cross-currents in culture volume 2 • number 7 • spring 1999 • free

Contents

Editorial

In the early days of World War II, when Hitler was dividing up Poland, he told the two Generals he appointed that he would ask no questions about their methods. It is a common enough euphemism in politics and the exercise of power to this day. When questions are asked about methods they unearth the fact that power acts covertly to conceal its part in the ruthless consequences of its design.

In this issue, Marshall Anderson's *Another Story of Art Development* is not presented as a salacious expose—more rather an example of the norm. That there will be conflicting opinions of his account is unavoidable since the statements of the parties involved themselves—officialdom—are at odds with each other.

Our interview with the Glasgow Media Group—we would hope—will be read carefully and encourage a reconsideration of the theories which have led to such betrayals of common sense and progressive politics. The 'cultural compliance' referred to in the article is the culpable failure to address the enforcement of anachronistic right-wing politics, through an adherence to a view of culture which is based on intellectual meaninglessness. This compliance carries with it a failure to question the free market—despite the effects it is having on our society. Masses of people are unemployed—deemed to have no use in life—because the market has dictated so, and that this ideology cannot be challenged.

In the arts, and many other sectors of society, the involvement of a mass of people is touted as a worthy criterion by funding bodies, except when it comes to decision making. Consultation is considered something to be put into the hands of professional consultants at public expense; public consultation is the joke of organising a meeting to tell the public what they are getting. Decisions are taken before public consultation, during it or by ignoring it. This taxation without representation is wide open for factions to follow a line of interest. The private will incline towards partiality; the general will incline towards impartiality. Talk of independence abounds while the centralisation of the arts and culture increases.

Our open discussion on artists' initiatives will hopefully encourage debate on the collusion of private business and public development agencies in deciding what is 'culturally' relevant in Dublin and Belfast. Aware only of the corporate facade of such schemes in Ireland, the Scottish Arts Council—blatantly evading its own responsibility in decision making and monitoring—asks in its *visionary* 'Scottish Arts in the 21st Century' document:

"Does the subsidy system diminish entrepreneurial spirit of artists and arts organisations? Are there ways of supporting the Arts in which this could be avoided or which entrepreneurial spirit could be stimulated?"

Who wrote this—Baroness Thatcher?* Is their vision of the future that art becomes an adjunct to a corporate logo. Will this even maintain their own position? Can we show entrepreneurial spirit in questioning their methods or are we all to be herded into the ghetto which will be constructed for us?

*No, Ruth Wishart.

Variant volume 2 Number 7, Spring 1999. ISSN 0954-8815
Variant is a magazine of cross-currents in culture: critical thinking, imaginative ideas, independent media and artistic interventions. Variant is a Society based organisation and functions with the assistance of subscriptions and advertising.

We welcome contributions in the form of news, reviews, articles, interviews, polemical pieces and artists' pages. Guidelines for writers are available on request.

Opinions expressed in Variant are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the editors or Variant.

Editorial & Advertising Address
1a Shamrock Street, Glasgow G4 9JZ
Editors: William Clark & Leigh French
Advertising & Distribution: Paula Larkin
Design: Kevin Hobbs
Editorial Assistant: Ian Brotherhood
Cover: *St. Theresa* by Sarah Felton
t/f +44 (0)141 333 9522
email variant@ndirect.co.uk
Variant acknowledges SAC support towards the payment of contributors to the magazine.
Printers: Scottish County Press

Subscriptions
Individuals can receive a three issue (one year) subscription to Variant for:
UK £5.00, EC £7.00, Elsewhere £10.00
Institutions: UK & EC £10.00, Elsewhere £15.00

Ian Brotherhood

Tales of The Great Unwashed

—We're all to be on the telly, says Joe.

I get behind the bar and dump my bags at the foot of the stairs. We've been on the go twenty-four hours what with the flights being rearranged at the Turkey end of things. I'm that way I know I won't sleep, and I want to catch up with the news anyroad. When we were away I only called back the once and Diane assured me all was well and not to call again.

—So what's this then?

—It's a programme about the writers and them, and the telly's coming to see this fella doing his research and that's when he's mixing with the likes of us. And it's drinks on the house.

I look hard into the bilious bag-bound eyes of Joe Doghead and wonder what strange new fever of mind makes him think he will ever get another drink on me after his behaviour at the New Year.

Within the minute I've Diane in the office, and instead of giving her the doll I bought her, it's a dressing-down she's getting.

—I don't care if it's the telly. What's this about free drinks?

—Technically free as far as the customers are concerned, but all covered if you submit an accountant's statement for the best Wednesday you've had in the past year and there's twenty-per-cent on top for inconvenience plus a flat five hundred cash for you. All they require is three hours, access to power, a maximum of ten genuine regular customers who should ideally be unemployed or retired manual labourers, and your signature on these.

She's got the forms, it's all worked out. They'll be arriving before tea-time. I tell her not to do it again, then give her the doll.

—Who's this writer guy anyway, I ask.

She's looking at the doll, which is a wee girl dressed in the Turkish national costume. She attempts to remove the hat and the head comes off.

—Bill Mantovani, she says as she puts the head in her pocket.

—Am I supposed to know him or what?

She gives me one of those knowing wee smirks that drives me mad. It's like when I've forgotten the soft drinks order and she has to remind me, or when she's got the evening off and it turns out I okayed it when I was pished, so have to pay her treble time to stay on.

—I'm very surprised you are unaware of this author. Mr Mantovani has created some wonderful Scottish characters, all drawn from real life but possessed of a dignity which allows them to transcend poverty, rise above the class-ridden mores of...

—Aye, alright. So is he famous or what?

—Moderately. His most recent work is set in a fictional bar called The Waiting Room. The characters have colourful names and enjoy sophisticated discussions on topical matters. It seems that he is nominated for the Harrison-Bland award. That is why they are making this short film. It is for the programme during which the winner will be announced next month. He is the favourite.

So I hit the sack and try to kip. I don't need this. I wanted to get in, have a decent bath, then go down and have a few jars, a chinwag and an early night. But that's a good deal right enough, five ton cash, so I'd best try and look sharp and be about my wits.
I get up, have a shower, put on the good white shirt that's for funerals and weddings and the like, and the autographed Tommy Gemmell tie. It's a nice dark-green silk and the writing's with one of those silver pens. It actually says 'kissmyjarlers' on it, but the writing's so squiggly no-one can tell. Seventy notes for that too. Then on with old faithful, the tweed suit I got in Slater's back in seventy-two. Cost a packet back then but worth every bob. I even get a bit of pomade in the old crowning glory, and that's the first time for years, but it kills the white and lets me get it combed back a bit, so no harm. Got to look the part if there's cameras and that.

Going down the stairs, fierce blue light is streaming through the gaps about the closed door leading into the bar, and when I open it it's like I've walked right into Close Encounters and I screw my eyes shut and have to grope for the gantry. The silhouette of Joe Doghead slowly assumes features as my eyes adjust. The whole bar is swarming with folk, wires everywhere, and great big black boxes stacked here and there. I recognise no more than a dozen folk, all regulars, and even they look strange in the glare from the big lamps stood all over, and curtains of dust hanging about making the place look a lot dirtier than it really is.

— You must be Mr Doodlehoo, says this fellow who's appeared beside Joe.

—Doohihan, I say, and the young bearded fellow bites his bottom lip and says sorry, makes a note on the clipboard then tears off a bit of paper and sticks it on the bar afront me.

I'm almost finished writing my signature when the fellow screams.

—That's him! Oh my God! he says and then he's off towards the door.

The little figure advancing towards the bar is maybe four feet tall, and it's impossible to guess his age. He might be fifty, he might be ninety three. Under the huge faded Black Watch flat cap, his straight fairish hair is tufted above his ears, and his short trimmed beard is dense and looks soft, like fuzzy felt. He walks slowly, with shoulders back, and from the noise of his boots on the floorboards I guess he's got segs nailed in the soles. He's wearing a wee dark suit of fifties style, a collarless shirt, perhaps once white, and the waistline of the breeks hovers about his rib-cage, suspended by the button-on braces. So this must be him. Bill Mantovani, Scotland's foremost man of letters.

He is looking at me as he approaches, the gaggle of telly folk taking tiny steps behind him as he nears, and a couple of them have books that they must want signed and he does so without looking at either the folk or the books, moving forward all the time. When he reaches the bar he goes out of sight, and I'm leaning forward to check if he's still there when the bunnet bobs and shifts upwards and he grunts, climbs up the bar stool, and perches himself on it.

—Fitlike, hunestwurthy loonie ' E'en a muckle body wid craw aw the nicht whin the barley-fever drouth taks haud. Huv ye a hauf a' yon ale, Samson's Auld Arsecracker, an' a wheen o' Sot 'n Veenaygir billscrapins, if ye huv them mind.

He smiles. I don't. I've no idea what he's on about. A girl appears behind Mantovani, and even with him atop the stool he has to look up when she whispers to him. She's a right nice looking lass, not much older than my Mary, maybe twenty or something.

—Lovely. Now, just be natural Bill. We want to capture the essence of how earthy your world is, how symbiotic the relationship between you and your people. I know this isn't your regular hostelry, but we've made sure that these men are, to use one of your inimitable phrases, ambassadors for the dispossessed. Natural, natural, natural.

I catch Joe Doghead's eye, which is like a trapped shark's. Mantovani removes his bunnet, and I watch Joe staring at the shiny beige wig, which is almost the same shape as the cap, but smaller, and from the way the fringe has been cut it seems a fair bet that Mantovani has been trimming it to compensate for the shrinkage of his ageing skull. He licks his tiny forefinger and smooths down his eyebrows, which are like strips of rusty brillo pad. He stares at me again, and the voice is quieter.

—Half heavy and a glass of low-flyer with water squire, he says.

This I understand, so I set about the Grouse and Diane gets the beer. The mirrors behind the gantry look smeared and dusty in the light, and the reflection of activity in the area behind the spotlit Mantovani is shadowed and warped.

—Tape running! shouts someone.

I turn with the whisky, set it on the bar, then slide the water jug across. Mantovani's little hand holds a crisp fifty note, and the hologram shines like a wee dish of rainbows in the light. I reach out to take it. I feel strange and stiff, like my body is drunk, or just awake, and I've the note between my fingers when I remember our rule about no fifties. Even twenties are dodgy these days, the fakes are that good.

—Sorry my friend, but maybe you didn't see the notice, I say, and the wee man's eyes widen.

—Cut! Cut! shouts the lassie, and there's a hubbub of chat and laughter.

Mantovani snatches back the note, stuffs it inside his jacket, then rakes about in his wee pocket and there's jangling of change as he mutters and fires me dirty looks. The lassie comes over and wags her pen at me, and for all that she's smiling, and a nice smile it is too, you can tell she's not the most patient of creatures.

—This time we'll just take whatever Bill gives you and we'll ring it up as normal. The cash isn't really important right now.

I smooth down my tie. KISSMYJARLERS gleams silver upside-down in the light.

Three hours later, and I don't care about the five ton any more. My eyeballs are knocking together like coconuts in a sock. I want these folk out of my place. It took an hour to get the shot of Mantovani at the bar done, and all he did was sink one short after another, a double malt for every one of the six takes, a different malt every time. I've made sure Diane keeps a right close tally. Of course, Joe, trying to keep up, is cataleptic, and only the fact that the drink is free is keeping him going.

Sippy Pat and her Mum, Bobby Elbow and his fiance have been in the alcove by the puggy, and from the bar they can barely be seen through the cloud of fag smoke. The fags are free as well, handed out for every take, and Diane has had to empty the ashtrays three times already, a task made easier by the beardy assistant director fellow, who gets her to just empty them onto the floor for added grittiness. By the toilet door, directly beneath the wall-mounted gas heater, Halfpint Henderson and his three sixty-something sons are gleaming with sweat, devouring pints as fast as Diane can pour them in an effort to replace the fluids being sapped by the powerful beams. It's take-ten

of their domino game because Jerso, Halfpint's youngest, keeps laughing, and this is ruining the grimness of the set piece.

It's almost ten. They're well over the agreed time. I get my jacket off, and I know there's big dark stains at my armpits and the pomade has long since been boiled off my hairs. I want my bed. The director lass is chatting to the beardy fellow. I get my bad boss face on.

—Excuse me dear.

—Jack? she says, all surprised like maybe we had a love affair once and she's seeing me for the first time in years, and it's like she pulls the smile out of a bag and sticks it on faster than the eye can detect.

—If I'm not much mistaken, the agreement was three hours. You've had near enough four. I'd like my pub back now, if that's alright with you.

She glances at Beardy, and he looks for something imaginary hovering above his forehead.

—Jack, you've been an absolute dream. We couldn't have managed without you, she says. We just need to get the interview done and we'll be off, promise.

—Interview?I say, and it's like God himself is having a wee joke with me cos her eyes go to the front door and Beardy's follow, and I turn to see this character come strolling in like it's him, not me, that owns the place.

He's a big lad, maybe heights with myself, and very portly too, to be nice about it. But not heavy in a fit way this one—it's like puppy fat he's not managed to lose, even with him being maybe thirty or so, and his cheeks are as rosy and smooth as a baby's fundament. He's wearing a kilt and one of those dress jackets that has a huge big frilly shirt sticking out of the front. His hair is crewed to a number three or thereabouts, and it's silvery white. He pauses, hands on hips, sporran swinging, scans the bar, and makes like a berserker when he sees Priscilla approach.

She gets an arm about his big waist and guides him over to the corner by the fag machine where Mantovani is smoking his pipe and dozing. I catch Beardy looking at me before he scuttles off to join in the hoo-haa over this new arrival—he looks at me as if I'm getting in the road. The temper sparks and catches. But I can't lose it. I take a deep breath, and the influx of real and artificial smoke sparks a fit of coughing that leaves me doubled and gagging. That's it. Enough's enough.

I get to the table just as Mantovani stands up, and they turn as one towards me. Priscilla gushes at me again,

—Jack, I want you to meet Peter Princely, presenter of this year's Harrison-Bland Awards programme. Peter, this is Jack Doughy-hand, he's the manager here.

Peter Princely offers his hand and smiles at me with teeth so bright I want to retreat. I shake it as I stare at him, and make a point of holding it firm.

—What an unusual name, says Peter, and his grip is so strong that I hear a whimper coming from myself.

—Yes it is, I say in much higher voice than my own.

Priscilla accompanies me back to the bar, filling me in. My hand feels like the udder of a knackered cow. She wants Mantovani back on his seat at the bar. Peter will ask the questions. Mantovani has already seen them, and will rattle off his answers. Little, if any, of the material will be used unless Mantovani actually wins the award. It's a one-take job, no problem. Three hundred extra, off the record. Ten minutes set-up, done within the half-hour, and if they're a minute over I'll be due another three ton. Fine. I stick the cash in my shirt pocket, keep my trap shut, and rub the blood back into my fingers as I work out who to call first.

The telly bodies are milling, moving their gear, nipping outside for a breather, the two agency lads checking passes as the crew move in and out. They're big and healthy enough, these chaps they have by way of security, but nothing special.

There's a mobile phone on the bar. Maybe Priscilla's, maybe Beardy's. I slip it in my back pocket, then move across to say a quick hello to Joe Doghead, who is still upright and breathing. He looks at me. The whites of his eyes are mother-of-pearl. I have never seen him like this. He is beyond drunkenness. Perhaps it is the way the likes of your shamen and whirling dervishes get, or maybe the holy men who've been buried for months. He's barely breathing, but he must know how close he is to the end. This is the only state in which Joe Doghead Ryan could be called upon to defend the honour of the woman who loves him. Sippy Pat is still in the alcove with her mother, who is arm-wrestling Bobby Elbow. I mentally cross myself, cup Joe's head and draw him close and tell him what I have to tell him. There is a grunt to acknowledge that the information I have given him has been received, and only the further dilation of his pupils gives a clue as to the imaginings now coursing through his befuddled mind.

Priscilla is calling for positions. The artificial smoke machine starts up again. Beardy appears with another carton of fags and exhorts all those awake to partake. Peter Princely is having his make-up seen to while a couple of the young female crew members lift Mantovani onto his stool at the bar.

Have to work fast now. Nip in the back, flip open the mobile—makes me feel like Captain Kirk under siege on the Enterprise. Fishy Maggie isn't home. Her and the girls are out working the hen-night down The Spring, so call there and by the racket when the phone's answered it seems they're there alright. The chargehand fetches her. Yeah, she can make it. She listens, laughs, is very interested. She can get The Carpet and his guys up as well. Fair enough. She's leaving now. The big lamps bang on again, and I can hear Beardy shouting. The blue fag smoke slips under the door. I'll be needed for pouring more drinks. Fast. Bang in the numbers, do it too fast, have to do it again. Big Polly can shift anything—he's home, and none too pleased at first what with girlish giggling in the background, but when I give him a rough description of the gear they've got you can hear the lassie's giggles becoming whines and complaints and you can tell he's getting his clobber on. I give him the instructions. He'll be there.

—Where's Mr Doodlehoo? shouts Beardy.

I sling the jacket on and quickly comb back the hair, and when I go out they're all waiting. Waiting for me. I take my time, whistling and smiling. Priscilla does not look at all happy, and neither does Beardy. Big Peter Princely draws daggers, and wee Mantovani's features are clouded with fatigue and impatience. I wink at the little man, turn to the gantry, pour myself a measure of rum, then take my place at the end of the bar. Joe has turned a shade of grey only ever seen on cadavers and is staring down at the top of Mantovani's head.

—Thanks for joining us Jack, says Priscilla. Right, final shot, interview with Peter and Bill, then it's a couple of Peter noddies and home. Run the tape. Let's go!

Peter Princely clears his throat, fiddles with his bright blue bow-tie.

—Bill Mantovani. The characters, the tradition, the sheer weight of history. The legends. You've become one of those legends, dare I say, a myth? says Peter Princely very softly, and with much gentle finger massaging of something unseen on the bar.

Mantovani rubs his beard, and a wee bit of salt and vinegar scratching falls from the rusty felt, plops into his large Black Bush. He downs the lot, wipes his hairy gob. His voice is strong and echoes about The Great Unwashed.

—History. Yes. Inscrutable. Long inertia, the steady dribble of hopelessness in a community of souls where to commit poverty is to once again thread the needle of interminable, nay glacial, misery. Myriad personal anarchies need not be indefatigable, but the inevitable, unimaginably heroic defiances which are what we stand for, which delineate the boundaries of what we are, these cannot reasonably hope to successfully combat the underlying compliances demanded, if not wrested from us, by status quo.

Far off in the corner, Bobby Elbow and Sippy Pat start singing 'Down Down, Deeper and Down.' Priscilla's voice rings out.

—Carry on Peter! Keep going!

Peter Princely empties the last of his half-heavy-shandy. I top it up as he consults the wee card in his cupped hand. Another glass of cratur for Mantovani.

—The new work, says Peter, shaking his head with awe. The Waiting Room. Innovative. Authentic. Provocative. Dare I say, ground-breaking?

—The breaking of ground, yes. Dirt. Coal. Men in holes, digging their own cells. Elemental, fundamental of life. Water. Drink. Aesthetic preoccupations? The working class artist, seduced, luxuriates in the surreptitious undermining of establishment, unguenting conscience with the conviction, solidified through constant introspective repetition and the encouragement of his peers, that he is a foot soldier within that wooden horse sitting at the heart of that beast which is the enemy, whiling away the hours before the surprise attack by pondering the innumerable permutations which might lead to the decipherment of that most enigmatic of all codes, that infinitely inexplicable crossword puzzle we call life. But for my characters, for all of them, there is no life. There is only...reality.

Peter Princely starts to cry.

They chunter on for a while, Princely lobbing questions, Mantovani speaking in tongues. I glance at my watch. It is the time agreed. I look over to Sippy Pat, who is grimacing at me, waiting for the signal. I loosen my tie. She gets up and moves towards us despite the best efforts of the crew to return her to her seat. I lean against the door jamb, poise my thumb over the switch for the big Guinness sign outside. Peter Princely is closer to Mantovani, trying to whisper.

—This is the one in case you win it, he says, nodding, wide-eyed.

Mantovani shakes his head, smiling coyly, as if the possibility had not even occurred.

—Sorry I won't be able to make it for the dinner. It's just that it's been lined up for yonks Pete, know how it is. It's the timeshare you know, use it or lose it. And Magaluf's nice this time of year, says Mantovani.

Sippy Pat has got as far as Beardy, and is staring at Mantovani with raw lust. Joe notices her, and half-shuts his lids, as if making sure that she really is there. Princely smiles over at Priscilla, who nods.

—Bill Mantovani, winner of this year's Harrison Bland Award for Scottish Literature, congratulations.

—Yes. Thank you. I'm sorry I can't be with you all tonight to...

Sippy Pat advances, brushing Beardy aside. Princely, turning to see the Afghan-clad figure bearing down upon him, shrieks and hops back from the bar.

—Mister Mantovani! cries Pat as she embraces him.

Mantovani momentarily disappears from sight as he is engulfed in the nicotine-stained coat, and when she does release him his wee wig is swinging from the topmost of her fat imitation-bone buttons. I sense Joe shift. I told him that Mantovani had

already made some very indiscrete enquiries as to Sippy Pat's bill of fare, convinced she is a lady of the night. A low growl confirms Joe's growing displeasure.

—I just love your stuff so I do, says Pat. That Pink Panther, that was the best. I used to always watch that with the weans, Jesus, I was near enough a wean myself. That car was pure gallus by the way. Were you ever in it? Eh? You're wee enough anyway aren't you? Eh?

—Do you mind ! shouts Mantovani. This happens to be a very important...

—Bet you I can remember it. Right, here we go, shouts Pat.

—Is it money you want? says Mantovani, and from his pocket he pulls the crumpled fifty.

At the sight of the money, Joe looks at me like a man about to be shot, then drains his glass and stands. I flick the Guinness light switch off, then back on right away. The front and side doors burst open simultaneously, Fishy Maggie and her dozen or so girls streaming in the front while The Carpet, Big Polly and ten or so of the Spring lads rush in the side, all wearing see-you-Jimmy bunnets with red hairy sidelocks by way of disguise. Mantovani whimpers. Peter Princely runs towards Priscilla, who is heading for the toilet with her colleagues.

—Right, here we go now! If you don't know it, clap!

Pat has her hands on hips, head back, eyes shut.

—Think of all the animals you ever hear about, like rhinoceros and tigers laddy-da, I can never get that bit, never mind, oh-ho there's lots of funny animals in all the world, but...

—Take this! Please! shouts Mantovani as he waves the fifty in front of Pat, but she's away, sent.

Fishy Maggie has clearly come to some kind of understanding with Big Polly and the Spring boys—the ladies head straight for the bar and the fag machine while the lads concentrate on shifting the crew's hardware, carefully removing plugs but otherwise working fast. The two minders brought by the crew flee for the Gents, manhandling smaller colleagues out of the way.

—Think! A panther that is positively pink! Oh here he is...

Joe lifts Mantovani from the seat by the scruff of his jacket, gets the other hand under the wee man's arse, lifts him up high like he's offering a new-born son to the gods, then releases a howl which seems to freeze everyone.

—And he's a gentleman a scholar he's an...

Joe hurls Mantovani the full length of the bar, and the wee body bounces off the shiny surface and straight into the wall of crisps and other boxed snacks stacked at the far end, causing an explosion of small multicoloured bags. The raid resumes, and I lift the bar phone. Fishy Maggie looks at me, looks at the till, raises an eyebrow. I nod. She opens it and takes out the whole tray. I throw the mobile phone to her. She'll get rid of that. The boys have almost finished wheeling out the large black boxes of sound and light gear, and have started on the bar furniture. Maggie's girls have all but cleared the gantry, and have managed to remove the fag machine from the wall.

—Yes, my bar's being looted. The Great Unwashed. Doohihan. No. Doohihan.

—Yes he's the one and only truly original, Panther Pink Panther from head to toe-hoe! Dumpity-dumpity dum!

I applaud, as does Joe and Sippy Pat's Mum. Everyone else has gone. The telly crew are all in the Ladies, and will probably stay there until the cops arrive. The sirens are getting nearer. The only sign of Mantovani is a tiny clenched fist defiantly thrust from the carnage, and in it is clutched the crumpled fifty note. Pat gets on the stool beside Joe and puts an arm about him. He'll succumb tonight, that's for sure.

Pat shrieks and flicks Mantovani's tiny wig off her coat. It lands on the bar.

—It's a rat! she screams.

Joe's mighty fist batters down on the hairy scrap, and I remove it quickly. Pat sighs and pulls her hero closer, and he acknowledges her attention with a toothless grin.

Ewan Morrison

Politics of Friendship

Has Derrida taken a political turn? After his frustrating re-reading of Marx many will no doubt rush out to buy "The Politics of Friendship" in the hope of finding clarification on Derrida's politics—if such a thing could ever be said to exist. Deconstruction supposedly laid bare the problematics behind the grand political projects. It announced a period of skeptical reflection, a gap between action and justification which rendered political activity impossible. It contributed to the groundlessness of contemporary political beliefs. It placed "'truth' in quotation marks". (p. 44)

If deconstruction gave reasons to suspend judgement, to distrust the choices available, it also created an atmosphere of apathy and frustration. Ironically, Derrida has now turned to re-assess politics to see if it is now safe to go back to some of the secure notions of responsibility, commitment, and political allegiance that have so been missing.

Of course we should know better. While theorists like Baudrillard and Lyotard at least offered the promise of a controversy, Derrida will not be reduced to a soundbite theorist. He will not carry the can for Post-modernism, will not write a book that sums up the journey so far and shows us where to go next; which is exactly what post-modern theory needs right now, if it is not to be relegated to history as a temporal blip. Instead Derrida has done what he always does: produced yet another exquisite and rarefied book, polished and hermetically sealed.

Derrida is no doubt aware of the pressure on him to act as seer and leader for those left floundering in the wake of Post-modernism. He is unlikely to succumb to such a temptation, and warns again and again in "The Politics of Friendship" against such 'hasty' readings of his work. Throughout the book he chastens the reader to have patience. As always his work is a multiplication of questions. Of course we should by now expect to be frustrated by Derrida, to not reach a conclusion, to undergo his endless deferrals of meaning. Derrida's digressions are not errors in logic, but a necessary strategy which tries to prove his own theory that meaning is differential—interpretation infinite.

As with all of Derrida's work "The Politics of Friendship" starts with a quotation, and proceeds to lay it open to a multitude of interpretations. In this instance the quotation is one attributed to Aristotle by Montaigne.

"O' my friends, there is no friend."

The book is an enquiry into the meanings of the words "friend" and "enemy". The aim is to focus on: "the political problem of friendship." To do this Derrida traces the chain of this quotation from Aristolte to Kant, Blanchot, Montaigne, Nietzsche and through to the Catholic political theorist Carl Schmitt.

Derrida's method is to set in motion the contradictions and imbalances behind each attempt to define "the friend" and "the enemy". Through this he unearths a convincing array of aporias: gaps, divergences of meaning—contradictions which have nonetheless been acted upon throughout history.

"The Politics of Friendship" chastens the zeal of those who have sought conceptual clarity and acted in its name. It is possible to read from this book that the entire concept of "fraternity", as enshrined in the French revolution, was based upon a confused notion of "brotherhood" which sought universality and the eradication of the enemy, but which nonetheless depended upon the enemy for its existence.

Throughout the book Derrida follows the shifting positions of "the enemy": The enemy as the other, as the brother, as the alibi for the self and finally as the self itself. A reading could be as follows: if fraternity always posits an enemy, if the existence of the enemy is what constitutes not just the identity of the friend, but also of the self, then is it possible to reject the opposition friend/enemy, on which "the self" is based? And finally to reject "the self" and the western philosophical tradition that rests upon it? This is the question which Derrida leaves us with. The possibility of a different way of conceiving of the self—a self without a centre, without parameters—the decentered self.

We will recognise this critique of "the self" from the 1970s. From Foucault and his announcement of the death of the subject. As such, "The Politics of Friendship" is another contribution attesting to the end of humanism, and which ushers in something else: Post-humanist theory?

It is surprising really that the coming of the decentered self has been announced for so long, and yet we still know so little about how we can cope with being "decentered selves".

Who is this decentered self, this deconstructed subject, this person with no fixed identity, with no fixed principles, without a basis for ethics or politics? The person who lives deconstruction. The major question which has haunted Derrida (and Foucault's work) is just how a society comprising such Post-humanist subjects might operate. How we live with our decentered selves is one question that post-modern thought has always left hanging.

The simple reduction is to see deconstruction as a historical moment and to see the decentered self, as an event in advanced capitalism. Deconstruction is then seen as being symptomatic, or descriptive of the breakdown of western values. The decentered self, from this perspective is a social, political disaster, a retreat from the enlightenment project. The shifting values of the post-humanist subject, are said to map directly onto the fragmented self which is the consumer. Inevitably, deconstruction is forced to face what might be the political implications of the theory of the decentered subject.

"The Politics of Friendship", is a long awaited but tentative attempt at doing just that. But what would such a project be—a sociology of the deconstructed subject—a political study of post-modern man? Of course for Derrida such a project would be impossible. He cannot use a grounded methodology to critique deconstruction. However, the question of the political, of how individuals act in society haunts this book, and tries to assert itself, albeit in hidden forms.

In one passage, notably one of the most awkward in the book, Derrida implies the question of the social repercussions of the dissolution of self.

"If we were not wary in determining them too quickly, about precipitating these things towards an excessively established reality, we might propose a gross example, among an infinity of others, simply to set a heading, since what a naive scansion dates from the "fall of the Berlin wall" or from the "end of communism", the "parliamentary-democracies—of-the-capitalist—Western-world" would find themselves without a principal enemy. The effects of this destructuration would be countless: "the subject" in question would be looking for new reconstitive enmities; it would multiply "little wars" between nation-states: it would seek to pose itself, to find repose, through opposing still identifiable adversaries—China, Islam? Enemies without which, as Schmitt would have said—and this is our subject—it would lose its political being; it would purely and simply depoliticise itself." (p.76)

This is an important point, but it is couched in terms which are elusive. This is classic Derrida. The idea he puts forward is "naive"—"a gross example", "it exists among an infinity of others", "these are questions we must mutter to ourselves." He cites "we" "ourselves" and as "Schmitt would have said." Hiding what he wants to say behind a series of disclaimers, each one distances the statement from any authorial intent. This is however, the one passage from which the entire book gains its urgency and direction. Derrida echoes the point throughout the book, with reference to Schmitt:

"A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy."

"For Schmitt losing the enemy is losing the political self." p.83

"A crime against the political—the death of the enemy." p.88

These points from Schmitt, reinforce what we already know to be Derrida's own theories about "the subject". What they do though is situate the deconstructed subject at a point in history. Deconstruction has long laboured in breaking down the binary oppositions which it presupposes that western culture is based upon. A reading of Schmitt would suggest that society itself is moving towards the breakdown of the opposition between friend and enemy, political right and left. But at what cost?

What happens when society itself moves towards the dissolution of opposites? This can only be a pressing question for Derrida, as his entire theory is based upon the negative critique of the role of opposites in western thinking.

Derrida however cannot admit to the issue of the "social relevance" of his theory. By his own method cannot be seen to be making a statement or looking for evidence to support a statement. Therefore what we are left with in this text is this endless apologising, this infinity of disclaimers, this slow sensitivity in approaching the possibility of actually saying something, this way of hiding his intent behind the voice of others. Derrida's work has always had such suggested or inferred meanings, which he can usually pass on as "the reader's interpretation". However, never before has such an important suggestion played so pivotal a role in one of his books.

There is a vampiric quality in Derrida's writing. It saps the life out of that which it quotes, while at the same time exalting the original for its valour, its arrogance, its naive certainty. His love of controversial and powerful texts is exemplified here by his use of Nietzsche, Schmitt and Victor Hugo. But while Derrida draws these powerful and important quotations together he can only hint at his reasons for doing so, and cannot thread them together into an argument which might make sense.

There must be a frustration at heart here for Derrida. By his own method, he can never make a bold statement, neither can he explore a subject analytically, or systematically. He can only deconstruct each quotation, rendering them unstable, unverifiable, problematic. Neither can Derrida assess theory against facts, or found opinions upon empirical observations, as writers like Schmitt do. Derrida has through his work systematically problematised such attempts by others to jump from fact to theory, to seek proof of their ideas in reality. He does however want to imply to us that the text has some importance to the period in which we live. How can he do this though? Through vague allusion, and through saying the opposite of what he means.

Throughout the book Derrida makes repeated attacks on Schmitt's "historicist's" discourse. In typical deconstructive method, Derrida looks for the one "undecideable" which undermines their entire discourse. For Derrida, Schmitt's theory hangs upon the existence of a possible "concrete"—a phrase which bridges the gap between Schmitt's theory and the facts he claims to observe: a reality which is nonetheless contingent—an absolute which is temporal.

"What are the political stakes of this figure? On the other hand, the unending insistence here on what would be the opposite of spectral—the concrete; the compulsive and obsessional recurrence of the word concrete as the correlate of 'polemical'—does indeed provide food for thought. What thought? Perhaps that the concrete finally remains in its purity, out of reach, inaccessible, indefinately deferred, haunted by its spectre." (p.117)

So Derrida effectively undoes the concrete terrain on which Schmitt, the "modern political expert" has built his discourse. But does Schmitt not in turn

haunt Derrida in the form of the necessity to address Schmitt in the first place? In the form of the question of the political relevance of theory?

There is undoubtedly something about Schmitt's prediction of a post-cold war world, fragmented into struggles for identity that troubles Derrida. What if a world without binary opposition (friend/ enemy, left/ right) is a world without meaning. Perhaps it is that Derrida sees in the post-cold war struggles of small nations and ethnic groups, a metaphor for the "decentered subject" in which the old binary oppositions no longer apply.

How often has deconstructive theory been used to undermine the "binary oppositions" of imperialist culture? Since the '60s there has been a tacit understanding that although deconstruction did not have an overt politic, it was of use in theoretically destabilising oppressive hierarchical structures. This has been the implied ethic behind the use of deconstruction. Deconstruction would take us beyond the rigidified culture of entrenched opposition—it would be a radical cultural force.

