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“When examined, answer with questions.”

Susannah Thompson interviews Jenny Holzer

A number of my questions are related to the idea of site-specificity and ‘audience’. Your work, and your self-confessed approach is almost characterised as being at odds with the established gallery/museum ‘system’, choosing instead to locate work in the urban environment. In an interview with *Wired* magazine in 1994, for instance, you stated that you were ‘always trying to bring unusual content to a different audience—a non-art audience’, describing your Guggenheim show as an ‘aberration’. Do you still feel that you are ‘running in the opposite direction...trying to get out of the art world and go someplace else?’

I practice inside and outside the art world. About 3/4 of what I do is for a general public, and I would like to be considered a regular artist, too. The Xenon projections are a relatively new way to show my text, and sometimes other material, to non-art audiences. These projections often are unannounced, and anonymous, so that people can concentrate on the content, and not worry about whether what they see is art or not.

In relation to my last question, do you feel any sense of conflict in your involvement in commissions and exhibitions which are very much part of ‘the canon’ and appeal specifically to the ‘art world’. For instance, much of the work experienced by a UK audience has been almost exclusively located in large, National Lottery-funded arts venues such as Baltic and Tate Liverpool.

Choosing to show in an art venue doesn’t necessarily exclude the general public. For example, because my projections are outdoors, a non-art audience always attends. I would enjoy having projections in unexpected locations, as well.

In terms of the ‘site-specificity’ of your works, have your commissions for Baltic and Tate Liverpool been site-specific in terms of the immediate architectural ‘site’ or have you also addressed/considered a wider (but also ‘site-specific’) socio-political context in the creation of the works?

Hopefully these projections take the architecture and the site into account, and speak to socio-political concerns.

In works such as ‘Truisms and Survival’ the initial success of these works was partly (for me) dependent on the fact that you had so adeptly manipulated the ‘traditional’ spaces of advertising in the presentation of your work, which was sited so that passers-by or consumers would ‘happen upon’ or ‘stumble across’ the work almost by accident. It shares a lot of common ground with hip hop graffiti in this respect, and I know you have collaborated with graffiti writers in the past and been very much part of this kind of ‘subversive’, yet democratic, art activity. How does this compare to your works, again with particular reference to Tate Liverpool and Baltic?

One difference is that I was invited, and it was legal, to work at the Tate and the Baltic. What might be democratic about the projections, though, are the varied points of view in the texts, and the accessibility of the work. What could be subversive is the meaning and the subjects of the writing, and the fact of presenting this material outdoors.

These installations seemed to be experienced in a radically different, almost opposite way, in which crowds were almost invited to ‘gather’ as though in attendance at an ‘unveiling’ or an ‘illumination’. In this way, these commissions were, to my mind, very much an art world spectacle or an ‘event’. Are you comfortable with this kind of presentation and its intended audience, given your previous approaches and antipathy towards the art world ‘elite’?

My preference always is for the Xenon to be stumbled upon rather than announced, but I don’t mind the occasional presentation as artwork. Even when organizers invite people; however, there always is an accidental audience, too, and that pleases me.

You obviously work very much with an ‘audience’ in mind (as opposed to ‘working for yourself’). I find it ironic, and successful, that these works look totalitarian and commanding (in terms of scale, the manufactured ‘look’ etc.) but are in fact often suggestive and questioning rather than ‘imposing’.

I am happy to know that this is how you find the Xenon, as commanding and questioning is a good combination.

Would you say that ‘reader-response theories’ are a motivation in the creation of your work, that once you put it ‘out there’ your audience will complete the work?

I don’t know much about reader-response theories, but audience reaction is critical to me, and to every artist who works in public. I study what people do or don’t do at my events, try to overhear what is said and watch people’s faces. Yes, I rely heavily on the audience to create part of the meaning of the work, and so to complete it.

And, if so, are you pre-occupied with the individual response or engagement (or ‘solitary decoding’ as Edward Said terms it) or are you more interested in Stanley Fish’s notion of reader-response in terms of collective responses or ‘interpretative communities’?

I am pre-occupied by both.

Your Truisms obviously convey some firmly held beliefs and concerns, do you ever worry about audiences’ ‘misreading’ messages about issues such as rape, violence etc.?

Yes, this is a concern. It is a delicate matter to address hard questions and not have the work be sensational, or worse, stupidly provocative. On the other hand, it would be counterproductive to pretend—by ducking the subject—that violence doesn’t occur.

Is there any element of attempted ‘control’ in how your work will be ‘read’, and if not, do you think there should be?

I try to choose the right media and venues for the tough texts, and the cruel writing is surrounded by sentences that are not.

You have spoken about the need to ‘occupy the Big Brother media as well as the basement workshop’ Do you intend to continue to work within both contexts?

Yes, I like everything from small stickers to large scale high tech projects.

I’m reminded of Dave Hickey, discussing Christopher Wool in asking the next question, ‘The interesting question is whether Wool’s pictorial appropriation of the Congregationalist kunsthalle actually constitutes an endorsement of its politics’. In terms of your own work, can you consider this comment in relation to your work at Baltic and Tate Liverpool. Is there an element of ‘subversion from the inside’?

I don’t think there’s much need to subvert art spaces. Art institutions are the least of the world’s problems, and deserve much support. Although I never know how effective anything I try is, I would rather try to subvert the sort of thinking that leads to war, and to routine assaults.

You’ve said that ‘there’s nothing wrong with art for art’s sake’. I agree, but do you find it restrictive to be considered as an artist who wholly embraces the idea of public ‘access’ and ‘inclusion’, and opposed to art world elitism?



I am delighted to be considered an artist who embraces public access, and I am happy when my site specific installations in buildings such as Mies van der Rohe’s new National Gallery in Berlin, or the Guggenheim’s in New York and Bilbao, are recognized. I have little control over how I am considered.

I was interested to see your work and the work of On Kawara in the group show *Ill Communication* at Dundee Contemporary Arts. Your work from the ‘70s was juxtaposed with ‘contemporary’ new media work. How did you feel in being placed as a new media ‘pioneer’ or ‘exemplar’ to these younger artists, and was it odd to see your cutting-edge use of technology exhibited as a new media ‘artefact’? Do you think there was an element of attempting to construct a lineage of new media art there?

I didn’t see this, so I don’t know exactly what was attempted, or how I would have reacted. Pioneer is not bad, but I want to believe I am not a dead dinosaur yet.

Can you tell me more about your new media work? Do you view the web a resource, or a new ‘tool’ in which you can document work and make it accessible (in the way you once used posters, stickers, t-shirts etc., or the way Land Artists used documentary photography in galleries)?

Yes the web is a useful new way to hang work where people stare. The web pieces function somewhat the way that the posters did, when people would write on these street works. In the (now very old) web piece I invited visitors to comment on my texts by rewriting them. Then their responses were saved, just as I would keep, and then ponder, comments scrawled on my posters.

What are your current pre-occupations and can you tell me about any forthcoming projects?

I am trying and failing to write something adequate about the war. I have a number of projections and installations in progress and in disarray.

Jenny Holzer,
From *Laments*,
Baltic 2002

Bob-a-Job

Abolish Working Links (AWoL)

For the last three years fifteen areas across the UK have been declared "Employment Zones".¹ This means private contractors have been brought in to deal with long-term unemployment in areas where it is at a high level using methods that guarantee maximum "flexibility". This is one of Labour's flagship privatisation projects. That unemployment is an individual, personal affliction is its explicit ideology. The following article looks at some of the effects this flexibilisation is having for claimants.

The model is the same throughout all fifteen Zones. After twelve or eighteen months claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (the main Unemployment Benefit in the UK²), you get a compulsory referral to the local Employment Zone contractor. You attend or you lose your benefits. You then spend nine months of any further year of unemployment with this contractor. The first three months of each stint, referred to as 'Step One', involve frequent one-to-one interviews with a 'Personal Adviser'. You're supposed to get the same adviser all the way through but bad organisation and a high turn-over among the employees ensure that this isn't always the case.

After three months you are called in to sign a 'Costed Action Plan', a sop to the 'Jobseeker's Agreement' with the Jobcentre, in which you agree to take certain steps to end *your* unemployment, and the Zone contractor agrees to 'help you'. After signing this document the contractor takes over the payment of your starvation rations, otherwise known as Jobseeker's Allowance, with the exception of fifty pence a week, which the Benefits Agency still pays in order to ensure access to "passport benefits" like Housing Benefit. That's called 'Step Two' and is usually where the real pressure on the claimant starts.

The figures from the 1999 document in which the government initially put the Zones out to private tender offered the following payments to Zone contractors for each claimant consigned to their charge:

- For each claimant referred to 'Step One': £300
- For each claimant progressing to Step Two the equivalent of six months Jobseekers Allowance: approximately £1,400
- For each claimant who finds a job, regardless of what help they may have got from the contractor: £435 (or £547 if unemployed for more than three years). And the contractor retains whatever's left of the six months Jobseekers Allowance.
- If the claimant retains the job for three months the contractor gets a bonus of £2,468 (or £3,098 if unemployed for more than three years)³

This is a recipe for disaster. As Eddie Spence, a senior officer in the Public and Commercial Services Union, put it:

The logic of paying a company large premiums to get people jobs, when it's not in the company's interest that they keep those jobs for more than three months, escapes me. If they actually were to provide secure, long-term employment, they'd be undermining their profits and thus their existence.⁴

Currently three contractors operate fourteen of the Zones: Working Links (Employment) Ltd, Pertemps Employment Alliance Ltd, and Reed in Partnership Ltd. The Nottingham Employment Zone is run by Nottingham Links, a partnership of Working Links and Nottingham City Council.

Blood Money

The long-term unemployed in nine areas⁵—including my own, Brighton & Hove—have been delivered into the hands of the Zone contractor Working Links; a profit-making, public-private partnership consisting of the Employment Agency, Manpower, the consultants Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, and the Jobcentre (Plus!).

Working Links made a straight profit of £500,000 in their first year of trading, when most companies are laden with huge deficits due to initial capital investment. Once, while leafletting my Jobcentre, a man stopped and asked me: "What's wrong with Working Links? They've made me millions." It turned out he was a manager at Cap Gemini Ernst & Young. Indeed, the profits keep rising, last year running at £2.4 million.

Working Links are well known for sending people to other Employment Agencies, including Manpower, who will then also look for jobs for the claimants. Working Links boast in their literature that 15% of the work they find people is actually found by agencies. Very convenient. Not only can Working Links cash in on the premiums if other agencies find the claimants work, but agency jobs are usually short-term and employees less well protected than in regular jobs, so the claimants often find themselves back on the dole, then back in the clutches of Working Links, who can cash in on them again.

In Brighton, Working Links continually send claimants to the agency Personnel Selection, which was responsible for sending the 24 year-old worker Simon Jones to his death on his first day of work at Shoreham docks in 1998. The agency had not fulfilled its legal obligation to check out the Health and Safety provisions at the company they sent him to. Last April, Personnel Selection still didn't even have a Health and Safety Officer for the industrial sector where the most accidents occur.

Intimidation & Humiliation

Staff of the private Employment Zones have the same status as Employment Officers, i.e. as

The Ideological Underpinnings

The retreat of social democracy... Re-imposition of work in Britain and the 'social Europe'

Aufheben, issue 8, end piece

"...The 'Welfare-to-work' programme, which has been modelled on the programmes of the same name in the USA, is the emblem of New Labour's Third Way. Indeed the programme can be said to embody the key principles or 'values' behind much of New Labour's economic and social policies: links between government and business; 'responsibilities as well as rights'; a utilitarian approach to education; and the importance of work and self-reliance. The centrepiece of Welfare-to-Work is the 'New Deal' for 18-24 year olds, which the government has described as its 'flagship' policy. The New Deal and the other Welfare-to-Work programmes do not seek to create jobs: that would be far too Keynesian. Rather Welfare-to-Work is a 'supply-side' measure which seeks to get the reserve army of labour up to scratch so that, as the economy improves, employers are able to draw upon it instead of competing with each other for the existing 'job-ready' workers. And if the economy doesn't improve, the job-readiness of the reserve army of labour will serve as more than just a threat to those in work; in conjunction with the trend towards short-term contracts, it will enable a faster turnover of labour-power in order to keep wage costs down. Indeed, the 'modern economy' is all about just such 'flexibility'—employers being able to take up and shed labour when and where and under whatever conditions are demanded by the market. New Labour seeks to promote a greater sense of 'responsibility' in each individual to match their 'rights'. From this general 'sense of responsibility' will flow, it is hoped, a more participative and active engagement in 'the world of work'—whether through some kind of petty entrepreneurship or through accepting a shit job or crappy placement just to get a toe-hold in the labour-market. Despite how they appear to many claimants, therefore, the 'work experience' aspects of the New Deal programme aren't simply there to cut the dole figures as under the old Conservative approach: they are there to change people's expectations, their mentality, their acceptance of work-discipline and hence their labour-market position..."

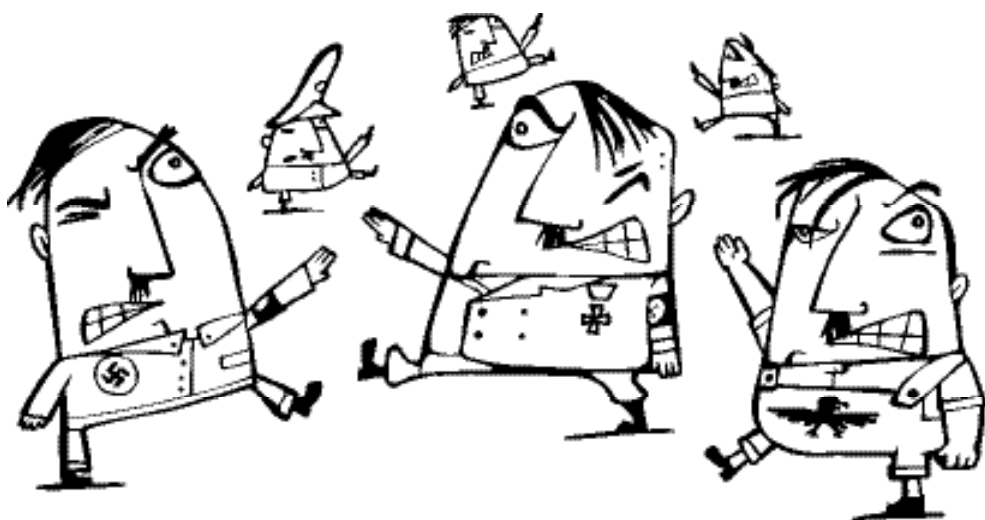
"The minimum wage today is not a concession to working class strength. Instead, it needs to be understood in relation to the Government's attempt to re-allocate welfare payments from non-workers towards those in work. While non-working claimants (e.g., unemployed, single parents, disabled, asylum seekers) are to be subject to greater means testing and cuts in eligibility, those in low-paid jobs are to receive a new 'Working Families Tax Credit' plus a 10p rate of income tax to make such low-paid work more attractive. In the context of benefits becoming in effect wage-subsidies, a minimum wage serves to contain such subsidies within reasonable limits and thus acts as a safeguard against employers shifting the cost of reproducing labour-power onto the state. It is not, therefore, a social democratic concession to a strong working class, but part of the broad project of re-imposing work."

The complete article can be found at:

http://www.endpage.com/Archives/Mirrors/Aufheben/auf_8_work.html

Jobcentre workers. This means they can impose sanctions on the claimant. Sanctions include suspension of benefits ranging from two weeks to six months, which can also result in the withdrawal of Housing Benefit, Council Tax relief, and other Welfare Benefits, if the claimant is not sufficiently advised on how to proceed. Again, a recipe for disaster. The sanctions regime, introduced by the 1995 Jobseeker's Act is to be opposed whether it's implemented by the state or by a private company, but giving such huge responsibility over people's subsistence payments to a profit-driven organisation shows no more than contempt for the dignity of unemployed people.

This is borne out by the culture at Working Links. Almost everyone I've spoken to in my area who's been through the scheme uses the words "condescending" and "patronising" to describe staff behaviour. They love to treat you like a pal, disrespectfully and not shy of suddenly getting the cosh out. They don't seem to use sanctions that much here, but threaten to. I have encountered people who've actually been sanctioned, but mainly they rely on bullying and intimidation, below



Illustrations: Paul Bommer

the belt and humiliating comments. Many find the constant harassment too much to bear and end up on the sick. In fact, 7% of the UK working age population are on the long term sick, as opposed to only 3% in most other European states.

In Plymouth, on the other hand, claimants are constantly threatened with Jobseeker's Directions ordering them to do all sorts against their expressed will under pain of benefit cuts. And these are enforced in the case of non-compliance. As a claimant, Dereck Jennings was ordered by Working Links in Plymouth to apply for a job at the Post Office via the agency Pertemps. When he didn't comply, due to the fact he'd already applied for a job there and failed to get it, he was sanctioned for two weeks, and warned he'd get six weeks, three months and then six months in case of further "uncooperative behaviour". He was then given a further Jobseeker's Direction, ordering him to attend Working Links every day to improve his typing skills. Royston Vasey wasn't satire. Dereck eventually managed to get better treatment by going to a solicitor on legal aid, who pointed out to Working Links that their requirements on him were "unreasonable".

Kafka's World seen through the looking glass

When specifying the circumstances under which Zone contractor staff may impose sanctions the government mentioned no more than a failure on the part of the claimant to "co-operate". What this means is defined by the operational procedures of the particular company involved. When I looked at the legal background I was surprised to discover that there is absolutely no statutory legitimation for sanctions imposed by Zone contractors on jobseekers who are not looking for work! The 'Employment Zone Regulations 2000' stipulates that the following requirements of jobseekers are suspended for the duration of being on 'Step Two' of Employment Zone:

- the requirement to have a valid Jobseeker's Agreement
- the requirement to be actively seeking work
- the requirement to be available for work

All suspended!

This is supposed to provide maximum flexibility for the Zone contractor to send people on training schemes. It also provides the advisors with maximum flexibility to impose sanctions, reducing the framework for deciding whether someone is "co-operating" or not to a question of discretion. You can, however, still appeal against sanctions from the Zone contractor through the normal appeals procedure at the Jobcentre—for what it's worth.

Further definition of the "co-operation" claimants are supposed to display to ensure receipt of their weekly pittance is not available, but apparently the 'Jobseekers Regulations' of 1996 do apply. This means that, in order to be classed as actively seeking work—despite this requirement's annulment in the 'Employment Zone Regulations 2000'—you have to "take more than one step on one occasion in any one week". A "step" can be looking in the papers, visiting the library, asking friends etc.

With Working Links, however, you're asked to sign up to applying for as many as five jobs a week in your "costed action plan". A job application can comprise of a number of "steps". How many steps you have to take when dealing with the Jobcentre depends on what you negotiate at your Jobseeker's interview when you sign on. Working Links, on the other hand, have standard numbers of applications you have to agree to make, practically irrespective of your personal situation. They talk about a "motorway" with a fast

lane, a middle lane and a slow lane. Should you want to see these 'standards', you are met with the wall of "commercial confidentiality". The documents, such as the contract between Working Links and the government, where their obligations vis-a-vis claimants are presumably defined, is not allowed to be seen, as we are told it contains information that might affect their profits if shown to third parties.

In Doncaster the Employment Zone is run by the Employment Agency Reed⁶, pioneers in public-private partnerships in matters of labour exchange. Claimants there have to negotiate 'Action Plans' every couple of weeks, in which they agree to carry out painstakingly detailed schedules, including cold-calling employers with the added, absurd requirement that they procure business cards or letterheads as proof that they've done it. Invariably, the only obligation on the side of Reed is to "provide support". What a sick joke.

(A Department of Work and Pensions Study revealed last year that Reed advisers were being offered £200 bonuses per job placement, and that their job security was linked to reaching targets. One adviser had been on one-month contracts for the last 9 months.)⁷

Democracy stops at the factory gate, for sure. The Employment Zone set-up doesn't even have the pretence of democratic transparency. It's just load them up and boot them off, a wholesale stripping down of constitutional form to the naked profit motive. It provides a framework for frustrated, tin-pot Hitlers to live out power trips at the expense of often quite vulnerable people.

Banking on it

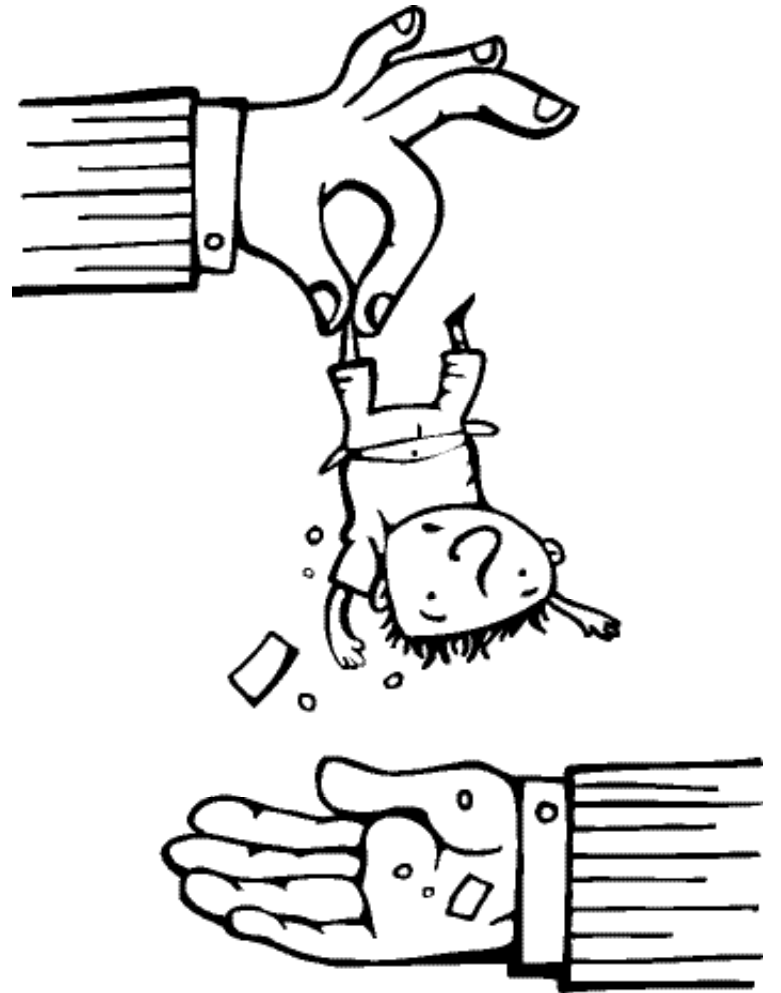
All Employment Zone models, whoever delivers them, are supposed to incorporate something called the 'Personal Job Account'. This is money that can be paid for training or tools to help your jobsearch and to give you more of a stake in determining your future, because you are supposed to have a say in how it is disbursed. No one really knows how much is available in the account. Advisors give conflicting information. Some advisors don't deal with it at all. With Working Links access to this money is always connected to a deal of some kind. You can get a couple of hundred quid to buy yourself some clothes, a computer, whatever your adviser agrees to. In return you're supposed to take a job you may not want, or even just, as we heard from one bloke, sign off for 3 months. There's something basically offensive about reducing decisions that will change the course of your life and may exclude you from National Insurance schemes for a period to this kind of cattle-market barter. This money has been set aside for the claimant's needs. Access to it should not have strings attached. No deals.

