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# M20: Digital Commons [Summer 2001]

m20\_cover

Including: Ted Byfield interviews James Boyle, James Flint and Hari Kunzru futurecast the British countryside, Delhi's Sarai Centre, JJ King on ICANN, Maria Fernandez and Suhail Malik on the Cyborg Manifesto, Matthew Hyland on social exclusion protest and the politicisation of the 'mentally ill', reviews: John Hutnyk's South Asian Sound of London special, Esther Leslie on Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid On Earth

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## Tales of the Commons Culture

By Monica Narula, Awadhendra Sharan and Shuddhabrata Sengupta

Imagine the digital commons: public and accessible to all... But, is it anything like a city, a library – or more like a fertile groove in the landscape? In an online conversation, Monica Narula, Awadhendra Sharan and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, three co-founders of Sarai, Delhi's innovative new media initiative, discuss.

### **Monica Narula <monica AT sarai.net> wrote:**

The ripple-causing proposal by Grossman and Minow to the American Congress to disburse \$18 billion in a trust fund (The Digital Opportunity Investment Trust) to generate knowledge that would remain “open source data” and in the public domain, data that would counter “the trend toward copyrighted, privatised ‘pay-per-view’ scholarship that threatens the university system” has been announced but not yet become fact. [<http://www.current.org/pb/pb0107gift.html>]

But this fact evokes another time...

Our desire to know more about the world takes us to places in which we can find narratives concerning ourselves and our communities. The public library is one good example – but how easy is it to define what constitutes other such spaces?

There are various kinds of libraries that exist in the city of Delhi, some established and run by the national and city government bodies, and some that are the offerings of other nations' cultural largesse. In all these, only one offers relatively unfettered access – the American Centre Library. Many university students in Delhi are members of only this library, and for a lot of them the idea of 'freedom' and 'free America' have become synonymous with its existence and operation.

Yet the libraries that you do not enter are as formative as the ones you do. The problem lies not in the fact of you being given access to only one universe, but of being barred from many others. This arises not from a lack of resources but because these emerge from public policies which premise themselves on the continuation of gated knowledge communities.

### **This conclusion evokes a memory...**

I was told by a friend of the ramblers in England – who go on long walks for the wonderful pleasure of taking in “mountain, moor, heath and down” – that when they walk, they do so partly to keep public paths public. Many of these walking routes have emerged from being trod by countless people over countless years. By law, if they are not used by the public to walk on them, they will revert to private ownership.

### **These paths evoke other ones...**

In most rural parts of India one can find 'sacred groves'. These are now usually small, very small, groves where vegetation has been allowed to grow unhampered by any fear of slash and burn. These dense growths are looked after by the village, may contain flora not found in the vicinity for 500 years, and are the source for medicinal herbs and potages used for traditional, often quite effective, healing. Communities maintain these, in some form or the other, because their survival is linked to the groves.

If we are to imagine a digital commons, then we must first admit that a commons does not emerge on its own. It does not exist *sui generis*. It has to be invented, created, maintained and protected. In cyberspace there are no embedded communities, with their ecologies of survival. Here the proximity is not one of space but of affinity. Here if we want our commons, dispersed affinities will have to tend, and wend, their paths together. But even as we do so, we must remember that no matter where the library comes from, it cannot constitute its public by exclusion. And that these dispersed affinities will have to engage with power, memory and practice – the historical processes and contemporary conditions of their formation – so that new gates are opened, not old ones locked again....

### **Awadhendra Sharan <sharan AT sarai.net> wrote:**

Commons are a finite set of resources shared by an embedded community. Historically, the process of closure is linked to the establishment of market relationships and notions of private property. In that sense, the digital commons are both similar and dissimilar to the idea of 'commons'. First, the differences:

Unlike traditional commons, the digital commons are not a resource that belongs to an embedded community. Hence the notion of reciprocal responsibilities that is so central to the management of the traditional commons is difficult to imagine here.

And, unlike the traditional commons, it is not a limited set of resources that is at stake. Theoretically, and linked to the question of scale, one can posit an almost infinite sense of resource.

On the familiar side, what remains is the attempt at gating, underwritten by the acceptance of the primacy of private property. This process of gating may be carried out both by industry and by governments. The digital reference, however, is not only to free software and commercial software. For gating is also being realised in the name of 'public interest'. Here it may be pertinent to consider that even with respect to traditional commons, governments have instituted regulatory practices in order to attain sustainability. There can be two kinds of critiques of this latter move:

(i) The process of tight regulation of commons in the name of 'higher goals', 'public interest' etc. has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is quite possible that this process saw the further dispossession of the most marginal sections of the society (e.g. through nationalisation and management of forests by the State). On the other hand, it could enable the dispossessed/marginal to gain a greater voice in the management of affairs (e.g. the management of village forests by the panchayat – an elected local government body – rather than the traditional community, which were often dominated by the high caste).

In this context one may consider for instance whether 'gating' in the form of determining child-appropriate content is enabling or disabling.

(ii) One can make a more radical critique that does away with the idea of any regulation. But what would be the ground on which to make this radical critique: the Internet as a completely different medium, requiring different sets of ethical behaviour? In the case of the traditional commons, however, the reason that so many traditional commons have survived is the well-accepted principle of management through community norms. Could such a system prevail online?

My general point about commons/sharing etc. is not concerned with equity or material access. To the extent that we live in regimes of property, I accept that there will be exclusions. To me, what is important is the possibility of contesting the grounds of such exclusion. In that regard, I think the free software movement stands on a very different footing to the anti-censorship strategies of net activists. In both cases, they are contesting very different principles of exclusion. And again, both these are quite different from the politics of lessening the digital divide, either in terms of access to computers/bandwidth, or in terms of computer literacy and expressive abilities.

The digital commons can still be imagined and precisely because it is *not* anchored in an embedded community, it offers the distinct possibility of extending the boundaries of the ‘community’ in question. In other words, it is not the case that unless everyone has access to computers, or unless everyone is computer literate or unless free software becomes the norm, there is no commons. There is – if we bear with Marx’s insight that the seeds of the new are already contained in the old.

**Shuddhabrata Sengupta <shuddha AT sarai.net> wrote:**

I don’t think the digital divide is something that operates between those that have access to computers and those that don’t. As a corollary, one might say that a ‘digital commons’ is not necessarily that which exists between all people who have some form of access to computers.

Access (or the lack of it) to a digital space is a function of cultural distance as well as social class and economic capacity. While a young working class kid may not have access to computers in a city like Delhi on a frequent or regular basis, a powerful and elite intellectual in the same city, (say, a director in a publishing firm) may choose not to work with computers, because he can afford to, (let us say that his secretaries take a lot of dictation). Does this mean that these two people are on the same side of the Digital Divide, or that they share an ‘Analogue Commons’?

Clearly, a data entry operator who gets repetitive strain injury and the spoilt rich kid who gets a new computer every time Apple brings out its latest model are not equally placed within a ‘digital commons’. Perhaps there is nothing common (digitally or otherwise) between them. What then, is a common digital space in culture, and how might it be entered, and how might we pitch our tents on it?

It is no doubt true to say that a notion of a ‘Commons’ in societies such as ours is quite fragile. The commonplace and somewhat bleak (bleak in my opinion, that is) understanding of ‘a common cultural space’ seems to be that which people can ‘hold’ together out of having a shared sense of being mutually beholden to a given ‘identity’ formation, or to a given construct of destiny and culture, or subculture, devolving from this ‘identity’ formation. This is the tricky terrain of the ‘authenticity of feeling’ or subjectivity of togetherness that a given identity formation bestows upon its people. But the problem with this tyranny of authentic feeling is that it doesn’t allow you to take things away from this ‘identity’ or to bring new things into this field of ‘identity’ which would either subtract or complicate matters for its formation. This identity formation could be language, nationality, religious adherence or ethnic affiliation.

In other words, I cannot simply edit that constituent of my particular cultural commons (that which is shared by me and others who I think are exactly like me) without simultaneously challenging one of the key features in the landscape of my commons. This threatens to dislocate me, both emotionally and culturally. But can I afford not to conduct this operation? Especially, if I want to find new things to share with other people.

One problem that has been bothering all of us at Sarai has been the question of appropriate scripts and fonts for writing in Hindi and other Indian languages in a digital domain. This is crucial to any project that seeks to intervene in the fashioning of a ‘digital commons’ in Non-Romanolect languages. (Romanolect languages are those whose character set is the Roman alphabet, like English, Turkish,

Yiddish, Tulu and Bahasa Indonesia, while Non-Romanolect languages would include Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali and Hebrew.) In South Asia and in India, (where Romanolect and Non Romanolect languages cohabit) this would be of paramount importance. And the shape of an emerging 'digital commons' would bear the mark of this cohabitation.

The dilemma that is before us is something like this: am I committing cultural violence to the language that we share (Hindi) by arguing that it be written in the Roman alphabet on computers, so as to make Hindi in some ways more accessible (shareable) as a digital language for first time computer users? [Notice here, the crucial difference between that which we 'share' (the Hindi language) and that which is 'shareable' (the Roman alphabet).]

Or am I, by insisting that Hindi be written only in Devanagari characters, also ensuring that it never takes its place as a workable language in any 'digital commons', at least for the time being, and so necessarily endorsing a linguistic monoculture in which English, with all its class and cultural baggage in a South Asian context, reigns supreme?

Now this is a very vexing question because, by writing Hindi in Roman characters (as opposed to Devanagari characters), I am simultaneously taking something away from the present form of the language (its script) and adding something (other characters) to the act of writing in that language. In other words I am at the same time subtracting from and complicating the sense of the 'Hindi-ness' of this new Hindi in cyberspace. This imperils me with its inauthenticity, cleaves me from the history and tradition of the language (its existing commons) and at the same time allows for new forms of solidarity by discovering a possibility of expression that would otherwise be denied to me, (because of the difficulty and the cost of writing Hindi digitally) that I can share with others, in Hindi (as opposed to in English), in the digital domain.

The question to ask would be which of these things contributes to the Commons that we are building in the present for an appropriate digital form of the Hindi language. Should we abandon the task of building a 'digital commons' in Hindi because it may not be possible to do so with the existing script in an accessible fashion, thus ensuring that the majority of those who have Indian languages as their first languages are always left looking into a digital domain from outside, never looking out from within it.

While on the one hand, the loss of Devanagari characters, does involve a sense of loss of the shared and even tactile familiar, a refusal to countenance that loss (at least until such time that a standardised key map and accessible digital tools for Devanagari are available) also means ensuring that Hindi remains a fringe language in the digital public domain, and that only those who have access to difficult and expensive Hindi software and proprietary fonts are able to deploy Hindi as a language of digital expression.

In other words, by insisting on the latter option, I help maintain the grip of an existing cultural and social elite over a popular, living language. I do this in order to continue sharing an authentic sense of the Hindi Language with its established forms of practice.

It seems to me that the need to build a 'digital commons' might in some cases imply that we have to find new tools that are alien, though not unfamiliar, to our older commons and to established forms of authenticity and togetherness. If we were all equally inept and inauthentic in our deployment of these new tools, then this would imply an equality of ineptitude. And the fumbling, the necessarily faulty and crude steps that we could take, with new (though not necessarily unfamiliar) tools, would still be worthwhile in that they could at all be taken together and in common.

