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# M19: Global Systems Meltdown [Spring 2001]

m19\_cover

Including: Martin Conrads and Ulrich Gutmair's interview to Bruce Sterling, Hari Kunzru on futurecasting and scenario-planning, Benedict Seymour on the modern metropolis' regeneration game, Mike Holderness on Microwave crowd-control weapons, Corinna Snyder on the ghost of dot com fever and corporate attempts to reanimate it. Includes Ceci n'est pas un magazine, a kind of Mute & Metamute manifesto.

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## Being Aquatic

ByLuciana Parisi

Although its evolutionary theories were by no means unanimously accepted, Elaine Morgan's 1982 book *The Aquatic Ape* caused something of a perceptual seismic shift and formed the perfect companion to her 1972 feminist classic *The Descent of Woman*. Luciana Parisi suggests our cyberspace surrounds make Morgan's number due to come up again.

As all good cultural anthropologists know, Y2K is a time bomb which decrypts the computer calendar's digital codes, disrupts the linear counting of the Gregorian clock and sets time back to zero. More than a regression in the history of civilisation, this cipher marks the cybernetic rewinding of evolution and, in doing so, drags the first woman Eve down into the digital sea.

In contrast to the tempo of the long-accepted story of gradual evolution, adaptation and sexual selection, this time bomb ticks far too fast for the Time-Chains of the civilised Monkey to survive. Zeros and ones unleash an unnatural devastation upon the *Descent of Man* comparable to the aquatic traumas of the African ape when it was forced to move from the jungle to the sea during the obscure bio-geological period of heat and dryness known as the Pliocene.

Continental drift, infernal droughts, the impact of comets and the flooding of plains have repeatedly looped mammals back into the waters and triggered serious somatic mutations. Expounding this theory, Elaine Morgan's *The Aquatic Ape* (1982) and, earlier, *The Descent of Woman* (1972) challenged conventional evolutionary wisdoms built on the figure of the terrestrial savannah ape. In Morgan's history, the primordial cave of Man Hunter gives way to the salty aquatic space around the Danakil Island in Africa, where quadruped apes living near the coast were forced to migrate into the waters.

For 12 millions years, the Pliocene saw the continent's forests dry up: starting from Central Africa, the drought rapidly forced mammals to immerse themselves in the sea. This sudden change generated the unnatural scars of the Aquatic African ape who walked into the sea on two legs, vertically aligned her spine in order to breathe, lost her body hair and acquired webbed digits to swim more smoothly. Morgan's evolution shows how the new aquatic habitat disentangled eroticism from reproduction (by disconnecting it forever from the uterus and substituting a rear approach to sex with an aquatic ventro-ventral proximity) and, through the water's 'three dimensionality', made the movement of her spine more fluid. As Morgan explains, these were swift and unnatural changes which forced the line of hominid terrestrial evolution to deviate forever.

When the African continent was engulfed by the sea, she says, our aquatic ancestor crossed the narrow gap from Africa to the Eurasian land mass. The diasporic circumnavigations of the globe are not an invention of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, the evolved, wise monkey. Described by Morgan as a rapid succession of evolutionary shocks, the aquatic experiences of the middle passage are, in effect, programmed into our bodies as memory.

Samuel Butler, the infamous author of *Erwhon* (1872), already acknowledged race memory. He believed that “an instinct can evolve as if memory were inherited”. Tapping into the zeroed matrix of the aquatic continuum - the cybernetic U turn from the waters to digital waves - mnemonic marine tactics short-circuit the evolutionary ladder of Eve, the reproductive wife of the terrestrial ape and plug the webbed digits of the aquatic ape into cyberspace. Our ancestor knew about swimming long before she met any hunter. If surfing has become the default motion capture of cyberspace, it is because she learnt to surf marine tides long before she learnt to eat meat.

Dr. Luciana Parisi <L.ParisiATbtinternet.com>

More at the Aquatic Ape Theory page maintained by Dewi Morgan, Elaine Morgan’s grandson:  
[<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5168/aat.html>]

## All The World’s Beverly Hills 90210

By Francesca da Rimini (aka Gashgirl)

Its shiny, happy faces have been relegated to cheap slots and re-runs on digital TV, but Aaron Spelling’s cult teen soap Beverley Hills 90210 knew better days. So popular was it that even those inured to its soft-focus version of the-meaning-of-life started seeing a certain kind of truth in it. One of those was cyberfeminist **Francesca da Rimini** (aka Gashgirl) whose online exchange shows the unique interpretative power of her ‘90210’ Pin Code

Remembering lickedy-slit edges and ragamuffin days... Most of the early 1990s I spent online at LambdaMOO. As GashGirl/Puppet Mistress/Brenda\_Walsh my days were crammed with sex and sudden death, and I was inured to my RL resident B-boy’s daily taunts of “Get a life, loser!” With the slimy sluts of VNS Matrix and some alt.fratboys, a cruel playpen remix of the teen soap Beverly Hills 90210 was created.

Mutating through the drift-zones populated by the terminally spoilt, post-codal, perpetual adolescents were fragments of text liberated from US military sites, government think tanks and Indigenous resistance. In ‘94 such spectral manifestations of Power provided a de-coherent mirror to the networked alpha-numeric futures of J18, S26, M1 where the ghosts of the walking dead from around the world would join together to spit in the bloated faces of the blue-eyed sons of star wars.

Is there any significant difference between Dylan\_McKay and GW\_Bush or are they, along with designer toad Tori, more bastard spawn of Aaron Spelling?

@go 90210

### look Brenda\_Walsh

Bad Girl Shannen Doherty gives in to the psychic nausea caused by the insidious family values of the squeaky clean Walsh family. Inspired by her beloved Marquis de Sade, she embarks on a new career as crack dealer, snuff filmmaker and porn queen.

**o what a perfect day, i want to spend it on glue**

**Brenda\_Walsh** says, L'amor is a hard blade that cuts heaven open. Some nights I feel that I have fucked every orifice on every soul on this desolate planet of dreams. All history is pornography and all women are ghosts and should rightly be feared. // **Kelly\_Taylor** says, we must be instantly aware, globally dominant, selectively lethal, virtually present. // **Dylan\_McKay** says, I'm horny. // **look Steve\_Sanders**

Steve has had a severe decline in personal morale since his Mummy died (she gave him the only realwoman love he has ever known). His crystal meth habit (he's David's dealer) and penchant for deviance have left him jaded...

**chemical pale sleep, dreamstained sheets**  
**no centre, ragged edges**  
**zeroing tolerance**  
**gene raiding hyperdecay**  
**fox bites tail**  
**invisible artillery follows nurse with wound**  
**endlessly uncoiling a spectacle of irretrievable situations**

**Dylan\_McKay [to Brenda\_Walsh]:** are you hot for me tonight baby? // **Brenda\_Walsh** says, there's not a moment goes by when I don't crave your drug-fucked personality.

**he is her G8, her dumb genius**  
**flight capital exponentially decreasing with each birthday**

**Kelly\_Taylor** says, control requires robust negation systems

**come, she said**  
**come be my killer application**  
**come be my next five minutes**

**Kelly\_Taylor** says, war is the continuation of politics by other means // **Kelly\_Taylor** says, the art today is to attack everything one encounters // **Brenda\_Walsh** pounds **Dylan\_McKay's** **beauteous ass mercilessly.** // **Steve\_Sanders [to Brenda\_Walsh]:** Hey, what's going on, babe...c'mon, Uncle Steve needs some attention... Look, I know that I'm not the frat man I once was but really, Dylan? That corpse?

**Dylan\_McKay** nearly drowns in the hot tub but his ego keeps him afloat. // **Brenda\_Walsh [to Steve\_Sanders]:** We are monstrous, multiple and we're worried for your safety. BTW, you've had a bit of a penchant for Dylan yourself from time to time. // **Dylan\_McKay [to Steve\_Sanders]:** how about it, Steve? I know you've always fancied me.

**generals suck each other's oily stripes as snow caravans crawl the trail of tears ring a ring a rosies, pocket full o stealfies bend over banker, lights go off all fall down!**

**Brenda\_Walsh [to Dylan\_McKay]:** I'm still ravenous. // **Dylan\_McKay [to Brenda\_Walsh]:** suck on this baby!" // **Dylan\_McKay** opens his pants for **Brenda** to have a good grab. // **Dylan\_McKay** says, "god damm - I've premature ejaculated again :( too much go again

**21 and his uranium all depleted**  
**ah, hispania**

Steve\_Sanders [to Brenda\_Walsh]: okay babe, you've tried the rest, now get the Jim Walsh best...

**coma life trawls drearily towards the inevitable  
as summer drops like acid into global spring**

**intolerable signs—ruined, all ruined  
can't believe—this trash life.**

## The Tomorrow People

By Hari Kunzru

For a good few years before the NASDAQ began to crash, a certain synchronicity existed between where California's tech companies said they were going and where their share price went. Did they know something the rest of us didn't? Or did they have better kit? One popular tool they might have used is 'futurecasting', a cybernetically enhanced mode of storytelling. Last summer **Hari Kunzru** went to California to meet the Global Business Network, an eclectic cabal of futurecasters, and its founder Peter Schwartz. One year on, how bright does the futurecasters' future look?

[IMAGE]

Last summer, just before the dot com bubble burst, I visited San Francisco. The Bay Area local press was already running nervous articles on high burn rates in the new tech sector, and noting the advent of 'pink slip parties' held by sacked dot com employees, which were starting to replace the lavish corporate launches of the previous three years. Nevertheless the atmosphere at the Webby Awards, a glitzy ceremony for the beneficiaries of the technology boom, was upbeat and self-congratulatory. Limos pulled up to the Masonic auditorium on Nob Hill, disgorging twenty-something CEOs and their highly-styled partners. Outside the ceremony, activists protested about the destruction of the working class community in the Mission District, which was being pushed out by spiralling property prices. No one took much notice of them. They were yesterday. Inside the auditorium, standing on the shoulders of the workers from Adobe, C|Net and Google trying to out-cheer each other like rival fans at a sports event, was tomorrow.

In retrospect, no one seemed aware of what was on the horizon. The crash was neither predicted nor planned for. This has an irony to it, since prediction and control of the future were the cornerstones of the ideology driving the dot com bubble. Much has been written (a lot of it by Californians) about California's 'future-orientated' society, with its focus on envisioning, creating and profiting from new trends and technologies. From the 1849 gold rush to the space race (orchestrated by West Coast aerospace companies), California's history has been driven by a sort of techno-economic transcendentalism, a yearning for a New Jerusalem on the temporal (Tomorrow!) and physical (The West!) frontier; dot com was simply the latest incarnation of an established trend.

For a period in the 1990s confidence in the future and in the possibilities of prediction and control was exemplified by *Wired* magazine and by the Global Business Network, a strategic consultancy specialising in 'scenario planning' a technique of futurism with its origins in cybernetics. Both *Wired* and GBN became associated with a visionary teleology, an account of a near future in which the accelerated deployment of new technologies of computer networking would lead to an exponential rise in economic prosperity and an attendant social and cultural renaissance. This rhetoric was instrumental in selling dot com to a techno-illiterate (and initially techno-indifferent) public. Its millenarian quality ("Everything You Know Is Wrong" was the poorly-judged slogan for the publicity campaign which launched *Wired UK* – a doomed venture in which I played a role) appalled and excited people in equal

measure, and arguably it was the cascade of this rhetoric through the mediasphere that inflated the bubble in the first place.

The high-water mark came with the publication in *Wired* in 1997 of an article by a group of GBN affiliates entitled 'The Long Boom'. "The world" they wrote, "is faced with a historic opportunity". In a book-length expansion of the article, GBN co-founder Peter Schwartz argues that computers and telecommunications are increasing the productive capacity of the economy and that big companies are becoming more flexible and responsible. Soon a whole new generation of technologies will provide clean energy, better health and massively-increased longevity. Schwartz states his belief that "with the right choices" the economic boom which the US and Europe is enjoying "has the potential to pull the whole world into it, allowing literally billions of people to move into middle-class lifestyles. And that spreading prosperity will help bring about beneficial changes far beyond the economy, changes that could truly make this a better world."

By the time of my visit, a body of criticism of this position, mainly from writers in Europe, had emerged. In this view Schwartz and his organisation are not 'objective' futurists, but proponents of a particular free-market libertarian political position which has the not-coincidental effect of reinforcing America's global hegemony. GBN is proud of the network of experts they use to provide insights for their clients. Economists, business theorists and financial bigwigs like Robert Hormats, vice-chair of Goldman Sachs, are mixed with politicians, including the odd former US Undersecretary of State. There are technologists – a very A-list crowd – including the founders of Sun Microsystems, Broderbund Software and Thinking Machines, neurobiologists, anthropologists, complexity theorists and even a paleontologist. There are writers and musicians – Peter Gabriel, Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno, Douglas Coupland, William Gibson and beat poet Gary Snyder are all on the books. There is even an Apollo 9 astronaut. To the European critics this list has a quasi-masonic quality, reading like a roll of Californian illuminati.

*The Long Boom* is what GBN calls a 'scenario', a form of structured story-telling about the future. It is an example of a style of futurism which stems from cybernetics, the creation of Norbert Wiener, who dreamed of a science of rational prediction and control. During the Cold War cybernetics was hugely influential on both sides of the iron curtain. In the USSR Wiener's books were at first banned (a 1954 Concise Dictionary of Philosophy defines cybernetics as a "reactionary pseudo-science"), but during the fifties the climate thawed and in 1960 a decision was taken to found the USSR's first cybernetic institute at the Novosibirsk academic village, Siberia. During the latter part of the Khrushchev era and into the Brezhnev period, cybernetics became increasingly integrated into the running of the Soviet state, and was applied particularly intensively in the grand plan of centrally managing the economy. Economic data was collected and fed into Moscow mainframes, which determined 'rational' price and production levels that were then imposed on the regions – with disastrous results.

The USA made its own gargantuan command-control blunders, notably with the RAND corporation's attempt to cybernetically manage the Vietnam war. RAND conducted a vast information-gathering enterprise, with every patrol, every engagement being recorded on standardised forms whose impersonal mathematical language of 'contacts' and 'kill ratios' became part of the popular jargon of the war. Throughout the years of America's engagement in South East Asia RAND ran this data through cybernetic models which influenced both policy and military strategy – RAND simulations (which failed, for example, to take into account NVA morale as a factor) were a primary justification for the bombings of North Vietnam and Cambodia. The greatest debacle came in the latter stages of American engagement when a simulation exercise was conducted to find out how much longer the war would continue. The response given by the computer was a date several years previously.

Like these Cold War policy-makers, Wiener had always believed in the application of cybernetics to social and cultural systems, and the idea of modelling the variation of such systems over time was an idea which held great fascination for futurists. Since no mathematics existed to make such models, it remained a tantalising dream, a dream which seemed to promise profound, even transcendental revelations. This extension of this American science into the realm of ideology was largely responsible for 1950s Soviet hostility to cybernetics. At RAND, futurist Herman Kahn, who had previously worked with John Von Neumann on the ‘Monte Carlo’ simulation of the effects of a nuclear explosion, turned to the ideas of social cybernetics to model entire nuclear wars. Kahn chaired the Strategic Objectives Committee, which proposed a variety of simulations that became the basis for US strategy throughout the Cold War. Kahn’s wargames played through a variety of scenarios, taking imaginary conflicts through forty-four “rungs of escalation” from “ostensible crisis” through “justifiable counterforce attack” to “global nuclear war.” Utilising game theory models like the ‘prisoner’s dilemma’, Kahn’s scenarios had a social element, political situations being represented and considered through an increasingly ‘soft’ non-mathematical technics of modelling.