What this cannot replace, however, is proper funding for training for those who want it.

The New Deal for over 25s is not available in Employment Zone areas, because the money has been given to Working Links or the other contractors. While the New Deal is essentially a compulsory, workhouse-style policy aimed at disciplining and degrading the unemployed, it can offer limited educational and training opportunities. With New Deal, you get four options after 18 months (for over 25s) or 6 months (for 18-24 year-olds) unemployment: Environmental Task Force (sweeping roads for 6 months); Voluntary Sector (working for your dole in charity shops); Subsidised Employment (the government pays £75 a week to an employer to employ you for 6 months); or Training and Education.

The fifth option is: you starve.

Unsurprisingly, by far the most popular of these duress choices has been the Training and Education option. However, neither this, nor so-called Work-Based Learning for Adults— another



scheme where you work towards a qualification while still receiving dole—are available in Employment Zones, where the combination of training and receiving dole is anathema. The couple of hundred quid Working Links may bung at people as a bribe to get off their books is no replacement for proper training facilities. Long-term solutions aren't part of their repertoire.

Where Working Links have contracted themselves into the implementation of other New Deal services not excluded from Employment Zone areas, accusations of under-investment and short-termism also abound. They are involved in administering the 'New Deal for Communities' in Whitehawk, Brighton's largest council estate. Community workers have complained vociferously about the fact that abundant demand exists for training in trades such as plumbers, carpenters, electricians. Working Links will only provide quick computer courses for admin skills. Given that the New Deal funding depends on the number of people registered on the scheme, one community worker was prompted to comment "they're only interested in bums on seats." Several Working Links workers in the 'New Deal for Communities' scheme in Whitehawk are reported to have left in disgust at the company's cavalier approach to expressed needs of the people they're supposed to be helping.

It's gonna get worse - from worthlessness to worklessness

From next year selected towns will be hosting multiple Employment Zone contractors. Claimants will be allotted to the different contractors randomly, and the contractors will compete with each other for performance related bonuses. The lucky areas with multiple contractors are: Glasgow, London, Liverpool, Birmingham.

Claimants returning to the New Deal for 18-24 year-olds after one stint will be automatically referred to the Employment Zone.

(Not surprisingly, the Minimum Wage regulations discriminate against these young workers. There's no minimum for under 18s, and 18-21 year-olds only get £3.80 an hour, so they have very little bargaining power.)

Lone Parents will also be referred to the Employment Zones, at this stage voluntarily, but that can change.

Better still, from April 2004 pilots will begin in 12 sites where entry to New Deal or Employment Zone will be accelerated to just 3 months. These are: Tower Hamlets, Knowsley, Wirral, Sheffield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Birmingham,



Middlesbrough, Swansea, Great Yarmouth, Hastings, Glasgow City. These areas are being labelled "concentrations of worklessness".

The bidding guidelines for the new contracts indicate that Zone contractors will have to be responsible for claimants for the 3 months of the year when they are back at the Jobcentre, as well as the other 9 months. They will also be able to cash in on the back to work bounties during this period!

Ideological Exports

On January 1st 2003, the Social-Democrat German government passed a bundle of laws introducing the most profound changes in the Welfare State seen in the post-war era. The changes in the benefits structure resemble and are openly discussed as a direct rip-off of the British model. Furthermore, the German welfare reform envisages the creation of profit-making partnerships between the German Jobcentres and local temp agencies, to be called Personal Service Agencies. This sounds very familiar. Slightly different is the fact that claimants will be "under contract" to these agencies, which will be able to hire them out directly at a rate 20% below union tariff.

This has profound effects for everyone dependent on a wage to live. The traditionally high wages in Germany acted as a comparative ceiling, which other national economies would partially undercut. With the ceiling of the European wage structure fallen in, and the final bastion of state investment in the labour market in Europe toppled, wage levels will be much harder for workers to negotiate all over the continent. Cheers, Tony.

Resistance - is anybody out there?

The Employment Zones met with some initial resistance from the PCS, the Union representing Jobcentre and Benefit Agency staff. Privatisation threatens jobs and makes it more difficult to defend pay and conditions. The PCS started a campaign against the Employment Zone, which started with a policy of non-secondment, advising members to refuse to work for the Zone contractors, despite enticing pay differentials.⁹ A campaign with the local Trades Union Council was started in Merseyside. The Union is still generally opposed to privatisation of public services and published a "bill of rights" for Jobcentre workers and claimants in collaboration with the "National Unemployed Workers Centres Combine" in September 2002. The specific campaign against Employment Zones seems to have dwindled, however.

The Claimant's movement in this country is very weak at the moment. A campaign started by claimants in Brighton & Hove last year is the only one I know of to address the issue. Results have not been spectacular in terms of recruitment, but it appears from comparison with other towns that

Poverty, Inequality & Minimum Income

Donnie Nicolson

When Blair's New Labour came to power in 1997, it did so under substantial rhetoric, talking about an end to poverty, ostensibly backed up by the introduction of new policies such as the long awaited minimum wage.

But beneath this superficial veneer was the stark reality that the quality of life had by those on benefits under the Tories would not improve, and that poverty, including discrimination against those who rely on benefits, would continue into the new millennium.

Perhaps the most damning of all criticisms of Blair's 'New Welfare State' is that the minimum wage, far from tackling poverty, actually serves to perpetuate it. The woefully low wage now stands at £4.20 per hour for workers aged over 22 years, and £3.60 for those between 18 and 22 (those under 18 do not even qualify for the reduced rate). Now employers who pay low wages have the golden excuse of being 'NMW compliant' and are considered above criticism.

So despite (or even because of) this new minimum wage, poverty is increasing. In Scotland, one in three children and one in four pensioners lives in poverty. The Low Pay Unit has in the past pointed to the European Decency Threshold, previously set at 68% of male median earnings. This is suggested to be the lowest wage necessary to have a reasonable standard of living, without relying on tax credits or other benefits, and in the UK this would be substantially above the present minimum wage, at around £7.40 per hour.

Those workers struggling to bring up a family, pay rent and council tax, water charges, utility bills, VAT at 17.5%, etc. while receiving the minimum wage have to rely on other forms of benefits, like tax credits and child support. This is evidence which points to the inadequacy of the current minimum wage.

The idea that younger workers receive a reduced wage is reflected in 'Jobseekers Allowance'. The current level is just over £42 per week for those under 25, while those above 25 receive just over £55 per week. When I

enquired about this difference at the Benefits Office, a worker there told me that the idea was that younger people would be encouraged to stay with their parents!

So while we have pensioners, low paid workers, lone parents, and the unemployed all with very low levels of minimum income, there is one group in society for whom there is no minimum income level at all. Students in further and higher education no longer receive grants. They are no longer able to claim benefits outside of term time, although they can work. This forces many students to take up one or more part-time jobs alongside their studies, discriminating against students from poorer backgrounds. The culture of student loans and 'top-up' loans prepares debts averaging over £10,000 after graduation.

One of the ironies of this is that the MPs and MSPs who have introduced legislation to bring about this state of affairs went to university and had their education paid for by the state, with half-decent minimum income levels that they are now denying to their children's generation.

New Labour's re-organising of unemployment benefits includes schemes like Jobseekers' Allowance, the New Deal, Restart programmes and Jobcentre Plus. After researching the effects and perceived effects of these schemes, it would be easy to become cynical about their aims. It seems clear that the driving force behind the new programmes is not the importance of tackling poverty and genuinely decreasing unemployment. The purpose of, especially, New Deal and the desperate and demoralising Restart schemes are to get as many unemployed 'work ready' and into any job whatsoever as is (in)humanly possible.

Back in 1997, the theme tune to a (New) Labour victory was 'Things Can Only Get Better'. Fast forward to Scottish parliamentary elections in May 2003 and we had Pauline McNeill, Labour MSP for Glasgow Kelvin, driving her election van and playing 'Better the Devil you know' over the tannoy. You can only laugh.

claimants here aren't treated quite so badly. Whether this is indirectly a result of the campaign is a moot point, however.

The best way forward has to be from the bottom up. Getting together with fellow-sufferers in local claimants' groups to share information and try to expose the Employment Zones wherever possible will lead to a strengthening of claimants' hand, both collectively and individually. These companies rely on their public image, that is their weak spot. Many claimants are scared that if they stick their heads above the parapet they might lose their means of subsistence. Some individuals find that the opacity of Employment Zone structures and organisation offers them a shelter against the increasingly hostile environment at the state-run Jobcentres. It is false to play the one off against the other. We need to be speaking out against both.

Please send any information on harassment from Working Links or other Employment Zone contractors to:

AWOL, c/o
Brighton and Hove Unemployed Workers Centre
4 Crestway Parade, The Crestway, Hollingdean,
Brighton BN1 7BL

e-mail: stopdoleprivatisation@yahoo.co.uk

Notes

1. Employment Zones are situated in Birmingham, Brent, Brighton and Hove, Doncaster and Bassetlaw, Glasgow, Haringey, Heads of the Valleys, Caerphilly and Torfaen, Liverpool and Sefton, Middlesbrough Redcar and Cleveland, Newham, Nottingham, North West Wales, Plymouth, Southwark and Tower Hamlets.

2. Per week: £53.95 for over 25s, £42.70 for 18-24s, £32.50 for 16-17s.
3. The funding arrangements are projected to change in October after re-negotiation of the contracts: the 13 week back to work bonuses will be £3,600 if the claimant is on Step 1 or has been through the EZ once already and £2,400 for all other claimants. The original 1999 bidding guidance is to be found at www.uuy.org.uk or can be obtained from the DWP. The new guidelines for the next five years of contracts are contained in the "Invitation to tender for single provider Employment Zones, May 2003". The result of the bidding should be known around August the 4th.
4. Speaking at the TUC Unemployed Workers Centres Conference, October 2002.
5. Working Links Employment Zones are: Brent, Brighton, Glasgow, Middlesbrough, Nottingham, Plymouth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wales
6. The *Independent* reported on 9/6/03 that Reed in Partnership's offices in Liverpool have been raided by Merseyside police in a hunt for evidence of a £3m alleged fraud and the alleged employing of illegal workers. Reed in Partnership is run by Alec Reed, a Labour Party supporter who has donated £120,000 since 1995. In addition, Lord Sawyer, a former general secretary of the Labour Party, is a former non-executive director of Reed Healthcare, which provides nursing staff.
7. DWP report: "Personal Advisers in New Deal 25+ and Employment Zones" August 2002.
8. Last year advisers on the New Deal 25+ programme earned a basic salary of £14,000 - £16,000 p.a. By contrast EZ advisers earned £16,000 - £25,000 p.a. Reed's bonus system brought some adviser's pay up to £40,000 p.a. (ibid.)

Figures of dissent

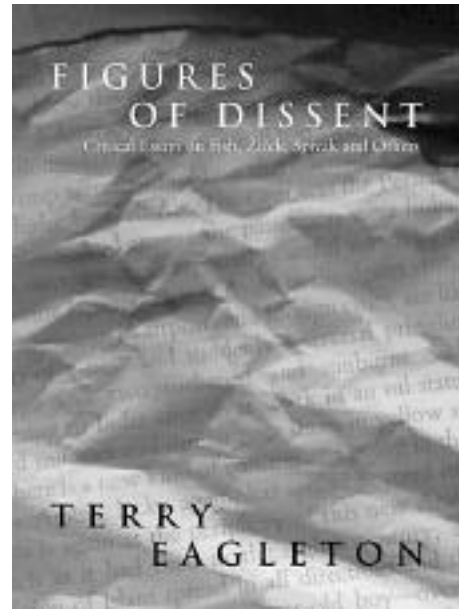
Liam O'Ruairc

Terry Eagleton—"that Marxist goof from Linacre college" as Northrop Frye once called him (102)—is one of today's most important cultural critics. In his latest book, *Figures of Dissent*, some 40 essays based on book reviews written over the last 15 years have been collected. Those essays are 3 to 12 pages in length, and deal with topics ranging from postcolonial theory, the nature of Gothic or utopia to David Beckham and forgery. What gives the collection some form of unity is that the majority of books reviewed have something to do with some of Eagleton's known interests: literary criticism, cultural theory, Ireland, Marxism, Wittgenstein... The essay, as Eagleton writes in a review of a book by Stuart Hall, is "that most supple, tactical of literary forms"; and like that author, "he fashions it with a rare blend of metaphorical flourish and polemical punch, pitching his tone somewhere between heavy-duty theory and zesty journalism, at once quick-footed and high-minded, showman and specialist." (210) Eagleton's tone is combative, provocative and imaginative. Trenchancy comes naturally to him, but he also makes a conscious effort not to be spiteful or unfair. His prose style is humorous, and at the same time, his writing retains a certain opacity. The reviews collected in this book are of uneven interest. His essays on Gayatri Spivak or Slavoj Zizek are likely to have far more impact than those on IA Richards or gallows speeches in eighteenth-century Ireland. However, even his minor pieces are colourful. He notes for example that David Beckham's prose "is as excruciating as one imagines VS Naipaul's shots at a goal would be. Reading this aggressively styleless book is a bit like munching your way dutifully through yard upon yard of muslin." (266). But there are also limits to Eagleton's colourful style. Take for example his critique of deconstruction's ethical turn: "Ethics for the later Derrida, is a matter of absolute decisions, which must be made outside all given norms and forms of knowledge, decisions which are utterly vital, yet which completely evade conceptualisation. One can only hope that he is not on the jury when one's case comes up in court." (247) On the basis of that example, some could object that Eagleton's comical turn of phrase is a substitute for more rigorous argumentation.

The most interesting essays in the collection are those dealing with the small number of innovative theoretical currents that have appeared over the last two decades. "It has been apparent for some time that literary theory is in something of a cul de sac ... The path breaking epoch of Greimas and the early Kristeva, the Althusserians and avant-garde film theorists now lies a couple of decades behind us. Few truly innovative theoretical moves have been made since ... It is as though the theory is all in place, and all that remains to be done is run yet more texts through it." (135) But there are exceptions. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the leading theorists of postcolonialism, "is among the most coruscatingly intelligent of all contemporary theorists, whose insights can be idiosyncratic, but rarely less than original." (161) However, postcolonialism has received so much criticism "that to use the word unreservedly of oneself would be rather like calling oneself Fatso, or confessing to a furtive interest in coprophilia." (158) Eagleton is not very enthusiastic about the current postcolonial hype. He finds Spivakian metaphorical muddles pretentiously opaque. "It might just be, of course, that the point of a wretched sentence like 'the in choate infans ab-original para-subject cannot be theorised as functionally completely frozen in a world where

teleology is schematised into geo-graphy' is to subvert the bogus transparency of Western Reason. Or it might be that discussing public matters in this hermetically private idiom is more a symptom of that Reason than a solution to it." (159) Also, for Eagleton, the theoretical radicality of postcolonialism fails to translate itself into a radical political praxis. "Orwell's politics are much more far-reaching than his conventionally-minded prose would suggest. With much postcolonial writing, the situation is just the reverse. Its flamboyant theoretical avant-gardism conceals a rather modest political agenda." (164) But it would be wrong to think, on the basis of his critique of the hermetic and turgid sentences of postcolonial theorists, that Eagleton believes that the theory has no valid insights to offer; Eagleton writes on Irish issues from a postcolonial perspective. The book contains essays on a number of Irish writers (for instance, Wilde, Yeats and Heaney). Eagleton's fascination with Ireland perhaps partly comes from the fact that because the Irish "were condemned to express themselves in a language not of their own, they could reinvent it with a brio and boldness less marked in the metropolitan nation." (48) On the basis of that idea, Eagleton demonstrates the originality of Seamus Heaney's translation of Beowulf. Eagleton's postcolonial criticism does not suffer from a modest political agenda as can be seen from his excellent review of the leading revisionist historian of Ireland, Roy Foster. Eagleton shows how the so-called 'great demythologiser' of Irish history remains trapped in a few myths of his own. Foster blames hostility to the British state on some deluded demonology of the Republican version of Irish history. Eagleton comments that "there must be a fair few Satanists with scars from plastic bullets." (232) He is entirely correct to note that "Foster's constant nationalist knocking, far from representing some daring dissidence, is now the purest platitude in these islands. In fact it would be hard these days to get an academic job in Irish history without a certificate of proficiency in the pursuit." (233) But what Eagleton fails to take into account, is that in spite of its hermeticism, postcolonial theory has proved to be much closer to the spirit of the Republican Socialism of James Connolly and more radical on Ireland than most of the intellectual British Marxist left (like Eric Hobsbawm or Tom Nairn and the New Left Review) who adopted a position reminiscent of the old "socialist colonial policy".

For Eagleton, Slavoj Zizek is "the most formidably brilliant exponent of psychoanalysis, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged in Europe for some decades." (200) Unlike the turgid sentences of postcolonial theorists, "his writing is splendidly crisp and lucid, even if his books can be fearsomely difficult. ... His style is deep and light simultaneously, shot through with an intense political seriousness, but never at all portentous." (203) What Eagleton presumably likes about Zizek is that he is a lot more practical and political than most contemporary theorists. Zizek shows how we are haunted by the Lacanian real by using examples from popular culture, switching from Hegel to Hitchcock. Eagleton's criticism is that Zizek "never really takes time off from his explorations to reflect on just what a hideous view of human life he is delivering us, or on how this is compatible with the political dissent which he clearly still embraces." Just as human existence for Lacan is the fantasy by which we plug the terrifying void of the Real, "so Zizek's chirpy wit and anecdotal relish serve in part to mask the obscene vision of humanity he offers."



(204-205) Eagleton also deals with the studies, inspired by the work of Foucault and Deleuze, on sexuality and the body. Eagleton predicts that, "there will soon be more bodies in contemporary criticism than on the fields of Waterloo". "Somatic criticism" as Eagleton calls this new field of cultural studies, makes it difficult to distinguish soft porn from literary theory sections in bookshops; "many an eager masturbator must have borne away some sexy-looking tome only to find himself reading up on the floating signifier." (129) But for the new somatics, not any old body will do. "If the libidinal body is in, the labouring body is out. There are mutilated bodies galore, but few malnourished ones, belonging as they do to bits of the globe beyond the purview of Yale." (131) Eagleton engages in a brilliant discussion of the relation between body and mind. Eagleton's Roman Catholic background enables him to have good insights and to write well on topics such as the body and soul, confession and resurrection. He corrects quite a few mistaken ideas about what Christianity has to say about the body. Eagleton constantly displays a sharp political edge in those essays. The central problem for him is not so much the flat-footed style of those texts written by the cultural left, but that cultural theory today is limited by the social and political context in which it is inserted. "Today's left, bereft of the political opportunities of a Lenin or a Lukács, is accustomed to practice limping behind theory, or even being replaced by it." (90) The divorce between theory and practice has pathological consequences. "Radical theory tends to grow unpleasantly narcissistic when deprived of a political outlet. As the semioticians might put it, the theory then comes to stand in metaphorically for what it signifies." (160) These are no longer the days "where 'Marxist' and 'cultural theorist' are as synonymous as Ivana Trump and liposuction." (209) Today "socialism is as alien a territory as Alpha Centauri." (165) But one certainly cannot accuse Eagleton of capitulating in those essays to the current zeitgeist of hermetic sentences and political shyness.

'Figures of Dissent'
Terry Eagleton
Verso, ISBN 185984667x

Video purified of television

On why video art wants to be boring

John Beagles & Dave Beech

Galleries used to be white. Maybe they still are but it's harder to tell now that they've all turned off their lights. The reason for this shadow cast across the contemporary art world is video. Particularly the video projection. It's difficult to believe these days that this dominating presence made its debut in the world of art not so long ago and that it did so very sheepishly indeed. Shoved in the corner of the gallery, video art was initially seen as nothing more than a modish, relatively inconsequential presence. Then, it would seem, video art learned to accommodate itself more fully to the logistics of the gallery. Videos on monitors in the notoriously chapel-like confines of the white cube were always going to find it difficult to compete with the visual punch of painting and sculpture. However with the increased availability of the video projector and cheaper portable cameras, members of that new profession, the video artist, were able to project a large-scale image onto the gallery wall. For the artworld, video art arrived in a big way when it demonstrated it could hold a wall, fill a space. Bill Viola fills as much space as anyone. Insofar as video art has amassed its own set of delusions, however, he is both hero and culprit. Combining as he does the spectacular sight of multiple and elephantine video projection with empty displays of humanist heavy-breathing, Viola's art takes itself very seriously indeed. And it is more than a coincidence that serious video art looks nothing like television.

Big Guns and Big Ideas

The big guns of contemporary video art invariably share Viola's sense of scale, even if they recoil from his cosmic ambitions. Gary Hill, Bruce Nauman, and Tony Oursler dramatise the presence of video in their own distinctive ways. Oursler's precise installations are a diversion of sorts, but they are no less bombastic than the more typical wall-sized projections.

