

Who's Afraid of Red White & Blue?

attitudes to popular & mass culture,
celebrity, alternative & critical practice
& identity politics in recent British art

edited by David Burrows



The press release & alternative spaces

Mark Harris

In the unfinished introduction to his *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno writes a surprising accolade to artists' manifestos. Objective aesthetic truths come from the hyperbolic slogans, tossed out by accelerating avant-gardes burning rubber down the twentieth century. They aren't to be found in the pronouncements of commentators who look for stable criteria with which to judge these fast-evolving artworks. In Adorno's words:

'Certainly it needs to be shown that the truth content of great aesthetic manifestos and similar documents has taken the place once held by philosophical aesthetics. The aesthetics that is needed today would be the self-consciousness of the truth content of what is radically temporal.'¹

This language of truths and aesthetic enquiries makes us uneasy today, given how accustomed we are to the populist eclecticism of the contemporary scene and secure in our suspicions of art that lays claims to value. But Adorno was still working on this book when he died in 1969, his classes at Frankfurt University disrupted by student protesters demanding greater political accountability from their teachers. Aside from 20th-century art, his dialogue was with Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, challenging their categories of truth and beauty for valuing art. Adorno wanted to return power to the artwork at all costs, and if his strategy was criticised on the grounds that contemporary art was unsuitably ephemeral, he was determined to show that its power, or truth, was located in that very ephemerality.

If ephemerality is taken as a structure for Contemporary Art, then artists' declarations must draw attention to the artwork before it fades from view. Such declarations become the hectoring intermediary between art object and distracted public. 'Forget that, now look at this', they instruct, before sketching out didactically the reasons for their insistence. If one purpose for this haste is to profit from a moment of relevance before being displaced by the next

artwork, another is to invalidate criteria that assert enduring artistic value.

In the British scene now, artists' manifestos and polemical writings are rare. There are still issues that need arguing over, still uncertainty over artists' social efficacy, unease about cynicism and irony in practice, disenchantment with the stagnation of ideas, unhappiness about overdetermining theory, and insecurity over aesthetic initiatives. Yet little argumentative discourse emerges from this situation.

Instead, communication amongst artists is oblique. The artist-run shows in Britain are the artist community speaking to itself. Although these events spill over into the commercial sector (for example, Martin Maloney's *Die Yuppie Scum* at Karsten Shubert in 1996) and into the non-profits (such as Chisenhale's 1997 benefit initiated by Tim Webster and Sue Noble) and act as feeders for both, it's fair to say that in terms of discourse they are a parallel entity. After nearly 10 years in New York I was struck by how hardly anyone makes studio visits in Britain, nor do they talk about work socially, nor are there public alignments of like-minded artists. Instead artists keep themselves visible, test the waters, and communicate ideas via the artist show. A project is floated, a proposal written, artists are invited to participate, and through the organisation of these events, in no particularly conspicuous way, ideas are exchanged. This must suit the British temperament better than the flat out, up front conversing that goes on in New York where a verbal introduction to someone's work will often precede the visual encounter. In that promiscuous and ruthlessly exposed environment presentation is crucial. Work is continually being explained and justified to strangers, whose interest must be secured. In London, if not elsewhere in Britain, artworks must somehow make their own way into strangers' lives.

Because of the monolithic nature of the artworld in New York there is the tendency to view everything there, including artist-run shows, as commercially determined. When Gasworks in London recently held a discussion on the role of artist-run spaces, one of the American speakers asserted that New York didn't have the same need as London for artist initiatives since the non-profits there were doing an adequate job of organising what he called 'alternative' shows. Yet most of those spaces – Art in General, Artist Space, The Clocktower, Exit Art, The New Museum, P.S.1, Sculpture Center, White Columns – are only viable insofar as their activities run seamlessly into the commercial sector, taking from, and sending artists back into, the galleries. Furthermore they become powerful and impenetrable institutions in their own right whose ambitious directors have only a tenuous and undependable link to the vast platform of unexhibited artists.

Yet if artists organise their own shows in New York it is usually understood as an initiative made from a position of failure. They even have an appropriately derisory name for them: 'vanity shows'. They are what are to be left behind once a commercial gallery takes interest in an artist's work and as such are second best. The need for discourse is satisfied on an everyday level during the continuous circulation around openings, the proliferating reading and discussion groups, and the dinner parties. The one well-known anomaly to this is itself very American. Four Walls in Williamsburg was for a long time a venue for one-day exhibitions, opening and closing on the same Sunday evening. A formal panel discussion followed an opening where the artists in the show would talk about their work and answer questions from the audience. Every event however was a theme show where a specific issue would be dealt with.

