ‘democratic rights’, unlike civil liberties or human rights, “asserts the rights of the people to struggle against exploitation or oppression”; the right to defend yourself under attack, empowerment, self determination. And, as Desai also argues,

the democratic rights’ movement cannot be a movement of intellectuals only. It has to have for its backbone the working class and the peasantry, employees, women and students - working people generally

If I have a position then it derives from the significance of the distinction between ‘democratic rights’ and ‘human rights’. I accept the right to resist oppression and that this right is inviolable. The people of Turkey and/or Kurdistan will resist oppression in whatever way they see fit. I can have criticisms of the form this resistance sometimes takes but I am not about to defend a position that can only benefit their oppressors.

Almost nothing of contemporary Turkish writing is available in translation via ordinary English-language U.K. or U.S.A. publishing channels. As far as I know, not even Besikçi’s work has managed to find a publisher.³⁷ At the Press Conference organised by Amnesty International (Scotland) and Scottish PEN on the morning after my return, the one and only journalist present at the venue was a slightly embarrassed young man from *List Magazine*.³⁸ A couple of weeks before my visit to Istanbul *The Scotsman* newspaper had included the following snippet in a rare U.K. report on Turkish domestic affairs:

Turkey’s armed forces have intervened three times in the past 37 years to restore law and order in the country and to safeguard its secular nature.

James Kelman April 23, 1997

notes

- 1 Current report from PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee.
- 2 Dr Ismail Besikçi’s KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings*
- 3 With France and Iran (Persia), the USA stayed somewhat in the background
- 4 Ismet Sheriff Vanly’s “Kurdistan in Iraq”, collected in PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY: *the Kurds and Kurdistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand (Zed Books 1980)
- 5 *Evening Times*, Glasgow, 21 April 1997, encouraging its readership to “fly to Turkey this autumn”.
- 6 Amnesty International report
- 7 *Voice of Kurdistan*, where this information is taken
- 8 *The Kurds and Kurdistan: THINKING IS A CRIME*, a report on Freedom of Expression in Turkey, published by The International Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan (IMK E.V.).
- 9 At Edinburgh University
- 10 In mitigation, I had prepared for an audience I assumed would consist almost exclusively of Scottish people, but more—roughly half—were Kurdish exiles.
- 11 *Oppression and Solidarity*, in the collection SOME RECENT ATTACKS (A.K. Press, Edinburgh 1992)
- 12 Except where stated, and with apologies to Kendal, all information is lifted (and lifted directly) from a collection of essays published by Zed Press in 1979, reprinted a year later after the fall of the Shah of Iran, with an extra section: PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY: *the Kurds and Kurdistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand; Kendal’s essay is entitled “Kurdistan in Turkey”
- 13 He spells this ‘Carduchi’
- 14 See 5, the essay by Nazdar, “The Kurds in Syria”.
- 15 For evidence of this read almost any issue of *Statewatch* journal “...monitoring the state and civil liberties in the UK and Europe” (take out a subscription, c/o PO Box 1516, London N16 0EW). A public meeting was held earlier this year in London on the issue of “the Criminalisation of the Kurds in U.K. and Europe”.
- 16 Information from *Statewatch* vol 6, number 6
- 17 *PSK Bulletin*, number 6, for information on the South African/Turkish connection
- 18 *Statewatch* vol 7 number 1
- 19 *ibid*, for an extended discussion on this
- 20 *Lobster* 32; for its comment on the *Mail on Sunday* report
- 21 Linked directly to the British security services (M16 in the early 1970s, M15 after that). See *Lobsters* 16, 19 for information on Paul Wilkinson and see also *Lobsters* 10, 14 and others for a fuller account of the whole murky area. Wilkinson is erstwhile colleague of far-right ‘terrorist experts’ such as Brian Crozier and Maurice Tugwell. Subscribe to *Lobster* c/o 214 Westbourne Ave., Hull HU5 3JB, U.K.
- 22 22 April 1997, following the day of transport stasis in London
- 23 See Dr Ismail Besikçi’s KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings*
- 24 *ibid*
- 25 See 6
- 26 Press releases by the *Freedom of Thought* initiative
- 27 This is only as I understand it, as a layperson
- 28 Which I believe revolves around unfurling a banner in parliament
- 29 A pseudonym adopted by the writer
- 30 Musician/composer, and one of the leading activists
- 31 A.I. report Turkey: *No security without human rights*.
- 32 *Kurdistan Information Bulletin* no 34, Jan. 1997. Just more than four weeks after the event, on 16th April, Yurdatapan was detained at Istanbul Airport then held at the Anti-Terror Branch of police HQ.
- 33 *ibid*
- 34 See 10
- 35 Organised by Amnesty International and entitled: “The pen is mightier than the sword”; held in Edinburgh, April 1995, in support of Taslima Nasrin who was also on the platform
- 36 Unfortunately I no longer have this reference but Desai’s article, as far as I recall, was published in *Inqilab*; the London-based journal of the South Asia Solidarity Group
- 37 His KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings* is published by the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and Kurdistan Information Centre, London
- 38 A Scottish events and entertainment listings magazine

Your place or mine?