Kahn’s published works were widely read, and the concept of cybernetically modelling the future spread from military to business circles. Corporations began to allocate large budgets to cybernetic futurism. In the mid-sixties the oil company Royal Dutch Shell hired an eccentric Belgian, Pierre Wack, to run its planning department. Prone to burning incense and chanting mantras in the office, Wack cut an unusual figure in the corporate world. He was also a disciple of two seemingly contradictory things – Kahn’s RAND scenarios, and the thought of the central Asian mystic Gurdjieff. From RAND he learnt the importance of research, of collating accurate information about the present in order to make predictions – and through the abject failure of RAND’s methods in Vietnam, the uselessness of simply trying to mathematically extrapolate the future from the present. From Gurdjieff, he took the idea that a certain number of ‘remarkable men’ exist in the world at any one time, people whose knowledge has the power to change the world. From a fusion of the two he invented ‘scenario planning’ a technique where organisations create a number of ‘alternate futures’: visions of how the world might be in ten, twenty or fifty years time. To do this they work with ‘remarkable’ outside thinkers and are encouraged to step away from the ‘official future’ – whatever the mainstream picture of things might be in their organisation.

Scenarios, in Wack’s definition, are like science fiction stories, except with rules. No aliens. No disregarding plausibility. GBN founder Peter Schwartz likens them to movie scripts and it seems no accident that they thrive in California, home of Hollywood. There are, Schwartz stresses, some differences. “SF is not bounded by reality. You can rewrite the rules of reality. With scenarios you can’t. SF is intended to stimulate and entertain. Scenarios are about improving decisions. The purposes are quite different.” If a company has, say, four different futures in front of them, they can see where their business would fit into each possible scheme of things. Making pictures helps notoriously hidebound corporation man ‘think the unthinkable’. In a world where the birth rate is tiny, what does that do to his sales of disposable nappies? How will a CD pressing plant fare if everyone starts listening to music online?

Schwartz worked under Wack at Royal Dutch Shell, and when Wack retired, took over his job. Schwartz’s own scenario-planning claimed its first major victory when he accurately predicted the possibility of an oil crisis in the early seventies. When it actually happened, Shell was able weather the storm much better than their competitors. Scenarios, unsurprisingly, became a topic of interest to organisations around the world.

Schwartz is a dapper bearded man with sparkling eyes and the engaging manner and studiedly-open body language of a great salesman. We sat down in his Bay Area office, beneath pictures of his kids and a plastic model of the Mars Lander, and he said things into my tape recorder like “we are on the brink of extending human life very far into the future”, “there is about to be an energy revolution” and

“in 2050 we will look back on the turn of the century as a time of monumental change.” He spoke rapidly, with a slickness honed by countless conference debates and corporate presentations.

“When I set out in this business twenty-seven years ago,” he started, in one of those introductions which ought to cue the opening of a bio-pic, “I wanted to figure out what was a better future and how to get there. I was a student activist in the 1960s, I was a leader of the student rebellion at Columbia University, big in the anti-war movement, all that. But as a result, at the end of it I knew what I didn’t like, but I didn’t know what I did like. I was honest enough to look at the communist world and say, the extreme Left, that ain’t it. I looked at a lot of what I saw in the US from conservative politics on the Right and said, I don’t like that either – so what’s a better future? So I set out to answer the question. I set out to get a career that would allow me to answer that question.”

[IMAGE]

By the eighties Schwartz had left Shell to join Californian think-tank SRI, an outfit which among other things first conceived of the computer mouse. Then in 1987, along with a group of former colleagues from SRI, from Shell and even further back in his countercultural past, he formed the Global Business Network. One of GBN’s co-founders was Stewart Brand, one of Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, publisher of the Whole Earth catalogue and founder of the Well, the prototypical online community. Other GBN associates include the ex-manager of the Grateful Dead and Peter Coyote, movie actor and member of famous San Francisco commune The Diggers. With such figures blended in with the rest of the ‘remarkable men’, the GBN is inevitably a management consultancy with a strong utopian flavour.

GBN has built scenarios for a vast range of organisations, from civil engineering firms to the government of Colombia. The Christian Brothers of Rome recently hired them to look at the long-term prospects for their celibate religious order; they are having (understandable) problems recruiting young members. One of GBN’s greatest successes came in 1991, when they went to South Africa to see if futurism could help move the country out of its apartheid-era impasse. The resulting ‘Mont Fleur Scenarios’ showed that the only future in which South Africa could potentially thrive was one in which there was real power-sharing.

In all the GBN sessions I attended, from a corporate all-dayer at a Berkeley hotel to an open meeting addressed by a British futurist with a specialism in the environment, there was a scrupulousness about exploring a variety of possible alternatives, and (among the insiders at least) a shared set of intellectual reference points – more or less what you would expect from a crowd of middle-aged San Franciscans – Gregory Bateson, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, the green movement. Nothing appeared to justify the European suspicions of a sinister plot; not the unpretentious offices in a shabby part of Oakland, nor the good-natured banter and faintly hobby-horse-ish point-scoring among the participants. However in writing *The Long Boom*, Peter Schwartz has crossed the line from disinterested futurism to political advocacy, in the process breaking the cardinal rule of a scenario planning session – that there should always be a set of alternatives. *The Long Boom* contains a single well-developed scenario, and a call to make it come true. Schwartz’s book has been positively-received by decision-makers around the world – including (in Britain) members of the Prime Minister’s policy unit and on the Bank of England’s interest rates committee. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the ‘rich man’s club’ of industrialised nations, was so excited by the original ‘Long Boom’ article that it convened a special conference to discuss it.

Driven by high tech optimism and unabashed celebration of American innovation, *The Long Boom* is Peter Schwartz’s ultimate scenario, what he describes as his futurist “PhD thesis, written in the light of everything I’ve learnt over the years.” The argument turns on a single point – that all the economic laws of the industrial era, like scarcity of resources and diminishing returns, are about to collapse. This

is the defining New Economy idea, and Schwartz (with his co-writers Peter Leyden and Joel Hyatt) builds it into a seductive vision. In the future, he argues, economic value will not be based on physical stuff, but on the circulation of knowledge. Already much of our economy, from news journalism to mortgage advice is based on information, rather than tangible things. Even in very physical processes like car-making, 'knowledge' infuses everything, from the new body styling which attracts customers to the just-in-time delivery system which gets the parts to the assembly line. Unlike objects, which are finite and scarce, knowledge is abundant. You can't quantify how many ideas there are in the world and every second of the day people are having more. Yet some of them can create real value. So making money in the New Economy is about skillfully extracting value from this torrent of information, not labouring to add it to raw materials. Think of the world this way and the logic of the dotcom bubble becomes self-sustaining. The proposition is that a new dotcom's knowledge, the idea behind it, an idea whose sole physical embodiment may be in its business plan, is what makes it valuable. In its extreme form, this is a kind of transcendental dematerialisation, the soul of economic value unshackled from its troublesome material body. This is the proposition which, in the last year, has ceased to convince the global technology markets.

*The Long Boom* imagines a future where this explosion of abundance goes global. It also argues that apart from these magic-wand changes of economic laws, a series of crucial technological advances are in the offing, which are likely to have profound effects on the world. "Right now," Schwartz points out, "there are 500 new drugs in trials in the US. Typically there are maybe 25." Add to this the knowledge from the human genome project, and the drug treatments and gene therapies it will bring, and the result will be a massive improvement in health and longevity. "You and I have a shot at a hundred and fifty" he tells me, beaming. "Our kids may live for centuries." Add to this the possibilities of fuel cells, nanotechnology and computerisation, and you have some compelling reasons for optimism.

The final requirement for a 'Long Boom' will be a political one. "Going global," says Schwartz, "is the first principle. I understand the fears of the anti-globalisation protestors, but I think they're fundamentally wrong." He paints a picture of a 'virtuous circle' where the integration of the global economy leads to innovation and accelerates growth, which in turn spreads affluence, decreases poverty and produces a wave of tolerance. Comfortable, well-off people won't want to fight each other. In the contrasting 'vicious circle', in which the global protestors put up "trade barriers", the effect is a spiral of economic stagnation, poverty and intolerance.

Schwartz stresses that the Long Boom is a 'vision' of a possible world that could easily not come to pass. Many problems could short-circuit it – from ecological crisis to fragmentation caused by the current plethora of small ethnic conflicts. Thus he has devoted much of the last few years to bringing the gospel of the Long Boom to the ears of influential people round the world. Asked about his British contacts he mentions Geoff Mulgan, founder of influential think-tank Demos and member of Tony Blair's policy unit as 'a fan'. Deanne Julius, until April one of the three-person committee who set UK interest rates at the Bank of England, though sceptical about the possibility of a Boom, presented a paper to the OECD outlining three policy frameworks to facilitate it.

To many people Schwartz's 'vision' of free market capitalism trickling down wealth to the poor is, to say the least, a little rosy. He dismisses such fears. "The Left aspires towards making the world a more just and fair place, whereas the Right says that's not possible. My view is that I'm not sure you can make the world a more fair place, but you can help those people who have been left out by creating sufficient abundance – and history now shows us over the last fifty years that if you have high growth and an abundant economy eventually everybody benefits. Is that fair? No. Is that equitable? No. But if you ask people at the bottom, whether they would prefer that to being poor – would I like to have my house even if my house isn't as big as his house, the answer is 'yes thank you, I'll take the house'! If

you ask the poor, they're as realistic as anyone else."

Confronting the other major argument against globalisation – that the main reason Americans are so enthusiastic about it is because it will extend their cultural and economic dominance of the world, Schwartz is equally unfazed. "What we think of as Americanisation – Coca-Cola, McDonalds and baseball caps worn backwards – is very superficial. The values and cultures and histories and belief systems that make up a culture are very deeply embedded. You can't change cultures easily even if you want to." He believes that globalised cultures might acquire an initial American veneer, which will then even out, in a harmonious cultural exchange. The question of whether globalisation will just reinforce American economic hegemony is similarly dismissed. America may get there first, but soon the rest of the world will catch up – as long as we don't disregard Long Boom principles.

Much of the book version of *The Long Boom* reads like a statement of America's manifest destiny to lead the world into the future. At one point Schwartz describes the westward movement of something called the 'axis of innovation', a kind of cultural ground zero which shifts through history from Greece and Rome, through Europe and England to land in the USA, flooding it with the "power to influence the rest of civilisation in the long term." Although America's current position as global superpower is undeniable, this kind of rhetoric ("where the future is being born") feels like nothing so much as a sales pitch. The notion of California, in particular, as somehow literally existing in the future ("five years ahead", "ten years ahead") is a common feature of much Bay Area conversation. Remember, in the new knowledge economy, talking yourself up is a literal method of generating wealth.

However, despite the dark suspicions in Europe that GBN are a sinister force, when I asked around in SF dot com circles, people laughed. GBN were seen as hippy relics, people from the old days of the Net, who seemed out of place in the new accelerated corporate San Francisco, the San Francisco where you couldn't find a parking place, clubs had door policies, and anyone earning less than \$100,000 a year was being pushed out across the Bay. "GBN", as someone said to me at a party on the roof of the Industry Standard building, "are, like, so nineties".

Yet though GBN's star may be fading, 'the future' is likely to remain the site of a highly-charged political battle. The alliance of cybernetic futurism and emergent New Economy ideas in which information is held to be a direct generator of economic value mean that information about the future circulates as an increasingly-important commodity. It exists both as mathematical formalisations (computer simulations, economic projections, weather reports, futures trading) and informal descriptions (science fiction cinema, religious prophecy, venture capital) as well as the formal / informal hybrids created by professional futurists.

West Coast business culture, steeped in cybernetics, has always cannily promoted positive feedback between future-oriented media and capital (notably in the Cold War use of science fiction about space exploration to promote aerospace industry research). Looking back at the media generated by the computer boom of the last ten years, it is clear that the effect of futurist fictions, projections and predictions has been to fuel our desire for a technology boom. From *The Matrix* to *Enemy of the State*, product-placed Hollywood visions (ambivalent, dystopic, yet sexy) of the awesome reality-controlling, reality-producing power of computer networks have contributed to an explosion in the technologies they hymn. As New Economy ideas take hold, a subtle oscillation between prediction and control is being engineered. The consensus is that virtual futures generate capital, which is to say that successful or powerful descriptions of the future have an increasing ability to draw us towards them, to command us to make them flesh. Early twentieth-century avant-gardists revolted in the name of the future against a power-structure which had its source in control and representation of the past. Today the situation is reversed. Now the powerful employ futurists, and draw power from the futures they endorse, condemning the disempowered to live in the past. The present moment is stretching, slipping

for some into yesterday, reaching for others into tomorrow.

A year on from my visit, the atmosphere in the Bay Area has changed beyond recognition. The classic Californian disaster movie scenario has been played out across the peaceful abundant meadows of the technology boom. Towering inferno, great earthquake, market crash. The ideas in *The Long Boom* no longer seem backed up by short term trends in stock prices, though certain other key aspects of the scenario (pharmaceuticals, nanotechnology) have been gathering pace lately. But it will take more than a market downturn to kill futurism. The dream of a predictable, controllable tomorrow, a tomorrow which can be created, or at least planned-for, is still tantalisingly present on the horizon.

Hari Kunzru <hari@metamute.com>

>> Illustrations by Simon Worthington

## D.I.Y. Rules

By Simon Worthington

At this, the first revamped and DiY-themed ‘Transmediale .01’, the zeitgeisty subjects of user collaboration and social software enjoyed top billing. Under the aegis that “the DiY approach is now increasingly assuming the form of a cultural movement”, the conference cast a net around a zillion different activities. Subjects for panels, workshops and screenings ranged from the empowering (How to Build your own robot), the romantic (Love in the age of digital nomadism) to the ever-present (‘Music and Internet’, ‘New forms of distribution’). Awards with categories like ‘video’, ‘interactive’ and ‘software’ provided another way into the movement. In the latter category, artistic software, Netochka Nezvanova and Adrian Ward ended up sharing the award. Interestingly, the panel’s remit here was to choose them on the merits of their algorithm – as opposed to their code’s ‘outputs’ (i.e. what you see, hear or feel).

In a sense, these ‘two’ winners (Nezvanova not quite fitting the criteria for individuality!) represent different genres of computer code-based creators: respectively, the collective identity of an anonymous ‘hacker’ network and the maverick programmer. At Transmediale, Netochka Nezvanova was represented by a paid human ‘avatar’ (in code jargon – otherwise known as an actress). The collective she ‘embodied’ for this occasion produce a software application named *Nebula.M81 – Autonomous*, an aesthetic processor of html code. Co-winner Adrian Ward has created a software package in the style of Adobe Illustrator or Corel Draw which works in tandem with you, mimicking features such as those of Microsoft Word where the application attempts to pre-empt your action, but takes even more liberties – corrupting you, making decisions of its and employing generative algorithms to make you both work towards your finished ‘artwork’. What both encapsulated for the panel was a rejection of the utility function of computer code in favour of something more frictious and exploratory.

Simon Worthington <simon AT metamute.org>

## Born in the USA

By Ulrich Gutmair and Martin Conrads interviewing Bruce Sterling

Celebrated science-fiction author; chronicler of hacker wars and founder of Green design movement ‘Viridian’, **Bruce Sterling** is also bastard child to Texas’ phenomenally powerful oil industry. In this capacity, he knows a thing or two about how America’s big boys do business and, after nearly a decade, a fair bit about the leadership style of their very own President, George W. Bush. During a

recent visit to Germany, only a couple of weeks prior to Bush withdrawing from the Kyoto agreement on Climate Change, **Ulrich Gutmair** and **Martin Conrads** quizzed Sterling on what positive political intervention might look like in the Brave New World of immanent eco-catastrophe

**Ulrich Gutmair:** You live in Texas and have spent a lot of time under the rule of George W. Bush, so perhaps you could tell us something about his politics? From what I've heard, he represents this idea of 'compassionate conservatism', which means deregulation and having churches which feed the poor. What do you think his presidency will mean, in terms of change, for the USA?

[IMAGE] **Bruce Sterling:** In terms of change for the USA, probably not very much - it's just a restoration of the Bush dynasty. All the old hands on the Ford administration and the Bush administration are back in power and he's just a young man who is the acceptable face of that particular establishment. He's very popular in Texas. He's not a megalomaniac or anything. He is just a young man of privilege who happens to have inherited this office.