But what if the end of binary oppositions (black/ white, gay/ straight, left/ right) does not spell a positive future, in which the old oppositions end, but one in which chaos rules, and in which the form that instability takes is violence—violence beyond reason. There are only vague allusions to these concerns within the book, but it could be that Derrida has started to become anxious about "the social relevance of deconstruction". Naturally no one has marched into battle carrying a deconstruction banner, but culturally the infiltration of deconstruction into our institutions has meant a filtering through into culture of some of its inherent attitudes. Was Deridda wrong to give up on the enlightenment project, the left? These questions haunt this text, but Derrida cannot ask them.

Is there an unwritten politic behind this book without conclusion? Through each of his works Derrida has repeatedly told us that every philosophy is haunted by the spectre of its opposite. What then is the opposite that haunts deconstruction? What if not linear discourse—the statement—the need to adopt a subject position. Could it be that Derrida is haunted by what it is he really wants to say?

"Who could ever answer for a discourse on friendship without taking a stand?" (p.229)

In the Politics of Friendship we see a Derrida trapped in his own method, unable to articulate the real questions that concern him without threatening the credibility of deconstruction itself.

Politics of Friendship
Jaques Derrida
Verso - ISBN 1-85984-033-7

Creative Music in a Plain Brown Box

David Thompson

"Those who compose because they want to please others, and have audiences in mind, are not real artists. They are merely more or less skilful entertainers who would renounce composing if they did not find listeners."

Arnold Schoenberg, 1946.

As the music industry seems enthralled by the shrinking circular logic of its own marketing NewSpeak few small organisations remain pleasingly unmoved by the makeover imperatives of packaging. As one company's name suggests, the Unknown Public shows scant regard for audience demographics and makes little concession to the music media's appetite for modish imagery and sound bites. If the company's motto "Creative Music in a Plain Brown Box" qualifies as a sound bite of sorts, it's also a perfectly reasonable summary of what the Unknown Public does.

Conceived as an irregular audio journal of contemporary music, and with a loyal and growing audience of subscribers in 51 countries, the Unknown Public (UP) catalogue spans an enormous range of sounds and sensibilities, presenting as standard: a breadth of frontier innovation few conventionally structured record companies could hope to match. The UP aesthetic accommodates an encyclopaedic sweep of compositional possibilities, whether conventionally scored, electronically rendered or configured by some other means. As so many labels, festivals and publications adopt elaborate territorial postures that define audiences by exclusion, UP's open-ended blueprint seems subversive, simply by default.

In the space of six years, UP founders John Walters and Laurence Aston have given an artistic home to more than 250 composers and performers, presenting exclusive or neglected work from figures both known and unfamiliar. A hasty scan of the UP archives reveals contributions by Gavin Bryars, Sheila Chandra, Steve Reich, Trevor Wishart and Frank Zappa. Each subtitled issue offers a loose and often abstract theme, around which the featured recordings gravitate. With no underlined sleeve-note connections to follow the listener is free to fathom whatever associations their own listening may inspire.

The ninth collection, subtitled "All Seeing Ear" circles around notions of synaesthesia and music's potential for rich visual suggestion and metaphor—a personal cinema experience for the ears and imagination. The featured pieces include the automotive agitation of Rob Elli's "Black Bullet Fiesta", Andrea Rocca's playful cartoon cut-ups and the gorgeously hesitant cellos of Richard Robbin's "He Meets His Mother". Also making appearances are the Polish Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra and a brief, febrile extract from Michael Brooks' "Albino Alligator" soundtrack.

The imminent tenth UP anthology takes solo performance and solitude as points of departure. Linked by the title "Naked. Music Stripped Down", thirteen pieces of audio erotica reach from improvised jazz and classical forms to live electronica and clouds of atomised ambience. Amidst the popular assumption of music as an incidental soundtrack to collective leisure activity, neither warranting nor rewarding significant attention, the pieces curated here invited a more serious and intimate consideration. From Helen Chadwick's slow sparing rendition of Osip Mandelstam's poem "Words" to the data glove-directed electronics of Walter Fabeck's "Les Astronautes" and Julian Argue's gorgeously discreet saxophones, the sense of detailed intent and introspective absorption is difficult to resist.

Rather than adopt the conventional strategy of reinforcing boundaries and generic familiarity the diversity of the UP collections quietly encourages the audience to investigate each piece with little of the prejudicial baggage that is fostered elsewhere. Irrespective of size and musical orientation, many record labels now employ marketing to prescribe an audience response that is more or less uniform, typically patronising and entirely premature. In effect, the listener is told how he or she should feel about the music before it can be taken home and scrutinised. In marked contrast, the UP's plain brown boxes invite their listeners to browse the music and to find out for themselves.

Good

The Glasgow University Media Group

In 1974,through involvement in a social science research project, a small group of 'academics', Jean Hart, Alison McNaughton, Paul Walton, Brian Winston, John Eldrige and Greg Philo got together to produce the book *Bad News*. Their analysis penetrated the surface appearance of neutrality and balance of the news media and found the partial and restricted reality.

They did not present a crude notion of bias. Their central question was simple enough:'Does television news as presently constituted help explain,and clarify events in the real world or does it mystify and obscure them.' The BBC were hostile to their research – even before it began obliquely threatening them with the possibility of copyright action, complaining to the Principal of the university and pressurising the Social Science Research Council to limit the freedom of researchers. With ITN there was 'no hostility and equally almost no co-operation.' When the book emerged the group was described by Lord Annan—who had conducted the government's own inquiry into broadcasting—as "a shadowy guerrilla force on the fringe of broadcasting."

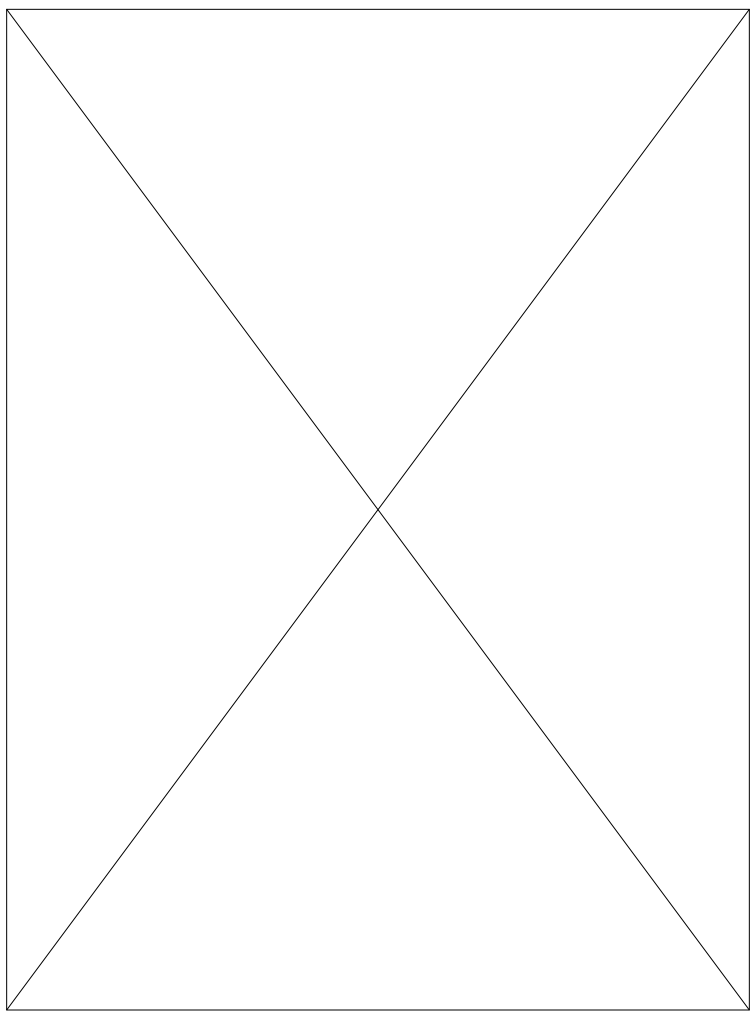
They had called themselves the Glasgow University Media Group simply to collectively represent their work. Follow up books *More Bad News* and then *Really Bad News* completed a trilogy. According to Greg Philo the group didn't really exist—it was just a collection of academics who were still writing—he encouraged a slightly more organised structure so that they could carry on working together. This was a significant move enabling them to involve more people—the Glasgow Media Group became anyone who wrote with them to produce the books. That included journalists working on the production side of news media together with their own content and audience studies. At the same time they also set up the Glasgow University Media Unit which could apply for research grants. *War And Peace News* (Open University Press 1985) with its focus on the twin subjects of the Falklands conflict and Nuclear Defence highlighted the wholesale abandonment of impartiality in the news media. With their work on subjects such as the miner's strike the group gained something of a reputation for not shying away from a whole range of politically difficult social and political issues. *Getting The Message (News Truth and Power)* Routledge 1993 saw the group investigate media treatments of areas such as food panics, health scares, public understanding of health issues, AIDS in the media,mental health and Ireland. John Eldrige's work moves towards a critical position of the Chomsky/Herman model on how the media functions.

The new works are: *Message Received*—a collection of work from '93—'98 with various writers with subjects such as race, migration and media;disaster and crises reporting and violence, mental illness and suicide. *Cultural Compliance (Dead Ends of Media/ Cultural Studies and Social Science)* by Philo and David Miller (of the Stirling Media Research Institute) is a shorter critique which turns its attention to sociology as taught in universities.

Both works set out serious indictments of the political failure of media and cultural studies as they are presently taught in Britain's universities. The 'cultural compliance' that they speak of is not specific to sociology but has a relevance to the effects of the absorption of the inadequate political assumptions of post modern writers, such as Baudrillard, into artistic interpretation and production. Here too, if we view contemporary art as a form of media and social science, we see the same symptomatic loss of the ability to engage critically with the society in which it exists and a similar drift into irrelevance.

> 'Within the post-modem vision, there can be no agreed reality or 'facts' because meanings are not fixed but are re-negotiated in the constant interplay of the reader and the text. This focus on the text and the negotiation of meaning has reduced the ability to study the real and often brutal relations of power which form our culture (and the perspective actually legitimises the absence of such studies). If texts have no inherent meaning and 'it all depends on how they are interpreted and used', then it is not possible to argue that some elements of our culture are oppressive and damaging.'
>
> Greg Philo, from the Introduction of *Message Received*.

The following interview with Greg Philo was recorded last autumn in his office in the Sociology department of Glasgow University. The questions were by William Clark and Ian Brotherhood.



Images: *Euan Sutherland*

News

Cultural compliance

Greg Philo: We've got a new book coming out at the end of this year [1998] called *Message Received* which is a critique of contemporary cultural studies; the media, in this country and abroad. We've basically said it's lost its critical edge, that it's ceased to have the ability to comment critically on the society which exists. That it's become, really, a celebration of the popular, without any critical edge in terms of the negative elements of the society that's developed. That the market for a long time in the '80s was seen—by many people—as potentially positive in that they focused on elements of consumption and saw the market as a liberating force in some way. I think a number of people went down that road. *Marxism Today* did, but then at the first hint of capitalist crisis they neatly did an about turn and, ha ha! marched in the other direction. Opportunists to the last.

Variant: Yeah well...They brought out that recent edition?

GP: It's ghastly. It's depressing watching people who've moved so far in the direction away from what was the original critique of the market.

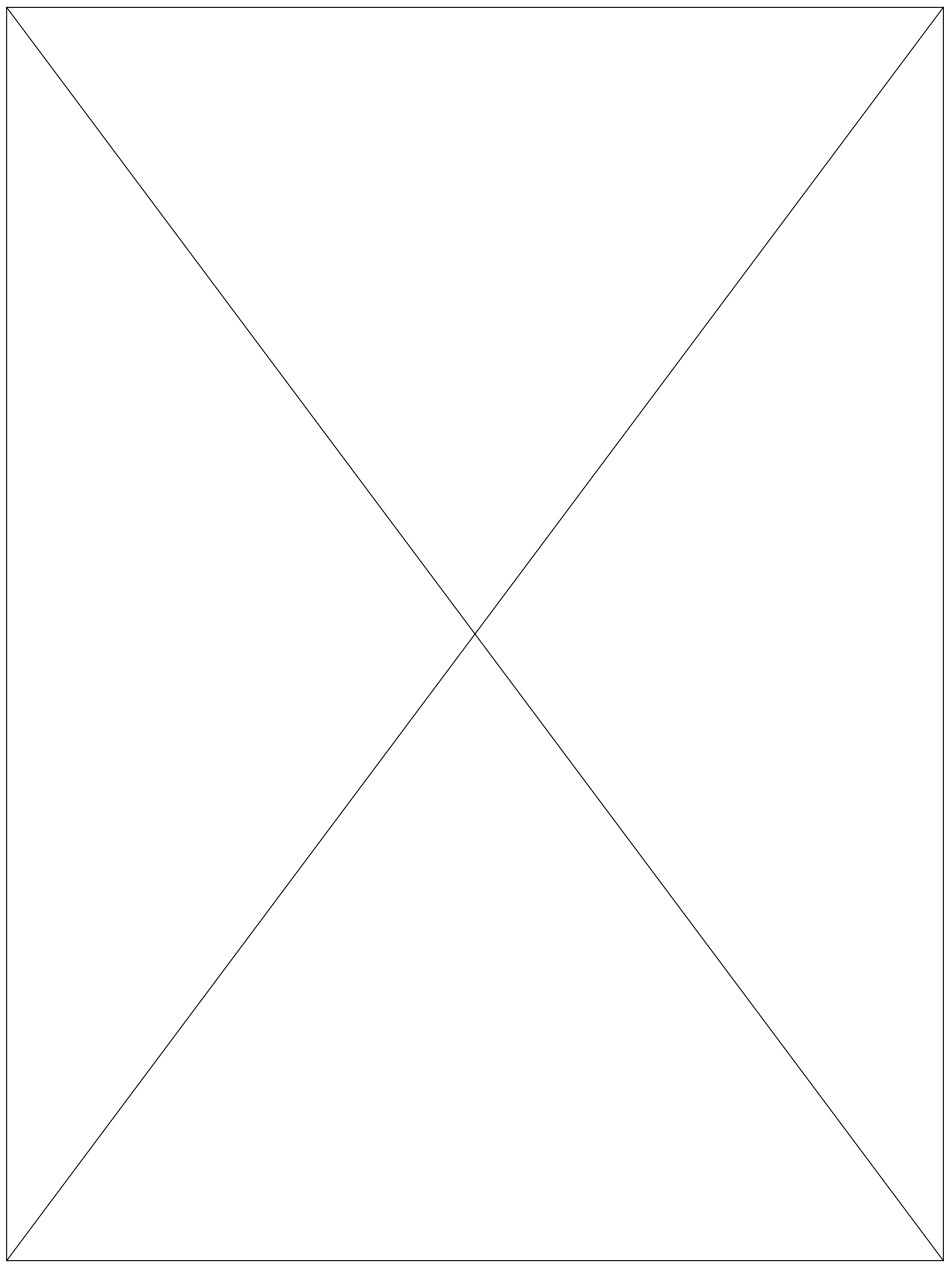
V: Well they've brought it out and it's all 'Tony Blair's got it wrong'. Marxism Today has Stuart Hall, but from what I gather Hall taking over in Birmingham was seen as a big push for media studies. The introduction of Marxist critiques, semiotics, but that was some time ago.

GP: I would think Stuart has done some very interesting things. I think in his early work for the *New Left* he wrote some very important material and I think we did use some of his work when we first started doing *Bad News*. He wrote an excellent article called *The World at One With Itself*, which was, I think quite inspirational at the time. Having said that I think a lot of what the Birmingham Centre went on to do was to move between one or other branches of increasingly obscure academic theories. And it moved away from—I would say—empirical work which could be used to mount a sustained critique of the society as it developed in the '80s. I actually think that it moved into obfuscatory and non-critical work, and I think some of the problems that now beset cultural studies come from that. The emphasis on the encoding/decoding model—which they used—was basically wrong. It was full of flaws. I think it led them into a concern with audiences, and audiences having the ability to make up their own meanings and make up their own worlds. And once you start to go down that road you lose sight of the power structures which exist in society which actually position people. Power structures which relate to what I would see as key issues like ownership and control. They stopped talking about who owns the society or who owns the world; and instead focused on small elements of how people construct and develop their own systems of language and meaning.

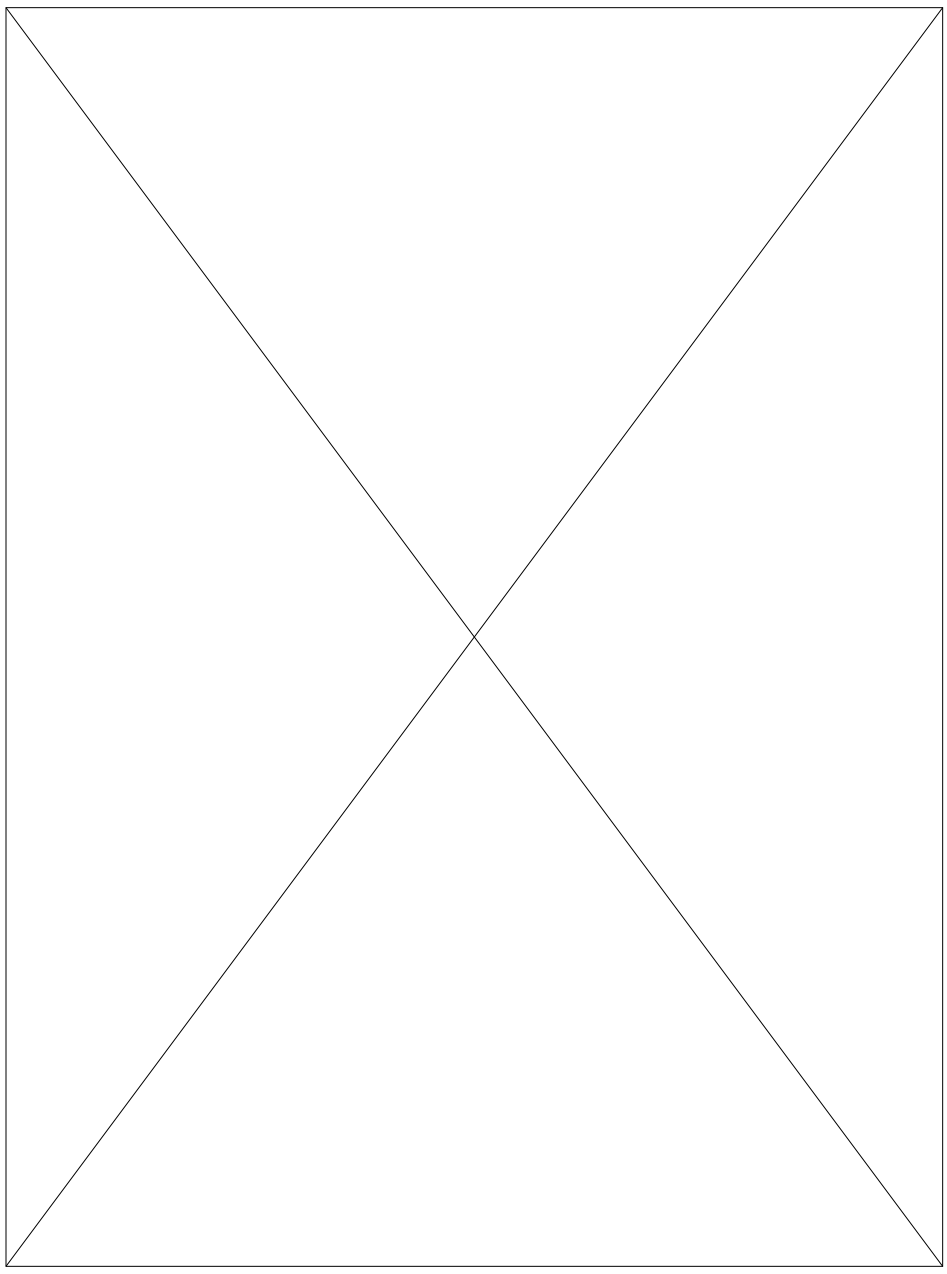
V: There seems to be a division of people who are just interested in a theoretical approach—arriving at some sort of theoretical model, and there's work which I would say is quite polemic. I'm sure that's a big insult for people seeking to be objective. But your work seems to have more of a scientific spirit about it.

GP: I've nothing against theory at all, I've nothing against science—what I'm talking about is abstract theory: theory that proceeds in the absence of any practical empirical critique of the society which we're in. The post-modern turn in social science left people moving away from what I would say is any serious critique—which was empirically evidentially based—of the society which they exist in. *Cultural Compliance (Dead Ends of Media/ Cultural Studies and Social Science)* is very much a critique of what you might call the 'discursive turn' in social science: The move towards the obsession with meanings and meaning construction; without looking at the social practice which position the possibility of action. It moves towards meaning to the detriment of any analysis really, of the conditions under which meaning can become possible.

...Its really quite a long critique, it takes on most of the contemporary theories and theorists in cultural studies. What we did was to say that first of all there have been a series of major changes in the last 20 years: The rise of the market, the free market and deregulation; the release of market forces in the society as a way of disciplining trade unions, as a way of lowering wages, as a way of changing the balance of power in society was pushed through very effectively. But it had a number of very powerful influences in the way in which people related to each other in society, so the influence wasn't just in the workplace—in the sense that there's a change in the shift of power at work, that trade unions were broken, there was a series of strikes which were successfully defeated by the government of the time.



All of those things happened but at the least the market changed our culture as well. It increased the levels of insecurity in our society, it increased the stress levels, it changed the way in which people worked—we brought in part-time contract type labour. That is going to have all sorts of implications for the way people address each other, relate to each other, the sort of clothes people wear, the way people relate to commodities, the way in which conformist dress-styles are likely to increase. Children now all wear the same kind of clothes, very tightly defined dress styles now occupy almost the whole of society. It's not the kind of invention you saw in the '60s and '70s because people are just very conformist. The nervousness and insecurity of society produces those kind of changes.



So what we did was to go through a whole series of material cultural changes that occurred in the last 20 years. And then we said why is it that contemporary cultural studies cannot explain any of these, or is not addressing any of these things? That the actual conduct of children in schools, the way in which they relate to films, the way in which they identify with new kinds of role models—like the characters from *Pulp Fiction*—all sorts of things that we've been doing here—are not being typically done in most of cultural studies. They're actually not looking at the power structure of society, and how that structure is impinging upon tastes, style, what is possible and the everyday lives of most people, the everyday problems that most people confront in their lives. In this country it's that you can't get a job or if it's Africa you can't get water. That everyday culture is not any longer part of most social science studies.

So what has happened? Basically in the '80s the bulk of academia stuck its head in the sand, and went up a very easy road: Which was to go along with the post modern account. Which is to say well we'll focus on small groups of people who in different ways construct their own little worlds for themselves, and we'll see this as a liberating force in society. And in fact they very rarely even looked at what anybody was actually doing because they never got beyond discussing the theoretical implications of that kind of position. If you look at the quotes at the beginning: There's one which is actually a quote from Stuart Hall:

> "The 'discursive turn' in the social and cultural sciences is one of the most significant shifts of direction in our knowledge of society which has occurred in recent years."
> (Introduction to Open University course book on *'Culture, Media and Identities.'* 1997)

Now I have to say we think that's wrong. We follow that with a quote from Raymond Tallis which is:

> "When the emperor is restocking his wardrobe, he usually shops in Paris."

Which is pretty much what we thought was happening—that they simply moved into one after another of a series of increasingly obscure and really pointless academic debates, which I think went from Althusser, to Lacan to Baudrillard, just one after the other of these theorists who were posing these questions at a theoretical level and had no empirical base for what they were saying. If you read Baudrillard's work I mean it is just rubbish. He makes statement after statement about audiences, about beliefs, about what people think in society, about how all the population is deceived by the simulacrum. If you read his book on the Gulf War I mean it is simply rubbish. I mean we studied in detail both the Falklands war and the Gulf war...

V: I've always felt so distrustful of the adulation—this is similar in art theory—with all that kind of stuff. I understood it to be pushed by a lot of film theory people, Colin McCabe from Strathclyde University—it was just so dull...

GP: But it works in a certain way, because it has no empirical base. But the value of that is that you can make outlandish statements which have a sort of...

V: Entertainment value?

GP: A kind of entertainment value, ha, yes! And a kind of happy ring to them. And then people can use them with their students and they're catchy. It's like 'The Medium is The Message' or 'The Global Village'. These are wrong—this is actually not how it works. But the process of actually going through different cultures and finding out what does actually happen in culture and how people did really relate to the Falklands war or really did relate to the Gulf war is very, very complicated. It takes a long time, you've got to interview hundreds of people. It's really bloody hard work. And you can avoid all that by saying 'all of the population is taken in by the simulacrum'.

The first question a real social scientist would ask is: 'do you mean all of the population except you'. How did you escape? Are you the only one who did?' As soon as you start to question the premises of these people their statements all collapse. *Reality is constructed in language, the classic post-modernist philosophical position*: And then you say now that last thing you just said—is that true, or is that just for you, did you just construct that? So what you're actually saying is all reality is constructed in language except what I just said which really, really is true. You see—you go round and round with these crazy circles.

V: Also a lot of this stuff is so based on 'text'.

GP: Exactly.

V: Most people must be able to see through that.

GP: It's great for students you see—actually students hate it—but it has a kind of cachet in teaching because it's easy to do, it can be applied across borders—because you're not actually relating it to anything very special, other than the most general statements about 'this is what the Gulf war was like and this is what happened'. But you're not actually relating it to the different conditions in different countries; there's no point in which Baudrillard for example discusses whether the French press was different from the English or from the Scottish press, or whether American television is the same as British television. Nothing like that—he's quite happy to make statements about how everybody relates to the media without the slightest bit of work on the issues that—actually the media are quite different and audiences are quite different and there are many different audiences within a single national audience. So none of those kinds of issues are discussed. And in a way that's its strength. You can have an all purpose theory which is applied to everybody everywhere and you simply say oh well there's no difference now between reality and its image.

This seems to us to be ridiculous. If Baudrillard dressed up as Napoleon Bonaparte a picture of him would not show the real Bonaparte, ha ha! An image is not the same as what it represents, and that you can't collapse one into the other. And that in order to say that, to even raise those kinds of things you have to have in your own head that there is a clear division between the image and the reality. The sorts of examples they give constantly depend on making the division that they say doesn't exist.

You know the one about how television stories are constructed as news events. So they say for example the timing of bombings is done so it times in with the Nine o'clock News or something like that. The first question we would ask is are you sure that was what was done? You're absolutely clear that this actually really occurred that they actually did time the bombing in this kind of way? So someone's done some empirical research to know that's really what they did. As soon as you tell the audience that's really what they've done—there is an immediate division in the audience's mind between the reality of what they've done and between the image that's been constructed. And of course that happens all the time and audiences do pick those kinds of arguments up. And that's what we find. We find people very distressed at the actions of governments because they start to be aware of these kind of things. Television journalists start to reveal that sort of thing, they start to deconstruct it and to constantly point out the difference between the reality of what's occurring and the image that's attempting to be constructed. To say that it's all one bundle of images and you can't distinguish one from the other is just nonsense.

What seems to be most peculiar was that as the society got worse in material terms, as it created more and more problems for the people who actually lived in it, at the same time cultural studies seemed to be less and less able to actually analyse that or to talk about what was going on

V: You're describing certain academics who have got all this material and are saying we'll just give this to the kids, that'll give them something to do: There's vague amorphous stuff which we can check if you've actually been reading or not. This is very much painting a picture of academia as having just a Bourgeois agenda—and that it always will have, even when they get hold of quite radical stuff—it will always fold back into this...

GP: Yeah that's fair enough, ha ha ha! There's a marvellous quote here from Nick Garnham which describes exactly what you've just been saying. Post modernism was the perfect practice for academics because it came with lots of cheap research opportunities, it in no way challenged anything, you didn't get into any trouble, it didn't require any major movement out of their offices...

He says that the focus on the text, the postmodernist approach:

> "Developed out of literary and film studies and carried its texuality into versions of structuralist and post-structuralist Marxism and on into post-modernism. It took with it the bacillus of romanticism and its longing to escape from the determining material and social constraints of human life, from what is seen as the alienation of human essence,

> into a world of unanchored, non-referential signification and the free play of desire...It is also perfectly designed as an ideology of intellectuals or cultural workers for it privileges their special field of activity, the symbolic, and provides for cheap research opportunities, since the only evidence required is the unsubstantiated views of the individual analyst."

What you find is this odd combination where you have a complete relativism in what is being taught to students combined with an absolute demand that they toe the line. If people come round and say what about material structures or...this is just dismissed as oh that's old fashioned. This is what you have: a movement through intellectual fashions. And I do think the Birmingham school were terribly susceptible to that, not just them, a lot of cultural studies moved in that direction. But it left it in the end unable to address the everyday life of most people in the world.

There's a section of the book called *'Critical Journalists and Silent Academics'*—which is saying that the great bulk of critical work done in the 80s was not done by academics at all. There are one or two people at it, but the actual analysis of power all but disappears and is not a fundable area—so we find the whole of the '80s, if you look at research councils, the way in which funds were given out, it was very difficult to do any kind of research that was critical at all. If you wanted to, for example, investigate even something like the relationship between unemployment and ill health: very difficult to do—to get funds for it. It was a kind of area which would be almost impossible to fund through normal research-type channels because it would be regarded as an absolute no-no, a very politically difficult thing to look at. And you can imagine how much trouble we had when we wanted to look at Northern Ireland, when we did all that work on the broadcasting ban. We had to do that entirely out of our own resources, people were working for free.

V: What I've never understood about that was when Thatcher banned the BBC from reporting, all the independent journalists just fell into line, they just complied with the ban. What power has the government got over independent journalists? With the Independent network why did it comply?

GP: Fear. That's the main issue. I think they are much more tightly controlled than people imagine. 'I've spoken to some friends on the *Sunday Times*: They were talking about short-term contracts, how quickly people just get tossed out if your face doesn't fit, if you do something wrong. People like Andrew Neil who you would not see as a radical by any means was hoofed out of the *Sunday Times* because of the story on Malaya and the dam. If somebody like Andrew Neil can go well what about the lesser mortals. This friend who was on the *Sunday Times* was saying to me that it's like Watership Down working here—people just disappear, you look around and someone else has gone.

V: Would you say what is happening In the Glasgow media group is unique...it was hardly really taken up as a model throughout the country was it?

GP: I think it was used a lot by journalists. I think we are closer in that sense to the practice of journalism, we are contacted as a source of information, because we're the ones who have done the empirical work, there's so few people doing it and they keep coming to us...there's a few people, we're not the only ones. There's people in Leicester, in Loughborough (Peter Golding), James Curran in Goldsmiths, in Liverpool. There are quite a number of people who are in the same tradition as us on empirical work on the media.

V: I'd like to ask about the development of your research methodology...

GP: First of all we started with the study of television news—we looked at the content of it, we did a very big study of the news and what was available in terms of explanation. Then we started quite quickly to move into production processes. One of the first studies was *'From Buerk to Band Aid'*. We started to look at the conditions under which stories became stories and who made decisions and what the basis of the decisions being made were and things like that. And the difference really between the media's version of how wonderful they were in covering such an issue and what had actually occurred if you look at it—the cack-handed series of accidents...

V: Yeah it almost never got shown...

GP: Absolutely, if Mohammed Amin hadn't have gone and met Buerk at the airport you would more or less not have had the whole Live Aid thing. The point that we made in that particular case, was that the story was turned down by most of the media. It was 'just a new famine.' They were really quite shocked at the public response to it. So we continued with a lot of work on production, interviewing people about particular stories.

David Millar came to work with us in I think about '85/6. He started to work for the Media Group then later formally in the Media Unit. He pioneered all the work on Northern Ireland. We had done some work on Northern Ireland before, but David did a PhD on it and then later published a book *'Don't Mention the War'*. He worked in areas of production processes and began to look at audiences as well. Just before that I had started to move into audience work—so I did the Miner's strike stuff. Apart from theoretical and academic interest, it just seemed to me to be a crucial issue to show how the media did in fact inform public opinion; we couldn't go on just doing content studies we had at some point to say well look it does make a difference. So I interviewed a large amount of people up and down the country with the intention of seeing whether it was possible to show in a definitive way what the power of a media message was.

It seemed to me that all of the previous studies had not been able to do this because—I don't want to be too rude about people, ha ha ha—they had not managed to identify very clearly what the impact of specific messages were on audience beliefs or understanding. That was the problem—they had a blunderbuss approach. They would use divisions like heavy watchers and light watchers. It's not very clear how you draw a line between a heavy watcher and a light watcher. Then they would say heavy watchers are more scared of the dark, or more scared of strangers, or more scared of being attacked in the street. You weren't clear whether they'd actually watched violent programmes or which programmes they watched. So there was a lot of work which seemed to me to be not very methodologically adequate.

There was also a lot of work which had relied upon showing people a video or a television programme and trying to measure whether there was any difference in their beliefs. It was very difficult to work out what the contamination was—all the other possible factors which they could be bringing to bear on that. Anyway you were putting people into very artificial situations, by forcing them to watch something which otherwise they would not have watched.

So all of those things seemed to me to be wrong. What we did was to develop a method which turned all that on its head; and said the first thing we've got to do is empty people's minds of what they already know. The way to do that is to give them a very minimal stimulus and to get them to write the programme. Then you can find out what's already in their head about that particular issue. Then the next step is to take apart all the things they've written and to work out what the sources were. But tie it to very distinct and very measurable issues which are new so that you can date the entry of this information into the public arena. That was why the Miner's strike was so good because there was a whole range of new information which was coming in: Like 'Miner's pickets are violent', things like that, which have never really been in the public area before that or been associated with violence.

One of the things we did was to give photographs and tell them to write [a headline]. What we found was that people could reproduce actual headlines from the strike—over a year after it had taken place. These lines—almost word for word—the juxtapositions of the failure of the strike and the apparent increase in violence were very deeply rooted in people's minds. We then traced the source of people's beliefs and we found huge differences between people who had any kind of experience of the strike, even at the level of a solicitor driving to work in the morning and who would go past a picket line: His vision of it was completely different from anyone who had got their ideas from television news. That sort of person would say 'oh... they just lay about on the grass all day'. Ha ha ha! While people down in St. Albans or something—who'd never seen a picket line were terrified of even meeting a miner in case they were set upon! We showed very clearly that this had occurred.