These grew to be extremely popular with a

couple of hundred people turning up for some serious wrangling. In being thematic (though like their show of unrealised projects, sometimes very inventive) they conformed to the New York stereotype of a conceptually accountable, and of course marketable show. Even artist/curator Kenny Schacter's anarchic ventures (the closest thing there to initiatives in London) would assume didactic purpose. His *Unlearning* show in 1992 proposed that its artists shake off their acquired skills in order to produce vital fresh work.

In Britain the artist's declarative argument may be obsolete but the formality of the press release continues. There isn't an artist-run exhibition that doesn't comply with this ritual of objective explanation, the more surprising since they are quickly read and discarded. In this system of using the artist show to raise aesthetic issues for consideration the press release announces the terms of discourse and the issues in question. These terms are of less concern to the commercial or non-profit spaces which instead require clearly defined parameters to successfully promote their product and don't share the urgency of the artists' projects. Again the lines sometimes blur as in May 1997 when a gutted space was strategically used by Sadie Coles for showing Sarah Lucas's work.

The fast consumption of the press release allows issues to be thrown out without the care that would usually be expected. They are helpfully revealing since their ephemerality seems to license thoughts which artists would normally be cautious about divulging. In spite of the great diversity of work and ideas discussed, these documents usually comply with a conventional format. Clearly the artists concede that this convention is still an effective communicative tool, a kind of digestible and disposable manifesto rapidly outlining the concerns of the show. Recurrent issues raised include the challenge to the exhibition venue,

the encounter between artist and audience, the critical relationship of art to its surroundings, the engagement of art with everyday life, the implications of a diverse selection, and occasionally the role of humour. More rare, but still occurring, are references to subversive practice, the democratisation of art, and to commodification. Artists will also make a point of ignoring issues altogether by methodically describing the work in its disparity.

Surprisingly, this list of issues suggests that some of the historical avant-garde antagonisms are still unresolved and thus valid for a number of British artists. According to its press release, Giorgio Sadotti's *Dinner* at Cubitt, where artists served and entertained their patrons and gallery dealers, considered the blurring of public and private domains and commented on 'recent attempts to integrate [sic] "real life" into the artificial constructs of the "white cube"'.

Though not a preoccupation of the New York equivalent, this last concern is a particularly recurrent anxiety of the British artist-run projects which still feel the responsibility to actualise their alternative status, when instead energy invested into the realisation of a radically new idea would be unusual enough. The same impulse to integrate art into life was expressed in the press release for *The Happy Shopper* which, by taking place in an old supermarket at the Elephant and Castle, hoped to broaden its audience and dissolve the boundary between artist and consumer. *Martin*, likewise curated by David Goldenberg, presented an exceptionally dense text of interesting but impossibly entangled ideas, including notification that the exhibition was '[an] obsolete orthodox structure' and that the justification for alternative shows has collapsed. The notion fruitfully raised by these three artist ventures is the paradoxical one of continuing with their project in the face of the likely bankruptcy of its theoretical justification.

In Manchester, The Annual Programme proceeded with fewer anxieties about this condition. The organisers' unclouded enthusiasm was rare enough and evoked some of the optimism of early avant-gardes. With *Eastenders*, where work was sited in public locations around a square, an entirely new audience was to engage with art which would 'maintain both a decorative and critical relationship with its surroundings'.

Judging by the number of sponsors at the foot of the press release this may well be the language of fundraising applications jarring with art discourse. Yet in their press releases for interventions in each other's houses, similar issues about art questioning public and private realms, becoming absorbed into and revealing real life, were raised and self-assuredly dealt with by the artists. The confident literalness of the written account does sometimes raise a smile. Ian Rawlinson was described as coating a window with silver which visitors were encouraged to rub off. 'As the month progresses the mirror will slowly deteriorate, once again letting in the daylight, and revealing the awful realities of life in Chorlton'.

The press releases frequently convey that their art is to be proactive within its environment. Hence the continuous references to a wider public, to a movement out of the conventional space, to an engagement with aspects of everyday life, as if these resolved the need for aesthetic invention. There is the sense that aesthetic strategies relating to art in terms of the invention of form or the reappraisal of its autonomy are discredited. It's tempting to wonder whether a new formal radicalism may turn out to be liberating for artists caught in this ethical reflexivity. That a new form might be a radical new idea is not discussed at this level.