You could think of it as the Hohenzollern dynasty, this sort of imperial- military power. The USA is the world's policeman and our Secretary of State is now the former Chief of Staff of our army – generally not a good sign, you know. If somebody says: "our General is our Secretary of State" that generally indicates that the Cruise Missiles are warming up in the basement. But it won't be about Europe, it will all be about Iraq. I think the Bush dynasty is convinced the only real interests America and the rest of the world have are resources – specifically oil. We've had an energy blackout in California and a lot of the campaign was centred around energy policy.

The idea is "go out there and dig, dig, dig". Not only are Bush and his father oil men, but the Vice President is also a very, very active oil man. I think it's kind of a segue back from the 'New Economy' as represented by Gore to the 'Old Economy' as represented by these oil moguls. What does this mean from a European perspective? Basically nothing! I don't think Bush even knows Europe exists; he can't tell Slovenia from Slovakia, he thinks the Americans have no interests whatsoever in the Balkans. They'll moan and complain about the idea of separate European armed forces, but probably nothing will happen just because it's too much trouble.

But it's not like he's a maniac or anything. There are people in the American Left who are coming on like the guy is a lunatic: dyslexic or insane or possibly stupid. It's always a bad mistake to call any politician stupid – it gives him an opportunity to do whatever he wants and not have to take any blame for it. Underestimating your opponent is one of the *stupidest* mistakes you can make.

**UG:** You say the Bush presidency won't have any consequences for Europe. But, on the other hand, you as the leader of the Viridian movement – which is concerned with the Greenhouse Effect – should be interested in all these oil people. Unlike Al Gore, I don't think they will be remotely interested in having a Green policy. Could you explain what the Viridian movement means?

**BS:** The Viridian movement is kind of my hobby crusade against the Greenhouse Effect. I'm a futurist and I'm very interested in issues that aren't a big deal now but will soon be pressing on people. I really think the Greenhouse Effect is starting to change the climate pretty rapidly and it's going to be one of the most important things about daily life in the 21st century. People looking back from their perspective of, say, 2020 and reading contemporary political coverage will just be shocked that nobody was addressing this issue. It'll be like: were they in a dream or sleepwalking? What was the problem? So I make a lot of noise about it.

It's true there are the oil people but, in point of fact, oil people and private enterprises are doing some pretty good work in the way of the Greenhouse Effect. I'm very impressed by what BP does. If you're gonna reform the energy structure you can't just march with pickets, you actually have to build a different energy structure – I mean you have to *build* it, and it's *dirty work* – like, with shovels! It's not something you do by pressing the F1 function key. Actually, George Bush's house in Austin has been solar-powered for quite some time. He's on the Green Programme in Austin. Some of his supporters are not just energy people but right-wing Greens – sort of an unknown thing in Europe because there's such a strong Red/Green coalition – but I'd consider someone like Bill Ford of Ford Motor Company or John Brown of BP basically to be right-wing capitalist Greens. There's no reason why you can't make a lot of money selling green energy, there's a business model there. It's not like a dot com, it's like 'voltage dot com' and there's this wheel that turns around and people get paid for that, it's not a difficult matter. I'd hope to see some progress made there but, let's face it, America is not the leader in that issue – Europe is, straight out and across the board! So people around the world shouldn't expect America to carry the torch for every single thing. There are just some things Americans are no damned good at.

**Martin Conrads:** How do you see the political impact of someone like Ralph Nader? Will there be a continuity for the next voting period? Or was his just flash in the pan success, a way of breaking up the two big political opponents?

**BS:** I don't know, I mean they're very determined to go drill in Alaska, sort of drill off the cost of Florida. And oddly Jeb Bush, the governor of Florida, doesn't like the idea of oil derricks off the coast of his state. He thinks it's going to interfere with tourism, so there may be a struggle between the vice president's oil buddies and the president's brother over the spoils here. Eventually I think Green issues will rise more and more to the fore because rich people don't like having their houses blown down in monsoons. It's a drag when the weather starts decaying because, hey, the rain falls on the rich and poor alike. Okay, it's not some kind of socialist equity issue, but in the American two party system, third parties are traditionally corrupted. So I'd expect the Greens to have their clothing stolen. It's just a question of who gets it – is it like the right-wing Green thing that's represented by these new corporate Greens, or is it the sort of old fashioned Red/Green coalition that Gore tried to put together – which sort of kind of worked, because Gore got more votes than Bush?

The Left is actually making a pretty strong showing in the US right now. It's an open question as to which party is better able to address that particular issue. Right now very few people feel it. It can only get worse – it's like failing to take out the garbage, it smells bad but not intolerably bad, but you just know it's gonna smell worse and worse, it's just got to. It's a chronic problem and someday somebody is gonna do something about it. I don't think the initiative is gonna come from the US though. If it's coming from anybody it's gonna come from the Danes. Like, right now West Texas is full of giant Danish windmills from the Vestas corporation. I mean, it used to be that Texans would go into the North Sea and build these giant derricks and now it's all about Danes showing up and building these giant wind derricks! That strikes me as a little weird but, you know, hey, they deserve it – they invented them! They've got the best wind technology around.

**UG:** I found a short quote, something you said about the whole idea of 'Islands in the Net', and all the Hakim Bey followers who took it as a very liberatory model, the idea of having these distributed zones?

**BS:** Yeah, the Temporary Autonomous Zone...

**UG:** ... you said that the TAZ will ultimately be more advantageous to the deregulation of capitalism than to the forces of liberation.

**BS:** Yeah, I think the TAZ – in the way that Hakim Bey describes it – is an accurate reflection of something like an illegal rave. But, you know, if you want to engage in illegal activities and you want to use that particular technique, it doesn't matter what your political convictions are. Just like everybody can pick up a protest sign and march in the street. It doesn't matter whether you wear a red shirt, a brown shirt, a green shirt, a white shirt or a black shirt – I mean, *they are all shirts!* It's not like long-haired drug addicts have some kind of copyright on temporary autonomous gatherings that show up, accomplish something illegal, and then scatter in all directions leaving no trace. What that really sounds like is illegal North Sea dumping. That would be like: "I've got trash, you've got trash and we could get rid of it by recycling it. But that costs a lot of money – so why don't we have like a trash-dumping rave? Well just get this cool old ocean-liner and take it out into the international waters where no-one is looking and throw everything over the side and then we'll all go back where we came from, just like: hey man, party"! Instead of looking at each other saying: "boy are we cool, we fooled the cops one more time", they'd be saying: "wow, we saved a lot of money! Let's do this again"!

**MC:** There is this project by some people from Oklahoma building this 'New Utopia' island in the Caribbean, some libertarians. Have you heard of this project?

**BS:** I've heard of a lot of 'Island Republic' bullshit over time, yeah.

**MC:** Are they just fools, or is it the newest dream of the American frontier, or is this the contemporary format of an autonomous zone, or is it just hype? Is it taken serious in the States?

**BS:** Well, the Sealand thing got a lot of press. These Linux guys said: "well, we're gonna build up a rogue node on the Internet and do all this stuff..." or whatever. But my question is: what's the revenue model? There are a lot of counter-cultural organisations all over the place. There are lots and lots of religious communes, like the Amish in the USA, that are sort of semi-autonomous. The Amish can't be drafted and they don't pay certain amounts of taxes, they're tolerated because they're cute. The main reason they are tolerated is they look after themselves, raise their own crops and create their own buildings.

And then you got a place like Christiania in Copenhagen, where a bunch of guys took over this military base 27 years ago where it's like: "you know, we're *Autonomen*, and we're gonna squat this place and build our own beautiful rainbow flag hippie republic here". So, what do they actually do to make money? Mostly they sell hash, and they sell it to people who are coming in from the rest of the city. Now if they were just selling to each other and they could sustain an economy that way that would be okay, but that's not the truth. In point of fact they are merely parasitic. They're just retailing their autonomous legal status in order to break the law of some larger society and then retail their sort of semi-criminal enterprise.

So, if we gonna go build an independent island – and it's actually economically self-sufficient – that would be interesting. That would be very interesting. But if you just build one because you're trying to profit on this black marketeering scheme sooner or later somebody is just gonna step on you, maybe not this week, maybe not next week, but....

The other problem you might face is that as soon as you set up your TAZ somebody else will build one right next to you and then he's gonna come shoot you to get your turf. That'll be my prediction. Either two of them show up and there's a gang war between two independent republics both trying to seize this market, or else there's some kind of internal power struggle among the pioneers over whether it's really about autonomy or about the black money. Over the long term it's always about the

black money! As long as there's black money it's like: "Cut to the chase. Just give me the cash! Forget the independent hand-waving temporary autonomous bullshit! Just give us the fucking cash"! It's like Grenada. Maurice Bishop: "They have turned their guns on the masses!" No, Maurice, they've turned their guns on you, okay? It was on you! You were the guy getting shot in the tennis court, not 'the masses', okay? It's like running around, doing your little thing here, arming the population and preaching, preaching, preaching. What was it about? Offshore money! All you have to do is look at the history of those things and you can predict how that's gonna shake out. If you can maintain the ideology and also have a productive economic system – if you could do that the Soviet Union wouldn't have collapsed, frankly. What's the problem there? No jogging shoes, man! No toilet paper! That's the problem. The economy does not function, it still doesn't function!

**MC:** In *Heavy Weather* you described how the run on information about the weather brings a whole system into terminal velocity. At the time the New Economy crashed in Europe the climate was also crashing and still is. There were those big rainfalls in England, for example. Are you surprised by this coincidence? Or is it like two sides of the same coin and that, in fact, the run on weather data is the great hope for the New Economy after the crash?

**BS:** Well, I think we're gonna see a lot more economic crashes and a lot more weather crashes. Like, the Champs-Élysées has its trees blown off, Britain is knee-deep in water, the Alps are melting and the glaciers are melting. It's becoming pretty severe. By 21st century standards we're really in the early days of the Greenhouse Effect. This is not the bad part. The bad part is ahead of us. This is just sort of early-warning signs, like a light cough and a sore throat compared to emphysema and lung cancer. The dot com crash will probably be behind us in a couple of years. People don't want to pay absurdly inflated amounts of money for companies that cannot realistically supply their revenue stream. There's nothing new about that, it happens all the time, it happened in railroads, and with a lot of different economic booms. It's very typical to over-value certain things. It's a bubble, like a Japanese real estate bubble or something, but it's not like the weather suddenly is gonna get better. The economy might suddenly get better really easily, because a lot of productive capacities are gonna been taken away from imaginary Internet companies and devoted to Internet companies that are actually changing the means of production and distribution. In other words, it's not an economic revolution or a new economy if I can merely talk gullible people into giving me money for nothing. That's not change, that's just a fraud. But I think there's plenty of potential for real change, really serious changes in the way things are made, in the way they are sold, in the way they are shipped, in pretty much every aspect of the industrial order. I don't think there is any way to stop that, it's just from now on it's gonna look a lot more like an actual economy and a lot less like a carnival.

As for the weather, it's gonna be probably getting worse for the rest of our lives. Our children may see the worst of it. Even if we shut down every carbon-emitting thing and every methane emitting thing and every greenhouse gas tomorrow, there's still a tremendous left over surge with the warming oceans and the changing currents and the rest of it. We're not gonna be able to do that tomorrow – it's just physically impossible, even with the greatest political will in the world and a warlike state of mobilisation it's gonna be very difficult to uproot that *enormous* network.

They are huge, those energy utilities – bigger than continents. They are the biggest machines the human race has ever built and they are literally on at the present: they're in every home, every industry, every airport, every nation. There is no nation that has no electricity. Sometimes there are areas that haven't been electrified yet, but there's never been a government that said: "Electricity? We don't want any of that stuff!" That has never happened under any system. Alright, the Amish don't want electricity. And people don't want to be Amish, believe me on that one! Even the Amish aren't real happy about being Amish, they just do it out of stubbornness.

My hope is that, if there's convergence there, it's not gonna be so much a convergence between the stock market's instability and the weather's instability, it'll probably be a convergence between electrical networks and digital networks. In other words, if the utilities were a lot smarter they'd probably be a lot more efficient. And I see some hope there – you might be able to see the utilities reform as rapidly as say, the telephone systems. But even then I don't have a lot of hope because there are plenty of telephone systems that still don't work. It's fragmentary, there's WAP in Europe, four different cellphone things in the US and a different DoCoMo in Japan. And there are analogue ones and digital ones, it's gonna be messy. You're just deluded if you think that something like energy reform is easy. If it were easy we would have done it during the first OPEC embargo. We would have done that in the '70s. We put it off. We put it off for thirty years and now we are going to pay the consequences of not having done it in 1970. It's just gonna get ugly.

**UG:** The idea of the Viridian design movement really reminded me of Buckminster Fuller's idea of a design revolution; to have an ecologically oriented design functioning in a very general way. Would you compare your ideas to that?

**BS:** I couldn't compare myself to Buckminster Fuller. He's an actual engineer and I'm somebody who talks a lot. Let's put it this way: I have a personal grudge against the Greenhouse Effect. I'm a child of the oil industry in Texas. I feel a personal sense of responsibility about what's been done by this industry because, hey, it fed me, it educated me. I'm a child of privilege thanks to this industry and I don't think that the people in it are evil. I'm not like denouncing my own father – he was my father! It was what we did. There is nobody in Texas who isn't implicated in oil – Texas is synonymous with oil. But when there was an environmental disaster in Mexico and the jungles in Chiapas caught fire the sky over my hometown was grey for two weeks and the plume went as far north as Chicago. I'm not prepared to ignore that. I'm not under the illusion that I can change it by going into the office and hitting the F2 function key, but I'm not gonna stay quiet! *I dissent!* I'm a dissident on that issue. I won't collaborate any more! I'm going to do what I think I can do in the most effective way I can think of.

Now, I could have started the Viridian *political* movement and supported the Green Party in the US and tried to do some fundraising. I live in a State capital and I have friends in politics, I understand how that system works, but I don't think that's a good place for a science fiction writer to be investing his energies. I'm more interested in issues like industrial design and technological development. If there's anything that I think science fiction writers are really good at it's making technology sexy. That's sort of where we shine! You take some gizmo nobody has ever heard of and you deploy it in some way where people say: "Wow, that's cool, that's the way forward"! That's the sort of very typical social role. So, I've written science fiction novels about this. I wrote the book *Heavy Weather* which is a Greenhouse Effect disaster novel which I wrote in 1994. But that didn't change anything. It's not like the guys at the Kyoto conference were like: "Oh, yes, Mr. Sterling's novel changed my entire....". It's just a science fiction novel and I really feel it's time to carry the war to the enemy here.

When I look at social groups I could talk to – the police or emergency health services or the military, who are gonna have a big role in environmental disaster, or architects, or literary people or academia or internet people – there are a lot of different groups, all of them will be affected by the greenhouse situation. But I think the group I'm most interested in reaching are industrial designers, really. And not even industrial designers that much, because the real industrial designers are busy designing stuff. The people I'm really interested in reaching are industrial design *teachers*. Although the Viridian list doesn't have a lot of working designers on it – it's like, Philip Starck isn't gonna stop making toothbrushes to come see – I want design teachers getting really interested in my list. There are lots of little projects there and they have students and they are always looking for imaginary schemes.

When you are in design school you don't get to make anything, you just have to make *imaginary* things, paper projects – and we are very good at that! You need some paper projects, boy, Viridian list has got plenty of those! It's something we specialise in. Things that don't exist that we wished we had, that are really objects from a better world. I think that's one of our most effective tactics: just to describe consumer objects that are very attractive that you can't have because your society is too dirty and too poorly organised to be able to produce them. To look at these projects and to imagine owning them is to be forced to imagine a different world. I think that's a better way to get people into that frame of mind. Give them the artefact! Don't give them a lecture about the constitution! It's like, give them the jogging-shoes. Let them see the toothbrush. Give them the CD, don't give them a talk about free speech! Let's see some free speech! You wanna live in a society where women are liberated? Let's not talk about female oppression! Let's see some liberated women doing something that shows their freedom!