Siting Belfast:

Maeve Connolly

Context, Audience and the Symbolic Economy of the City

Belfast recently played host to several high-profile touring exhibitions, as well as a season of prestigious contemporary opera, dance and theatre productions, all courtesy of the 'Festival at Queens'. The participation of Yoko Ono, David Byrne, Philip Glass and Bill Viola helped to secure the Festival's position in the "premiership of world class culture".1 The international selectors of the 'Perspective Exhibition' (October/November 1998) at Belfast's Ormeau Baths Gallery also displayed a concern with the placing of the city on the 'world scene'.

'Perspective '98' was the first of the Ormeau Baths' proposed annual open submission competitions, aiming to "highlight the diversity and quality of contemporary visual art practice".2 It was followed in November by the city-wide project 'Resonate' which in some ways functioned as the antithesis of the gallery-based exhibition; an artist-led initiative incorporating a website, a touring artwork and a series of site-specific interventions. Criticism of 'Perspective '98' has tended to focus on the paradigmatic opposition between the curated show and the artist-initiated project. Reviewer Derval Fitzgerald, writing in Circa, notes that the "artist-run project in Belfast was set up, at least in part, to supersede the kind of send-in competition/ exhibition of which 'Perspective' is a (slightly) updated version".3

The 'Resonate' project, unlike 'Perspective '98', appears to privilege the local rather than the international context, through its emphasis on site-specific art practice. However despite the frequent labelling of artist-run projects as 'alternative' or 'oppositional' it is apparent that no model can be regarded as inherently unproblematic. In this article, it is perhaps more useful to address each in terms of its relation to what Sharon Zukin terms the 'Symbolic Economy of the City'; "[the] intertwining of cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital".4 Zukin has focused primarily on the development of 'place entrepreneurship' in New York City but her emphasis on the role of visual culture and artists in framing urban space is increasingly pertinent in the European context.

Zukin emphasises that the symbolic economy operates at several levels. Cities, she claims, have always manipulated "symbolic languages of inclusion and entitlement", a phrase which clearly takes on particular resonance within the Belfast context. She suggests however that modern cities also owe their existence to a more abstract economy devised by 'place entrepreneurs' and the related activities of a 'patrician class' whose "ability to deal with the symbols of growth yields 'real' results in real estate development, new businesses and jobs".5 Within the national and global market this symbolic economy speaks for and represents, the city.

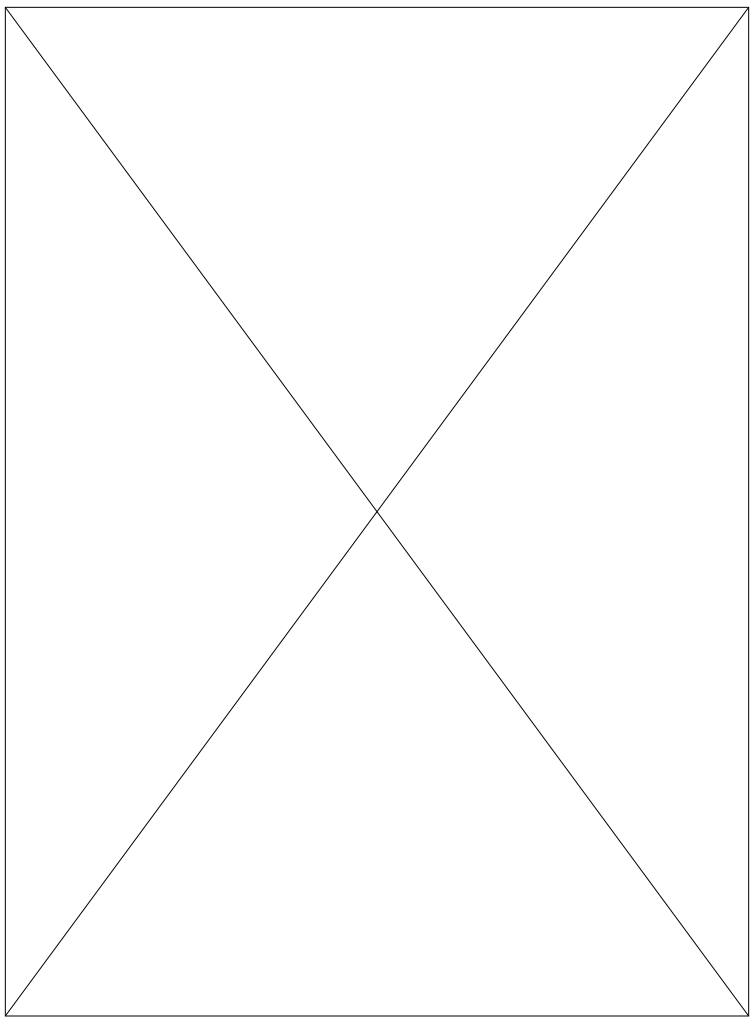
The redevelopment of Belfast's Cathedral Quarter by Laganside Corporation, like the transformation of Dublin's Temple Bar, provides an almost text book example of such 'place entrepreneurship'. Laganside (according to the official website) aims to secure the regeneration of the city with the participation of local communities, and to develop a "positive international image of Belfast" leading to "increased investment, visitors and tourists".6 Plans for the Cathedral Quarter include "residential accommodation, cultural facilities, shops restaurants, bars and areas of open space". The recent Laganside-sponsored Fringe Festival 'Live in Cathedral Quarter' celebrated the corporation's role in the area's "cultural and artistic renaissance".7

Laganside's plans to redevelop the Cathedral Quarter may be linked to the fact that the area includes several 'alternative' exhibition spaces, such as Catalyst Arts, the Clear Spot Gallery and the Community Arts Forum. As yet however Laganside have no specific plans to build facilities for artists, focusing instead on the improvement of public space through the provision of 'street furniture'. In an examination of the gentrification of New York's Lower East Side, Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan emphasise the fact that the presence of 'pioneering' artists in an otherwise economically depressed area places it on the road to gentrification.8 Their work has highlighted the art world's crucial role in the displacement of blue-collar communities from the city. The regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter cannot be categorised in quite this way but the work of Deutsche and Ryan does expose a relationship between the artist, place entrepreneurship and the increasingly symbolic economy of the city.

Survey shows, such as 'Perspective,' also play a part in the symbolic economy, contributing to the promotion of the city as a cultural capital. 'Perspective '98', as I have already suggested, positions contemporary practice in relation to the 'world scene'. Hugh Mulholland, exhibition director of the Ormeau Baths, acknowledged the importance of the international panel in his introduction to the catalogue; "having an international panel travel to Belfast to select Perspective is crucial if the exhibition is to contribute to a wider debate around contemporary visual art".9 The international curators were thus over-valued specifically for their perspective as outsiders. In his catalogue essay Paul Hedge expresses the hope that 'Perspective' "may contribute to the discovery and assistance of many artists that turned [sic] out to be important on the world scene".10 He goes on to compare Belfast with other regions which are "in geography and character NOT LONDON".11 Dr. Slavka Sverakova, another selector, is even more 'cautious' in her definition of the regional context, acknowledging the "slippery character of the idea of a context".12

Overall 'Perspective '98' set out to celebrate variety; "a mix of work, which represents many of the ideas current within contemporary visual art practice". The curators set themselves the task of providing audiences with access to a broad spectrum of current art practice within the domain of the gallery. As Louise Dompierre states "many of the works that captured our imagination were intent on generating new, broader and perhaps easier dialogues between art and its audiences".13 According to Dompierre the curators "developed a non-linear narrative of forms, ideas and emotions".14 In practice however the exhibition format could be said to have encouraged a rather linear reading of the works on display. Many visitors followed the guidelines of the gallery handout, progressing from 'Gallery One' through to 'Gallery Four' in the correct order, reading the explanatory notes on each artwork.

Each of the numbered galleries appeared to display works which shared thematic or formal concerns. In some instances this was a successful strategy; encouraging the interplay of ideas and extra-textual references. Eamon O'Kane's digitally altered 'Wederland' cityscapes, Russell Hart's pseudo-documentary photograph entitled 'I want to believe but...' and Andrew Vickery's model 'Theatre' all worked particularly well together. Many of the works in this section of the gallery explored the relationships between memory, fantasy and narrative, often utilising photography. In this context the snapshot documentation of Fiona Larkin's prize-winning performance piece 'The Sand-Bagged Arse' seemed somewhat out of place. Dan Shipsides' 'The Stone Bridge', another performance piece, suffered from superfluous video documentation. Approaching the gallery as a hostile terrain, Shipsides climbed across one wall, leaving a series of footholds and scrapes marks, exploring the notion of the artist as 'pioneer' or ground-breaker.



Graham Fagen

Works displayed in 'Gallery Three' were more concerned with the language of the museum. Mary McIntyre's large scale photograph 'The Grand and the Mean' foregrounded framing as means of fixing cultural value. Prize-winner Blaise Drummond's 'Untitled History Paintings' utilised the techniques of fine art to explore the common territory shared by imperialism and cultural tourism. 'Thoughts and Second Thoughts' by Mark Dale consisted of a series of painted fragments contained within two sets of ornate moulding, inviting the viewer, according to the handout, "to actively engage with the work, making

new compositions from the available sections". The critique of exhibitionary practices, evident in the work of Drummond, Dale and McIntyre, exposes the relationship between museum culture and the maintenance of class distinctions.

'Perspective '98' sought to display a full spectrum of contemporary art practice, within the gallery. The exhibition thus featured two installation pieces. Ruth Jones' 'On Mercury the Days are Longer than the Years', incorporated a drinking fountain and investigated biological rhythms. Susan Philipsz's atmospheric sound and light installation 'Alone is not Lonely', was positioned in the stairwell. Both pieces functioned effectively in their respective sites but the inclusion and the positioning of this work could be read as a attempt to incorporate 'site-specific' work within the domain of the survey show without any real degree of commitment to this type of art practice. Overall 'Perspective '98' succeeded in displaying diversity but the exhibition format tended to efface contradictions between the works rather than promote debate.

The 'Resonate' project, organised by Susan Philipsz and Eoghan McTigue under the title of 'Grassy Knoll Productions', featured a total of seven site-specific artworks at various locations throughout the city. The project, according to the press release, aimed "to raise questions relating to the profile of, and possible function for contemporary art beyond the gallery space, and ultimately to the role of the artist in the city". The brief for artists was simply to choose a functioning environment within the city and to make a piece of work in that context.15

In a discussion of several public art projects, including 'Resonate', Circa reviewer Aidan Dunne emphasised the usual problems associated with site-specificity; "weaving arts into the fabric of day-to-day life is a process fraught with problems... When you go into a gallery you know if it's in there it must be art but out in the wild, who knows?"16 Projects such as 'Resonate' often succeed in placing the issues of context and audience on the critical agenda for reviewers, simply through problematising access, despite the fact that these issues are sometimes side-stepped by the work.

Although the 'Resonate' organisers/ participants are mostly Belfast-based, there was an international dimension to the project. French curator Guy Tortosa, who has widely espoused this type of public art practice, was invited by the organisers to give a public talk during the Belfast Festival, Tortosa's speech, which centred on his experience of curating 'EV+A' in Limerick in 1996, explicitly promoted the regional or peripheral context as an appropriate site for experimentation by established international artists. Tortosa categorised the relationship between the 'provinces' and the mainstream as a process of 'exchange', thus problematising the construction of the peripheral as a 'pure' or 'alternative' space.

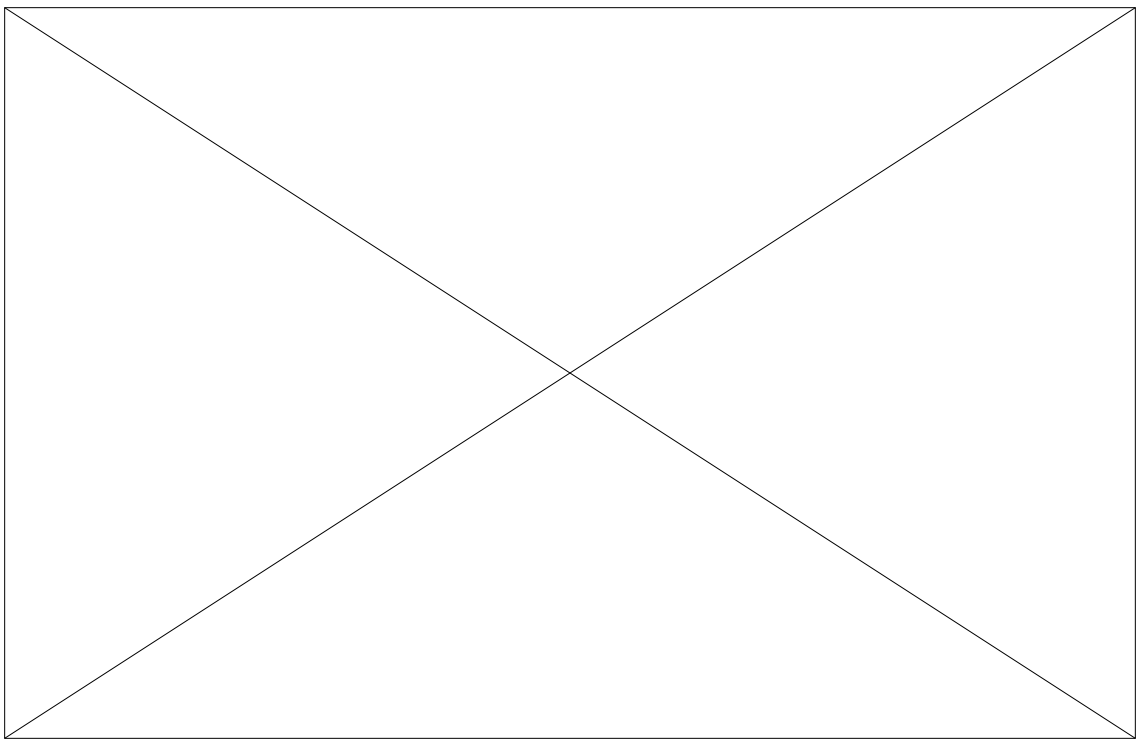
Careful choice of environment was arguably the key factor in the success of the project as many of the interventions were decidedly modest in scale. Graham Fagan's drawing of 'Belfast as World Garden', a rather child-like map of the city could easily have been mistaken for a school project. However its placement in the Victorian palmhouse at the Botanic Gardens linked the process of mapping with both imperialism and contemporary tourism.

Susan Philipsz's 'Filter', accapella versions of pop songs played over the sound system at Laganside Buscentre, was both evocative and eerie. Philipsz succeeded in creating a tension between those positioned as the audience for the piece as many of those listening to the 'Filter' were unable to determine its source. Mary McIntyre's mobile billboard piece 'Home', which toured the city, featured ambiguous domestic images. This work played with conventional definitions of private and public arena, and functioned as an antidote to the slick billboard images of Yoko Ono and David Byrne (displayed in Belfast during the Festival).

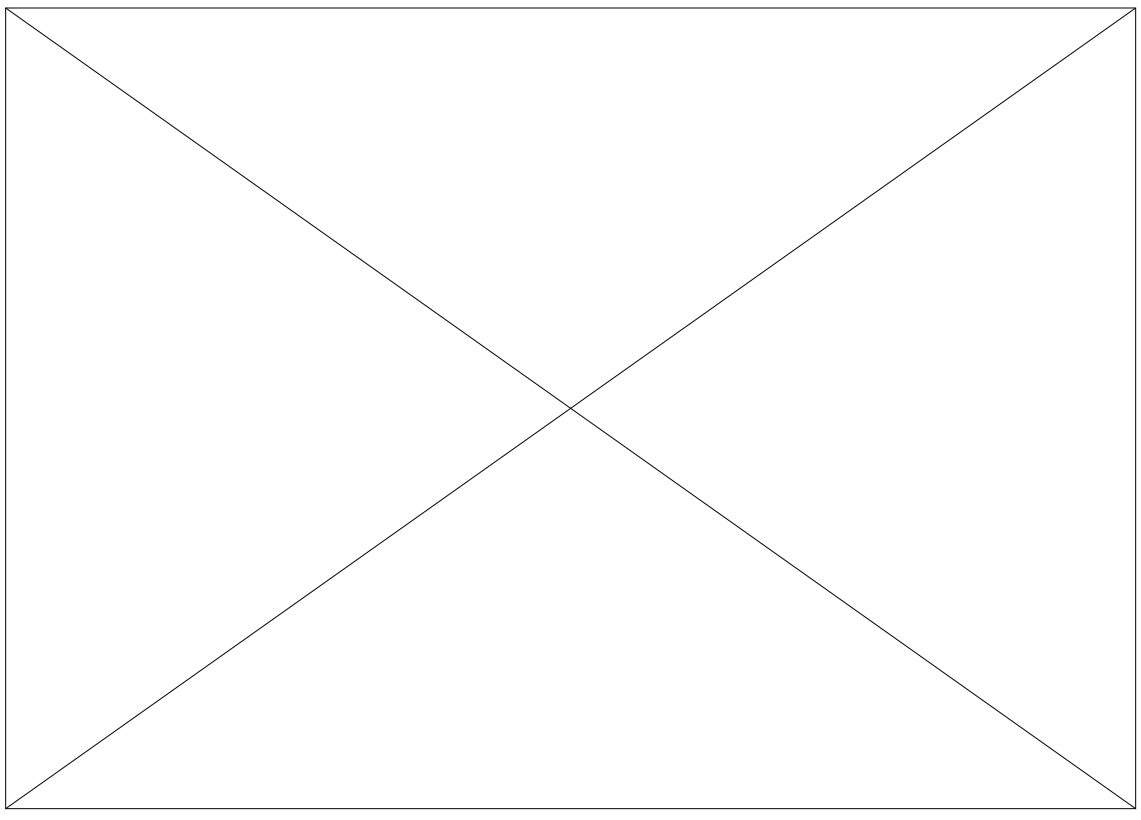
Karen Vaughn's 'Untitled' was a barely noticeable intervention, consisting of a grey painted band, painted at waist height on the facade of a building on Castle Street. This work (which drew attention to the subsidence of the building) hinted at the complex relationship between the artist and the city. The notion that cycles of decay, redevelopment and renewal are somehow 'natural' has been critiqued by several urban theorists, including Deutsche and Zukin.17 No one could mistake the destruction of sections of Belfast city centre, occurring at various points during the last thirty years, as a 'natural process' of urban decay. However the role that artists and artists' initiatives, even those which appear to function outside the 'mainstream', play in the re-imagining and re-presentation of the city, still requires critical interrogation.

The 'Resonate' project, incorporated into the Belfast Festival, formed part of a series of high-profile events designed to promote the city as a world-class cultural capital and several of the 'Resonate' sites were well-known tourist landmarks (such as the Botanic Gardens, Queens University and the Linenhall Library). 'Resonate' was thus ideally positioned to explore the re-construction of the city as tourist destination but, although the project placed the role of the artist in the city on the critical agenda, many of the works stopped short of addressing problematic issues, such as urban regeneration.

Cultural practices such as 'Perspective '98' and 'Resonate', although they appear to function as opposing paradigms, play a significant part in the re-presentation of the city. Several of the artists participating in both projects did attempt to investigate the workings of, and their place within, this process. It is apparent that both the site-specific project and the survey show provide opportunities for contextual art practices. Work which actively engages with the production of meaning, whether inside or outside the gallery, can contribute to a much-needed critical interrogation of the artist's role in the symbolic economy.



Mary McIntyre



Susan Philipsz

notes

1 'Belfast Festival at Queens' Programme introduction, p. 1.

2 Ormeau Baths Gallery Programme, July/October 1998.

3 Fitzgerald, Derval, Circa 86, p. 59. Fitzgerald notes the fact that many of the selected artists have participated in the activities of 'Catalyst Arts, Orchid Studios et al.'. Three Belfast-based artists (Theo Sims, Mary McIntyre and Susan Philipsz) have contributed to both 'Perspective' and 'Resonate'.

4 Zukin, Sharon, 'The Cultures of Cities', (Cambridge, Mass.,: Blackwell) 1995, p. 3.

5 Ibid., p. 7.

6 Laganside website.

7 'Fringe Festival' (November 10-28) Programme Foreword, p. 1.

8 Deutsche, Rosalyn and Ryan, Cara Gendel, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', October 31, 1984.

9 Mulholland, Hugh, 'Perspective '98' Exhibition Catalogue Introduction.

10 Hedge Paul, 'Perspective '98' Catalogue Essay.

11 Ibid.

12 Sverakova, Slavka, 'Perspective '98' Catalogue Essay.

13 Dompierre, Louise, 'Perspective '98' Catalogue Essay.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview with Susan Philipsz and Eoghan McTigue, SSI Newsletter, January/ February 1999, p.11.

16 Dunne, Aidan, Circa 86, p. 5.

17 See Deutsche, Rosalyn, 'Evictions', (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996) and Zukin, Sharon, 'Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change', (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982)

Comic & zine reviews

Mark Pawson

Original 1960s underground cartoonist Justin Green makes a living these days plying his craft as a signwriter in California. **Justin Green's Sign Game** is a collection of single-page strips that have appeared in *Signs of The Times*, the professional signwriters' monthly magazine, over the last decade. Green obviously enjoys his work both sign painting and cartooning and it shows, these strips manage to combine the practical—technical hints, tricks of the trade, safety warnings, small business advice and typography lessons—with anecdotes on how to deal with and extract payment from clients, flamboyant self-promotion schemes, and diatribes against the universally hated vinyl lettering. The onslaught of computer generated lazer-cut vinyl lettering in dull typestyles is held responsible for a decline in work for traditional signwriters. The **Sign Game** obviously has a devoted readership in the sign industry—many strips are based on tips and stories sent in by readers.

The *"Story of O"* strip, about the endless quest for a perfect letter 'O', comes closer to his earlier neurosis-soaked mystical tinged stories in *"Sacred and Profane"* and *"Binky Brown meets the Holy Virgin Mary"*.

This collection is extremely obscure—I don't think it's had any publicity or distribution outside the signwriting trade, and is incredibly difficult to get hold of. I eventually got one mailorder from the U.S., but it's worth the effort. Ostensibly just a collection of comic strips about signpainting **Justin Green's Sign Game** is an massively enjoyable oddity from a cartoonist who never really fits in anywhere.

Looking back over a pile of previous issues of Chris Ware's **The Acme Novelty Library** I realised that the main reason I'd bought them was because they looked so interesting. I'd cherished them for a couple of weeks before getting round to actually reading the stories, they really are sumptuous visual novelties first and foremost, top-grade Eye Candy to be sure—and should be enjoyed as such!

I like the way **The Acme Novelty Library** seems to change names with each issue, employing a library of subtitles which dominate the front covers of successive issues, *"Big Book of Jokes"*, *"Jimmy Corrigan—The Smartest Kid on Earth"*. For issue #11 we're treated to an alternate spelling, *"Novelties"* instead of *"Novelty"*, which crawls around the spine so that it can't be properly seen from either side. I like **The Acme Novelty Library**'s use of different types of paper within an issue and its fluctuating page size and cover price. I like the sumptuous palettes of colour chosen for each story individually. I like the pages of small ads and line upon line of pedantic small print, explanations and exhortations. I like the detailed paper cut-out models of robots and spaceships. I like everything about **The Acme Novelty Library** apart from the stories, they're just a bit too sad and mean spirited, not just occasionally, but persistently, issue after issue, maybe now I've realised why I prefer just looking at it to reading it. Can we expect **The Acme Cruelty Library** next issue?

Top Notch Comics #1 has got me puzzled, and I don't like it, this is so similar in *every* respect to **The Acme Novelty Library**—same publisher, same price, same city of origin, very similar name, similar size and format, mean spirited Father & Son story, mean spirited Robot strip, paper cut-outs, duotone print, spoof adverts and patterned endpapers, that it's impossible to tell if it's an elaborate self-parody of **Acme Novelty Library** by Chris Ware himself, (it's probably the kind of thing he would do, but given the gargantuan amount of work that goes into each issue of **Acme**, it's hard to believe he'd have the time) or a comic so wholly inspired by **Acme** that it comes across as a *"School of Acme Novelty"* title.

Either way it's an impressive exercise but kinda pointless. Much, much worse than any of the above it *looks like it was done on a computer*—aaarrrgggghhh.

Measles, Teddy & Comic Book are *"Comics for Kids of All Ages"*. In the **Measles** anthology, the best strips are the first two, *Venus* by Gilbert *"Love & Rockets"* Hernandez and Jim *"Jim/ Frank"* Woodring's *Little Frogs*. Both deal with subjects in a light and happy way, everybody, particularly the little frogs, ends up happy in the end, as indeed they should in kids comics.

In Hernandez's strip, Venus introduces herself proclaiming "I love Comic Books! So what?" Later on her way home from the comic shop, in a comics-induced reverie, she takes a forbidden shortcut home, and in what must be a comics-industry first scares off a possible stalker (or is he just looking for a lost dog?) with a superduper loud fart! I hope that copies of **Measles** will be included in *The Sun's* "Free Books For Schools" scheme...

In Jim Woodring's *Little Frogs*, Hippy chicklet Aloris subtly persuades two pesky boys against harvesting baby frogs by pelting them with the decomposing body of a massive dead toad that she finds nearby!

The anthology format is always problematic, there just isn't space in 28 pages to develop a coherent style and identity, and for readers to avoid the "Well I paid £2 for this and half the comics are crap, so I feel cheated out of half my money" feeling. I like Steven *"yikes"* Weismann and Rick *"Doofus"* Altergott's work, but they should both get back to their own comics, where they belong.

Teddy faces repeated hassles from the unemployment office for just being a teddy and not having a job. When things get really bad and they're starving, Jean-Pierre, Teddy's cat, decides it's time to utilise his predatory instinct and go find some mice to eat, not expecting his intended victims to be quite so well trained in modern crisis management techniques, the mice decide to help Jean-Pierre by sneaking into a printers and pinching several thousand vouchers for free pots of yogurt! Another delightful story has Jean-Pierre escaping a boring Saturday night a home with his owner by pinching Teddy's cigarettes and slinking off to the cathouse, to guzzle as much milk as he can in the company of dancing felines and accordion-playing tabbies.

After the frustrating but financially rewarding trauma of having his previous characters *Ren and Stimpy* removed from his control John Kricfalusi vowed to go it alone. In *Spümco's* oversized, high-intensity colour **Comic Book** we're presented with John K's latest deranged characters, *Jimmy the Idiot Boy*, and *George Liquor* his all-american huntin'n'fishin uncle. We see Jimmy feeding scabs to the squirrels, and together with George spanking a sassy fish, with other bonkers adventures just too ludicrous to attempt describing in print. With their animated cartoons (you can watch at <www.spumco.com>) and merchandising (dolls, skateboards and animation cel painting kits), George and Jimmy are much more worthy of your attention than those *South Park* guys—a sad waste of plastic, they should be thankful if every *South Park* toy in the world was melted down to be made into *Jimmy the Idiot Boy*'s incontinence knickers!

Jack Chick's tracts are palm-of-your-hand sized religious rants in comic book form, I've accumulated a collection of 12 over the years but have no idea where these mysterious publications came from, handed out in the street or picked up off seats on the bus? Dan Raeburn got to wondering about them and dug a bit deeper, **The Imp?** a 64 page overgrown monster of a tract is the result of his hideous fascination with this series of candy-coloured hate literature/soul savers.

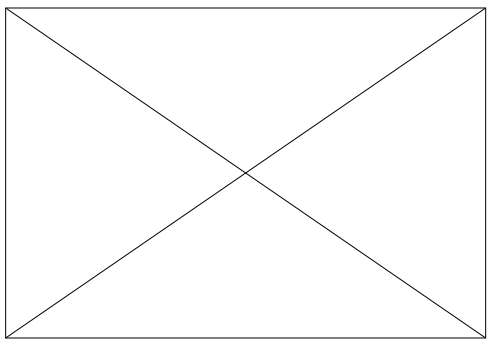
In the 1960's Jack Chick decided that his mission was to spread his rabidly anti Roman Catholic, anti pretty much everything else, religious views and chose the microsized comic book format as the most appropriate method to do this, using powerful images, persuasive language and an accessible, cheap format—he's since distributed over 400 million tracts worldwide.

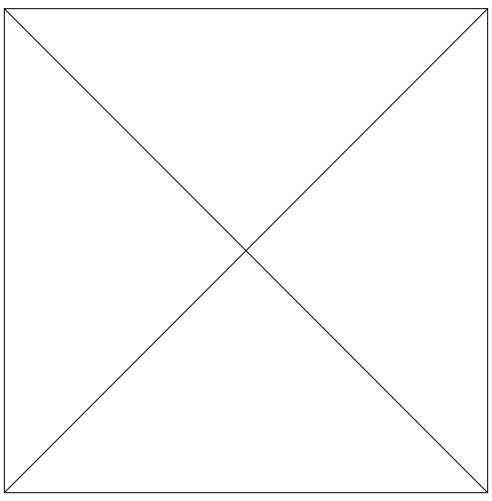
Dan Raeburn's read them all, well over 120 different titles actually, his extended essay examines Chick's perverse take on theology and hateful obsessions. **The Imp?** delights in damning Chick with his own words and pictures and provides a concordance-reference list of themes and characters for those wishing to study the tracts further. If you've ever been puzzled when one of these mysterious tracts has fallen into your hands, you owe it to yourself to get a copy of **The Imp?** and find out more.

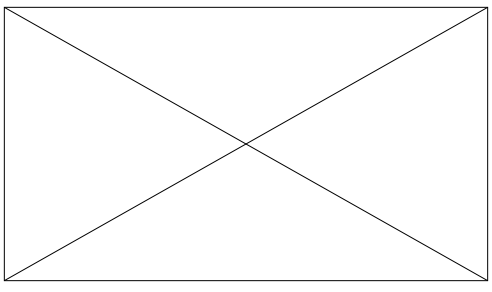
Peter Bagge sometimes seems to have more fun doing occasional one-shot mini comics than his regular title, the recently deceased **Hate**. **Donna's Day** is a great little slice of life 16 pager following the repeated ups and downs of slackerette *Donna Day*. Publisher *Slab-O-Concrete's* new "missive device" format, a postcard-comic hybrid, solves the problem of what to do after you've read the comic in a couple of minutes—write your message inside, stick a stamp on the back and send it to a friend. My copy will be staying exactly where it is though, carefully filed next to Bagge's thoroughly reprehensible and totally enjoyable *Testosterone City*.

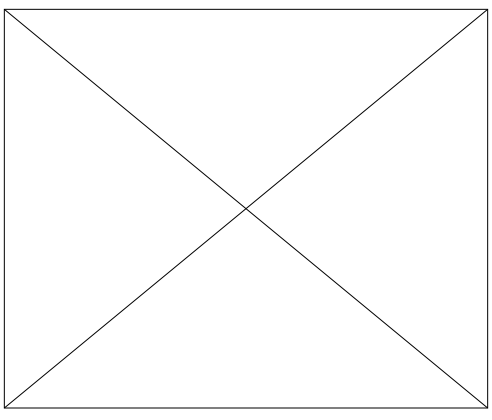
Tiki News excavates the legacy of the 1950's vogue for Hawaiian/Polynesian culture, looking at artifacts of the craze that originated in California and spread worldwide. Editor Otto von Stroheim has assembled a globetrotting team of lounge-bar archaeologists, these committed cocktail tasters travel to the world's major cities revisiting ancient tribal sites—Tiki bars deep in the bowels of hotels, or currently languishing as strip joints, it seems that most major cities in Europe and the US have surviving Tiki-themed bars.

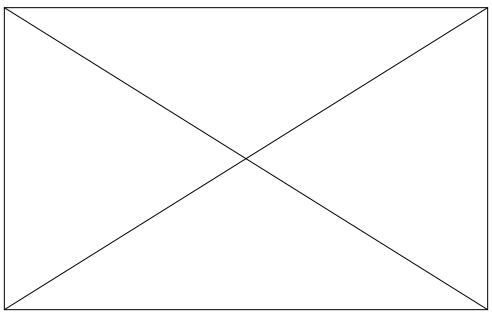
Issue #14 is the *Exotica Erotica* issue and has serious fun examining the many and varied representations of exotic dusky maidens











presented for consumption in the West, Illustrated with collections of Velvet Paintings, Hawaiian shirts, Record Sleeve Artwork, Restaurant decor Menus, matchbooks, tacky tourist souvenirs, carvings and waitresses themselves! **Tiki News** shows the artifacts that were created to satisfy consumer demand for exotic fantasies and forbidden desires.

Infiltration—"the zine about going places you're not supposed to go", is the underground journal of alternative urban exploration, all about exploring hidden, forbidden parts of our urban environment-subways, rail tunnels, storm drains, catacombs and other supposedly off-limits structures. Editor Ninja, and the enthusiasts who contribute to the zine, seem to locate and access these places pretty easily.

With minimal design and plenty of atmospheric murky photographs, each issue is a collection of factual accounts. It's particularly impressive that Ninja is so committed to his hobby (sport?) that he plans his holidays around illicit tunnel tourism, meeting up with catacombs explorers in Paris, but feeling slightly less adventurous in Milan after seeing submachine gun toting police and security guards everywhere.

I like the subversive, yet responsible tone of Infiltration, it's clear that careful planning and precautions are necessary in potentially dangerous spaces, one issue is full of tales of getting caught, and offers practical advice on what to do if security guards find you—play dumb and say sorry seems to be the best strategy!

At first glance both **Infiltration** and **Tiki News** seem incredibly narrowly focussed, you can't help wondering if there's enough material to fill 30 A5 pages of a zine, let alone a dozen or more issues about Tiki Bars or Old tunnels, yet for me this is where the success and strengths of both these zines lies, in focussing on a highly specific, obscure yet accessible area of contemporary culture and covering it well, with the editors enthusiasm showing through and thus attracting good contributors.

CONTACTS

JUSTIN GREEN'S SIGN GAME, 80pgs, ST publications, USA, available in UK from Disinfotainment £10.95 inc p/p

ACME NOVELTIES LIBRARY #11 $4.50, TOP NOTCH COMICS#1 $4.50 and MEASLES#1 $2.95, Fantagraphics, USA, both $4.50, should all be available from any decent comic shop

THE IMP? 64pgs, $6.00 inc p/p, Chaplain Dan Raeburn, 1454 W Summerdale 2C, chicago IL 60640 USA. Available in UK for £4.00 inc p/p from Disinfotainment

JACK CHICK Tracts may or may not be available in your local Christian bookshop
Jack Chick Website: <www.chick.com.>

DONNA'S DAY, 20pgs, £1.50 inc p/p, Slab-O-Concrete, PO Box 148, Hove, BN3 3DQ-ask for their catalogue of other fine comics

TEDDY by Virginie, 48pgs, Bill, Luc vandewalle bruggestraat 11, 8755 Ruiselde, belgium in Uk £3.50 inc p/p from Slab-O-Concrete

SPÜMCO COMIC BOOK, Dark Horse Comics, $5.95, might still be available...