This does not require us to jettison older tools inasmuch as we continue to operate in older forms of common cultural space (say in print), but it does ask of us a certain equivocal stance, of being non-committal to older as well as to newer forms of shared cultural spaces. Of realising a necessary 'outsiderness' at all times, in all common spaces. And realising that our deployment of a particular tool of expression is contingent on the 'commons' that we are in, at any given moment.

While the sense of inauthenticity accompanying this stance may produce some discomfort, it at least brings with it a means of entering the digital commons on reasonably fair terms. Once there, we are free to forage for new meanings and new identities.

All photographs: Monica Narula

Monica Narula <monica AT sarai.net> and Shuddhabrata Sengupta <shuddha AT sarai.net> are filmmakers and media practitioners with the Raqs Media Collective, and co-initiators of Sarai. Awadhendra Sharan <sharan AT sarai.net> is a historian of urban spaces working at Sarai

## Social Misery, Mad Pride

By Matthew Hyland

**Matthew Hyland** looks at two examples of emergent protest cultures: one operating behind the spectacle of the prison system, the other a defiant political body celebrating mad culture

### UNDISAPPEARING SOCIAL MISERY

The grim alliance between 'deterritorialised' capital and its rampant 'criminal justice' machine exhibits, it must be conceded, an elegant symmetry. 'Quality of life' legislation, 'zero tolerance' policing and public-private prison expansion deliver what Angela Y. Davis calls the "magic disappearance" of social misery. At the same time there are lucrative paybacks for particular capitalists – not only in security and prison design, construction and administration, but also in countless industries making use of prison labour or speculating on the growth of the enforcement industry. Finally this 'booming' but unproductive sector vampirises social wealth, creating more misery and thus more 'need' for policing and imprisonment.

Davis imagines a convergence of "grassroots projects" at this vanishing point of State/capital symbiosis. Easier said than done, but not inconceivable. In Britain, the CAGE network has linked prisoner support, research, education, occupations of prison building sites with action against other forms of racist social enclosure, notably immigration enforcement. Pickets of detention centres became 'criminally damaging' near-invasions, contact was made with detainees and at least one deportation stopped through airport intervention.

Brixton-based Movement For Justice, meanwhile, fights the systematic racism of 'criminal justice', including immigration law, on a day-to-day basis. This means politicisation of the legal process – public and successful work on frame-ups, racist attacks and asylum cases, advocacy for 'victims' in dealings with their 'own' lawyers. It also involves straightforward direct action, a 'Don't Walk On By' campaign organising the tendency for 'interfering' crowds to form on South London streets to stop the police doing their unwelcome 'job'.

### MAD PRIDE

It comes as news to no-one that in every social dimension we have been witnessing a massive privatisation of destiny and an individual internalisation of responsibility. This is evident in welfare and labour market 'reform' (adjust the flexible worker to the fancies of the market) and speculative science ('the gene' as ubiquitous explanatory paradigm), but nowhere more than in 'mental health'. 'Treatment' for mental distress means forcibly adapting the sufferer to their surroundings while depriving him/her of the power to act on them, setting up a vicious solipsistic circle from which escape is difficult. The public appearance in 1999 and 2000 of Mad Pride amounts to a refusal of this imposed autism. Collectively the 'mentally ill' seize back the agency denied to isolated patients. Mad Pride emerged from the daily reality of the 'survivor' or 'user' movement. Through user groups the 'ill' defend themselves in institutions that have the power to drug, imprison and electrocute them. (One indication of the groups' effectiveness is the Maudsley Hospital Trust's recent attempt to bypass them by appointing 'user representatives' itself). This work is urgent, pragmatic and low profile; Mad Pride links it to a wider antagonistic politics. The name mocks not so much all notions of illness as an uncritical preference for 'health'.

One catalyst for Mad Pride's creation was Labour's abysmal new Mental Health Act. This will remove many of the safeguards currently protecting users from sectioning, ECT and ruinous, sometimes fatal, neuroleptic polypharmacy. A new power of Compulsory Treatment in the Community would force users to live under curfew in a particular place in order to ensure access for various kinds of professionals. Any prisoner – even those on remand – could be detained indefinitely for treatment on diagnosis of 'mental disorder'. If 'biopower' means social control exerted directly through bodies without political or juridical mediation, surely it appears in a refined form here.

Faced with a 'health' mechanism menacing freedom and even survival, Mad Pride conceives its action in far-reaching terms. The introduction to the Mad Pride anthology notes that in the future "the boundaries between 'mental illness' and 'criminality' will be further blurred", and that survivors/users "can expect during the next decade to be charged rent by biochemical research companies for carrying patented genes." While the organisation's official aims are, wisely, more circumspect, anyone taking seriously the shift from representational politics to bio-political control will be cheered to hear voices from where the experiment is most 'advanced' affirm that "direct action is the correct way forward: defiant displays of ostentatious madness; riots; sabotage; medication strikes; and linking up with those elements who wish to bring about a complete transformation of society."

Matthew Hyland <asperger AT caramail.com> is co-compiler of Wolverine, the journal of Childish Psychology [<http://wolverine.c8.com/>], and is one seventh of the Mean Streaks.

Angela Y. Davis, Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex, [<http://www.arc.org/PagesArcColorLines.html>]

CAGE: [<http://www.veggies.org.uk/cage>] (the site seems to be down at time of writing)

Movement For Justice: P.O. Box 16581, London SW2 2ZW

Ted Curtis, Robert Dellar, Esther Leslie & Ben Watson (eds.), Mad Pride, a Celebration of Mad Culture, London, Spare Change Books, 2000. Page 7.

Mad Pride: [www.madpride.net](http://www.madpride.net)

Southwark MIND (South London user-led organisation): Cambridge House, Camberwell Road, London SE5 0HF

# Blockbusting the Election

By Benedict Seymour

**Benedict Seymour** on the evolution in televisual aesthetics in the UK's Party Election Broadcasts.

“There now follows a Party Election Broadcast by...” Words to make any cineaste's heart beat faster and ones which, in the past month or so, have introduced a riot of visual experiment to British television screens. While elections have ceased to function as an arena for the bracing clash of policies, they remain the party political equivalent of Cannes. PEBs offer a feast of aestheticised politics, with even the less affluent players now able to rustle up some kind of a show, from the humble ‘indie’ parties with their earnest discursive fare to the high concept offerings of Downing Street.

New Labour made a big fuss about their main offering, an ironic pastiche of disaster and horror movie trailers. Joining up their series of slick billboard ads riffing on the danger of a Conservative return to power (‘Towering Interest Rates’; ‘Economic Disaster 2’; ‘The Repossessed’) they aimed to create a summer blockbuster. However, with borrowed stars (William Hague and Michael Portillo on loan from Conservatives) and a series of po-mo one-liners in place of a plot, this was the PEB equivalent of *Naked Gun 3*, smartarsed and pseudo-subversive. The Conservatives' own flicks were even less dynamic, content to reprise the look (and much of the action) of TV crime shows – anything, presumably, to avoid the task of making William Hague into a credible male lead.

With a merger of the major studios apparently imminent, it fell to the indie newcomers to enliven this year's competition with their punkish low-budget productions, even if they did less well at the box office. Ken Loach directed the Socialist Alliance's TV film in precisely the style he used to use for (old) Labour Party broadcasts back in the 1970s. His PEB dispensed with story, suspense and semiotic spin, to concentrate on ideas, argument and that old standby of the pre-Kinnock election broadcast, *People In Crowds*. As in traditional art cinema, the auteur was the real star, and his cool, almost Calvinist refusal to elicit conventionally ‘good’ performances from the film's cast made one wonder if Loach conceived it as a ‘Dogme’ work. It observes the spirit if not the letter of the Vow Of Chastity which all Dogme directors are supposed to take (“I promise not to fool the audience”), although zealots might complain that the use of captions and tripod shots diminish its authenticity.

The same cannot be said for that other rogue offshoot of the old Labour Party studios, Socialist Labour. Their film subjected realist conventions to a relentlessly self-conscious neo-Godardian interrogation, adhering to his maxim that a film must have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order. Introducing the film's two stars in ‘backstage mode’ – Arthur Scargill (relieved of his iconic comb-over in a shocking concession to Blairite hair policy) and Ricky Tomlinson (loveable TV proletarian with a Trade Union history, best known as the dad in *The Royle Family*) – we glimpse them hanging out at the studio and informally discussing Issues. Scargill enthuses about Ricky's appeal to working class audiences – surely a deconstructively self-reflexive touch, not a Stalinist strategy of self-congratulation – then, after running through the policies and panning over the autocue speeches that they will read, we finally get Scargill and Tomlinson's ‘actual’ speeches to camera. Systematically alienating even the most mystified of viewers, this film managed to echo Socialist Labour's workerist and pro-industry position by foregrounding the technological means and process of its own production. Fusing Brecht and Brookside, it proved that cinematic modernity and political atavism can be fun.

Benedict Seymour <ben AT bseymour.freereserve.co.uk> is a writer, journalist and filmmaker. He is currently working on a film about regeneration in London. He wrote about the ICA's CRASH: Culture and complicity in Mute16.

## Hacking Away At Patents

ByFelix Stalder

Don't let the apparently contradictory stance of 'Big Blue' IBM supporting technologically 'radical' open source confuse you. While you're keeping your eye on the operating systems ball, in the land of hardware and patents, business goes on as usual. Felix Stalder reports on the challenges ahead.

[IMAGE]

>> Logo by Andreas Dilger, combining Larry Ewing's 'Tux the Penguin' and modifications on Allan Petlock's logo.

Everyone loves open source (OS) these days, with the predictable exception of Microsoft which is most directly threatened by it. Some, like Pekka Himanen in his optimistic book *Hacker Ethic*, go as far as arguing that the OS community is not only developing new software for the Internet, but also nothing short of a new ethical foundation for the network society at large. Similar to the way in which 17th century protestant ethic – work, rationality and self-restraint – laid many of the cultural foundation for 19th century secular capitalism, the culture of self-motivation, openness, and collaboration permeating the OS movement is seen as the core of an emerging new ethic. Recently, big business has begun to join this praise of OS, though for somewhat more pragmatic reasons.

Leading the pack of corporations that have discovered OS and the Linux operating system is IBM. This has less to do with a new ethic than with hard-nosed business strategy. More than a decade ago, IBM ignored the emergent client-server paradigm, saw Sun and Microsoft prosper and almost went bankrupt. It then reinvented itself as hardware and service company focusing on 'solutions'. A free operating system that can be customised for its own hardware and given away with extensive service contracts fits in this strategy perfectly. Consequently, IBM is pouring more than \$1 billion into various open source initiatives. While this is a lot of money, one can assume that it is much less than IBM currently pays in licensing fees for proprietary software.

More surprising than IBM's sudden embrace of the OS community is the enthusiasm with which its gesture is being welcomed by many OS activists. Not too long ago IBM was the proto-typical sterile corporation that inspired the killing-you-for-your-own-good computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey and Apple's famous 1984 Big Brother commercial. Also not too long ago the OS movement was distinctly countercultural. An odd couple, it seems. The main reason for this enthusiasm is the fact the IBM's support of OS finally proves that Linux is really serious. IBM gives the OS movement the recognition that many within it had been craving. In the peculiar culture of the US, being serious means, above all, being useful for business. What was noted as particularly beneficial was the fact that IBM's involvement made Linux a safe choice for conservative managers or, as one slashdoter put it, "No one has ever been fired for buying IBM, Intel, or Microsoft." Thanks to IBM, middle managers can now add Linux to this safe-play category.