The new guns are matching the established video artists yard for yard and hour for hour, with massive and lengthy works produced by Steve McQueen, Gillian Wearing, Douglas Gordon, Sam Taylor-Wood and Jaki Irvine. If it's not size that matters then no-one has told video artists, yet. Just like in the Salon of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, size is a marker of value and ambition in contemporary video art. There were times in the 1990s when the long night of video projection's reign seemed in danger of never ending.

It is increasingly hard to shake the notion that video projection will come to be seen as a defining embarrassment—like shoulder pads and big hair in the '80s—not just for being there, but for being *everywhere*. Of course many in the artworld would find this statement both preposterous and scandalous. After all, video is at present the great white hope of the artworld, heavily invested with dreams of cultural liberation and accessibility through the power of a new media technology. If everybody has a video recorder, a camcorder and a DVD these days, the argument goes, then video art uses a 'language' that everyone understands. Video art's populism is bogus. Indeed, while the physical presence of video art in galleries is meant to testify to art's inclusiveness, the manner of this inclusion—the forms of address and forms of attention of video art—reinstates art's own values, not those associated with popular video production, television, cinema and home video.

Video, as a technology, was no virgin when it got involved with art. Video had already had a series of liaisons with image production that hard-

ly even qualified for commercial and industrial uses, never mind Culture with a capital 'C'. In this sense video as art was always a potentially volatile combination. Video is a contaminated area, which, if you enter without adequate protection, will infect you with all manner of fatal diseases. Culturally, video is a carrier, and what it carries is the irksome and vulgar spirit of mass culture and popular pleasures. Artists who fear this sort of contamination need to take precautions. Like a politician who's crossed the house, video's position has to be continually questioned, its honesty cross-examined. Ominous soundings of rampant, crass, commercial television, big-budget Hollywood blockbusters; all that could and would devour, chew up and spit out art.

When an artist does take popular culture as raw material in video, the host culture often cooks it up for cultivated tastes, as a narcissistic display for the culturally astute. Think of the monumentality of Douglas Gordon's '24 hour Psycho'. Mass culture is retained in the gallery on the condition that it lose its capacity to entertain (pace, dialogue, soundtrack, narrative, all have to go), a conversion that is made all the easier by the fact that Hitchcock has been transformed into a cult auteur by the *Nouvelle Vague*. You could say the same for Steve McQueen's badly retold Buster Keaton joke. Such examples of the collision of art and mass culture in contemporary video make explicit what is implied in almost all video art.

Video Purified of Television

The fact that there is so much video art around does not disqualify these observations about its low and threatening status within art. What happens is not that art, or artists, exclude video from the gallery and the seminar room. Rather, video is managed (that is, the fundamental contradiction is smoothed over); it is recoded by including it in ways that inoculate art from its dangers. To put it bluntly, the fear that video art might just become television or film is almost enough in itself to guarantee that video art will tend to be boring to watch. Video's cultural threat is not fixed into it as a form or a medium but stems from the forms of attention that it harbours, that it seems always already to be contaminated by. This is why the cultural adversaries of TV and the movies make their presence felt in video art by using extreme slow motion, undramatic events and failed jokes.

Video art, it seems, wants to be boring. The proximity of video technology to television, and the culture industry generally, brings video art into contact with exactly that which the adversaries of popular culture oppose. If such an adversary were also a video artist, then she or he would want video art to be boring. Boring, here, means not entertaining or not taking pleasure in popular pleasures. It is not so much that video art is boring, but that it promotes prestigious pleasures, that which Bourdieu describes as 'pleasure purified of pleasure'. It produces video purified of television.

In this way video art, therefore, must sacrifice—or annihilate—the pleasures associated with TV and the movies. Matthew Higgs has recently made the same point about art in general, commenting that:

there was more pleasure to be had—both intellectually and viscerally—in any randomly selected five minutes from Wes Anderson's recent film *Rushmore* than in almost the entire ... Liverpool Biennale.¹

Higgs' point, put in Bourdieu's terms, is that art is purified of culture. Video purified of television is just one more example of this general cultural

tendency, and yet, it is the sharpest example because the two extremes are brought in such proximity with video art. What is at stake, here, is the division of culture couched in terms of the preservation of one side of that division. To speak of video art as boring, therefore, is intended to antagonise an antagonistic situation. As an insult, calling video art boring is intended to support the further integration of art and the rest of culture, to regard video and television as existing in the same world. We do not regard popular pleasures as 'more' pleasurable than the pleasures of art, literature, theory, the theatre and so on but this fact cannot be used to condone existing cultural divisions. As such, we are not even opposed to video art that happens to be boring so long as this is not an effect—a symptom, we might say—of the fear and loathing that art has for television, cinema and popular culture. If cultural division is going to be challenged and overcome then we must make efforts to think some crude thoughts in order to protect our intelligence from the sophisticated consensus that perpetuates cultural division by defending art against its adversaries. We don't always actually find video art boring, but we are politically obliged to emphasise it when we do.

If we leave the matter there, though (as a question of rival and competing—and hierarchical—tastes), then we misunderstand something crucial to the cultural tendency of video art to be boring. It is not that video art fails to be interesting and is boring by default, but that video art actively *seeks* to be boring. The choice, we think, has something to do with power and prestige. It is, in short, a question of pedigree. In order for video to become art it must pick up some pedigree. And it does.

Back in 1972, when May '68 was recent enough to taste sour and Terrorism was chic, Peter Wollen wrote an article in defence of Godard that began with a list of seven sins and seven virtues of filmmaking. Fiction is bad, while reality is good; pleasure is bad, un-pleasure is good; identification bad, estrangement good; transparency bad, foregrounding good; closure bad, aperture good (he means meaning should be left open to the viewer, not *managed* by the film-maker); single-diegesis bad, multiple diegesis good (not one storyline but several incompatible ones—he's not after a complex texture of narrative, but wants one narrative to disturb and subvert another); and finally: narrative transitivity bad, narrative intransitivity good (instead of a chain of events he wants fragments and breaks and discontinuity).

Wollen attacks popular pleasures head-on in favour of a more robust culture. This preferred culture is a counter-culture, for sure, but rather than merely being the opposite of popular commercial culture—the antidote to the seductive products of the culture industry—it must have something more to recommend it. What makes Wollen's unappealing criteria attractive or defensible is that they guarantee a special form of subjectivity, one which is active, contemplative, critical, intelligent, alert, vigilant. It is the subjectivity of what we have called the 'good student'. Wollen's prescriptive list is a vivid insight not only into the values and categories of experimental film, but also into the ways in which pleasures are conceived as rival and competing. It is not so much that experimental film denies pleasure and mainstream cinema supplies it in abundance, but that they promote adversary forms of pleasure. If we said nothing more about these rival pleasures we would perhaps regard them as equal and a matter of taste or opinion. What we must add, however, is



LEFT:
Bruce Nauman
Clown Torture
1987

that these rival and competing pleasures are subjected to hierarchies. It is through the prestige accorded to certain forms of pleasure that experimental film—and later, video art—gains, or finds, its pedigree. Wollen's prescriptive list is as good an example as we're likely to see of how 'pleasure purified of pleasure' actually sees itself not as self-contradictory but as intelligent, sensitive and worthy. It feels like the Enlightenment dream of the marriage of aesthetics and truth come to life. It is not surprising, therefore, that it casts a spell across film and video art well beyond its short, politically charged heyday. In the terms laid out by Wollen, it is not merely possible for experimental film and video art to fail to be entertaining, it becomes one of its central duties. And, we may add, one of its principal pleasures. It may even become an exquisite gesture for the video artist to resist vulgar pleasures so much that he or she could shoot a movie of a large group of people posing as if for a snap but holding their position for an hour or more. Such works are at war with popular pleasures, of course, but they are also conscientiously anachronistic, confining themselves to the filmic grammar of the very earliest flicks. In the early years of the cinema films were shot with stationary cameras, without editing, and without sound. Recorded sound wasn't available, cameras were too cumbersome and heavy to move about and editing hadn't been thought of. After the invention of editing, film-making had not only surpassed the miracle of pointing a camera at a moving subject, but constructed these images in narratives. This is why the Soviet pioneers said that 'editing is everything'. Nowadays the edit isn't everything. In fact, the edit usually counts less than character, dialogue, special effects, *mise-en-scene* and the soundtrack. Video art, from its inception, harked back to the era before editing, in the filmic Stone Age when a stationary camera was placed in front of an event and recorded it in real time without interruption. Why?

New Kids and Old Codgers

There is a growing consensus that the reason video art is slow and looped and at pains to distance itself from the movies is essentially due to the nature of the gallery. Video art apes painting, it is said, by filling the wall, slowing its action to a minimum, preferring contemplative or meditative subjects, and doing without narrative, dialogue and character. However, it is too easy to blame the preponderance in video art of the filmic Stone Age and the loop on the desire for film to be seen in institutions designed primarily for paintings. The resemblance is not trivial, but these features of video art would not have emerged if they were merely a function of the gallery. For one thing, as we have said, art demands pedigree. For another, we would expect the emergence, development, maintenance and monitoring of a cultural form to

be multiply and contestedly determined, not merely the product of one, isolated factor. The idea that video art looks like it does because of the way that galleries are, or because of some presumed envy of painting, conveniently dampens consideration of the contestation that inevitably takes place in the institution. To be sure, we need to explain why video art is so well placed to reconfigure the hierarchical relations between art and popular culture and yet reconfirms them more than perhaps any other art. In fact, there is a comic irony at work when video artists emulate modernist painting and look anachronistic while painters get funky and leave the old painting behind. Technically, video is the new kid on the block, yet culturally it comes over as the old codger in care.

It's no coincidence that a large proportion of monographs on video are also on Performance art. In many respects Performance art is, in the official history, credited with giving birth to video and then guiding it along the path to cultural legitimacy. Tracing video art's genetic history back to Performance gives us another perspective on video art's cognitive style. In particular, what we have identified as video art's resistance to entertainment and popular pleasures has its correlation in Performance art of the '60s and '70s. These are deep and complex issues but they show themselves in the most trivial and insignificant details. Consider, for example, the simple fact that Performance artists, without exception until recently, always looked so glum. Keeping a straight face was as dear to Performance artists as keeping a smile on your face is to the chorus line. One of the reasons why performance artists in the '60s and '70s looked so glum all the time was because they took culture seriously. Looking glum is good for business if your business is elevated or critical culture. Historically, glumness goes deep. Performance artists, on the whole, went along with the modernist maxim that 'art is concerned with the *how* and not with the *what*'. So, just as abstraction had been against realism, Performance sets itself against theatre. Performance came to be all act and no acting; real events in real time; hence, so much glum endurance, for the artist and audience alike. Similarly, video art set itself against TV and the movies.

Thirty years ago, when video art was in its infancy, it was often tied up inextricably with Performance, functioning as documentation and as audience. It was the dramatic drop in video camera prices for domestic use which allowed artists to utilise their potential. Up until this point it had stayed pretty much within educational campuses, small businesses and projects in the community. Later on, video came into itself initially in the form of performance specifically

designed to be recorded on video. What's more, the equipment for making videos was practically as heavy and cumbersome as early movie cameras. Rosler and Nauman didn't have the option to use a palm-held digicam or to edit their footage offline. This is one of the reasons why even the best examples of early video art have the technical capacity of the very first cinema: Martha Rosler performs her 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' straight to camera; Bruce Nauman walks around his studio; Vito Acconci lies on his back serenading the viewer; Gilbert and George stand in front of the camera and bend over a lot to a pop song. Fast-forwarding thirty years, the persistence of the look of early video art by contemporary artists finds its necessity not in the technology of the day (a lot of it is made digitally and burned onto CD or DVD) but in the uncritical assimilation of '60s and '70s critical art and the cult of Conceptualism. So much new video art recycles the formula just as text art and what's left of 'idea art' do.

Many cinemagoers would be surprised to learn that video art's lack of filmic sophistication has been done on purpose. There is, it seems, an inverted economy in operation when artists, instead of entertainers, get hold of a camera. That means any camera, whether it be a videocam, digicam or 16mm cine. Devotees of 'film as art' or the new romanticism of the video-projected miracle would prefer us to discriminate between the materiality of one medium and the reality of the other, or between the ready to hand production of video and the obsessive intricacies of film production, or between the chemical and the digital. If you wake up now and smell the coffee you will notice that the sensitive souls who celebrate video and film 'as art' talk almost exclusively about form. There is no richer source today of the residue of that old modernist preference for discussion of the 'how' over engagement with the 'what'. Which is why most video and film art seems so boring: it has little or no regard for what it is of, or how it might begin to engage, enthrall, absorb or entertain the viewer. Strictly speaking, then, video and film art is boring only to those who either haven't been initiated into these specialist forms of attention or have no interest in them. Again, though, it must be said that these rival and competing forms of attention do not stand shoulder to shoulder; they are arranged hierarchically according to the constellation of cultural divisions.

The elevation of video that we are trying to describe will be seen as a strange story to those who imagine its democratic credentials are guaranteed either by its technical accessibility or its distance from the smear of elitism. What is stranger still, however, is how the assumption that video is always already placed outside of the history of art proper, turns into an alibi for producing work that makes little sense outside of the modes of attention of that tradition. Sometimes the relationship between video art and elevated forms of attention are made explicit, such as in Douglas Gordon's statement that his favourite artist is Barnett Newman. Other times the relationship is more insidious, such as when Steve McQueen backs up his argument that he is against the 'pop-corn mentality' by describing his desired film as being elusive and romantic, "like a wet piece of soap—it slips out of your grasp."²

The Cold Bath and the Hothouse

Despite its technological novelty, however, this is not a conceptually new situation for art. Thomas Crow identifies a similar breach of artistic protocol in 18th century France. There was "an abiding problem for those in authority over French art because of a fundamental contradiction at the heart of academic doctrine: a universalizing conception of artistic value had to be mapped onto a divisive social hierarchy."³ In other words, the expansion of art's public does not necessarily mean the extension of art's pre-established tastes, modes of attention and so forth, but may, on the contrary, be the source of a particular kind of challenge or crisis. The arrival of video art in the art world renewed these questions of art's authority and its relation to another broadening of the cultural environment in a very intense way. Video was not as manageable as a newly arrived public was for the French academy because its threat

would be made manifest not through the presence of an excluded, philistine public but through the activities of artists themselves. It was, in this sense, more insidious, more cunning, more deceptive. It brought questions of cultural division into the very practices—the thoughts and activities—of artists. (One of the dangers for video artists, clearly, is that they open themselves up to the charge that they are themselves philistine.) As such, the problem of mapping artistic value onto a divisive *social* hierarchy has to be construed as the mapping of certain artistic values onto a divisive *cultural* hierarchy. Video threatens the fundamental contradiction of cultural division from the inside. But not for long.

Video art's refusal of filmic sophistication can be traced, we have suggested, to the glum earnestness of Performance art, the political and cultural desires embedded in Wollen's litany of instructions, back to the cognitive style of modernism's foregrounding of form and technique. A good case can be made for going back further, to what Michael Fried called "the beginnings of the pre-history of modern painting",⁴ articulated in the writing of Diderot. In his early treatises on the theatre, Diderot urged playwrights to turn away from surprising turns of plot, reversals and revelations, and instead seek, in Fried's words, "visually satisfying, essentially silent, seemingly accidental groupings of figures ... expressive movement or stillness as opposed to mere proliferation of incident".⁵ (Notice how that statement could just as well be a description of so much contemporary video art.) Fried spots a fundamental paradox in this aesthetic which he argues is unavoidable in art of the highest ambition. The paradox is: Art is made to be seen but the best art pretends (to itself or to us) that the viewer does not exist. In painting this means *enthral*ling the viewer without *addressing* him or her at all.

In this conception, pictures of individuals and groups absorbed in their own activities and distractions succeed where theatrical images employing all the painterly pyrotechnics of the day fail. For Diderot, Chardin's pictures of a boy carefully constructing a house of cards, or nervously blowing a bubble through a pipe, are always going to be superior to the Rococo bombast of Boucher's spectacular scenes of erotic promise and costumed masquerade. There is, without doubt, a tangible sense that "the cold bath of purity replaces the heady hothouse languor"⁶ which we don't want to underestimate, but at the same time we don't want to reduce these aesthetic rivals to a choice between moderation and indulgence. It is essentially a question of competing pleasures, not of the competition between pleasure and un-pleasure. Diderot makes the point that drama is, despite everything, more pleasurable than theatre because of its capacity to enthrall and absorb the viewer. Above all, according to Diderot, drama has the capacity to hold us, to fix us to the spot. And it does this due to its own inherent dramatic content, not through the tricks of theatrical technique.

Diderot does not propose that theatrical techniques have no affect, only that their accomplishments are shallow. His schema is an explicit argument for a hierarchy of forms of cultural address and their corresponding forms of attention by the audience or beholder. At one time Diderot would have been criticised for setting up a regime of taste, but taste needn't come into it. Accusations of anti-intellectualism or populism follow the same contours. This is where the philistine lives. The safe option, of course, is to signal with every fibre of your art and your personality that you are cultured, well read, alert, not easily tempted by shallow pleasures, etc., etc. This is the art of the good student and there is plenty of it around receiving praise, payment and prestige. It not only leaves cultural and social division in place; it lives off that division, profiting from it, and depending on it for her or his distinction. There is, therefore, a kind of imperative to do the opposite of the safe option in order to challenge or overcome the hierarchies and splits of cultural division. But the risk of being regarded as a philistine is real and has economic as well as other costs. Who in their right mind, then, would

be mongrel enough to smirk, to laugh out loud, to join in, to get right in there amongst the cultural blood and guts?

Video Purified of Art

There has been a discernible shift of tone in the last few years, which has endeavoured to escape the comforts of ironic distance or a secure, theory-bound critical armature. In video there have been several notable examples of artists working in the medium who have avoided the portentousness and righteousness of abstention. Bruce Nauman's work has a good claim as any on this shift of tone. He is an unlikely candidate, rooted so deeply as he is in the established history of video as art. Nauman is a great favourite and inspiration of the new generation of artists including those who use video in line with the tradition of video art. In fact, he had supplied some prominent video artists with their conceptual daily bread. Nevertheless, there remains a palpable sense of the mongrel in Nauman's work. Nauman might be one of the most important artists around, so it might come as a surprise, then, to discover that there are strong traces of the philistine in Nauman's work. His reputation should not prevent us from noticing that his work does not trade on the distinction of art from popular culture and everyday life.

The reputation of a certain branch of young art following the yBa splash was that it had inverted the values of cultural responsibility and artistic quality. Indeed, we can revive Peter Wollen's list of the seven sins of cinema and the seven virtues of Godard to animate the conflict. The inversion would go like this: pleasure is good, un-pleasure is bad; identification good, estrangement bad; transparency good, foregrounding bad; closure good, aperture bad; single-diegesis good, multiple diegesis bad; and narrative transitivity good, narrative intransitivity bad. In the case of Nauman, though, we find neither the adherence to the rules of critical decorum nor their abandonment. Rather, Nauman's work seems to scoff at the divisions. In place of the opposition between sins and virtues, Nauman delivers the goods: fiction good, reality good; identification good, estrangement good; transparency good, foregrounding good; and so on and so forth. Or better still: reality/fiction opposition bad; identification/estrangement opposition bad; etc etc.

Nauman's work, from his use of neon signs to his videos of clowns or simple everyday acts like walking in a straight line, has always cut across the established boundary separating art from popular culture and everyday life. This fact needs to be underlined if Nauman's recurrent challenges to the borders of art are to be recognised rather than suppressed in the judgment of his work. Nauman's early work does show all the signs of what has become video art's hallmarks, it is true, but Nauman never allowed these pedigree features to crowd out more unorthodox, mongrel elements. Using minimalist-inspired systems and reducing the role of the camera to a minimum, Nauman would typically act out performances for the camera that conform to the strictures of video art but that pointed elsewhere. His 'Fountain', for instance, is uninflected, straight-faced and dry, but it is neither tedious nor glum. Spurting water from his mouth, it is as if the artist is using the decorum of video production as a point of comic departure. Nauman, in fact, never confines himself to the territory of art and is, in this sense, in a constant state of mutiny with the concept and boundaries of art. Rather than feeling at home in art's isolation, with 'pleasure purified of pleasure' and so on, Nauman constantly infects art with its others (popular cultural forms, everyday activities, non-art idioms). Art infected by non-art is by the same token art not confined to art. It is art liberated from art's limitations, or, in the case of the video art, video purified of art.

In another seminal early video work, Nauman recorded himself walking along a line on the floor. Not a particularly enthralling or amusing proposition, of course, and therefore the sort of unspectacular plan that gives the video in-crowd goose-bumps. In other hands, this piece would have remained dull and predictable, but Nauman stretches the tolerance of the instruction to incor-

porate movements that are far more bodily than the original idea suggests. He swings his arse to and fro in a camp exaggeration of the body's natural gait, thrusting himself one way then the other with the drama of a catwalk superstar or the bathos of a drunk walking the line. Either way, this is a walk that more than goes through the motions. It is, perhaps, an embodied version of a Sol LeWitt wall drawing in which lines are coordinated with the assumption that accidents will happen; only, in Nauman, the deviations from the norm are very comic indeed.

More recent work brings out the themes implied by Nauman's involvement in the tension between seriousness and the comic. A series of videos depicting clowns makes comedy the content as well as the form of the work. In one, the clown has one word to say, and he says it over and over. Again, this sort of repetition is rife in video art, but with Nauman it does not add up to the demolition of character and identification; the result is not the deconstruction of filmic vocabulary but the development of affect through the slimmest of means. The word is "no" and the video undulates with the various inflections of the word and its contexts. We snigger as the clown seems to be chastising a child, wagging his finger and saying, "no, no, no, no, no". Then, the power relations are reversed and the clown seems to be pleading for his life and almost in tears while begging an off-camera assailant, "no, no, nooooo!". Your relationship to the video mutates over time, partly through the effect of the internal loop, but mostly through the personality of the character.

Some of Nauman's early videos were all act and no acting (and he plucked comic effect out of that very situation), but his later works turn on the acting because they hold our attention through the play of identification and estrangement. A good example of this is the video in which a clown walks through a door. In typical clownish slapstick, pushing the door open has the effect of tipping a bucket onto the clown's head. Cut to the partially open door and enter the clown who pushes open the door so that a bucket falls once again. The clown never learns. Or, maybe, what we are seeing here is a clown learning how to perform the joke. It is a fact of life for a clown that the joke that we see once, or once in a while, is his daily routine. Our entertainment is his workaday tedium.