INFILTRATION, 24pgs, $2.00 inc p/p , Infiltration, PO Box 66069, Town Centre PO, Pickering, ON, L1V 6P7 Canada
Website: <www.infiltration.org.>
Available in UK for £1.50 inc p/p from Disinfotainment

TIKI NEWS, 40pgs, $3.00 inc p/p Schwarz Grafiken
2215-R Market Street #177, SF, CA-94114, USA
in UK £2 inc p/p from Disinfotainment

DISINFOTAINMENT
— mailorder catalogue P.O.Box 664, London, E3 4QF

WEBSITE; <www.mpawson.demon.co.uk>

Marshall Anderson

Another story of art development

According to Bob McGilvray, consultant director of Dundee Public Arts Programme, the idea of an arts centre for Dundee originated in the printmakers' workshop and associated gallery organisation in the Seagate in 1986. McGilvray could not say from whose actual lips this idea sprung. It must have issued forth from the wellhead of group wisdom. An arts centre, a greater ideal, would provide them with a more prestigious stage to improve their position within the city, and most importantly, might extend the range of facilities for artists independent of the art college.

Dundee Printmakers Workshop Ltd & Seagate Gallery had little money. Its rent and running costs were paid by the District Council (DC) and Scottish Arts Council (SAC). In order to drive forward their arts centre initiative they had to interest parties with more money. Pieda, an Edinburgh-based arts consultancy, was commissioned to produce a feasibility report but, in the words of McGilvray, "It was a waste of money. They sent along some office junior who hadn't a clue."

The Scottish Development Agency was then asked to contribute to another feasibility study. This time a consultant, Tim Jacobs, did the honours. I have not been able to find a copy of what was entitled, Jacobs' Intrinsic Strategy. It was published sometime between 1989 and 1991 and cost between £15k and £25k. It was trashed. McGilvray told me that Jacobs had been asked to examine three likely sites to develop as an arts centre: A vacant building next to the Repertory Theatre, a vacant lot behind Dock Street, and the Seagate Gallery building itself. Jacobs' vision was to cost £600,000 per year to operate. As far as the DC was concerned his figures did not 'stack up'. They were certainly not prepared to invest such a sum in art at that time. The vision was impracticable and was summarily forgotten. The feasibility study was assigned to wastepaper-bins throughout the city. Hence its subsequent rarity. Maybe in years to come these products of '90s culture will be seen as works of art in their own right and become highly collectable.

Bob McGilvray was highly regarded as an artist by his peers. He painted the first two public murals in Dundee, which were commissioned by the DC under pressure from SAC who paid McGilvray's fee. He had become a part-time lecturer at Duncan of Jordanstone (DoJ) and was the director of an initiative called the Dundee Public Arts Programme. He was an obvious and popular choice of artists' leader.

Originally McGilvray was paid as the Exhibitions Organiser and shared the work of running the Seagate Gallery with Ann Ross, the part-time administrator. During this time the Board of Directors was being chaired by Jonathan Bryant whose vice-chair was Steve Grimmond. The Board was still actively pursuing the dream of an arts centre as being a natural progression of Seagate Gallery and its stablemate, the printmakers' workshop. However, it was told by SAC that in order to seriously pursue its ambition it would have to appoint a full-time director whose duties up until that point had been shared by Ross and McGilvray. The post was advertised and McGilvray encouraged an Aberdeen-based artist called Dave Jackson—who had held a successful exhibition at the Seagate—to apply. Steve Grimmond who was actively involved in the local art scene as a musician and printmaker resigned as vice chairman of the Board in order to apply for the director's post. It was awarded to Dave Jackson in April 1993.

When Jackson assumed his post as Executive Director, McGilvray was employed as Exhibitions Consultant. The Board paid him £5,000 per annum to carry out part-time duties and when Jackson was hired on a salary of £17,000 it was obvious that McGilvray's post would be sacrificed. Obvious to most people except McGilvray that is. He accused Jackson of stealing his job and as far as I know never spoke to him again. McGilvray had been enjoying a privileged position at the Seagate from where he could run the Dundee Public Arts Programme rent free and by doubling up staff could take on three part-time jobs. He remains highly critical of Jackson who, by uniting the printmakers with the gallery under the banner, Seagate Ltd, ultimately sacrificed it to DCA Ltd.

Jackson perceived McGilvray as the 'clan chief' and was aware of the acrimony his arrival as an outsider had caused. His determination to reverse the collective apathy split the ranks and likely brought about recriminations that affected ensuing developments. The organisation had died on its feet as a result of dismissing the Jacob's report, having no clear exhibition's policy and a lack of proper management. With complete endorsement from his Board of Directors Jackson effected a 'Nordic House' styled policy: To raise the profile of locally-based artists and the gallery while bringing in the best contemporary art he could afford. He recognised the gallery as being the interface with the public and concentrated on raising its overall profile. Live events, coupled with a policy which incorporated Dundee Photographic Society as associate members, helped treble the annual attendance figures. Jackson had been briefed by his Board to make the Seagate break even and this he did by creating a popular centre of cross media events. But there were many who mocked him within the arty cliques and pubbing huddles where historic loyalties were watered and cultivated. Dundee is a small city with a village closeness and it is all too easy to offend and to incur petty jealousies. History is the result of the cause and effect of human relationships: The colliding and denting of egos: The marrying of partners. And this is a story of such.

Consultation 1993/4

During this time Steve Grimmond worked for Dundee Council, within the corridors of power traditionally dominated by more ruthless and corrupted characters. When I interviewed him in his office on December 9th 1998 he was distinctly on edge. His body language betraying his casual executive exterior. He had been Corporate Planning Officer since 1994. One of the first jobs he had been given was the development of the arts centre project. What he neglected to tell me was that prior to this he had been handed the Dundee Arts Strategy Consultation Document to complete and publish.

The first Consultation Document was a spiral bound A4 report of 79 pages. It clearly defined The Arts as being "set out in five generic parts: A. The Visual Arts; B. Literature; C. Music; D. Sound and Vision; and E. Performing Arts." It was an audit of every facility for the aforementioned within Dundee.

In December 1993 the DC's Chief Executive, Alex Stephen, issued an open letter '*Dundee Arts Strategy—Consultation*' enclosing a "*Consultation Return Form, How You Can Help*," to be completed and returned by the 14th February 1994. By completing the form arts organisations would be invited to attend an *informal* consultation meeting. This was convened in April 1994 at the McManus Galleries. Its agenda included a 'Welcome' by Alex Stephen; a 'Chairman's Introduction' by Eric Robinson, Director of SALVO (Scottish Arts Lobby); 'Outline Remarks' by Andrew Nairne, *then* Visual Arts Director, SAC; and 'Brief Statements' by spokespersons from the main local groups:

Dundee Printmakers Workshop Ltd & Seagate Gallery, Dundee Art Society, Dundee Photographic Society, the Embroiders' Guild (Dundee & East of Scotland Branch), the Saltire Society (Dundee Branch), the School of Television and Imaging (DoJ), Dundee Rep and several 'Individuals'.

The only organisation represented that advocated a City Arts Centre "with an emphasis on a facility like the Printmakers Workshop, but encompassing a broader range of media to include photography and electronic imaging" was DPW Ltd & Seagate Gallery.

SAC *suggested* "that a further consultation paper setting out the goals and priorities of the Arts Strategy should be issued before the District Council agrees the Strategy." SAC also included detailed comments on the proposed new City Arts Centre and *suggested* "that the Public Art project should continue to receive support from the District Council and other agencies and should be widely promoted to enhance the city's image both in respect of its quality of life and also its artistic and cultural aspirations."

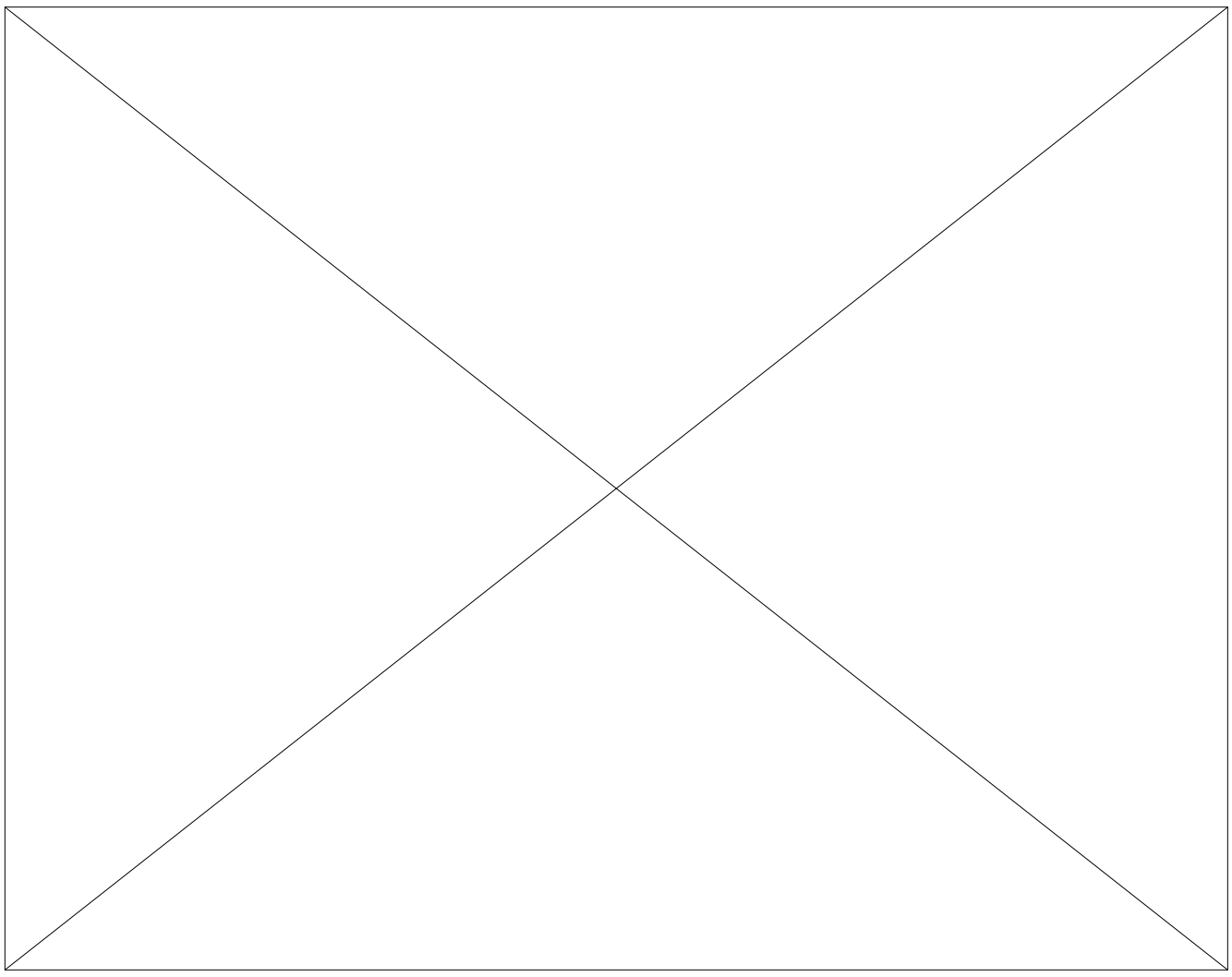
The second Consultation Document was an Arts Strategy of 29 pages bearing the Scottish Arts Council logo. It had evidently developed from the McManus meeting and was so redolent of SAC documents that one must conclude that DC was led by the nose by SAC in its production. This is confirmed in the introduction: "The development of an Arts Strategy for Dundee compliments the Charter for the Arts in Scotland which was launched in January, 1993 by the Scottish Arts Council." At this time every Scottish city and region was undergoing similar exercises, each one subsidised and endorsed by SAC.

A shift in emphasis

This second draft became a glossy A4 'Dundee Arts Strategy' designed for public consumption. Published in December 1994, its idiom is formulaic hyperbole. The DC refers to itself as "a listening Council" which "Aims to confirm Dundee's status as a major regional centre for the Arts." The Strategy informs us that "*no art activity is intrinsically superior to any other,*" and that as a force "*arts and cultural activities can make a major contribution to putting the heart back into the City*"'. A city that was disembowelled throughout the 1960s and '70s, culminating in the corrupt stewardship of Lord Provosts Moore and Charles Farquhar from '73 to '76.

The Strategy defines "the development of a City Arts Centre, primarily for the contemporary visual Arts." Under '*Strategies*', we find highly questionable statements that pre-condition the City Arts Centre vision: "*It is only through experiencing the best that would-be artists will be encouraged to excel.*" Under '*Facilities*', the City Arts Centre is described as being "*independent*", a description that would become even more contradictory with time. This statement is followed by '*Economic Benefits*', one being that arts provision attracts tourists and prolongs their time in the

Richard Murphy Architects



City. "To capitalise upon this a longer term strategy will be to develop links between arts, tourism and economic development organisations in the City with a project driven remit to identify high profile initiatives." One presumably being the City Arts Centre. Under '*Participation*', it clearly states that: "Every member of the community should have the opportunity both to practice and enjoy the arts. Access to creative self expression should not be in the preserve of a minority." This ethos is further declared under '*Access and Equal Opportunity*': "Underpinning all of the specific Arts Strategies for Dundee is a commitment to ensure equality of opportunities and of access for all."

The publication concludes with an *Action Plan* and the first priority under Short Term Action is to "Establish a Steering Group to develop proposals, locations and costs for a City Arts Centre." This is to be achieved by a grouping of the Chief Executive (Alex Stephen), SAC (Andrew Nairne) and Arts Organisations (those above mentioned as operating in Dundee). Within the publication this list was extended to include a new partner, Scottish Enterprise Tayside (SET) who had obviously been encouraged, through the wording of the second edition of the Strategy, to participate as a major investor; contributing £920,000.

1995 to 1997

Back in Steve Grimmond's office he told me that he was placed in charge of building a partnership that could make the art centre concept work. A concept, it must be said, that was very confused in its expectations and ideology. So much so that the arts community believed that it would be independent and entirely for their benefit.

Grimmond's boss, Alex Stephen—who had been in the DC during the notorious Farquhar era and had held the post of Head of Finance and who set up the Arts Strategy—was now manipulating his officer's strings. Grimmond 'arranged' a meeting with Dr Chris Carter, the Deputy Principal at DoJ. He was very keen on the arts centre proposal from the point of view of a partnership. And, according to Grimmond, was interested in the way such a project might help the college to raise its public profile and connect more strongly with the city. This meeting served to affirm the college's role as a partner within a major investment, the costs of which could not be met by the DC or any one partner alone.

Grimmond also told me that his job entailed establishing a "greater clarity". This was achieved by "listening to the different ideas of what an arts centre might be." His general recollection was "that there wasn't a huge discrepancy between what the DC wanted and what those at Seagate wanted." Grimmond's recollections are highly suspect for although the Seagate artists expected the arts centre to be independent of DoJ the DC could not develop the project without Dundee University, DoJ's parent organisation.

"The vision," said Grimmond, "was, from the outset, that a new art centre would contain the printmakers' workshop and that the galleries would be the principal enhancement. They would have to be better than what we already had. If they weren't the whole project would be a waste of time. There were also ideas for cinemas, artists' studio space, a ceramic workshop and sculpture studio." There were even possibilities for photographers and live arts too.

These informal Steering Group meetings encouraged an open forum which included Dave Jackson and James Howie from the Seagate, Ian Howard and Charles McKeen from DoJ, and the DC's Steve Grimmond and John McDougal (Finance Dept) augmented by engineers and architects. The Steering Group discussed and examined forty potential sites within Dundee. The most significant of these, 'McLean's Garage' being a large, city centre site commanding a view of the River Tay and virtually straddling the boundary between the university campus and the city centre. From the point of view of all the major partners, DoJ, DC, SET it was the site that offered the most spectacular economic benefits in terms of its central location and tourist potential. Such a key development would also attract significant funding from SAC and other agencies. By this stage Seagate Ltd (a brand name devised to unite the print workshop and the gallery) was being castrated. It had neither the financial muscle nor the strength of a unified community of artists with which to fight off its emasculators.

What followed was a condensed, energetic period in which the steamroller gathered a momentum that was not to ease off enough for people to take stock until the building was underway. During the spring of 1995, to prepare for single tier government, while the old DC was being shadowed by Dundee City Council (DCC), a new administrative organisation was put into place. Arts & Heritage was established in April and with it a restructuring of staffing levels was implemented. Clara Young lost her role as Keeper of Art: a role that permitted local artists direct access to the McManus Galleries in terms of talking through projects and ideas. Young was replaced by a Team Leader and a Chief Arts Officer, Andrea Stark, who was appointed in July '95 having previously held the post of Head of Arts Development with Sunderland City Council. Before relinquishing its bank account to DCC the DC purchased MacLean's Garage for £390,000. The role of the Steering Group was over. The policy of open debate was also at a close. It was time to consolidate and to develop. A private company Dundee City Arts Centre Ltd (DCAC Ltd) was set up and the major partners were invited to send representatives to attend regular meetings.

At this stage Seagate Ltd believed that it held a third stake in a new arts centre and felt confident that its reps, Sheena Bell and Douglas Black would report back to the Board all that was being discussed behind DCAC Ltd's closed doors. However, this belief was unfounded when the reps refused to inform the Board as to what was going on. No minutes were made available. Minutes that were being kept by Steve Grimmond who, when I questioned him in his office about the role of SAC and its rep, Andrew Nairne, declared quite categorically that they "*were observers only. They maintained an arms length approach throughout*," he said and then continued: "*They never sent an observer. They received minutes ... As far as I recall they were never represented*." I found his statement incredulous, for although SAC certainly do favour an arms length policy when it comes to dealing with their revenue clients they had certainly showed enough interest in the arts centre project from its first murmurings to take an active part through attendances by Andrew Nairne at several meetings. I asked Grimmond if Andrew Nairne had ever attended meetings of DCAC Ltd. "My recollections are," he declared, "*that he was never there*."

On December 22nd '98 I met with Professor Ian Howard in his office at DoJ. Involved in the arts centre project from the outset, he had been asked by Dr Chris Carter to attend meetings as a representative of the School of Fine Art in the company of Charles McKeen from the School of Architecture. Would his memory be sharper than the man who had kept the minutes? "The SAC were observers more than advisers," he confirmed. But they did attend meetings either in the person of Sue Pirnie, Amanda Catto, or Andrew Nairne. "*We met once a week or once a fortnight*," he continued, "*SAC came once a month*."

According to Howard another feasibility study was commissioned. A number of consultants tendered for the job and it was, once again, awarded to *Pieda*. He referred to this as an interim report which outlined various options by which the arts centre might proceed. One option was chosen. "We built a much larger vision" he said. "Other consultants were brought in to develop the Business Plan," and "a bigger plan enabled it to be a larger project. We wanted to achieve 'critical mass,'" he explained. Originally the college investment would have been for post-graduate studios only but as the project became bigger the potential for research facilities began to look obvious. "We have no custom-built research facilities here," he explained. "Only teaching facilities. Custom-built laboratories would make for more interesting developments, different synergies and links." I was beginning to see how dreams are made, especially when they can be endorsed and supported by large, state financed institutions, corporate development and a powerful City Council.

Howard's relatively open approach to my questions confirmed one thing. Grimmond's uneasy and edgy display had been a clumsy attempt at concealment. But what was he trying to hide? From the time DCAC Ltd appeared with a controlling influence of the project all sorts of rumours about coercion and small town gangsterism began to emerge. It was alleged that Councillors and Council employees had begun a campaign to weaken the administrative structure of Seagate Ltd. Particular Board members were harassed, asked to stand down, abdicate their responsibilities. Effectively turn a blind eye to what was going on. A local guitarist with aspirations to establish an annual Guitar Festival was advised, reputedly, that the *Council would not fund his event if...* The past president of Dundee Photographic Society and an

employee of DCC was coerced into resigning from the Board after serving on it for ten weeks only. He believes the command filtered down from a higher authority within the Council. The bully-boy tactics of the past were still in evidence. When James Howie threatened to withdraw Seagate Ltd's support of the arts centre he received a threatening letter from Alex Stephen suggesting that he was jeopardising the future development of the city. Seagate Ltd had, by this time, taken legal action to ensure that minutes of DCAC Ltd meetings were released to the Board. Later their firm of solicitors informed the Board that they could no longer represent them. At the AGM in November 1996 it was noted that Sheena Bell and Douglas Black had resigned from the Board on the 28th November 1995 while maintaining their positions in DCAC Ltd. They wanted to preserve a continuity, but a continuity of what? Self-interest?

Grimmond had been so emphatic that he had repeated it twice. "They (Sheena Bell and Douglas Black) were representing the interests of the membership (of Seagate Ltd) which largely consisted of local artists." I had asked if local artists' interests were represented at DCAC Ltd. Clearly they were not. Local artists' only grasp of what was going on with the arts centre development was via a wilting grapevine. Seagate Ltd was effectively reduced to a scramble as Howie valiantly attempted to recruit people to sit on the Board in an attempt to hang onto threads of communication and control. The Council withdrew its financial support of £8,000 per annum and SAC likewise saved itself £80,000. And although Seagate Ltd was earning up to £30,000 a year it was evidently perceived as an organisation worth sacrificing. The one person who should have taken up their cause, Andrew Nairne, the Visual Arts Director of SAC, did not. One could be forgiven for thinking that he had set his ambition on running the new gallery now that Seagate Ltd was effectively out of the picture.

According to Steve Grimmond, however, the decision to subsume Seagate Ltd if the arts centre went ahead had been discussed during the Steering Group meetings to which those at Seagate were a party. "The revenue funders," Grimmond stated, "would not duplicate their commitment. And in terms of the Seagate reps they stuck to that principle." Dave Jackson was made redundant in March '97 despite being employed to take Seagate Ltd forward as an arts centre. He took Seagate Ltd to an industrial tribunal who found the company guilty of unfair dismissal.

Professor Ian Howard was not alone in taking the university's vision of a Research Centre for national and international collaborations forward. For not only did his colleague, Charles McKeen attend DCAC Ltd meetings but so too did Dr Ian Graham-Bryce, Dundee University's Principal, and Alex Stephen, DCC's Chief Executive. From reasonably modest beginnings a major development began to take shape. Arts & Heritage were incorporated into the vision along with the Steps Film Theatre which had occupied space within the Wellgate Public Library since 1979. The vision did include the printmaker's workshop but its membership was dismantled and it was reinvented as the Print Studio. According to Howard there will be: "A continuum from local to international." The Print Studio providing the link between the ordinary practising artist with an interest in printmaking and the international research fellow invited to work in the 'Laboratory' on cutting edge, high-tech projects. Links too will be developed between the Research Centre and local industry as well as other faculties within the university, such as the Medical School.

Howard's vision is in harmony with Dundee City Council's Economic Development Plan; while in the Council's Corporate Plan 1996 to 1999 it says that a new City Arts Centre "will be a significant focus for the development of Dundee's cultural industries which is a sector of the economy the City would need to achieve growth in." One-person and small businesses operated by artists and craftspeople, musicians and writers did not count as "cultural industries," for the partnership that drove forward the development of the City Arts Centre did not include them. The partnership consisted of state subsidised "cultural industries" that had access to major capital funds. Nowhere is there any mention of supporting and promoting the work of local artists who, if they create outside of the medium of printmaking, will not be catered for within the arts centre.

In April 1996 an architectural competition to find a suitable design for the City Arts Centre was launched. A panel comprising DCAC Ltd, SET, DCC, SAC and the Competitions Unit of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, selected Richard Murphy Architects. Dundee City Arts Centre would be their first major rebuild. The package to present to the Lottery Board was taking shape and it must be concluded that the decision to go for a major Lottery award had been taken during the early stages of DCAC Ltd because the Lottery as a capital funding source came on stream in March 1995.

Andrea Stark, Arts & Heritage's Chief Arts Officer who had begun to attend meetings of DCAC Ltd was put in charge of the application. A comprehensive Business Plan was commissioned from *Pieda*. It begins: "The Dundee City Council, in conjunction with Scottish Enterprise Tayside, is seeking Scottish Arts Council National Lottery funding to develop the Dundee City Arts Centre. The project will provide a unique experience within Scotland allowing visitors to view and participate in state of the art visual arts exhibitions and processes. The project cost amounts to £8.6m and a contribution of £4.8m is sought from the Scottish Arts Council (National Lottery)."

Interestingly, the background details say: "More recently the project has been championed by the Dundee Printmakers Workshop." No mention of Seagate Ltd as a driving force or a partner is made. No mention of Seagate Ltd as an organisation with a director and board of directors is made. Under Construction Costs it states that "the disposal costs of the Seagate Gallery, have been included." It goes on to say: "The disposal cost has been calculated to be £168,000, if the Council has to buy out the lease from 1998 to 2010." Presumably these details were being discussed at meetings of DCAC Ltd while Seagate Ltd still had a director on a salary with an understanding that he was to be responsible for taking the arts centre project forward. Dave Jackson and James Howie were quite right to feel concerned for it is obvious that Seagate Ltd as an organisation was to disappear while its 'sub brand' organisation who shared the same building would survive.

Through a misleading and confusing use of brand names *Seagate Ltd* had been divorced in people's minds from the print workshop. If the gallery was to be redundant so too was its director despite the fact that as Executive Director he was responsible for both organisations. This underhand strategy made economic sense because the new Print Studio would rely on the old DPW Ltd equipment while the gallery was simply an empty space with no material assets to carry forward. We can also assume that this strategy and the entire contents of the Business Plan were being debated and finely tuned during meetings of DCAC Ltd.

The SAC Lottery application was signed and dated on 24th August 1996 by all the partners excluding Seagate Ltd. In April of that year Laura MacDonald, acting Chairman of Seagate Ltd's Board, signed what she believed to be the final draft of the Business Plan. However, it was amended and republished in August and this version was the one that was sent to support the Lottery bid. On 29th October 1996 it was announced that a record sum of £5,380,756 had been awarded to Dundee City Arts Centre. The role of DCAC Ltd was complete.

Dundee Contemporary Arts Ltd

DCA Ltd had been formed in May 1997 after DCAC Ltd was dissolved and three months after its director's post had been advertised. Many rumours about Andrew Nairne had preceded his appointment. It had been a "stitch-up" according to one academic at DoJ. Allegedly he had been in a position to negotiate his own salary when, as an SAC rep., he had attended meetings of DCAC Ltd. Almost everyone in the know in Dundee will tell you how he handed in his resignation at SAC two months before the post of Director was advertised. The post was advertised in February 1997 and, according to Prof. Ian Howard who assisted with the interviews, attracted a fairly wide field of applicants. Only two, however, were deemed suitable. An anonymous person from London and Andrew Nairne. Both were interviewed by Andrea Stark, Ian Howard and Councillor Andrew Lynch, convener of Arts & Heritage. All three having attended meetings alongside Nairne throughout the planning and development of the city arts centre project. No wonder conspiracy theories multiplied.

His previous record working in an arts centre as Exhibitions Director in the Third Eye Centre is peculiar to say the least. *Stoy Hayward*, Chartered Accountants, were appointed as administrator to investigate the accounting records for the fifteen months ending June 1991. This revealed a trading loss of £242,873 which compared to a reported profit of £4,618 as shown in the Management Accounts for the year ending 31st March 1991. In a written statement Stoy Haward's Douglas Jackson said: "During the fifteen months prior to my appointment, the company's expenditure on the centre's cultural activities significantly exceeded its grant funding. (£220,100 from SAC and £15,000 from Glasgow District Council per annum). A balance sheet prepared by me on a going concern basis at 18th June 1991 showed an insolvent position with current assets at £106,000 from which to meet current liabilities at £578,000."

Stories of deliberately concealed travel receipts and personal extravagances abounded—someone had been spending money without due concern. Six members of the Board of Directors resigned and a chorus of rumours echoed around the art community of Scotland. Astonishingly, in his report Jackson said: "Subsequent enquiries showed that the company's ledgers and bank account had not been updated or reconciled since 31st March 1990 and therefore management accounting information presented to the Board after that date could not be relied upon."

The SAC provided "a dividend fund for the benefit of unsecured creditors". This amounted to £125,000 but of course SAC had to settle other 'accounts'. An unlikely scapegoat was found in Lindsay Gordon, the Visual Arts Director of SAC. He took SAC to an industrial tribunal and won his case of unfair dismissal. In a opportunistic move, Andrew Nairne applied for and was given Gordon's vacant office. There he stayed until destiny called in Dundee, The City of Discovery.

Nairne took up his Dundee post in May 1997 and according to the *Pieda* Business Plan was to receive a salary of £21,740. But then at this time the company with responsibility for the operation of the galleries, print studio, cinemas and cafe franchise was to be named Dundee Visual Arts Ltd. Later the word 'Visual' was to be replaced by 'Contemporary', a trade name to describe a hybrid, homogenised artform that often denies its cultural origins.

1999

It is premature to judge how DCA Ltd might fulfil its own remit in the Business Plan because it is not scheduled to open until March of this year. However, we can assess its character on the evidence of what has emerged in this story. After a period of consultation followed by a duplicitous development (when artists were not informed as to what was being discussed behind closed doors) a partnership representing the interests of powerful organisations within Dundee, with the complicity of SAC, railroaded through a vision that failed to address the needs of local artists. The resulting institution will enhance the career prospects of those who were directly responsible for its development and further the careers and status of an exclusive minority who operate within its

studios and laboratories.

DCA's internal hierarchy is based upon the assumption that the 'best' art is produced by those with an art college training. It fails, therefore, to acknowledge that some of the 'best' art of the 20th Century was produced by artists who were outside of this self-acclaimed elite. Academic research during the last fifty years has shown that there is an equality within art which DCA's philosophy denies. Instead of commencing from the basis that all artists are equal it imposes a pyramidal power structure onto art, at the top of which are the staff of DoJ. Local artists will provide a workforce for the facilities within the institution and perform outreach and educational roles. That the exhibition policy excludes locally-based artists on the assumption that their work would not attract tourists speaks for itself.

That the welfare and interests of the local community of artists was sacrificed by DCA's perspicacious and career-blinded developers in favour of a corporate vision is obvious by the way they refused to accommodate the city's largest grouping of amateur and professional photographers (the Dundee Photographic Society) who have been promoting the medium (and the city) since 1880. The photography darkrooms are geared to service the requirements of printmakers and not necessarily individualistic photographers.

The absence of a creche is a blatant denial of the existence of women artists with young children. These artists are the most vulnerable in terms of the struggle to create. Without a caring support structure many simply give up. That the developers represented a white Christian majority within a city of a diverse cultural blend must also be noted.

Despite all the rhetorical devices employed to secure funding the keystone to DCA's existence is its claim upon the territory of tourist and economic development. That Dundee University has 11,257 students plus staff on campus and contributes approximately £10m to the city's economy is the central reason why it was invited to join the arts centre partnership. Not only is its rent of around £70,000 per annum and its initial investment of £197,000 crucial to the building's economic viability but its staff and students will produce the art component, provide an audience for events, and help staff the facilities.

There has always been an unhealthy umbilical connection between art groups in Dundee and DoJ as mother figure. Such symbiosis has not assisted a truly independent art scene with sufficient cultural distance from 'mother' to make radical and original art. Now that DoJ has secured an even stronger position within the heart of the city and within the very citadel of art production which also houses two public art bodies, the art cinema, and the DCC's Arts and Heritage offices, there is absolutely no cultural distance whatsoever between state run institutions and art.

The state has the controlling influence on art in Dundee and this does not bode well for a culture that is taking its first steps towards independence. That the state is so firmly behind the construction of DCA as a "unique cultural institution" with links to similar hi-tech institutions in Europe reflects New Labour's millennialist vision for the 21st Century rather than a more modest and fundamental solution as proposed by Dundee-based artists. With New Labour's aspiration influencing Lottery funded projects, which tend towards over-excessive schemes requiring vast sums to maintain and operate at the tax payers' expense, there is a danger that those sectors of the community most in need will be disenfranchised and alienated. This state of affairs being exemplified in Dundee where individualistic and self-taught artists will shy clear of DCA because it has little or nothing to offer them.

Not only has the original notion of an arts centre, independent of DoJ and serving, first and foremost the interests of the local community of artists, been lost but the very name 'arts centre' has gone from this new institution's corporate logo. The building is now called Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) and a pale, electric blue neon sign, visible from the waterfront and railway approaches to the city, advertises it as such.

Orla Ryan

EV+A 98

Limerick's *EV+A 98*, in its 22nd year, showed the work of 150 artists and as such is Ireland's largest group exhibition. Usually *EV+A*, in an attempt at 'objectivity' brings high profile curators, such as Jan Hoet and Guy Tortosa, to Ireland from Europe. Referring to this objectivity, the chairman, Hugh Murray writes of how "this very detachment and lack of knowledge of the Irish art scene was also a weakness". With these reasons in mind the EV+A committee decided that Paul O'Reilly, the director of Limerick City Gallery, should curate it. One gets the sense that O'Reilly on taking the position was reflexive in terms of his approach to the power involved. Worth noting was a willingness to engage with people and discuss why their work was not chosen for *EV+A's Open Submission*. This has to be a first. It also shows an acknowledgement by O'Reilly of the power inherent in judging people's work.

The work was dispersed over 20 different centre-city sites and because of this *EV+A* resembled large European shows which negotiate the discursive terrain of 'site' and location. However this trajectory was not a priority but rather was arrived at by default. In the catalogue we were told that "this is due to the unavailability of Limerick City Gallery's Carnegie Building on Pery Square". Originally the show was to be brought to Pery Square but this was not possible because of building delays. The potential of 'off site' art practice collided with conceptions of how art works function in traditional art spaces at *EV+A 98*, sometimes to good effect and sometimes not.

Discussing the works' pattern of dispersal around the city, Paul O'Reilly writes that it is "...a pattern that has no single dominant gallery presence". Unfortunately this was not the case; the dominant gallery presence was in evidence and located at City Hall. There are a number of reasons for this, the most obvious being that it was the location for the official opening. The main space in City Hall was used to present a large selection of 'hangable' work and followed a traditional conception and allegiance to how gallery spaces function. Perhaps it might have been more interesting to challenge viewers' expectations. This is not to ignore the pragmatic difficulties of finding space for the amount of work to be shown but rather to remark on the consequences of some of those pragmatic decisions.