How long this unlikely honeymoon will last, and if it's ultimately beneficial to the OS movement, remains to be seen. Underneath the balmy surface there are conflicts lurking between the suits and the hackers and none more important than the issue of software patents. A patent grants an inventor for a limited time exclusive right to exploit an invention. Contrary to proprietary software, which prevents knowledge from the public domain by hiding the source code, a patent makes an invention public but

restricts the rights to use this invention to the patent holder. Particularly contentious are the software and business model patents because they often cover general ideas and broad ways of doing things that are not necessarily always new.

Like in an arm's race, many companies acquire such general patents as a defensive weapons. The more patents a company controls, the better its bargaining position in cross-licensing deals with other companies that also hold patents. While such a mutual disarmament practice works reasonably well in a corporate world crawling with lawyers, it's a direct threat to the development of an OS movement which has traditionally rejected patent protection for software in favour of a more collaborative, non-proprietary approach to innovation. This is therefore especially vulnerable to having its development efforts crippled by the threat of costly patent infringement suits. This is a very real problem. Some key technologies can't be used without expensive licenses. Open source browsers, for instance, can't display GIF images because the algorithm used for the format is patented by a company called Unisys which is increasingly trying to impose licensing fees.

All of the big technology companies which are currently supporting Linux are also engaged in the amassing of software patents. None more extensively than IBM which has secured by far the most US patents: a grand total of 2,886 in the last year alone. Not all patents are bad, of course. Some, however, are very questionable. Last year, for example, IBM acquired a patent on the idea of using spare processing power of idling computers connected to the Internet for computationally intensive processes in the fashion of seti@home. This is hardly an innovation but clearly an attempt to cover as much territory as possible and to secure dominance over an entire field that has barely developed.

Such a strategy of protective land grabs is clearly at odds with the spirit of the open source movement. To what degree such patents are being enforced in the context of OS software remains to be seen. However, as it moves into mainstream business it is likely to be more and more affected by it. To address this problem in a constructive manner, Bruce Perens – the author of the Open Source Definition and one of the most respected OS activists – has been calling for a meeting, Open Source and the Law, with industry representatives later this year. His goal is to convince the corporations which are now making money off OS that they should support the movement by relinquishing some of the patents that are most restrictive for future OS development. A long shot, to say the least.

Felix Stalder <felix AT openflows.org> has recently completed his Ph.D., is a member of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, a co-founder of openflows.org, one of the moderators of the Nettime mailing list and a few others things. He lives in and out of Toronto, has seven nieces and nephews in Switzerland and most of his texts are archived at <http://felix.openflows.org>

Pekka Himanen: *The Hacker Ethic, and the Spirit of the Information Age*, Random House 2001; Bruce Perens: *Software Patents vs. Free Software* [<http://perens.com/Articles/Patents.html>]

## **Melting Pot Markets & Digital Commons**

ByMute Editor

Editorial

Including: Ted Byfield interviews James Boyle, James Flint and Hari Kunzru futurecast the British countryside, Delhi's Sarai Centre, JJ King on ICANN, Maria Fernandez and Suhail Malik on the Cyborg Manifesto, Matthew Hyland on social exclusion protest and the politicisation of the 'mentally ill', reviews: John Hutnyk's South Asian Sound of London special, Esther Leslie on Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid On Earth

In mid 1600s Britain, with food prices reaching record heights, the notion of common land became intensely political. A group called the Diggers, led by one Gerrard Winstanley, alarmed the Commonwealth government and roused the hostility of local landowners with their claims that common land should be made available for the very poor to cultivate. Dogged by legal actions and mob violence, and abjuring the use of force themselves, the Diggers movement ended scarcely a year after it began. But it had succeeded in bring the idea of commons as a political scene into the European consciousness.

This issue of *Mute* is dedicated to the theme of the digital, or intellectual, commons. The term enjoys a certain currency at the moment, and for good reason. It implies that the world's growing wealth of information might turn out to be a parallel to the shared, common land that was once our birthright and that, like its physical analogue, this shared information space could be revealing itself as an intensely political domain.

But, in Western Europe, this revitalisation of the commons comes at a different time of crisis, one that is arising from the increasing homogenisation and democratic dislocation of party politics. Our evolutionary interpretation of political history has left us with a managerial style of governance that many are less than happy with. Its dominance may be attributed to the success of consumer capitalism or the so called 'end of history', but its brand of perfect pragmatism feels ever more out of touch.

So, let's turn this ostensibly static situation on its side. Consider this 'ordinary' crop of events, just for a moment. 1) The UK Conservative Party responds to the apocalypse of a second New Labour landslide with plans to nurture a more 'caring' and 'inclusive' image. 2) UK New Labour leader Tony Blair celebrates his now secure second term in EU politics by building prime buddy relations with right-wingers Silvio Berlusconi and José Maria Aznar. 3) 'Social Democrat' Euro-politicians, Tony Blair among them, criticise Gothenburg's anti-capitalist protestors for their authoritarian tendencies. 4) In the UK's *Daily Telegraph*, arch right wing cultural critic Roger Scruton defends the protestors' use of violence. He compares their revolt favourably with the 'spoilt-brat' leftist uprising of '68 Paris and affirms its critique of unaccountable, secretive and virtualised global governance. 5) Finally, the World Bank withdraws from its scheduled meeting in Barcelona citing 'freedom of expression' as the cause for a 'move online'.

Our homogeneous evolutionary pinnacle, it seems, is producing some contradictory results. Faced with restrictions in choice at the local level, and an escalating sense of crisis and inequity at the global level, citizens are rewarding their political 'managers' with what, to them, must seem a curious mixture of apathy and direct action. Left and right are borrowing each other's mantles and totems in a race to be most democratic.

But increasingly frequent public lurches towards nationalism and fascism at one end of the political spectrum, and towards a new leftism at the other, seem to be leaving their representatives alone in preaching the centre ground. Is it possible that our sense of stasis cloaks a dramatically turbulent and open political scene?

Politics is fought, now more than ever, in the realm of the symbolic. The 'information' so central to it takes routes through megacorp-owned news media, public relations tools, stock exchanges, the entertainment industry, public policy documents and independent media. While it twists and turns tactically, strategically mixes and melts, the premium on information grows whilst its value appears to diminish. So, where does it end up? Who owns it? Can it provide a shared history and resource? Is there now, or will there ever be, such a thing as a digital commons? In the main section of this issue, James Boyle, Ted Byfield, members from Delhi's Sarai New Media Initiative and JJ King provide some tentative answers to this vexed question.

## Racial Biotech Business as Usual

By Eugene Thacker

If you thought that genomics had already exhausted the chamber of ethical horrors, think again.... By **Eugene Thacker**

[IMAGE] Now that the genome is 'finished', the question on everyone's lips is what it all means: Programmable pills? Hotshot gene therapy? Crystal ball health care? Or, quite frankly, just a lot of data? While research continues into post-genomic fields such as proteomics and pharmacogenomics, one of the first immediate uses of the genome data has been in the practice of 'population genomics'. Combining bioinformatics (computer science applied to molecular biology), molecular genetics, health care data, and genealogical records, population genomics has begun its task of databasing the population.

Its predecessor is the infamous Human Genome Diversity Project which, in 1994, set out on a US NIH-sponsored budget to collect genetic samples from isolated, indigenous groups around the world. While the HGDP were forced to back down due to overwhelming protest, the new wave of computer-boasted biotech is just getting started. Biotech companies are focusing on the genomes of particular populations: Iceland's deCODE has its IHD or Icelandic Health Database, which aims to mine Iceland's gene pool for potentially useful (read: patentable) drug targets. Others have followed suit: Myriad Pharmaceuticals is doing the same for selected Mormon communities in the US., Oxford Biosciences for Newfoundland communities, Autogen Limited for Tonga communities in Australia, and Gemini Genetics for descendants of French settlers in Quebec. With their histories of low migration and genetic drift, such groups are becoming prime targets for a new biotech niche-market, where 'nation', 'race' and perhaps even 'culture' all mean the same thing: targetable DNA.

While the actual research has not definitively shown that there is a genome specific to racial and/or ethnic groups, the use of the human genome data to target specific peoples is becoming part of the biotech industry's business plan, as deCODE's recent partnership with pharmaceutical giant Roche demonstrates. The logic is that if you can isolate genes responsible for diseases that are specific to certain groups, you get one step closer to the dream of personalised genetic medicine. Outside of industry, there are also non-profit or government-funded projects underway such as the Estonian Genome Foundation and Howard University's (in the US) Genomic Research in African-American Pedigrees (or G-RAP) which have, in some strange way, become the basis for a genetics-based nationalism or ethnicity.

Whether the goal is new drugs, patentable products, or the preservation of racial and cultural 'heritage', critics argue that this also creates the conditions for a new type of genetic discrimination and racial profiling. Except that this time, the 'difference' being discriminated is based first and foremost on data – all that human genome data stored in the databases of GenBank or Celera. With such endeavours, novel software and data mining agents – such as those made by Incyte, Lion Bioscience, Compugen – have become the key to identifying unique genes and genomes. It appears that the old markers of 'race' – principally visibility and representation – are being joined by sequences on a database; data management has become a new type of biopolitics.

Eugene Thacker <eugenethacker AT hotmail.com> is an Assistant Professor of New Media at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He has written extensively on biotech and biomedicine, and also works with the group Fakeshop.

# Looking Inward, Finding Nothing

By Shane Brighton

After spending Mayday confined in London's Oxford Circus with other enemies of the British state, Shane Brighton asks if it's time for anti-globalisation protestors to sidestep the media's obsession with public order and focus on education and informing.

[IMAGE]

>> Photograph by David Panos

The depressed torpor afflicting those inside the police corrals which ended the Mayday protest may well have been the effect of hours of cold and confinement. To me it felt like a physiological reaction to the protest itself.

Travelling home from central London I found myself wondering less about what had or hadn't been achieved than whether anything really happened at all. Catching the late news didn't help much. Police helicopter footage neatly expressed the mainstream media's focus, simply showing the extent of the protest and its containment. In the following days much was made of the police strategy which simultaneously turned a political demonstration into a contest over space and announced its own "victory" by closing in the "opposition". Other commentators announced the marchers' victory in the contest over perceptions, the undermining of media cliché through humour and 'subversively passive' tactics. Nobody (unless I blinked and missed it) said much about globalisation or the domestic problems associated with neo-liberal economics.

Accepting, as most of those involved seemed to, that what was important was less what occurred than the way it was perceived and represented, the Mayday protest was a *fait accompli* of sorts. The media's search for violent spectacle was largely foiled by the protestors' scrupulous self-policing. In fact, the biggest display of collective passion I witnessed was the mass booing of a few individuals who, tired of being boxed in, started bashing at shop windows. But isn't there something missing in all this? It's one thing for liberal journalists to set the agenda around the question of whether the protest is 'peaceful' (and therefore 'legitimate') or 'violent' (and therefore 'illegitimate'), but why should this be uncritically accepted by anyone else?