If the video initially makes us laugh, it goes on (and on) to take that laughter away from us. This is because we become familiar with the joke and turn our attention, instead, to the clown himself. That is to say, we become estranged from the comedy and attached to the comic, and our identification with the clown may even cause our estrangement from the clowning. As such, this makes McQueen's badly retold Buster Keaton gag seem superficial in its effect and simplistic in its understanding of how to achieve it. Nauman's clown isn't glum it is drained. Repetition is married to variation in typical post-minimalist fashion but with the twist that each can be treated as diegetically or psychologically significant. At its most banal: professional clowns must repeat these actions in order to earn a living. More profoundly, though, perhaps the clown's stubborn return to the inevitable indignity stops being funny because it is too close to the pathological patterns we live out despite our best knowledge of their harm. It's not just the clown that never learns.

Notes

1. Matthew Higgs, *Art Monthly*, Dec 1999/Jan 2000, p.12.
2. Teve McQueen in an interview with Patricia Bickers, *Art Monthly*, Dec 96/Jan 97, p.5.
3. Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris*, Yale 1985 page 104.
4. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of California Press, 1980, p.ix
5. *Ibid*, p.78.
6. Michael Levey, *From Rococo to Revolution*, Thames and Hudson, 1977

The world he has lost

Dave Hickey's beauty treatment

Grant Kester

While the American art world of the 1980s is often associated with the curious coexistence of 'death of the author' postmodernism and hairy-chested Neo-expressionism, there was another event, much less noted at the time, that was to have a considerable impact on the future of contemporary art. It was the gradual movement of women and various minority groups into the art world through teaching positions, and through the nonprofit artists' space sector that emerged during the 1970s.¹ Their numbers were never overwhelming and acceptance was almost always grudging, but by the early '90s the absolute dominance of white men as artists and in key gatekeeper positions in the arts (curators, teachers, critics, etc.), was broken. Like most demographic shifts this one precipitated a backlash. However, in the culturally enlightened precincts of the art world it wasn't acceptable to openly attack people on the basis of their sexuality or skin colour. Instead, the backlash expressed itself indirectly, often through attacks on the theoretical discourses that emerged at around the same time, which critiqued the art historical canon from the perspective of class, race, sexuality or gender (feminism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and so on). Long simmering resentments would occasionally burst forth in less guarded form. Thus, in 1989, photographic historian Bill Jay issued a manifesto of sorts attacking the Women's Caucus of the Society for Photographic Education as a 'nasty little pimple on the face of photographic education', run by 'frothing at the mouth feminist leftists' who were using 'scurrilous feminist propaganda' to 'distort' and 'subvert' the field. One doesn't have to be a student of Freud to recognize that Jay's hostility was motivated by something slightly more threatening than the decision to assign Jacqueline Rose readings in art history seminars.²

I was editing *Afterimage* through the better part of the '90s, a journal that was known for covering aspects of independent media art practice (such as activist work around AIDS or labour issues, Third Cinema, and community-based photography) that were generally ignored by the mainstream art press. We conducted a reader's survey in 1992, and while most of the responses were supportive we also received a number that were highly critical ('Less on and on descriptions of politically-correct film and video. Enough already with the third world video; you've seen one, you've seen them all', etc.).³ What I found particularly interesting at the time was the consistent yoking together of attacks on art produced by black, Asian and Latin American artists, or gays and lesbians, and attacks on particular theoretical paradigms (queer theory, feminism, Marxism, etc.), as if these were somehow identical. I suppose, in a way, that they were, although not in the conspiratorial sense that some of our readers imagined. Theory during the 1980s and early '90s facilitated an epistemological break with earlier paradigms in art practice. It was a way for younger artists and critics to clear some space between themselves and the norms that governed art-making at the time. Further, it tended to 'problematise' (to use the language of the day) concepts like self-expression, the universality of art, and creative genius that a lot of artists preferred to embody rather than question; to make artists self-conscious about their privilege. The distance from conventional models of artistic identity opened up by theoretical research was invigo-



rating for some and debilitating for others. I think the effect on straight, white artists of seeing gays and lesbians, black people, and other 'others' beginning to exhibit in 'their' galleries and teach in 'their' departments could be similarly disorienting.

Old Martinis in New Shakers

In the absence of a new paradigm the attack on what might be loosely termed 'postmodern' art and theory could only go so far. There was an obvious intellectual market for a theory that could preserve the cherished truths of conventional art practice (the magical power of the artwork to transcend its commodity status, the artist as a heroic visionary, the primacy of taste, and the aristocratic pleasures of the collector and the connoisseur) while insulating the artist from charges of elitism or co-option by the art market. That new paradigm began to take shape around the concept of beauty during the early 1990s. This wasn't your mother's beauty; but rather, a retooled, slightly risky beauty that was simultaneously sexy and politically dangerous. It found its Jeremiah in the person of Dave Hickey, author of the wildly successful books *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1994) and *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (1997). Hickey has made something of a career posing as the perennial outsider whose home truths are just a little too real for the culturati to tolerate. Literally 'too cool for school', despite the fact that he's a tenured professor at the University of Nevada, Hickey has now attained the status of a cultural demigod; celebrated by such bellwethers of middlebrow taste as the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and awarded a half million dollar 'genius' fellowship by the MacArthur Foundation.

The Invisible Dragon was probably the most widely read book among American art school students of the last decade. This is curious, because a good bit of Hickey's spleen is vented towards university studio programs. But of course that's precisely the appeal. Hickey provides a way for students to sneer at the (parental) institutions through which they pass, sampling the pleasures of institutional compromise while deferring just a bit longer the inevitable Oedipal resolution.

However, I think there was a deeper appeal in Hickey's work, embedded in the somewhat labyrinthine account of aesthetic experience that he presents in between stories designed to advertise his *demimondaine* realness. Hickey presents a narrative of loss in which the 'old' art world of his youth, populated by iconoclastic dealers and boho artists and writers directly out of central casting, has been replaced by an impersonal, bureaucratized and moralistic maze of *kunsthalle*, ICAs, public funding agencies, and graduate programs, dedicated to eviscerating all that was joyful and spontaneous in art and turning it into a pious improvement scheme replete with wall texts and pedantic catalogue essays. In the good old days the art world was ruled by iconoclastic but savvy dealers like Leo Castelli and Paula Cooper, who were less concerned with making a buck than with the sheer love of art. Even an unknown 'cowboy' like Hickey could wander into their 'little stores' and 'find things out'. Art dealers are, in Hickey's account, no different from the guy who runs the Billabong Surf Shop; bubbling over with excitement, and eager to share it with any passerby, collector or not.⁴ The art market isn't some gilded prison run for the benefit of arriviste yuppies and blue blood culture vultures, it's just a bunch of passionate enthusiasts united by their love of art; more like a Star Trek convention than a business.

And then the darkness came and the little stores were made to feel ashamed. Art became institutionalized and professionalized with the expansion of college-level studio education and public art funding. Rich collectors don't really 'own' art, they are more like caretakers or hobbyists, but academics are another matter. 'All the treasures of culture were divvied up,' as Hickey writes, 'and owned by professors, as certainly as millionaires own the beach-fronts of Maine.' During the 1970s and '80s a bunch of puritanical do-gooders started raising questions about commodification, trying to police the otherwise uninhibited desires set free by the pleasure machine of the market. Hickey legitimates this rather sanguine embrace of privatized art by relentlessly staging his own munificent openness; shocking the stodgy professors by embracing Norman Rockwell and Roseanne in the same breath as Pontormo and Mapplethorpe.⁵ How could Leo Castelli's artists be elitist when the pleasures that their works evoke are no different than those to be found on the Vegas strip or the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*?

Art schools are only part of the problem, according to Hickey. The *primum mobile* of this vast left-wing conspiracy is, of all things, the National Endowment for the Arts. This is a rather remarkable claim, given that the NEA's budget at its height was well under \$200 million (the equivalent of five Van Gogh canvases at 1987 prices), only a small portion of which ever went to fund contemporary visual art. Nevertheless, Hickey endows the NEA with a remarkably efficient malevolence, arguing that it effectively 'transformed the institutional art world into a government-regulated industry'.⁶ Hickey's particular genius was to link the concept of beauty with a kind of potted libertarianism that naturalised the relationship between 'desire' and the market, at precisely the moment that a recrudescing capitalism (fuelled by the stock market boom of the '90s) was coming to dominate American political dis-

course. Here is Hickey, doing a creditable impersonation of conservative icon Milton Friedman: 'all our basic ideas about horizontal relationships between people derive from the premises of contract law. The whole purpose of a commercial contract is to establish the equality of the two people who enter into the contract... in my view... the basic pragmatic justification for the existence of legal rights is the conditions of commerce.' 'Commerce is a simple thing,' Hickey continues, 'When I was an art dealer: I have [sic] paintings, you have money, you want paintings, I want money... It is a lateral relationship, an exchange between equals, an exchange of desire.'⁷ One may be forgiven for failing to recognize the image of the market presented here, as a neutral mechanism for organising 'lateral' exchange among 'equal' subjects, in an era of NAFTA, GATT, and the rampant monopolisation and centralisation of both capital and political power in multinational conglomerates. In Hickey's world desire is simply one more commodity to be bought and sold—it provides the psychic energy needed to fuel the consumption of commodities on which the market itself depends.

Voodoo Aesthetics

In Hickey's Gingrichian narrative the state is cast as the puritanical killjoy that dictates to the individual on behalf of a grudgingly tolerated concept of the public good, while the market is the domain of personal freedom. Hickey thus projects a classic libertarian opposition between the repressive state (standing for morality and the regulation of desire) and the 'free' (libidinal) world of market exchange (filled with self-actualising individuals following their desire), onto the art world. Hickey postulates a kind of Nietzschean dynamic in which it is the interaction between these two essentially autonomous forces, the Apollonian state and the Dionysian free market, that provides the impetus for contemporary art and culture. But in the US untangling the interests of the state from those of the private sector (given the current system of subsidies, tax breaks, tariffs, defence contracting, and outright corporate welfare) would be difficult if not impossible. Nowhere in his account of the emancipatory powers of the market is there any acknowledgment of the long tradition of critical thought directed precisely at questioning the ostensible neutrality of the 'horizontal' relationship established in contract law (civil rights case work being only one example), within a larger legal system that is heavily biased towards the interests of property.

Hickey's analysis of contemporary art thus hinges on a mythic image of the market system which transforms the greed that drives capitalist accumulation into desire; a natural and even emancipatory component of human subjectivity. This hypostatization of an undifferentiated desire leaves us no way to understand the social and political implications of ostensibly personal choices or tastes. The sprawling cottage industry of Deleuzian studies notwithstanding, this sort of uncritical, ahistorical cult of the consumer has clearly reached its sell-by date, especially in a country that has so strenuously defended the sacrosanct 'freedom' of its citizens to gorge themselves endlessly on the world's resources. It should come as no surprise that Hickey describes his work, apparently without irony, as an example of 'supply side' aesthetics ('I'm a consumer. I'm arguing for the consumer's side of the transaction.').⁸ The difficulty comes when Hickey wants to argue that art can be something more than a Matisse-like 'mental soother' for the tired bourgeois software magnate. This requires a rather confusing narrative about viewers being seduced by the visual beauty of a work of art, only to find themselves (inadvertently), identifying with a radically different subjectivity (Mapplethorpe's 'X' portfolio work is the example typically used here), which they will then come to appreciate (or at least tolerate). Here our (inherently progressive) 'desire' is used to police our (inherently defensive and prejudicial) conscious reason. Thus, Hickey's claim to speak on behalf of the hapless viewer, overwhelmed by the patronising and judgmental hectoring of 'activist' art, is somewhat disingenu-

ous. It is not desire for its own sake that he advocates, but desire as a tool to correct or liberalise our perception of difference. Whether the viewer is seduced or assaulted the underlying function of the work remains essentially pedagogical and orthopaedic.

Hickey, and fellow travelers such as Wendy Steiner and Peter Schjeldahl, cast themselves as the embattled guardians of 'experience' over 'discourse about experience', the irrefutable evidence of the senses over the abstractions of theory. The assertion of beauty and pleasure as the only legitimate basis of an art experience and the reaction against theory (which is seen as contaminating the purity of that experience) coalesce around the troubled figure of the individual. The artist (as an exemplary individual) becomes the final bunkered outpost of resistant subjectivity against a whole array of abstract cognitive forces. The somatic or sensual experience that they register through their works is understood as having an inherently progressive political power, constituting a pre-social domain of personal autonomy and virtual play. This is part of an essentially conservative yearning for the plenitude of the real; the unmediated access to the world that we can achieve only by listening to the truth of the body. Schjeldahl claims to recognize beauty on an almost 'biological' level: 'Beauty makes me aware of my brain as a physical organ... My shoulders come down.' Steiner is confident that 'we will not be led into fascism, or rape, or child abuse through aesthetic experience'.⁹ The individual body is thus immune to the effects of history, power, and the totalising drive of reason—through the body we intuit the intrinsic rightness of things; a 'rightness' that is, by implication, both aesthetic and ethical. In her book *The Scandal of Pleasure* Steiner divides the world, roughly, into art critics and artists who 'love' art on the one hand, and 'the world' or 'the public', on the other. All criticism of art that does not accept its *a priori* value is dismissed as a product of a philistine know-nothingism driven by a fundamentalist fear of the subversive (and inherently progressive) power of the visual image.¹⁰ Of course this simplistic partitioning off of the body and the mind, the visual and the textual, on the basis of a Manichean division between domination on the one hand, and freedom on the other, is not without its political liabilities. Steiner's reference to fascism is particularly striking in this regard, considering the Nazis' adroit handling of the somatic and the sensual; the appeal to 'blood' and the galvanizing effects of light, color, and music in political rallies.

In Hickey's account the market, far from generating inequalities and encouraging the creation of works that appeal primarily to wealthy collectors, is actually the most perfect mechanism for distributing rewards and determining merit in the arts: the more effectively you deliver 'pleasure' to the viewer the more successful your career. University art schools and public art funding distort this 'natural' mechanism by allowing young artists to develop their work independent of market forces. It constitutes a kind of welfare or affirmative action for those artists who can't otherwise compete in the pleasure derby of the gallery scene. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, one of the chief effects of the expansion of the nonprofit artists' space movement, and of the growth of MFA programs, was to bring some greater diversity to an art world that for decades had been ruled by a relatively small coterie of New York dealers, curators and collectors, and their 'stables' of (nearly all white, and mostly male) artists. And it was precisely a desire to separate themselves from the Antiques Roadshow mentality of the art market that led artists to establish non-profit exhibition spaces in the first place. Hickey provides the comforting assurance that all those annoying artists during the 1980s and '90s who raised questions about racial privilege and sexual representation, or who challenged the cosy commodification of the gallery system, were really nothing more than mean spirited whiners who failed to 'test the magic of the market place' (to use one of Ronald Reagan's favorite expressions). All that 'bullshit about social power', as painter and critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

has so eloquently written, was simply a distraction from the deeper truth of artistic beauty.¹¹ By now, 'beauty' has joined 'the body' as one of the leading intellectual conceits of the new millennium. One can hardly swing a dead French theorist without encountering another conference, anthology or exhibit devoted to one or the other of these themes. Hickey and his cohort are the well established heroes of a generation of young artists eager to enjoy a Tribeca loft or a Malibu beach house free of the nagging whispers of an unhappy conscience. As we contemplate a return to the art world Hickey has lost, we would do well to recall that the beauty he evokes, not unlike the patriotism that surrounds us today, is something to be felt rather than questioned. This is an equation we may yet come to regret.

Notes

1. See Howardena Pindell's essay 'Art World Racism', in *The Heart of the Question: The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell*, intro. by Lowery Stokes Sims. (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997).
2. Bill Jay, 'Fascism of the Left', Shots #22 (January/February 1989), reprinted in *Photo Metro*, (April 1989), p.25. Also see Catherine Lord, 'History, Their Story and (Male) Hysteria', *Afterimage* (summer 1990), p.9-10.
3. '1992 Afterimage Readers Survey', *Afterimage* (September 1992), p.3.
4. Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1997), p.13.
5. *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, pp.13, 71.
6. 'Richard Nixon's expansion of the NEA in the nineteen seventies has, over the years, effectively transformed the institutional art world into a government-regulated industry dedicated to maintaining a strict consensus of virtue.' *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, p.152. Hickey's predilection for monetarist fiscal policies is particularly evident in his criticism of Nixon for curtailing tax breaks for art collectors in 1972. See Dave Hickey, 'An Address Regarding the Consequences of Supply-Side Aesthetics', *Art Issues* (Summer 1998), p.13.
7. Dave Hickey and Peter Schjeldahl, 'The Nature of Beauty', Proceedings: American Photography Institute, National Graduate Seminar, Photography Department, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University (June 4-17, 1995), p.40. Here is Friedman, the doyen of Reaganomics: 'Indeed a major source of objection to a free economy is [that] it gives people what they want instead of what a particular groups thinks they ought to want. Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself.' Milton Friedman, with the assistance of Rose Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p.15.
8. Timothy Cahill, 'So You Think Today's Art Isn't Pretty? Look Again', *The Christian Science Monitor* (August 21, 1998), p.B-4.
9. Dave Hickey and Peter Schjeldahl, 'The Nature of Beauty', p.39 and Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.211.
10. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe provides a more theoretically ambitious, albeit somewhat turgid, version of this argument in *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts, 1986-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
11. Bill Beckley citing Gilbert-Rolfe in the introduction to Gilbert-Rolfe's *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), p.xviii. Hickey's devotion to the art market is so absolute that he actually ascribes the 'dematerialization' of art during the 1960s and '70s (in conceptualism, performance and activist art practices) to the failure of artists to find gallery spaces. 'Non-object, non-portable art arose... as a strategic reaction to a commercial reality: all the walls were full!' *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, p.64-65

Blood curdling

Tom Jennings



Recipe

Take blood from right arm
Take oil from car engine
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction

Take country with large oil reserves
Take global capitalism
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction

Take untenable situation
Maintain in artificial state
Mix ingredients
Observe reaction

Sally Madge

A contemporary art exhibition entitled 'Resist: Protest Art' might sound like a surprising proposition in this postmodern age of cynicism, Young British Art and the death of grand narratives. And whether or not the obituaries are premature, for me the title of this show (and the clenched fist on the poster) raised the spectre of the heroic pose either as a safe veneer on liberalism, or concealing the kind of prescriptive moralising beloved of many political groups and parties on the left over the last few decades. However, this might only worry those of us jaded by the manipulation, dishonesty and/or downright betrayal by vanguards, central committees and other 'conscious minorities'—whereas perhaps concepts such as resistance and protest are more innocent for the younger anti-globalisation generations. Plus of course there is always the possibility of reclaiming the symbols and language of rebellion from the dead hands of reformist, bureaucratic, institutional or even corporate sequestration—as in the anarchist movement's persistent attempts to realign Mayday with its revolutionary grass roots origins.¹ In any case, happily, the vague misgivings—in particular, the likelihood of yet another worthy middle-class, trendy-leftie, political-correctness-fest, somehow left over from the 1980s—proved unfounded here.

Instead Scarborough's *Crescent Arts* mounted an interesting and varied collection of mainly small-scale pieces in painting, collage, photography, mixed media, sculpture and installation. The relationship of the work to either protest or resistance was tenuous, but then an exhibition entitled 'Critical reflections on what politics in art might entail these days' probably wouldn't have cut any promotional mustard. Certainly there was little sense of any politics in the formal qualities of the exhibits (beyond the ambiguities of referentiality and irony, along with texts signalling a problematization of discourse), which dealt with current real-world concerns such as the right to publicly organise, war, technology, environmentalism and consumerism. For example, while backing away from the wall-based work, viewers risked tripping over Yoke & Zoom's ammunition box 'Not In Our Name' in the centre of the main space—a more subtle and effective message about the debris and detritus of war (landmines, etc) and its mediated portrayal, than any number of celebrity charity galas could achieve. More oblique were Catherine Graham's double electrical socket and plugs joined with a short cable, 'F**k The System'—implying the possibility of shortcircuiting the rapidly closing nature of present power (and technological) relations—and George Heslop's 'Chocolate Crucifix' hinting at the religious overtones of commodity valorisation and fetishisation. Most potent was Sally Madge's installation, 'Recipe', consisting of small clinical specimen bottles containing blood and oil on a glass shelf, accompanied by short verses in the form of cookery notes.

Blood and oil has been a potent metaphor in

the context of the invasion of Iraq, as demonstrated well by the 'Recipe' text. Public outrage made an intuitive connection between powerful corporate vested interests and the actions of the governments such interests support. And it can hardly be denied that since early last century there have been consistent links between the directions followed by international politics and control over petrochemicals. The slogan 'No blood for oil' captures the widespread sense of revulsion at the cynicism and duplicity of the New World Order, even though it is generally understood that rather more is at stake than cheap crude.² Importantly, the commonplace laments of the complacent classes about the political apathy of ordinary people are exposed as lies by the unprecedented levels of protest against this Iraq 'war'—before it had even started, and irrespective of the media circus grinding into gear and spinning the vacuous demagoguery of freedom and democracy where none is (or will be, in any meaningful sense) apparent.³

So, despite their oversimplifications, slogans can be very effective in mobilising people to contemplate and take action; and 'Recipe' could be interpreted as effective sloganeering in the form of a small art installation. But, whether intended or not, it also mobilised many more layers and levels of meaning and resonance than such a function would suggest. Contributing to and wholeheartedly echoing the exhortation to 'Resist', more difficult issues were also raised—of complicity, the relationship between subversion and containment, and the problem of tackling symptoms rather than causes. Deeper philosophical questions loomed underneath, of the exploitation, destruction and future of all *resources* (as perceived by our rulers; encapsulated in the concept of 'collateral damage')—including human bodies, consciousnesses and lifeworlds, and the material and biological environment. Most of all, implicit in this work was the challenge of where we locate ourselves in these complex processes—as viewers or makers of art, citizens or consumers in the West, and/or as subjects and objects of political or other discourses. This challenge surely started as humble and local (e.g. 'Where do I, where does my life, my art, *figure* here and now in this situation?'); but on reflection could hardly avoid expanding into the historical, universal and global.