On the application form of *EV+A 98* there was a very definite call for 'lens-based media' which was unusual in an Irish context and yet by the end this emphasis was disregarded by the final call of "...And everything else". It is difficult to understand the reasoning behind this besides a need to be inclusive, although arguably this desire for inclusiveness can collapse everything to a certain level, creating a compromise in which no one is satisfied. This is also worth negotiating in terms of Paul O'Reilly's catalogue notes in which he situates the dangerous implications of "...contemporary culture's visual bias". O'Reilly opens up a potentially engaging discussion on the prioritisation of the visual in consumer culture although there is a sense in which this potential remains confined within the catalogue rather than a discursive dialogue that flows through the works.

Referring back to City Hall as the 'dominant gallery space' there was a sense in which the discursive potentials available between the various art works were not explored. The inter-relationships between works suggest discussion and dialogue, but this was often so disrupted that the spatial gaps emerged as gulfs, almost as if the works were ignoring each other. This was especially obvious in work that negotiated a specifically gender based discourse. Eliz Lagerstrom's installation *'Pain is a State of Mind'* which references some womens' position towards sadomasochism, employing a combination of objects, photographs and text such as *"...She wears her bruises with Pride. Like trophies, like tattoos. Hidden under her clothes. Her secret. Her game"*. This was shown in a small annex off the main room and although employing cliched materials such as rubber, buckles, belts etc it would have been more interesting to see what sort of discussion, be it provocative or polemical, that the work would generate if shown in closer proximity to, for example Dorothy Ann Daly's crocheted wall drawing, or any of the more acceptably 'feminine' work shown in the back room at City Hall. This back room was a difficult space in terms of how the work was installed. This was unfortunate, especially in the case of Elizabeth Byrne's *'The Insistence of furniture'* where the conceptual research of the installation involved confinement—the actual placing of the work.

Paddy Jolley's VHS film loop *'Late for the Train'* was shown on a monitor at the end of a stairwell, a location which suited the work, a figure in the New York Subway flat out on the ground as trains on either side stopped at the station. As an installation the stairwell had the right atmosphere or 'end of the line' quality about it.

The video installation *'Untitled Unsigned Story'* by Amanda Coogan in the main space was a video of a woman, mostly in close up. Through a variety of facial expressions, tapping fingers on her face, and guttural sounds, Coogan presented the frustration of failed communication and mis-translation. Coogan writes: "Irish sign language has been consistently and consciously oppressed" and in situating this Coogan opens up an intriguing view of some of the socio-political relations of a marginalised community. This video was installed in a wooden structure, a cross between a house and furniture. It was difficult to figure the necessity for this. The conceptual terrain of the video did not need any props to support itself and the sculptural rhetoric of the wooden structure appeared jaded in terms of the complexities of language being figured in the video. The collaboration between Amelia Stein and Barry McGovern 'Do You Love Me Cunt' employed Beckett's logic although this was more an illustrative piece. This work comprised a black and white photograph of Barry McGovern looking suitably aggressive/angry as he recites an excerpt from Beckett's 'How It Is'. Listening to this extract as one looked at the photograph of McGovern, restricted the photograph's possible readings to one of a 'character study' of the actor performing. This made it difficult to know what this image was meant to mean. The installation was located in a small corridor beside a lift and listening to the sound piece it was hard to resist thinking how much better it would work in the actual lift.

Within City Hall, the placing of Andreas Gursky's large colour image *'Chicago Board of Trade'* in the Council Meeting Room was impressive. Gursky's image, of the stock exchange taken from above, presenting the action on the floor as frantic and trivial at the same time creating a strong dynamic with the discourses of power flowing through this Council Room.

The performance of Fergus Byrne's *'Splint'* took place on the Saturday in Cruises Street. Byrne with the help of two assistants and behind the cover of a makeshift 'tent' was wrapped up in roof slates, turning himself into a "vertical pillar". Byrne eventually emerges from this architectural space by using physical pressure to break the gaffer tape holding the slates in place. What made this particular performance so nerve racking was the alternative performance it gave rise to by a group of local teenagers. Besides the verbal abuse there were various moments of risk for the artist and the people standing close by. As the teenagers pushed into the tent as Byrne was being wrapped, the potential for him to fall and get cut up by the slates became a tense build up. Cruises Street on a Saturday afternoon is a great location for performance because of the volume of people passing by, although the lack of an official *EV+A* presence to aid Byrne was a mistake.

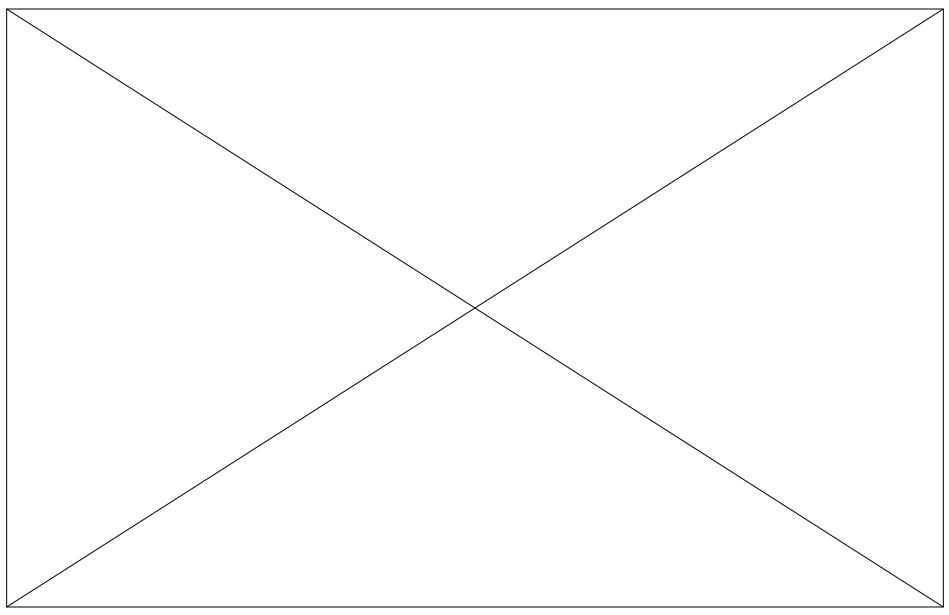
St Mary's Cathedral, offered a tomblike location to view Karl Grimes' *'Blood Cell Memorial'*: A grid of 24 colour images of blood cells together with others in alcoves or lying on pews, so that there was the potential for them to get lost amongst the memorabilia and artifacts in the Cathedral space.

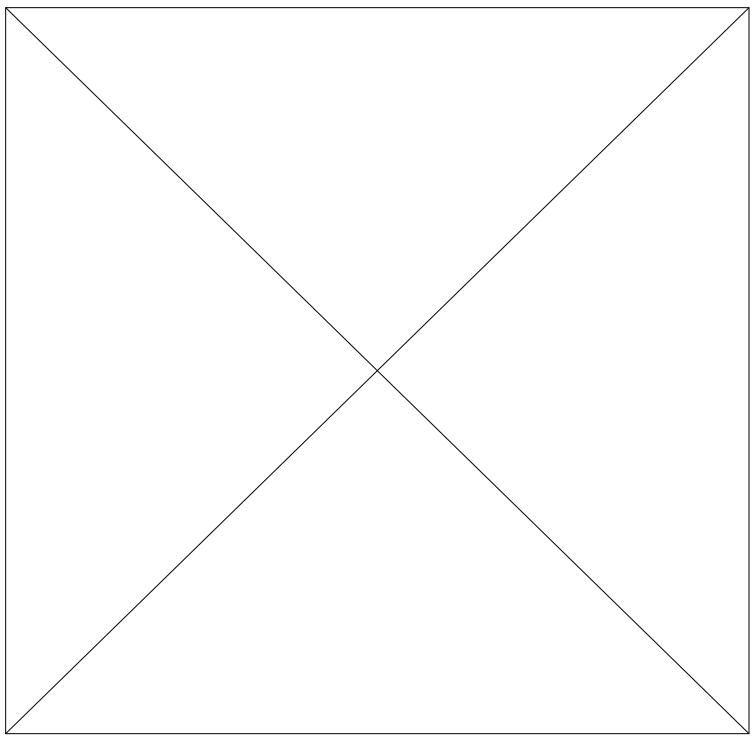
The billboard of Mike FitzPatrick *'EV+A Not As Good As It Used To Be'* required the collaboration of all EV+A's open submission artists. The billboard containing photographs of the artists with the above caption was, to use FitzPatrick's words "...an attempt to test the ability of an institution like *EV+A* to resist censorship". As an example of how effective this proposed 'institutional critique' was, the billboard occupied a prominent location just outside City Hall.

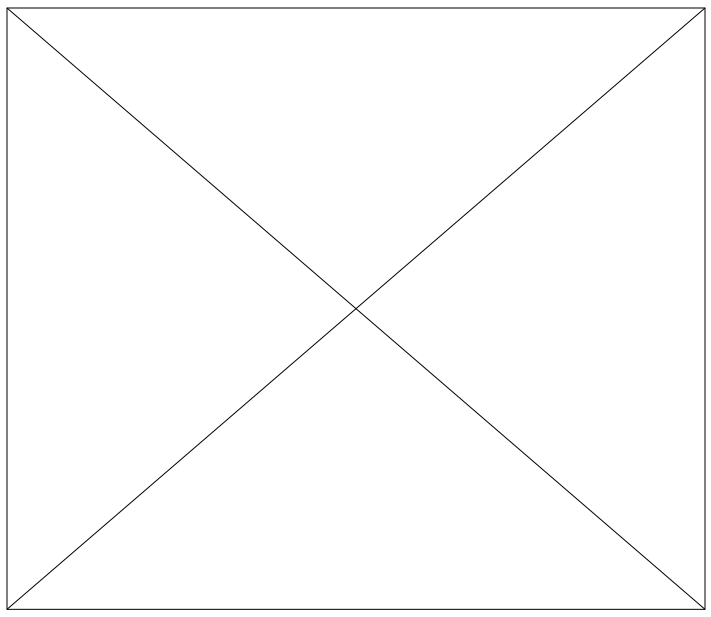
FitzPatrick's artist's statement continues "this work delivered in the format of a billboard, could act as an incentive for people in general to be more conscious of, and engaged with, an exhibition which is publicly funded and highly regarded by the participating artists". FitzPatrick aspires to a 'discursive practice' and yet the piece prioritises his intentions and perceived possibilities of how the work "...could act". It is worth noting that artists who did ask what the caption would be were not told.

There is also a problem here in the simplification of specific audiences to a more general "people in general". Who for example? *EV+A* as the largest art exhibition in Ireland, draws a large percentage of the 'art community' in the country. There seems to be an over simplification of 'art community' audience 'bad'; the 'people' audience 'good'. This is not to discount the validity of a practice which wishes to reach beyond a given 'art' audience. However, there is a political myopia in operation when 'artists' become some

Brian Hand







Top: *Paul Gray*
Above: *Daphne Wright*

homogenous targeted group.

FitzPatrick ends his statement with: "I defend my actions on the grounds of freedom of artistic expression and the broader social intent of the work". Unfortunately this follows a certain cynical logic that falls into a heroic conception of the lone artist (male!) battling to change the world no matter the personal cost.

Located in a tax office, Susan MacWilliam's *'The Last Person'* is a strange and humorous reconstruction of the paranormal events surrounding one Helen Duncan (1898-1956). The video is based on Duncan's trial. A medium from Portsmouth, she "...was the last person to be prosecuted under the British Witchcraft Act of 1735". The video uses the court reports as a narrative, recounted by a monotone male voice. The enigmatic qualities of MacWilliam's video were expanded by its setting in the bureaucratic atmosphere of this '70s style Civil Service space.

Jonathan Horowitz's *'Bach's Two Part Invention'* situated in Maloney's Bookstore was an installation comprising an audio track, a framed vintage photograph and text. The photograph is of the 1974 Minnesota Music Teachers Association Piano Contest Recital in which Horowitz took part. The text presents Horowitz's memories of the contest; the fact that he forgot his piece and his subsequent disinterest in the piano lessons which he was forced to take until he left the family home. The sound accompanying this is of piano notes played randomly, resulting in, not quite dissonance but more of a depressing but humorous pointlessness which was totally in sync with Horrowitz's story of suburban mores in Minnesota circa 1974.

Two of the largest installations in *EV+A 98* were located in Glen House, Daphne Wrights's *'Looking for the Home of the Sickness'* and Brian Hand's *'Foam'*. Wright's installation, comprises rows of plaster rhododendrons which vertically frame horizontal rows of miniature Georgian balustrades, which are torso height and again made in plaster. Just behind the balustrades are miniature park land 'dead' trees placed in a random pattern behind each one. The visual effect of this alludes to a theatrical space the effect of which is intensified by the sound element which is someone whistling a tune, which is vaguely familiar, reminiscent of British music halls. I think the tune is a an Edwardian music hall song "I don't want to play in your yard". With lines such as "I won't let you pick my pansies, And you won't climb my apple tree, I don't want to play in your yard if you won't be good to me".

'Looking for the Home of the Sickness' as with Wright's other projects explores the cultural positions of Irish Southern Protestantism. In this instance the 'Big House' of the Anglo Irish Ascendancy is figured. The plaster while referencing the decorative qualities of the interiors of these houses also creates a melancholic space, eerily nostalgic accompanied by the whistling of this tune. What makes Wright's installation so effective though, is that none of the things it alludes to, the 'Big House' or the sense of nostalgia for example, are fixed in terms of reading the work. Each element complements the others and promptly runs off with its own network of associations—creating a complex and ambiguous viewing space where all inherent 'essentialisms' are open to question.

Brian Hand's *'Foam'* is an installation comprising a slide dissolve of two images taken a minute apart of the Green Isle, a trawler, being salvaged from Howth harbour after an arson attack which resulted in the trawler sinking. The sound, coming from four different speakers is of the first line of *Sea Breeze*, a poem by Stephane Mallarmé. These four lines are synced to occupy the space together just as one slide dissolves into another, creating a dissonant babble in the centre of the space. This was said in French and three translations, one in Irish and two in English. Two of the translations were by two Irish poets, Brian Coffey and Denis Devlin. Both Coffey and Devlin were signalled by Samuel Beckett as an emergent tradition more concerned with translation. In employing them in this instance Hand, is in a sense indicating a different trajectory of modernism in an Irish context, away from the 'originality' centredness of Yeats & Co.

Hand's negotiation of translation is also apparent in the use of images employed. The images show a group of men observing a trawler being brought out of the water. On first viewing it is difficult to see how the image has changed when the dissolve takes place. Slowly different aspects of the image make themselves apparent, one man disappears behind something while another emerges, a hand raised in one image goes down in the next. Pursuing this emphasis on translation, Hand misregisters the slides, so the dissolve is never smooth. Another factor situating translation was the difficulty in deciding the location of the image. As a place it has the look of some generic space in the States. *'Foam'* was installed in an architects storage/archive space containing shelving units stacked with architectural plans and files which surround the installation with an abundance of texts and documents making the location well suited to the conceptual space of *'Foam'*.

One of the things that is interesting about *EV+A* as an institution, especially in an Irish context, is the amount of work, discussion and negotiation involved to make this multi-location exhibition work. The amount of 'good will' required between different and competing art spaces singles *EV+A* out as an institutional practice that makes it highly specific to Limerick and to the people there who organise it. I think it is important to state that as things stand in Dublin for example, an exhibition of this size would not be contemplated, never mind get off the ground. Whatever criticisms of *EV+A 98* one might wish to pursue or negotiate, its potential as a large 'event' and its potential to change each year are aspects of *EV+A* which need to be put to the fore.

Endnote

All quotes in the main text are taken from the *EV+A 98* Catalogue published by *EV+A*, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Carnegie Building, Pery Square, Limerick, Ireland.

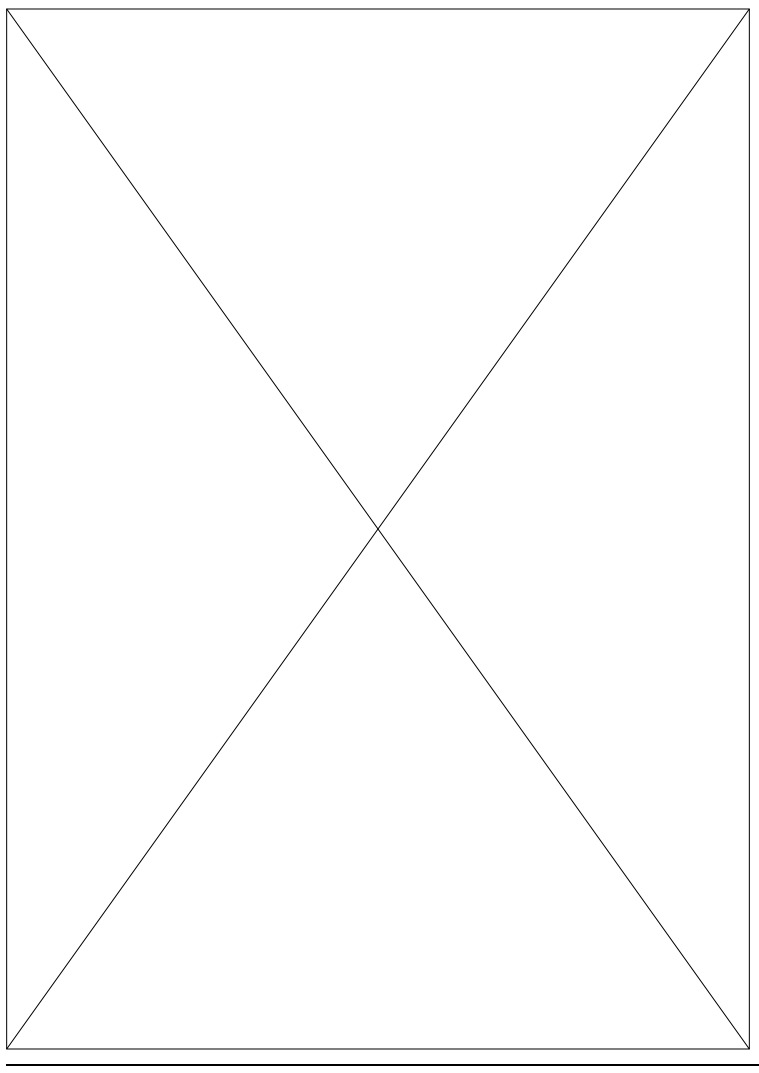
Stefan Szczelkun

Volcano!

September 26th to October 3rd 1998, South London

London's *Volcano Film Festival* is the nearest that Britain has to a lowbudget film festival that is truly independent from both public and commercial sectors. This year it was organised, without any public funding, by six London based 'underground' film groups. *Volcano* has a critical edge and raw excitement that other festivals, from the BBC's lifeless *'British Short Film Festival'* to the ponderous *'London Film Festival'*, can never hope to attain. This year it had box office attendance of over 2500 people who went to 19 events over 8 days. 280 films and videos were projected, plus dozens of performances and many installations. It was international, with attending groups from Germany and New York. Perhaps the most distinctive thing about this festival and the London underground film scene generally is the way that film isn't isolated as a media. In *Volcano* film coexisted with music, performance, clubculture, publications, market stalls, cabaret, installations, debates, food and what have you. The films themselves are also as diverse as the contributing groups which range from the relatively upmarket *Hallowe'en Society*, which shares some of the 'production values' of mainstream short film culture, to the Kung Fu cultism and no-messing street-wise attitude of *Shaolin*.

This is the festival's third year and the first time there has been a base for guest shows in a single venue. The Oval House Theatre in South London provided serviced space, box office and cafe facilities in exchange for a 20% cut on ticket sales and the beer and food takings. We didn't make any profit but it was good to have the luxury of a base for all the guest shows. The organising groups each put on their own shows around London in venues of their own choice—some days this meant that four shows were going on simultaneously.



The first Saturday night of the festival was dedicated to a Jeff Keen retrospective. This Brighton based film-maker is a master of the multiple exposure, along with animation and studio based performance. Veering wildly in style from raunchy home-movies to exquisitely composed drum rolls of coloured light and collaged form, his Super 8 films oscillate between the lyrical and the banal—retinal roller coasters. Keen, who has been making movies since the early '60s, appeared looking somewhat awed by the adulation of the younger audience. His film works were avoided by the film establishment in the '80s and '90s, perhaps because of his occasional pop art use of naked women and soft porn icons. This was his first show in London for over 10 years. His most recent work was a live multiple projection using stock he had digitally recoloured. It appeared to be attempting an escape from the limits of the screen—jittering, flashing and jumping the frame like a cinematic demon. It was this latest stuff that the younger audience seemed to like most.

The next day saw the *'Death of OMSK'* in Hoxton. A danceclub/cinema hybrid run simultaneously in three venues: the roomy '333' club and two nearby pubs—*OMSK* is a place were 'anything can happen'. The organiser Steven Eastwood had decided to put this project aside for the next year and make a movie, so this was to be the last in the series. It had over 800 people on a Sunday night—what a way to go! Just about every type of artist had a slot in this extravaganza, from poets to VJs, with inbuilt cinemas in each venue running alongside dance floor, bars and chillout spaces.

Down in deep South London, *Real Fiction's 'kinetic candlelit cabaret'*, organised by Paul Johnson, showed fifteen Gothik films and four ethereal performances above a pub in Balham. That same evening, at the base camp at Kennington Oval, lanky Ian White, who has made a name running the *Horse Hospitals' Kinoculture* programme, put on his own 'transgressive' evening of hyper-camp with The Divine David and author Dennis Cooper.

Monday night saw the *Hallowe'en Society* do their regular show at the glitzy Notre Dame Dance Hall off Leicester Square. Philip and Tim do things properly, right down to projecting from a Beta VCR rather than the VHS machines most of the groups make do with. Each film is introduced by an MC—who also runs a quiz with daft prizes—while the audience sit around tables drinking, diverted by the occasional cabaret act.

Back at the Oval, hot off a plane from Havana, Robert Robinson was running the *Renegade Arts* show in the upstairs theatre. *Renegade* is an international exchange of work with an emphasis on what slips off the mass media menu. It shared the Oval with a double bill by Jack Sargeant who has a couple of books out by *Creation Books* and is an expert in the area of mainly US underground which is obsessed with death, schlock horror and the so-called dark side.

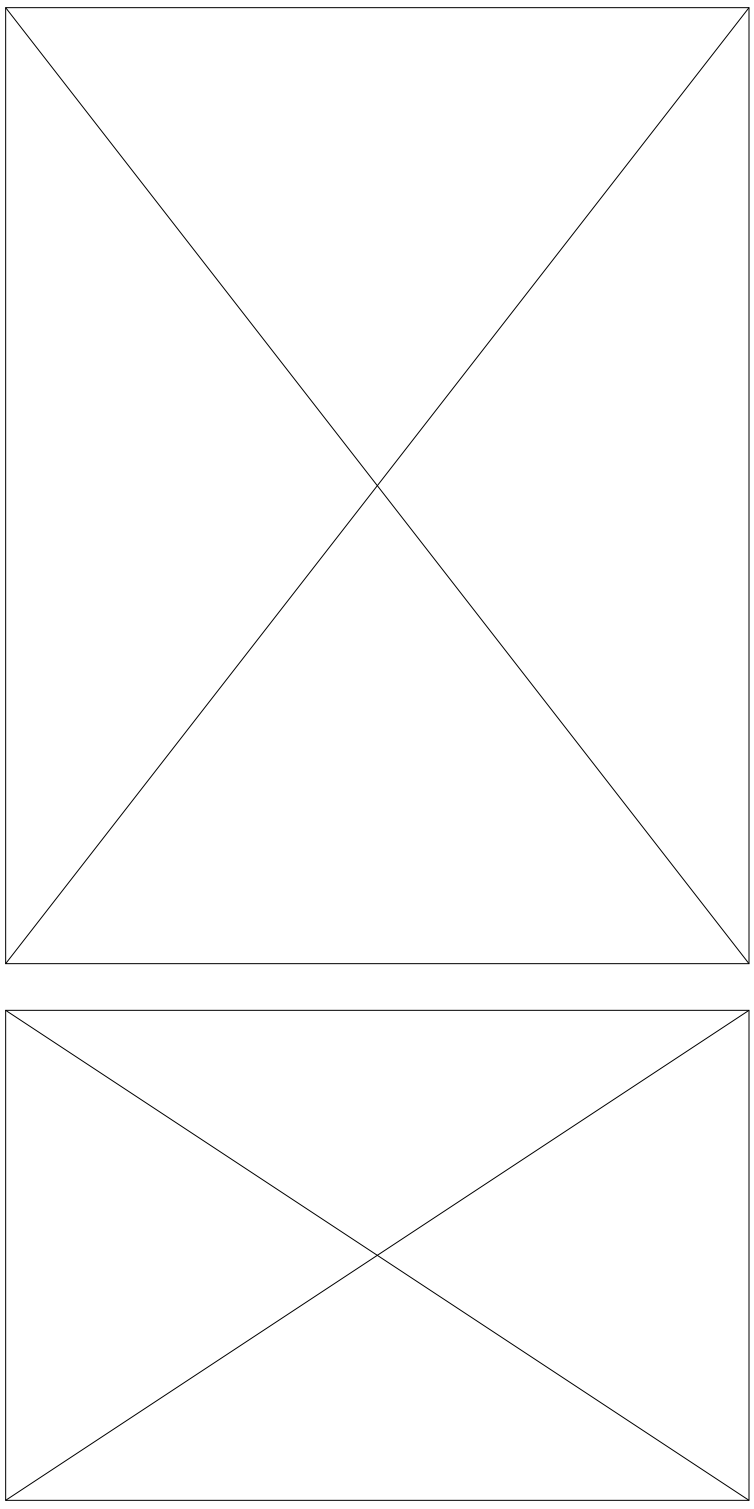
Tuesday was the turn of the *Exploding Cinema*—the only group with a firm open access/ no selection policy. The *Exploding* crew had taken over one of their old haunts the George IV pub, near the infamous prison on Brixton Hill, swathing the interior in lights from a myriad of slide projectors and Super 8 loops. More uncomfortable, raunchy, and unpredictable than the *Hallowe'en Society* they showed 16 works including four by collective members. Back at the Oval, James Stevens, proprietor of the open access cyberarts workshop *Backspace*, was running his chaotic *Blink* show—apparently programmed and organised on the spur of the moment. *Backspace*, situated on the riverside near London Bridge, is home to the *Volcano* web site amongst others.

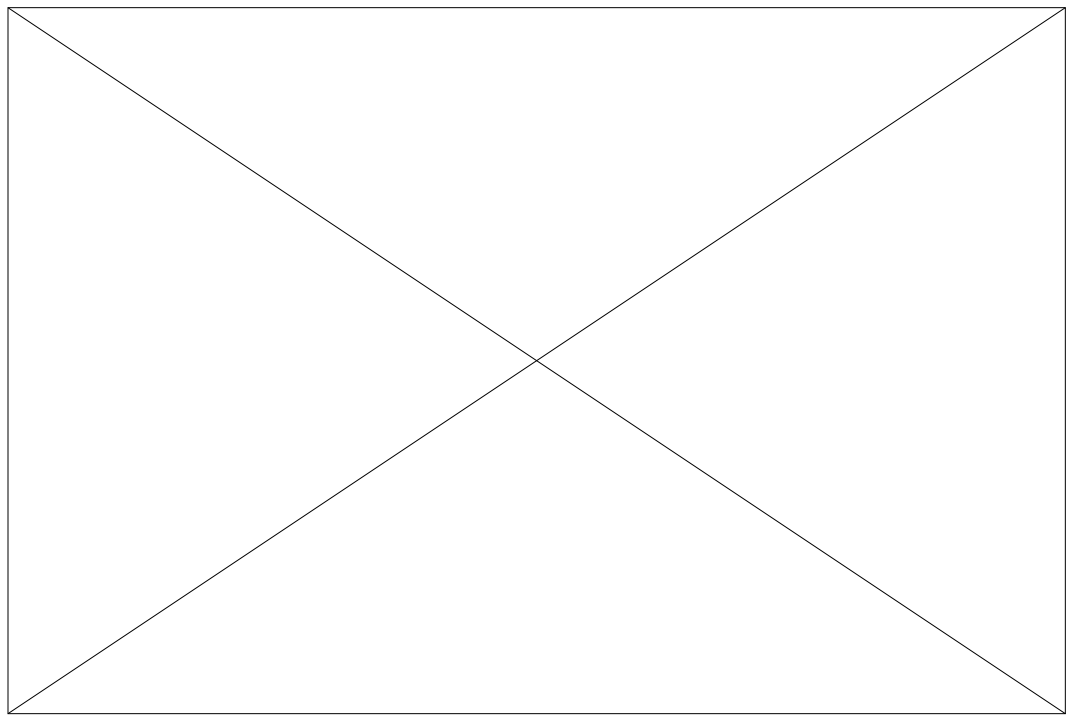
Attracting a more youthful audience, Wednesday saw Ben and Jap of *Shaolin* do their show at The Foundry near Fleet Street. Along with the showcase of obscure Kung Fu movies one of the things that distinguishes *Shaolin* are the live computer fighting games which are projected on a big screen. An amphitheatre of virtual combat; is this some kind of nascent ritual resolution of male aggression...? At the same time in the way-out South East, *My Eyes! My Eyes!* run by Clive, Grace and Damian, ran a show of home-grown underground classics to a mostly local audience, built-up in the last two or three years. Clive was the layout whiz who had designed our slick poster/programme which had given *Volcano* a high profile front-end reminiscent of the old Scala Cinema's programmes.

The main international guests were the notorious *Filmgruppen Chaos*, (est. 1975), who had come over in force with members of the Munich based *ABGE - DREHT*. For their Wednesday night show they decorated the passage to Oval's main theatre space with a variety of environmental projections: Rotating mirrors threw images over the walls and ceiling. A chattering face was projected onto a polystyrene head on a high shelf creating a surreal illusion. Inside the theatre large Gothic picture frames contained lurid loop projections. The main show, with three presenters, was a quirky mix of animation, cryptic drama, collage and found footage made all the more interesting by the lively presence of the film-makers.

The same night at the Oval, Philip from *Hallowe'en* had programmed a selection of short film and video from the USA in the theatre upstairs—saturation point! Audiences varied from the local to the 'cult'. One way the underground might be defined is by its diversity and inclusiveness, especially to outsiders.

From here on in the Oval became wilder and wilder. Next evening was taken over by the *Frank Chickens* who are now a broad London based collective of about 20 Japanese women, cultural refugees who not only show films but also VJ, sing, dance and do uncategorisable performances. In parallel with the *Jap-chick* madness downstairs *Hallowe'en Society* presented *Rocketfish*, the quirky films of Mark Locke and Guy Powell from Tamworth, Birmingham in the theatre upstairs. Lower class suburban culture at its most idiosyncratic and fascinating.





TOP: *Arthur Lager*
ABOVE: *Caroline, Exploding Cinema*

There was also a debate set up by Duncan of *Exploding Cinema* at the Lux in Hoxton on the Thursday evening. This was meant to confront the radical establishment and funding agencies of the so-called independent film and video. Film-makers turned up in force but the establishment didn't. Nonetheless, with just a few of them there, it was like trying to have a debate about political change with the police in attendance. For a while it revolved around the question of labels and especially the fluffy notion of 'independence', a category which has come to include major features and even high-tech ads. By the time I stood up to speak I found myself shaking with rage, frustration and incoherence. My outburst was followed by several people who, in the presence of funders, wished to distance themselves from any 'political' intentions. In spite of the atmosphere of timidity a few good points were made from both sides. The academic Jon Thompson pointed out the need for writers who could articulate a critical and historicising discourse. Jennet Thomas, of *Exploding Cinema* made a good point about how the rise of the professional curator had meant that art was mediated by a professional caste and that artists rarely had control of resources. This led to what Colette Rouhier called an 'exhibition lock-down'. The historically pernicious nature of a professional or elite third party management of culture was pointed out but unexplored.

To my mind both the organisation and context of the proceedings was counter productive. Underlining our incoherence rather than producing the conditions for constructive expression and discourse. The Lux is a prestige building which, as Mark Saunders pointed out, was put up as part of the property development of Hoxton in which Art became integral to a strategy for raising property values. It manages the mediation of underground culture and its history, inheriting the radical kudos associated with the early *Film Makers Co-op* which was, in stark contrast, artist controlled and democratic. This new institution now sucks in much of the funding resources allocated for this area and controls the presentation and historicisation of underground film in an antiseptic environment which is beholden to state funding and interests. Autonomous discourses are certainly required, but in this form of debate very few people can speak. Speakers are expected to be calm and restrained and arguments can never flow dialogically because of the queue of people wishing to speak.

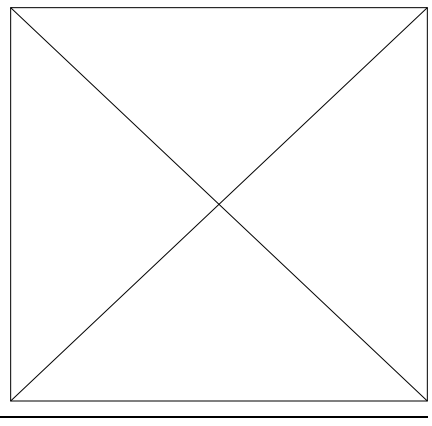
Friday night at the Oval was a double bill of Arthur Lager and *VaVaVoom* downstairs and Jane Gang's personally presented selection from the New York underground upstairs. The *VaVaVoom* evening had been set up by Colette of *Exploding*. This outfit is Brighton based and is a kind of sleaze cocktailbar cabaret with swamp/ Goth undertones. Lots of skulls and writhing around half naked. I'm not sure they were at their best in the Oval theatre, as there was not enough room for a table based audience, nonetheless they did provide the perfect environment for Arthur Lager's first retrospective. Arthur is a kind of suburban greaseball '90s version of Jeff Keen the beatnik. His Super 8 films also use goofy pop imagery along with multi-layering and animation. There is a lot of coarse and comical sex between unlikely creatures and seaside pier humour. All of which comes at you like a luminous freight train sometimes accompanied by live drumming. Arthur has been an *Exploding* favourite for years and Colette's inspired programming with *VaVaVoom* made it an unforgettable occasion. Nevertheless Mr Lager was, contrary to his presence on screen, his usual surly nervous self. Upstairs, the tattooed lady, Jane Gang had her New York *'Zipper'* show. Two of the film makers had come over and where somewhat shocked at our lack of basic hospitality for international visitors. US underground festivals can be much better resourced although they don't sound as much fun. Nor do they include the transmedia live dimension that made Volcano so alive. *The Zipper show*, which was a 'best of' selection, veered from the darkly comical to the horrifically vulgar. Annie Stanley and Patty Chang produced *'Hub Cap'* in which two women have sex in a motor car. Cut! Their limp and naked bodies are draped across the seats. The cops arrive. Horror enough? No way! A cop then proceeds with a variety of graphic necrophilic acts. Too plainly unpleasant for any metaphorical appreciation. But, well made. Oh God...