Engagement with the everyday, with the extra-artistic, is a familiar issue in recent British art. It is often linked with efforts to circumvent the authority of the gallery and prescriptions of the medium. In some press releases this is discerned in the use of found materials and unconventional tools. Unit's title *World of Painting* suggested that pre-existing painting should be located in the everyday environment. This was a show, we

The Annual Programme presents

IAN RAWLINSON
Hotel Harmony

at
Caravan

Flat 1, 20 Dawlish Road, Chorlton, Manchester

March 1-31 1997

Gallery open Sundays 12noon to 6pm, and by appointment

Private view 6-9pm Friday 28 February

PRESS RELEASE

This March, a ground floor flat in Chorlton is taken over for the eighth exhibition in Manchester's Annual Programme. Ian Rawlinson presents *Hotel Harmony* at Caravan, the home of artist Kerri Moogan.

Ian Rawlinson has chosen to highlight a theme explored by a number of the previous exhibitors in The Annual Programme: the tension inherent in appropriating domestic spaces. *Hotel Harmony* is concerned with the opacity and reflexivity of glass. The panes of a living room window have been replaced by sheets of silvered glass creating a double-sided mirror. By reflecting both the contents of the room and the street outside the work investigates the relationship between interior and exterior, between public and private space.

The work is both beautifully simple and extremely fragile - the silver backing comes off easily when touched and visitors to the exhibition will be invited to contact the work by wiping their fingerprints on the surface of the mirror. As the month progresses the mirror will slowly deteriorate, once again letting in the daylight, and revealing the awful realities of life in Chorlton.

Ian Rawlinson has shown widely in the UK and abroad with recent installations for half Manchester (1995), Venice Biennale (1995), Krefeldwerk (V. Chevruiz, Germany (1995) and Liverpool Gallery, Liverpool (1996). He is a collaborator on the Muggers Music project which has been commissioned by the Lower Merston Cultural Council for exhibition in New York this June.

The Annual Programme is a project in which ten Manchester-based artists have agreed to turn their homes into art galleries, to show specially made work by another artist. Month by month, each artist takes a turn to be host/visitor, and then guest/artist, so over the course of a year, the world's first 'open exhibition' makes its way across the city. The Programme so far has included glass floors filled in a Chorlton Hill terrace, a precise scale model of the View from a Salford flat, and a robot-sewing ink in a garden in Oldham. The artists are Michael Robertson, Graham Parker, Martin Vincent, Richard Hyton, Nick Crowe, David Mackintosh, Kistina Molyneux, Ian Rawlinson, and Kerri Moogan & Anneke Pattison.

For further information and supporting material on Ian Rawlinson's *Hotel Harmony* or The Annual Programme contact Nick Crowe on 0161 223 9925.

The Annual Programme, The Testing Block, 7 Sandham Street, Manchester M15 7H 1+1 +44 (0)161 591 9925
Programme: Sue Green & Anita Preece

Hotel Harmony work by Ian Rawlinson, organised by
The Annual Programme, at Kerri Moogan's house,
Caravan, in Manchester, March 1997



WORLD OF PAINTING

October 31 - November 23

Preview Thursday 30 October, 6-9pm

Open Friday to Sunday, 12 noon - 6pm & by appointment

Unit presents work by John Chilver, Paul Morrison, Michael Radecker and Michael Szobos in the exhibition *World of Painting*, where roadwork and road sign sugar decoration, pastoral and infantile images converge.

John Chilver paints pictures of sites and railings using a square section steel applicator. Materials are piled against imagery in a spirit of earnest excess.

Across the Gulf or Fred Flintstone might be the inhabitants of the rustic scenery in Paul Morrison's paintings, which make their references to the landscape genre with wit and affection.

In his suburban boulevard-scapes and school-of-holiday-land interiors Michael Radecker combines paint with cotton thread and other fabrics. Gestural and naive painting merge with deft and extraordinary giving oddly harmonious results.

Michael Szobos has attempted the logically self-defeating: paintings that seduce taste but still insist on being likable. The paintings on show here were made using devices ranging from mastic guns to icing sugar nozzles.

Michael Radecker currently has a one person show at the Stedelijk Museum's project space, SM Bureau Amsterdam.