In practice, the blood and oil *resisted* being mixed; they could be juxtaposed, but remained separate. Just as seawater is hidden from the sun underneath oil slicks, this mammalian blood (a phylogenetic analogue of seawater) was sealed in from the atmosphere by exhaust oil rendered thicker and darker with immersed particles picked up from the internal surface of the ailing engine. The blood was itself heavy with waste products and exhausted of oxygen and nutrients after its passage around the tired body's machine. Over its lifetime as an exhibit, the components sedimented into plasma and corpuscles; and the engine oil's components might do something comparable given geological time.

Fossil fuels represent prehistoric generations of lifeforms fixed in their strata by the natural disasters of planetary biography. Over many millennia they become instrumental in cycles just as arbitrary and destructive, but made to appear similarly inevitable by the rhetoric of neo-liberal economics—which also conveniently offers a revisionist Darwinism in which biological entities compete as capitalists, and only the most evolutionarily profitable survive. If the destiny of the losers is to become the ideological fossil fuel of the future, then blood and oil are both biologically and discursively related, but dislocated in time; and time is running out for both. Extracted from their natural habitats, they enjoyed here the tem-



porary reprieve of suspended artistic animation in an exhibition which was their memorial service.

However, this was not just any old blood and oil, but that which had circulated around the body and accoutrements of the artist in the service of her life. To keep us all in the lifestyles to which we have become accustomed, oil and human bodies are likewise basic raw materials of the lifeblood of the global machinery of capitalism. Both must be produced and reproduced for money to flow. We imagine and contrive our integrity and our purposes in life—including our freewill, individuality, expressivity and desire—according to and in between the demands this system makes upon us, in the interstices of its networks of subjugation, seduction and sedation. And the 'good life', for those who have one, has always required the devastation, exploitation and destruction of colonised lands and dominated peoples—now, it seems, more than ever (that's progress). What, then, does it mean to 'resist' one isolated symptom of this disease? Why here and now if not always and everywhere else? By mobilising the artist's own body, daily life, and sense of self in the equation of blood for oil, 'Recipe' pondered such questions intimately and personally, asking viewers to do the same.

Left to its own devices blood has a cycle. Blood flows, changes, grows, differentiates, mingles, heals, reproduces, degenerates. Blood organises itself over time. Time may also fossilise the body and its blood into oil—it depends upon how it is *contained* (what is done to it, where, by whom and for what purpose). One of these bottles of blood (in its 'universal container') clotted and developed imperceptibly into other modes of being; with the potential for strange beauty, fascinating and interesting shapes, colours, dynamics. Or, if tainted with anti-clotting agent, it could be maintained in an artificial state. This had a certain minimalist aesthetic quality, one might suppose, but was rather sterile—not only that, but it required the dead density of the oil for the effect to work. For my part, in art as in politics, I prefer the self-determination of the human element, which in both spheres has the additional capacity to not need the oil at all. And, when organised political resistance does finally return to the agenda, if an 'artificial State' is deemed to be oxymoronic as well as moronic—so much the better.

'Resist:ProtestArt', Crescent Arts, The Crescent, Scarborough, May 13th to June 28th 2003

Notes

1. See *Freedom* magazine, 14th June 2003, for a discussion of Mayday as well as coverage of the latest round of anti-globalisation protest in Evian, Lake Geneva, from 29th May-3rd June; and the subsequent issue (*Freedom*, 28th June) for a recent example of the machinations of Leninist would-be leaders—in this case the SWP—in the Stop The War Coalition.
2. See *Variant* No. 17 for a range of perspectives.
3. As in any other country the Western 'democracies' have blundered into over the past few centuries—so it can hardly *always* be a case of unintended consequences of 'good intentions'. See Noam Chomsky's work for detailed accounts.

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Putting Paid to War

On 31/3/03 BBC News Online wrote that two UK soldiers serving in Iraq had been sent back to their headquarters in Essex after reportedly refusing to fight. It went on to state it had discovered that, "conscientious objectors' are unprecedented in a professional army", and that the "two soldiers could face a court-martial after reportedly refusing to fight in a war 'which involved the death of civilians'," but that "the Ministry of Defence played down the suggestion they were conscientious objectors, something unheard of in a professional army."

Far from being unprecedented or unheard of, conscientious objection is a legal right. Any member of the armed forces with a sincere religious, political or moral objection to war is legally entitled to honourable discharge as a conscientious objector as derived from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Variant spoke with At Ease to find out more.

V: What is At Ease? What forms of support and information do you provide and to whom?

At Ease: At Ease offers confidential advice and counselling service to members of the UK armed forces, including reservists, and their families. Usually it's people wanting to know what the regulations are, as it is very difficult to get accurate information and they are forbidden by UK law to have any kind of trade union or association. And, unlike other European Countries, Britain doesn't have an ombudsman—an official who can investigate complaints.

The MoD invariably fails to inform members of the armed forces of their legal right to object to war or a specific campaign, either before or after posting them to their new stations.

Many young soldiers have never heard of conscientious objection. They believe that their only choice is between desertion or refusing to serve. A brief explanation of the legal alternative will save a lot of court-martials. At Ease can inform on procedure and help any member of the armed forces who have scruples about being involved with a particular war or with war in general, and may be able to help with other problems they might have.

At Ease has no paid staff, is entirely composed of voluntary workers and is completely independent with no connection to the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

V: Just how widespread is conscientious objection?

AE: Discharge on grounds of conscientious objection is classified by the MoD as a form of Compassionate Discharge, so the overall figures for conscientious objection are merged with personal, medical, family, or employment commitments (for reservists). Those advancing more than one reason for discharge have been told that the deferment has been for the nonconscientious reason.

The numbers of conscientious objectors amongst serving forces are even harder to investigate. To the best of our information, none of the regular serving soldiers now in Iraq of any rank were given any opportunity to register an objection and the information about the procedure on how to do so was withheld.

V: What are the principal reasons for conscientious objection?

AE: A recent At Ease client stated "I didn't join up for this"—meaning the invasion of Iraq. Most objectors who have contacted At Ease recently express similar sentiments.

V: What exactly is their legal position under

British / International law and how are the conscientious objectors being treated by their Commanders and the British Government?

AE: A United Nations Resolution, to which the UK assented, recognises conscientious objection as a Human Right and also states that individuals have a right to information about conscientious objection. The UK is in breach of its obligations under this resolution as the MoD keeps the regulations on conscientious objection as a 'Restricted Document'. (A copy can be found at http://wri-irg.org/pdf/co_uk_army.pdf) The situation in British Law is set out in this document: 'Retirement or Discharge on the Grounds of Conscience'. Sincere conscientious objectors either to war in general or to a specific campaign are to be discharged. The procedure begins with a written statement from the conscientious objector to his/her Commanding Officer. The final appeal is to the Advisory Committee On Conscientious Objection (ACCO). At Ease is very anxious for this committee to be set up to hear all the Iraq related cases as soon as possible—technically this advisory committee is convened, it's a permanent committee, but it's really a sinecure. What we are asking is that it sit. Currently, it only sits when somebody has been refused at every level and right at the very end they then appeal.

The Commanders have not been given information about the right of conscientious objection and so tend to respond inappropriately. The impression gained by At Ease is that the Army regard conscientious objection as a disciplinary offence and the Navy regard it as a psychiatric condition.

We may never know how many COs there were to the Iraq war. If a Commanding Officer is convinced that the objector is sincere then they can recommend to the MoD that they are discharged. If they are discharged as a CO the MoD statisticians list it under Compassionate Discharge, so it is hidden. You could ask the MoD how many Compassionate Discharges there were since the beginning of January this year and see if there has been a great jump.

If soldiers were charged with refusing a lawful order, that is if they refused and had an unsympathetic Commanding Officer who insisted in ordering, then the rule is that no application for any kind of discharge can go forward. So it isn't even listed until the completion of disciplinary proceedings. If this goes as far as a court-martial then it might be known because court-martials are in public and have to be announced beforehand, but this could be just a small notice somewhere.

Soldiers can also be sentenced for up to 60 days by a Commanding Officer, and that's at a trial which is not in public, where they can't be represented. So we don't know how many people may have done repeats of 60 days.

There is another category of people who expressed an objection and were told there's no such thing as conscientious objection, or you have to be a pacifist. Very commonly, people are told conscientious objection only applies to conscripts. It is amazing how many people believe conscientious objection ended in 1959 with the end of conscription. So there's also the ones that just gave up.

The other category we don't know are the people who went absent in order to avoid a posting—which technically counts as desertion. There certainly have been some cases of what I would call ordinary Absence Without Leave during the period of the Iraq war—people going absent for nothing to do with the war. In all, there were over 2,000 absent.

Then there are the reservists who were sent instructions and didn't report at all. Technically, because it's war, all those people are deserters. As far as I know, neither in this Iraq war or the first

one did the MoD actively prosecute any of those people—mainly because the MoD draws back from the publicity of formally court-martialing them.

We advised the reservists that came to At Ease to put in their written statement of objection to their Commanding Officer before mobilisation, but to turn up for mobilisation with a copy of their statement and to formally request a noncombatant posting. In a way that's a bit silly—if you've been called up to go to war there isn't a noncombatant posting.

This worked though—none that we advised have been disciplined, some have been given a discharge as a CO, but of course it's listed as a Compassionate Discharge. Others were given exemption and we've advised them not to let it drop. Some are still going through this, but the important thing was that they turned up for mobilisation. Some were told they were going to be 'stayed in'. We told them to work out exactly what their line was—some were willing to put on a military uniform but not put on desert uniform, others were not willing to put on military uniform, others were willing to sign others not. They also get quite a big payment for turning up for mobilisation so we advised them to refuse that money, and if it was paid to say loudly that they were giving it to a charity of their choice, and to do so.

We don't know how many reservists either didn't turn up, did turn up and were 'kept in', or went on the run—some will have chosen to do that.

V: Could you say more about the ACCO?

AE: The only objectors in theory that go to the Advisory Committee would be the ones where the Army is uncertain whether they're sincere or not. The glaring omission in this war is that one would have expected them to have put a test case of a Muslim soldier to the Advisory Committee to decide, because a Muslim traditionally is not a conscientious objector; certainly it's not a pacifist religion, but several Muslim organisations have very prominently and vociferously expressed the views that this war is wrong. Some Muslims adhere very strongly to the part of the Koran which says you mustn't fight brother against brother—then there's the contrary view, they all took an oath on the Koran when they were 16 and are therefore bound, and this again is very difficult for them.

At Ease has been asking for the Advisory Committee to sit, permanently, since before the war started. We were also asking to have at least one Muslim representative on it—it's a tribunal of three people, and because of the known large section of the Muslim community that objects it's only fair.

Although the Advisory Committee in theory should be deciding all the unusual cases, in fact the few that get through are always the uncontroversial ones. The total pacifist is not a threat to the MoD because there are already plenty of precedents and they are a minority.

V: What of the mainstream media's representation of conscientious objection?

AE: When they say, there aren't conscientious objectors, it is just untrue. At least there are those people who have been discharged by the ACCO, they can't deny their existence. And if they say it's not possible because it's a volunteer army, this is only true for the first six months of service for the under-18s, and the first twelve



weeks of service for over-22s. This is the cause of a lot of misunderstanding—people think there are only two kinds of army, either a conscript or a volunteer army. The British forces are an intermediate stage that is actually bonded servitude.

Those that sign on at 16 lose their voluntary status after six months. When they sign on at 16 they can give two weeks notice between the beginning of the second month and the end of the sixth month. At six months to the day that they first report for duty their recruit's right of discharge goes. After that they are no longer volunteers, they're held by compulsion—but they're not conscripts because a conscript is someone who didn't have any choice about joining in the first place.

A Bond Servant is someone who is tied to a bond made in the past. This was a very common form of indenture in the eighteenth century, such as for apprentices. Today, this is contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, the British Human Rights Act, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, except for military service. There is an appendix to the Human Rights Act which says that military service does not apply to the following clauses. It's not slavery, it's bonded servitude, they were volunteers once but their voluntary status has expired.

Bonded servitude is probably the single greatest issue in terms of the human rights of soldiers more than anything else. With the latest tragedy at Deepcut—whether those young people were murdered or whether they committed suicide—I would go as far as saying that the members of the Parliamentary Select Committees of the Armed Forces bill are actually morally responsible for Corporate Manslaughter. Those people would be alive—if they were bullied or unhappy or whatever, or were being threatened—if they could have left.

V: How does the legality of the Iraq war effect conscientious objectors?

AE: The view that it's an illegal war has been expressed by soldiers, they've said I don't want to be part of this because I believe it's illegal. There will be some who choose to put that at a court-martial, I think the MoD will do everything it can to avoid that taking place. Despite whether the whole Iraq war was legal or not, what is being overlooked are the lower levels of legality, the fact that legally the soldiers had not been informed of their rights of CO, that Britain is a signatory of a UN Resolution, that soldiers not only have a right of CO but they have a right to be informed. I think that a defence that was mounted that this individual was not informed is certainly a defence against refusal of a lawful order, but it should also be a defence of desertion, if, as last time, the people desert having been misinformed.

V: What of the recent reports condemning Britain for using 'child soldiers'?

AE: We ask people to avoid the term 'child soldiers' for a number of reasons. With the term 'child soldiers' people think of someone in Liberia or Sierra Leone, 7 years old holding a gun that's bigger than themselves. Repeatedly, we've been trying to get the British Armed Forces to come up to the European standards. The UK is the only country in Europe that sends young people under 18 into combat. Only the British send their youngest troops on active service overseas. We are trying to bring their treatment within European labour laws. When people use the term 'child soldier' this lets British politicians off the hook, because they can start ranting about 'How terrible it is in Sierra Leone', and also the UK's six year trap doesn't sound too bad when compared with 7 year olds being compelled to kill. Instead, we are saying look at the rest of Europe.

At the beginning of the Iraq conflict the first British troops sent to the Mediterranean as preparation for the invasion included sailors under 18. At that time Britain was still trying to get the UN to endorse the invasion, yet the UN had decreed that no UN troops are allowed under 18. It was brought to the attention of the British and they

had to send them back—they should never have been sent in the first place. So, having been stopped, when they sent the infantry they made a big thing about the youngest soldier being sent the day after his 18th birthday. The youngest UK force's casualty in Iraq has been a soldier who was only just 18. And if the UK could have got away with it they would have sent 17 year olds, more importantly they would have sent a much larger number of infantry youngsters over to Iraq, as last time—200 under 18s were sent to the first Gulf War, two of the American friendly fire casualties were 17 year olds and another of the casualties was on his 18th birthday.

In the Balkans it was even more blatant. When the UK troops were in Bosnia the UN ordered the under-18s out and Britain had to withdraw them, but because Kosovo was not under the auspices of the UN (they were K-FOR troops) they were then sent to Kosovo. This is how much respect the UK has for the international community. All the other European countries do not like fighting along side such terribly young colleagues.

The British MoD is committed to the six year trap which depends on recruiting people as young as possible, and it is quite awful. In terms of civil liberties they haven't got a vote, under-18s are not allowed to see certain films because they're considered too violent or too sexually explicit, but they are allowed to go into battle and see the real thing. So there are arguments we can use without overstating our case and saying 'they're only children, they're got to be protected', it has connotations of sentimentality. We're saying this is a young person who your law says isn't old enough to have judgment to vote, your law says has to be protected from certain films, so we're after consistency. And we're also asking for consistency with the rest of Europe—the UN has put an absolute ban on anyone under 18 being used in warfare, it is also against the European Convention on the Rights of the Child, we're not saying they're not legally 'children' but we're saying it's a campaigning point and don't call them that.

The other reason I worry about the 'child' tag is a lot of people think that if Britain is finally pushed into limiting sending under-18s into action that's all that matters. But the abuse isn't just that they're sent into battle under 18, it's that under 18s sign a contract that binds them into adulthood. A 16 year old couldn't buy something on hire purchase on their own, they can't get a mortgage, but they can sign a contract that commits them to the age of 22. The earliest age at which they can leave is 22 but if they have any education course between 16 and 22 that the Army pays for they lose the right to leave when they're 22. They can then be kept theoretically till they are 40.

V: What about the promotion of the Armed Forces with regard to education and training, and the MoD seeking to recruit more from ethnic minorities?

AE: At job fairs in East London, the biggest, flashiest stall is always the Army's. It is appalling as they're promoting training and where's the warning: 'Join at 16, earliest you can leave is 22'? The nearest we got to it is an interview we had with senior MoD persons who did concede they would think about that. We said: 'If you defend these regulations, if you say they're not unfair, why can't you draw attention to this?'

This is related to one of the problems I'm really worried about, what's happening to the Muslim COs. Throughout the '90s there was heavy recruitment targeted at ethnic minorities: St. Pauls, Bristol; Newham in East London; Birmingham Small Heath; parts of Glasgow and the Scottish Borders; Liverpool. They went into the schools and they recruited in droves. I saw a lot of this in East London, a lot of the young Asians very keen on educational opportunities. The army had big promotions where they invited the families and a lot of them presumed they could do A-levels, NVQs, a degree, all paid for by the Army. What the MoD say is not a lie, it's equivocation. They say 'You can get qualifications, and these are qualifications that are applicable to a civilian job'. If

you're a 16 year old and you hear that, what do you think? 'I can go in the army, I can get a qualification, and then I will be able to do a civilian job.' But that's not what they've said; the qualification is applicable to a civilian job, but the qualification holder will actually have given up their right, and they won't be free to take the civilian job. The MoD haven't said anything untrue, but this is terrible, to go and promote this to teenagers.

Before 9/11 there was heavy recruitment. A lot of the young Muslim kids for instance were told they'd be allowed Hal Al food, women would be allowed to wear Islamic head dress, they'd be allowed time off for Friday prayers, their religion would be respected—and they joined up in numbers. At that time the forces were involved in peace keeping operations including in defence of Muslim communities, and if you see the recruitment films there is tremendous emphasis on the humanitarian aspects—there's pictures of the marines rescuing people from the sea, soldiers with babies in their arms, little kids saying thank you, distributing food to starving people, it's very much the cavalry coming over the hill. To idealistic teenagers it's very enticing and a lot of these kids signed up, these are the kids who are now trapped and when you're in a situation with Afghanistan, Iraq—is it going to be Syria, Iran—this is horrendous.

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Crisis of Islamic Fundamentalism in Iran

Yassamine Mather

The last few weeks have not been easy for Iran's beleaguered government. In early June, Iranian students at the universities of Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz and Shiraz protested against the religious dictatorship as well as plans to privatise higher education in Iran. Many were attacked by the security services and fundamentalist thugs wielding clubs. According to one government source 4,000 students were arrested. Then in July, Iranian born Canadian photo-journalist Zahran Kazemi died in a Tehran prison cell from head injuries. She had been arrested for taking photos of



Iran's Evin prison. After initial denials, Iranian government sources admitted that she had died of a fractured skull as a result of being beaten. Demonstrations and protests by fellow journalists inside and outside Iran have once more called for an independent inquiry into random arrests of



journalists, writers and commentators by the Iranian security services. In early August news came that Ayatollah Khomeini's grandson, who had recently arrived in the Iraqi Shi'a city of Najaf, in a number of interviews with Western and Iranian journalists had denounced Iran's religious regime as "the worst dictatorship in the world", reminiscent of the "church during the Dark Ages in Europe." All this at a time when Iran remains part of the so called 'axis of evil' and when at least sections of the US administration harbour thoughts of 'regime change' in Iran.



During this latest US lead war against Iraq, Iran's Islamic government defined its foreign policy as one of 'active neutrality'. In reality, of course, Iran was anything but 'neutral': the supporters of 'regime change' in Iraq included many Iran-based Iraqi exiles. Typically, the Iranian government has used rhetoric to condemn 'US aggression' while holding extensive talks with the UK government, and more recently the US, regarding the role of various Shi'a factions in any future Iraq government. International isolation of the Iranian regime and unpopularity at home have left it with no choice, even if Tehran's not entirely explicit support for the US-UK offensive has led to comments about 'turkeys voting for Christmas'. Iran took a similar position in 2001 when it supported the US attacks on Afghanistan. It hoped to benefit from changes in US foreign policy, but no sooner was the war in that country over than



Soudabeh Ardavan's Evin Prison drawings

Washington identified Iran as part of 'the axis of evil'. Recent statements from the US make it clear that Iran is high on a list of possible targets for future 'pre-emptive strikes'.

The failures of theocracy

Twenty-three years after coming to power, the

Iranian clergy presides over a country where abject poverty, drug addiction, and prostitution (including child prostitution) have become major social issues that threaten the fabric of Iranian society. The gap between the rich and poor is wider than ever. Official statistics put unemployment at 16 per cent, but the real figure is much higher. Hundreds of thousands of workers haven't been paid for months, and government figures admit that more than 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Both the supporters and the opponents of the Iranian president consider the experience of reform from within, which began with Khatami's election, a failure. The abysmal low turnout in recent local council elections was the nail in the coffin of reformist Islam in Iran; many believe that parliamentary elections to be held in six months will show even lower turnouts. After more than two decades of fundamentalist rule, Iran has the largest secular opposition movement in the Middle East as most people identify 'religious' government as their main enemy.

Large numbers of workers who have not received any salaries for anything from six months to three years demonstrate regularly outside their workplaces. Millions of unemployed workers made redundant through mass privatisation (a policy demanded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in return for billions of dollars of loans) are among the regime's most determined opponents. And the youth and women who have suffered from the interference of religion in every aspect of their private lives are also amongst the growing opposition.

The economics of a capitalist state, even one that calls itself an Islamic Republic, necessitate an organised society. Within the Islamic regime itself, most of the battles of the last decade have been about the religious state's inability to deal with the current world economic order: on the one hand there are those who still believe in the rule of Sharia; on the other those who have decided that the only way the regime can survive is if it establishes the rule of law in a free-market capitalist state. The current president is of the latter party. His presidency has coincided with unfettered privatisation, as well as limited relaxation of the interference of religion in the private lives of the Iranian people. Inevitably, other arguments typical of capitalist ruling circles (between statist reformers and laissez-faire evangelists) have also been aired in Iran's parliament, the Majlis. But in both economic and political spheres the first Islamic state has predominantly been and is increasingly becoming a capitalist dictatorship with strong nationalist and religious overtones.