On the other hand, Mr Mean's *'Glamour Puss: How to Keep Your Man Happy'* was a delightful and funny celebration of sexual seduction for the over seventies. Mrs Means enjoys trying a variety of increasingly creative and hilarious seduction techniques on her newspaper hugging spouse. Finally he cracks. Yippee!

Upstairs and down, this was a wild night indeed. The large Oval cafe was packed and even had market stalls selling wares which ranged from dominatrix bone china mugs to second-hand super eight cameras. Sandwiched in this cacophony of commerce was Mark Pawson with his lurid selection of publications and pop trash ephemera. *VaVaVoom* had brought their own Techila cocktail bar and an inordinate amount of cleavage.

The final night's *Aftershock* was curated by Grace of *My Eyes! My Eyes!* Every corner of the Oval House building was used for installations and a continuous series of performances. The range of work on show that night was mind boggling. In a dark room a weird group, including a eight year old girl with a false beard, played cards around a table bathed in red light. Behind them was an audience of rigid (dead) rabbits seated on raked chairs. Very strange and unsettling. This was *'Toolroom Salon'*. Just around the corner Tim Flitcroft had a sound lab in which recordings of the previous evening were transferred to film mag stock which was looped and passed through a series of table mounted professional film editing pick-up heads. The resulting sounds were then modulated by a small team. An evocative electronic music experience which seemed like it had come straight out of the '70s arts lab scene. And so it went on, in every corner of the building, using the full firepower of *Volcano's* combined projection resources. The ambience was of a cross between some underworld street market and a primitive pagan festival of light.

This third *Volcano* was a milestone for autonomous film distribution in London. Of the 280 movies shown at *Volcano 1998*, and the 1200 works shown by the *Exploding Cinema* since 1991, almost all are unavailable. Little of this rich body of work can be accessed for study or pleasure. It will not be a part of film history and so anything but the barest outline, understanding and representation of autonomous grassroots film production will be lost. History is now a question of multiple viewpoints not just the over bearing narrative of the high and mighty. Counter to this is the view that the underground scene is an oral culture defined by its very outsider status. A culture which relies for its immediacy on a mythopoetic compositing of its past—whose organic traditions reside in human form rather than in institutions.



Margit Schiller being brought before the Hamburg press, October 1971

Terry Delaney

Photographs from an undeclared war

Baader-Meinhof: Pictures on the run 67-77 by Astrid Proll

From the mid 1970s until the early '80s I visited Germany regularly. Those were different times, it has to be said, and the Europe of 'no borders' was still some way off. On the train from Brussels to Cologne burly German Border Police stalked the corridors, pistols prominent on their robust hips, their intimidating manner impressive and accomplished. They carried with them what looked for all the world like outsized photograph albums. These they would flick through occasionally as they travelled through the trains examining passports. I never quite saw what was in those albums but imagined them to be full of photographs of suspected guerrillas. I hoped fervently that none of those images bore much resemblance to myself.

At the railway stations themselves one got a hint of what might have been in those bulky snap albums carried by the Border Guards. Everywhere there were posters, row on row of black and white passport-sized photographs of young men and women, with a question hanging over the ranks of faces: 'Have you seen these people?' There was something chilling about wanted posters displayed so prominently in a modern European state although a cursory glance would not have revealed quite how chilling these posters were. A closer look revealed something odd, indeed disturbing, about some of the photographs. Their subjects were dead. I'm not sure how these images had been made, whether the corpses had been photographed on mortuary slabs or had somehow been propped up for the camera. Having looked once one tended not to look again.

And so here, in this the 'Model Germany', the wunderkind of Post War capitalism, with its vorsprung durch technik glitz reeking of all that was modern and efficient and liberal, this proof incarnate that the barbarism of the first half of the century had been swept away forever, here I was confronted with something that seemed to be first cousin to the mediaeval custom of placing the heads of traitors and vanquished enemies on stakes in public places; a kind of salutary lesson to the potentially disaffected, perhaps, or a triumphalist gesture akin to the display of sporting trophies before one's loyal support?

The cover of Astrid Proll's Baader Meinhof, *Pictures on the Run 67-77* appears to have been taken from one such poster. There are the rows of young faces, serious, but in this case healthy, the pictures now somehow reminiscent of one of those American High School Yearbooks. You know the sort of thing; Holger Meins—Most Tenacious, Ulrike Meinhof—Class President, and so on.

But death is never far away in these photographs. There, at the very beginning of the book, is the dying

Benno Ohnesorg, shot by the police on June 2nd 1967 during a demonstration against a visit by the Shah of Iran. This was the death that started all the other deaths, the first move in the insane game of tit for tat that characterised the years of the German guerrilla. Ohnesorg looking more like an accountant who's put on his best casual clothing for a weekend barbecue than the martyr who will inspire a movement, is a strangely peaceful corpse. He could be sleeping. Another student, Fredericke Dollinger, is in the picture. She is cradling Ohnesorg's head, her own head looking away from the corpse and off into the distance; her eyes, fearful and angry, are a prophecy of what is to come.

And there, in the final photograph in the book, over ten years later, is the corpse of Andreas Baader. His eyes are wide open. He too is staring at something above and beyond the edges of the picture, his shattered head framed by an enormous halo of viscous blood.

In her introduction to her collection of photographs Astrid Proll emphasises how young the guerrillas were. The spirit of the early photographs is one of youthful exuberance. There is one of Baader in the Kurfurstendamm, dancing with Dorothea Ridder, and Rainer Langhans in drag. Baader's round face, and plump lips, give him the appearance of an overgrown baby. In other photographs it is his eyes which stand out: They are the clear and guileless eyes of a young child. The thought arises when looking at these pictures that Baader's appearance did him no favours. When placed against the Authorities' perception of him as a cruel and dangerous terrorist, this incongruous infant quality may have seemed quite terrifying.

Baader retained many of the same physical qualities until his death, but transformation in terms of physical appearance is another major theme to be traced in the book. Transformation unto death. The most dramatic change in the book, and the most disturbing corpse, is that of Holger Meins.

Early in 1967 we see the twenty-five year old Meins as film student. He is handsome, clean cut and neatly dressed. His hair is slightly long perhaps, but it is unlikely that any self respecting bürger would have objected to Meins accompanying his daughter home to discuss their future.

When we see him next he is standing alone outside a block of flats in Frankfurt. His hands are raised to shoulder level and he is staring at the police armoured car which is drawn up a few feet in front of him. In the picture on the facing page the armoured car has retreated about twenty feet and Meins is removing his trousers having already divested himself of the clothes from the upper part of his body. On the following page the near naked Meins is being taken away by police, his arms held rigidly behind him, his mouth open in a scream: Whether of pain or defiance it is impossible to tell. One of the policemen has a small pistol clutched tightly in his right hand; a peculiar detail this, in that his right arm appears to be participating in the arm locks being operated on Meins and is therefore, presumably, not free to actually operate the pistol should the need arise. Indeed he appears to be pointing the pistol more or less at himself, a lapse one imagines to be indicative of the fear of the guerrillas felt by their enemies.

Next we see mugshots of Meins and Jan-Carl Raspe, taken on the same day in 1972. They are both wearing black prison clothing resembling nothing less than the black pyjamas of the Viet Cong; a curious symmetry this considering the inspirational role of the Vietnamese guerrilla groups. The pair appear to be drugged: Their faces are contorted unnaturally. Raspe looks to be having difficulty standing up. In the close-up shots their faces are those of gargoyles; the once dapper Meins looks to have aged fifteen years in the five years since the film student photographs. His hair is straggly and he sports an unruly moustache. Checking back and forth between these photographs and those in the earlier part of the book it is impossible to be certain that they are indeed the same man.

The final photograph of Meins was taken in 1974. He is laid out in his coffin. His hair is long and he has the beard of an Orthodox priest. Indeed if I had been presented with this photograph out of context I might have taken it for an image of the corpse of the murdered Rasputin. Having starved to death he is little more than a skeleton with skin stretched over it. His eyes are sunk deep into their sockets, the outline of the skeletal basin in which they sit being as prominent as they are in a skull. Still in all it isn't a horrifying photograph. Meins looks to be at peace, he is clothed in white and his winding-sheet is lace trimmed. An ecclesiastical candle stands by the coffin. His hands are folded over one another in front of him. There is a sense of order about this image of Meins in death; it is as if despite the chaos of his guerrilla years and the horror of his death, tranquillity of a sort has been restored.

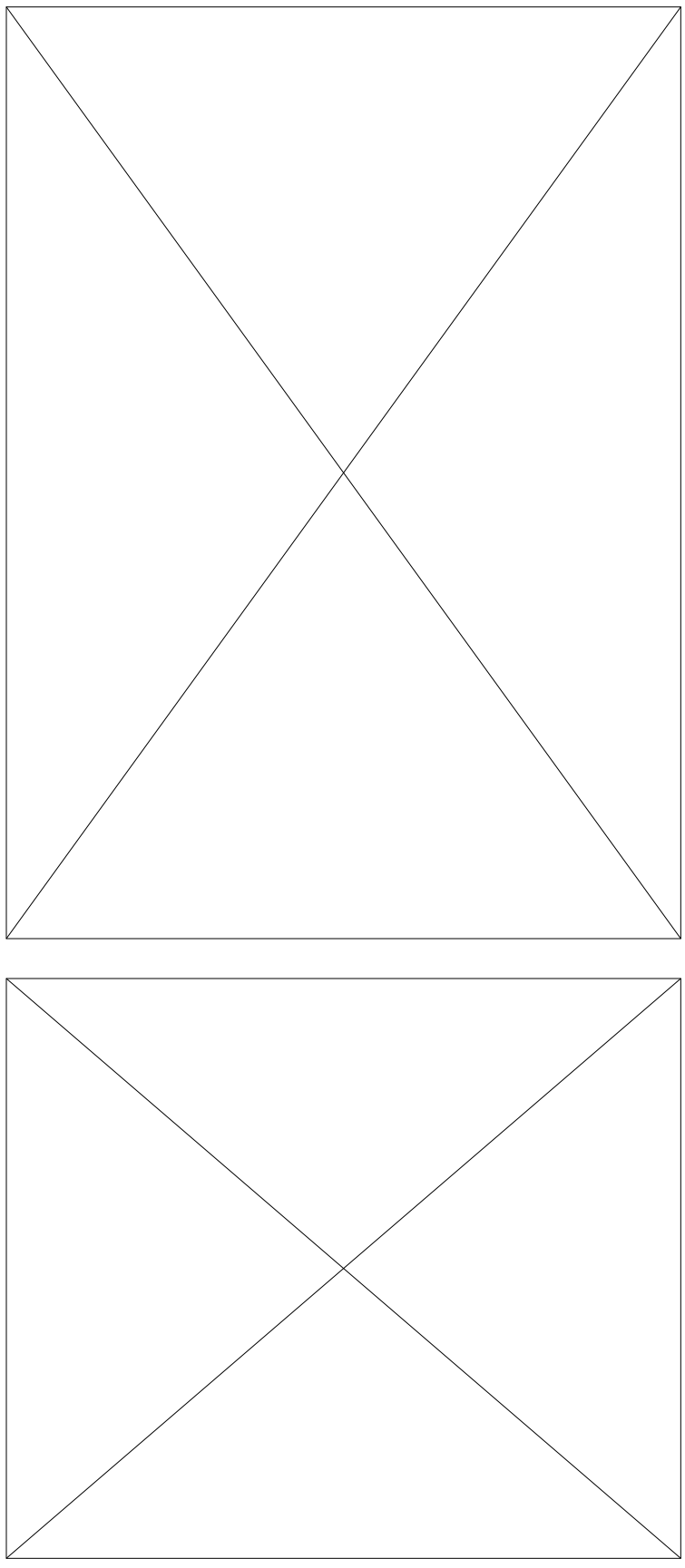
I have seen another photograph of Meins, not in this book, which is much harder to look at. His naked corpse is laid out on a floor. From neck to groin there is a huge scar, roughly sewn up after autopsy, a brutalisation, which although inflicted on a body already dead, is peculiarly shocking. His head is huge in proportion to his body which is no more than an assemblage of bones, the arms loosely joined twigs ending in claw like hands, the pelvic girdle seems to somehow loom above his torso, the iliac crests pointing upwards like thumbs raised in a gesture of victory.

It is of this picture that Hans Joachim Klein of the Revolutionary Cells, partner with Carlos in the kidnapping of the OPEC oil ministers in 1975, said; "I have kept this picture with me to keep my hatred sharp." It is seven years since the student photographs.

The history of the German guerrilla has many shocking features to it, but the most shocking was the way in which one catastrophic bloodletting led to another in a chain of action and reaction that seems in retrospect to have been nothing less than a blood feud. The day after the death of Holger Meins, the President of the West Berlin Chamber Court, Gunten von Drenkmann, was shot dead.

Njal's Saga, perhaps the greatest of the Icelandic sagas, tells the tale of a decades long succession of murders committed in response to other murders which ends only when the warring parties simply have no more energy to continue the struggle. The German guerrilla was something like that. By the time Baader and the others died in Stammheim another generation of guerrillas was already taking their place. The link between the RAF of the early 1980s and that of the early 1970s was tenuous. Almost from the beginning the motivation of the guerrillas was to release comrades or simply to strike back in retaliation. The German State's reaction to what, in the early days, was comparatively mild opposition, simply fed a monster. In turn the German establishment terrified itself into perceiving a much greater threat than there ever was. The grandiose ambitions of the guerrillas matched perfectly the State's perception of the threat. Action and reaction grew in viciousness and desperation.

The escalation of violence turned on the perception of the enemy as somehow inhuman. This perception is apparent in the photographs. The corpse of Holger Meins seems gutted of humanity, or even any trace of the identity of Meins the film student. The prison clothing the captured guerrillas were forced to wear is a time honoured means of depriving captives of their identity. Meinhof, forever anxious in these photographs, could have been snapped in any number of penal innovations from the earlier part of the century, from the Gulag to Buchenwald.

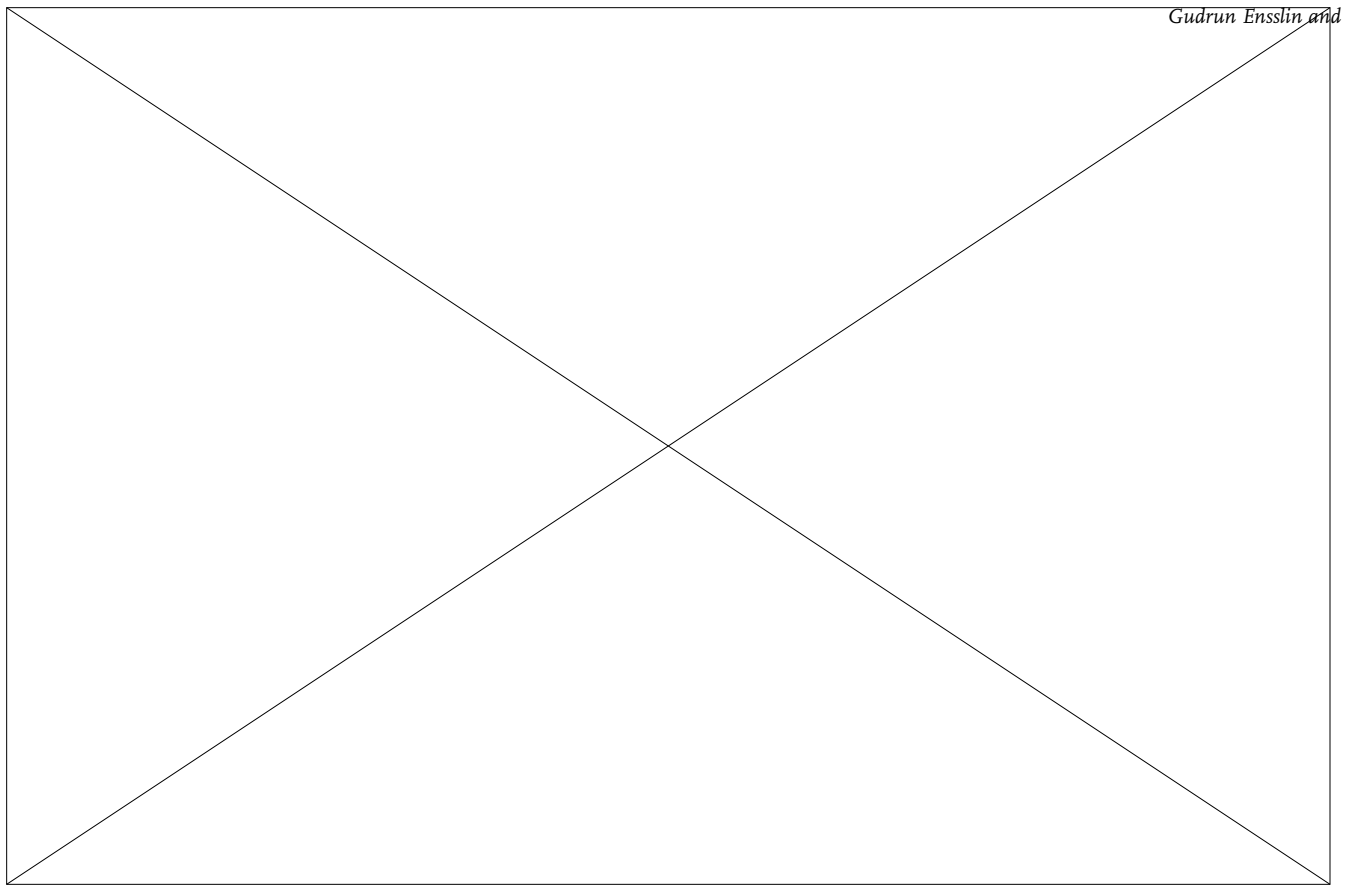


Enslinnn, dressed in the same type of canvas wrap, attempts to resist dehumanisation. She smiles at the camera or looks at it with her head tilted up in an almost flirtatious way. The four photographs of her in prison clothing are placed side by side. She is holding a piece of card on a string. The card has the number '1' printed on it. Together the images form a bizarre catwalk model show: Gudrun is wearing the latest in penitentiary fashion...

In an early photograph, a young woman, Margrit Schiller, is being physically carried by a group of five police persons. One, a woman has her head in an arm lock. Either side of this woman are two uniformed men. One is looking towards Schiller's face, the only one to do so, although her face is turned away. He wears an expression of contempt or disgust. On the other side his colleague is looking away. His expression is one of suppressed amusement. At her feet another man in plainclothes is pulling her forward. His expression is more openly amused. He is also looking away from Schiller as if the spectacle of her struggle is too embarrassing to contemplate.

In the middle of the group a second policewoman stands. She is looking at Schiller, but not at her face. She appears instead to be looking at her stomach. Her expression too is one of amusement and she has her left hand raised at Schiller's side, her fingers poised in such a way as to suggest she is about to pinch or, possibly, poke the prisoner. The demeanour of all of the police officers suggests not that they are

Top: *Ulrike Meinhof and Irene Goergens, whilst filming the TV documentary "Bambule" in West Berlin, 1969–70*
Above: *Holger Meins being taken into custody, 1st June 1972*



Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader in Paris, November 1969

handling a human being but are dealing with something, a rolled up carpet perhaps, an awkward load.

The caption tells us that Margrit Schiller was being taken to face the Hamburg press. She was a suspect in the murder of a policeman. She was never tried for the crime.

Then there are the photographs of the guerrillas as victims. Peter Lorenz sits stone faced, the cardboard notice pinned to his chest strangely reminiscent of the warning attached to the young David Copperfield, in that, like the proclamation 'He bites', this demonstration of young Lorenz's trophy status is essentially a humiliation.

The pictures of the doomed Hans Martin Schleyer are a similar display. There are three of them, days and weeks apart, and they c although they have their eyes fixed firmly on Klein he is pointedly ignoring them.

Klein Was never a member of the RAF but belonged to one of the other two armed groups, the 'Revolutionary Cells' (the third group was 'The 2nd of June Movement'). Within weeks of this picture being taken Klein participated in one of the most spectacular actions of the European guerrilla, the kidnapping of the OPEC oil ministers in Vienna, during which he was wounded in the stomach. Three years later Klein emerged from the underground and gave a detailed interview with Liberation, in which he rejected the armed struggle and criticised many of the actions of the guerrillas. He clearly outlined his motivation and the motivation of the guerrillas emphasising the extent to which retaliation played a part. Each time the authorities acted against the guerrillas it produced a desire for retaliation which drew more and more people into the armed struggle: "First there's a vicious manhunt by the police and then there's a vicious manhunt by the guerrillas." Proll makes much the same point in her book. The chronology speaks for itself.

The other picture I have of Klein is cut from The Independent of 13th September 1998. It sits beneath a headline which reads: 'Village rues arrest of affable terrorist.' Twenty years after he abandoned the armed struggle the State has caught up with Hans Joachim Klein, who had apparently carved out an anonymous niche for himself in a Normandy village the inhabitants of which are quoted as regretting his arrest: 'He was a nice guy... He was a friend... He adored opera. We dreamed of going to La Scala.' Daniel Cohn-Bendit is quoted as saying Klein was about to give himself up anyway and that the Frankfurt prosecutor had been cutting a deal with him before the arrest. About the whole affair there is a strong whiff of official duplicity.

One is tempted to ask whose photograph Klein's prosecutor kept by him to keep his, hatred sharp.

Proll had been a student of photography when she became involved with the Baader-Enslinn circle. There is no sense however in which this is a collection of art photographs. The sources of the collection are diverse and include press photographs. Many of the photographs are simply snapshots. A sequence taken in Paris in November 1969, when the group had made the move into illegality and were on the run, is particularly striking. Their high spirits jump out of the photos. This is a group of young people, a group of friends, having fun. They have changed their appearance, though not enough, I think, to fool anybody. The changes seemed designed to make them look more Parisien. These could be stills from the set of some Nouvelle Vague movie.

Narcissism is a major feature of these early photographs. These are young people showing off. In the Paris photographs Baader is wearing urban guerrilla chic. He stares moodily at the camera, cigarette held loosely in his left hand, the collar of his leather blouson turned up.

In another photograph Enslinn and Baader stare into one another's eyes across a café table. Enslinn's hand holds a cigarette poised above a Ricard ash tray. The photograph would fit quite easily into any number of current advertisement campaigns; it's black and white Calvin Klein chic avant la lettre. Such photographs raise the question of the extent to which Bonnie and Clyde fantasies fuelled the actions of the group—Young! Beautiful! In Love! And Armed to the Teeth!

Bommi Baumann, once of the group, '2nd of June', described the RAF as having the reputation among the other groups of being somewhat in love with the trappings of underground life—expensive clothes, expensive flats and, above all, expensive cars. In his book, How It All Began, he claims the other groups joked that the initials BMW stood for Baader-Meinhof Wagon. And here, sure enough we have Baader and Enslinn and others, standing beside a large white Mercedes in June 1969, with a BMW parked alongside. They look like a rock group about to step into their limo. Proll describes Enslinn and Baader as, 'little media stars for the radical left' and the pictures appear to show them ready to carry out this brief.

How readily style becomes substance. The photographs of the group's 1968 trial for arson show them clowning self consciously for the cameras. Thorwald Proll has a cigar stuck in his mouth and looks rather like Groucho Marx. There is a sense in which, in the early stages, the group is always dressing up, playing at different roles like small children. This is evident even in Enslinn's prison photographs, the catwalk pictures, of which Proll writes: 'Gudruun looks like a performing child in a Nazi home'.

It was unfortunate really that this was the role which stuck, that this was the costume she could not shed.

At Enslinn's funeral the photographers crowd to the edge of the grave. Their lust for the telling image puts them in danger of tumbling into the grave with her. The lenses of their Nikons, Pentaxes and Leicas are black mouths gaping like the ever open maws of hungry chicks. As we stare at this sordid avidity the open mouths stare back at us becoming in the process huge black Cyclops eyes. They are defiant and threatening and throw back at us the paranoiac's challenge, 'What are you looking at?'

In the middle of this gaggle of cameras stand a small group of mourners. The sight the photographers are shamelessly devouring is too much for this

group. No one will look into the grave. Each has found their own neutral spot to stare at instead—the ground, the horizon, the sky, a fellow mourner's shoulder. Central to this group and the focus of this photograph is Pastor Enslinn. His head is held high and he wears a mask of Stoic endurance. His chin juts forward and his thin mouth is turned down by the strain of holding it there. He holds his face in this immobile, sculpted position for fear, one suspects, that if he let go for a minute it will simply dissolve or crumble into ruins. He seems to be a figure from another time. His eyes are hooded and black and stare at a spot beyond the grave and beyond the edges of the photograph. We see this far gazing at other death scenes in this book, in Dollinger and Baader, as if at the end, when confronted with the finality of death, it is only possible to look away, beyond the confines of photographs and mere images to search for whatever can transcend the sordidness of the moment.

Perhaps this is a case for the airbrusher's art. There must be still, somewhere in the ruins of the Soviet Empire, persons skilled in eliminating the unwanted from history. Individuals whose task it was to remove all traces of politically inconvenient images from photographs which offered proof of their existence. Perhaps some merciful millionaire could fund a project whereby all copies of this picture could be recalled and the degraded hustle round the grave slowly brushed away, until all the photographers and the sound men and the grim and stolid policemen have vanished, leaving only the group of mourners finally alone with their grief, and Gudruun Enslinn in her coffin, allowed, at last, the dignity in death customarily afforded mere princesses, tyrants and torturers.

Thorwald Proll, Horst Sohnlein, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, 14 October 1968

id battery

Alice Angus

Ripples in the vacuum

Experimental electronic music and audio arts at ISEA 98, 2—7 September, venues in Liverpool and Manchester

The annual symposium of the *Inter-Society of Electronic Arts, ISEA98*, was billed as a critical event integrating symposia and artists projects, spread over 6 days. It embodied the *Revolution Symposium* in Liverpool, the *Terror Symposium* in Manchester and *revolution98* artists projects, in venues from galleries to trains across both cities. The annual *ISEA* symposium, now in its ninth incarnation, is a locus for exploring innovation in the cultural use of electronic technology.

It is no mean feat to produce an event of this scale and some excellent presentations did arise from among the two hundred speakers (ranging from Coco Fusco to David Toop), and projects by over 100 international artists. Sensitive and creative programming was evident across the programme yet *ISEA98* tripped on the overall scale and focus of the event. The thrill of seeing such an event taking place in the UK soon waned. Too many disappointing presentations and projects confused by unfocused publicity and the overload of parallel presentations and events, left delegates exhasted.

This appeared to stem from little integration in the structure of the two conferences; the hosts, one came to wonder, might rather not have worked together at all. A problem which led to vast heaps of information and programmes that amalgamation would have simplified. Unfortunately the high costs of this kind of event, despite bursaries, and the combined time span of the two symposia, resulted in some delegates attending only one. Add to that the travelling between venues and the meetings and introductions that are an important part of international projects. Events such as this are a focal point, a meeting place for artists, curators, writers and researchers feeding into the local and national cultural environment, it is vital they are accessible both in terms of cost and location.

It is not uncommon for digital art (new media, or new technologies) survey exhibitions and festivals to suffer from both the overload and the appearance of ill conceived, hastily constructed work. Work that thinly packages a surface image of digital technology instead of utilising it as a medium or a tool, views it as an end rather than a means to an end. The overarching framework of digital art allowed projects at *ISEA* to slip into a tedious celebration of the digital, leaving any notion of critical reflection on the practice outside the door.

The tendency to hang a festival beneath overarching themes and frameworks has become a common practice. It can provide a timely and constructive forum for discussion and focus on important issues; conversely it causes difficulties for artists and curators trying to shape themselves to the theme, resulting in weak and clumsily re-formed ideas. The apparent development of 'digital arts' as a practice should take it beyond the simple problems of a theme. It becomes a ghetto when it contributes to the rise of a situation where to gain funding and visibility artists and curators label themselves as digital artists, moulding their practice to the digital art framework. Artists whose practice involves only a nod to the digital are in danger of being overshadowed. The highlights of *revolution98* were cases where technology was appropriate to the work, where, simple as it sounds, the practice and the ideas had not been led by the technology.

It was a breath of fresh air, then, to find the audio programme attempting to embrace audio art/ experimental music that not only uses or is influenced by electronic technology but has itself been influential in the use and development of electronic technology. Thus we saw a programme that predictably included *Scanner* and *Audiorom*, but more surprisingly pioneer Keith Rowe and singer Diamandia Galas. Presentations and performances included artists, inventors, academics, broadcasters and pioneers in experimental electronic music. The programme investigated and celebrated innovation and revolutionary work over the last century.

Sonic Boom, the one day audio arts panel, curated by Colin Fallows, part of the Liverpool *Revolution Symposium*, consisted a series of short presentations thoughtfully programmed to allow ideas to resonate and develop from one speaker to the next. However, it suffered from trying to pack too much in back to back. Although engaging, the format of the day and quality of some of the presentations let interesting ideas slip by without the discussion they merited. Zina Kaye's research into articulating sound in the electronic vacuum, where real sound cannot exist without air and architecture in which to resonate, where it cannot reverberate through the existing land and soundscape, was one such instance.

An intriguing relationship grew up between this and the explorations of Max Eastley's work. His creation of synthesised organic objects that interact with the shifting, changing environment, set up a symbiosis of natural and artificial. There is a rare delicacy, and focused intensity to Eastley's work and it was a disappointment and surprise to many that he was not performing at *ISEA98*. Eastley's work sweeps to the edge of consciousness and recognition. Sounds flow in intricate patterns reminiscent of the rhythm of life and the sounds of empty spaces, the shuddering intensity of silence. His delicately constructed sculptures into which he breathes a voice, his use of the human body and electronic technology combine in a response to the existing, fluctuating environment. Concerns echoed in the work and writing of Brandon Labbelle of California based *id Battery*. Labelle's talk unfolded with the same poetic elegance of his performances, which map a path through the sensual experience of listening. Labelle articulated sound-making as a dialogue replying to the soundscape of the physical world.

Performing with Loren Chasse as *id battery*, Labelle continued this exploration. *Id battery's* instruments constitute a landscape of found objects (leaves, stones, bricks) collected electric and natural sounds, contact microphones and paper. Performing Width of a membrane, they kneel on either side of a white paper screen. Sounds are created from the collection as one traces on the screen while the other appears to ignore it, lost in his own activity. Their action indicates an urgent need to communicate to the other who cannot, or would rather not, hear it. The obvious danger the screen might tear and all be lost creates the same delicate balance at play in the sound, curling and uncurling, concealing and revealing another uncertain sound upon sound.

Unrecognised, yet utterly familiar, the sounds *id battery* weave vibrate against the membrane of recognition, never piercing the surface. The combination of sound sources seems to be reflecting, reacting to and reassessing the reverberating world that surrounds us. The contact microphones, placed on surfaces to excavate the inner sounds of rooms or objects, reveal sounds in the background of every day; the sounds

around us, behind us and underpinning silence. *Id battery* create sounds of such enduring resonance they nearly assume a biological, organic and evolving life and if left alone, you begin to wonder, might they just continue to unfurl, insinuating themselves into the existing soundscape.

Following *id battery*, in the evening programme at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, and with similar sensibility, was *In Between Noise*, Steve Roden, also California based, explored the resonant qualities of a combination of found objects in *helios flying (sound)*. His palette includes broken, found, and toy instruments mixed with field recordings, his voice and electronic manipulation. *In Between Noise* spins delicate strands of sound from air and holds them, expanding their complexity and volume as if teasing out some delicate invisible filament. An insane inventor on a quest to create life Roden seems increasingly frustrated, as if restraining himself from grinding the instrument to dust. Projecting, haunting and meandering narratives, at times tightly twisted and sharp then massaged by the deeply personal shadow of a human voice.

In a performance programme that ranged from Keith Rowe to *Audiorom* it was the two programmes at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA), that proved the most inspiring. Except for the critically acclaimed *Skyray*, the majority of the programme was the listening revelation it set itself up to be. *Skyray's* inclusion in a programme of experimental electronic music was incongruous to begin with, without placing him after *id battery*, *In Between Noise* and Keith Rowe. Although it is a genuine pleasure to drift away on this music with its French ambient techno and funk flourishes reminiscent of *Air* and French musician/ producer Etienne de Crecy, it is neither experimental sound nor is it experimental in terms of its own genre of electronic music. It would have made more sense in an evening devoted to the far reaching influence of electronic music and digital technology in contemporary culture and the club scene.

The second half of the programme at LIPA veered into the final frontier, the tractor beams, transformers and dilithium crystals; yesterday's utopian vision of tomorrow's technology. At some point the words "The shields are useless against it captain" came to mind. These performances were as intense as they were witty and I hope the pun on the popular science fiction of the '60s and '70s was intentional. Janek Schaefer, in a luminous white suit, performed *Triphonic Revolutions*, amidst the flotsam and jetsam of another decade's technology and the Tri-phonic turntable, invented in his bedroom in 1997. He appeared so intensely involved in the performance, so oblivious to his surroundings that you'd have been forgiven for thinking he was mad. I almost felt a voyeur for watching the extremely private creation of this wonderful true cacophony that famously reverses Dr Who and stutters T S Eliot.

It eventually faded revealing the deeply disturbing, obsessive, concentration of *Data Rape 2000* by *EAR* (*Experimental Audio research*). *EAR's* Pete Kember uses a process called circuit bending which involved doctoring the circuitry of sound making toys and combining this with recorded sounds of the sonic vocabulary of human existence: from insects to humans. In contrast *Project Dark's Excited by Gramophones* featured Kirsten Reynold's and Ashley Davies' records made from steel, hair, vinyl, glass, sandpaper and pyrotechnics creating an explosive, shuddering, assault of sound and rhythm. Finally *Blast*: *Mount Vernon Arts Lab's* stretching and testing of Theramins, Turbine Generators, Random Analogue Sequencers purpose built and connected with interacting circuitry, finished a combustible evening. Fire alarms set off during the previous performance, resulted in the evacuation of the building and delayed *Blast*. It was an evening of performances, reminiscent of all those movies we grew up on. To hear the flickering sound of the future coming back from the past, through the performances, was to wonder again about the utopian dreams and nightmare visions of the technology of the future.