Shouldn't protest do more than reassure people? What about legitimating protest through informing and educating people about the things that mainstream media, for the most part, exclude – like the specific social and environmental effects of globalisation? What about taking the whole thing out of the juridical discourse of public order into a more authentically political one, the aim of which being to provoke people to ask questions about the way we are governed?

On Mayday the police created populous, neatly defined political spaces in full view of the nation's media, spaces which were then effectively de-politicised by those inside them. There was no attempt to initiate mass discussion, to debate strategic activism or disseminate information. The only collective response to the police tactic of confinement seemed to be drumming and dancing – fine if you want to get E'd up and have fun, not so fine for publicising what's happening in the shantytowns of Manila and Sao Paulo.

Shane Brighton <shane.brighton AT virgin.net> is a Doctoral Candidate and Teaching Assistant at the University of London.

# The Regeneration Game

By Jemima Broadbridge

The notion of ‘regeneration’ is often used to underwrite new urban development schemes. In London, agencies such as Cityside Regeneration claim to be generating massive new opportunities for the local community. But increasingly, campaigners are asking who regeneration really benefits. This is the question at centre of the Spitalfields Market Under Threat campaign in London. Jemima Broadbridge, SMUT’s media spokesperson, explains why this is more than a local campaign.

[IMAGE]

Spitalfields Market, situated in the shrinking hinterland between London’s City district and its fashionable East-end, is both a food market, a community centre and a base for a number of thriving businesses. By night the space is used by rollerbladers: by day, city workers and bike couriers alike get lunch from one of its many stalls. On Sundays, Spitalfields plays host to one of the most popular organic markets in London.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given its prime location, property developers are desperate to submit the market to their vision of ‘urban regeneration’, in the shape of more than half a million square feet of offices erected over most of the present market site. Critics point out that the firm of international lawyers slated to occupy the offices will have little call for local workers. In fact, with local employment rates in the market standing at 75% and 300 stalls presently operating in the Sunday market, it seems likely that many jobs will be lost to the Spitalfields community as a result of the development.

This, surely, is not regeneration but degeneration. The Spitalfields Market Under Threat (SMUT) campaign, a coalition of mosque, church, community and small business associations, is currently lobbying the Greater London Authority and the Mayor to veto the latest plans for the market. Although we do not anticipate a positive decision (the Corporation and its developer are due to pay £18m to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as a condition for planning permission, a sum the cash-strapped council can ill afford to refuse), it is hoped that through continued lobbying of MPs and English Heritage, we can raise awareness of the problematic notion of ‘regeneration’.

There is still a serious gap between policy and practice when it comes to honouring the participatory, ‘bottom up’ ideals the UK government claims as a central part of its vision for urban planning. In its White Paper on Urban Regeneration, the government promised to “put people first” in development plans, engaging us in “partnerships for change with strong local leadership and sustainable growth.” It is difficult to see how plans for Spitalfields tally with this rhetoric. Nor is Spitalfields an isolated case: the battle to preserve public space from often predatory private interests is currently being played out over listed buildings all over London, from Kings Cross threatened by the new Crossrail link, to Borough Market, faced with extinction in the face of Railtrack and the Government.

We use the term ‘brightfield’ – describing a site that provides colour, character and relief from other forms of city life and brings people together in both economic, social and recreational ways – to describe places like these and Spitalfields. It is the very centrality of such sites in city life that puts them under such pressure from real estate developers. Yet brightfields are far more valuable as centres for the urban communities that live around them than they are as bulldozed building sites. Through the SMUT campaign we hope to bring this message not only to the locals (who already understand it all too well) but to the broader public and, most importantly, the government.

Jemima Broadbridge <jemima AT broadbridge.fsnet.co.uk>

For more information on the SMUT campaign: <http://www.smut.org.uk>

## Whatever Happened to the Cyborg Manifesto?

By Maria Fernandez and Suhail Malik

In 1985, Donna Haraway unveiled 'The Cyborg Manifesto', thrilling cultural studies bods, new agers, feminists, and cyberpunks alike with its mix of military, political, laboratory and hippy flavours. Consigning the boundaries between the born and the built to the rubbish dump of history, Haraway's politics of the information age made waves. But ten years on, has the radical promise of her manifesto been borne out by history? Maria Fernandez and Suhail Malik think not – for completely opposing reasons.

[IMAGE]

>> Merlin Carpenter, *A Colloquium of Traktors*, 2000, ink on paper, 35x50cm,  
[<http://www.merlincarpenter.com>]

### THE CYBORG - SWEET SIXTEEN (AND NEVER BEEN CLONED)

In an era when nearly everything, from small seeds to large computer networks, entails practical or metaphorical organic and machinic fusions, the 'cyborg', that product of early Cold War cybernetic theory, and detoured by Haraway a generation later, has lost its political clout. Haraway's cyborg, "not of woman born", the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, was modeled upon the 'mezisaje' (racial mixing) of Mexican Americans. Acknowledging that she wrote the piece at a particular historical moment and primarily for women, Haraway's cyborg was an inconstant figure able to incorporate spiral dancers, electronic factory workers, poets, and engineers; a figure that allied diverse oppositional strategies, from writing to biotechnology. Given this radical theoretical openness, what did the Cyborg Manifesto (CM) really manage to achieve?

1> CM was an early recognition of the fundamental and irreversible changes brought about by digital technologies. Pre-dating Dolly, the Visible Man, the Visible Woman, and the (purported) completion of the Genome Project, Haraway discerned society's transformation into a "polymorphous information system" and "the translation of the world into a problem of coding," both phenomena with specific effects for women worldwide. In the 1980s, Haraway was one of a handful of cultural critics to write about the double-edged possibilities of biotechnology, a major focus of cultural work today. Her prediction that control strategies applied to women to give birth to new human beings would be developed using the language "of goal achievement for individual decision-makers" had, by the 1990s, has been all too fully borne out.

2> CM urged feminists to embrace new technologies as tools for feminist ends. This was a pressing antidote to the pernicious notion, popular at the time, that women belonged exclusively to 'nature'. The manifesto proposed that feminists definitely could and should use the master's tools to destroy (or at least disrupt) the master's house.

3> CM contributed to the growth of a pan-global labour consciousness, acknowledging the key role of women as workers in the global economy. It also inspired the development of 'cyberfeminism' in various parts of the world. But in contrast to Haraway's feminist, socialist and antiracist politics, cyberfeminism eschewed definitions, political affiliations (including feminism) and even goals.<\*> The political effectiveness of so undirected a movement is still to be determined. Issues of race and racism, primary in Haraway's formulation of the cyborg, have been avoided in cyberfeminism. This

silence could prove as destructive here as it was to second wave US feminism. One can only hope that cyberfeminism is still open to transformations.

4> CM proposed feminist associations based on affinities, not identity. Haraway wrote the manifesto in response to endless fragmentation of the US Second Wave feminist movement along the lines of ethnic, racial and sexual identity. The manifesto called for the crossing of boundaries and for a re-organisation of women on the basis of affinities of political kinship. Cyberfeminists followed Haraway's lead to associate on the basis of affinities, but at present, with some exceptions, these affinities tend to be career-oriented rather than political.

5> CM reinforced and popularised earlier Utopian feminist imaginings of a world rendered gender free by technology. Effectively, what this really meant was that those who could afford medical services and technology would be able to 're-generate' themselves at will. For a small segment of the world's population this has indeed been liberating and empowering. Previously 'monstrous' prostheses became beautiful.

If the original radicality of Haraway's cyborg lay in its illegitimacy, the ubiquity of digital, ex-military, and genetic technologies suggest that the cyborg is now a recognised legal citizen, much more a creature of social reality than of fiction. The utilisation of the cyborg as an image of edgy radicalism was, and still is, the territory of electronics and the fashion industry. As cyberfeminism emphasises the cyber and backpedals the feminism, the most radical politics of the manifesto have been largely ignored.

Maria Fernandez

#### THE CYBORG FIFTEEN YEARS ON, FIVE COMPLAINTS

We know what a cyborg is: the hybrid transfiguration of the human and the machine into one continuous, prosthetically extended, techno-organically enhanced whole. The hope of this integration is for a transorganic or transhuman future, something like an entirely new evolutionary stage of life which will surpass the organic limitations of brain and body in favour of new, unlimited potentialities. A new sort of future that undermines the divisions and boundaries between the human and its others; a cross-disciplinary movement that, as Donna Haraway asserts in her foundational text, 'The Cyborg Manifesto', has characterised liberal societies in postmodernity.

The cyborg is yet another manifestation of the collapse of the traditional bounded stability of the human and its anthropocentric beliefs. But this notion of the cyborg is a lazy reconfiguration of already well-established political and moral sensibilities – why?

1> It duplicitously welcomes the technoscientific hybridisation of the organic and the technical while maintaining and perpetuating the critique of technological rationality which has characterised left-liberal activism and humanities. Neither aspect is transformed by what is in fact a confrontation but comes to exist side-by-side in a typically vague optimism in which all transgressions of boundaries are welcomed, without adequate consideration of content or the difficulties involved. In this way, the theory of the cyborg perpetuates the standard assumptions of leftist (and proto-hippy) critique.

2> This hypocritical determination only serves to reinforce equally naive notions of an extended freedom and responsibility which, rather, the cyborg is in the service of. There is something disgustingly, liberally 'communitarian' about the cyborg in its current appreciation, which could be readily taken as a covert if naively assumed parochialism or, better, Americanism. No surprise that this should come from those on the nice left where 'contestation' always involves 'respect' and 'creativity' rather than war and destruction (see Hardt and Negri's approbation of Haraway in *Empire*).

3> Cyborg theory is mostly a self-serving sexying-up of critical liberalism through great gadgetry and concept-busting movements in the technoscientific organisation of living material and extended systems. Tie-dye T-shirts are swapped for leather deathpants and ethnic beads for prosthetic hardware in a desperate bid for contemporaneity.

4> But the errors and dogmatism of the now common notion of the cyborg also extend to the understanding of what is actually happening in the technosciences. The cyborg is a theoretical fiction, since how the machinic and the organic in fact materially interact and combine is not and cannot be accounted for by a theory ultimately based on abstractions.

5> This tendentious, primarily phantasmatic appropriation of technoscientific development as 'cyborgian' precludes a technically precise and fully inventive understanding of organico-machinic integration in favour of asserting what has been going on in well-meaning left-liberal circles for some time anyway. It is a complacent reduction of the actuality of the organico-machinic nexus, dulling it into politically comprehensible and polite terms.

Suhail Malik

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<\*> See '100 anti-theses' [<http://www.obn.org/cfunder/100antitheses.html>] and Faith Wilding, 'Where is the feminism in Cyberfeminism' [<http://www.art.cfa.cmu.edu/wilding/wherfem.html>] originally published in *nparadoxa* 33, London, 1998.

## My Back Pages

By Mark Dery

**Mark Dery** on the paper Information Overload can't destroy

[IMAGE] Spilling in yellowing drifts across my office floor, my unread *New York Timeses* are a melancholy monument to time famine. Heaped into a single stack, they would stand a yard tall, a veritable Burgess Shale of media sediment, literalising Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge." Is this the first step down the slippery slope that ends in Howard Hughes-ian obsession, my uncut toenails curling into corkscrews, every level surface in my house covered with mouldering newspapers, yet unread?