Michael Szobos will hold a one person show at Duncan Caygill Gallery, London in January/February 1998.

For further information contact John Chilver on 0171 431 8608

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World of Painting at Unit, Bethnal Green, London, November 1997

learnt, 'where needlework and icing sugar decoration, pastoral and infantile images converge', and where we came across memorable phrases like 'deviant embroidery'. For one show The Conductors Hallway turned itself into a gym and invited us down for a workout. Jason Coburn's *Enough* at the Tannery described a wide range of work primarily in terms of its contiguity with ordinary life: a bus journey in Syria, a video of found photographs, a vending machine, the Tannery itself mapped onto a computer game, with Tim Hutchinson's fastidious plotting of his bedroom 'cleverly making links between architecture, animation, communication and the ephemerality of everyday life'. Curator Ciara Ennis's *Houseworks* at 30 Underwood Street announced itself as blurring boundaries, this time between the work of designers, architects and artists as they engaged with implications of the home. This show included work like Simon Tyszkowski's woven bondage outfit, David Cheesman's fragmented carpet and Nick Bolton's video of himself singing from memory while squashed under a chaise-longue.

Continuing with this emphasis on the everyday, Glasgow's Transmission Gallery seems to relish groupings of loosely related artists, linked spuriously to an improbable common reference. *The Unconditioned State of Search* used 'zen ikebana flower arrangement as a binder for work by four geographically and creatively disparate artists'. Reading through the descriptions it became clear that this kind of jocularity was grounded in a very considered choice of artists, including Dean Hughes, all of whom intervene with mundane found materials.

Also in Glasgow, *One Way Karma* proposed that artworks be faxed to an assortment of prominent businesses, including The Vatican, Saatchi and M15, for 12 hours one Sunday. It would be the office staff on Monday morning who faced a pile of fax paper. This playful

sabotage along the lines of Fluxus events becomes a more explicit political intent in other press releases. In London's Covent Garden, BUND's *Banana Republic*, a heterogenous and uneven show that spiralled through several floors of an office building, linked the myth of the tower of Babel to contemporary materialism where 'exhibits ... mirror the thrills and anxieties pre-occupying [sic] the individual in an environment of profit and proliferation'. The announcement for *Radio-Sound* at Fishe, described Daniel Newham's installation of 30 radios tuned to different stations in London as a 'cacophony of simultaneity', the press release pouring out descriptive cliches, like a *retardataire* Futurist manifesto, as if to mimic the commercialisation of the airwaves.

The Unconditioned State of Search at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow
October 1997

38 King Street
Glasgow G1 3JP
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e mail: 121546422@compuserve.com

transmission

CALLART

PRESS RELEASE

The Unconditioned State of Search

DEAN HUGHES, COREY MCCARDLE, PETER WALSH, PETER ZIMMERMANN
—WITH ISEKANA BY TEA FERGUSON—

14/10/97—11/11/97 Private View 11/10/97 at 7pm

The *Unconditioned State of Search* uses ten Ikebana flower arrangements as a binder for work by four geographically and creatively disparate artists: Corey McCardle, from New York, strips the schizoid out of such New-Ageism as relaxation videos until only elegant, minimalist ornaments—and possibly one transcendence—remain. His *For Greater Velocity Towards Grace* resembles modernist moulded plywood furniture, but is designed to support a sitter in the least position.

Dean Hughes, from Manchester, succumbs to the seductive quality of cosmopolitan niceties—fast access, gumstrip, ruled paper—involving himself in concentrated acts of serene play.

At first glance Cologne-based Peter Zimmermann's recreations of packaging and publicity files seem to be perfectly faithful to their mass-produced models; closer inspection reveals that they have been meticulously arranged to coalesce narratives which run through and amongst the text printed on them.

Peter Walsh, based in London threads a sort of magic through the mundane by making simple alterations to or arrangements of common objects and phenomena. The saucer in a white coffee cup becomes a mountain range; a 750g cranialike packet is conjured into a 250g packet; a hairline crack in a plastic slide mount coalesce attention and becomes a world in itself.

Vera Ferguson is a member of the Scottish Association of Flower Arrangists.