Iran's 'anti-Islamic' foreign policy

Contrary to those who believe it is 'Third Worldist', the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy was never anything other than a continuation of the Shah's pursuit of regional power. Over the last decade Iranian *realpolitik* has been dominated by highly nationalist competition with Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. To become a regional power, Iran pursues a pragmatic rather than an Islamist foreign policy, despite all the rhetoric we hear from its leaders. In pursuit of its fierce competition with Turkey, for example, Iran supported Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan, simply because Turkey backed the latter.



When Iran opposed the Taliban advances in Afghanistan, Tehran's propaganda talked of the Taliban giving a bad name to Islam. In reality, the defenders of Hezbollah in Lebanon could not have been too worried about the public image of Islam; the main concern was that Saudi and Pakistani money, competing with Iran for domination in Afghanistan, supported the Taliban. And Iran has kept contacts and reasonable relations with Israel, mainly because the enemy of its enemies (the Arabs) must be a friend. Of course, Iranian leaders have made a great deal of their support for the deprived Muslims of the world. Given their total mistrust of Sunni groups, this has effectively amounted to support for a handful of Shi'a community groups in Lebanon, Iraq and Pakistan. This policy has left Iran isolated in the region, and explains its 'active neutrality' in the current war. In fact, even the Islamist rhetoric of the Iranian regime is coming to an end. Last year's dialogue with the UK and US on the Afghan war and this year's covert support for 'regime change' in Iraq signal a final shift in the policy.

As far as Iran is concerned, and irrespective of how long the Islamic regime remains in power, we have come to the end of the road with Islamic fundamentalism. New diversions threaten genuine change. Bombarded with Western propaganda, young people and sections of the women's movement have many illusions about 'Western democracy'. Opposition figures—even among those claiming to be on the left—have chosen to forget that many of Iran's social and economic problems have more to do with the capitalist nature of the Iranian state in the current world order than its Islamic characteristics. These problems cannot be simply resolved with political change from above.

There is no doubt that the failure of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran has led to an unprecedented rise in secularism, and there is every reason to believe that the regime 'could crumble from within'—just as US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld claims. However, the possibility of a US-UK military attack could divert the opposition, and a nationalist backlash could prolong the Islamic regime.

Irrespective of what follows, it is the responsibility of the left to use the experience of Iran's Islamic government to expose the failings of political Islam—both in the economic-social sphere (poverty, corruption, etc.) and in the international arena (i.e., anti-Western rhetoric instead of genuine anti-imperialism). And inside Iran we need to link anti-capitalist campaigns against unemployment, non-payment of salaries and destitution with daily struggles for freedom and democracy. It is essential to show that Iran's social, economic and political ills are interlinked, and that many of these problems are the inevitable consequences of the 'new world order', even if the Islamic nature of this dictatorship gives it a more abhorrent characteristic.

From Porridge to Pelf: Young Adam and the Mysterious Scottish Film Industry

Mike Small

It was too dark and it was too late to do anything. I looked for a trace of her for a long time but, except for the debris that was floating past, the water was evenly dark.

Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 1954

May the force be with you.

Obi-Wan Kenobi, 2002

A distressing piece of news from Edinburgh yesterday. Jenny Brown, former literature director of the Book Trust is planning to make a bid to UNESCO for Edinburgh to be given an honorary status as 'World City of Literature'. It may have had agents' faces reddening with the prospect of lining their pockets, but 'literature as heritage' is surely a criminal act, and 'literature as tourist attraction' is a capital offence. The idea—as described gleefully in the press—that the bid would be based on the Famous Five monotony of JK Rowling's Pottermania or the execrable Ian Rankin surely betrays a dead culture operating behind closed doors.

That Sir Walter Scott was also used to prop up the cadaver hardly helps the credibility gap. It all seems redolent of the words of one man you wouldn't want to focus on for any corporate bid. When a heroine-filled Trocchi laid into a whisky-fuelled MacDiarmid at the Edinburgh Writers' Conference festival in Edinburgh in 1962 he remarked: "The whole atmosphere seems to me turgid, petty, provincial, the stale-porridge, bible-class nonsense."

So no great change here. Where's the vitality? Where's the wider Scottish world outside of Edinburgh, or even—god forbid—the wider world outside Scotland? It seems such a pokey, parochial plan. Step forward Alexander Trocchi, everyone's favourite smack-head, constantly overdue for a comeback to his rightful place atop the throne of Scottish culture. Step forward the glitzy Film Festival and this year's star turn, *Young Adam* based on his 1954 novel. But, while the film itself is brilliant its production was plagued by such a trail of financial crises that half the cast are now

at war with the UK funding bodies.

Is that body floating just beneath the surface our very own 'film industry' drowned by cultural stinginess, lack of vision and a hopeless lack of aspiration?

With the Jedi Knight of Scottish film teaming up with our own literary Darth Vader, who wouldn't have put money on the UK Film Council putting a little backing behind a film, set and shot in Scotland? Instead the film—which looks like being a critical and box-office success—has been undermined by the poverty of imagination of the UK and Scottish Film bodies, which now look not just like an overly cautious and bankrupt monopoly, but as cultural-guardians denying access to anything which falls outside their own world view. Increasing numbers of film-insiders point accusing fingers at the funders, that they're the equivalent of a skint version of Berlusconi's news and media empire, only rolled up in a cushy wee film *QUANGO*.

Main Feature

There's no doubt the adaptation's a success. Set in a steamy Glasgow of the early 1950s, the book/film focuses on the increasing crisis of Joe (Ewan McGregor), an itinerant young man who finds work on a barge owned by the earthy Les (Peter Mullan—who else?!) and his enigmatic wife Ella (Tilda Swinton). One afternoon Joe and Les happen upon a corpse of a young woman floating in the water.

The unexpectedness of a tale of existential crisis set on a canal between Edinburgh and Glasgow might be shocking to the contemporary reader. So the prospect of a re-telling for a wider domestic and international audience had most of Scotland's literati salivating. Although the film itself surpasses expectations—with McGregor's return to Scotland for the first time in seven years being marked by a remarkable performance, and Byrne's score affecting the genuinely tense unfolding story—a quick glance at the film's gestation suggests it emerged *despite* not *because* of any film body.

It's enough to make you blush. Here's a rare



thing. A bona fide 20th Century Scottish literary classic with international recognition, by the Glasgow end of the SIGMA Project (other participants Bill Burroughs and Kenneth White). The music's by Dumbarton's favourite son, David Byrne. It has a promising young writer/director David Mackenzie who has written a number of award-winning shorts for the BBC and Channel Four, most recently *Marcie's Dowry*, which showed in the Critics Week at last year's Cannes Film Festival. But it twice came close to being binned for lack of support.

Surprising that McGregor, rather than the 'dangerous' Trocchi didn't secure some serious backing. Instead McGregor claims his presence put off British backers who 'won't back a film with stars'. Others claim that the story is more complicated. Although having McGregor cast eventually may have swung the film, it also denied the role to another young actor and, arguably, what should

have been 'a film adapted from a novel by Trocchi' instead became 'a film with Ewan McGregor in it.'

Despite all this it's not McGregor but his co-star Tilda Swinton who's been more vocal in articulating the problems of the British film scene. In fact the whole film has become a sort of focal point for dissatisfaction about the state of the film 'industry'. "At the 11th hour the film council contributed the ever-crucial final 12% of the modest budget," she states with mock gratitude, adding, "Given its history I think it might be understandable why those of us who saw it through those difficult tottering months might be uncomfortable with the idea of this being a 'British' film first and foremost when the bedrock of its funding was from Scotland and for so many months our project was slapped down by London."

Certainly Swinton's comments are backed up by Alex Cox, (Repo-Man, Sid and Nancy and Three Businessmen amongst other great films). Liverpool-based Cox explains: "The main problem with the Film Council is that it's totally focused on London and Los Angeles. It has no regional remit. I fear this is unlikely to change and that as filmmakers we may have to look elsewhere for our funding." Robert Jones from the UKFC responded saying, "Cox should look at what we've done rather than think of good soundbites. We've done several films around the UK and several short films. To say we are Londoncentric only betrays his ignorance."

"All films are difficult to fund. The UKFC has put substantial funds into a film that is risky, and if we see it back I'll be very surprised. It's edgy. It's dangerous stuff."

Jones dismisses Swinton's comments as someone "not involved in the finance" and Alex Cox as someone who just wants "to be seen to be railing against the establishment". But how edgy can Crieff's finest be? And if having Ewan McGregor in your lead role marks the film out as "high risk"—God help us.

Film writer Jack Mottram disagrees: "There is a tendency among commentators to bemoan a perceived lack of funding, to be dewy-eyed about past successes while ignoring current accomplishments." And the ubiquitous Hannah McGill chirps: "People do tend to moan but the film culture in Scotland is in great shape." Both are understandably echoing the positive spin being put out at the time of the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Yes Alison Peebles' *Afterlife*, and *Wilbur Tries to Kill Himself* by Lone Scherfig are good strong new films at least with some Scottish backing. For sure Scottish Screen were able to bail Peter Mullan's *Magdalene Sisters* to the tune of £150,000 to stop it going to Ireland and forked out to contribute to Saul Metzstein's *Late Night Shopping*. All fine. But in film world this is small beer.

It's not enough for media-pals and warm-hearted critics to talk up an 'industry' when it's really just a small community of talented people waiting for someone to have a bit of chutzpah. While digital film making and shorts are good and innovative new schemes, you can only have so many 'schemes' before the game's a bogey. If Scottish publishers produced only comics and fanzines wouldn't somebody eventually say, "Aren't there any Scottish novels?" Nor would it be considered credible if the odd novel to be produced was made by a London publisher, who maybe employed a couple of Scottish proof-readers. It's not good enough to put down any criticism of the current situation as 'moaning'—and this from our 'critics'.

But the UK Film Council's Premiere Fund eventually invested £500,000 in *Young Adam*. So Robert Jones has a point. The film was made. It is good. Do viewers care about the boring machinations of film production? Not a wrinkle.

So what's the problem?

The problem is we don't make feature films in Scotland. Feature films are important. Occasionally other people come here and make films and employ some people. *Young Adam* should have been financed and produced here



employing local talent and injecting much needed vigour into the film community. That it spluttered into life is an ironic tragedy of Trocchian proportions. At best we're looking for the UK body to develop 'a regional remit', a chance to project our culture to the world. In 1997 we made one 'indigenous film'. In 1998 we made another one. In 1999 we made three, and in 2000 we made two.¹ It adds up to another classic Scottish example of missed opportunity, chronic lack of ambition and a remote and bloated public body with too much admin, little clout and not enough production cash. It's not their fault, and the false ceiling of £500,000 means that there's little Scottish Screen can do but chirp along with pockets of seed money.

It was a similar story for Peter Broughan's recently collapsed Graeme Obree feature, and for *Mary Queen of Scots*—which got its head chopped-off despite having some of Sean Connery's dough, Jimmy McGovern's writing talent and a classic-cut of kitschy "tragic Scottish history." Sadly for the Scottish film community what was billed as a £20m movie for general release has been downgraded to a £5m TV drama, the lead role will be played by an unknown French actress. The project is now being filmed in Romania to save money.

What Cox calls 'edgy dangerous stuff' is just what good literature should be. It's only in any way edgy next to stuff that you can use in a brochure flogging Greyfriar's Bobby paperweights or Slytherin Snowglobes. The whole experience of the commodified book-world and the self-satisfied film-world evokes Trocchi's comment that: "All great art, and today all great artlessness, must appear extreme to the mass of men, as we know them today. It springs from the anguish of great souls. From the souls of men not formed, but deformed in factories whose inspiration is pelf". It seems as true today as the "stale porridge" of yesterday.

Notes

1. Scottish Executive, Scottish Screen - A Review by the Scottish Executive, Annex B

Shell-shocked art

Doug Aubrey

It wasn't so long ago that Sarajevo was considered the hippest and coolest place on earth, attracting everyone from mercenaries to missionaries, from media celebrities to war junkies. Some claimed that Sarajevo actually became a different planet. Because as well as being besieged by a dirty and bloody (and still unresolved) civil war, the three year siege of the city (which it has to be said, got off lightly compared to Mostar and Gorazde) was also probably the first saturation media war of the satellite broadcasting age. While people optimistically talked about a "CNN effect" bringing a rapid end to the siege of Sarajevo, the war in Bosnia and the siege of Sarajevo in particular instead became the opposite: the first MTV generation conflict, in which the camcorder truly came of age.

Sarajevo under siege was a live-fast, die-young Rock'n'Roll war story, in which everyone from Magnum photographers to Susan Sontag, from acid-head street performers to U2's Bono were to play a part, alongside incompetent UN officials and corrupt politicians.

But what of the role of the local artists in all this?

The Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) contains a remarkable record of art and other perhaps more worthwhile cultural artefacts produced as a result of, or during the conflict (www.scca.ba/).

Much of the work in this archive was produced by the many artists who stayed in the city and found themselves surviving or fighting against former friends. Friends which they had grown up with in a unified city that represented all that Yugoslavia formerly stood for.

"You just didn't have a choice you either fought or would end up in some concentration camp or another!"

Nebojsa Seric - Shoba or Soba

Soba, like many Sarajevans, was the offspring of a mixed marriage. Neither Moslem or Orthodox, Serb or Croat, but a child of something that was once called Yugoslavia. So, when extreme nationalism tore his nation apart and besieged his city, Soba's conscience led him to stay and defend the civilization that Sarajevo represented against the barbarism that surrounded it. The Artist became the Soldier.

I first met Soba in the legendary *Obala* bar—a subterranean hangout where the wild, the beautiful and the damned used to accumulate after a day queuing for UN rations under fire, or returning from the front. Here, they would listen to bands such as *Sikter* (Sarajevo's answer to the Sex Pistols) and try to persuade the multitude of journalists present to buy them drinks and "tell their story of the war."

Soba—the descendent of three generations of Partisan fighters—was everywhere: he was a student at the art academy, bassist in *Sikter* and it has to be said a complete media whore. Soba had his photo taken by the *Magnum* photographer



Paul Lowe, appeared in countless news and documentaries about the war (including my own *Victim of Geography*), featured in articles by the likes of Ed Vuillamy and was even turned into a comic book character by war junkie/cartoonist Joe Sacco.

Soba: the Rock'n'Roll Star, the Artist, the Soldier and the cartoon character. Had the war gone on, chances are there may have even been a Soba rap album, a clothing range and eventually a movie that perhaps Michael Winterbottom may have made instead of his dire and dishonest 'Welcome to Sarajevo'.

Then there was the black humour. One night in a club surrounded by mostly drunken young men, a number of whom were in wheel chairs, Soba joked that everyone in the room had "probably killed more people than Fred West."

But the surreal humour aside that the Sarajevo war spectacle created, the dark reality of war was having to fight and witness friends being killed and eaten by packs of wild dogs, seeing children killed by snipers, and mothers and lovers torn apart by mortar shell fire.

Being a soldier that survived came at a cost. Soba suffered a breakdown brought on by shell-shock (he was caught up in a major offensive during which more than 1,000 shells fell on one small hill) and the cumulative trauma of witnessing carnage first hand (post-traumatic stress).

Like many involved in the war, Soba felt that the act of making art became irrelevant. Rather than creation there was destruction. Survival with the minimum of resources itself became an art form—a key factor on his eventual rebirth as an artist.

Soba's work—a testament to the humour and resilience of the human spirit, or more to the point a good laugh—can be found at his virtual on-line retrospective at:

www.scca.ba/artistfiles/soba/ok/index.htm



It is an art born from the downside to heroism, that by degree celebrates and mocks the cult of the artist as a celebrity, its black humour (of which there is plenty) is born from horror:

"When you see someone running across a sniper alley like John Cleese in Monty Python's Ministry of Funny walks and you start to laugh, then you know you will survive."

Nebojsa Seric - Shoba or Soba

Soba's art is the art of a survivor, a cultural refusenik who for a while lost his mind and has permanently lost his country. (He now lives in New York, where he arrived pre 9/11 and before the near continual war that we have all lived in since.) His work's spartan and irreverent nature belies the fact that this is an art born out of first hand experience.

With the media coverage of war now reaching saturation point and the theory of the "war spectacle" now a reality in all our living rooms, perhaps to even talk about the role of the artist in simply recording war any more is an oxymoron. For the most part, that which passes itself off as official "war art" is often as heavily censored as much of the media "inbeds" coverage has been in the current war in Iraq. To talk however of an artist responding to war in their art, either as an issue or via their actual experiences of combat, raises a number of key and crucial questions of the roles and responsibilities that all artists have in dark times.



Bosnia now = $\frac{\text{no future}}{\text{no past}}$

Bosnia and Herzegovina in the spring of 2003

Zlatko Hadzidedic

Since the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) has been living in a state of permanent present, with no future and no past. The past, which could serve as the key reference in construction of its own B&H identity, was forcefully expelled from the public discourse in B&H by the logic of the so-called peace process (imposed by the so-called international community), claiming that any reference to the past inevitably leads to a new war. This kind of mechanistic reasoning starts from the (false) assumption that the outbreak of the 1992-1995 war was the result of perpetuation of 'ancient hatreds', of 'continuous repetition of the past in the Balkans', of 'revenge for WW II' and 'revenge for Kosovo', etc., rather than the result of efforts undertaken by international players and their Balkan cronies to impose the model of ethnically pure nation-states across the Balkans.¹ This kind of logic creates a fundamental practical problem—it eliminates any potentially constructive analysis of the past,² for the purpose of maintaining an absolutely unproductive *status quo*, whereby the (artificially constructed) present remains totally *conserved*, thus overshadowing any vision of the future. The logic of the so-called peace process, which imposes a *taboo* not only on any reference to the past but also on consideration of any legal, political, social, or economic changes, which could transform this (preset) present into a different future (with an equally false assumption that any change in the Dayton set-up of B&H society inevitably leads to a renewed conflict), thus *eliminates* the very idea of the future that might in any way be different from this set present. To consider this problem, one needs to identify certain political, social, and economic forces which articulate and realise their own interests through such a conservation of the present.

Besides the international bureaucracy—which tries to present itself as an advocate of the interests of the so-called international community³ and, quite logically, finds justification for its own existence in the Dayton model of a divided B&H⁴—the political forces interested in conserving the present and eliminating the future are the very same ones which at the Lisbon Conference in 1991 accepted, either implicitly or explicitly, the idea of ethnically pure territories and the partition of B&H.

At the very root of the concept of ethnically pure territories and *ethnoterritorialisation*⁵ lies the idea of an ethnic group's collective 'ownership'⁶ over an entire territory and its resources.⁷ Of course, practically, ownership and control are established by individual, physical entities (i.e. political forces) which legitimise their position of the *de facto* owners of territory and resources by presenting themselves as the sole, monopolistic representatives of 'national interests' (at the same time excluding all other potential contenders for this form of ownership).

In the case of B&H, all the political forces

which accepted the principle of ethnic partition (starting from the Lisbon Conference and ending with the Dayton Agreement) demonstrated at the same time their ambitions towards individual ownership over such ethnically constituted (i.e. brutally 'cleansed') territories and their resources. Given the actual effects of war, ethnic cleansing and (Washington and Dayton) peace agreements on the implementation of the concept of ethnoterritorialisation of B&H, a logical conclusion may be drawn that the realisation of these forces' ambitions was in effect strongly supported by these military and political processes. In practical terms this means that during this period ownership was redistributed: until 1992 the territory of B&H and its resources were *de jure* owned by the citizens of B&H⁸; they were then partitioned and *de jure* transferred into the ownership of ethnic collectivities, which led to the establishment to the *de facto* ownership over partitioned territories and resources by individual political forces which asserted themselves as the representatives of these ethnic collectivities. On one hand, this process led to the establishment of these political forces as *ethnonationalist owner-oligarchies*.⁹ On the other hand, the process of ethnoterritorialisation and the subsequent transformation of ownership led to the dissolution of the B&H *demos* (i.e. the citizenry of B&H), thus replacing representative democracy with *oligarchic ethnocracy*. Throughout this process of ethnoterritorialisation, these political forces worked on the establishment of an exclusive oligarchic ethnocracy, i.e. an oligarchic ownership over ethnically constituted (partitioned and 'cleansed') territories and their resources. It is thus logical that they resist any attempt to reconstitute the B&H *demos* and civic democracy, as they naturally strive to conserve the system of oligarchic ethnocracy and their own ethnonationalistic oligarchic position. Accordingly, both in form and in essence, these political forces are conservative: publicly, their conservatism is formally manifested in their reference to the protection of 'national interests', 'faith', and 'tradition'; practically, it is an effort to conserve the existing system of ownership, which includes these publicly declared categories as the code for oligarchic ownership.