The notion that it's every bourgeois' sacred duty to digest the daily *Times* is a hangover from an earlier, more print-centric era, when a copy clutched firmly under one arm was every American's moral armour against the dreaded charge of cultural illiteracy. The paper's notoriously prudish motto ("All The News That's Fit To Print") promises a Calvinist diet, long on roughage and short on fun. Flogging oneself with a copy of *The New York Times* was and is a moral act, part of the American mania for self-improvement that began with *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* and lives on at Buddhist retreats, where stressed-out dotcomers sit for hours, wracked by leg cramps, while monks whack them upside the head with sticks.

So the *Times* is our secular Bible, a puritan nation's Daily Read. Then, too, for disaffected leftists, it's an EEG of the empire's ruling class, its selective emphases and conspicuous omissions a graph of the fears and fantasies of the power elite.

Of course, this is the politically correct reason for reading the paper; there are other, less sober ones. Some, like me, still chase the demented dream of holding the world, whole, in our heads. We seem to believe, in some neo-primitive way, that by stuffing our skulls with every scrap of data out there, from the menu of Timothy McVeigh's last supper to the distinguishing characteristic on the ex-President's penis, we can rob the information age of its power to overwhelm our puny primate brains.

Beyond such cyber-age power fantasies lies a more cosmic odyssey: the Monty Python-ian quest for the Meaning of Life. In his new nonfiction book, *Double Fold*, novelist Nicholson Baker rages against the widespread practice, in space-crunched American libraries, of destroying old newspapers. But as the Village Voice reviewer Julian Dibbell has noted, Baker's quixotic mission to save our old papers conceals a deeper yearning. Baker dreams, says Dibbell, "of having access to all the information ever published, and it drives [him] nuts to see a single scrap of it fall through the cracks." Bibliophiles like Baker – and myself – want to know everything about everything, perhaps because we dream of a Unified Field Theory of All Human Knowledge, in which every last datum is interconnected with every free-floating bit in a cosmic epiphany. The answer to the metaphysical riddle, "What is the meaning of life?," some of us are convinced, lies hidden in the mildewed pages of yesterday's papers – if only we could get to the bottom of them.

Mark Dery's <markdery AT mindspring.com> latest book is *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink*, published by Grove Press.

## Look At Me Ma, I'm Memetic

By Bill Thompson

In the attention economy, the media compete aggressively for our eyeball time. **Bill Thompson** investigates the latest memetic strategies.

[IMAGE]

The day after John Prescott punched Craig Evans in the run up to the recent General Election, web marketing agency Panlogic [www.panlogic.co.uk] created 'Splat the MP', a simple game that involves throwing virtual eggs at a range of politicians. News spread largely by word-of-email, generating massive publicity for the company. There was no campaigning message in the game, but there could have been. This ability to move rapidly to capitalise on news events is one thing that any campaigning group can exploit, but it requires the ability to spot an opportunity and seize it. Combine that with slow and steady awareness building and a solid list of email addresses and you're on the way.

We all know how quickly jokes do the rounds in the wake of a news event (especially a tragedy or a disaster). The best ones are quick off the mark, genuinely funny (or genuinely sick) and, crucially, very simple. The same applies to online promotions, whether in the form of games, visuals, jokes or email chains. Done right, these are a great way to draw attention to a site. But hitting the right note is not that easy.

Getting a joke or game to successfully spread around the web, whether in the slipstream of a news-event or by creating a stir all of its own, isn't necessarily about blind luck. There's an art to it. Think of it as memetic engineering; to spread thoroughly and fast, a meme needs a head that's as sharp and barbed as possible coupled with a streamlined and frictionless body. Slow download times count

as friction, as do complicated concepts or tricky execute-procedures of any kind (either human or machinic).

One way to achieve low friction is to dispense with having a body at all. You can do this by becoming totally parastic. Witness the classic site hack; with so many security flaws in Microsoft's Web server, all you need to do is find a representative of exploitative global capitalism using a Microsoft platform and hack into their site. Put up a few banners, deface the home page and tip off the media: you're guaranteed a mention in *The Guardian* and maybe even a hysterical rant from the *Daily Mail*. Thousands of people will flock to your campaign.

If illegal interference with other people's sites isn't your bag you may prefer less confrontational online tactics. These can be just as effective. Look at The Hunger Site [www.thehungersite.com], one of the pioneers of the principle, 'I click, they donate'. The one click 'body' is easy and hassle-free, and the 'barb' is perfect: it hooks right into you the first time that you hear it – whether or not you think it's a good idea. Lots of people slagged off the Hunger Site for being all about lazy altruism, but the Hunger Site didn't care – the whinging just helped to spread the word, and its 101 million lazy visitors since 1999 have sent 198 million cups of food to starving people since 1999. Simple, frictionless, memorable. Result.

Bill Thompson <bill AT andfinally.com> does stuff that mostly involves computers and the Internet. He writes for various on and offline publications, appears on radio (and sometimes TV), builds websites and writes books for children on how to navigate cyberspace. He also writes and runs an email arts newsletter.

## The Language of New Media

By Josephine Berry

Josephine Berry reviews *The Language of New Media*

Throughout the 90s Lev Manovich has raised the standard of new media criticism through his rare ability to mesh technical understanding (he is a trained computer programmer) with a historically grounded aesthetic analysis. How disappointing then that his magnum opus, which attempts a synthesis of his many shorter essays and interventions, should be so flat. Manovich's methodology is at first promising; he wants to produce a "comprehensive record" of the technical attributes and cultural effects of new media technology as it emerges and before its familiarity renders it invisible – a record that he regrets never having been written about cinema after its invention in 1895. By creating an exhaustive inventory of the effects that computation has on all mechanical and electronic media, Manovich hopes to be able to read the future by making a precise map of the present.

But this 'bottom up' operation runs into some fundamental problems. Firstly, its demands on the computing novice are too high, whilst it simultaneously taxes anyone even remotely familiar with the computer's basic functions with its excessively elementary descriptions. Secondly, and more seriously, its manual-like approach succeeds in reducing all cultural artefacts to subservient illustrations of its concepts. At times it feels as generic, dry and dislocated from actual experience as the very manuals it emulates. Artworks are cut and pasted into the text with the same montage mentality Manovich identifies as the avant-garde's core legacy to new media culture. His decision to contextualise net.film, net.art, digitally enhanced Hollywood cinema, and computer games primarily through early avant-garde filmmakers such as Vertov, Eisenstein and, more recently, Godard again cuts living, contemporary culture adrift from its moorings. What happened in the intervening years between the late 60s and the early 90s?

But if the book fails to present a compelling or convincing interpretation of its individual artefacts, its aesthetic extrapolations from fundamental technical processes are engaging. Railing against the George Lucas school of Hollywood naturalism which hides the profound 'variability' of the digital object, Manovich calls for a new media culture that lays bare the computer's inherent ability to composite, algorithmically alter, copy, access, and manipulate material ad infinitum – and he's right to do so.

Josephine Berry <josie AT metamute.org> is deputy editor of *Mute*, former co-editor of *Crash Media* and a PhD monkey desperately trying to complete her dissertation on site specific art on the Net.

*The Language of New Media* // Lev Manovich // MIT Press // 2001 // pp 354 // ISBN 0-262-13374-1

## **They Came, They Bored, They Conquered**

ByJJ King

A California based corporation running the Internet's Domain Name System in the interests of the US Department of Commerce. Sound unbelievable? Think again...

The domain name system (DNS) has recently been described by Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig as the most important "constitutional space since the Louisiana purchase." Lessig's statement may be hyperbolic (is the Internet's so-called 'namespace' really a direct successor to America's frontier? Is it a space at all? And is this the American constitution he's referring to?), but his recognition of the DNS as a major political scene is long overdue. The critical business of assigning the names and numbers that make the Net's addressing system work, too prosaic and technical to attract the attention of the mainstream media, has until recently been largely exempted from public scrutiny. But the activities of ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), a not-for-profit entity created to manage the namespace and recognised by the US Government in 1998, have begun to raise serious questions that have implications for our understanding not only of Net politics, but also of NGOs and transnational corporations across the board.

### **A DOMAIN NAME PRIMER**

The Net depends on domain names (such as 'metamute.com') as the unique identifiers needed to route e-mail, find web pages, and connect users to other resources online. Consequently, control over the Domain Name System (DNS) confers substantial power over the Net itself. Whoever controls the DNS decides what new families of 'top-level' domain names can exist (for example, new suffixes like '.biz' or '.xxx') and how these names and the numbers they refer to will be assigned to websites and other Internet resources. It is becoming increasingly obvious to many analysts that this power conferred by control of the DNS is, via ICANN and its satellite organisations, being used to do create a new regime of regulation online.

### **BLINDED BY SCIENCE?**

You are not alone. If the fairly complex technical issues surrounding the DNS aren't enough to put you off, ICANN's claims that there are nothing but technical issues in considering the DNS probably will. Vint Cerf, chair of ICANN, has gone out of his way to emphasise what he calls the corporation's "constrained responsibility" with regards to the namespace. He maintains that ICANN is a "technical coordination body," and that its focus is therefore on technical issues, such as 'does the registry work properly? Does it interwork with the root? Does it interwork with clients, registrars? Do you have a way of backing it up in case something goes wrong?' In other words, Cerf wants Net users to believe ICANN's remit is to fulfil the 'straightforward technical requirements' of making sure the

DNS functions correctly.

But under the guise of such ‘purely technical’ activities, ICANN has in fact repeatedly exceeded the mandate of the Memorandum of Understanding<\*> it signed with the US government in 1998. It has held controversial elections for public members on its board, allocated new TLDs\* whilst failing to open up the ‘.com’ registry to competition, negotiated ‘kingmaker’ agreements with registries, attempted to restructure relationships with national ccTLDs (country code Top Level Domains), and created a bizarre arbitration process for domain disputes (of which more in a moment). In doing all of these things, the corporation has remained intensely secretive, holding its meetings in a series of locations around the world (from Egypt to Yokohama, Japan) that prevent many members of the public from following its actions consistently, if at all.

Karl Auerbach, elected to represent North America on the ICANN board in October last year, has accused ICANN of being so secretive that even as a board member he often learns about its actions from outsiders. Auerbach too believes that ICANN shelters behind its claim of making ‘purely technical’ decisions whilst pushing through policies that far exceed its mandate. “Because the Internet is new and technical,” he argues, “there is much room to dissemble public policy as technology. I have a difficult time understanding how any of ICANN’s decisions concerned with the Domain Name System have any technical content at all.”

#### THE TECHNICALITIES OF POLICY, OR A POLICY OF TECHNICALITY?

One area in which it is difficult to perceive any kind of technical component is ICANN’s Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), a quasi-legal process which expands the protection of trademarks online to an extent not previously provided for in any US or international legislature. The UDRP attempts to substitute a set of uniform global rules for what was once a largely territorial system of rights and dispute resolution. By permitting wealthy trademark holders to pay for domains they want to acquire to be considered by ICANN-approved ‘arbitrators’, the policy is effectively being used to furnish corporations with a means to stake out their intellectual property online. Controversially, it allows the complainant to pay just one arbiter to decide on a case (repeat this sentence a couple of until its full import sinks in). As if that were not enough, published league tables of results allow trademark holders to ‘forum-shop’ for the arbitrator most favourable to their case.