THE FOLLOWING is an edited discussion, chaired by John Beagles between Martin Vincent, Andrew Brook, Janie Nicoll and David Wilkinson. All of the participants are artists who have been involved in organising exhibitions within domestic flats in various parts of Britain. Martin Vincent is part of the Manchester based duo Annual Programme, with Nick Crowe, who turned their homes into art galleries to show specially made work by another artist. Month by month, each artist took a turn at being host/curator, and then guest/exhibitor, in a form of 'chain exhibition'. Janie Nicoll, along with Karen Bauld, Marcia Lochhead and Nicola Cooper, organised 'Pretty Vacant', an exhibition in a 'To Let' tenement flat in Glasgow. David Wilkinson, along with Beta Veszely and Charles Esche, organised 'Wish you were here too', a large group show of Glasgow based and international artists, exhibited amongst the flotsam of his everyday living space, also in Glasgow. Andrew Brook organised and curated 'Smooth Operation', one of a series of ongoing exhibitions held in his flat in Dundee.

The intention of the discussion was to examine some of the differing reasons for organising 'flat shows', their recent popularity, especially in Scotland, and some of the issues associated with them.

John Beagles: Martin, what prompted your involvement or interest in putting on a 'flat show'?

Martin Vincent: We were trying to raise awareness within Manchester of what could be done and to raise awareness outside of Manchester of what was happening there. It was also about being artists and living in a particular place. We set up a series of critical relationships between artists, some of whom did not know each other when the project started out. It was an investigation of the whole idea of curating and exhibiting.

David Wilkinson: Part of my reason for doing 'Wish you were here too' was to look at the way that as artists you continually involve yourselves with other artists' work, this was really the idea of the show. Firstly we asked artists if they would like to show with us, then, as it was impossible to visit everyone, we asked them

to send all the pieces of work to us. We explained what space was available and exchanged ideas about possible spots for the work; they'd say they'd like the piece to be by the bed etc. These quite complex relationships were set up and allowed to exist. We didn't try to control that, and in the end these relations became what was most interesting.

JB: How do you think your show 'Pretty Vacant' differed from 'Wish you were here too' Janie?

Janie Nicoll: I think we felt we were doing it very much off our own backs, with very little time or money, which is why we simply advertised the event locally with fliers. The show was on for a relatively short period of time. We kept the space as it was, as a vacated flat, with all the remnants of previous tenants that go with that. We were interested in showing in a domestic space as a lot of the work concerned itself with that environment. The whole thing was very informal, small scale, with mainly friends turning up.

JB: Andrew what caused you to organise 'Smooth Operation'?

Andrew Brook: I'd been involved with the art community in Glasgow, then I went back to Dundee to work. The difference was striking. Apart from the exhibitions in the college and the print makers workshop, there's really nothing else, as far as showing work is concerned. Initially my motives were purely selfish. I wanted to show my own work, what I was doing in Dundee, and there was no way of doing it. I carried on in that vein in the sense that I decided I would organise other people and that I would curate, having control and power, over how it was shaped. I didn't feel I was tapping into ego mania by dictating all this, because it was our flat.

JB: In the late 80s, early 90s warehouse shows were the preferred way of attracting the attention of the 'big boys', now it seems flat shows have replaced them as a way of flexing curatorial muscles. Do you see the flat show as a strategic move, as a stepping stone to bigger and better things, or are you interested in it as more low key, informal way of showing work?

MV: I don't believe you think about it in those ways, at

least not in advance. What we were doing was just trying to work things through. We'd invite a few good artists, put on a series of good shows, and just go like that. The only way that it was a strategy, was that we didn't feel there were any other options. If we didn't do anything nobody else was going to.

AB: I agree. I never thought about that until someone turned round and said "Oh you're the curator". Just because I'd phoned a few people up and asked them if they'd send me some work, that suddenly made me a curator. Having said that I did advertise the show in the Guardian and the Observer, and I was aware that the whole thing could blossom into something else. But with reference to the question of using the flat show as a stepping stone, I think it's different in Scotland, because there isn't the market for contemporary art. People don't expect buyers to turn up.

DW: Warehouse and shop spaces don't seem interesting anymore, so even from a conceptual point of view they've been ruled out.

JB: When you were organising the show, did you decide you were going to try and make the flat look like a gallery space or did you just place work amongst the other items in the flat?

AB: Well my flat's very basic, I've not got that much stuff and it kind of looks like a gallery anyway. Also, I didn't want people rifling through my record collection.

JN: It was a different situation for us, regarding the work and its context. The flat we consciously chose wasn't totally empty and obviously had a history to it, a feel about it. We were interested in our work relating to and working with these elements. And, while citing the 'domestic', we were still very much aware that it was framed in an art context.

JB: One of the problems about doing a show in your flat, is that people not familiar with 'art' are going to be quite intimidated by visiting someone's flat. I mean it can be bad enough visiting a private gallery where you make an appointment, but with a flat it seems worse.

DW: Well I was quite surprised, I didn't expect a lot of people to come, but I can honestly say a lot did. I saw a lot of people I'd never clapped eyes on before. Maybe



not advertising it as a flat show helped.

MV: I think that does help. We didn't advertise any of the shows as flat shows either. Everyone called their house by a name of their own choosing, my house became the 'Gallery of the Glorious 22nd February' for example. We thought it would be good if people in say, New York, might have no idea that the space was any different from Chisenhale. Also going back to the question about audiences, I think a lot of initiatives to try and attract new audiences end up being really patronising, even insulting: suggesting that people are only interested in entertainment and therefore art has to be presented as such. We didn't expect people who don't usually attend galleries to come, most of those who turned up were people we knew, but saying that, if only three people who don't normally go to galleries did, that's encouraging.