Naturally, oligarchic ownership as a system is a capitalist one; accordingly, transition towards capitalism is a condition *sine qua non* for the establishment of this type of ownership. However, this is a case of a specific form of *pre-modern proto-capitalism*, and these political forces are trying to promote it as the only possible form of capitalism. In this form of capitalism, the goal is to establish *monopolistic control* over resources and their distribution.¹⁰ Hence, *monopoly over the distribution of existing resources* is the basic constituent principle of this form of production-distribution relationship, which theory defines as *rentier capitalism*. Production of new goods, their free-market distribution, competition, initiative, entrepreneurship,

Notes

- 1 The idea of ethnic division of B&H and the creation of ethnically pure territories had been presented by the so-called international community at the Lisbon Conference in 1992 (and accepted as such by the future key instigators of the conflict), long before the actual armed conflict started. Much of the territorial acquisitions and ethnic cleansing in the period 1992-1995 was based on effecting the so-called Lisbon borders, as proposed by the so-called international community. Hence, the idea of ethnic division and ethnic boundaries drawn on the Lisbon map served as the generator of the future armed conflict rather than as a solution to an existing one.
- 2 In the case of B&H, the tradition of denying, erasing or ignoring the past as a potential source of B&H identity is somewhat older than the presence of the so-called international community in its territory: it dates back to the age of nationalistic projects in the Balkans (in the late 19th century). In that era (which was to continue during the existence of the first and second Yugoslavia) Serb and Croat nationalists acted systematically in order to delegitimise the right of B&H to its own identity, presenting it as 'the result of Ottoman conquest' or 'an artificial construct'. Given the failure of all the attempts of the time to establish a B&H national identity, this discourse of Serb-Croat nationalism dominated all others. The inarticulate attempts to establish continuity between the statehood of medieval Bosnia and its present constitutional status were mainly reduced to proving continuity of the existing religious groups (the concept of lineage between the old Bosnian Church and the present Muslim identity, and concepts which translated the presence of Orthodoxy and Catholicism in the Bosnian territory into the presence of respective Serbian and Croatian statehood), thus practically accepting the logic of Serb and Croat ethno-religious nationalism. The B&H identity was accordingly reduced to the identity of just one of the religious groups (Bosnian Muslims), which merely contributed to Serb and Croat nationalist attempts to break the B&H identity into a mechanical set of several incompatible religious identities. Throughout this process, the significance of medieval Bosnian statehood for the legitimisation of statehood of modern-day B&H and for its establishment as a nation-state, with a common B&H identity as the key constituting factor, was systematically ignored, and the *nationalised* present was automatically projected into religious past, with regular redesigning of the past in accordance with the needs of the present.
- 3 I will maintain the use of 'so-called' before the phrase 'international community' specifically because the interests of this bureaucracy are in almost all instances presented as 'interests of the international community'.
- 4 This bureaucracy was created as an *ad hoc* 'task force' with the primary task of supervising the

economic growth, industrial and social development, job creation, and all that theory links with the notion of *entrepreneurial capitalism* is thus the *antipode* to the system of monopolistic, distributive, rentier capitalism. In rentier capitalism's essence is the principle of distribution of existing resources (and the extraction of capital from them) rather than the principle of creation of new resources; the principle of monopolistic control rather than free-market competition; the principle of stagnation rather than new initiative, growth, and development; the principle of reduction of options rather than the principle of creation of new ones.¹¹

Of course, it does not take an expert in economics to understand that in the long run this system has no real future.¹² This is exactly the point: rentier capitalism is the kind of system that strives to eliminate the very idea of future and the very idea of social and economic dynamism. In its essence is the concept of *static* conservation of the present, which means elimination of the idea of future as a principally *dynamic* one, as well as elimination of any related ideas of movement, initiative, change, growth or development. This framework has been imposed on the post-Dayton Bosnia. It denies *a priori* the possibility of any fundamental change and promotes only the conserved present, whereas any consideration of either past or future remains prohibited under the threat of a new war. It is thus easy to conclude that this environment is the least favourable for ideas of reform, initiative, competition, free market, development, or anything else related to the notion of entrepreneurial capitalism. However, domestic ethnonational oligarchies are not the only conservers of such environment—they are joined by the international bureaucracy in charge of 'partition-management': from the very onset, the process of ethnoterritorialisation, or rather the process of ethnic partition, implied the establishment of ethnonationalist oligarchic ownership over territory and resources; its management also implied control over its course and conservation of its principles as the only governing principles of the target B&H society.

This environment engendered an entire rentier *culture*, which identifies the ideal of individual prosperity with the idea of individual ownership over resources and the idea of their rentier-type exploitation. In that context, prosperity generated by expansion in production, sales, trade or initiative is not even seen as desirable: the ideal is the self-perpetuating capital generated by *inactivity*, rather than capital created by production or trade. A specific problem in B&H society is the wide presence of this ideal, even in the social strata most affected by the consequences of this type of socio-economic system: paradoxically, even in the widest social strata, the ideal of social and economic success is identified with the ideal of rentier inactivity. At the same time, anger and frustration over these strata's social position in relation to those forces that imposed their own control over the resources, denying access and charging rent for their usage, are, paradoxically, usually directed against examples of capitalist entrepreneurship (the so-called 'tycoons').

This double paradox escapes explanation based on any kind of *rational-choice* theory. Still, it can be explained by considering the aforementioned culture as part of the general culture in B&H, whose elements of specifically *modern*, civic values failed to assert domination over elements of *pre-modern*, non-capitalist and proto-

capitalist values. One cannot really argue that this culture is totally pre-modern and that it contains no elements of civic values. However, the presence of various non-modern elements, such as the *neo-feudalist* ideal of rentier exploitation of resources (and the subsequent respect for its agents), the *neo-tribalist* ideal of ethnic territories, or the *neo-medievalist* ideal of bringing religious and secular powers together, indicates that transition towards a modern, civic society in B&H has never been completed. While socialism did have ambitions towards modernity, insisting on rapid modernisation, it nevertheless proclaimed its struggle against typically civic values. This practically meant an inconsistent modernisation policy and selective promotion of civic values, while maintaining many of the pre-modern elements. B&H was thus relatively fertile ground for the revival of these non-modern, i.e. non-civic, values. Therefore, the elements of civic values—which include capitalist entrepreneurship, private initiative, and, above all, interest-driven association—do not have the kind of prominent status they normally enjoy in mature civic societies, constituted on the principle of the so-called *social contract*.¹³

From the point of view of transition towards a civic society, a particular problem in B&H is its underdeveloped culture of *interest-driven* association,¹⁴ as opposed to the inflated culture of association driven by *assumed affinity*—either *space-based* (neighbourhood) or *kinship-based* (real: family; or imagined: ethnic, religious or regional). In the process of decomposition of B&H society from 1990 onwards, there has also been a shift of focus within the culture of assumed affinity-driven association, from relative domination of association driven by space-based affinity to an almost absolute domination of association driven by imagined kinship-based affinity. This shift coincides with physical decomposition of the population: in addition to ethnic cleansing and brutal expulsion, there is also intensified migration of rural populations to urban centres. This is leading to the strengthening of rural values in relation to urban ones—this process includes the strengthening of the principle of association driven by assumed affinity of imagined (and real) kinship, in relation to the principle of association driven by space-based assumed affinity. As it contains elements of individual choice along with elements of automatic, assumed affinity, the principle of association driven by space-based assumed affinity (neighbourhood) normally serves (and may have served) as a proto-model for the inception and development of the civic principle of association driven by rationally calculated, individual interests. It is therefore logical that, as the principle of association driven by assumed affinity of imagined kinship (ethnicity and religion) becomes stronger and strengthens the presence of other rural values, B&H society becomes further alienated from the desired civic model of interest-driven association.

In addition to the strengthening of non-modern *neo-feudalist*, *neo-tribalist*, and *neo-medievalist* elements, it is clear that the principles of entrepreneurial and industrial capitalism, principles of constitution of a civic nation, and principles of secularism, are far less present in B&H today than they were before 1990. Particularly devastating for civic values is the merger of these processes into a single flow of 'original accumulation' of (rentier) capital in the hands of three ethno-religious oligarchies—whose constituent principle is a perverse synthesis of inter-

process of partition of B&H. In that respect, creation of this structure started with the Brussels Conference chaired by Lord Carrington (part of which was the Lisbon Conference chaired by Jose Cutillero); it acquired its present form with the creation of OHR. Its activity could be best described as 'partition-management'.

- 5 I use this term to denote the entire process which started with drawing ethnic boundaries on maps and ended with their effectuation on the ground through the process of so-called ethnic cleansing (which includes killing, expulsion and pressure for the purpose of forceful relocation, all in order to establish ethnic territories).
- 6 The principle of 'ownership' of a particular group over the territory it inhabits and the resources located in it is the principle that all nation-states rest upon. Thus a nation may be defined as a collectivity (irrespective of whether it was constituted on the ethnic or the civic principle) united by the belief that it has a claim on the 'ownership' over the territory it inhabits and its resources; in this, the 'ownership' is realised by the establishment of state administration over such territory. Hence, a nation is a group which considers itself the collective 'owner' of territory and resources, which it attempts to control through a state apparatus. In order to effectuate such control, the nation must establish its own state and ensure its recognition by other nation-states. The establishment of a nation-state realises the principle of 'ownership' over territory and resources, i.e. the principle of national self-determination.
- 7 By resources I mean all the goods subject to imposition of ownership and monopolisation, and which are subject to non-productive, i.e. *rentier* exploitation. Therefore, resources may include various *objects used for extraction of capital*—land, service corporations (telecommunication, power supply, etc.), down to the actual population inhabiting a particular territory.
- 8 *De facto*, control over territory and resources was in the hands of bureaucracy constituted on the principle of affiliation with the ruling political (Communist) party. What defined B&H citizens as the *de facto* B&H nation was the *de jure* ownership over territory and resources, though not constitutionally defined as such. In the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, B&H citizens did not have the status of sole 'owners' of territory and resources; they shared this position with ethnic groups ('constituent peoples'). This ambiguity allowed for a later declaration of ethnic groups as the practical *de jure* owners of territory and resources acquired in the process of 'ethnoterritorialisation' (*de facto*, territories and resources were acquired by the political forces which adopted and implemented the process of ethnoterritorialisation).
- 9 As shown in practice, these forces are not limited to the three pronounced ethnonationalist parties (SDS, HDZ and SDA); they include all those who are attempting to assert themselves as, and those who are, *de facto* owners and controllers of ethnoterritorialised resources. In that sense, individuals such as Ivanic and Dodik, as well as Lagumdžija, contribute actively to the preservation of the system of oligarchic *rentier* ownership over ethnoterritorialised resources. Sporadic efforts of *Stranka za BiH* to revive industry and production, as well as the role of the state, and to strengthen entrepreneurship are an exception to this concept, significant though insufficient.
- 10 The actual transition of B&H society, where the model of rentier capitalism has been consistently implemented, also acquired a specific form: priority has been given to the so-called process of *restitution* as opposed to classic privatisation. This is a case of domination of the idea of distribution of existing resources over the idea of creating new, material and human, resources, aided by entrepreneurial privatisation. There is thus privatisation and distribution of existing property for the purpose of their rentier exploitation (restitution),

est-driven and assumed affinity-driven association, thus creating a unique principle of association founded on *assumed interest-driven affinity*.¹⁵ Of course, these oligarchies are principally *interest-driven groups*, though constituted on the basis of assumed affinity. In them, the existence of absolute identity between the assumed ethno-religious affinity and the assumed oligarchic interests is equally assumed. And this very identity (assumed to exist between oligarchic interests and ethno-religious affinity) creates a conceptual framework which, in turn, assumes that any deviation from automatic following of oligarchic interests is seen as treason of the constituent principles of ethno-religious affinity. Or, to use the rhetoric commonly used in B&H, it is seen as 'betrayal of one's own kin' or 'betrayal of national interests'.

In a society where the possibility of individual choice and individual articulation of one's own interests is reduced to the lowest level, under threat of sanction for treason, and where this state of affairs is 'carved in stone' by factual elimination of any notion of (different) past and present, the individual is deprived of any free margin as well as of any possibility to change this position. The result of this is a sense of apathy and hopelessness, i.e. a sense of impossibility of any influence over one's own fate or the fate of the society the individual lives in. All this leads to totally passive individuals, and that, following the logic of relationship of the individual and the society he or she lives in, leads to a total paralysis of the society.¹⁶ In a paralysed society, the individual and the society reach a point when the most basic survival instinct begins to weaken and when giving in to fate seems to be the only option available.¹⁷ In the spring of 2003, eleven years after the beginning of the process of destruction of B&H society, this process seems to have produced the desired results.

Since this state of affairs acts as a mechanism for perpetuation of existing relations, maintained by systematic, *interest-driven* activity by both external (international bureaucracy) and internal factors (ethnonationalist rentier oligarchies), there is no possibility of changing the basic function of the mechanism without deconstructing it and, by that, without jeopardising these factors' vital interests. Since this mechanism also acts as a mechanism for protection of those vital interests, it is highly unlikely that these factors would voluntarily forego the mechanism and deconstruct it themselves. In this situation and given that these very factors have, in the meantime, marginalized all other potentially relevant social, economic and political forces, an effective change of the existing relations would only be possible through systematic, strategically *planned organisation* of the latter into a kind of interest-driven *network for mutual assistance and promotion of alternative models of socio-economic relations*; a less effective and less probable change would be through the latter's *spontaneous organisation*. As the former (including both internal and external factors) also function as an informal, interest-driven network for mutual assistance and promotion of the rentier-oligarchic model, an alternative model of socio-economic relations can only be promoted through analogous interest-driven organisation.¹⁸ This, however, is a separate issue requiring special elaboration.

instead of privatisation for the purpose of launching entrepreneurial initiatives in order to create new value.

- 11 Reduction of accessible options is particularly important in the process of establishing monopolistic control over existing resources, as well as in the process of extraction of capital from the target groups (which practically includes the entire population of the country, with the exception of ethnonationalist oligarchies themselves). Job creation and new accessible options are thus in direct opposition to the principles of rentier capitalism and monopolistic control over existing resources (within which target groups of population function as yet another resource serving the purpose of extraction of capital), since they offer choices and access to different goods, and create an ambience conducive to business initiative and competition.
- 12 Of course, this does not mean that the ethnonationalist oligarchies are unaware of the long term non-viability of their project of ethnoterritorialisation and its disastrous consequences for the society and the country on the whole. Ethnonationalist oligarchies knowingly violate all the rules of 'good household management' (which is the original meaning of the word *oeconomia*) over territory and resources, counting on their short-lived yet more intense exploitation. This philosophy is best reflected in the (by now infamous) statement by one of the advocates of ethnoterritorialisation: 'What you've grabbed is yours to keep.'
- 13 Interest-driven association is the basis of the so-called social contract. Contractual association on the basis of well known and well articulated individual interests is the conceptual basis for civic society, just as much as the myth of the assumed, assigned common origin is the conceptual basis for an ethnic group. Starting from the definition of ethnic group as a collectivity united by a myth of common origin leading back to shared biological ancestors, civic society may be defined as a collectivity united by a myth that asserts that the given society was established by means of interest-driven association, i.e. social contract. In that sense, even *rational-choice theory* starts from an assumption that interest-driven association and rational calculation of interests are the only legitimate form of behaviour, which is, to an extent, true for civic society. Still, this theory is hardly applicable to behaviour in societies not dominated by civic values.
- 14 This problem is usually referred to as 'underdeveloped civil society'.
- 15 All the 'cosa nostra' organisations function on the same principle. In fact, the very principle of 'cosa nostra' is, in fact, the principle of assumed interest-driven affinity. Although it contains elements of rational calculation of interests, association based on *assumed interest-driven affinity* is the total denial of any principle of individual choice or individual articulation of interests. It can not serve as a basis for a civic type interest-driven association, not only as it is a matter of assumed affinity (as the case is with real or imagined kinship) but also because the principle of *assumed interest* leaves no room for individual choice, definition or articulation of interests. Members of the collectivity constituted on the principle of assumed interest, by definition, share the same interests, and their individual interests are understood to be nothing other than identical to the interests of the collectivity.
- 16 In a society like this, an illusion of dynamic movement is maintained by an artificial public debate between leading print media outlets (e.g. the permanent latent conflict between *Slobodna Bosna* and *Avaz*, *Slobodna Bosna* and *Dani*, etc.) which pretend to represent mutually opposed political forces (*Slobodna Bosna*-SDP, *Avaz*-SDA, *Dani*-Stranka za BiH, etc.). In reality, both the 'conflict' of political parties and the permanent 'war' of affiliated 'independent' media can hardly serve any other purpose but to maintain the said illusion and to further deepen the paralysis of the society, by creating artificial blocs through which confrontation of real individuals perma-

nently takes place (a Hobbesian concept of 'war of all against all'). Although these blocs may seem to be the first sign of association based on individually chosen and articulated political interests, the reality is that these interests are also automatically assumed by the very alignment with one of the blocs. Within the mechanism created by this artificial public debate, failure to belong to one of the blocs practically means an automatic affiliation with the other, 'opposed' bloc.

- 17 In his 'Sociology after Bosnia and Kosovo', Keith Doubt, an American sociologist, used the term 'sociocide' (i.e. the killing of a functioning society) to denote the process the B&H society has been exposed to since 1992. In light of the consequences of total paralysis of B&H society as described, and the *de facto* suspension of any functions of B&H society as a society, the killing of this particular society can be said to have been successful.
- 18 The promotion network of the rentier-oligarchic model functions on the principle of systematic *simulated permanent conflict* between its publicly visible branches (e.g. constant, simulated conflicts between ethnonationalist parties and the affiliated media; constant, simulated conflicts between them and the international bureaucracy, etc.—which, in fact, *structurally strengthen* the position of these elements *as seemingly opposed*). The simulation of conflict is *structurally preset*, and any individual deviation from the preset principle of simulation of permanent conflict leads to *weakening of the entire existing rentier-oligarchic model*. This deviation may be in the form of suspension of the simulated conflict and creation of a framework for true cooperation, as well as in the form of a real, authentic conflict. In both cases, the conflict simulation structure acts to block both options. At the same time, one of this model's protection mechanisms is based on the principle of *generation of a latent authentic conflict* among all other elements in society, thus further strengthening the principle upon which the actual structure rests, and at the same time weakening any other principles on which alternative socio-economic and political models could function. A network for promotion of alternative models (such as the individual-entrepreneurial or liberal-democratic model, or the state-industrial or social-democratic model) would have to be organised on the basis of totally different principles, such as the principle of free market and ideological-political competition, or the principle of coordinated, state-managed economic and political activity, etc. Moreover, alternative structures would have to contain separate mechanisms for prevention of conflicts (as conflict is the dominant structural principle of the existing rentier-oligarchic model) and for promotion of free-market competition, or of state-managed coordination.

Wood Pulp and Glue

The Uncertain Future of Ideas

Gavin Jones

We must hope that in coming years more people, here and abroad, will realize how dangerous it is to live in a culture with a limited choice of ideas and alternatives, and how essential it is to maintain a wide ranging debate. In short, to remember how important books have always been in our lives.

André Schiffrin, *'The Business of Books'*, Verso 2000

How important are books to us? Hand in hand with Starbucks and Sushi bars, bookshops have been spreading over the UK with irrepressible haste over the last decade. Our free time has never been so erudite. Or so it would seem. However, the growth in bookselling masks a deeper malaise.

Bookselling is a business, and like any other business, the smart money moves where the pickings are richest. This seems obvious; not at all controversial. There is, though, a big difference between bookselling and pretty much any other business; one that is in danger of being forgotten in the rush for immediate returns. The bestsellers of the future are rarely those of the present, and for books the future can be a long time (the Epic of Gilgamesh is nigh on three thousand years old, for example). Book production is inherently entrepreneurial, and yet the returns are not great, if you are unable to focus beyond today's sales' spreadsheet.

This article is not an argument against good business sense. On the contrary, it is an argument for the long and sustainable future books demand of us. This article is, though, an argument against the prevailing business sense—one that is willfully undermining that future in order to pursue the quick returns shareholders demand.

This article is also a reminder of the important role books have played in the development of our democracy; such as it is. In his book of 1942, "English Social History" (Penguin Classic History, 2000), G.M. Trevelyan has the ghost of Chaucer peeping "over the shoulder of Edward IV at the machine which Mister Caxton had brought from Flanders, as it stamped off... copies of the Canterbury Tales..." he "would have smiled at so pleasant a toy. He would hardly have foreseen in it a battering-ram to bring abbeys and castles crashing to the ground, a tool that would ere long re-fashion the religion and commonwealth of England."

Unlike other media, books last. Their future relevance is potentially greater than their present importance. Unlike politicians and businessmen, they do not merely give the impression of revolution. That makes them dangerous, difficult and challenging: a marketing exec's nightmare. It is vital that attempts to shackle book production to any single ideology be fought.

Bookselling is one of the UK's strong points. According to recent tabloid surveys, we are a land of bookish types, more interested in reading than pretty much anything. Britain produces more books per head of population than any other nation (a total of 3 billion pounds worth per year). Bookselling accounts for 0.35% of the country's GDP (some 2.2 billion pounds, way less than the Iraq War, but still considerable). The sector has seen year on year expansion over the past decade. More importantly, some would say, the quality and diversity of publishing in Britain is without parallel.

I qualify that last sentence, because, as we shall see, some do not view the quality of publishing as of paramount importance. More pernicious-

ly, some see the diversity of publishing as a threat. Unfortunately, these people have huge resources and sway. Worse still, they sit on the boards of many of the world's biggest publishing houses. In the next few years, their agenda will effect what we read as never before. Britain's great success story is about to hit the buffers, not for lack of skills, but as part of a wider political agenda.

In his autobiography "The Business of Books" (Verso, 2000) former head of Pantheon Books, André Schiffrin, clearly sets out the backdrop against which developments in the business of bookselling will take place. It is not an edifying prospect.

By the end of 2000, five multinational super-companies gained control of over 80% of the American book market (in Britain, the situation isn't much better, with the top six companies bossing just over 50% of market share—things always lag behind here—the trend towards merger and takeover is gathering pace). This has had a detrimental effect on the breadth of what is considered publishable. On Harper Collins' absorption into Rupert Murdoch's *News International* fold, books with a critical slant on China were cancelled. China is Murdoch's most important future market, and any rocking of the boat from within his own empire is not tolerated. Though there are many such instances of political interference across the publishing world, individual cases do not make a trend. If there were plenty of other outlets for new or difficult ideas, major label anti-democracy would be easily fought. However with the "big boys" increasingly acting as a cartel (unquestioned by both the Monopolies and Mergers Commission or the Attorney General), the possibilities of writers, whose work does not fit, finding an outlet are diminishing year on year.