Thanks to the UDRP, the trademark owner has gained significant advantages over domain names previously held by ordinary members of the general public. If one of ICANN’s approved arbitrators decide (as they are paid to) that a domain is ‘confusingly similar’ to a known mark, or that the defendant has ‘no legitimate interest’ in a domain, or was registered ‘in bad faith,’ then the trademark holder has a very good chance of retaining that domain for its own use. Many arbitrators (and I am excluding here eResolutions/Disputes.org, which has an excellent track record) tend to stretch the UDRP definitions to cover the facts of a particular case, in many instances coming up with ingenious definitions of ‘bad faith,’ ‘identical,’ ‘confusingly similar,’ and other such policy criteria. One arbitrator in particular, WIPO (The World Intellectual Property Organisation), has been attempting to create a so-called ‘preclusion’ doctrine that goes well beyond UDRP policy in holding that prior registration of a name constitutes ‘bad faith’ in and of itself, simply because it prevents the trademark holder from having the name they want. As a recent report by Milton Mueller, Senior Associate of the Global Affairs Institute, points out, domain name registrations are by definition exclusive, and there are worries that the preclusion doctrine could be used by arbitrators to justify ‘bad faith’ for any name a trademark holder wants.

Accordingly, a significant number of complainants have attempted to use the UDRP to acquire property rights over generic terms or to seize valuable names from legitimate owners. Yet panellists at the most popular arbitrators seem happier to find bad faith among registrants than among complainants. As of this year, those taking a dispute to an arbitrator stand a 78% chance of getting the domain they want – provided they pay their fees.

## DEEP DOWN IN THE CONNECTIONS

Why should ICANN be doing so much to support the rights of big business over the average Net user? The answer may well lie in the connections the corporation has with other NGOs and companies - and perhaps the US government itself. Tenacious ICANN-hound Ted Byfield (interviewing James Boyle in this issue of *Mute*) has already exhumed ICANN's close links with law firm Jones, Day, Reavis and Pogue (JDRP). The firm, through its partner Joe Sims, had a significant hand in the creation of ICANN, helping to draft ICANN's bylaws and select the initial board members. Another of its number, Louis Touton, became a central figure at board meetings, and now fulfils not only the role of General Counsel, but also Vice-President and Secretary for the corporation. In January this year, ICANN used an Executive Committee meeting in order to circumvent its elected board members and pay \$465,553.67 to JDRP for legal services rendered during the months of October and November. This gives at least some idea of JDRP's usefulness to the corporation.

It was JDRP, through Touton, who helped create the Government Advisory Committee, with its heavy WIPO presence that produced the UDRP. You remember WIPO. They're the folks who are helping trademark owners to help themselves, a UN organisation established for the benefit of (and largely paid by) corporate intellectual property interests. It is of little surprise that WIPO's dispute arbitration process is so grossly biased in favour of trademark owners. In December 1998 WIPO produced an Interim Report which called for the strongest intellectual property regime imaginable online, a one-sided procedure which, according to Michael Froomkin, another keen ICANN-baiter, all but encouraged domain name hijacking by experienced, well-funded multinational trademark lawyers, whose challenges would pose formidable risks and uncertainties to an average domain name registrant.

The WIPO Interim Report's recommendations were opposed by existing and prospective registries, organisations representing the Internet technical community and many individual domain name holders. But although this widespread opposition forced WIPO to modify its Interim Report, the vast majority of its intent made its way into the UDRP. Which is good for WIPO, now raking in the \$1000-a-pop fees it demands in return for retrieving names for its trademark owners.

## ELECTED MEMBERS? WHO NEEDS 'EM?

ICANN's potential authority is largely unbounded. Policy authority over the root server system and other central Internet functions make it possible for the corporation to exert very broad control over Internet activity. Yet one consequence of ICANN presenting itself as a technical body is that it is able to sidestep the accountability that should be concomitant with its power, evoking the glory days of the Net in which groups like the Internet Engineering Task Force saw to things in a voluntary, decentralised, consensus-based fashion. Does there have to be, ICANN therefore feels justified in asking, an elected presence on its board?

These, of course, are questions only appropriate to a corporation which really does limit its interests to the Net's 'technical co-ordination'. And given that many are now recognising the links between ICANN's putative technical work and the creation of public policies for intellectual property, industry competition, and perhaps even national sovereignty, they seem wildly out of place. What, it seems more proper to ask ourselves now, is the appropriate role of the Internet user in global Internet policy-making?

Unfortunately for the users, ICANN's first gesture towards giving us a voice was less than successful. Firstly, only five of the nine seats on the ICANN board turned out to be up for grabs; the rest, it was quietly announced, would be retained contrary to the pledges signed by the initial, 'interim' board members. Their reason for their hanging in there was, said Michael Fromkin, "because they are afraid of what ICANN might do if they are not there to stop it. They don't trust their own system". (Back in the days of ICANN's formation, the US government had assured us all that the initial, secretly appointed members of ICANN would serve only "until the Board of Directors is elected and installed", which was supposed to be a period of one year. These terms had now been increased to a minimum of four years.)

The 'At Large Membership' registration which then took place in order to establish a constituency to elect the board members was both over-complicated and fatally flawed, allowing only a woefully inadequate (and technically pathetic) 1,000-2,000 applications a day. It seems possible that ICANN did not anticipate the degree to which the public wanted to gain a voice in the global governance of the DNS, but many could not resist seeing this as part of a continued effort on ICANN's part to limit its public accountability by hobbling direct representation of users. It was, as Lauren Weinstein of the PRIVACY Forum puts it, "a dreadfully sorry excuse for a representative process." The fate of the At Large Membership (ALM) and the directors they have elected is still far from certain.

#### WHEN IS AN NGO NOT AN NGO?

Lt. Col Shoyster, the head of MPRI, America's largest military advisory firm, has recently suggested that military campaigns conducted by a private sector firm don't raise the same kind of political controversy as would, for example, aid from the US government itself. His suggestion gave credence to the notion that the military sector could be using mercenaries to train armies in countries where governmental intervention would be politically unpopular. Could the same strategy be at play in the case of ICANN? Could the US government be using the non-profit corporation to launder its policymaking?

"If so," says Michael Fromkin, "it violates the Administrative Procedures Act and violates basic norms of due process and public policy designed to ensure that federal power is exercised responsibly." Yet the facts speak very loudly indeed. Had the US government itself been behind the UDRP, or ICANN's shoddy election processes, there would have been hell to pay. Instead, because it is a non-profit corporation rather than a government department, ICANN is not obliged to undertake any of the tiresome, constitutional due process burdens imposed on governmental administrative bodies. It need not be (although it has always claimed brazenly that it is) transparent. It is not (at the moment) subject to the burden of judicial review or the Federal Administrative Procedures Act. It is not compelled to undergo any independent judicial review of its actions. It is not actually required to invite entities affected by its decisions to participate in making the decisions. It does not have to pretend to be democratic. In fact, ICANN has no external entity to which it is accountable other than the Attorney General of the State of California.

If ICANN is a corporation designed to represent the interests of the American government, to govern the global commons of Net users in American interests, then it is a dangerously unaccountable one insulated – as many commentators have pointed out – within a complex set of organisational shells, which preclude effective participation from outsiders.

ICANN SEE CLEARLY NOW...

As far as Tony Rutkowski of the Centre for the Next Generation Internet is concerned, ICANN is ‘a government corporation in disguise.’ Michael Fromkin agrees, calling ICANN an ‘adhocracy’ which advances US Department of Commerce interests under de-facto DoC control. Fromkin accuses the DoC of ‘half-handing’ management of the DNS to ICANN in order to let it go beyond governmental limits.

Yet there has begun to be the feeling, over the last six months, that ICANN may have gone a couple of steps too far. The DoC has become increasingly and publicly interested in the corporation’s activities and its constitutional propriety. In particular, one Senator Conrad Burns has been asking some very sticky questions about the legalities of having ceded so much power to the organisation in the first place. It may well be that ICANN is an experiment in ‘policy laundering’ which has failed dismally – insofar as many Net users are up in arms about its unaccountable, corporation-centric, bureaucratic activities. There are certainly those within the DoC who feel it’s high time that the corporation was reigned in.

Nonetheless, the strategies deployed by ICANN, if strategies they are, may work better for other such bodies in the future. We would do well to watch out for them. ICANN challenges the idea (implicit in recent writings of, for example, Negri and Hardt) that so-called NGOs must be necessarily non-governmental, divorced from the interests of the nation state. In fact, the example of ICANN suggests, the NGO can be a useful cipher for governmental and national interests (as well, as we already knew, as those of big business). We need to avoid being blinded by bureaucracy (viz. ICANN’s ‘byzantine’ structure, which makes studying its processes so difficult), or excessive technical detail. These can be used to manufacture, or sustain, a lack of interest from members of the public whilst making it very difficult for anyone who is interested to find their way to the issues that matter. Lastly, an issue that merits serious examination is whether an NGO or non-profit corporation can hide or shelter de facto policymaking under a canopy of ‘purely technical’ activities, as many commentators now (some rather belatedly) accuse ICANN of doing. Because it would be foolish to let other groups like ICANN camouflage their activities to the extent that the public sees no need for them to be publicly accountable. ICANN might well prove to be a failed experiment, but we can be sure that the corporation’s successors will learn from its mistakes. Certainly those of us at the receiving end should do the same.

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### DNS (Domain Name System)

Despite being infamously decentralised and non-hierarchical, the Internet in fact relies on the underlying centralised hierarchy of the domain name system, a service that translates easy-to-remember domain names into the IP (Internet Protocol) addresses that the Net is based on. Every time you use a domain name, a DNS service must translate the name into its corresponding IP address. For example, the domain name [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) translates to 207.25.71.29 .

### Root Zone File (‘The Root’)

At the top of the domain name system is the root zone file, which directs Internet Protocol number queries to other domain name system databases called top-level domain zone files. To ensure speed and consistency, the root server system is composed of 13 file servers containing copies of the root

zone file databases listing all domain names.

The master root server is called the ‘authoritative root server’ or the ‘A’ root server. Currently, the authoritative root server is operated by Verizon (formerly Network Solutions, Inc.) under the direction of the US Department of Congress, despite original plans to hand control over to ICANN. The other 12 servers receive updated information daily from the ‘A’ root server regarding the contents of the root zone file and the top-level domain zone files.

### Registries & Registrars

The ‘Registry’ is a database to which registrars (see below) have shared access. Each registrar writes new names to a central registry database, from which the authoritative root (see above) is built.

Registrars act as the interface between the public, applicants and registrants on the one hand, and the registry on the other. They apply on behalf of applicants to register .ca domain names in the registry, and provide registration renewal, transfer and information update services for registrants.

Registrar: A ‘Registrar’ (or “Domain Name Registrar”) is an organisation that is able to register domains within certain top level domains (see below for a definition of ‘top level domain’). Different registrars have rights to register within different names. Registries and registrars pay fees that account for 90 percent of ICANN’s budget. Any domain name registrar must contract with ICANN before its TLD name is listed in the root. All domain name registrars must also be accredited by ICANN before they can register domain names in the generic TLDs. This contractual relationship gives ICANN the ability to tax and regulate key aspects of the domain name business.

Some argue that it is through the registrar accreditation contracts that ICANN extends its regulatory control to domain name users. Each registrar passes on the conditions and constraints of the ICANN contract to the domain name registrant.

### Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

This document is the primary formal vehicle through which ICANN was officially selected as the private corporation contemplated by the government US White Paper of 1998, which expressed the intention of the US government to end direct support of Internet name and address coordination services.