JB: Getting out of the gallery could also be read as getting away from all the problems of accessibility associated with showing contemporary art in a publicly funded space. This seems especially the case in Glasgow, where the pressure to popularise art has obviously resulted in the kind of tokenistic gestures Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art markets and the ill conceived attempts to reach a wider audience of the "Trust" show at Tramway. Do you think the recent interest in flat shows has been partly to do with retreating from these difficulties, and exhibiting to a smaller, known constituency?

DW: Well in some ways you don't want any of the hassles. Doing the flat show was a way of creating a space that, as artists, we could direct more freely.

AB: I never thought of applying for Arts Council or City Council money, mainly because I never thought the show would need that much. I thought, why do I need to manoeuvre through bureaucracy to set this up. It would be better if everyone involved just chipped in, then it could be done more simply.

DW: There's a growing gulf between artists and administrators these days. The more this kind of bureaucracy retracts itself and becomes a kind of desk tied facilitator, then the less contact it has with the art and the artists, so at the end of the day the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. The prob-

lem is that projects that might look good on paper might get precedent over other things which don't read so well, but could be fantastic. There's a problem if people in these positions don't know what's going on. You've got to have a working relationship with things to understand them.

JB: That does seem to be the case. What we've got now is a proposal culture where things which work well as typed paragraph, as a neat tidy package which can be digested easily and of necessity quickly, get the cash.

MV: I think we're in danger of really polarising the funding situation into 'them and us'. There's a tendency of regarding funding bodies as a homogeneous group, and the danger of believing that all artists have the same interests and concerns, when this is not necessarily the case. In any one organisation there are some individuals that are more sympathetic than others.

JB: No, I'm not interested in occupying a position of self imposed exile. You can't pretend that you work completely outside of these bodies.

DW: I mean, if 'they' want to formulate an effective funding policy 'they' have to know what's going on, and the only way they are going to do this is by listening, looking and creating forums where questions and discussion can exist. I don't think anybody wants to be completely isolated from these people, that's the whole point.

AB: While I agree that no one wants to be too insular or separated, I do however like the whole punk aspect of doing your own shows. It's your thing and no one can dictate how it goes. You don't have to respect the power of the establishment.

JN: Dave, how do you relate to that? People have said that your show featured a lot of artists who are very

successful and established and who have plenty of opportunity to show.

DW: Well yeah, there were people who were well known, but there were also people who weren't that well known. You have to balance these sort of things out. If it was just all people who weren't well known there wouldn't have been the same interest, which is after all what you want. It was funny, we got a request for a catalogue from the Museum of Modern Art in Sweden and we did actually sell two pieces of work to the Arts Council of England.

JB: What good has come from doing this for you, Martin?

MV: In Manchester it was a very studio based practice, people making paintings, piling them up against the wall, and then sending slides off to get shows. People seem less interested in doing that now, instead what you do is organise a show and make the work for it. My own practice has changed as much as anything else during this period. Our shows have contributed towards changing this climate, we have made a difference, but it's not all down to us.

DW: Have you had any reaction from the establishment in Manchester?

MV: Yeah, they like it. I think they're impressed. I mean it makes Manchester look like a good place to be right now.

notions of reactionary complicity on the part of the Labour party with that bit on the “most sensitive services”. The best argument that the Council can muster goes something like this: GCC knows it is being manipulated and made to look stupid and cruel by Central Government. They cannot imagine any way out of this. They simply cannot set an illegal budget - that would be ruinous for the City and bring them into disrepute. Thus the whole issue boils down to respect for due process of law. It is a legal issue. While they make the cuts in the most painful of ways, workers are at perfect liberty to squeal exactly what they are told to squeal.

As to the last sentence from Forsyth, well, either inadvertently or not the Council's own propaganda sheet “Glasgow” (April 97) hired a professor, Arthur Midwinter (Dean of the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Strathclyde University) for the purpose of echoing Forsyth's words. At the end of his screed Professor Arthur tells us that “Glaswegians can hold neither central (sic) nor local government accountable for the crisis.”

Consultancy is something of a boom industry in these impoverished times. For a grossly inflated price you can hire ‘professionals’ to say practically anything. The Scottish Office spent £250,000 on an ‘independent’ study into council spending. This was carried out by Coopers & Lybrand and a company called Pieda. This said that Councils were “well funded” and was published on 15/2/97. COSLA, not to be outdone spent some of their meagre budget on an ‘independent study’ on the impact of spending controls on local authorities, which said: “The restriction would result in the loss of 17,000 jobs and £30m in household income.” The people who did the study were just Pieda this time. Pieda is run by the boss of Scottish Enterprise an organisation designed somewhat anachronistically to promote ‘Thatcherism’ in Scotland, which itself competes with local government, the NHS etc for central government funds.