Deborah Ibbotson, past president of the Edinburgh chapter of Ikebana International, will give a demonstration of Ikebana on Saturday 25th of October at 3pm at the Gallery. Corey McCardle will give a talk on his work and on Threadwasting Space, the art-run gallery in New York with which he is affiliated, on Tuesday 14th of October at 7pm at the Gallery.

supported by the Scottish Arts Council and Glasgow City Council

In a typically bizarre swansong, the press release for Plummet's last show *Euthanasia* read as its re-entry into real life. Echoing Baudrillard, it obscurely offered a German term, meaning 'vigorous life', to overcome simulation and spectacle. It was to serve as 'an escape hatch for the cultural producer from a life negating practice'. The piece ended by saying that the gallery would revert to its prior status as council flat; a wry citation of the avant-garde dream of sublating art into life.

As one of very few theme shows, Jeremy Akerman's *Pictures of Lily*, at 30 Underwood Street, went against the grain. From the press release we learnt that this show was about the politics of a concealed side to male identity, that it would engage with the personal, offering as a liberating principle the vulnerability and insecurity beneath the male facade. 'The brutal honesty in the the work, exposes the cosy myths of free speech and of the existence of a liberal acceptance of difference'.

Announcing *Rude Mechanic*, one in their series of sound and performance installations, Beaconsfield's text revived familiar strategies of late modernism. We were told 'this is a project which examines notions of artistic identity, the democratisation of artistic process and the manipulation of underground tactics', this last taking us back to the calls of current British artists to reappraise the determinants of the exhibition space. In fact Beaconsfield has been one curatorial venture to successfully raise new possibilities for gallery-based projects. The limitations of the conventional space were most creatively tested by *Instantaneous* which for once offered more than what the press release led us to expect. Only in a footnote at the back of the catalogue could we read that 'the artists' activities ignite each other to exist as a composite within a moment of time'. This is as good an explanation as any for the experience of coming across Michelle Griffiths

near-invisible body prone on a bed of feathers, in front of Mark Dean's double projection of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, running simultaneously backwards and forwards on an entire wall, while a white dove flew around the space.

BANK are the only artists I'm aware of who use the press release as a polemical tool, in this way coming closest in strategy to the historical manifestos, even though BANK use irony and parody in their revival of the idiom. On one level their entire production of press releases parodies or lambasts the kind I've been discussing. The one describing *Ocean Floor* (produced for their exhibition *Dog-u-mental*) included generous tongue-in-cheek references to JG Ballard, and was a convincing pastiche of the kind of indigestible critical theory that sometimes appears in other artists' texts: 'In descent the gaze is degendered and the binary opposites of subject and object are stripped by the acid of mythology'. The press release for *Mask of Gold* provided the most relentless and enjoyable diatribe against many of the concerns (most notably this concept of the everyday) that have been attributed here to British artists, along with ridiculing the narrow categories of art-making these legitimise.

Instantaneous curated by David Crawford & Naomi Siderin at
 Beaconsfield, Vauxhall, London
 January 1988

press release

Instantaneous

Mark Dean, Michelle Griffiths, Stephen Hayward & Matthew Galey,
Claire Shilton, Neil Shustler and Gai Sutherland

Preview 16 January, 6-9pm
17 January - 6 February 1988 Saturday - Sunday 12-6pm

Membership 13.00 with catalogue

Film screenings on Fridays at 7pm (free with membership)
23 Jan: *cinéma*
30 Jan: *a programme of hours*
6 Feb: *Joseph Flaubert 2*

Beaconsfield, Newcomer Street, Vauxhall, London, SE11 4AY

Instantaneous will focus upon the presence of short-lived and incidental occurrences within the practices of six artists. A series of new commissions will explore the political strategies of these practices.


Mark Dean sets up relationships within and between classic film narratives through unconventional projections. For *Instantaneous* an on-going exhibit is complemented by Friday evening screenings. Michelle Griffiths juxtaposes the metaphorical histories of brass and St Ethelburga in a still action montage. Moments are presented related to the history of one myth and the lives of the other, physically placing the artist at the centre of a new hybrid myth. Visual site suspensions. Histories and good Matthew Galey bring together sound, time and text in a multi-media installation which presents the viewer with strongly familiar and loaded imagery. Claire Shilton uses the phenomena of the disappearance as her live deconstruction of the elements of identity. Claire Shilton's performance work addresses impressions about the nature of the audience/performer relationship. Employed by the gallery, Shilton will engage with every person entering the space, establishing a fluid context which enables the public to re-imagine of this on-going event. A video installation by Neil Shustler explores the 'happening' and 'failure' of elements made in representing the subtle addresses of values.