The MoU establishes a development program to design and test mechanisms for private coordination of technical functions related to the DNS. Critics allege that the US government had no right to transfer control of the Internet to private parties.

### TLDs & ccTLDs

Top level domains are those at the ‘top’ of the domain hierarchy: ‘.com’, ‘.net’, etc.. So-called ‘country-code’ top level domains (ccTLDs) are those which also relate to specific nationalities (‘.co.uk’, ‘.co.nz’, and so on).

### ICANN Organisational Structure

Critics have drawn attention to ICANN’s ‘byzantine’ structure, calling it “hopelessly complex” and “insulated from accountability by [its] organisational shells.” In case you are in any doubt, the corporation’s formal structure is shown in this diagram ICANN is governed by 18 volunteer Directors and a salaried CEO who sits on the Board of Directors ex-officio. Members of ICANN’s Board of Directors are selected in four distinct ways. Three Supporting Organisations (SOs), each one representing a separate functional area of Internet management, elect three Directors. Five at-large members have been elected by ICANN’s at-large membership. The rest are hangovers of the initial ‘interim’ Board (some are calling them ‘boardsquatters’).

The ICANN Bylaws call for three Supporting Organisations, one concerned with domain names (the Domain Name Supporting Organisation or DNSO), one with IP address management (the Address Supporting Organisation or ASO) and the third with protocol parameter assignment (the Protocol Supporting Organisation or PSO).

The DNSO is composed of a Names Council, a General Assembly, and various Constituency Groups representing DNS-related interests. Each constituency elects three members of the DNSO Names Council which is supposed to manage the DNSO's 'consensus-building' process and communicate recommendations about Domain Name System policy to the ICANN Board of Directors.

useful urls

Official ICANN page [<http://www.icann.org>]

ICANN Watch [<http://www.icannwatch.org>]

Lextext's 'ICANN.Blog' [<http://www.lextext.com/icann>]

'the roving\_reporter' on Tasty Bits from the Technology Front [[http://tbtf.com/roving\\_reporter](http://tbtf.com/roving_reporter)]

## Vicky Victorious

ByMarek Kohn

Intentionally or unintentionally, the V&A's Victorian Visions exhibition proffered a surprisingly accurate interpretation of New Britain – New Labour's Britain that is. Among other things, its polite modus operandi also demonstrated how effective Victorians' attempt to create a pleasing self-image has been.

Sometimes, to make a change from contemplating the original features of the Victorian house in which I live, I try to imagine how it must have looked when it was occupied by Victorians. The vision of overstuffed and ungainly gloom is equally agreeable, symbolising as it does our luxurious liberty, in which we hold the rights to the Victorian heritage but have escaped from its duties.

The V&A's own Victorian Vision, marking the centenary of Victoria's death, is likewise one which is at peace with the past. It hasn't had to make peace; instead, it materialises upon an ideological field that had already been cleared. One of the merits of this exhibition is that it makes you stop and realise that this has happened. Many retired people can't for the life of them understand why their descendants choose and cherish Victorian houses: they grew up in them when the buildings were oppressively middle-aged. Those now themselves middle-aged remember when 'Victorian' meant not only obsolete and unacceptable, but laughable. The "Victorian values" invoked by Margaret Thatcher were condemned as all those things. And they were seen as values for a ruthlessly divided society.

All that, it's now apparent, is in a past from which the present has drifted clear. The public may now be invited to embrace the Victorians without a shudder and without irony.

At first glance the subtitle's omission of an article looks like no more than an opportunistic grab for contemporary relevance. But this really is how we are supposed to see it. Victoria, says the introductory gallery text, ascended the throne surrounded by "economic uncertainty, republican agitation and social unrest. Yet, through industry, imagination, confidence and a sense of their own history, the Victorians were able to create a new Britain, with a new morality and democracy, and an enthusiasm for education and progress". How uncannily like New Labour's these Victorian values were, apart from the morality and democracy, and the absence of "choice".

The nascent parliamentary Labour movement is represented by a picture of an orator addressing a crowd. Jutting forward at a Lenin-like angle, he could be a Bolshevik icon, but his listeners are decked out in top hats and straw boaters. This was presumably before the moment, noted by the historian Eric Hobsbawm, when working men universally asserted their class identity by donning flat caps and mufflers. In this context, though, the effect is emollient. Like the new Labour worldview, Victorian Vision is based on the understanding that there is only one grand story. Conflicts are acknowledged,

but dwarfed and lost in the crowds milling underneath the Big Tent.

Compassion is also fundamental to both visions; and the V&A's show presents many images that are truly moving. George Clausen's *The Stonepickers* is luminously respectful to its subject, a girl carrying stones in her apron, and with them her opportunities in life. So is *Thoughts of the Past*, by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, which depicts a young woman whose gown and features both signify an exquisite balance between dissolution and classical beauty. Her situation is conveyed with elaborate discretion: the man's cane on the floor, the harbour scene through the window, the moderate disarray of her effects, the clues undramatically adding up to suggest that she lives by selling sex. Her life may be a mess, but it is not a catastrophe. Paintings like these push the sentimental spaniels and even the *Monarch of the Glen* (displayed courtesy of UDV, United Distillers and Vintners) into the shadows.

A more selfish sympathy is apparent in the bust of *African Venus*. Her angles and her shock of spirals would propel her post-haste into today's fashion pages, and we can take it that Venus was not intended ironically.

The caption notes that images of other races became uglier later, referring vaguely, and somewhat off target, to the emergence of eugenics (which is not the same thing as race science). And here the strategy of The Victorian Vision is apparent. It refers but doesn't display. There are no examples of the caricatures depicting the Irish as gorilla-featured subhumans. In fact, there is next to nothing about the Irish at all. It would have been a different story if they had worn tartan.

One is hard put to find negative depictions of anybody else, either. Even in a painting of Europeans fleeing the Indian Mutiny, the only native is a loyal servant. The exhibition is, we're told at the beginning, about how the Victorians saw themselves. This implicitly benign perspective excludes the unkindest lights in which they saw each other. A cartoon or two from *Punch*, that fount of over-rendered snobbery, would have been a salutary corrective here.

Instead, courtly standards of manners prevail. Royalty has the first section of the show to itself, and also sets the tenor of the 'World' section, which is largely about treasures and souvenirs. This is the most traditional, object-centred part of the exhibition; and the objects overshadow the relationships they represent, blurring the distinctions between diplomatic exchange, imperial tribute, and looting. Victoria herself is present throughout, her remarks prominent among the many quotations blown up into epigrams. Her comment upon communication, technology and power is particularly apposite: "I touched an electric button, by which I started a message that was telegraphed throughout the whole Empire."

She also started a tradition of monarchical button-pressing which has obliged the present Queen to launch every grand technological slam short of the H-bomb. But it would be unfair to Victoria and to her husband to dismiss their participation as gesture. They were early adopters of the telegraph, which appeared the year before Victoria's reign began. Later the widowed Victoria became, the exhibition tells us, an 'enthusiastic' phone user. Albert's passion was the promotion of science and technology, his major achievement being his role in the Great Exhibition of 1851. As James A. Secord's book *Victorian Sensation* recounts, among the texts that Victoria and Albert read to each other in the evenings was the bestselling evolutionist book *Vestiges of Creation*.

A royal telegraph machine is almost the first object in the show. Almost the last is a device whose significance is conveyed by the lines from Hilaire Belloc on its glass case: "'Whatever happens, we have got / The Maxim Gun, and they have not'." Who 'we' and 'they' are is not elaborated, but the answer is given in John Ellis's *Social History of the Machine Gun*. The killer application for the first fully automatic machine gun was to counter the advantage native armies had in numbers. In Hiram Maxim's own words, it was for "stopping the mad rush of savages". Its industrial effectiveness was

confirmed at Omdurman, where the British achieved a kill ratio of 11,000 to 28.

Not only is it detached from this history, but it is kept well away from the Army section altogether. The Maxim is safely isolated in Technology, among the early movie clips and jolly advertising posters. Pointing towards the exit, it could be said allude to the ensuing century of mechanised slaughter. Somehow it looks more like it's aimed at the gift shop.

Marek Kohn's <marek.kohn AT mcr1.poptel.org.uk> books include *As We Know It: Coming to Terms with an Evolved Mind* (Granta), *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (Granta), and *The Race Gallery: The Return of Racial Science* (Vintage).

'The Secret of England's Greatness', by Thomas Jones Barker, 1863. Oil on canvas. © National Portrait Gallery

## A Greenish Brown and Unpleasant Land

By Hari Kunzru and James Flint

After a springtime of generating apocalyptic headlines and nationwide soul-searching on matters agricultural in the media, the UK's Foot and Mouth crisis now threatens to become an eerie background hum. The crisis continues, but has ceased to provide fuel to the fire of radically different agricultural futures. In this summer interval of positive attention, we follow up on Mute19's futurecasting article (Hari Kunzru's 'The Tomorrow People') with four satirical farming scenarios by **Hari Kunzru** and **James Flint**.

### BLASTED HEATH: A WILD AND LAWLESS LAND

After the final demise of upland farming and the consolidation of Britain's remaining food production into the East Anglian prairie belt, large areas of Scotland, Wales and the SouthWest are designated official government wilderness areas (GWAs). Grand plans are devised to mould these areas of underused land into national parks recreating, as far as possible, conditions before the first major Bronze Age interventions into the landscape. "It will be," announces the Department of the Environment, "as if the Wellington Boot of man had never been felt on this green and pleasant land."

The decision causes huge protests by the remaining population of the GWAs, many of whom object to the imposition of this 'ahistorical' form of management on the landscape which their crofting and hill-farming communities have shaped through agriculture. "Britain's countryside is an artefact of rumination," insists the head of the National Farmers' Union. "Sheep and cows give this land its unique appearance." A brief occupation of the Cullain GWA by Gaelic-speaking activists, protesting at the 'New Highland Clearances' is put down by a mixed force of police and park rangers.

Private infrastructure providers see which way the wind is blowing and gradually withdraw transport, communications, health and leisure facilities, accelerating the depopulation of the GWAs. This is followed by the catastrophic recession of the 2030s which devastates the global economy. Hard-pressed to provide basic services for major population centres, government wilderness management schemes are first suspended, then abandoned altogether. The GWAs become unmanaged areas, land no one either wants or can afford to use.

Officially designated as 'commons' but under nominal regulation preventing legal building, farming, mining or other 'non ecological uses', the GWAs fall out of public consciousness, used only by a declining number of walkers and climbers. The usual twenty-first century demographic factors (declining birth-rates, carcinomas, immune system diseases, fast-mutating eurovirii and acute food

allergies) reduce Britain's population to a third of its former size, and further informal wilderness areas are added to the official GWAs which, in their unmanaged condition, become colonised by bracken and heather. In the absence of government control, a semi-nomadic population of travellers, survivalists, millenarians and outlaws begin to eke out a living in these places, occasionally holding up intercity bus services or making food raids on the fortified shopping centres of border towns. Gradually, in some areas, deciduous oak forests, bluebell meadows and wetlands slowly re-establish themselves. Other areas are blasted heaths and dumping grounds, toxic empty spaces that are shunned by decent TV-fearing folk, who scare their children with stories of what happens up there on the moors. -HK

## BLACK FOREST: A NATION OF NEO-WOODLANDERS

An historic third Labour term in 2005 and a long-delayed referendum on the Euro in 2006 (with 51% voting in favour) begins the long vaunted economic amalgamation of the UK with Europe. This, combined with a complete overhaul of the crop quota system and a scrapping of subsidies in the wake of the 2001 Foot and Mouth crisis, leaves the farming community unable to re-establish its export markets. By 2008 all but the largest and most industrial of agricultural operations have completely collapsed. An immediate and effective response is sought and, for once, not only found but implemented: the subsidies paid for switching arable or grazing land to maintained woodland or renewable plantations are tripled.