Why do we find performers like *id battery* and Max Eastley at a symposium on electronic art? What relevance has their work to innovation in digital arts; with its unusual and minimal use of electronic technology, its physical relationship to the instruments and to the sound itself? It is precisely this relationship with the evidence of the human, the touch, the voice, the natural materials and the irreverent approach to technology that is necessary to explore and question our relationship with electronic technology. This innovative and radical work is not at the established forefront of technology development because it is radical in its approach which challenge assumptions and expectations. It deliberately blurs the boundaries that allow us to separate "artificial" from "real". Our approach to digital technology is built on our historical relationship with computers and video technology. Part of our understanding of computer technology is that of order, control and precise measurement. We are entrenched in material, architectural visions of digital space such as Robert Longo's 1995 visualisation of the *Internet 2021*, in the film of William Gibbon's book *Johnny Mnemonic*. Against this, many of the artists above push their use of technology into an area where control is lost, opening up space for natural phenomena and chance. Away from the screen and the visual, away from the linear, structured visions of digital space. Artists such as Max Eastley, *id battery*, Steve Roden and Pete Kember offer alternative approaches to understanding digital space and strategies for exploring digital technologies.

id battery cds are available from PO Box 931124, Los Angeles, CA 90093 and *In Between Noise* from Steve Roden Box 50261 Pasadena CA 91115.

Alternative, Mainstream, Mainstream Alternatives:

The viability of the artist-led initiative

On Saturday 6th February, Variant held a discussion in the Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, under the title 'Alternative, Mainstream, Mainstream Alternatives: The Viability of the Artist-Led Initiatives'. The publicity material for the discussion raised the extensive gentrification schemes undertaken in Dublin's Temple Bar, and now underway in the Laganside area of Belfast. Both have been sustained, at least in part, by co-opting a 'cultural' agenda. Mindful of the contemporary position of the artist as agent in social processes, we provided a platform for artists and artist-led initiatives to debate the assisting of such property speculators through their activities, examining the viability of an 'alternative/ mainstream' dichotomy, in a climate of supposed consensus politics.

The discussion was chaired by Val Connor, Visual Arts Director of the Project Arts Centre in Dublin. The three featured speakers were: Orla Ryan, Dublin based artist and writer; Toby Dennett, public art consultant and former committee member of Catalyst Arts, Belfast; and Martin McCabe, lecturer and founder of Critical Access, Dublin. The discussion was organised by Daniel Jewesbury who is based in Belfast. What follows is an edited transcript of the event.

Toby Dennett: Looking at the events that led to the setting up of artist-run spaces in Belfast, there was a feeling that if the platforms needed were not in place, and the opportunities were not coming through the channels that should have been supplying them, then we had to create these for ourselves. This moved on quickly and became a realisation of the potential of initiating our own agenda. This was a sustainable option which wasn't just about the provision of appropriate places to platform contemporary art. There was a shift from the feeling of obligation to the realisation of the potential to effect a much wider arena, the whole issue of actually making art.

Another important element of artist-run spaces has been the ability to curate with a lot more insight and vision—artists are, in most cases, going to be two steps ahead of the average gallery, curator or programmer, and could take more risks and be more ambitious. They're not up against the constraints that conventional galleries are up against. The concerns that are relevant to artists and their working practice can be examined by them curating, opening up an extra dimension to the avenues of their work as an artist. There is, however, a potential problem. When the control that an artist has in their own work, setting their own agenda, is employed in their work as a curator, the individual elements of other artists' work, which you're trying to platform, can be smothered. The work or the show can simply become a ready-made for the artist-curator.

On the question of sustainability, artist-run spaces are becoming more and more mainstream, and that's being picked up as a kind of cultural branding, especially with 'arts and culture' now seen as a viable economic option. I'm referring specifically to some of the gentrification schemes currently underway, particularly Laganside's adoption of Cathedral Quarter [an area of Belfast, where Catalyst Arts is situated] and the extent to which artists and artist groups should or could co-operate with this. I don't think we should see Laganside as a threat just because they're big business; the real fear is of losing autonomy and having your reputation let down by a surface gloss that does not reflect reality, and being trampled in the process. I think artists have always had ambitions that reach beyond their ability, due to funding constraints, and would love to see major investment following on from the reputation they have established in the area, but they fear it's all going pear-shaped as has happened so often before.

Artist-run spaces need to look hard at how they deal with this problem. The traditional methods of sticking to your guns and fighting your corner by continuing to produce good projects, as if this will in some way make Laganside sit back and say, wait a minute, we should let these guys run the show, they seem to know what they are doing—it simply won't happen that way. We're trying to lead by example, saying, look this is what good practice is, this is a viable way of working. This has worked to some extent and has been recognised in many quarters. However, the private sector and public corporations seem quite uninformed. Examples of good practice are only recognised at a surface level, and the complexities that go to make that up aren't necessarily understood. So the usual way of proving critics wrong, by showcasing good work, leading by example, just doesn't apply here. It's also related to the fact that these bodies, although seen as threats, are not critics of the way artist-run spaces operate in any ideological sense. They only see them as commodities; the whole area is seen as a single unit or industry. That is a worrying point. No amount of good press is going to get you anywhere, it only increases your value as a commodity.

Having said that Laganside can do great things for Cathedral Quarter. Artist-run groups have been struggling for years with financial problems, lack of audiences and a run-down environment. They need the investment that the potential Laganside development can offer. Laganside are not the real threat; they're not buying all the property and pricing artists out of the area. They want to keep artists there because they're an asset to the area. The danger is the developers that Laganside are trying to encourage to take the area on; so the battle is to ensure that some form of clause is inserted into the development contracts that takes into account artists' needs.

The relevant groups would do well to change their usual stance and act more as political-type lobby groups, either by themselves or through the Visual Artists Association of Northern Ireland (VANNI). It's a difficult situation, everyone's unpaid, and who wants to take on that task of researching documents, going to meetings, campaigning, lobbying. It's a shit job, but you have to play by their roles if you really want to make any impact. At the end of the day, Laganside are a public body and they're afraid of bad publicity, especially if it's directed towards lack of accountability and lack of consultation, or not fulfilling their statutory obligations. They spend a lot of money trying to persuade people that this is not the case but unless someone spends the time looking at this and investigating the channels through which decisions are made, and acting on this, then the whole process is going to go on without you. You have to get the people who matter on your side, to enlist the Arts Council, the City Council, who unfortunately are also under pressure to go for the grander plans and big publicity.

At the end of day, you do need Laganside. The basic question is whether the artist-led organisations feel they have the will and commitment to go down that road. Maybe they decide it's the last thing they want to do and just carry on regardless, if need be relocate to a new area, or use some other strategy for continuing to work. By definition the nature of artist-run initiatives will constantly change as they respond to the cultural/ political/ economic environment. That's their strength, that's what artists created these platforms for in the first place.

I don't think organisations want to be alternative

for the sake of it. The mainstream has always wanted to be alternative; films are marketed as cult-classics before they're even released. That artist-run spaces are becoming more mainstream in terms of getting recognition and acceptance, as being viable, almost enhances the alternative slant they are being labelled with, but when you get into that sort of arena it gets less to do with substance and an aspect of dumbing-down comes into play. To avoid being tarnished with that artists may feel a move towards a real alternative stance is needed.

Orla Ryan: The alignment of alternative/ mainstream has a certain 'given-ness' about it, making it highly suspect. Alternative to what? What mainstream? Is there just one? As meta-narratives these terms are pretty useless unless we clarify the theoretical ground from which we speak. How do we fit the artist into this landscape? We're faced with the problem of defining 'artist'; we could ask for example is an artist an 'artist' when she is curating a show, working in an administrative role, as a social worker or critic? What is the reasoning behind the artist subject-position being the over-riding role?

The handout for today's discussion asks: "...How useful are terms like 'alternative' or 'avant-garde' in the current climate, as yet another generation of artist-run projects become elevated to the cultural 'mainstream'?". I would question the transparent assumptions inherent in a term like 'generation'. The idea runs something like this: young artists start off being idealistic, socially motivated and 'alternative' until their careers take off and they are "elevated to the cultural 'mainstream'". Such a linear conception of alternative practices reduces the discursive potential of 'alternative'. We need to be reflexive in asking whose interests are served by maintaining such a linear model?

I believe artists occupy a multitude of different spaces, some 'mainstream' and some 'alternative', within a process of to-ing and fro-ing. If you keep the discussion so close to an idea of 'generation' what happens is in effect a collapsing; an artist such as Martha Rosler, is canonically documented and therefore one could argue is 'mainstream'. She shows work in a commercial gallery space in SoHo, New York, again suitable for a positioning as 'mainstream', but within 'this' space she remains a distinctly alternative voice.

Accepting the 'artist' role as the predominant indicator of difference, we should investigate whether that role brings a different theoretical model or sensibility, that in some way offers an 'alternative' approach to the 'singular' role of curator or administrator. Does the crossover cause problems of interpretation, creating a certain slipperiness that refuses the parameters of what 'artist' is supposed to mean?

There have been many examples of the cul de sacs that can arise when the artist enters different spaces (institutional or otherwise), where the political/ social/ critical discourse under negotiation is displaced by the artist as 'author'. Institutions often seek to legitimise themselves by using particular artists for the social issues they are seen to represent. That said, we have to distinguish between an artist who incorporates the multitude of roles in their actual art practice and those artists who occupy different roles but keep them, in some way, separated.

It seems that artist-run spaces are the particular initiatives being targeted in today's discussion, yet this centring has a déjà vu quality to it. Is anybody in any doubt, including the people involved, that these spaces are feeder operations for the larger institutions? This emphasis also limits a critical engagement with other recent artist-led initiatives, less upfront, who silently align themselves with powerful or semi-powerful institutions.

I'm hopeful for a discussion on artists as active agents who have what I would refer to as 'available knowledges'. Depressingly in an Irish context there is always a sense of reinventing the wheel; it is this historical amnesia which also allows artists, artist-led initiatives, the larger institutions and the Arts Council off the hook. The history of these power relations always remains an oral one and as a result remain hidden.

One current example is Arthouse and its origins five years ago. I really believe Arthouse does not know where it's going and this has both positive and negative repercussions for artists who work with time-based media. If Arthouse is an interface between artists and industry, we need to take a look at what model of the artist, if any, it is expounding.

To begin an analysis of the complex relations and conflicts involved in Arthouse's establishment would necessarily involve looking at artist-led initiatives such as Random Access, The Sculptors' Society, the Artists' Association of Ireland (AAI) and Blue Funk; examining also who was on the first board of Arthouse, not to mention who let the architect away with that building! We might also want to ask when, if ever, we will have the opportunity to read the report on Arthouse commissioned by the Arts Council?

To conclude on the point of the artist as 'double agent' in her relationships with various organisations, I would ask whether artists' refusal, at present, is not the strongest way to show up the structures and operation of power?

Martin McCabe: When Critical Access came about, two local precedents were being discussed, Catalyst in Belfast and Blue Funk in Dublin. They'd set out to do something not necessarily remarkable, but certainly different in terms of the context of the Irish art scene. We thought we could learn from them and their mistakes. Looking back over the last four or five years, I see Critical Access as being marked by partiality or failure, whereby any of the great ideals which were set out initially have not really been delivered on. The reason we came about as a small collective—generally of practising artists, with people involved in management, administration and arts education—was our experience dealing with a bigger,more professional, arts organisation, the Sculptors' Society of Ireland. We wanted to move away and so hijacked the Random Access project and took it with us. Morally we had ownership of the project. We had to run it on our own without a space, an office, phone or fax, and our contact address was constantly changing. Certain members of the committee were well known personalities and had profiles in the wider arts establishment; and slowly but surely we coalesced as a group whose agenda was driven by the artist-run initiatives, certainly not interested in looking at a space and having a stable reference point, maybe sharing Blue Funk's ideological imperatives in terms of trying to alter the co-ordinates on the Irish art scene, particularly in Dublin. It was essentially a way of generating new types of art formations or opportunities through dialogue and discourse around contemporary art practice. The importation of what was happening in the UK and America seemed to be a way of throwing what was happening locally to a wider international frame.

In order to receive funds from the Arts Council we had to rigidify ourselves, incorporate ourselves as a legal entity which presented itself as 'organised'. It was strange how the Arts Council of Ireland was very interested in us, very attentive to our needs. I don't think we had a huge problem with that, because there was certain rhetoric identifiable in the Arts Council, a change in the understanding of community and community arts; we fulfilled a bit of that because we explicitly positioned ourselves on that edge between the gallery-based system and the community arts situation. They gave us £12,000 to begin with, to see through two projects that we had on paper.

At the same time we were working in Temple Bar, doing public discussion and forums. Sometimes we'd go outside Temple Bar; we were kind of playing a to-ing and fro-ing game, because we were conscious that Temple Bar was quite amorphous, I think the Italians call it a *tangentopolis*, a notion of an octopus which is willing to absorb and co-opt groups of artists like ourselves, so we tried to skirt around that. We were always looking for a place where we could site ourselves momentarily. The bigger picture here is Temple Bar Properties, with their gentrification, with their use of the gallery spaces, and the way Art House was developing.

So there's an historical narrative taking place here but it keeps falling off the edge, it keeps failing. Part of the deal there is generally the conditions, the determinants which operate, in the widest frame of Irish culture, Irish politics, Irish art at the end of the 20th century. More locally it was about that struggle to set up something that was different from the mainstream. I think we were conscious of the fact that we could be easily sidelined and marginalised and yet at the same time we were trying to make a difference, to have some notion of efficacy. Part of that is our interest in education and arts pedagogy in particular, so we were running a programme of discussion forums which were not really being facilitated by anyone else. Since that happened it's been taken up by Temple Bar Galleries, because they've seen this audience open up for that type of discourse.

One problem that needs to be marked at this stage is that issue of personality difficulties, about amassing of body of people together to organise, on top of other commitments, and the division of labour between the committee themselves, and how to administrate this. For instance, the *Waiting Spaces* project we did had nine public artworks in a mental hospital, and two in social welfare offices in Dublin, at the same time. It was a hugely ambitious project amongst six or seven people who were doing it part-time and getting no pay, and were struggling enough in their day to day living. I'm always awe-struck by the success that other artist-groups have because they always manage to maintain themselves at the same time as reaching some sort of critical audience, maintaining some sort of dignity in the face of all of this, because behind the scenes things are going haywire.

Another project was *Articulate*, in Art House. It was about breaking open a hermetically understood notion of art practice, we were trying to introduce other types of discourse, from the legal, or medical, or social policy angle, in terms of the discussion about rape and sexual abuse. This was very much a self-developmental thing, it was about educating ourselves as to how we were going to investigate the system in place.

Of course our last thing was the *Littoral in Ireland/ Critical Sites* conference in Dun Laoghaire last September. It was very much an effort to set up a stall that was outside the mainstream in terms of the type of discussion that was being had, and yet we realised when it was going on that it was something that the major arts administrators, the major interest groups, the power blocks within the arts system, the Arts Councils, were very interested in.

Val Conner: I'm interested in the notion that an artist curating or administrating is more virtuous, more of an 'honest broker' of power, money or information than, say, a professional curator or art administrator; is that necessarily so? When an artist curates or administrates, do they retain their originary identity as an artist, does this act as an insurance policy against their new personality as arts administrator, curator and so on? It's as if the artist occupies an almost innocent place, and from there this person can then go forth and role play, learn the inner workings of the administration and so on, that otherwise are seen as in conflict with them as an artist.

I think it's interesting to talk about this idea of

leading by example, the notion of setting a good example, whether as an artist or collective of artists, the idea that there is an ethical, social role, to input into social and cultural policy. Can you make deliberately aggravating public work, deliberately aggravate your peers and deliberately say no? Orla talked about refusal; in any sort of generally liberal democratic society, is this notion of complete refusal at all possible?

On that idea of agents and agency, it struck me with reference to Critical Access that the enthusiasm displayed by the Arts Council in Dublin may have come from their recognising Critical Access as an opportunity to invest in an educative agency.

Gavin Murphy: I'd like to ask each member of the panel to describe what they think an alternative or oppositional culture might look like, given that the mainstream in the talk here, the Arts Council, seems more than willing to fund the projects that you are talking about?

OR: I think that when the Arts Council start pouring money into artist-run initiatives that's the time to be self-reflexive.

Chris Bailey: Are you saying then that the art has to exist without money?

OR: No, I'm not. I think you can be alternative for particular moments, for particular situations, then the thing disbands or moves on, and that way it can be really effective.

MMcC: It's important to remember that whole point about working in terms of understanding local struggles, certain sites, the notion of contingency; alternative in Warsaw, and alternative in Tokyo, and alternative in Dublin are not the same thing. The notion of an alternative art practice is not about medium, you could even argue it's not about content, it's an understanding of where one is positioned at any given time in terms of the nexus of different forces. I wouldn't push the boat out in terms of Critical Access's activity being alternative, but it was something extra, I don't think we had this banner which we huddled underneath.

VC: Is there a conflict between ideas about being *'pro-active'*—the term is thoroughly integrated into arts planning and writing, to be most general about it—and notions of being *'reactive'*? Now at the moment maybe there's a third term, *'non-active'*. Is the idea of the *'pro-active'* one that still has any currency any more? Have we lost sight of the possibility that a reactive practice does perhaps enable you to have a sustainable activity, where you can shift from being one thing to another, to dealing with various groups of various interests? How do you manage a situation where you deal with very official funding bodies or developers but on the other hand do work that is critical?

Daniel Jewesbury: Can we take it that once you have set yourself up with any degree of permanence you become an institution, is that the qualification of moving into this nebulous thing that is the mainstream, that once you have any permanent kind of funding you are an institution and that there is no differentiation between institutions as such? I'm struck by what Martin just said, about Critical Access existing as an extra thing, it's not necessarily always the case that you are undermining the rigid and authoritarian structures that tower above you, rather you're something supplemental.

MMcC: It's the notion of some multiplicity or multiplication of possibilities rather than 'you're either in or you're not'. Trying to function both as something that was contingent and critical, and at the same time dealing with a funding body, was a task we just couldn't forge. What Val was saying, about the notion of the artist as the honest broker—to suggest that all artists are good people is crap, obviously nobody's saying that, but the idea that an artist would respect another artist is a little more difficult. We did try and do that, in our dealings with artists. We tried in some way to address the issues, the problems, so we saw ourselves as being a mediating layer between artists and other institutions, and we thought we were artist-centred, we believed we understood those terms.

Peter Richards: Catalyst continually applies to funding bodies and it has a permanent base; but the people who run it are in there to facilitate the organisation. You've talked about individuals of Critical Access being prominent figures, and not having a space, whereas in Catalyst the people were important, but not as important as the organisation. So it was continually changing, the attitudes and ideas were shifting, but it had a way of obtaining funding through its reputation...

MMcC: The brand.

PR: Yeah, it's a different type of institution, it's not an alternative, it's different within the same thing, a different approach to the institutional body.

OR: Critical Access, from what I'm hearing, was trying to present a critical response to different subjects. It's interesting that the Arts Council will fund that but if you were presenting an institutional critique, of the structures of power in culture in Irish society, would Critical Access have got funding for a project like that? I doubt it. We can't think about the funding bodies or the spaces we occupy as being neutral.

PR: How interested do you think the Northern Irish Arts Council are in the reports and projects we write up? I don't think they really look too much at what we write. I think they just say, all right, same again, give you the cash they think they can afford, let you get on with it, and then file your reports.

OR: As long as you don't rock the boat.

VC: We've talked about Catalyst being more than just another place to have a show, that there's a discussion, facilitating meeting between artists who are carrying out these functions as well as making their own work. There's the notion of professionalism; is that only permissible in the terms of what's now a recognisable format, the artist-led initiative, that formal kind of structure that the Arts Council would recognise, other artists would recognise.

Dan Shipsides: It has a perceived feel-good factor about artists working with other artists, collaborating, but that moves into your Euro-supercurators, who see themselves as working with the artists, for example Manifesta, that's a kind of mainstream alternative if you like. I don't think it's always a good thing, that perception of artist-run spaces always being so 'benevolent' to the artist. In Catalyst, you just work as a facilitator, whereas the artist can direct the shots. If the mainstream is pseudo-alternative, Catalyst is like that on a small scale.

Brian McAvera: There's a confusion here about notions of change. Any movement that has traditionally been described as avant-garde has actually changed the way we look at things, it has brought some kind of new process in. That's totally different from the kind of institutional changes that some of you are talking about which is about the betterment of the artist's lot, the way in which the artist can actually effect change in terms of their conditions. If you want to improve artists' conditions, change is a very slow accumulative process, and the only way to do that is through artist organisations. I would suggest, especially to the Northern Irish artists who are here, that the one thing that has kept them firmly under the thumb is the lack of a substantial artist organisation which can actually have real weight. We do not have in Northern Ireland an artists' organisation which has had the clout to go and take on the government. What we had historically, and what I suggest is quite deliberately organised in terms of the various structures which are in place in Northern Ireland, is a fracturing of the artists into ever smaller groups and cliques, and unless that process is reversed you'll never get change.

Brian Hand: I think this is a real problem about making art, about thinking about an audience, about thinking about who's funding you and realising the totally conflictual nature. I wouldn't take the sphere of art-making out of the context of a social, economical, political sphere, they're intermeshed and I think that the kind of abstract idealism of the autonomous transcendent artist is very close to a free marketeer perspective, which is that the market is some sort of regulatory body which doesn't need human agency, that we can only fuck it up if humans get involved, the market can control itself. Any of us who live in this society know it's a complete myth, that the society is more extreme as years go by and nation states continually manipulate markets; there's no such thing as public good. I think we live in a much more at-each-others'-throats environment than most of us recognise, and it should be okay to say that. Talking as a member of Blue Funk, trying to get money from the Arts Council of Ireland was impossible and that's not because we didn't make an effort. I don't think there's an easy linear progression for artists out of this mess. I think we live in a mess and maybe have to recognise the mess.

PR: Maybe I was being a bit crass with what I said about the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. They do give out money but there doesn't seem to be any particular strategy, they don't particularly review what they give the money for. That's what I was suggesting rather than that they just hand out Christmas presents.

BH: The role you are supposed to fill, be it alternative, be it an artist-led initiative, that is a qualitative statement of what you are. I think the quality issue of what the Arts Council give the money for is the most difficult question to ask. How do they measure it, what understanding do they have about quality, is it based on audience? If you put that question to them they just collapse. They have no concept of what the quality issue means.

TD: The situation isn't all down to the problems with the Arts Council, they obviously only receive so much budget per year and part of their major strategy is to support places like the Ormeau Baths Gallery, and the amount of money that takes up leaves a very small amount to be spread between a large amount of groups. What can you do about that?

Eoghan McTigue: One of the reasons why I think we're in a different situation here is because the likes of Catalyst Arts first of all gets most of its money from Belfast City Council and not from the Arts Council, that's a new initiative. The City Council have become a lot more pro-active in funding spaces, projects, organisations. You can go to the City Council and present them with a project, it isn't already going to be valued or assessed under these problematic criteria. I think there's a good relationship between artists and the City Council where they're developing the City and you can find space to work or run projects, it isn't always co-opted by the idea of regeneration. I think if you start continually looking at where you're getting money from you're going to run into a stalemate, where you can't move forward.

VC: Toby, could you tell us a bit about the lobbying process because I think that's another potential. To come together, to start to talk about a lobbying group, really shifts the understanding of the politics of the situation and also makes it very explicit. The Arts Council down in Dublin, as far as I know, still print on their literature that they're resistant and impermeable to lobbying. So you're already disenfranchised

from making representations and asking for the accountability that in every other aspect of our lives we're increasingly told to expect.

TD: Your main source of funds are the people you're trying to change; the City Council have been very supportive. The purpose of lobbying is to make a change and then to change the direction that funders might take. I think you've got to accept that and you can't just say that you're becoming mainstream if the things that you're lobbying for actually happen.

BMcA: I believe that artists should lobby, but the general point I'm trying to make is that individual artists lobbying on their own are simply played off against each other. It's no accident the Arts Council continually give a little bit of money to x,y and z because it buys them off. You have a lobbying organisation, the AAI, you have another potential lobby in VAANI. I personally think the two should be linked because it's lunacy on an island this size to have two organisations which are theoretically fighting for the same thing. That organisation, given a proper weight of members, is then in a position to access money that does not come from the Arts Councils.

BH: What's their bargaining power?

BMcA: Their bargaining power is the number of their members who are classed and employed as professional artists.

BH: So they say, sorry we're going to give it to the farmers, to the postmen, they're going on strike tomorrow, you're not. That's the point.

BMcA: You're assuming that one group is automatically played off against the other. What we should pick up is the fact that artists, and culture in general, are amongst the biggest contributors to the economy. There are statistics to this effect, the Arts Council down south actually did a survey, demonstrating that money going to artists and arts organisations created more jobs than any other area.

BH: Where does 'culture' begin and end? You say culture, but what is it? Artists make spaces, they move into parts of the city and within ten years that space will be redeveloped, and there will be people who make millions of pounds and they're not lobbyists, they go around with brown paper bags with money in them that they give to politicians, they ensure that the whole thing is oiled.

Aisling O'Beirn: I think attention is being drawn to it on our side because Temple Bar is marketed as a cultural sector now, and it started off that artists moved in there because rents and rates were cheaper than any other parts of the centre of Dublin. And now it's a big cultural centre that's used for tourism.

BH: I can understand it as a tourist sector but to understand it as a cultural sector is quite hard. This phrase used today, the 'culture industry', is hilarious in my opinion. This is a phrase that was invented in the 1950s as a totally damning critique of what 'culture' was about, that it was an industry, it was systematised. And yet the Arts Council and Temple Bar Properties came together in 1994 for this big conference called 'The Cultural Industry', and now you'll hear this phrase used all the time. It's a nonsense.

MMcC: Can you set up a superstructure, a representative body like the AAI, which can represent artists in all their diversity, the people who want to work outside of the gallery system?

BMcA: You're missing the point. The job of an organisation like the AAI is not to promote x,y or z, it's to promote all artists and to get them the conditions, the money or what ever.

BH: That 'culture' is totalising and is used to efface the injustices, to efface the glaring conflicts, that becomes more of an area of critique for artists; that culture itself becomes the focus, where other spheres are using culture to mask their own selfish profits, not that 'culture' wraps itself into a ball and then goes off to government.

MMcC: You're quite right, in that there are some artists practitioners who wish to dissipate or dissolve that rigid, reified notion of professionalism that has been proposed, saying let's dispute that concept, let's see culture in the much wider frame, as the stuff of everyday life.

OR: There's this suggestion that all artists have to stick together and support all artists, and I have a problem with that. I don't want to support all artists, there's work that I'd rather wasn't around. In terms of Temple Bar and Laganside, I think that artists in Dublin had access to information about this gentrification process through what happened in SoHo in New York; I don't think we're all so closed off in Ireland that we didn't have access to the political discussions that were going on in New York, so I find it hard to take in Dublin when people say, "We didn't know it was going to turn into this". I'm beginning to see that possibly the same thing is going to happen here and it's very important to think about available knowledges when you're wondering what these development agencies can do for you. What are you actually going to create with it?

TD: The knowledge of the arts which the development organisations have is very little, and the arts groups can actually get in there and make these decisions.

DJ: I'm aware of the comparisons between Belfast and Dublin, but it's worth remembering that Temple Bar Properties owned all the buildings and land and have had millions coming in from Europe from the start, whereas Laganside has an income of around a million pounds a year and isn't a large property owner itself, so there are some not so subtle differences between those developments. Belfast City Council and the Arts Council here just issued a report they commissioned on this issue, written by Maureen Macken, who was formerly involved with the Arts Council. There are certain proposals/ recommendations put forward concerning what the future of this sector is. It's not so much the fact that there are direct comparisons between what happened in Temple Bar and what happens up here, it's that the terminology is being borrowed from Temple Bar in a completely unreflexive way. It's surprising to see that language articulated again here and with such a tenuous basis for it.

BH: Why is that surprising? Who owns this terminology? It's the easiest line of access to the market, it's always the same language, it always follows the quickest course. It's not going to go out of its way to do some massively expensive research; it's always going to find the quickest route.

DJ: I accept that, but I'm surprised that there's not even an attempt to cut it to any kind of cloth. It's a totally borrowed terminology and a totally borrowed methodology in terms of how the area can be developed and how 'culture' will fit into that, bearing in mind the amount of debate that was generated by Temple Bar. Maybe it's not debate that's out in the open, maybe to a large degree it's suppressed or repressed.

TD: Maybe it works in that there's people going into Temple Bar spending money. So that's why it's adopted.

VC: I'd like to recap on the notion of a generational denotation of politics, as some kind of lifetime timeline which goes from young to old, inexperience to experienced.

DJ: I accept absolutely the criticisms Orla makes of that terminology, but I'd add the clause that within the local situation, Belfast, there has always been an idea of a generational division, and a selective amnesia about what existed five years ago. That's potentially a problem with a group that sets itself up as an artist-led space to exist for perpetuity. That selective amnesia is very much here; if we look at the structure of the studios in Belfast, and where Catalyst came from, the idea that Catalyst was the first thing that had happened in Belfast is quite widespread, even amongst people who have worked closely with Catalyst. It's an enormous problem if we're having a debate that someone had 12 years ago.

VC: Is it impossible to suspend disbelief for long enough to take an action that sees itself as a refusal, as outside of the system? Can that kind of moment happen now? Will there ever be such a moment? There are lots of revisits to notions of 1968 currently, where it's represented as some special moment for revolution; whether it was or wasn't, it's reproduced as *a tourism of the imagination* for everyone that was never there. I'm still coming back to whether you must accept consensus.

BH: There has been progress on one level. To take the term 'the culture industry,' when it was devised by Adorno and Horkheimer it meant the entertainment industry; they valorised avant garde modernist art practice that had never been contaminated by 'culture', they just turned a blind eye and played their end game: Rothko would just never be appropriated. Now we're 50 years on we see this completely turned on its head and I do think this sense of not being innocent anymore is really pervasive. There is no innocent view, people couldn't have been talking about this 30 years ago because so many things have happened, and we can't deny that there are totalising projects that attempt to try and move into our spaces of human freedom.

One of the big things not mentioned here today is the whole audience question. That was a factor that came out of 'Littoral', certainly from Grant Kester's paper. One of the most interesting things he was trying to say was how to make a new paradigm shift within an art practice that moves from an anti-discursive aesthetics to an inter-discursive aesthetics.

MMcC: It suggests in terms of the discussion here that there is a history to be written, which would incorporate the political economy of visual culture, of visual arts in Ireland in the '80s and '90s. It would talk about Temple Bar Properties and the agenda there in terms of the pursuit of urban regeneration. It may also include something of a discourse that we're having here in terms of how artists have been positioned, at any given moment to accomplish certain ends. Going back to the thing about SoHo and the way artists have been used as the cutting edge of gentrification, it's well documented elsewhere, but maybe now it's happening here we might need a localised version. Something like that might be instructive and useful in how this thing will move forward. There's a dearth of critical writings on these types of formations; it's part and parcel of what we're living through at the moment.

Following this initial platform, Variant is to establish an e-mail forum to further develop the discussion. If you wish to participate in any way contact <variant@ndirect.co.uk>.

"I was a ball of nerves and sleepless paranoia (figuring that I might be next)..."

William Clark

Terry Gilliam's film of *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas* and the publication of the early novel *Rum Diary* late last year, indicate a retrospective interest in Hunter S. Thompson. The reviews of the film (*Screen*, *Variety*) were consistently bad—in the sense that they failed to understand anything of the work. Thompson's style is taken for drug addled ranting, yet it provides scholarly and precise insights into the period, blended with a real passion, humanity and commitment, which are absent from conventional accounts.

Much of Thompson's work—certainly that of the early '60s—is akin to the investigative journalism of the 'Muckrakers' of some fifty years ago. *The Proud Highway*, another recent collection of letters to and from Thompson, makes a comparison to Lincoln Steffens. Little known now, Steffens together with Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair (who like Thompson ran for office) wrote fearless, impartial and enormously popular accounts of American cities rancid with corruption.[1]

Much of Thompson's early work for the *National Observer*, particularly *Democracy Dies in Peru But Few Seem to Mourn its Passing*, show him as a complete freelance, who with no resources whatsoever, writing better analysis than the mainstream press: largely because of his sheer involvement with the story. Discussion of Thompson tends to focus on his lifestyle, which is largely born out of establishing a way to operate without money. The person revealed in the *Proud Highway* is one of astonishing self-reliance, determination and self-sufficiency. Be that as it may, *Fear and Loathing* came about largely by accident and desperation when he thought his career as a writer was over.

The film is a very faithful adaptation of the book and of course the book is supposedly based on real events.[2] It seems little-known or forgotten now, that Thompson wrote an introduction to the early copies of *Fear and Loathing* which set out its real context: the murder of Ruben Salazar in the Silver Dollar Cafe by the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department on August 29 1970.

While he worked on the Salazar story (which appeared in *Rolling Stone 81* on April 29 1971), around about dawn in an effort to relax, Thompson would also work on the jumble of notes and taped gibberish of what would become *Fear & Loathing*.[3] So the two were written in tandem. Chronologically the events of the Salazar killing precede the little holiday in Las Vagas, which happened in early April '71.

It was probably his most dangerous story—caught between the enraged Chicanos who wanted to kill him on principle, because he was white, and the police who were running amok, Thompson pried radical lawyer, Oscar Acosta (his main contact on the story and an old friend) away from the situation so that they could talk openly.

> "Flashing across the desert at 110 in a big red convertible with the top down,there is not much danger of being bugged or overheard...By the time I got back to the Rolling Stone HQ. in San Francisco, the Salazar story was winding out at around 19,000 words, and the strange Vegas 'fantasy' was running on its own spaced energy and pushing 5000 words—with no end in sight and no real reason to continue working on it, except the pure pleasure of unwinding on paper."