To return to the theme of reactionary complicity, we also have the following series of events. Before the Council turned belly-up, the Parliamentary Labour Party announced some good news to a Scottish Industry Forum meeting—“In a clear attempt to convince voters and money markets that he means business”—it was announced by George Robertson that Labour would be sticking to the Conservative's public spending limits for the next two years. Limits set to control Councils and tinker with the welfare state. There would be no extra cash—so we can expect the same cuts next year and the year after that. That was on the 20th of January to a bunch of Business people. The Local authorities got wind of it and were said to be ‘seething’. Five days later George Robertson came up with a brilliant solution: resurrect the Poll Tax. Press reports (Herald 25/1/97) stated that:

“George Robertson offered to open up Britain's tax records to local authorities chasing people who have dodged the poll tax or council tax payments.”

This was to “soften the blow” of new council budgets and is a tactic even the Tories didn't stoop to. It met with a “warm response” from the largely Labour dominated Local authority leaders, the report went on:

“Indeed they have suggested that an incoming Labour government go further and allow Councils to make deductions from Social Security payments without having to go to court.” Barely concealing his glee, a spokesman for COSLA, Financial Director, Dave Sneller—is quoted by the Herald to have stated that:

“He did not think the labour proposals would be viewed as an infringement of civil liberties or unnecessary... ‘There is over £700m owing and we have to get the money somehow.’ He added that enforcement measures, which would involve changing the law, would be targeted at people who had the money to pay and benefit arrestments would involve taking small amounts of money over a long period.”

So it seems that when it comes to screwing the poor strict adherence to the law is not such a big deal as it is when setting a budget or when people protest. The strange thing is that our Labour-run local authority in Glasgow were handing over their hard fought ‘legal budget’ to a Tory government which had about a month left of its existence. Or maybe they thought that the

party wouldn't win, and we can forgive them for that. It is going to be very tricky next year when there is no Tory government to blame. But think of all that £700m. What will they do with it? Spending it on the poor would be an idea which would unite us all, but of course they have to get it off them first. And then every penny of it will have to go back to central government, those are the rules and they know it. This is Councillor Des McNulty, vice chair of policy and resources, complaining about this and inadvertently revealing how the economic renaissance is coming along, why businesses should (or is that shouldn't) come to big booming Glasgow and ‘create’ some wealth:

“Since April last year Glasgow has been squeezed by Government Gerrymandering into the smallest territorial area of the 4 major Scottish cities...Currently, around £210m a year is collected in Glasgow in the form of non-domestic rates is pooled across Scotland. After handing its revenues over, the city gets back less than £160m. In other words, it suffers a net loss of almost £50m. This is a tax on wealth creation in Glasgow.”

There is little talk of changing the law on that little set-up. It is just simply easier to screw the poor over a long period of time and cut the services they depend upon. In Glasgow 58% of the city's 81,000 school pupils receive clothing grants, while around 43% receive free school meals. In Drumchapel the figures are 84% and 68%, in Easterhouse it is 87.2% and 64.3%. We could trot out endless figures proving the existence of widespread poverty, but the council will continue to ignore these facts in favour of their higher calling of turning the city centre into tastelessland, not that many Councillors want to spend much time in Glasgow themselves when there are free holidays to be had. The Social and Community workers, the Teachers and drug workers who were denounced as a violent mob, went on strike because they know that they cannot hold the meagre fabric of social services together. The Council feels powerless because they know they do not have the people behind them. There is no sign of that faith ever returning, not now. When the ‘junkets’ enquiry finally gets published in September, ‘The City’ will be the venue of another Council initiative: the 67th Congress of the American Society of Travel Agents. And the inquiry looks bad, it's not the left they are after, they were dealt with some time ago. The Evening Times of 22/5/97 had this to say:

“Moves being planned include stripping the Glasgow city party of the right to pick candidates for the 1999 election, a move which has angered and upset many sitting Councillors...Labour's purge is unprecedented in Scotland. The only similar action by the party was against Derek Hatton's Militant Tendency in Liverpool, more than a decade ago.” And then of course we have the Sarwar affair.

Questions of fundamental principle have disappeared in Glasgow and questions of management prevail. It is one way for our Councillors to ignore the horror of their grievous mistake. What they also ignore is that our laws are made for the public good, and, for the public good they may be suspended. Furthermore the public good is not to be considered, if it is purchased at the expense of an individual. Authorities are legitimate if they govern well. Whether they do govern well those who they govern must decide. These unwritten laws reign supreme over our municipal law. Or are we wrong as to the basis of democracy. Perhaps there is no such thing as right. Politics are then an affair of might. A mere struggle for power.

Calculated barbarities inflicted on women and children are usually justified by the necessity of striking terror. Then the only message that needs to be officially declared is that whatever is right. What has happened in ‘Glasgow's renaissance’ is that our Councillors have forgotten that they are public servants: they seek to be masters of the public. Their final appeal for justification to be seen as ‘elected representatives’ is a brave one given the mockery they have made of democracy and given the lesser known facts of the ‘election procedure’ which takes place in the back rooms of Glasgow's Labour Clubs.

This is an eyewitness account of the demonstration from an interview with Variant. Although it was offered, we declined to print the name of the individual.

“The response we got to the official strike on the 6th of March was unusually high, about 98%, but when we got to work on the Monday people were unhappy. I walked straight into a Union meeting and heard about the Council making the Budget decision that morning. People asked their area management if they could use their flexi-time to extend their dinner break to attend, it was not intended to be an all-day thing. The management, in collusion with the Council, banned flexi-time, no reason was given. The government has to give us permission to go on strike, several days notice has to be given, so Monday was an unofficial strike, although Unison did back us.