Dean has participated in major exhibitions in recent years including *Play at Clinic* (York), *Attention in the Park* at Leicester College Gallery and a solo show at City Hacking. Previous installations by Griffiths include *Actual Travels in Atlanta's Self Storage* and *The Occasional Judgement you said me I know*, whilst the *Put Better Pig and no Woodcock Chines*. Hayward and Galey have previously collaborated at Beaconsfield, GAINC, the Festival Gallery in Thirsk and the *Alternative Art Fair* in Leeds. Shilton's performance and video work has been seen at numerous events and exhibitions including the *Disintegrated Nation* in Houston, the *Site Action*, site of action between in Madrid, the *Cliff Art* in Paris festival and the *Suspensive Gallery* in London. *Instantaneous* will be the first of the showing in Leeds. *Beaconsfield's* work has been seen extensively throughout southern in Europe including the *Choc* in 2011 in addition to the *One Fine Art* Association, the *Leeds Arts Festival* and *Gallery Mall* in Barcelona.

For further information contact Naomi Siderin
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Instantaneous has been curated by David Crawford and financially supported by the London Arts Board

BEACONSFIELD



BANK PRESENTS
MASK of GOLD

GALLERIE POO POO, 34 UNDERWOOD ST.,
LONDON N1 7JX • INFO: 171 3366836
2-6 SEPT - 2 NOV • FRI-SUN 12-6
OPENING 25 SEPT 6-9 PM

... IT'S 1997 AND WE'RE IN A SITUATION WHERE STUPID BOURGEOIS CURATORS ACT AS LEECHES TOWARDS THE ARTISTS THEY CURATE. A NEW BREED HAS EMERGED, TO SERVICE THE ENDLESS HALLS TO CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EDIFICATION, RHETORIC OF THE POSTNAR, POST-P.C., WHITE, LIBERAL GUILT-TRIP. IN GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS THAT LOOK LIKE BUREAUCRACY MADE CONCRETE IT'S NO SURPRISE TO FIND TIDY, BUREAUCRATIC, SCHREIBTISCH TÄTER ART.

CURATORS, BORN WEALTHY, WISH TO ABSOLVE THEMSELVES OF THEIR CRIMES, AND BECOME CULTURAL MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT; THEY DO THEIR BOVINE PUBLIC A FAVOUR BY GLORIFYING OPPRESSION AND FINANCING SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES. IN TURN, THIS CURATIONAL TREND HAS SPAWNED A LEGION OF CAPITALIST ARTISTS PRODUCING NON-ART-LOOKING-ART TO FEED THE GUILT MARKET. WITH ALL THE SUBTLETY OF THE AVERAGE ROCK VIDEO, "THE STREET" IS IDENTIFIED AS THE SITE OF "THE REAL" AND "THE PEOPLE" - WITH THE GUILTY GALLERY "NOT REAL", "ELITIST". DUMBLY CLAIMING TO COMMUNICATE VIA THE MOST NOTORIOUS MEDIUMS OF NON-COMMUNICATIONS, LIKE POP MUSIC, TV, INTERNET, THESE PAMPERED ARTIST CHILDREN OF THE NON-REVOLUTION QUEUE UP FOR LESSONS IN OTHER PEOPLE'S OPPRESSION, PSEUDO-CRITICALLY MIMICKING EXPLOITATIVE STRUCTURES OF POPULAR CULTURE IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE.

**FUCK THEM ALL, SNIVELLING
SHIT-LICKING CAREERISTS TO A WO-MAN...**

→

Any misgivings about the naive optimism or awkwardly formulated agendas of the shows featured here should be weighed against the fact that a small, relatively hermetic group of artists has dominated the yBa category for a long time. In New York by now many successive artist groups and tendencies would have appeared and been absorbed. It was predictable by contrast that London's *Sensation* would turn up the same names that Minneapolis's *Brilliant* and Manchester's *British Art Show* had done a couple of years earlier. The current slack feeling to the scene in London might be the unbeneficial after-effect of this kind of unimaginative repetitive programming.