**MC:** So what you're talking about is the opposite of dead media – it's forthcoming media?

**BS:** Dead media is about dead forms of media and the Greenhouse Viridian movement is all about making our current energy systems extinct. How do we kill them, how do we obsolesce them, make them obsolescent in the quickest and least blood-thirsty way? How do we drive these things out of existence and replace them with something more effective? I'm very interested in obsolescence. Obsolescence is the future in reverse. You wanna know how things are gonna arrive on the scene? Well watch how they leave. It's all the same curve, it's all the same phenomenon. Maturity, decline, age, senility and death are just as much a part of the human condition as sex, conception, birth, youth, puberty. People don't like to talk about that as much but that's the same phenomenon. There's no real reason to divide up the future of technology from its past – it's all technology and if you really want to understand it you have to understand the whole thing, you can't sort of pick and choose.

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## Free Improvisation Actuality

By Ben Watson

In the wake of the Napster debacle and the recording industry's recapture of the main means of music's commodification – the recording – **Ben Watson** considers Free Improvisation, a music 'groupuscule' and attitude which bypasses the music ownership wars, unpredictably

[IMAGE]

>> Free Improvisation with Steve Beresford, Uithorn, Holland, 1977 (ICP's 10th anniversary festival), Photo © Gerard Rouy

Conventional thinking contrasts classical music to pop, assigning the technologies of score and recording to different epochs. Free Improvisation doesn't credit the significance of such 'progress': on the contrary, classical and pop are viewed as symptoms of an identical malaise. For Derek Bailey and Lol Coxhill and the hundred-odd international musicians who play Free Improvisation in public, recording is simply the technical apotheosis of the score. Following on from the radical critiques of classicism made by both Free Jazz and the 'indeterminate' compositions of the 60s, Free Improvisation focuses on a time-based art's most basic virtue: a cultivation of unpredictability as an end in itself. On the way, Free Improvisation is also an elegant answer to the accusations of recuperation and commodity-fetishism which Situationists, Art Strikers and Neoists hurl at visual

artists. Here is an uncommodifiable art-happening that leaves no saleable residue, a poetry of modernist form that truly melts into air.

In 1919, Kurt Schwitters declared in *Der Sturm* that “a perambulator wheel, wire-netting, string and cotton-wool are factors having equal rights with paint. The artist creates through the choice, distribution and metamorphosis of the materials”. Free Improvisation is aural Dada: any sound source – from traditional instruments played in outrageous ways to crisp packets, Pokémon watches or G3 PowerBooks – is permitted. Sampling and digital editing are ubiquitous, but subject to the judgement of the ultimate receiver: the distinctly analogue interface of airwaves and the human ear. Free Improvisation, one of the few areas of cultural activity that adheres to dada principles, comprises one of the most tenacious and vehement groupuscules in today’s fractured music scene. Although Improvisation is currently enjoying an Indian summer – Sonic Youth are proselytisers, Tortoise are into it, Blast/Disobey puts its veterans in the lime light – it has weathered Bop, Prog, Fusion, Glam, Punk, New Romanticism, the Jazz Revival, Minimalism, Authentic, Rave, Lo-Fi, the New Complexity and Electronica without losing an (indeterminate) beat. It is fierce, angular, abstract. The timing is super tight, closer to stand-up comedy than to the smudge and fuzz of Post-rock or Ambient. If you can’t play, forget it. Its controversies, schisms and exclusions resemble those of revolutionary politics. Claims to have “broken out of the Improv ghetto” by including such no-nos as tonality, regular rhythm or a hummable melody surface at regular intervals. But, far from accessing the energies of pop or funk, these invariably signal a failure of nerve, a lessening of tension, a lapse into feeble ingratiation.

It’s not always great. Reputations burgeon, musicians coast. A recent complaint – voiced by Bailey, and also by bassist Simon Fell – is that you can predict the music on most Improv CDs by simply checking the names on the box. Musicians develop a personal ‘sound’, and people pay to hear it: what is deemed evidence of ‘genius’ is actually the reassurance of the already-known. So the malign influence of the star system impacts on even these refusenik domains. However, there’s probably no other scene where musicians and listeners are more critical of these and other failings. Free Improvisation: music for those who prefer the chill of actuality to the reliability of the concept.

Ben Watson

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All Angels T: (0)20 8348 9595 // Cenophelle T: (0)1932 571323 // Flim-Flam T: (0)20 8809 6891 // Free Radicals T: (0)20 7263 7265 // Klinker W: [<http://www.theklinker.freereserve.co.uk>]

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Sound 323, 323 Archway Road, London N6 5AA. E:<[sound323@aol.com](mailto:sound323@aol.com)>

**Radio:**

Infrequent

**Print:**

Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Da Capo)

Jeff Nuttall, *The Bald Soprano: A Portrait of Lol Coxhill* (Tak Tak Tak) and Ben Watson, *Derek Bailey & the Story of Free Improvisation* (Quartet, forthcoming)

## **Top Of The Eco-Pops (Global Analyses Fight to get to Number One)**

By William Shutkin and Critical Art Ensemble

William Shutkin and Critical Art Ensemble beg to differ about ecology and capitalism

[IMAGE]

## CAPITALISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

**William Shutkin**, author of *The Land That Could Be: Environmentalism and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*, gives five reasons for believing that democratic capitalism and vital eco-systems could happily co-exist.

### **1. Capitalism is a Construct.**

To believe that capitalism is inherently limited vis-à-vis environmental goals is to give up the battle before it's been joined. Like all man-made systems, capitalism is constantly being shaped, revised, and reinvented by those communities who adopt and use it. As with any human institution, it is subject to abuse and malfeasance, but has proved increasingly open to progressive reform through shareholder activism, corporate social responsibility techniques, social policies, and other interventions.

### **2. Capitalism is Only Part of the Equation.**

As an economic model, capitalism is just that. It does not and cannot purport to be a comprehensive system of social governance or social values. Capitalism on its own can be an awful environmental menace (not to mention its sometimes evil social effects). But economic activities are conducted within a larger system of social relationships, and rely on legal and political systems to temper and manage their effects. In a representative democracy and liberal legal order such as exists in the U.S., this means there is the potential to deal with capitalism's negative environmental externalities i.e., pollution and waste, through social policy, regulation and adjudication. That firms and markets have yet to be effectively regulated or held accountable for their environmentally harmful actions suggests that the political and legal orders have not functioned as effectively as they should.

### **3. The Paradox and Promise of American Environmentalism.**

No other nation on the planet can claim an environmental tradition as strong and enduring as the American environmental movement. No doubt this is in part a function of the fact that as early as the beginning of the 19th century, concerned citizens started to worry about the pace and scale of environmental destruction brought about by mercantilist enterprises bent on exploiting natural resources as part of a simultaneous nation-building and commercial effort. Capitalists, and Americans in general, have historically resisted efforts aimed at putting the public interest ahead of private gain. But as Americans have become more educated about and engaged in environmental efforts, the demand for more 'social democracy' and social responsibility has grown, suggesting the strong possibility of a greener capitalist culture over time.

### **4. No Other System's Proved More Environmentally Responsible.**

Unfortunately, no other social order has proved more environmentally responsible than America's capitalist/liberal democratic system. Every large, industrialised nation has experienced or is in the process of experiencing large-scale environmental degradation owing to the depletion of common resources and the attendant negative environmental externalities. Because of the sheer size of the American economy and a uniquely aggressive consumer culture, the nation's ecological footprint is larger than any other. But we must not assume it has to be this way; the reformist tradition within the capitalist/liberal democratic system is robust and can help create new environmentally friendly ways of reforming economic development.

## **5. Natural Capitalism and Sustainable Development.**

Emerging theories and practices of economic development are finally coming to recognise the immeasurable value of nature's goods and services and the malleability of capitalist constructs. Ideas like 'natural capitalism' and 'sustainable development' suggest there are feasible methods for protecting natural resources while supporting viable economic activity. From green design and industrial ecology to green tax policy and sustainable land use planning, new policies and techniques are being developed to 'green' the way firms and market behave, and the way communities and regions physically grow and change over time.

William Shutkin

## **MARKETING DISASTER**

U.S. tactical media collective **Critical Art Ensemble** give a 6 point account of the symbiotic relationship between market behaviour and ecological crisis and its economical leveraging power.

### **1. Hyperbole as Ideological Fuel.**

Disaster, catastrophe, and crisis are part of a rhetoric that is structured around associations with the extraordinary and the severe; however, this language system is just a mundane and routinised form located in everyday life spectacle among populations saturated by Information Communication Technology. Crises – real, virtual, or impending, medical, ecological, military, or economic – are an ideological fuel intimately tied to capital that function to either raise or protect it.

### **2. Storm in an e-Cup.**

For example, the current economic crisis in the US amounts to little more than a market correction in regard to over-valued corporations, the loss of faith in the vapourware known as dot-coms, a reaction to the Asian market strife, and some yuppies losing money on the stock market. The US is in no way threatened by a serious economic depression, but it is enough of a catastrophe for Bush to withdraw from the international global warming agreements because corporate profits would be damaged.

### **3. It's Only a Crisis if the Market Says So.**

Global warming isn't a crisis, because dominant corporate culture knows that to define it as such would diminish profits rather than increase them. Once profitability reaches a point where it is worth the investment to find a symptom-arresting solution, the market will do so, and global warming will be granted the status of an authentic ecological disaster.

### **4. Crises of Scale.**

It's not just the status quo that loves a good crisis; activists use the rhetoric of crisis too. They have to, since it's only the rhetoric of the extreme and the excessive that generates action. Unfortunately, resistant initiatives and unpopular fronts can only generate minor (in the Deleuzian sense) crises. These have no exceptional profit potential (such as the impact of the AIDS crisis in the third world), and tend to primarily affect only those who are considered to be unnecessary to the efficient functioning of the profit machine. Minor crises are good for an occasional news report, or to help impoverished relief agencies raise money, but they will not affect policies on the distribution of capital. Ultimately, minor crises are just bad investments.

### **5. Reclaim the Crisis: Delink.**

So what can be done by resistant groups? Not that much in terms of changing the general dynamics by which sign value and exchange value are deployed. Battles over the placement of a crisis within a hierarchy that dictates the immediacy and intensity of response are primarily in the hands of corporate or national sovereigns. However, alternative macro-tactics do exist. For example, the current initiative by Treatment Action Campaign in Africa to start an alternative network for pharmaceutical production

and distribution (South to South) of medicines to treat HIV is a sign of hope. Its plan is to create a coalition of states and manufacturers that can raise the necessary capital to produce the desired drugs at an affordable price. Strategically, it is a plan to delink from the global market (something even more frightening to the first world than the independent production of drugs).

## 6. Empire Fights Back.

As one would expect, first world counterattacks have already begun. In South Africa, for example, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (a coalition of American, German, and British drug companies) has already filed a suit to stop the initiative, claiming patent violation. This situation is complicated by the refusal of the South African government to declare a state of medical emergency that would give South Africa compulsory licensing for the manufacture of generic medicines.<\*> In this situation, we get a clear example of what a real crisis is (as opposed to a spectacular, virtual, or impending crisis) – a point of desperation in terms of loss and deprivation that makes a tactical revolt against global market oppression necessary rather than profitable. And we see what a ‘free market’ actually means – a global market dominated by nomadic capital and structured to serve its interests alone.

Critical Art Ensemble

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<\*>For up-to-date details on the recent climb-down over accessibility of generic medicines to South Africa see [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/aids>]

## Who’s Copying Who?

By Philip Sherburne

Taking a sidelong glance at ‘that Napster business’, **Philip Sherburne** puts a new stress on the ‘copy’ in copyright

[IMAGE]

While it is true that the Internet has revolutionised the distribution of content, Napster’s ascendancy points to an unforeseen shift in the circulation of content. Today I looked up from my keyboard to see that a song I had downloaded an hour before was already being uploaded off my hard drive by another user. An old Detroit techno track by Theo Parrish certainly doesn’t draw the same demand as Britney and Limp Bizkit, and yet there it was, called up by another invisible user and ricocheting along an interminable canyon of networked obscurity. It felt – at least for a moment – as though my Napster friend and I had been singled out as nodes, as though it were the song that owned us.

Napster, as we have all read by now, has problematised the ownership of intellectual property to an unprecedented degree. With the advent of not just the unlimited reproducibility of texts, images, and songs, but also their nearly frictionless *circulation*, old concepts of copyright and ‘fair use’ seem as worm-eaten as the coats our copyright lawyer forefathers are buried in.

Information wants to be free, we are told time and time again, and it’s true – but not in monetary terms. Information wants to be free in the same way that energy does: the Internet has shown us that, like electricity, information seeks the quickest path to the ground. Only information’s ‘ground’ is precisely this free-floating circulation. Napster is merely the symptom of info-desire. As a recent

manifesto put it, information is “absolutely free of will, a constant flow of signs of lives which are permanently being turned into commodities” (<http://textz.com>). Indeed, Napster represents a new moment in the history of the acquisitive urge. A co-worker of mine is so enamoured of MP3s that he has developed scripts for the sole purpose of nabbing MP3s automatically, the moment one is posted to a newsgroup. His desk piled high with CD-Rs brimming with MP3s, he has amassed so much music he can’t possibly listen to it all, ever. (This is nothing new, of course; Walter Benjamin writes of his own library in similar terms. But digital compression, distribution and circulation facilitate collecting to new orders of magnitude). Just as for years the bourgeois have attempted to become an image of the objects they acquired, today’s cyber-savengers have shown the desire to be petrified, like fossilised wood, in the form of their amassed information.

The majority of the debate over file-sharing has missed the point. Despite the RIAAs bad-faith claims, Napster is not a threat to the livelihood and the rights of artists, writers, musicians, and ‘content producers’. The system was already rotten long before Napster chanced upon the scene. And despite some Utopian pronouncements, it’s unlikely that peer-to-peer will launch the stone to topple Goliath. Capitalism is remarkably slingshot-proof – although, as a supporter of the independent recording industry, I hope that the destabilising force of Napster is enough at least to tip some badly-needed reforms in their favour.

No, the most crucial question that Napster raises with respect to ownership is the question that all consumers must ask themselves: what owns us? Objects, information, our own petrifying desire to submerge our subjectivity in limitless circulation?

Philip Sherburne <[philip@askjeeves.com](mailto:philip@askjeeves.com)>

Napster: [<http://www.napster.com>]

## You Lost All My Money

By David Mandl

As the gamblers’ rules that make stock markets bullish in the first place start producing waves of losers, **David Mandl** wonders what the bear market’s scapegoating frenzy is all about and advises the dot com cry-baby losers to read the manual

[IMAGE]

>> William Holman Hunt, *The Scapegoat*, painted in 1845-5

In a wonderfully cynical essay by David Mamet, the playwright and former poker hustler applied the lessons learned from a shelf-full of gambling books to the no-win business dealings that people have to engage in every day. Attempting to distil that knowledge down to a single pithy statement, he settled on this gem, from George Bernard Shaw: “All professions are a conspiracy against the laity.” Even when going up against unavoidable landlords, bosses, and phone companies, it’s well to keep those words in mind. If, however, you choose to be dealt in on a fixed game, or take on business men armed with thousand-page rulebooks you’ve never even read, you’ve got no one to blame but yourself. For the unfortunate acquaintance of mine who invested his life savings in a taxi partnership without reading the fine print, or the steady stream of naifs who drop \$20 bills in rigged three-card monte scams on the streets of Manhattan, the message is the same: “Our game, our rules.” *Caveat gambler.*

Nevertheless, people can get pretty upset about losing 80% of their money in a scheme touted as a sure thing by everyone from the secretary of the Treasury to Jesse Jackson. And really, who can blame them? So, the search for the person or persons ‘responsible’ for the stock market crash of 2001 – with trillions of dollars of wealth already destroyed – has begun. We’re already painfully familiar with the list of names it has produced: the celebrity research analysts who shamelessly touted worthless stocks to drum up business for their investment-bank employers; the net entrepreneurs who used Monopoly-money options to dupe their employees into working seventeen-hour days for sub-minimum wages; and the media pundits who reeled in hordes of slaving viewers with better-than-sex bull-market yarns. But was anyone’s arm twisted? Weren’t these cry-baby investors motivated by unbridled greed in the first place? And why didn’t they complain when the NASDAQ was going *up*?