We went down to the march and heard the loudspeakers at the balcony. We had been aware that people had occupied the Chambers over the weekend and we joined the crowd. As councillors turned up people were trying to engage them in conversation, but they were ducking and diving, avoiding the people. A chant of “shame on you” started. That's the first time I realised that the people were getting active, because the Councillors had fucked off round the corner to get in at another door. I personally got a hold of John Young, he was with a policeman, a top cop, and I told him that people wanted him to go home for one day and not pass the budget. He said: “people like you didn't vote me in.” How does he know what I voted? I said: “Are you a councillor? Do you think people are here for nothing?” And all he said was: “They never elected me, I'm Conservative I don't need to answer anything.”

It was not a picket line at that point, just people standing outside the Chambers looking up at the people inside the building who were asking for help and saying, “we can't let them do this, are you going to just stand there and watch?” By this time, about 12, there were lots of people joining in, just people doing their shopping, kids in prams, just the people of Glasgow. A young boy told us that the Councillors were going in the side. Somebody suggested covering the doors, so they'd have to cross a picket line. We knew they needed about 24 to form a quorum, we were getting information from the inside. We were also told that the if meeting had not started by 2.30 it wouldn't happen today, that intensified people's efforts, we were then a working party.

Some people started charging at the picket line. One guy actually grabbed one of the line and put him on the street, we were attacked about 4 or 5 times (all by guys with suits—business people trying to get in to make money). Now the police were sound throughout and told them that that constituted assault. We became very determined: it was a line of iron because of the numbers. The real motivating thing was all the council vans and private cars all beeping their horns and doing circuits of George Square in support. Then it went on the telly and the numbers increased by about 1,000, you could feel the volume: the telly never brought a single dissenter out, they were all supporters. We had two official strikes and the press coverage was as minimal as possible; we have an unofficial strike and we go live on air - why not for the official strike?

The police were asked to assist people going into the Chambers on numerous occasions. What I seen was a brilliant bit of policing by a young officer. A woman was calling us ‘left-wing activists’, and ‘scum,’ basically. The young policeman escorted her over and asked: “Can this woman get through?” We said: “Nobody is getting through, not before 2.30.” The police said: “You realise it's technically illegal not to let someone through?” We said, “yes”. The boy informed us of the law “technically,” and after this he said: “You realise I'll have to inform my superior officer? The woman said: “Is that all you're going to do!” He said: “Other than forcibly removing everyone—which I'm not prepared to do till I've spoken to my superior officer—that's all I'm going to do.” That's what they're meant to be there for—informing the public.

People waited and the word came round that the meeting had been held in a side room. It must have been a short meeting, the decision was clarified by 2.30, there was no way any announcements were heard and a Tory confirmed that to us, because they declared it an illegal meeting.

I've never seen so many drooping heads. But people went round the front. The people on the balcony said: “We tried to stop them and they've just sold us down the river. The police have said that nobody is going to be charged as long as we give them our names and addresses.” Ten minutes later they started to walk out of the building. The press took over: 6 or 7 protesters were escorted down to the cameras as they came out, but they declined an interview or any comment. Then they started walking down the road with a banner in front of them and we all fell in behind them and started marching round the square—the old defiant Scottish thing.

William Clark
Robert Doohihan

When we were two little boys

Oliver Sumner

"There were two young men with no heart and no peace
They thought to be free lying under a tree.
And so they lay there from dawn to dusk
Enjoying the air and the chickens and ducks.
They thought to be nice and wave with their hands
And so day after day they are under that tree.
Counting the leaves and waiting for tea
They are as happy as can be."

This dreadful poem, 'Normal Boredom', appeared in 1971 as one of eight signed booklets mailed out by Gilbert & George. A scratchy pen and ink drawing on the cover typically showed the two besuited gentlemen sitting on a wooden farm gate gazing across a meadow, or Gilbert stooping to examine a plant. Gilbert & George's appearance in their work as singing or dancing sculpture, in film or photographs is more significant than mere performance. Within the characters they affect, a simple ride on the London Underground becomes a sweet little work of art. It is important not only that they are two, but also that they are male and middle-class, cultivating the effect of refined outsiders.

The early Gilbert & George bring to mind Bouvard and Pécuchet, Flaubert's pair of 19th century Parisian copyclerks who yearn for a pastoral retirement. The bachelors meet sitting in a park bench one hot day. At first sight they experience an electric attraction to one another and become inseparable, held together by 'secret fibres'. They are both tired of the capital and when Bouvard inherits a small fortune they determine to realise their dreams, acquiring a farm in rural Normandy. Despite amassing a fine library on agricultural techniques, in practice the bookish fellows' attempts at farming are predictably dismal. Their ensuing failures proceed through the pastimes of garden architecture, chemistry, physiology, anatomy, geology and archaeology, all the while collecting a private museum of incongruous equipment and books pertaining to their latest whim. They end up with what amounts to a banal assortment of bric-a-brac and eventually revert to copying.

Bouvard and Pécuchet is a favourite tale for post-modern museum critiques, living as they do at the moment of classification. The enthusiastic amateurs have for instance been invoked in the discussion of Mark Dion's ecological investigations sited in natural history museums. The importance of the moral in relation to the collection since Foucault's 'The Order of Things' has been well covered, suffice to say that there is no 'natural' given in the way we classify nature or the disciplines that study it. 'Nature' is arbitrary and culturally produced.