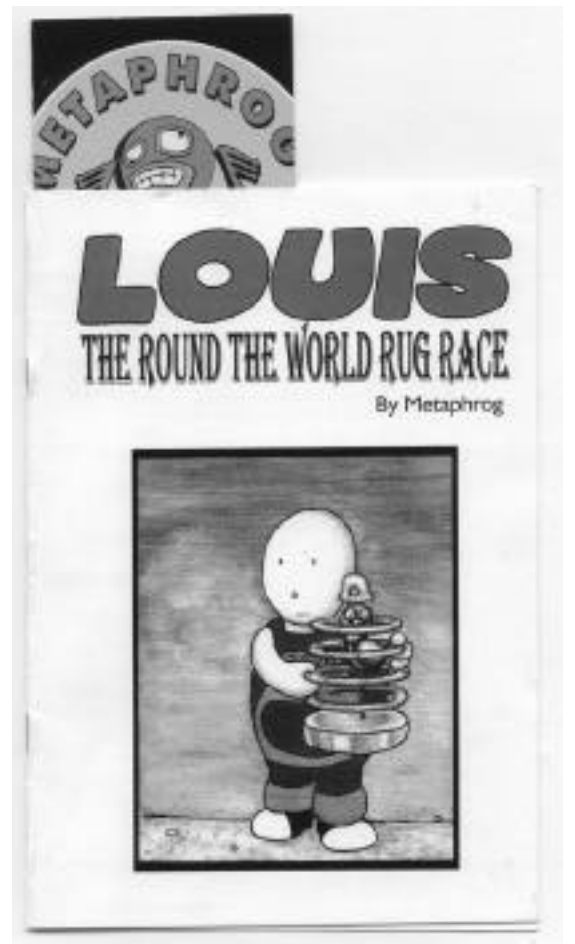
The trend away from plurality towards the middle ground is found in an analysis of UK book sales. It makes for unhappy reading. I apologise in advance—loading an article with figures is against all conventions of decency—but please bear with me on this. All figures are based on those available on the *Bookseller's Association* web site.

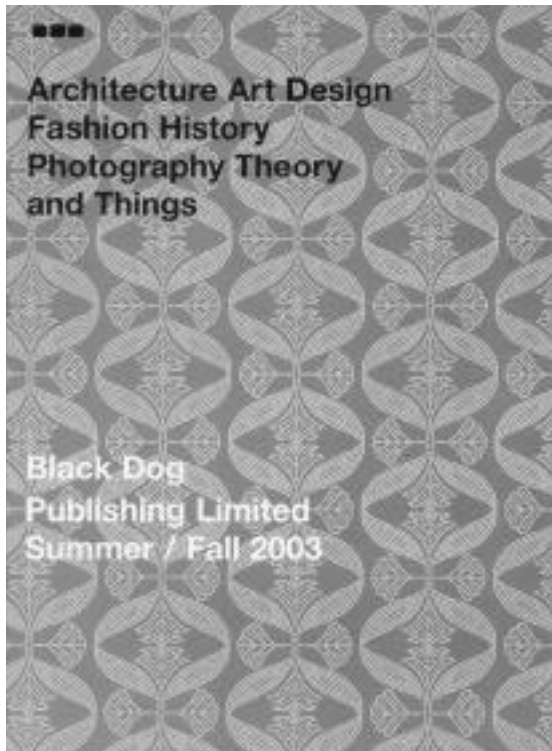
If one looks at trends in the market share of bookshops, a picture of how publishers are being squeezed into less outlets takes shape. In 1998, chain stores (*Waterstone's, Borders, Ottakers* etc.) accounted for 15.2% of total book sales. By 2001 that figure had risen to 18%. The projected figure for 2004 is 21.2%. That means an increase in market share of 6% in 6 years. There have also been increases in the internet (controlled, incidentally, by *Borders* and *Barnes and Noble*) and in the bargain books' sectors.

However, the tale in small book outlets—museums, galleries, independents (excluding second hand, bargain and stationary outlets)—is very different. In 1998 they accounted for 14% of book sales. By 2004 that figure will be around the 8.8% mark. A drop of 5.2%.

If we now look at the types of books being produced, a picture echoing that of bookshops is seen. This illustrates how publishers have reacted to meet the demands of the retailers. In 1990, "mass appeal" books accounted for 66.87% of produced books, and academic books for 26.46%. By 2004 mass books will have increased their share of the market by 2.14%, whilst academic books will have fallen by 3.45%.

This is bad of itself, and with current retail thinking as it is, this situation will deteriorate. Shops increasingly allocate shelf space according





to market share. In a shop the size of the Glasgow branch of *Borders* (around 40,000 square feet) this means a fall in market share of 3.45% from 26.46% would lose academic books 1,380 sq feet, a fall of 13.04% from their 1990 allocated space. A "spine out" hardback book takes up about three inches. Work it out from there—that is a lot of books no longer on the shelves.

Of course space is not the only factor in influencing the sale of books. The placement and merchandising are vital. However, the same logic runs for this as for space allocation. If an area is doing badly, under performing against other areas (or more likely against targets set by the finance "guys"), it will tend to be moved to less visible places in the shop. The signage goes AWOL, junior booksellers end up with the section (not that booksellers do much buying anymore), in short, the subject drifts into neglect. Next time you are in your local chain store, seek out these areas, see for yourself.

The consequences of shrinking and deteriorating space are obvious. Sales in that area will further dwindle, until, like "local interest" books, a bare minimum of shelf space will be allocated, a token gesture, easily dropped.

In the past few years the book market has been working under benign economic circumstances. High street spending has been increasing and overall book sales (even academic) are up. The implications of the underlying trends highlighted above will only be felt when the sector drops into recession. The twin effects of decreasing market share and decreasing overall sales will be catastrophic for many academic lists. Add into this the increasing reluctance (or inability) of museums, galleries and universities to bank role economically uncertain retail ventures and their increasing reliance on "advisors" with high street retail and main stream publishing backgrounds, and the situation is parlous. The recent collapse of *Zwemmer's*, badly run though that company was, should be a wake up call to everyone concerned with museum and gallery bookselling.

For small scale and specialist publishers and retailers alike, the future is bleak. Many will go bust. Many great books will go unpublished. The diversity of ideas will be lost and talent squandered. Some would say the market is only taking care of itself. That may well be the case, but we must remember that without specialist and small scale publishers, "Trainspotting" would probably have never seen the light of day. Not to mention most poetry, most great works of literature, the women's movement, Marxism, free-market liberalism, Matt Groening etc. etc. Trevelyan's assessment of publishing as the medium for social change cannot be overstated. However good Zadie Smith or Robert Ludlum may be, they hardly buck any trends, even within today's publishing.

What exactly will a small scale specialist bookseller face in the coming years? As publishers limit their risks, the proportion of challenging titles will be cut, or the margins will be slashed. Many publishers will be "merged" within larger corporations (reps will be withdrawn, contracts will be re-negotiated). Many companies will go under. The potential for specialization will be limited. "Uniqueness" will be a pitch very difficult to play. Small shops will be forced to compete with the chain stores on unequal terms.

This future is echoed by that facing publishers of more contentious lists. The chain store outlets will limit the space available to their books. It will become increasingly difficult to sell academic lists, and books by unknown or difficult authors. The amount of independent and freer thinking bookshops will begin to shrink. The little publishers will be forced to compete with multinational conglomerates on unequal terms, for space in unsympathetic stores.

It is unlikely the whole sector will disappear overnight: business' worth £700million or so just don't do that (maybe I should go back to the coal fields of South Wales, where I spent my teenage years, and say that!). So, in an optimistic scenario, what will remain of the academic and independent book trade?

Publishers owned by the "super-league" will retain a vestige of more difficult material. The

more popular series (for example books like the "For Beginner's" series) and reading list standards will always be worth keeping. Certain subjects will also retain their hold. Tiny publishers, who manage their costs, and focus on meeting a tight sectorial demand may find the small profits sustainable. Soccer is a good illustration of this. Since the collapse of T.V. deals in football, some of the better run little clubs have even turned in profits this year. It doesn't make for a healthy business sector, but some get by. For a percentage of well structured companies, staying small, avoiding takeover and hoping enough retail outlets hold their product, is a future of sorts, but it is precarious.

Internet publishing is—to a far lesser extent—a way to go, certainly for archival type ventures. However, the publishing of lucrative back list material on the web is something of a contentious issue. I recently found a massively influential philosophy title, in its bi-lingual entirety on the web. No mention given to the book's publisher anywhere. This may be great for some readers, especially students, but someone must be losing out.

Institutions have always supplied the academic sector with the best quality books, both in production and subject terms. This is changing, and not for the better. As the chairman of the *American Association of University Presses* recently said, in-house publishing was beginning to receive "negative support" from parent institutions. In Britain, museums and galleries are finding the economics of free access onerous to say the least. The low returns and high investment of publishing is not a model which fits in the business plans of many. The books that will be produced in the coming will either be sure fire, "cheap as chips" or funded by a shrinking pool of benefactors.

Every now and again an independent in the book world will make it. It is then that the old realities of the book business will take over. These affect publishing generally, big business or small. You can work in bookselling as a hobby for a while, but a couple of kids and a mortgage will soon put paid to any idealism you once had. A friend of mine, an editor in a respected publisher, with 15 years experience, is not even on £20,000 p.a.. Enough to just about afford student digs in London, where rents are £11,000 plus per year. That's not that bad, and everybody has to make choices in life, but as a factor in how publishing and bookselling will develop in the coming years, it is important. Such wages are an indication of how much "fat" publishers can trim before going bust. Clearly, not much.

I began the research for this article with a hang over of belligerent optimism. As someone who has spent 12 years involved in specialist bookselling, in one way, shape or form, I thought there had to be strategies for countering these appalling trends.

The trouble is, the deeper you go, the dirtier it gets. As I have said, there will always be academic publishing of one sort or another. There will always be an independent sector. What is less certain is that such companies will ever be anything more than beautiful butterflies. What is even less certain is that innovative, speculative publishing and bookselling will retain even the marginal place in our culture they currently do. How many untried ideas will go without a voice-piece in this new world? The future does not look good. Editorial decisions made by publishers are increasingly shackled by their finance departments. Stock decisions made by booksellers are increasingly shackled by their finance departments. The Indian summer of British publishing is fast coming to a chilly end. When it does, the final decisions will be made by the finance departments of liquidators and asset strippers, for whom great ideas are nothing more than wood pulp and glue.



I am a cliché

David Adam

For the past twenty-five years I have been diagnosed with depression. Where this immeasurable 'illness' originated from I'm not exactly sure, although I have my suspicions. From birth until I was the age of two I was in the care of the Social Services, since then I have continued to be someone's patient, client, member or caseload. I have progressed through the socio-medico ranks from a child to a teenager, and now into my adulthood. During this time I have been 'treated' by an array of health-care professionals, each of whom has tried to assist me with my problems in life. But let's not beat about the bush, what this means to you, the socially well adjusted, is that I am mentally ill, and, as I cannot cope with daily life, I need medical help. Or do I?

Doubtless there are those among you who would not hesitate to administer a regimen of tablets to control my ailments, for is drug therapy not the old revolutionary of medicine, has it not swept aside many of our psychological and physiological illnesses? What then of other treatments, counselling or group therapy for example? I have tried these treatments. For two years I dully confessed all my deepest, darkest fears to a consultant psychiatrist. While *he* tried to stay awake, I tried to explain how I felt. During one session, when I was about to burst and tell all, the door was suddenly thrown wide-open and in walked a cleaner with an industrial sized floor buffer. I coped no better in group therapy, where often the group would hijack the exercise, with its many personalities all struggling for equal attention and understanding. As for tablets, I have a long history of over-dosing, and when finally allowed/given/trusted with tablets, these produced side-effects so similar in nature to the effects of my depression that it was a waste of time taking them. At least the depression didn't bring impotency and potential addiction.

Oh, I forgot to mention, I am now living my life (my choice) free of any mental health intervention or treatment. Although I still often feel depressed, I feel better in my self for being able to decide what I need and want for David. Besides, diagnoses of stress, depression, anxiety, and the ominously titled 'personality disorder', hold little meaning within wider general society. Or do they? And before you reach for the phone, don't worry, I don't have an arsenal of weaponry under my bed, nor do I walk the streets with a machete concealed about my person. Neither do I hear voices, except when I'm listening to the radio or television. I don't wear my deceased mother's old clothes, how terrifying that thought is, and I don't have hundreds of air fresheners dangling from my ceiling. And finally, I don't own a hockey mask. I'm not schizophrenic, neither am I schizoid, and I don't have delusions of grandeur. But if I told you my friends are and do, what would you think? Would it change your perception of them and me, of whom 'we' the mentally ill are? In fact, I'm not even ill.

So what am I meant to do each week as an alternative to receiving these medical appointments and services, some of which I feel relied upon me far more than I ever could on them. And how can I justify to you, the tax-payer and provider of my compensatory £85.00 per week incapacity benefit, that I *am* worth the effort, let alone the cash. I'm 'fortunate' that I don't have to justify myself to you, that the money is a statutory payment. This means the government, because I cannot work due to my incapacity, by law has to support me. There are also few expectations made of me. I could, if I choose, do nothing. I could in effect, as I have done in the past, wallow

in my bed, half-anaesthetised by the bleary discord of day-time television. Or walk a thousand hours of library floors, shopping centres, and patron the cheap cafés, where as long as one stays 'topped up' one can sit all day. Inasmuch as these solitary pursuits, and I am a solitary person, occupy one's time, I have felt enough loneliness and isolation when depressed.

I do attend a centre; I can hear the sympathetic acknowledgement that I'm not completely cast aside. I had little choice; it was the centre or dreaded day-care. When I heard them suggest a day-care centre, I thought, "god things are really desperate". So for a couple of days a week I attend the centre. It is, incidentally, National Health Service backed, but we enjoy our own autonomy. Most of 'us' already know one another from the various support groups, organisations, and hospitals we've attended. 'We're' the remnants of the health service, and as clichéd as it sounds, many members have been in the system all their lives, or at least a large part of it. Every scenario, story, medication and illness—real or imagined—is represented by the experiences of the centre's membership. We are, I guess, a highly concentrated cross-section of the reality of mental illness. Whatever—it's for people like me.

My friend Jackie has been at the centre for nine years. She's cheerful, intelligent and a self motivated young woman. We both know it's difficult dealing with life's demands. Apart from the past and 'the illness', which haunt us in equal measure, there's the constant worry of poverty. It's not easy living on state-handouts. I *could* get more money from a higher benefit, but can't be bothered being put through any more medical examinations and endless questionnaire forms asking me if I'm pregnant or if I can lift a 2lb bag of sugar. No, I make do with what I have: I have to. Once the rent and council tax, electricity and food are paid for, I have next to nothing to live on. Apart from the poverty, being on incapacity benefit is just another negative social stigma to attach to our lists. In fact, other than the money there's little benefit to being on benefit.

So what does the taxpayer get for all their hard-earned money? Not that it ever crosses their minds that they can work, earn a living, and so provide themselves with a life. Well...they get people like myself, Jackie, and Gavin and the thousands of others in similar circumstances to our own. What do we get for the money? In Gavin's case, an abusive and alcoholic step-father; and a physical attack as a teenager which left him with permanent psychological damage. The rest, the real bad stuff, he's asked me not to write. Now that's real value for money.

I know I can't be the only person stuck in this rut. Trapped within an identity that medical science defines me to be, and yet equally ensnared by the processes of a benefits bureaucracy that can't decide if its true ideals are medical, social or political—or all three or none of them. Yet, this identity is not one I have created. Nor are my mentally ill attributes qualifications I would wish for anyone, least myself, to possess. And one would think that in receiving welfare benefits this would be the end of my problems, but it's just the start.

All Jackie and I (and many people I have spoken with) want to do is to keep moving on with our lives. Yet, until only recently, we were not allowed to study full-time due to receiving benefits. Because Jackie (like myself) can't gain the necessary qualifications, and has a poor work record owing to her long periods of illness, few employers are likely to employ her at the level she



and I are capable of and once held. It seems so pointless that we were not allowed, even for therapeutic reasons, to study full-time and realise our potential. And this greatly illustrates the inconsistency in attitudes towards people with mental health problems, and that for some it's a choice between day-care for example, or a course at university. Likewise, and despite my academic ability, I was forced to spend four years (part-time) as opposed to everyone else's single year in getting into university. Maybe it was just as well that I became ill again, early on in my first semester, as I would not have had the energy to study for another eight or more years for this degree.

Yes, I know the old adage that if one can study full-time, one can work full-time, but for whatever reasons 'we' can't. People like Jackie, Pamela, Gavin and myself do all the part-time courses we can, then grind to an undignified halt. If one does manage to escape returning to 'telly land' then one might be fortunate enough to end up at the centre. The alternatives are day-care or out patients and an endless trickle of support groups, drop-in, and community centres. Still, it's better than nothing isn't it? Isn't it?

As I'm in receipt of welfare benefit due to my incapacity to work, I fare equally as badly with the compulsory medical questionnaire forms and medical examinations imposed on me by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP)—formally the Department of Social Security—to verify my inability to work. Whether it's Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Incapacity Benefit or simply claiming tax credits, if one can't work due to illness, one's tested.

As nearly everyone at the centre is receiving some type of benefit, news travels fast. The letter containing the medical questionnaire looks innocent enough, it's worded: "We require some more information to assess your entitlement to benefit." The cover letter comes across as a 'help us to help you', but it's really the first stage in a process which will lead to a medical examination and 'possible' removal of one's benefit entitlement. Simply replying, which you have to do, starts their process.

Every claimant who is then assessed as having a 'mild' to 'moderate' disability, whether physical or psychological (mental) or both, will be called to attend a medical. When one considers that the DWP's Decision-Maker considers severe disabilities to be, "tetraplegic (paralysis of all four limbs), in a persistent vegetative state, terminally ill, has dementia, is blind, is severely mentally impaired or mental state severely restricted or learning disabled", one can see the direction this process is

taking. This is irrespective of any personal circumstances one's managed to squeeze into the five-inch boxes of the questionnaire. Moreover, it's difficult, nearly impossible, responding to a questionnaire (the precursor to the medical) and to realistically describe the effects of one's illness day to day while wondering whom these improbable questions are truly aimed at.

At the medical one has between twenty and forty minutes to be 'examined'. It's usually towards the end of the medical that it dawns on the individual that what they've said, their mannerism, and what the Benefits Agency Medical Services doctor thinks of them are the main factors deciding if they will pass the medical and score more than fifteen points—or fail and lose their benefit entitlement. It's at this point most people realise, too late, what's actually going on and what's really at stake.

One can, after the fact, appreciate how easily the questionnaire and medical examination constructs its legitimacy against the individual, and how much its premise can be used bureaucratically, as opposed for any real medical intention. Yet it's not just its design which one should criticise—which takes no account whatsoever of the individual—but its intention. It is simply a bureaucratic tool. No wonder we all nickname the place where we go for the medical 'Lourdes'. One goes in ill and comes out cured. Rightly so, the medical does net the odd fraudulent claim. For the rest, the vast majority, it's an unnecessary and often traumatic intrusion into our personal and private lives. It takes away even one's right to be ill. While being so obviously politically induced, ethically, it seriously questions the role of the medical profession which is charged with our care. And what of the government which has continued to use these measures since 1995, what note does it send to the disabled community?¹

It's such a mixed message, 'yes we value you, but we don't trust you'. Yet fear, mistrust and discrimination are historically the social hallmarks of the mentally ill, those with mental health problems, as we're now labelled. Most of the folk who use the centre are everyday people. Yes, some are like me and have a case-history files thick, others haven't. We live our lives as best we can, being both accommodating and aware to our situation. Sometimes I think that the illness is the least intrusive and it's everything else that produces the real dysfunction in our lives. It's even more ironic that, rather than the exception many of us at the centre hold academic and professional qualifications. There's even two members I know who have Master of Arts degrees, one of which is in sociology. I have qualifications in the Arts and Social Sciences. So much for the social-norm of deranged lunatics.

Yet we're nearly disregarded by society, denied opportunities, discriminated against, purely because we're diagnosed with a mental illness, and received with all the misgivings such a term cogitates. I *am* different to you, but my difference is not in my diagnosis. Possibly due to my own new-found sense of self-awareness, I've noticed there are several centre members who are also entangled within the standard perceptual definition of mental ill-health. When looking into each past, there is often, as with Gavin, other environmental forces and social factors shaping their lives. And I can't help wondering if this is why they too have become lost, like me, within the [psychiatric] mental health system for so long.

As I say, I'm not ill, I'm hurt. The services that could help us, despite what we are told, are not there. Those that are, are under funded, under staffed and over prescribed. I waited fourteen months for my counselling-psychology appointment and nearly sixteen months for a place at the centre. It's hardly crises intervention; that's still left to the accident and emergency departments.

Yes we need assistance, I don't deny this, but it's got to be more than waiting lists and medication. And certainly not bullying by the Department of Works and Pensions.

There's a real wind of change approaching, and I for one am extremely sceptical. The mutation in name from Department of Social Security to Department of Works and Pensions is not the only clue. Could it be that the questionnaire and medical are simply being used to justify the removal of one's entitlement to welfare benefit? Because with one in five working aged adults possessing a disability, these 'medical tests' are going to get a lot tougher.

The focus is obvious... work. To get the 'disabled', as the government refers to us, back or into work. Indeed, therapeutic work has, since April 2003, been replaced by permitted work. There's more than a mere suggestion that the emphasis has shifted from therapy to work. Those individuals that cannot work due to physical or mental disability/incapacitation, and whom rely on Incapacity or DLA benefit as their sole means of income, and who can't satisfy the DWP's criteria, they're going to have real problems. But it's not simply about economics and the capacity of the workforce... is it? Least of all it's definitely not to be found within the smokescreen of helping the disabled because there are many other practical ways to do this. So what is it all about, these so-called questionnaires and medical examinations? It's about money. If only to deny a higher rate, or reduce an existing rate by one level; in removing entitlement to benefit the savings to the government is in the tens of millions of pounds.

There's currently much being said as regards the changing face of mental health policies and its associated provisions, especially with the implementation of new legislation in the form of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. People with mental health issues, nearly one in ten of the UK population, are supposedly better informed, better protected and better off. However, I see an all too familiar face, with a tired expression showing discrimination, stigmatisation, poverty and isolation. "Behind every disability there's a person" we're told. If only the DWP believed their own propaganda. Or in the words of Susan, a centre member, "Just how's does someone get out of this f..king loop?"

Notes

1. From April 1995 Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit were replaced by Incapacity Benefit. A new medical assessment of incapacity for work called the all work test was introduced with Incapacity Benefit. The All work test has now been renamed the Personal Capability Assessment.

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