Just as in the tired debates about responsibility under a ‘free market’ (do teenage girls *have* to emulate anorexic supermodels? Is anyone forcing billions of people to eat at McDonalds?) things aren’t quite so simple. Whose fault is it if people are ridiculed for having their money in a 2.5%-per-annum checking account? Or that otherwise sensible couples approaching retirement age can be persuaded that they’ll be living in the street in a few years if they don’t move everything they’ve got into the stock of some stupid ‘internet incubator’? Or that hastily trained ‘financial advisors’ cut corners when disclosing risks to their unsophisticated customers? There have even been tacit admissions of guilt here and there, as in the new Regulation FD (Fair Disclosure) requiring companies to release their financial data to everyone at once rather than to a select group of industry insiders (as previous practice had it).

Still, anyone born before last week should have known better. The bait-and-fleece cycle that we’ve just witnessed – complete with junk IPOs, ‘new economy’ gurus, talk of a 20,000% increase in the Dow, and proletarians picking stocks based on their zodiac signs and winning – was practically a cliché, a pantomime that’s been played out over and over again and well documented even by insiders (like Benjamin Graham, author of the 1949 value-investing bible *The Intelligent Investor*). Say what you like about the ‘science’ of economics, but there are certain rules that aren’t going to be broken even in this millennium: anyone who sincerely believes that everyone can be a stock-market multimillionaire simply hasn’t been let in on the joke. Or as the old saying goes: “If you’re in a poker game and you don’t know who the patsy is – it’s you.”

David Mandl <dmandl AT panix.com>

## Just Because You’re Paranoid

By Mike Holderness

Microwave crowd-control weapons have a distinguished history in paranoid lore. **Mike Holderness** revisits some choice theories only to see one return in very real form

[IMAGE]

>> Photo - Air traffic controller on the USS Enterprise guide the strike aircraft in and out of Iraq, 28 Dec 1998

Funny thing, paranoia. Consider the notion that ‘da guvmint’ might build exotic crowd-control weapons, specifically microwave weapons. For thirty years, mentioning such ideas irrefutably labelled you as either a stoned first-year student or the sort of person whose thoughts are controlled by transmissions from the Russian Embassy.

I heard it from stoned students in 1971. Five years later I'd been one, Dropped Out, Maaan, and was rejecting green-ink Letters to the Editor. Now such people self-publish. A quick Web search turns up 'Microwave Mind Control', dated 1998, by "Europe's leading expert on remote viewing, psychic spying and Psi-warfare".

Another search produces a Proper Medical Paper suggesting that tinnitus – ringing in the ears – in people diagnosed with schizophrenia doesn't respond to treatment that works in others. Interesting, given the cultural correlation between paranoia and fascination with 'vibrations'.

The story took a turn for the weirder in – when else? – 1984. Some of the women camped outside the Greenham Common air base in Berkshire, protesting at the nuclear cruise missiles the US Air Force had installed there, started complaining of severe headaches, drowsiness, irregular bleeding...

Now, there were a great many exceedingly sane women at Greenham. And protest movements do also always serve as care-in-the-community of last resort. Life on camp was stressful – between endless meetings and daily evictions – and not all the roll-ups smoked there were pure tobacco. Sufficient explanation for all the symptoms, say I: no need to invoke mysterious radiation from inside the base. Result: huge row in The Collective about patriarchal Science.

But the editor of *Electronics Today* – not a prominent lesbian-matriarchalist-feminist – took it on himself to go down to the base with some kit. In December 1985 he published the result: actually, yes, there was significant microwave radiation around the base. Oops, went the rationaliser. Probably an unintended side-effect of a USAF intruder-detection system.

Then, blow me down, on 26 February 2001 the US Department of Defense announces that it's developed a microwave crowd-control weapon. It uses millimetre waves to heat victims' skin to the point where they run away from the pain. It's been developed over ten years, they say, at a cost of nearly \$40M.

So, if they're telling the truth, maybe the paranoids gave them the idea and made the prophecy self-fulfilling. If not... well, maybe paranoia is the painful extreme of a useful faculty. The DoD's timing is especially nice given the simultaneous prediction by Admiral Eugene Carroll (US Navy retired) that its National Missile Defense will make the Fylingdales radar station in Yorkshire the new Greenham Common.

The silly thing about this weapon is that it's ridiculously easy to defeat. Look at the front window of an old microwave oven. That pattern of little clear dots is a 'Faraday cage'. An electrically conductive mesh will stop all electromagnetic radiation down to a wavelength of twice the mesh spacing.

So, chain-mail is too coarse, which is a shame for those who like to look well 'ard on demos. *De rigueur* garb for the tenth-anniversary Carnival Against Capitalism will be head-to-foot gold lamé fabric. Which will be nice.

Mike Holderness <mike.holderness@mcr1.poptel.org.uk>

## Russian Roulette, Mir - Style

ByJJ King

For a week in March the Mir crash-landing was a hot and reliable global news item. Finding himself in the Planned Target Zone, **JJ King** experienced how hot news feels when you're standing under it.

[IMAGE]

Mir: a heavenly body falling to earth? The poetry of a Cold War science project returning home. Right?

Yeah, right – unless you happen to be living bang in the zone of impact, waiting with the millions of other islanders who comprehend, with varying degrees of precision, that something really big is going to fall out of the sky somewhere (relatively) near by.

Welcome to Vitalevu, Fiji: a place where ‘satellite’ (let alone ‘Cold War’) means very little at all to the vast majority of the population, but in whose vicinity a 136-ton, bus-sized space station is going to come crashing down, spreading its molten debris across a 6,000-kilometre radius.

In the days before re-entry, I find myself unable to stop thinking about the litany of mechanical problems (fires, collisions with other spacecraft, malfunctioning oxygen systems, leaks – you name it) that have made, for the last twenty-odd years, the cosmonauts’ lives on board Mir a kind of extenuated Russian Roulette. It seems unjust that the Russians’ Roulette should now have redounded onto the Pacific Islanders (Nikolai Ivanov chief navigator of Mir, conceded in the week before the crash that there could be no guarantee that the thing would fall on target.)

These Islanders, who could never have participated in the so-called space-race, whose only experience of the Cold War and its fruits had been in the form of the nuclear testing carried out in the so-called Pacific Proving Grounds were now, as the zone of the least population (and therefore least risk) in the world, to become the proving grounds for the Russian technicians who could give ‘no guarantees’. Wouldn’t Washington, DC, I kept thinking, have had far more poetic potential?

The Japanese, not liking one little bit the one-in-a-hundred-million odds of getting hit by a falling chunk of Mir, went on national alert and set up a crisis management centre. Major airlines rerouted their Pacific flights. In Fiji, where there’s no government left to speak of following yet another coup, a national alert would have been problematic, to say the least, and there were no warnings. The people watched Mir’s fragments, held together for so long by the efforts of Russia’s spacemen, streaking silently in, eating up the night like jet flames. The pieces came down, someone said, in the ‘Planned [but not – did I mention it? – guaranteed] Target Zone’, somewhere between New Zealand and Chile. Not far off – but far enough for us. We had played Roulette with the Russians – and survived.

JJ King <jamie@jamie.com>

MIR information: [<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/osf/mir>]

## March For Indigenous Dignity

By Austin Class War

Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos’ dynamic identity has offered an unwitting foil for facile interpretation of Mexico’s recent March for Indigenous Dignity as a spectacular battle between leaders. Mexico’s peoples beg to differ. **Austin Class War** report back from the Zapatista caravan

[IMAGE]

Commentators on both the Left and Right have viewed the Zapatista’s recent March for Indigenous Dignity as an ‘espectáculo’ (spectacle). Media reports have nostalgically compared it to the March on Washington and Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. Success has been measured largely in terms of a peace negotiated between Subcomandante Marcos and president Vicente Fox, the Zapatista’s audience with the legislators and their positive image in the eyes of Mexico’s growing

middle class. Unfortunately, most interpretations accept the limited political framework of representative democracy by restricting the Zapatista's success to concrete achievements in the traditional political arena.

The March for Indigenous Dignity can hardly be reduced to the well-coordinated media event construed by some analysts and political activists. Far from a mere war of words and astute use of publicity stunts, it must be understood as a direct action by the Zapatistas and an enactment of autonomy by an increasingly organised civil society. The march was also a demonstration of broad popularity, a rolling *encuentro* (encounter) activated by Mexico's indigenous on the move. The Zapatistas did not, in fact, direct the indigenous led series of meetings and cultural events – attended by tens of thousands – which thronged the marchers' 12-state route. Mexico's indigenous peoples joined the Zapatistas and declared full support for the Commission for Peace and Reconciliation (COCOPA) legislation and implementation of the San Andres Accords. The degree of public and clandestine organisation triggered by the march was also part of its success as a whole. The march offered Mexico a new path to dialogue and dignity, while inviting Mexican civil society to acknowledge and celebrate its diversity. Over its 15 days, the 23 Zapatista *comandantes* and Subcomandante Marcos produced a significant number of reactive and strategic communiqués whilst also engaging in a profoundly humble dialogue. The Zapatistas spoke with a variety of sectors in numerous venues, including the over 250,000 who filled Mexico City's main square on 11th March. The march and its support revealed what the Zapatistas had been saying for some time: elected officials should be behind, not in front of, the people and should "lead by obeying". Governmental unwillingness to engage in open dialogue and underhand attempts to regain political ground through legislative sabotage threatened to provoke violent reactions from guerrilla groups and the urban disaffected alike.

Given that no indigenous community has ever addressed the Congress in their 500 plus years of exploitation, the march served to expose the extent of Mexican racism. The at times arrogant and fearful urban reception betrayed this history, manifesting itself in attempts to portray the Zapatistas as quaint and folksy (ridiculous in light of the massive national and international mobilisation that made the march and its political victories possible). To this Marcos countered: "No, we Indian peoples have come in order to...ensure that the inclusive, tolerant, and plural tomorrow which is, incidentally, the only tomorrow possible, will arrive..., we...have resorted to the art of reading what has already been sown yesterday, which is being cultivated today, and which can only be reaped if one fights, if, that is, one dreams." *El Sup* assessed the march as the moment when Mexico's most marginalised population made history, not through great feats by individuals that become the dead historical facts of books, but rather in movement, through action and engaged dialogue.

Austin Class War

For more information about Zapatismo in Mexico, Texas, and elsewhere, see [<http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave>]

## Daily Operations: The Weblog

ByJouke Kleerebezem

Over the last eventful decade, the fledgling World Wide Web of the early 1990s has faded into distant memory. **Jouke Kleerebezem** thinks a daily session of 'weblogging' can keep many of its original promises alive.

[IMAGE]

>> Photo: Easyeverything Ltd. ©2001

When Tim Berners-Lee ‘invented’ the World Wide Web over ten years ago, he designed his publishing system to enhance and preserve corporate memory. At Geneva based CERN (Centre Européenne pour la Recherche Nucléaire), a constant flux of knowledge, expertise and invention needed capturing and structuring and, above all, to be made productive beyond individual functionality and task setting. Berners-Lee’s design for this purpose had to be scalable, and so it proved to be – growing beyond its particular environment, beyond any size ever imagined by its inventor, exploding into the hosting Internet. The Web was conceived neither to carry Amazon or Napster, nor as a model for a new economy or the multi-channel ‘television’ it has come to be. The near real time communication most people use it for today is to a large extent their own invention.

Artist Michael Samyn once turned around the argument that we produce for (meaning: in reply to) a new medium. With the World Wide Web Internet, he suggested, he and the rest of us got precisely what we craved. In fact, we got what we had been waiting for for too long already, uninterested as we had become in top down management, one-to-many media and the star system (to name just a few of the nasty effects of old school cultural production, the art world *et al*).

One development in personal publishing which remains close and true to the ‘integrated writing, link creation and browsing’ which the Web allows for, is weblogging. Known for some years, this easily acquired daily habit of taking personal notes while building a library of annotated links to special interests increased exponentially with the arrival of dedicated free software and server space like Blogger and Pitas. Journal, homepage, professional reference, news service and editorial invention platform rolled into one, weblogging is an idiosyncratic narrowcast which, for many thousands of programmers, artists, designers, editors and writers, acts as their way of paying the daily new media dues.

Weblogging, networked personal publishing, builds a landscape of interests through which multiple, possibly competing, paths can find their way. Well written, at times humourous visual and textual narrative emerges most conspicuously in cleverly designed cross-linking. However engaging an individual weblog may be, it is best read in the context of other weblogs. Actually, by not distracting from their point of departure, but rather adding to it and inviting an informed return, some weblogs come close to those idealised sites where it might actually pay off to follow links. These anti link-and-run-school weblogs tend to pick and introduce their references meticulously. Their authors expand lines of thought by anchoring them in those of peers, allowing a kind of multi-authorship to form, in dialogue. These weblogs also break free from pre-conceived ideas of repetitive production, the linear process of refining, finishing, testing and shipping a product at market-strategic intervals. In a sense, they remain forever half-products, reaching an unprojectable momentum with individual readers and for individual interests.

Finally, for a reader of weblogs, the best way to structure (and savour!) one’s own eager consumption is by producing with the pack, and start weblogging. Ultimately, in times of content abundance (like ours) the read/write/link habit – agglomerating personal interests, ideas, observations, reflections; making the private public and the public private – is appreciated for its unlimited supply of focused attention.

Jouke Kleerebezem <jk@nqpaofu.com>

<\*>Tim Berners-Lee on networked hypertext production, in *Weaving the Web-the Past, Presence and Future of the World Wide Web by its Inventor*, 1998, Texere, ISBN 1-58799-018-0, page 33)

CERN [<http://public.web.cern.ch/Public>]  
Michael Samyn [<http://entropy8zuper.org>]  
Blogger [<http://www.blogger.com>]  
Pitas [<http://www.pitas.com>]

Weblogs, author's pick:

Notes Quotes Provocations and Other Fair Use [<http://www.nqpaofu.com>]  
Alamut [<http://www.alamut.com>]  
Generosity [<http://generosity.weblogs.com>]  
Eatonweb portal [<http://portal.eatonweb.com>]  
weblogs.com [<http://www.weblogs.com/about>]

## The Utopian Imagination Revisited

ByMute Editor

### Editorial

Including: Martin Conrads and Ulrich Gutmair's interview to Bruce Sterling, Hari Kunzru on futurecasting and scenario-planning, Benedict Seymour on the modern metropolis' regeneration game, Mike Holderness on Microwave crowd-control weapons, Corinna Snyder on the ghost of dot com fever and corporate attempts to reanimate it. Includes Ceci n'est pas un magazine, a kind of Mute & Metamute manifesto.

Since last autumn *Mute* has taken a break. The magazine needed a breather to assess some basic operational realities – the time we took out has been worth it (but more about that inside and below...).

Returning to editorial writing, nothing seems more pressing than the changes this half-year has wrought on the economy. The dot com and technology shares crash and – spreading outward from it – the deepening economic 'downturn' is the hot topic on everyone's lips, not merely a few Internet obsessives. All around, former enthusiasts are showing due remorse and bowing down before the (mysteriously recalled) dictats of monetary prudence and back-to-basics realism. In the background, meanwhile, jobs and paper millions are scythed down like there's no tomorrow.

But this 'tomorrow' was always the more interesting topic. (Which is also why it's a shame that so few of the mile-high columns of 'told-you-so' comment and outraged finger-wagging analyse why everyone believed so 'irrationally' in the New Economy's promises in the first place). As 'The Tomorrow People', Hari Kunzru's article on the history and adherents of futurecasting suggests, such business visioning tools are basically fictions about the future. During the heyday of the 90s digital revolution, the lion's share of those in use were overtly utopian to boot. Hardwired into company objectives or output and market growth targets, as they were from Silicon Valley to London and Frankfurt, they took on an authority they might otherwise have lacked but, well, fictions they remain.