This shocking truth makes the wilderness seem a far more scary place, and Flaubert appears to loom as a 19th century existentialist prima donna. I'm thinking of Bouvard and Pécuchet as precedents for Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon in 'Waiting for Godot'. Picture Gilbert & George in the poem gazing across the water or over a field. What are they looking for? Art? It may be more fruitful to turn to the shared identity of the figures rather than their collection. Without trying to force a direct equivalence, is it possible to use Flaubert's gents to identify a formulation for Gilbert & George in their work?

The ambiguous sexuality of Flaubert's characterisations seems intractable, whilst not quite naive they present an air of bewilderment about the whole question. The two French companions are both 60 when Pécuchet loses his virginity to their maid, contracting an embarrassing 'intimate disease'. Meanwhile Bouvard's clandestine marriage to a local wealthy widow is abruptly called off when it emerges that she was only after a part of his land. Following their bad heterosexual experiences, the gentlemen resolve to have nothing more to do with women: 'No more women, right? And they embraced each other tenderly.'

We know Bouvard and Pécuchet love to collect. From Walter Benjamin, a self-confessed collector, we get the suggestion of a relationship between collecting and libidinal desire. So it is that in his short essay,

'Unpacking my library,' Benjamin refers to children and old men as collectors, the more sexually active social groups apparently having less interest in the pleasures of collecting. *Sammeltreib*, the primal collecting urge, attempts to reclaim the old world. The object must be released from its function, taken out of the bondage of use, reborn in the private collection. The whole business is intense and obsessive, as Benjamin recalls:

"...one of the finest memories of the collector is the moment when he rescued a book to which he might never have given a thought, much less a wishful look, because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom - the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in *The Arabian Nights*. To a book collector, you see, the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves."

Gilbert & George, who understand the underlying melancholic existence of Bouvard and Pécuchet, have a collection of their own. In the recent 'South Bank Show' film they revealed their collection of ceramics, including 1880s Branham Ware and unremarkable Torquay Terra-cotta. For them too, the act of collecting is above 'the collection.'

"Gilbert: That's how we started to collect because once we are collecting, we are able to relax immediately. We don't even mind what we are collecting, only this movement was very cheap and very neglected so we started to collect this. We could collect anything, children's books, the magazines that George was collecting..."

George: Yes the possibilities are...

Gilbert: Endless."

Like many couples they finish each others sentences. Gilbert and George share with Bouvard and Pécuchet the curious combination of their liking for measured consistencies in life, never quite (or only just) countering a sentiment for being completely lost. Bouvard and Pécuchet, unlike Vladimir and Estragon, or Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, are equally matched, broadly concurring on all essential issues. Like Vladimir and Estragon, they could be understood as two sides of the same personality. As I mused over the question of these sensitive twosomes, I wondered if we could regard their melancholia as, in some way, a gendered space. This may seem an awkwardly framed idea. What I mean to suggest is that the wistfulness they express, and the viewer experiences, is a product of their identity. If melancholia is in part a manifestation of, for instance gender or class, it is because it is also directly figured through the desire of those identity co-ordinates. Where the word in identity politics would be 'desire', I could read 'yearning', or as I have shown, the *sammeltreib* of the collector. So while their melancholia is of course not exclusive to the male pair, it is specific to them. Their desire can be exhibited not only in the collection but also in their alienation. In fact it is not enough to imagine the possibility of a female Bouvard and Pécuchet as mapping another specific set of desires. The point, aside from Bouvard and Pécuchet's relationship with each other, is their relationship with society. Women, particularly in the mid-nineteenth century, were not able to move freely within social structures in the same way as men. They are not accorded the right to stare at the crowd and to remain inconspicuous. Furthermore, a female counter-type of the collector is far from established.

As clerks, Bouvard and Pécuchet played a crucial stabilising role in the fabric of Parisian society. As amateur enthusiasts, their social contact with the outside world is as limited as the objects in their private collection. They are further put off by rare occasions such as the party to show off their garden which left the guests singularly unimpressed and ended in a terrible argument. As with their sexual exploits, Bouvard and Pécuchet's reserve in their relations with the small rural community is compounded by these incidents.

The small local village of the Chavignolles provides a caricature of the fabric of society; a doctor, an aristo-

crat, an ex-politician, a tradesman, a lawyer, a priest and farm workers. Gilbert & George's immediate community, around Spitalfields provides the backdrop for much of their work. However it is always viewed with professional detachment. Being alone can be so much more effective if there are two of you. The more they are removed from it, the more Gilbert & George can view society in the way they compile their collection. We might fashion a kind of crude correlation between class and classification. Finally we the viewers, their public, find ourselves in their line of sight, we are implicated in the mass they survey from a lofty position. Like four observatories, their eyes zoom into the middle-distance of the crowd.

Gilbert & George have, as they say, 'held on to each other' since their early days at St. Martin's and are now approaching the Autumn of their years, an age that suits them. In some of their latest work they have begun an ongoing collection and documentation of their own bodily fluids. For 'A huge new group of pictures,' photographing samples through a microscope: shit, piss, tears, sweat and sperm. They have, George speculates, 'probably one of the biggest visual studies of shits ever made - we have thousands and thousands of different ones.' This takes collecting to new gratuitous limits.