The selection of shows featured in this article is a small indication of the great range of events that has been going on in the background while one small group of British artists has gained most attention and whose extended dominance grows wearisome. With the exception of Jake and Dinos Chapman, Keith Coventry and Paul Noble at City Racing, and Gavin Turk (who helped organise last year's outdoor show, *Stock Market*), they aren't doing much to help the visibility of younger artists even though it is likely that they would themselves benefit in the long term. Without the trickle-down support of the lesser-known by recognised artists the international market (and its facilitators like journalists and curators) remains focused on one main group without engaging with new artists. In a scene dominated by artist-curated shows where are the ones organised by Hume, Emin, Lucas, Ofili, Wearing, Whiteread, given how easy it would be for them to secure venues, sponsorship and critical attention? They don't seem to feel the same need to be involved with a younger group of artists that is felt by the those running spaces like Gasworks, Conductors' Hallway, Beaconsfield, The Tannery, or BANK's gallery, just to mention a few in London.

Without strong interest and support of the younger, as yet unsuccessful artists, by the

successful few there's not going to be enough revitalization of the scene to sustain it for long. The very insularity that made it interesting in the first place will be what kills it. As the prominent group continues to promote its exclusive circle of members, they constitute an academy, an ad hoc equivalent to the Royal Academy in which they all recently showed. Instead, there have to be new ideas emerging for the market to remain focused on this country. New ideas are easily stimulated by imaginative curatorial projects. Since these are not coming from the museums, nor from public spaces like the Hayward or ICA, we remain dependent on the artist-run spaces for such initiatives.

- 1 Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 337.

OCEAN FLOOR BANK

20 Dec - 28 Jan
Fri-Sun 12-6pm
P.V. 15 Dec 6-9pm

The gaze directed skywards captures rays of light that have travelled countless millions of miles across space; a journey in this direction is pointless (J.G. Ballard's "Voices of Time"), because DNA itself, the ultimate script, is deteriorating; the DNA clock is counting down, and the gaze out towards space is metaphorically extinct and directed at an area without myth.

If the surface of the ocean, the mirror reflecting the stars, is reversed, and the gaze directed downwards to the depths of inner-space, the journey is now through time, but reversed; as if, not only is the D.N.A clock counting backwards, but the journey is now a metaphorical journey down the spinal column (Ballard's "The Drowned World").

In descent the gaze is de-gendered and the binary opposites of subject and object are stripped by the acid of mythology. The fish here wear the mystical representations of multi-valent identities: both as strait-jacket inhibiting evolution and as a suit of armour preventing prying intelligences.

Ocean Floor is an exhibition which deals with the notion of "reason" through a play of ideas around issues of "myth" and "identity".



Ocean Floor organised by BANK as part of Dog+mental Gallery Dog,
34 Underwood Street, London December 1996

Thanks to > Peter Wollen / Michael Corris / John Roberts / John Russell, Simon Bedwell, Milly Thompson & Andrew Williamson of BANK / Mark Harris / Yinka Shonibare / Mark Wallinger / Jean Fisher / Gavin Turk / Jaki Irvine / John Swift / Michael Holland / Alex Jeffery / Jamal Butt / Sarah Trigg & video-sound team / Stewart Russell & London printworks trust / Rasheed Araeen / Steve Bell / David Austin / Kipper Williams / Stephen Friedman Gallery / Anthony Reynolds Gallery / Gavin Everall & Serpentine Gallery / Sadie Coles HQ / Lisson Gallery / Oliver Summer & John Hansard Gallery / White Cube / colleagues at uce

Special thanks to > Patricia Bickers / Paula Smithard / Ruth Blacksell

Patricia Bickers / chair of the conference is an art historian and writer on contemporary art. She also lectures at University of Westminster and is editor of *Art Monthly*.

Peter Wollen is an author and a professor of film at University of California.

Michael Corris is a reader of the school of Art & Music at Oxford Brookes University. He is also an artist, writer and curator.

John Roberts is an author, critic and curator.

BANK is a group of artists.

Mark Harris is an artist, writer and curator. He is also lecturer in art at Cardiff, University of Wales Institute.

Yinka Shonibare is an artist.

Mark Wallinger is an artist.

Jean Fisher is an artist and writer on contemporary art. She is also a lecturer at University of Middx. and is editor of *Third Text*.

Gavin Turk is an artist.

Jaki Irvine is an artist and writer.

David Burrows / convener & editor of *Who's Afraid of Red White & Blue?* is an artist and writer and lectures at University of Central England.

BANK presented a video *A Day in the Life of BANK* at the conference. For the book they have produced cartoons of the conference proceedings.

Gavin Turk presented a series of slides at the conference. The images reproduced in the book are from that presentation.

Jaki Irvine presented two video works at the conference.

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