Looking at its impact over the last decade, it seems global capitalism has left 'the utopian imagination' both unevenly distributed and underdeveloped. While utopian imaginings about the behaviour of stock markets, property prices and the flow of global capital are part of our daily routine, those disconnected from business plans and company objectives – beyond some simplistic stereotyping and hysteria – are barely given the time of day. All the proof one needs for this is the advance treatment given to

Britain's May Day protest by its 'objective' press. Or, perhaps more symptomatically, Anita 'Body Shop' Roddick's statement in London's *Evening Standard* that the measure of trustworthiness for any organisation, including those training peaceful protestors, is the possession of "offices and full-time staff". Movements with a decentralised *modus operandi*, emergent political philosophy and ragbag of hiccuping economic theorems just do not fit the bill, no matter how legitimate their criticisms of the status quo and dreams for the future.

And things don't change when the State makes communal and economic utopias its business. Benedict Seymour's article on regeneration in Britain's cities provides a case in point: could there be a better illustration of the clash between UK plc's capital and community-based utopias than what is happening in London? Even the government has been forced to realise it is impossible for most 'normal' people to live comfortably – notwithstanding the existence of community housing and urban development programmes.

The global explosion of counter-summits, anti-globalisation protests and consumer boycotting is leading inexorably to a focus on economics. Theories of 'participatory economics', psychologised economics (see 'Cyberhype') and 'open' and 'closed' economic systems (which factor in everything from the happiness of citizens to the state of the oceans) all point to a dissatisfaction with our current business manuals. The question is: is this economisation of life merely another step in the utopian fiction of global capitalism? If it is, Bruce Sterling (interviewed in this issue) doesn't think it's necessarily bad: his Viridian movement is founded on the belief that our desire to acquire nice, functional things may yet lead us out of eco-disaster.

For those who are interested, our website *Metamute* (now online at <http://www.metamute.com>) is to be our own location for editorial, technological and financial experimentation. If you want to see a basic outline of what we're hoping to do, click here.

Over and out!

Pauline van Mourik Broekman <[pauline@metamute.com](mailto:pauline@metamute.com)>

## All Tomorrow's Parties

By Corinna Snyder

Veteran of the dot bomb **Corinna Snyder** asks if revitalising the all-day office party of the past is the key to recovery or the road to perdition

[IMAGE]

During the 90s, a wave of digital services providers emerged who explicitly imagined themselves as hip play spaces in which to simultaneously develop, and undercut, corporate structures of power. They built sites and felt politically fulfilled by the fact that the information architecture was just inherently really cool and subversive. I have worked at one for the past year.

My company rode the bull market – aggressive growth, global expansion and a wildly successful IPO. And then the ride began to slow in the 3rd quarter of last year. Now, the firm is battling the effects of an emerging recession and the associated bear market. There's not a lot of work – not here, not anywhere. It's hard to be playfully subversive when no one's footing the bill. What does senior management do? Amongst other things, launch a 'morale-building' website. Corporate-sponsored morale-building efforts, especially ones designed to explicitly reveal employee dissatisfaction, seem inherently tragic. Like monuments, they're incredibly rich in conception but frequently all too barren in realisation.

[IMAGE]

This effort is emblematic of more than just the flaws inherent in the attempt to create an idealised corporate culture. The new economy stance that one could succeed and subvert at the same time, both eat the rich and be the rich, has come undone if only because dot com people aren't as rich as they used to be. In turn, I see colleagues discovering a past relationship between the company's 'cultural' values and its book value, and leading efforts to reinvigorate business through the resuscitation of culture. These attempts draw on some pretty outmoded forms of cultural reproduction – forms that, it was claimed, had been radically transformed in the age of the 'new economy'. The fashionable belief that social articulations of hierarchy and difference are now powerless as instruments of inequality but rather mere 'lifestyle' choices for an empowered populace is looking more than a little dubious.

The logic of a sympathetic simultaneity between cultural and economic value runs as follows. Once both were strong; now both are weak. 'Our culture' was trumpeted as one of the 'core values' that distinguished us from our competitors. So was our profitability. Now our valuation is at an all-time low, and so is the mood in the office. Once both were also thought to be transgressive; now both play by the rules. Ours was a business sector that showed such continuously anomalous relationships between established valuation ratios and stock prices that many believed that we were entering a new economic age, in which the old rules no longer applied. Now people show up on time and play golf.

But was our past culture the source of our past profit? Did our company succeed economically in the past because it broke the economic rules? Can profitability be regained by a reinvigoration of the cultural life of the past? Here, the cargo cult ideal has been made real: we are using digital communication forms to overcome a profound unease with historicity, turning back time to invoke a mythic past – one of egalitarian access to power. The moral site launches – all can communicate, but only the leader can moderate. We try to force the transient to become permanent by instantiating nostalgia for history. The call goes out by email: take off your headphones and turn your music up loud every Thursday, in the hope that the old will hear you and return to their old haunts, bringing with them herds of client buffalo. Sponsor an art month and a talent show. Act alternative, and maybe the old (new) P/E ratios will return.

Transience was once lauded – everything was changing, and that was a good thing, because a new paradigm was emerging that would shift the balance of power. Now transience is feared – everything is changing, and that's a bad thing, because the change was supposed to create stability, not more flux. The reason we wanted to redistribute power was that we wanted more of it – not so we could upset it, but so we could wield it. So what's new?

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>>Images

-Gustav Klutskis, 1931. The USSR is the crack brigade of the world proletariat

-E. Mirzoev, 1938. A giant Stalin amid Azerbaijani peoples celebrating the anniversary of the introduction of the new constitution of the Soviet Union.

## **Rainer Komers' quiet Pandemonium**

By Mike Sperlinger

**Mike Sperlinger** retrieves a gem from London's Pandemonium Festival, Rainer Komers short film B224

Rumour has it that German filmmaker Rainer Komers came away from the Pandæmonium Festival 2001, held at the Lux Centre in London, promising to make his next project on video. Certainly his film B224, shot on ravishing 35mm, looked classical – almost anachronistic, even – in the context of Pandæmonium’s combustible mix of ‘daft punk cinema’. Composed mostly of static shots, with no voice-over or music but with an exquisite attention to the recording of ambient sound, the film juxtaposes scenery, industry and people discovered along the eponymous autobahn near Frankfurt.

Komers catalogues his motorway marginalia – a Warner Brothers’ theme park, a family sunbathing by a river under a busy bridge, the relics of the area’s coal-mining industry – with silent, if compassionate, detachment. This total reliance on montage distinguishes B224 from, say, Patrick Keiller’s idiosyncratic psychogeographies, and makes it more immediately enigmatic. B224 tests the motorist’s patience with the command to stop, look and listen at what is vanishing in their rear-view mirror, drawing suggestive affinities between the countryside, decayed industrial landscapes, and the ersatz fantasias displacing them both.

But whereas, say, a Koyaanisqatsi simply gawps in wide-eyed wonder at the congruence of commuter and ant, B224 remains more cynical about the analogy between society and nature. Perhaps its most telling image is when a pillar of flame fills the sky, as if from an industrial jet, only for an edit to reveal it as spewing from the theme park’s ‘magic mountain’. Crossing from wonderland to hinterland and back, B224 suggests that it can no longer be a case of ‘out of town, out of mind’.

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‘Pandaemonium’ [<http://www.pandaemonium.org.uk>]

## Cyberhype III: Economics does the Shrink Act

ByCCRU

The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit examines ‘psychological’ economic theory, lite. A recent anonymous letter sent to the CCRU examines the newly popular analytical tool of ‘psychological’ economic theory. After reading the books and learning the theory, the author seems to have understood why only the ‘lite’ version is doing the rounds in the City today. Read it for yourself...

As I was waiting outside the London School of Economics to hear a lecture by Professor Matthew Rabin of the University of California, Berkeley, a tramp, swathed in the filthy blankets so typical of the street-dwelling underclass, was ranting in what seemed to be an incoherent fashion. He kept repeating the same few broken words – what sounded to me like “new feral magic MAGIC MAGIC” – in some loose approximation of a chant. The state of mental health care in the capital being what it is, such incidents are so common as to produce indifference in most Londoners, me included. But something about this incident made me unable to easily forget it.

As it happens, the lecture – whose subject was ‘The Economics of Immediate Gratification’ – was very engaging. Economics, Rabin argued, was dominated by unwarranted and unargued assumptions about ‘rational agency’. Like Robert Shiller, author of the recent *Irrational Exuberance* (see *Mute*18), Rabin was attempting to reform economics by importing into it psychological theories which departed from the 18th century empiricist dogmas dominating standard economic theory. What we need to think about, he urged, is phenomena like self-deception and procrastination. Procrastination, he memorably observed, is the ultimate vice – a kind of meta-vice – because you can combine it with all other vices!

Like *Irrational Exuberance*, Rabin's work appears radical when compared with the absurdly insular fantasies of academic economics, but timorously cautious when set against the reality-mutating machine of global Kapital. With his notions of 'self-fulfilling psychology', the importance of 'storytelling', feedback theory bubbles, media immanence to commerce, and the similarity of share speculation to gambling, Shiller seems to come close to what you at CCRU call 'hyperstition', but he stops short at pursuing some of his positions through to their logical conclusions. Why?

The only theorist who had pursued these was the so-called Professor of Libidinal Economics, Robert Kennington. In Kennington's account it was only Freud who understood that "economics is not about the representation of particular zones of the real. Rather the real is economic through and through", making him "the one real economic theorist of any merit." According to Kennington, Freud dealt with economics in its "most abstract sense – the study of flows and their regulation."

The 'de-demonisation' of psychoanalysis by Adler-influenced US 'driving ego' theory had led, so Kennington insisted, to a "mutual corruption – both moral and intellectual – of economics and psychology. Each finds the other's (Oedipal) blindspot. Freud shows that there is no irrational. He returns us to a Spinozist perception of the cosmos as an ongoing conflict amongst demonic tendencies, each with their goals and purposes, or rationales."

As Kennington's research went out into the various CCRU-zones of occult numeracies, the convergence of fiction and commerce and the war between magic and sorcery, his status as a professional academic – predictably perhaps – became increasingly untenable. His last published paper – a denunciation of the 'new era' thinking which, as Shiller establishes in *Irrational Exuberance*, accompanies all speculative bubbles – was entitled 'New Fear Magic: How New Era Thinking will End in e-katasrophe.' Everything after that is rumour. The inevitable mental breakdown happened, there was a messy dismissal process and then – nothing. He seemed to disappear, completely. The question that came into my mind at the moment – and which has haunted me ever since – will now be obvious to you: could that ravaged bum outside the LSE really have been Kennington? Thinking of his haunted pallor, I understood at once why Shiller and Rabin are so conservative. Be careful out there.

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## **Ceci N'est Pas Un Magazine**

ByMute Editor

Mute on 'prosumers', collaborative production and the future of the magazine - a Mute infomercial

Towards a 'Participatory Publishing Model', Part I: Over the last six months, Mute magazine has been in a suspended state of publication. During this time, we've been contemplating the implications of our magazine's content – the digital 'revolution' and its discontents – for its form and self-sustainability. When Mute published its pilot issue, in 1994, the Net was anything but ubiquitous. Mute's original 'Financial Times' newspaper format was a deliberate attempt to debunk the information revolution's much vaunted inclusivity – hence our decision to make a printed object and our motto 'Proud to be Flesh'. Six and a half years later, we face a very different picture: the many-to-many publishing environment is now far more than a theory spouted by inspired techno-lotus eaters and our publishing gesture is dwarfed by the reality of today's Net.

## Genre That, Muthafucka

ByJim Flint

Fuck knows what Si Begg thinks he's doing. The man is clearly insane. Exhibit A: *The Complete Death of Cool*, an amalgamation of the 'best' (i.e. the most obviously barking) bits from *The Complete Death of Cool: Parts 1 and 2*, released over the last few years by Begg's Noodles Foundation (see *Mute18*), the self-styled "stupidest recording Organisation in the World". Featuring the work of Begg himself (under various pseudonyms), his pal Zygmunt Janowski (crazy name, crazier guy), and such electronic luminaries as Mouse on Mars, Neil Lanstrumm and Steve Dixon (of Drug Free America fame), the overall effect is like someone letting off a nitrous oxide capsule in a 1970s Disney movie soundtrack edit studio. Super-kitsch, super-satirical sound collage. Mental.

Jim Flint <jimATmetamute.com>

Noodles Foundation': [<http://squat.com/noodles>]

## Spooky Little Boys

ByHari Kunzru

Though cryptography has long been a staple topic of activist discussion, it has yet to appear on the mainstream political radar. This is largely due to the abstruse nature of the technology – it would be an extraordinary orator who could enthuse the average voter about the significance of increasing key lengths from 64 to 128 bits, or persuade a public which is only just coming to terms with the internet that crypto is a serious civil rights issue, rather than a simple question of protecting your credit card number. Yet this is where we are today, and unless someone finds a way of putting crypto on the agenda, the erosion of the right to privacy will continue unabated.

Steven Levy's book is the latest in a long line of pop science volumes which tell the story of a technical breakthrough by concentrating on the personalities involved. It's a workmanlike effort which makes no attempt to explain the maths behind the topic, although it will still be of use to anyone who has ever puzzled over the significance of Diffie-Hellman key exchange, RSA, triple DES or PGP. The book is most interesting when it sheds light on the workings of the ultra-secretive NSA (No Such Agency, in spook-slang), which has battled for thirty years to keep crypto out of public hands. From slapping restriction orders on public scientific papers to undermining companies attempting to export crypto software, Levy portrays an agency which has always taken the view that secrecy for itself is good, but bad for everyone else, to the extent that its agents, when signing in to a meeting with Nathan Myrvald at Microsoft, refused to give their surnames. Now that's paranoid.

Hari Kunzru <hariATmetamute.com>

*Crypto: Secrecy and Privacy in the New Code War* // Steven Levy // Penguin Allen Lane // January 2001 // 368 pages // ISBN 0-691-05062-7 // £18,99

## Unreal

ByChris Darke

TV's a dead duck. Mainstream cinema's a fucked-up franchising operation. Well, if you feel like that (and who doesn't?) then prepare for the 'Unreal Festival of Non-Fiction Film' which starts up this year and intends to explore the formal and technological hybridity that marks out the best in contemporary film and video. Taking place at the ICA and Tate Modern on an annual basis, the organisers are looking for submissions right now. It promises to be a crucial event that historicises as it looks to the future, taking in documentary, first-person essay-films and the increasingly fertile overlap between film and the gallery. For real.

Chris Darke <chrisATmetamute.com>

'Unreal Festival of Non-Fiction Film': <http://www.unreal.as>

ICA: <http://www.ica.org.uk>

## Tacita Dean's 'Jukebox 1'

By Paula Carabell

'Jukebox 1' demonstrates that it is often the aural, rather than the visual, that may serve as the most evocative of artistic media. The work is comprised of one large console, three CD changing mechanisms, four speakers and 192 CDs housing a collection of ambient sound collected from eight coastal cities around the world. Recorded during one 24-hour period, Jukebox 1 illustrates not only the artist's fascination with sound, but also its potential for stirring the imagination of its listeners. This is a participatory work; the visitor may choose a location and an hour in order to imaginatively recreate a day in the life of Ajute Mill in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Dixie D's Snack Bar in Hoonah, Alaska. Memory, duration, and curiosity all contribute to the power of this work. Just as in the days of radio, what we can't see is often more suggestive than what we can.

Paula Carabell <itsmepcATyahoo.com>

'Jukebox 1', Tate Britain, 15 February - 6 May 2001

## JLG Forever

By Chris Darke

For most of Summer 2001 the life, career and astonishing achievements of Jean-Luc Godard will take over London. A complete retrospective runs at the NFT throughout June and July and an international conference, 'Forever Godard', takes place at Tate Modern on 21-24 June. After all, there's a lot of catching up to do. Time to glory in his days as nouvelle vague *enfant terrible*, take it to the barricades with the extreme Leftism of the late-60s/early 70s and settle down to what followed. Godard's work in video has been going on since the 1970s and he's a true pioneer – Dogme's grandad in many ways. But the later video work, including the magisterial essay-collage-encyclopedia of *Histoires du cinema*, is breathtaking.