We might refer to the unwavering recording video eye of another double act, the Swiss artists Fischli & Weiss. Accumulating video footage whilst going for a drive, sometimes to and from their studio, sometimes with no particular destination, or on a train somewhere around Zurich, Fischli & Weiss tried to present their unremarkable experiences in real time. Eighty hours of film with the uninflected quality of the ready-made: cheese making, cleaning the city sewage system, at the dentist, amount to an encyclopaedic comprehensiveness but have no explanation. Ultimately they find copying is the only answer, the conclusion of Bouvard and Pécuchet:

"They copy papers haphazardly, everything they find, tobacco pouches, old newspapers, posters, torn books etc (real items and their imitations. Typical of each category).

Then, they feel the need for a taxonomy. They make tables, antithetical oppositions such as 'crimes of the kings and crimes of the people' - blessings of religion, crimes of religion. Beauties of history, etc; sometimes, however, they have real problems putting each thing in its proper place and suffer great anxieties about it.

- Onward! Enough speculation! Keep on copying! The page must be filled. Everything is equal, the good and the evil. The farcical and the sublime - the beautiful and the ugly - the insignificant and the typical, they all become an exaltation of the statistical. There are nothing but facts - and phenomena.

Final Bliss."

Gimmie two sounds and I'll make you a universe

Robert H. King takes a stroll through the new electronic soundscape

Live, experimental music has not had much of a presence in Scotland and given the number of people involved in one way or another (musicians, DJ's, record labels, magazines, fanzines...) it is an area that needs promoting. Stirling Arts has realised that locally, and within Scotland, there are many people (of all ages) involved in technology driven music. Working from this grass roots base, and as part of their arts development plans for Stirling, they have embarked on an ambitious concert programme that aims to bring together local and international musicians and champion a new approach to music development in an area often considered difficult and elite. They hope to work closely with other like-minded organisations such as the London Musicians Collective, in bringing many artists to this country for the first time. This is something which paid off recently with two sell-out performances from Death Ambient (USA/Japan) and Ground Zero featuring Otomo Yoshihide (Japan).

Over the past few weeks the more discerning music magazines have carried articles on the 'invisible soundtrack' or what might be described as the art of composing sound for the 'inner cinema'. This is nothing (entirely) new, musicians have been working in this area for a great number of years but with the more recent developments in portable digital recording technology, and indeed with the miniaturisation of the everyday walkman, the potentials of recording the environment and incorporating this within studio-based work to have it played back in the soundscape are only now starting to make a notable impression. Reading through the press releases and sleeve-notes of the majority of the CD's that arrived for review revealed a wealth of sound sources other than the lists of conventional instruments. The works reviewed here are pushing the envelope of established idioms and act as pointers to new possibilities in sound.

"Relief from the racket of everyday life" proclaims a flyer accompanying an impressive batch of CD's from Nottingham based Em:t. Housed in luxurious nature photography Digi-paks, these recordings have been spatially expanded: a 3-D sound imaging system which when listened to with headphones (or on your walkman) give you a sense of being placed inside the recordings. The seamless compilation Em:t 1197 is an excellent introduction to the sonic world of this innovative label, opening with a spiralling Laurie Anderson-esque piece of pop narrative groove from Richard Bone that flows into inner gamelan atmospherics courtesy of Woob, pulsing electro loops and onboard jazz tactics from International Peoples Gang and 'Waterpump' by Dallas Simpson: a field recording of Simpson walking through the undergrowth and over stones to an outdoor waterpump which throughout its 12 minutes

does have you feeling that you are there, involuntary scratching at the sounds of insects and constantly removing the headphones convinced that there really is running water in the house. This set of 9 aural snapshots has been curated with an attention to detail that is sadly lacking in a great many similar ventures. Essential.

Also from Em:t is the debut album by Slim, 0097 (there are no titles for these releases, just name and catalogue number) a smooth, seductive collection of polished urban exotica that blends drum 'n' bass, slow funk, hazy ambient textures and lush keyboards with hauntingly evocative female vocals. Another aspect of this album that sets it apart is the careful use of incidental sounds and voices that float teasingly in the background, again taking us back to the cinematic angle hinted at by many musicians. Instant and irresistible.

Last years Freeform album Elastic Speakers was criminally overlooked by the supposed 'forward thinking' alternative music press, but despite this Simon

Pyke has returned with a continuous stream bombardment of hyper velocity textures and impressions in the shape of 'Heterarchy' (Worm Interface SE01CD). Pykes skill lies in his ability to hijack sounds from the real world (the sound of bottles vibrating together on 'Late Surface' for example) and mutating them in ways that push the technology to new possibilities.

Heterarchy creates a personal inner space with slabs of noise expanding and contracting with each digital minute ushering the listener into something vast and at times claustrophobic, whilst probing microscopic rhythms get under the skin and implode at uneasy intervals. Freeform are taking a fresh route in the path of experimental electronics and as this does not embrace current trends and fads he has a difficult journey ahead of him, but this lack of engagement with any 'scene' is precisely what places Heterarchy in a class of its own. Challenging and vital.