Their dialogue on Salazar is not directly recorded in the novel—the tone of it is. The two stories intermingle on various levels. Suffice to say that both of them had stepped from a situation where the world could have ended at any moment in the same fate that met Salazar. It did for Acosta a few short years later. That factor should be added to any reading of the stress of events in Las Vegas. The two stories are collected in the Modern Library version of *Fear and Loathing and Other American Stories*; which cruelly cuts out Acosta from its cover photograph of the pair looking wide awake and abnormally normal in a casino at three o'clock in the morning.

In his short life Ruben Salazar became a nationally known professional journalist with ten years experience. He had won prizes for work in Vietnam and was something of a veteran war correspondent. Of Mexican American heritage himself, he was employed by the *Los Angeles Times* to cover 'local issues':

> "Within months, he had narrowed his work for the Times down to a once-a-week column for the newspaper, and signed on as news director for KMEX-TV—the 'Mexican American station', which he quickly transformed into an energetic, aggressively political voice for the whole Chicano community. His coverage of police activities made the East Los Angeles Sheriffs Department so unhappy that they soon found themselves in a sort of running private argument with this man Salazar, this spic who refused to be reasonable. When Salazar got on to a routine story like some worthless kid named Ramirez getting beaten to death in a jail-fight, he was likely to come up with almost anything—including a series of hard-hitting news commentaries strongly suggesting that the victim had been beaten to death by the jailers. In the summer of 1970 Ruben Salazar was warned three times, by the cops, to 'tone down his coverage'. And each time he told them to fuck off."[4]

Salazar was killed in the aftermath of a huge riot caused by a police attack on a peaceful anti-Vietnam rally in Laguna Park in east Los Angeles. Three people were killed and sixty injured. Thompson's story works his way through the evasions of the Sheriff's nervous mouthpiece as the police version of events collapses, even without an attack by Chicano partisans. At this point the question he tries to answer is *are the police willing to kill anyone who seems to be annoying them*?

Naturally the local press makes itself available to the status quo, to spread red menace stories of outside agitators. Thompson's assessment of the quality of the main paper the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* still stands for most papers today and reminded me of Glasgow's own *Herald*:[5]

> "As one of the few remaining Hearst organs, it serves a perverted purpose in its role as a monument to everything cheap, corrupt and vicious in the realm of journalistic possibility. It is hard to understand, in fact, how the shriveled Hearst management can still find enough gimps, bigots and deranged Papists to staff a rotten paper like the Herald."

Above Left: *Ralph Steadman's illustration from* Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

As the case unfolds a photograph of the Sheriff's deputy pointing a shotgun at the front door of the Silver Dollar Cafe emerges as do eye-witness accounts by Salazar's fellow newscaster, who was covering the riot with him and had joined him in the Cafe. When the accounts of what happened are published in *la Raza*—a militant Chicano newspaper—the police respond with more lunatic versions of events.

After the coroner's inquest the police slip the hook. Tom Wilson, who finally admitted to firing the death weapon evades any charges, moderate Chicano spokesmen ask for an investigation, the militants call for an uprising and the cops do nothing. Thompson seems convinced that the police were too inept to have actually conspired to kill Salazar, but:

> "The malignant reality of Ruben Salazar's death is that he was murdered by angry cops for no reason at all—and that the LA Sherif's Department was and still is prepared to defend that murder on grounds that it was entirely justified. Salazar was killed, they say, because he happened to be in a bar where police thought there was also a 'man with a gun'. They gave him a chance, they say, by means of a bullhorn warning...and when he didn't come out with his hands up, they had no choice but to fire a tear gas bazooka into the bar...and his head got in the way? Tough luck. But what was he doing in that place, anyway? Lounging around a noisy Chicano bar in the middle of a communist riot?"

It is hard now to comprehend the militancy of the times. The working title of *Fear and Loathing* was *The Death of the American Dream*. Originally Thompson set out to write something similar to Tom Wolfe's book on the Merry Prankster's *Acid tests*, but he decided to study politics close at hand. In Chicago in '68 Thompson was present at the five days of street fighting and eventual civil war with the National Guard, outside the Conrad Hilton Hotel where the Democratic Party Convention delegates and nominee, Hubert Humphrey, were staying:

> "For me, that week in Chicago was far worse than the worst acid trip I'd heard rumors about...It permanently altered my brain chemistry, and my first new idea—when I finally calmed down—was an absolute conviction there was no possibility for any personal truce...in a nation that could hatch and be proud of a malignant monster like Chicago. Suddenly it seemed imperative to get a grip on those who had somehow slipped into power and caused the thing to happen."

The massive onslaught on the left in America and the subsequent rise of Nixon saw Thompson retreat to Aspen to narrowly lose in his *'Freak Power'* campaign to run for Sheriff—it was originally started as a joke and it was here he met Acosta. Thompson later tried to initiate a platform which would mobilise 'the rock vote' for the Democrats in their desperate attempts to be rid of Nixon. With his journey alongside the Democratic Party Election campaign in '72 (which in those days was like a Rolling Stones Tour) he became the political Junkie he remains.

It was Acosta who tracked him down and suggested involvement in the Salazar story. Acosta was then defending six young Chicanos who had been arrested for trying to burn down the Biltmore Hotel, while the then Governor, Ronald Reagan was delivering a speech. He was also busy trying to subpoena all 109 Superior Court Judges in Los Angeles County and cross-examine them at length, under oath, on the subject of racism.

The Salazar story ends with Thompson outlining the brazen cover-up of the political upheavals of the area—the denial of the political legitimacy of the Chicano struggle through racism. The police attempts to present a public relations front are ripped to shreds as Thompson phones pretending to be coming to town to cover events and is told all manner of insanity contrary to what he has just witnessed.

Thompson's Salazar story and the more 'conventional' work of the radical press, particularly magazines like *Ramparts*, began to lift up the lid of the FBI Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), a massive and widespread campaign to subvert left-wing organisations involving agent provocateurs, harassment, phone taps, surveillance, informants, framing of suspects and assassinations. COINTELPRO had followed on from the anti-Communist crusades of the '50s. An engaging history of the American Counter Culture and the influence of LSD is wrapped up very nicely in Martin A Lee and Bruce Shalain's recent *Acid Dreams, The Complete Social History of LSD*.[6] The book seems an American import published a few years ago and now available in the UK. It maps out the early use of the drug by the East coast CIA-connected elite, mentioning some extraordinary characters such as Captain Alfred M. Hubbard an early Acid evangelist (he supplied several heads of state, ambassadors and Aldous Huxley). We also find Ken Kesey and Allen Ginsberg as early acid guinea pigs in medical experiments prior to the systematic demonisation of the drug for political purposes. At times the book spirals off into the convoluted intrigue of the times:

> "The CIA was in cahoots with organised crime; Agency personnel based in Southeast Asia were involved in the heroin trade; for eight years the drug was smuggled inside returning corpses of American servicemen who had died in Vietnam; and corrupt police pushed junk in New York, Detroit, and other major urban ghettos."

That is pretty straight-forward compared to the story of the *Castle Bank*, set up by the CIA as a money wash to facilitate the hidden transfer of huge sums to finance subversion, paramilitary operations, coup d' etats, Mob hit teams and so forth. Richard Nixon was among the three hundred prominent Americans who used Castle to deposit their cash (which included Tony Curtis, Hugh Hefner, Bob Guccione, Chiang Kai-shek's daughter and Howard Huges). It also laundered money for the *Brotherhood of Eternal Love* an organisation who distributed millions of doses of LSD until they were penetrated by CIA agent Ron Stark, a truly wierd individual whose connections included the Sicilian mafia, Shiite warlords, the PLO, the Red Brigades and on and on through a hundred twists and turns.

Another progressive aspect of Thompson's Journalistic style often ignored, is his use of technology, particularly the tape recorder (which was still something of a novelty). This is from the opening of *Fear and Loathing*:

> "This blows my weekend, because naturally I'll have to go with you—and we'll have to arm ourselves."
> "Why not?" I said. "If a thing like this is worth doing at all, its worth doing right. We'll need some decent equipment and plenty of cash on the line – if only for drugs and a super-sensitive tape recorder, for the sake of a permanent record."

Thompson's other abiding interest is in the technology to transfer his transcriptions, usually at the last minute. He claims to be the chief exponent of the MOJO wire—a telefax machine. In his home he set up a massive media monitoring station with the advent of satellite technology. Access is as much one of his lusts as ice in large quantities with Wild Turkey. Electric typewriters are as much of a fetish as his gun lust. In the film there is an image of the tape recorder microphone tapped to his head when he is tripping as if it had been grafted on.

The metaphorical core of *Fear and Loathing* is a 'tape transcription' of their search for "the American dream" in a "White Whale"[7] with Thompson and Acosta assuming their aliases of Dr. Gonzo and his Attorney. In the transcription they ask a waitress in a diner about a "place called the American Dream." Confused, people from behind the counter all try to help with directions to a place down the road which was:

> "The old Psychiatrist's Club on Paradise...It was a dis-

> cotheque place...but the only people who hang out there are a bunch of pushers, peddlers, uppers and downer, and all that stuff...it's a mental joint where all the dopers hang out."

The conversation spirals inward like Kafka standing waiting at the final door of the castle. The transcription ends because of garbled tape:

> "There is a certain consistency in the garbled sounds however, indicating that almost two hours later Dr. Duke and his attorney finally located what was left of the "Old Psychiatrist's Club"—a huge slab of cracked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds. The owner of a gas station across the road said the place had "burned down about three years ago."

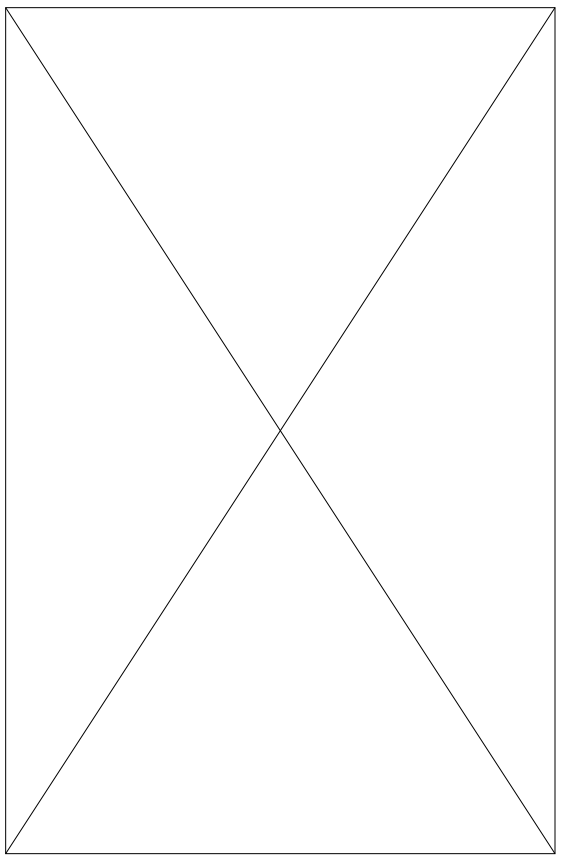
At first reading it appears that the characters behind the counter are advising that the pair head 'that little way further out west', quoting the constitution's advice of what to do if you are tired of an oppressive government. This is a poetic subtext—or at least an allusion to Thompson's notion of freedom. But it is more directly related to his earlier description of his life at the height of the '60s counter-culture:

> "My central memory of that time seems to hang on one or five or maybe forty nights— or very early mornings—when I left the Filmore half-crazy and, instead of going home, aimed the big 650 Lightning across the bay bridge at a hundred miles an hour wearing L.L. Bean shorts and a Butte sheepherder's jacket...booming through the Treasure Island tunnel at the lights of Oakland and Berkley and Richmond, not quite sure which turn-off to take when I got to the other end (always stalling at the toll-gate, too twisted to find neutral while I fumbled for change)...but being absolutely certain that no matter which way I would come to a place where people were just as high and wild as I was: No doubt about that..."

The diner transcription—the search for the freedom of the American Dream—is absent from the film. Instead it picked out the preceding passages in the book which talk of the spirit of the times through the music and drugs, principally LSD. It is here in the film that Thompson himself makes an appearance as himself being remembered. Gilliam's film touches on the freedom of the motorbike scene through the narrative, ignoring it pictorially. It would have been very difficult to film.

> "So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look west, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back."

The film leaves us (the camera pulls out from Johnny Depp's head) with Thompson's monologue towards



the close of the book, which castigated Timothy Leary. Who, according to *Acid Dreams*, turned State's Evidence while on trail, providing information on all manner of people in the underground:

> "We are all wired into a survival trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the sixties. Uppers are going out of style. This was the fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling "consciousness expansion" without ever giving a thought to the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously. After West Point and the priesthood, LSD must have seemed entirely logical to him...but there is not much satisfaction in knowing that he blew it very badly for himself, because he took too many others down with him. Not that they didn't deserve it: No doubt They all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped to create ... a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some force —is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel."

Thompson is not part of the hippy drop-out culture. Drugs are not extolled as a virtue. When the slaughter of Vietnam and the war against dissent at home was passed off as order—rationality, he like many others tried to resist it by any means necessary. A big—at times dangerous—part of that was telling the truth.

notes

1 According to *The Muckrakers* by Arthur and Lila Weinberg (Capricorn 1964) the term was used pejoratively by President Roosevelt: "He charged that the writers who were engaged in the exposure of corruption were "muckrakers," and likened them to the man with the muckrake in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* who could "look no way but downward, with a muckrake in his hands; who was offered a celestial crown for his muckrake, but who would neither look up nor regard the crown he was offered, but continued to rake to himself the filth of the floor." The speech, to a club of newsmen was off the record and soon became common gossip.

2 One of the producers, Patrick Cassavetti, has worked on a range of projects that have met with censorship and/or attack for little other reason than their artistic merits, such as Gilliam's *Brazil* and Alan Clarke's *Made in Britain*. He has also worked with David Leland, Neil Jordan, Davis Hare, Stephen Friers, Ken Loach (in *Looks and Smiles*) and Warren Beatty (in *Reds*).

3 This also outlined his concept of 'Gonzo journalism' stating somewhat modestly that the book was "a victim of its own conceptual schizophrenia, caught and finally crippled in that vain, academic limbo between 'journalism' and 'fiction'. And then hoist on its own petard of multiple felonies and enough flat-out crime to put anybody who'd admit to this kind of stinking behavior in the Nevada State Prison until 1984". The introduction – which was never used as such by the publishers – was eventually published in "*The Great Shark Hunt*", first published in the UK in 1980 by Picador. this also contains the Salazar story "Strange Rumblings in Azltan."
Thompson stated to P. J O' Rourke: "Right after Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, he wrote a very small book, not much noticed. And I remember reading that he said, "I wrote that just to cool out after *The Sun Also Rises*." I was working on *Salazar*, an ugly murder story. You know how you get. You get that, "Fuck, damn, where shall we go now? Whose throat can I eat?" And when I got stuck out in that Holiday Inn near the Santa Anita racetrack, outside Pasadena, I was there to work on this murder story. That was work, boy, that was blood. And, boy, that role got very, very tough. That's why I went to Las Vegas. And when I came back from Las Vegas, I was still writing that story." *Rolling Stone 748*

4 The owners of the station made sure it reverted back into a more 'friendly' style after Salazar's murder.

5 Obviously without the Papists.

6 Thompson is featured intermittently in *Acid Dreams* as are descriptions of what he was taking: "Owsley's product first hit the streets in february 1965...He...was on hand to freak freely at some wild parties hosted by Kesey...Owsley was obsessed with making his product as pure as possible—even purer than Sandoz, which described LSD in its scientific reports as a yellowish crystalline substance. As he mastered his illicit craft, Owsley found a way to refine the crystal so that it appeared blue-white under fluorescent lamp; moreover, if the crystals were shaken, they emitted flashes of light, which meant that LSD in its pure form was piezoluminescent – a property shared by a very small number of compounds." (p 146) It is interesting to compare *Acid Dreams* to "*Days in the Life*" by Jonathon Green, where the British Underground is defined as the hobbies of a few public school boys.

7 In addition to the references to Melville's *Moby Dick*, Gilliam seemed to smuggle in a reference to Traven's *'The Death Ship'*. Thompson has long struggled to write a book akin to Fitzgerald's *'The Great Gatsby'*.

New Labour, the Media, and the British Secret State

Robin Ramsay

Just after the previous issue of Variant appeared I talked with one of the editors and we agreed that I would write something about the relationship between the secret state—the spooks—and the media for this issue. It turned out to be one of those serendipitous occasions, for since then there has been, by British standards, a veritable torrent of information. But while I was thinking about the shape of this essay Foreign Secretary Robin Cook presided over the publication of a Foreign Office report on the notorious Zinoviev letter, which embodies many of the issues; and it is with this that I begin.

Zinoviev

In opposition politicians talk the talk. It is always interesting to see if they can walk the walk when they get into office. Robin Cook began life as a feisty Edinburgh MP who was asking awkward questions about the role of Special Branch in the late 1970s. He was asking some of the right questions about MI5 as the revelations of Peter 'Spycatcher' Wright and Colin Wallace came to light in 1986/7; and in the 1990s he was asking some of right questions about the entire British intelligence complex in the wake of the publication of the Scott Report on British arms sales to Iraq. For example, here's Cook in December 1986 in the first flush of the Peter Wright allegations about MI5 plotting against the Wilson government. 'Today's security services are not pitted against the KGB, they parallel it in the surveillance of their domestic population.' Considering reform, he wondered 'whether it would not be simpler merely to legislate for the abolition of the security services', especially in light of Peter Wright's revelation 'that MI5 provides no discernible service to the public, even in the intervals between swapping personnel with the Russians and destabilising democratically elected governments.' 1

These are not the words of someone who understands much about the security and intelligence services—very few politicians do: The subject is complex and being interested in it is rarely good for political careers—and though Cook never followed through on any of these issues, the basic impulse was radical.

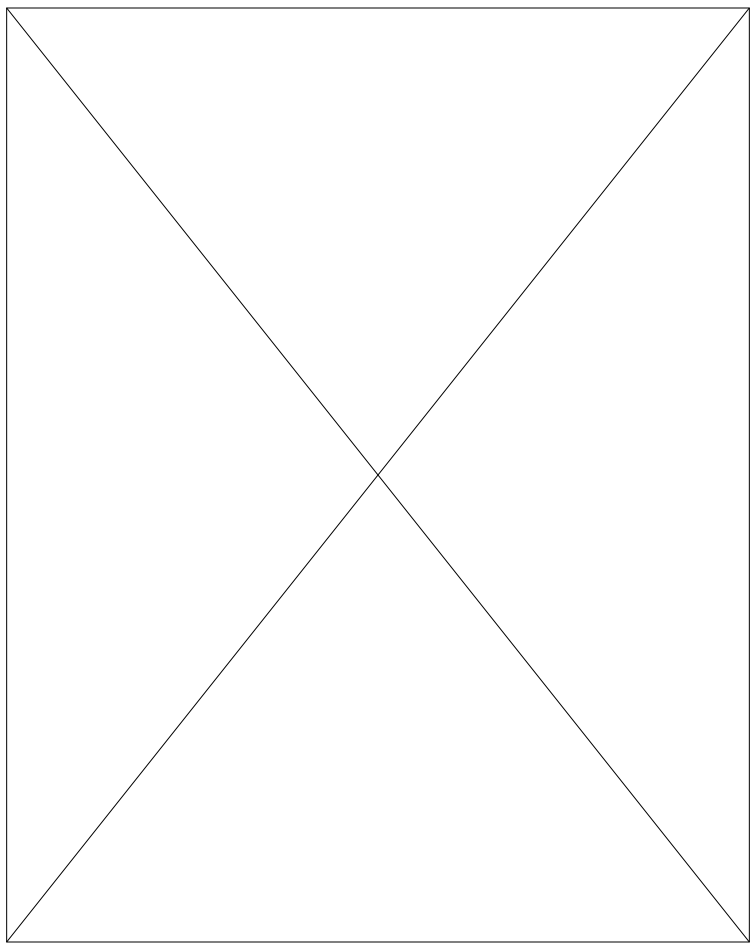
On 4 February this year as Foreign Secretary, Cook made extravagant claims for the publication of an official Foreign Office report on the notorious Zinoviev letter. In 1924, the minority Labour Government lost a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, which meant a general election. The next day the Foreign Office was sent a copy of a letter, purporting to come from Grigori Zinoviev, the president of the Soviet Union's international organisation, the Comintern, addressed to the central committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The letter urged the party to stir up the British proletariat in preparation for class war. Just before the election the letter appeared in the Daily Mail 2 and helped the Labour Party lose the General Election.

Soon after becoming Foreign Secretary Cook had been asked by a Liberal-Democrat MP if he would open the official MI6 files on Zinoviev. He wouldn't, but he did commission the Foreign Office's Official Historian to write a report on the matter. This report, claimed Cook in the Guardian, was 'a remarkable exercise in openness'... a 'huge amount of material [was put] into the public domain'. But only the official historian of the Foreign Office is allowed to see the files and the 'huge amount of material' consists merely of the report's 124 pages of text and annexes. This pathetic, officially-filtered dribble of material from 75 years ago could only be described as 'remarkable' within the context of the obsessive secrecy of the British state. Further, despite the fact that the official report concludes that two MI6 officers were involved in passing the fake to the Foreign Office, and the Foreign Office was provided with 'corroborative proofs by MI6 which have now been shown to be suspect'—i.e. more forgeries to support the first one—the report concludes, and Cook accepts, that 'there is no evidence of an organised conspiracy against Labour by the intelligence agencies'. Quite what is being implied here by the use of 'organised' is beyond me. A disorganised conspiracy?

The Zinoviev letter incident is a kind of template for one aspect of the relationship between the British secret state and sections of the British press: Intelligence officers give disinformation to the Tory press to publish to damage the British left. Zinoviev was the big stinky fact that the British secret state could never quite dispose of when it denied running covert operations inside British politics. Which is why, despite being 75 years old, it is still a sensitive subject for Whitehall.

Patriots not sneaks?

In his Guardian piece on the Zinoviev report Cook commented that it represents 'the maximum amount of material into the public domain without betraying the trust of those who helped Britain by co-operating with our intelligence services.' Home Secretary Jack Straw has come up with the same line when resisting appeals to open MI5 files. Speaking anonymously to



David Aaronovitch in the Independent on Sunday, Straw was asked when people like Aaronovitch—like Straw, a left-wing student leader in his youth—would get to see their MI5 files.

'Never...you see, these informers, no matter how you feel about them, were recruited on the basis that they were doing a job for their country. As far as they were concerned they were patriots not sneaks.' [3]

Clearly this is Whitehall's first line of defence against any possible Freedom of Information legislation which might try to include the secret state. And it is, of course, baloney: the 'trust' which is so important to our secret servants can easily be preserved by doing what the Americans do, deleting the names of individuals in the files. Just how far we are from anything resembling the kind of openness to be found in the United States can be seen by comparing this meagre, officially sanctioned and written report on Zinoviev, with the publication, via the Freedom of Information Act, of the actual CIA documents which began the CIA's operations against Chile in the 1970s which led to the dictatorship of General Pinochet. [4]

Until fairly recently the identification of a journalist with the intelligence and security services was a news story in itself—and something that would set the pigeons fluttering in the secret sections of Whitehall. But things have changed. Gordon Brook-Shepherd is a journalist who worked in the field of intelligence, chiefly for the *Telegraph*. He is the author of a pair of books about intelligence history which were obviously written with the assistance of the British secret state, chiefly MI6—*The Storm Birds and The Storm Petrels*. In his latest book, *The Iron Maze: the Western Secret Services and the Bolsheviks* (Macmillan 1998), he remarks on page 2 of his 'two volumes on Soviet defectors to the West (a project *also launched on my behalf by British intelligence*)' (emphasis added). The blurb on the book jacket says that after a war-time career in military intelligence, ending up a Lieutenant-Colonel with the Allied Commission in Vienna, Brook-Shepherd became a journalist.

'His first civil post-war post, as head of the *Daily Telegraph's* Central and South-East European Bureau during the Cold War Years, brought him again in touch with the Western intelligence community. These contacts were renewed at intervals right down to the war in Afghanistan, which he covered on the spot when Deputy Editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*.'

Compare that with the autobiographical blurb on his *The Storm Petrels*, published a decade earlier in 1988. Then Brook-Shepherd was described as having 'a deep understanding of the world of espionage' (wink, wink) and being a 'much-travelled foreign correspondent'.

The change has come about with the end of the Cold War. But the change, though real, should not exaggerated. Brook-Shepherd's book *Iron Maze* is a re-examination of certain intelligence aspects of the invasion of the newly-born Soviet Union in 1919 by the combined forces of the US, Japan, the UK and France. While he has had access to newly opened French and Soviet intelligence files, in the UK he was given a series of 'briefings' on the content of the British equivalent files. Not even a long-term associate of MI6 is apparently to be trusted with the British files.[5]

IRD

Though the spook-state relationship—and the spook-state-Conservative Party relationship—can be clearly traced back to the First World War, it expanded enormously after the Second. The psychological warriors and intelligence officers who had worked against Hitler slipped easily into similar roles against the Soviet Union. These changes were formalised with the creation of propaganda wing of the secret state, the Information Research Department (IRD), in 1948. Labour junior Foreign Minister of the time, Christopher Mayhew, died recently thinking IRD was his creation[6] but he merely adopted proposals which had already been agreed on within Whitehall. The recent very important book by Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War* (Sutton Publishing, Gloucestershire, 1998) tells the story of IRD in unprecedented detail.

IRD began as Mayhew intended, as the British contribution to the propaganda war then going on between the West and the Soviet Union. But what began as an anti-Stalinist outfit slipped naturally into being an anti-anyone-who-is-anti-British outfit—but using the struggle with the Soviet Union as the framework.[7] All nationalist and liberation struggles in the British empire in the post-war years were portrayed by IRD as being aspects of a great global conflict with the agents of international communism. IRD became *the* British enthusiasts for the Great Communist Conspiracy Theory—and not just abroad. As Lashmar and Oliver show, in 1956 they began running operations in the UK against the British Communist Party; and eventually, absurdly, and unsuccessfully, tried in the early 1970s to portray the Provisional IRA as somehow run by Moscow. At the height of its operations, IRD was feeding secret briefings to dozens of British journalists and hundreds world-wide—as, of course, was the CIA and the KGB.[8]

IRD's massive briefing system was the first really organised spin-doctoring of the British media in peace-time. But MI5, MI6 and the Armed Forces also had journalists they could trust to publish information and disinformation for them. The doyen of the Fleet St. spook's conduits in the 1960s and '70s was Chapman Pincher at the *Daily Express*,[9] who was succeeded at the *Express* by William Massie.[10] In the 1980s the major transmitter of secret state disinformation, mostly from MI5, was *The Sunday Times*, among whose many disgraceful smear campaigns those against Arthur Scargill and the unfortunate Carmen Proetta, who witnessed the SAS execution of the three IRA members on Gibraltar, remain in the memory.

During the Cold War the British intelligence and security services used the media as a source of cover for agents abroad and as a vehicle for anti-Soviet and anti-left propaganda and disinformation. With the end of the Cold War and with the collapse of the British left and trade union movement as serious opponents of capital, the intelligence and security 'game' has changed. MI5 is still doing its best to generate domestic 'threats' to justify its continued existence; but the green movement, the anti-roads and the animal welfare groups hardly constitute an equivalent to the intelligence services of the Soviet bloc. The spooks still have their media assets—as a quick perusal of the *Sunday Telegraph* and *Sunday Times* will show—but these days, so does every other government department. The Ministry of Defence currently employs 160 PR staff,[11] many of whom will have been through the Army's psy-ops training courses. The line between active public relations, spin-doctoring, and running psy-ops campaigns is so faint as to be invisible.

When the Foreign Office's Zinoviev report appeared in early February this year the major media had forgotten—or chose to ignore—the fact that it wasn't the first time since Prime Minister Blair took office that the Zinoviev story had appeared. In August 1997, just after Labour won the General Election, MI6 leaked material about Zinoviev to a couple of friendly journalists, Patrick French ('Red letter day' in the *Sunday Times* 10 August 1997) and Michael Smith ('The forgery, the election and the MI6 spy' in the *Daily Telegraph* 13 August 1997). Both articles were based on the release of certain documents from MI6's archives which purported to throw light on the Zinoviev incident.

French's piece used a briefing about the contents of the documents *before* they had been released. He argued that they show that the 'red menace' depicted in the Zinoviev forgery was real, and thus 'The Zinoviev letter did not need to be faked'. It was a fake which described the real situation; and so, implicitly, was justified.[12] Smith's article, written *after* the documents had been made available, argued that the letter '*may* have been forged to protect a British spy at the heart of the Kremlin'—and so, implicitly, was justified.

In other words, the Zinoviev letter not only described the real situation, it was produced to save a brave British agent who had penetrated to the heart of the red menace pointing at the heart of the British way of life. And which right-thinking person could object to that?

These Zinoviev leaks from MI6 were counter-balanced by one from MI5, the tale of Andy Carmichael who described in the *Sunday Times* (27 July 1997) his 'five years as a fully salaried MI5 agent' inside the National Front (NF). According to Carmichael, the National Front, in the guise of National Democrats, had planned to disrupt the Referendum Party's General Election campaign in the Midlands because the Front believed that the Referendum Party would take votes from them (standing as National Democrats). But the NF plot, we are told, 'unsettled senior MI5 officers'. Interference with a British general election 'would prove an enormous scandal' and Carmichael was told to 'pull the plug' on the NF plot. In case we hadn't got the point, the author of the piece, David Leppard, not noticeably critical of the British security and intelligence services in the past, tells us that 'Shortly afterwards MI5 decided to wind down its operations against all extremist parties'.

Patently designed to help persuade the security and intelligence services' new political masters that they had nothing to fear from their secret servants, these stories were crude examples of a fairly recent phenomenon in British politics: The leaking of secret information in the political and bureaucratic interests of the secret services in the Whitehall 'game' of budgets and roles in the changed circumstances of the post Cold War era.

Throughout 1994, for example, the Metropolitan Police and MI5 waged a press war as MI5, *sans* the Red Menace, tried to move in on areas hitherto the property of the police. For the first time in this country the politics of intelligence and security agency budgeting were being acted out—in part—in public. Even the *Daily Telegraph*, was moved to comment on 5 November 1994 on 'a burst of activity among defence institutions scurrying to identify new roles for themselves to justify their budgets and bureaucracies.'[13] Final confirmation of this aspect of the contemporary spooks' relationship with the media came from the former MI6 officer Richard Tomlinson, who told us that '[MI6] devotes considerable resources to lobbying its position in Whitehall, and has a specialised department whose role is to spin-doctor the

media by wining and dining favoured journalists and editors.'[14]

It was recently alleged that Dominic Lawson, the editor of the *Spectator*, is a paid asset of MI6. Lawson and MI6 have denied this but, if true, it would be an interesting example of the changing world (alternatively, of declining standards.) For until fairly recently the editor of a conservative (and Conservative magazine) like the *Spectator* could have been relied upon to open his columns to (dis)information from MI6 out of a sense of patriotism and duty. But with the Cold War over, the empire gone, much of the City of London now foreign-owned, Britain now merely a declining region of the European Union, the old discourse of nation and state within which concepts like 'duty' and 'national interest' were meaningful is in disarray. What is 'the national interest' these days? Who is the enemy?[15]

notes

1 *New Statesman*, 12 December 1986, pp.7 & 7. Thanks to David Turner for the quotation.

2 Thus beginning that paper's reputation which led Michael Foot always to refer to it as the Forgers' Gazette.

3 *Independent on Sunday* 9 April 1998. The unidentified Minister to whom Aaronovitch talked is obviously Straw.

4 The CIA documents are at:
<http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/ch03-01.html>
<http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/ch03-01.html>

5 He may have been an MI6 officer under cover. There have been persistent rumours that in the 1950s and '60s MI6 paid for the *Telegraph's* foreign news operation. Cf Brook-Shepherd's 'Central and South-East European Bureau' of the *Telegraph*.

6 Mayhew's memories of IRD in its early days are to be found in his *A War of Words: A Cold War Witness* (I.B. Tauris, 1998).

7 Even this had been prefigured during the war. One of the bits of the story of WW2 which the official British legend is reluctant to acknowledge is the massive campaign of propaganda, smears and blackmail waged by the British state against the isolationists in the United States in the period leading up to US entry into the war.

8 This is described in detail by Lashmar and Oliver. The fact that so many of Britain's journalists and newspapers were regurgitating unattributable briefings from IRD may explain why this extremely important book has had virtually no reviews. To my knowledge there is no single volume on the CIA's media operations but Carl Bernstein (of Woodward and Bernstein fame) made a start in his piece 'The CIA and the Media', in *Rolling Stone*, October 20 1977. I can't think of an equivalent for the KGB that is worth reading.

9 Pincher's many books, notably the 1978 *Inside Story*, are a testament to a career publishing material given to him by the secret arms of state. In 1991 his *The Truth about Dirty Tricks* contained a staggeringly inaccurate chapter on Colin Wallace which Wallace himself demolished in *Lobster 21* (May 1991).

10 Massie was prolific in the *Daily* and especially the *Sunday Express* in the late 1980s. For perhaps the most grotesque example of his use of spook information see the front page lead in the *Sunday Express* of 14 February 1998, 'Labour MP and the girl reds', which was based round a surveillance photograph of a Labour MP taken in 1964!

11 *The Armour-Plated Ostrich*, Tim Webb, Comerford and Miller, West Wickham, Kent, 1998 p.82.

12 A new branch of historical research suggests itself: history with the documents included which should have been written but weren't.

13 For a couple of examples see the *Independent* of 9 November 1994, which reported that 'MI5 ... and Special Branch are vying to take the lead in representing Britain at Europol's headquarters in The Hague. MI5 is making an aggressive bid to take-over the European Liaison Unit of the Metropolitan Special Branch ...'; and *Computer Weekly* of 10 November, 1994, which reported that 'The security service MI5 is to offer advice to government IT managers on nearly all computer security issues further diluting the role of Whitehall's dedicated computer agency the CCTA.' MI5 successfully moved into both the above and organised crime as well as taking over most of the Metropolitan Police's anti-terrorist operations. MI6 moved into 'the war on drugs' as well as international organised crime.

14 *The Guardian* 15 August 1998.

15 It is striking that in the 1980s the US citizens, notably the senior CIA officer Aldrich Ames, who were caught spying for the Soviet Union did it simply for money, not for ideology.