Chris Darke <chrisATmetamute.com>

For Ever Godard: <http://www.forevergodard.com>

Tate: <http://www.tate.org.uk>

NFT: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/showing/nft/>

# Two or Three Things I Know About Her

By Benedict Seymour

To gentrify or to regenerate? The British government prefers the latter. With its commitment to public-private partnerships, city-centre repopulation and social inclusion it hopes to save cities on the verge of a nervous breakdown. But, faced with building projects to rival the scale – if not vision – of Egyptian pyramids and gothic living conditions to match, they're far from salvation. **Benedict Seymour** looks at the reality of regeneration in the modern metropolis.

[IMAGE]

>> Holly Street Estate ruins, Hackney, London.

Jean-Luc Godard's film of 1966, *Two or Three Things I know about Her*, explored the transformation of the Parisian region – and its mores – by massive urban re-planning and development. The 'her' of the film's title is not only Paris and its burgeoning periphery, but also a housewife who becomes a prostitute to support her life in the 'consumer society'.

At the same time Godard was making his poetic film-essay, the young Richard Rogers was developing his own architectural response to the functionalism of the modern city. Inspired in part by the sci-fi reveries of Archigram and the politics of play and participation that would climax in the events of 1968, Rogers' architecture tapped into the anti-hierarchical mood of the times.

A third contemporaneous reaction to the post-war planning regime could be witnessed in the east London borough of Hackney. There, campaigners against the compulsory purchase and demolition of older housing and communities – the programme of 'slum clearance' that accompanied the British policy of tower-block building – were fighting to save their somewhat dilapidated but rather elegant Victorian terraces from the bulldozers.

While the sociologist Ruth Glass was coining the term 'gentrification', some of these young professionals were founding a housing association to defend their homes.<1> But what kind of gentrification was going on in this part of Hackney? Uniting with local people of different classes and racial backgrounds to protect their property, these pre-Thatcher 'young urban professionals' also ended up advocating the rights of the area's tenants, fighting back against harassment from landlords, and helping prevent an unmitigated middle-class takeover of their neighbourhood. Thinking of the displacement of other classes and ethnic groups that had occurred in a less enlightened wave of gentrification across the borough border in Islington, they sought to avoid what they termed 'Barnsburyfication'.<2> This was conservation with a social conscience.

Not all the young professionals in Islington were indifferent to the threat of 'social cleansing', however. One active figure on Islington's distinctly ungentrified estates was Anne Power, a veteran of Martin Luther King's 'End Slums' campaign in Chicago, now engaged in community-based projects.

Fast-forwarding 30 years, the term gentrification is still very much in use. It's heard in different registers, from cynically judgement-free description to angry denunciation, yet it remains largely absent from official discourse. Here the much more benign term 'regeneration', which makes no reference to hierarchy or social conflict, has taken its place. Concreting over cracks in the social edifice, 'regeneration' can also assimilate the idea of enlightened gentrification as practiced in the 60s and 70s. With the grand narrative of modern planning and *tabula rasa* development in disgrace, the understanding of urban social transformation has also mutated. Eschewing antagonistic, 'us-versus-them' thinking, regeneration policy emphasises co-existence and co-operation as the key to neighbourhood renewal.

This salvaging and recycling of gentrification may be the distinctive intellectual achievement of veterans of the 'good gentrification' like Anne Power, now Professor of Social Policy at the LSE, and (Lord) Richard Rogers, Chair of the government's Urban Task Force. When New Labour came into power after 20 years of Thatcherism, Rogers and Power were acknowledged experts, well placed to conduct an analysis of the accumulated problems of the city. With the Urban Task Force, Rogers and Power developed the diagnosis and programme for change that is now official New Labour policy on regeneration.

According to the Urban Task Force, British cities have been in decline ever since the war, haemorrhaging jobs and people, while infrastructures collapse, communities break down, social and economic segregation increases and the suburbs sprawl. As well as the legacy of past development and under-development there is also the prospect of massive population growth and the need for millions of new houses over the next 20 years, with the exodus from the desolated cities of the North to the economically privileged south-east and London putting even greater pressure on receding 'greenfield' space. Rogers and Power noted the redevelopment and 'recycling' going on in some inner city areas and identified this a possible source of hope.

Arguing that, for the sake of the cities, the countryside and the national economy alike, the new approach must emphasise the regeneration of cities, refunctioning old buildings and building new ones on 'brown field' – already used but now derelict – land, they also saw how, on its own. This would just intensify the gap between thriving urban centres and their moribund peripheries. This could be combated by reconnecting, restoring and repopulating the innermost neighbourhoods, improving transport and services, particularly education, thereby encouraging people to return to the city rather than merely working in it while living in the suburbs beyond.

According to Rogers' and Power's compact but dense book distilling the Urban Task Force's findings and proposals, *Cities for a Small Country* (2000), we need to live more densely and compactly. Where slum clearance took a bulldozer to 19th century over-crowding, we now need to repopulate our cities. Even London, which has been growing steadily in the last ten years, could benefit from extending its penchant for regenerating old warehouses near its centre to the outlying boroughs, bringing dead space back into use and preparing the ground for a revival of business, shopping and cultural life. If the switch from green field to brown field development is not made, with 3.8 million new homes needed by 2021, an area bigger than Exmoor will have to be concreted over. <3>

Regeneration isn't just about physical transformation, however. Rogers and Power stress the links between urban deprivation and social exclusion, showing how low housing demand in the depopulated (or simply poor) zones of cities is related to impoverished public services, unattractive environments and weak employment markets. Nevertheless, improvement in the quality and design of physical environments could be a stimulus to rejuvenating urban schools, health care and other facilities, attracting people back to the cities, halting the flight to green field developments and the safe, well-serviced suburbs.

At the heart of Rogers' and Power's ideal of what you might call 'non-violent' urban revival, and perhaps the main inheritance from their youthful interest in people power and community action, is the notion that social diversity – 'mixed tenure' and 'mixed use' – act as a motor of social integration: "To overcome the long legacy of social exclusion, cities must hold on to both richer and poorer residents." wrote Power in a recent article in *The Guardian*. "Their interests coincide. They both want good quality, spacious homes in a pleasant, safe environment, close to work, good schools, shops and transport. The two groups need each other. The original welfare state was built on this compact. So are cities. The rich pay in, and gain, alongside the poor – and both benefit." <4>

This very ‘Third Way’ remix of welfare state ideals, launched into an environment of public-private partnerships and fundamental governmental parsimony, does have a reassuringly positive and humane ring to it. With a plurality of programmes and of people, it suggests, perhaps a way can be found to manage fundamental social conflicts (even without an old-fashioned welfare state), reducing the physical, mental and – presumably – economic distance between people. A vast network of support measures and development projects stressing the combined social, community and business elements of regeneration are engaged in the attempt to actualise this vision, behind which lies the old-fashioned notion of a balanced social totality in which the inequalities of capitalism are contained and managed – made ‘sustainable’, to use the social policy buzzword.

[IMAGE]

>> Holly Street Estate ruins, Hackney, London

As well as a practical proposal for reinventing British cities and pulling us up to the level of our European rivals, Rogers and Power’s vision of an Urban Renaissance is probably the closest New Labour will ever get to a utopia, albeit one that is lukewarm, reformist rather than revolutionary, predicated on some fundamentally low expectations, and on closer inspection, unlikely to succeed even on its own terms.

While the government’s urban white paper (November 2000 ) embraced much of Rogers’ and Power’s vision, it also, characteristically, diluted it, gently encouraging rather than forcing developers to deliver on the target of 60% brown field development and partially rather than completely reversing the tax arrangements to incentivise them. Without getting into the complexities of the Neighbourhood Renewal programme announced a few months after the urban white paper, once again, when the government seemed to commit to an ambitious project – in this case a 20 year programme to empower the country’s most deprived neighbourhoods – the understanding of regeneration as a holistic process involving communities as well as developers was accompanied by a chronic under-investment in the structures put forward to realise it.

Augmenting the enticements to affluent ‘Urban Pioneers’ to activate the latent potential of the city, the Neighbourhood Renewal programme reached out to ‘community champions’ – retired head teachers, social workers, and others with expertise – and offered to devolve more power to them. However, as some neighbourhood managers have already pointed out, their newly recognised and financially rewarded efforts will be frustrated unless they are given genuine powers and resources. Again, there is a strong sense that the rhetorical emphasis on participation should not be taken too seriously, and that this postmodern, anti-bureaucratic, ‘grassroots’ approach to regeneration is what you might call a gentrified way of refusing to spend money. Talk to any regeneration professional about their mission in the city and you’ll end up getting an earful about business and community alliances, social programmes aimed at boosting employment, cutting crime, etc. etc., but very few will admit to the ultimate failure of these proliferating partnerships to compensate for the lack of government investment.

The most striking symptom of this failure is the crisis in housing. While the London Mayor Ken Livingstone enthusiastically endorses Rogers’ Urban Renaissance, recently appointing him as advisor to the Greater London Authority, he has attacked the government’s measly financial commitment to backing up the rhetoric.

“Nowhere are the inadequate levels of public investment in the UK clearer than in housing. The Labour Government has committed £5 billion of extra resources to housing investment in this Parliament, but virtually all of the money has gone to tackling the backlog of disrepair in councils’ own stock... When we look at new house building, the current government has the worst record on

building new council and housing association homes of any since the war.” <5>

In London, where the problems analysed by Rogers and Power take their own, in some ways anomalous, form, high demand for housing coupled with high house prices has placed acute pressure on the social housing stock. No amount of ‘joined up’ government can compensate for the fact that Labour has halved social housing construction and doubled the rate of stock transfer (that is, the sale of council housing to housing associations or private landlords) since they came to power in 1997. <6> While there has been much talk about social exclusion and regeneration, housing – presumably a big part of any Urban Renaissance that goes beyond cultural showpieces and random acts of architectural beautification – has not been a policy issue.

It is hardly surprising that property has become an over-weaningly popular subject of conversation for Londoners. Tenants and owners alike are caught up in this crisis, whether they perceive it as increasing the value of their homes or increasing their likelihood of becoming homeless. It’s a kind of parodic realisation of Power’s ‘social compact’ – all are united in residential insecurity and property obsession. In the last ten years the number of low rent homes in London has fallen by more than 50,000 due to the impact of Thatcher’s ‘Right to Buy’ scheme, and the sale and demolition of housing estates. The numbers of properties available for letting went down 17 per cent in the last two years. The cumulative result is that almost 100,000 people are now homeless. More importantly for the Urban Pioneers who can afford to make their homes here, key workers – nurses, teachers, firefighters, policemen – can no longer afford to live alongside them. <7> This is the most severe threat to the city precipitated by the housing crisis, and suggests exactly how monocultural the regeneration of London has been. Far from increasing demographic diversity, these figures suggest a rapid shrinking of the capital’s social bandwidth.

While attempts to provide more affordable housing for key workers is now government policy and top of Livingstone’s agenda, this does not even begin to address the effect of the transfer of council stock to housing associations, whose ‘affordable’ rents are simply not as affordable as the council’s. This phenomena may also contribute to the fact that, further down the social ladder, the number in temporary accommodation has increased by 50 per cent during the last two years to over 43,000 households, and is projected to increase by another 12,000 by 2002. <8> Despite the glamorous presence of the simulacrum of regeneration as it manifests in the media, on building site hoardings and the blithe news sheets of regeneration agencies, with big cultural success stories like Tate Modern on the South Bank, or the transformation of Shoreditch into a zone of Islington-style bars and restaurants, London is facing its worst ever crisis of homelessness.

The social mixture Power and Rogers champion, encoded in estate refurbishment programmes like Holly Street in Hackney and the Marquess Estate in Islington as a commitment to mixed tenure (council, public sector and private housing) could actually be contributing to this disaster. Not only do these projects reduce the density of estates, cumulatively reducing the number of houses available, but, while bringing new owner occupiers and relatively affluent tenants of ‘affordable housing’ into the area, they displace council tenants – and seldom to the ‘3-bedroom house with a garden’ that they are promised. <9>

Mixed use and mixed-tenure may well serve as a cover for a real decline in council housing, a dystopian or, at the least, half-baked realisation of Rogers’ and Power’s dream of a ‘good’ gentrification.

Perhaps the likes of Livingstone can persuade the government to free up some more money for housing – his vocal criticism is refreshing, as is Rogers’ and Power’s own sustained pressure on New Labour to live up to their vision. Yet there remains the question of the quality of regenerated urban

space, the actual result of regeneration as it has been practiced so far.

Another rarely mentioned side-effect of lopsided regeneration – perhaps of regeneration *tout court* – is the psychogeographic banalisation of the city. Along with the potential for social homogenisation, out-of-town developers' limited forays into privatised urban housing – perhaps encouraged by the government's stance on brownfield development – has led to the outbreak of a rash of architectural absurdities. One example is the developer's ongoing, and polymorphously perverse, love affair with the loft. Another orphaned child of the post-war margins, this upwardly mobile example of refunctioned industrial space has gone from squatted artist's pad to pre-packaged urban solution, progressing from naïve authenticity to the status of a readymade. Fusing with the 'traditional' (read revivalist) aesthetic of the developers, the 'loft concept' can now assume virtually any form, creating oxymoronic hybrids: unpartitioned live-work interiors with stripped wood floorboards come cloaked in the tried and tested reassurance of neo-victorian shells – Andy Warhol's Factory meets the gamekeeper's lodge. The aesthetic evacuation of the city effected by such isolated acts of regeneration – not to mention the impact of large-scale projects like Tate Modern or Hackney's new Ocean Centre – coincides with the physical evacuation of the underclass. Inverting the long-established relation between centre and periphery, this inner city suburbanism (Inurbanisation?) is a fitting symbol and symptom of the flaw in Rogers' and Power's vision. Unfortunately, it looks like that old-fashioned word 'gentrification' may not be obsolete after all.

Benedict Seymour <ben AT bseymour.freerve.co.uk>

1 Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins*, Paladin, London, 1992, p. 120.

2 *ibid.*

3 Richard Rogers, *The Observer*, 16 July, 2000.

4 Anne Power, *The Guardian*, 25 October, 2000.

5 Ken Livingstone, 'The State of London: Spatial Development', 2000.

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/state/solspatial.htm>

6 Tim Dwelly, quoted in *Housing Today*, 12 April, 2001.

7 Ken Livingstone, *ibid.*

8 *ibid.*

9 See Matt Weaver, 'Dense Thinking', *The Guardian*, 25 October, 2000.

## CODE: Chances and Obstacles in the Digital Ecology

By Florian Cramer

At the recent conference CODE: Collaboration and Ownership in the Digital Economy, conceptual sophistication rubbed shoulders with aesthetic primitivism. **Florian Cramer** reports on the highs and lows.

[IMAGE]

The recent Cambridge conference CODE amounted to more than a straight-forward expansion of its acronym into – in computerese – its executable "Collaboration and Ownership in the Digital Economy". It actually got some of its participants collaborating. The most interesting idea regarding collaboration came as an off-the-cuff remark from James Boyle, professor of law at Duke University, who compared the recent interest in open digital code to environmentalism. The first environmental activists were scattered and without mutual ties, Boyle said, because the notion of 'the environment' did not yet exist. It had to be invented before it could be defended.

After two packed days of presentations, it could well be that the virus will spread and make artists, activists and scholars in digital culture associate ‘IP’ with ‘Intellectual Property’ rather than ‘Internet Protocol’, whether they like it or not. Unlike many Free Software/Open Source events with their occasional glimpses at the cultural implications of open code, the CODE programme covered the free availability and proprietary closure of information in the most general terms, setting it into a broad disciplinary framework which included law, literature, music, anthropology, astronomy and genetics. Free Software has historically taught people that even digitised images and sounds run on code. But that this code is speech which can be locked into proprietary schemes such as patents and shrinkwrap licenses, thereby decreasing freedom of expression, is perhaps only beginning to dawn on people. John Naughton, moderator of the panel on “The Future of Knowledge”, illustrated this situation by describing how, in the US at least, it is illegal to wear T-Shirts or recite haikus containing the few sourcecode words of DeCSS, a program which breaks the cryptography scheme of DVD movies.