The work of Bengé is on similar ground to Freeform in that he is producing material that refuses to be labelled, although he does go part of the way in helping by titling his album 'Beautiful Electronic Music' (Expanding Records- expandedd 296) and EP 'Polyrhythmic Electronica' (expandedd 397). Listening to these I am reminded of an old Japanese custom (no longer practised as far as I am aware) in which prior to an outdoor gathering, the host would place chirping insects and small birds in bamboo cages which in turn were hidden amongst the gardens display so as to relax the guests with their lilting sounds. Bengé takes you on a stroll through his electronic garden and invites you to listen out for the gently spiralling pulses and tones to be found amidst the floating textural soundwalls and rapidly shifting cross fades of loops, pulses and heartbeat rhythms. Each track (identified only by its time) is a different caged sound that continues to evolve with each passing, catching the possibility of something if it was left to escape. Repeated listenings outdoors on a walkman revealed new insects previously unheard but most welcome. Engaging and one to watch out for.

Brume vs Aphasia (Atmoject, AtmoCD1) can only be compared to what it must be like having an eardrum removed with no anaesthetic whilst someone whispers words of comfort in the other. Harsh, intense waves of electronics flow into moments of almost sheer silence and calm. Digital surgery being performed on naturally occurring resonating chambers soon make way for the post operative relaxation sounds of fire, wood, stones and melting snow. "Use volume with caution" advise the sleeve-notes, too late, my ears may never be the same again.

Sheffield based Discus have been quietly producing a steady flow of non linear improvised, experimental recordings for a number of years now but the release of Martin Archer's 'Ghost Lily Cascade (Discus 4CD) should see them making in-roads to a wider audience. Archer has taken the structure of solo synthesiser pieces and distributed these to nine other musicians to create instrumental lines 'in their own time, in their own locations' then re-assembling them in a series of 'chance' encounters with his computer. What has emerged is a rich, complex, yet at times simplistic miasma of timbral soundscapes. Sustained echoing chords and computer based drone reveries interweave perfectly with the dark, subtle improvisations of the source recordings. Archer has managed to produce a unique blend of control and spontaneity that remarkably manages to steer clear of studio constraints.

Bruce Gilbert (of the seminal, Wire) has taken the concept of the spoken word album to another level with 'The Haring- (WMO5CDL). Exquisitely packaged in a luxurious box with Polaroid inserts this is an intriguing collage of Gilbert's own readings, recordings of market stalls, unidentifiable noise, stream of consciousness dictation into a hand held recorder and

voice manipulations. What Gilbert has achieved here is a confusing but compelling 'sound diary' that can only be likened to picking up tantalising snippets of conversations as you pass through a crowd, honing in on one only to be led of with another. Gilberts voice is relaxed and indeed he has mastered the art of lulling the listener into a false sense of security before rushing in with shards of electronic noise. Baffling but compelling.

WMO is a label that has been set up to make available the archive recordings from the various members of Wire. To date they have issued a stream of early recordings, previously unheard slices of pure experimentation and embarked on a series of 'various artists play Wire' CD's, the first being 'Whore' (WMO4CD) featuring Lush, Main Scanner and 18 others which demonstrates the impact and influence the band have had for almost two decades.

'Brawling in an art hangout' (Lime Green Yellow Recording Company- LGY005) by Pan Techno Icon is a quirky blend of abstract pop electronica and techno minimalism that has been influenced by the transatlantic ideas of American and European music exchanges. 'Brawling...' has discernible traces of the US club scene but what is more prevalent perhaps is the influence of mid eighties electro-pop experimentation from the likes of The Normal, Fad Gadget, The The and even Blancmange. This is no slight, for that period produced some ground breaking work that paved the way for a great many artists today. A refreshing mix of contemporary beats and hazy nostalgia. Also from Lime Green is 'Experimental clothing stories' by Ch.... Inspired by cartoons and animated violence this is the berserker animators machinations of break beats skipping along the malevolent yellow brick lane whilst loony tune drum 'n' bass and inwardly spiralling dark ambient textures force their way into moments of surreal quiet all fuelled by low level bass frequencies and brain pounding beats. Bedtime stories for the deranged.

Always to the rescue of your inner calm are Tuu whose latest offering 'Mesh' (Fathom- 11078-2) is 52 minutes of drifting cavernous spatiality. The layers of ancient bells, bowls, flute, clay pots and water drums flow along on a tide of harmonium and synthesisers creating a soothing shamanistic tranquility. Tuu have shaken of the 'ethno-ambient' label that had been placed on them and moved into a new space entirely their own, one where the ever present repetitious water drum pulses are interspersed with the faint chimes of Tibetan singing bowls and the breathy insistence of the ney flute, perfectly interweave to create sensations of light, space, colour and harmony. They are absorbed in the idea of creating the perfect inner sanctuary where drones and resonant loops suspend time just long enough for the listener to restore their mind to some semblance of order in a chaotic world. This is their most accomplished work to date and worthy of everyones attention.

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Em:t Square Centre, Alfred St North, Nottingham NG3 1AA.

Expanding Records P.O. Box 130, Loghton, Essex IG10 1AY.

Lime Green Yellow Recording Company

P.O. Box 2023, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 9FE.

Tuu Archive, P.O.Box 1035, Windsor, Berks SL4 3YP.

WMO P.O. Box 54, Hitchin, Herts SG4 7TQ.

Worm Interface 4 Berwick St, London W1V 3RG.

Title appropriation courtesy of DJ Spooky.