There is little awareness that any piece of digital data, whether an audio CD, a video game or a computer operating systems is simply a number and that every new copyrighted digital work reduces the amount of freely available numbers. While digital data, just like any text, can be parsed arbitrarily according to a language or data format (the four letters g-i-f-t, for example, parse as a synonym for ‘present’ in English, but as ‘poison’ in German), the copyrighting of digital data implies that there is only one authoritative interpretation of signs. The zeros and ones of Microsoft Word are legally considered a Windows program and thus subject to Microsoft’s licensing, although they could just as well be seen as a piece of concrete poetry when displayed as alphanumeric code, or as music when burned onto an audio CD. The opposite is also true: no-one can rule out that the text of, say, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* cannot be parsed and compiled into a piece of software that infringes somebody’s patents.

The legal experts speaking at CODE also explained the enormous expansion in intellectual property rights in the last few years. While patents are widely known to conflict with the freedom of research and even with the freedom to write in programming languages, the conference nevertheless extended its focus beyond this and made its participants aware of IP rights as the negative subtext to what was once considered the promiscuous textuality of the Internet. Still, it was surprising to see speakers with very diverse academic and professional backgrounds position themselves so unanimously against the current state of IP rights. In another informal remark, Volker Grassmuck proposed that we refocus “information ecology” from software ergonomics to the politics of knowledge distribution. Does digital code need its own Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund?

The conference took its inspiration from Free Software, but didn’t bother going into basics and priming the participants on what Free Software and Open Source technically are – which was both an advantage and a disadvantage. General topics were advanced right from the first session without first clarifying such important issues as the meaning of the ‘free’ in Free Software. GNU project founder Richard M. Stallman – who usually explains this as “free, as in speech” not “free, as in beer” – revealed his own questionable conceptions by proposing three different copyleft schemes for what he categorised as “functional works”, “opinion pieces” and “aesthetic works”: as if these categories could be separated, as if they weren’t aspects of every artwork, and as if computer programs didn’t have their own politics and aesthetics (GNU Emacs could be analysed in just the same way Matthew Fuller analysed the aesthetic ideology of Microsoft Word). It was annoying to hear Stallman reduce the distribution of digital art to “bands” distributing their “songs”, and it was equally annoying to hear Glyn Moody call Stallman the Beethoven, Linus Torvalds the Mozart and Larry Wall – a self-acclaimed postmodernist and experimental writer in his own right – the Schubert of programming.

To make matters worse, the artists who spoke on the second day of CODE echoed these aesthetic conservatisms in perfect symmetry. Michael Century, co-organiser of the conference and Stallman's respondent, unfortunately didn't have enough time to speak about the notational complexity of modern art in any detail. He was the only speaker to address this issue. Otherwise, artists were happy to be "artists", and programmers were happy to be "programmers". Stallman's separation of the "functional" and the "aesthetic" was also implied in Antoine Moireau's 'Free Art License' <<http://www.artlibre.org>>, a copyleft for artworks which failed to illuminate why artists shouldn't simply use the GNU copyleft proper. This question is begged all the more since the license is based on the assumption that the artwork in contrast to the codework is, quote, "fixed". While Moireau's project was at least an honest reflection of Free Software/Open Source, one couldn't help the impression that other digital artists appropriated the term as a nebulous, buzzword-compatible analogy. While there are certainly good reasons for not releasing art as Free Software, it still might be necessary to speak of digital art and Free Software in a more practical way. Much if not most of digital art is locked into proprietary formats like Macromedia Director, QuickTime and RealVideo. It is doomed to obscurity as soon as their respective manufacturers discontinue the software.

On the other hand, the Free Software available obviously doesn't cut it for many people, artists in particular. The absence of, for example, desktop publishing software available for GNU/Linux is no coincidence since the probability of finding programmers among graphic artists is much lower than the probability of finding programmers among system operators. This raises many issues for digital code in the commons, issues the conference speakers seemed, however, to avoid on purpose. While most of them pretended that it was no longer necessary to use proprietary software, their computers still ran Windows or the Macintosh OS. It would have been good to see such contradictions if not resolved than at least reflected.

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CODE, Queens College, Cambridge, UK, April 5-6, 2001

"Anywhere out of the World" is the first episode of "No ghost just a Shell" by Phillippe Parreno and Pierre Hyghe. (c) Phillippe Parreno. Image courtesy of Aire de Paris and The Institute of Visual Culture.

## Who Puts the Super in the Sound?

By Anja Buechele

If you are looking for elitist/selective mail order and innovative music sites on the Net (yes! We want standards!) whose reviews are critical and well written, whose prices are affordable and whose concerns extend beyond the gratification of geekish demands for immediacy – here are four:

[www.insound.com](http://www.insound.com) has a lot of otherwise unavailable material at low prices;

[www.epitonic.com](http://www.epitonic.com) hosts an excellent, enlightening selection of records and eyebrow-raising reviews ("This is fucking great! This is fucking great! This is fucking great!" etc.. on the first Die Kreuzen LP);

[www.supersphere.com](http://www.supersphere.com) my personal favourite, features excellent audio and visual streams plus lots of links to critical, political pages.

www.hausmusik.com is the understated site of the hausmusik, payola and kollaps labels.

Anja Buechele <anja AT tlank.fsnet.co.uk>

## Critique of Critique of Exotica

ByThanos Moutsopoulos

In his *Critique of Exotica* Hutnyk sheds critical light on pop orientalism and its variants as articulated in contemporary cultural industries and, more specifically, in the growing popularity of Asian culture in the West. The book is an enjoyable read, despite the fact that it suffers from cultural studies insiderism. For Hutnyk, Asian pop represents a hybrid of the contemporary culture industry and old fashioned orientalism which produces a transatlantic exotica. In Hutnyk's words: "The book is ... about how well-meaning Other-love (anti-racism, esotericism, anthropology) can turn out to be its opposite, can be complicit at best, counter-productive at worst, part and parcel of the evil dynamic of capitalist exploitation...".

The book centres around the wave of the New Asian dance music (based in the UK) with bands like Asian Dub Foundation, Fundamental, or Apache Indian stressing elements of Indian Identity and/or multicultural radicalism; a trend which Hutnyk endorses, identifying a genuine 'street level attitude' in a band like ADF as opposed to old skool hippy exoticism.

Despite his politics, Hutnyk seems to fall victim to what he accuses others of: he is reluctant to apply his critical rigour to his cherished second generation Asian producers. This is probably inevitable. What is less inevitable is Hutnyk's disinterest in the role of homeland in this process of pop exotica. Do the products in question mean something in their homeland? Has this been theorised by academics in New Delhi? Does India have an intermediary function in this process? Should academia start by asking whether the Mumbai b-grade horror film industry or musical directors like Vijaya Anand or Kalyanji Anandji are more challenging than the leftist rhetoric of Fundamental or Apache Indian, it could require a real shift in the analytical categories used to theorise the Other.

Thanos Moutsopoulos

*Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry* // John Hutnyk // Pluto Press // May 2000 //176 pages // ISBN: 0745315496

## Opening Up The Core

ByJJKing

They said Linux would never challenge Microsoft, and they'll probably say that OpenCores will never challenge proprietary hardware companies. But that's not going to stop them trying. This open-source hardware group aims to develop a library of free hardware designs for standard components – including processors, memory controllers, peripherals and motherboards, providing a set of publicly shared templates for producing computers. Right now, they're working to create a OpenRISC processor with system-on-a-chip capabilities. Come on, show a little faith: it's happening with software, so why not with the hard stuff?

JJKing <jamie AT metamute.com>

## **In the Land of Grail Quests**

ByChris Darke

Following the relatively mainstream visibility that *Lights Out For The Territory* earned him, Iain Sinclair returns to the clotted spleen of his fictional prose with this foray beyond the metropolis and out into the pre-foot 'n' mouth hinterlands. Especially to Wales, the land of his father. As usual with Sinclair, it's many books rolled into one in which several Grail Quests vie for precedence. A gallery of book-dealing grotesques rub grimy shoulders with washed-up media-whores, the present-tense shifts in the beat of a semi-colon into deep history, notably that of the doomed Welsh utopian communities of the port Walter Savage Landor and the artist Eric Gill.

The book is dedicated in part to John Sergeant, the director of the wonderful, neglected British essay film *The Blue Summer* (2000), who is more than a little the inspiration for the character of Jos Kaporal. Kaporal also turned up in *Asylum*, Sinclair's last film collaboration with Chris Petit (see *Mute* 17). Many pleasures here; amongst all the bile are lyrical appreciations of countryside, sharp insights into the power of the digital image and disconcertingly forensic descriptions of the horror of bad food. "'Coal', Prudence announced, bending her knife on something walnutty and black. 'They used to mine it, now they serve it with a hollandaise sauce'". Tuck in.

Chris Darke <chris AT metamute.com>

*Landor's Tower: Or, The Imaginary Conversations* // Iain Sinclair // Granta Books // April 2001 // 320 pages // ISBN 1-86207-018-0 // £15.99

## **Think Small Fish**

ByAnja Buechele

At last! A modern, wonderfully selective record-shop has found its way to Old street: Smallfish stocks old and new electronica, HipHop, Funk, Obscurita, and experimental stuff. In their small but excellent selection every pick is a HIT – with four record and several CD players at your disposal you can actually listen to your choice. The lovely, surprisingly non-geeky staff take pride in broadening musically bored minds by adding never-even-heard-of's to your pre-listen selection. Add to this affordable prices, free live-sets almost every Thursday showcasing modern musicians and a good choice of magazines and flyers. Find the actual on Old St., London (opposite the police station) and the virtual at [www.smallfish.co.uk](http://www.smallfish.co.uk)

Anja Buechle <anja AT fallout.org.uk>

## **Art For All? (Administrator 2 Administrator)**

ByDave Beech

From its very public call for contributions through a high-volume flyposter campaign to its nineteenth century style launch in an ex-Town Hall, hefty polemic Art for All? talked the talk of Big Politics. Reading between the lines, *Dave Beech* found it harder to see it walk the walk.

[IMAGE]

>> Mark Wallinger, *Oxymoron* (1996), © the artist, courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

There's good news and bad news. The good news is: politics is back on the cultural agenda and culture is back on the political agenda. The bad news is: the good news is wishful thinking.

*Art For All?*, edited by Mary Warnock and Mark Wallinger for PEER, is a hefty document that surveys the politics of art. It is a very timely intervention: the art world is currently curing itself of the yBa brand of anti-intellectualism and is looking for something more substantial; political scuffles are once more breaking out spontaneously in art magazines, conferences, books on contemporary art and even galleries; a number of high and medium-profile artists are producing work with strong political content; and, some of the brightest young curators have hooked political agendas to their careers. Add all of this to the muscle contemporary art has acquired with its performance in the media, sales and visitor figures, and the result is not merely that there is a new politicisation of art but that it has an unusually strong voice. Consequently, *Art For All?* is well placed to capitalise on an emergent, potent political culture and to have an impact on it. What a disappointment, then, that *Art For All?* sells its politics short by limiting its horizons to 'arts policy'.

The mistake of *Art For All?* is fatal. By settling for the narrow conception of politics (government, legislation, policy), the book depoliticises politics in advance. Central to the task of politicisation is the very question of what counts as political, which means not only, for instance, raising culture as a subject for political debate but also, and more importantly, asking difficult questions about how that 'political debate' might be constituted. Feminism's slogan 'the personal is political' is a good example of this – its politicisation extends political debate to areas previously considered un-political and, thereby, embraces groups previously considered extrinsic to politics. Feminist politicisation transposes the oxymoron into a performative truth. And the new truth requires new styles and forms of politics. Take another example: postminimalism's politicisation of art. Victor Burgin's snappy idea that the representation of politics needs to be replaced with the politics of representation, an important argument that seems to have been forgotten these days, is both a manifesto for a particular kind of cultural politicisation and, at the same time, functions as an emblem of politicisation in general. It turns the tables on so-called political art by attending to the politics of representation presupposed by those artists who represent political themes in their work without reflecting critically on their techniques, status, social relations and so forth. Postminimalism's politicisation of art requires two parallel critiques, one of art and one of politics. *Art For All?* is, by comparison, a non-starter.

Forgetting, for a moment, the debacle that is the political project of *Art For All?*, the content certainly has its moments. In fact, there are some gems in it. I would strongly recommend Kingsley Amis' speech on arts policy given at the first Tory Conference after Thatcher won the election in 1979. In it he quotes the Labour manifesto. "Politics are inextricably sewn into the fabric of the arts", it says (contrast this with Chris Smith's Blairite universalism in his lecture to the RSA in 1999. Politics is out, and in its place we have a few 'commitments', a couple of 'myths' and a 'challenge' or two). Amis wastes no time in pouring cold water on old Labour politicisation, stating categorically, "the authors are telling us something about their brand of politics, not about the arts. You won't find much political content in a given string quartet." He ventures that the Labour Party mean that the musicians in a string quartet are members of "a leisured, affluent class", and that there is a politics in there somewhere. Perhaps they did mean that. What they might have also meant, and what I take their image of "politics sewn inextricably into the fabric of the arts" to mean, is that the politics of art is not exhausted by consideration of the representation of social themes but extends outwards to its institutions, hierarchies and beyond, and inwards to its minute technicalities, modes of address and so forth. (*Art For All?* does not provide much textual evidence of these ideas apart from what Terry Atkinson calls "epistemological complexity"). If you read Amis and Smith together, you can detect

important differences of emphasis, but what stands out, and is truly chilling, is the degree to which the comparison shows that New Labour bought its victory by adopting the Thatcherite disapproval of what old Labour called politics.

Another gem is Matthew Higgs' gushing introduction to the publication commemorating Jeremy Deller's 'Unconvention'. When I say gushing, I mean it ("an event that remains – without any doubt – the most challenging (and moving) experience I have ever witnessed in an art gallery"). It is a gem because Higgs has made a career, both as an artist and curator, out of the conceptual and political stratagem of 'decentring' himself from his own practice and here we find him lost in reverie, carefully selecting the words that might express exactly how good he feels. I wish I'd been there. Arthur Scargill's public address (an extract is collected here) would have been worth the trip by itself. But Higgs' logic implies that the gallery ought to become a venue for weddings, funerals, births and spiritual awakenings. So, oddly enough, Higgs casts himself here as the head of a pretty gnarled coin. Stewart Home is the tail. Home complains that the gallery has "no room for spontaneity, for improvisation, for truly human contact and meaningful human relationships". Obviously, Home has never been to one of Deller's uplifting events. At least Home has the ambition to establish his political arguments about art on the basis of class relations (and the abolition of money – does he mean the abolition of property?). I think Stewart Home deserves his place in *Art For All?* just for this. Ex-Tory MP George Walden deserves to be here just for his opening sentence ("Personally, I do not believe that British contemporary art is either exciting or innovatory; indeed I do not find it of much value or interest at all..."). He offers no good reason to include the rest of his trivial ravings. His irritation at British contemporary art would have legs if, for instance, it was attached to an argument in favour of a rival version of contemporary art. Instead, the ex-Tory MP invokes obsolete modernist criteria and finds that contemporary art doesn't match up to it. Reading Walden is like listening to an old duffer telling you "we didn't lock our doors in the war, you know, because there was no such thing as burglary back then". I don't know how smug self-satisfaction gets to count as political debate.

Mark Wallinger's *Oxymoron* (a union jack in Irish colours, illustrated here) is, in my view, an emblem of politicisation not because it takes on one of the sharpest political conflicts of our time, but because it internalises those antagonisms in its very fabric. Politicisation is based on struggle and conflict; and, its opposite is not harmony or community but the undisclosed (hence unchecked) maintenance of already established prejudices and exclusions. Sometimes politicisation is mobilised to enfranchise marginal groups, and sometimes politicisation rewrites hitherto 'innocent' practices as fierce battlegrounds. Whatever it does, the first condition of politicisation is that politics be detached from administration. Consequently, the first task of art's politicisation is to struggle for struggle. This is why *Art For All?* is not a political collection at all; it is a reference book for administrators.

*Art for All? Their Policies and our Culture* // Mary Warnock, Mark Wallinger // Peer // December 2000 // 183 pages // ISBN 095397720X // £18 (paperback)