Farmers switch to being foresters in droves; those who don't, sell up to landlords who include foreign logging interests and the Crown. As patterns of changing land use emerge, zoning is introduced and encouraged by new international subsidies for the production of carbon sinks and 'planetary lungs', a wide corridor of woodland emerges around the river valleys of the Avon and the Trent, stretching all the way from Dorset to Nottinghamshire. As the rural population leaves the area in ever greater numbers, mainly relocating to the megacity that threatens to completely urbanise a triangular region in the SouthEast of England (cornered by London in the north and Southampton and Brighton in the south), rural villages and even isolated towns decline and die. Grazing land is, after all, no longer needed, most meat by now being grown headless and legless in arrays of bio-vats.

In its new role as one of the most powerful sectors of the government, the Forestry Commission pushes for a serious wildwood policy to be implemented and the government agrees to a series of compulsory land acquisitions and road demolitions, the effect of which is to turn the backbone of England into one vast forest, a sea of trees lapping at the shores of the island-like urban centres of Birmingham, Derby and Reading. This is the new 'Wooden Heart of England', and by 2040 it is once again possible (or it would be if it wasn't for the intervention of several large motorways) for a squirrel to travel between the mouths of the Humber and the Severn without ever having to set foot upon the ground.

Around the forest, of course, the culture changes too. With the country looking increasingly lizard backed, Mayan philosophies take hold. A whole new industry of wood crafts springs up, and Britain becomes a centre of excellence in the manufacture of hand-made furniture, wooden toy trains, bagpipes and assorted 'traditional' items. Arborocentrism grips the nation. Where there aren't woodlands there are orchards, and cider replaces beer as the national drink. Wassailing undergoes a grand renaissance; tree-houses become highly sought after; Druidism overtakes the Church of England as the leading religion. Political malcontents identify ever more strongly with the figure of Robin Hood, and football is banned, replaced by archery. By 2050 it is judged that up to half a million people may be subsisting illegally in the forest, though it is argued that they in fact cause less damage than those parties of rich businessmen who are reported to pay up to £100,000 to participate in illegal and notoriously dissolute wild boar hunts. -JF

## LEISURELAND UK: FOLK IS THE NEW DOT COM

In the wake of the BSE, Foot and Mouth, GM, munce-rot and neosalmonella crises, the climate of public opinion turns against farming. Perceived as dowdy, dangerous and frankly unfashionable, it is decided that Britain's countryside would yield most revenue through intensive high-end tourism, the experience of the West of Ireland and America's Blue Mountains having shown that post-agricultural landscapes could generate huge visitor numbers, as well as providing employment in the service sector for many of those sidelined by mechanised agriculture.

The subsidy system is abolished and arrangements are made to serve the nation's food needs with a two-tier system of dirt-cheap agricultural imports and organic show farms, the latter catering to the specialist produce needs of the urban elite. International studies on tourist satisfaction requirements produce a national plan based around the construction of ViewNet, a public-private partnership infrastructure of 'WideAngles' and 'Heritage Nodes'. The former are scenically located coachparks, the latter retro-styled population centres devoted to the production and retail of handicrafts, locally-themed refreshments, outdoor supplies and countryside activities, both types of site being linked by a well-maintained network of dual carriageways. ViewNet's aim is to make 85% of Britain's post-agricultural wildlands accessible on a day-trip basis to the cash-rich grey market of scenery-hungry retirees, who require low gradient walks, good toilet facilities and easily-available CPR. This aim is achieved within ten years of ViewNet's inception, the so-called Cream Tea Revolution thus successfully transforming Britain's failing rural economies into economic powerhouses, propelling the Social Mediocratic Party into a record breaking fourth term.

It is generally accepted that Britain (whose landscape has been continually altered since Neolithic times) has no true pristine wilderness areas, and that man-made structures such as dolmens, sheepfolds, ruined bothies and thatched cottages are a major tourist draw. The principle of the acceptability of human intervention opens the way for Britain's world-beating programme of wilderness landscaping, in which celebrity gardeners are given vast areas of wildland to improve. Dell-turfing, the dynamiting of new crags, the mass construction of gazebos and reflowing of rivers to create spectacular waterfalls results. The Suffolk Glen, the Cotswold Rose Fields and the acclaimed Windermere Water Feature are among the lasting legacies. As demand for heritage skills balloons, the country experiences a national shortage of drystone wallers, tartan dyers, lace makers and other traditional craftspeople. At the same time competition from national tourism schemes in Europe and Asia threaten the new countryside renaissance. The government responds with a series of radical measures, ranging from the coaching-inn quotas and shortbread laws to local ordinances enforcing the wearing of folkloric costume within five miles of ViewNet nodes. National Folk Colleges in Inverness, Aberystwyth and Saint Ives now produce smock-wearing graduates who tour the country, advising on local custom revenue streams, new folk skills and the correct management of heritage show breeds like the Shetland Pony and the Blackfaced Cheviot sheep. A pioneering scheme arranged in consultation with film producers in Los Angeles and Bombay has created UltraHighland, the super-pristine area to the North of Fort William reserved for elite media use: UltraHighland's newly landscaped upland forest panoramas boast some of the greatest depths-of-field in Northern Europe, as well as the Rob Roy croft'n'castle complex, so popular with film-makers that it has to be booked up to five years in advance. Such is the success of the scheme that Cornwall is to hold a referendum on whether to return all settlement patterns and visual phenomena to their 1790 state in response to the new vogue for piracy and smuggling epics. -HK

## ERRATIC EDEN: FROM CHIANTISHIRE TO THE DAY AFTER

Having made no headway in improving public services and faced with the possibility of a country v. city civil war as tensions in the countryside between disenfranchised farm workers, crazed aristocrats, confused hunt protesters and belligerent petrol lobbyists threaten to explode, the Labour party is ushered from office in disgrace in 2007. It is replaced by a revitalised Tory hardcore intent on separating England not only from Europe but from a fully devolved Scotland and Wales as well (though not Northern Ireland).

Clinging hard to a dead currency, a dead culture, a stringent immigration (and emigration) policy and a resurgence of nationalistic attitudes last common during the reign of Henry V, Fortress England is (still)born. Anne Widdecombe, the new Prime Minister, cuts ties with Europe and takes the country into NAFTA, exchanging US rights to all English military bases in perpetuity for a series of farming protectionisms and subsidies which are used to prop up an agriculture based entirely on the small-farming model.

Traditionalism is encouraged throughout the shires as Widdecombe's Tories attempt to recreate a rural idyll that recalls the countryside of yore. In a surprise concession to the organic lobby, while advances in the manipulation of the human genome are exploited and encouraged, biotechnology on crops and livestock is forbidden; England is to be a pure example of organic farming, a beacon to the world. A fashion for cart-horses and hand-ploughs develops. But alas, the dream of a traditional English agriculture replete with reinvigorated Christian/pagan festivals and young children taking time off school to work the land has reckoned without the factor of global warming.

As the new agriculture takes shape the climate begins to change, ambient temperatures rising by five degrees in as many years. With the Mediterranean a burning cauldron the shores of which are rapidly turning into desert, English farmers begin to cultivate vines, olives, almonds and other, formerly more southern, crops. By 2050 their vineyards and olive groves have started to mature and the die-back of traditional British flora has turned the English countryside into something more closely resembling Tuscany than any landscape by Constable. French and Italian media types buy abandoned village schools and convert them into luxurious second homes, bases from which they wander through picturesque local markets sampling the many and varied cheeses produced by hippy farmers. Many such producers have gone as far as to reject the pound, preferring to conduct business exclusively in goats. All seems well and good until in the accidental misfiring of a Chinese warhead targeted on the radar station at USAF Fylingdales. Fortunately for the now fully established US Star Wars program, the warhead goes astray; unfortunately for English small-holder farming it lands on Warwickshire, destroying Coventry and spreading a radioactive plume across seven counties. Once again, English agriculture must go back to square one. -JF

Hari Kunzru <hari AT metamute.org> is a contributing editor of *Mute* magazine. His novel *The Impressionist* will be published by Penguin (UK) and Dutton (USA) in Spring 2002 with translations into eleven languages following later in the year.

James Flint <jim AT metamute.org> was born in the country but now lives in the town. His first novel *Habitus* (Fourth Estate) won him the Amazon.co.uk 2000 Bursary Award; his second, *52 Ways to Magic America* – the story of a magician who starts an Internet company – will be out in the Spring. He is a contributing editor of *Mute* magazine.

# Net.Condition: From The Network To The Coffee Table

By Lina Dzuverovic

It's about time net-culture got its own coffee-table catalogue and *Net\_Condition: Art and Global Media* is as close as it gets. Edited by Peter Weibel and Timothy Druckery, the 400 page fully illustrated glossy publication documents an exhibition lasting two years which took place across global media networks as well as physical exhibition spaces in Barcelona, Graz, Karlsruhe, and Tokyo.

Claiming that the supporting cultural institutions (ZKM, Mecad, ICC Tokyo) served merely as physical bases for extending the artistic activities into the immaterial global information space *Net Condition* aimed to reach beyond traditional exhibition formats by holding an expanded exhibition across print, electronic media, television and the Net. As is often the case with initiatives cast across such a broad range of activities, real and virtual, it was the physical manifestations that became the most visible and memorable elements of the project. Two years on, the catalogue serves as a testament to the difficulties intrinsic to the curation and documentation of distributed and process-based practice.

The catalogue profiles a practice which arises from networked and collaborative methods while at the same time examining the economic, political, social and artistic 'conditions' instrumental to the development of net culture. The catalogue is structured into social, media, ideological, critical, community, artistic and other 'conditions', a reference to the 'conditions' used in programming languages. As the very nature of networked media prevents clear divisions, this structure is problematic. All of the contributions could just as easily fit into another chapter. However, *Net Condition* succeeds in offering a comprehensive overview of a moment in the global independent media landscape. With contributions from over a hundred artists, activists, scholars and theorists including Jodi, Olia Lialina, Vuk Cosic, Etoy, Alexej Shulgin, Critical Art Ensemble, Manuel Castells and introductions into networks including Syndicate, Xchange, Nettime, Backspace and Rhizome as well as URLs for all the work profiled, the catalogue serves as a thorough and useful reference, a 'way in' to existing global media networks and the golden period of net.art.

Lina Dzuverovic-Russell <lina AT metamute.org> is a media arts practitioner and curator and part of the NoAlternativeGirls collective. She is also a web-editor and advertising/communications manager for *Mute*.

*Net\_Condition: Art and Global Media* // eds Peter Weibel and Timothy Druckery // MIT Press, 2001 // January 2001 // 450 pages // ISBN 0-262-73138-X // £27.50

## Sound Samples

By John Hytnyk

First in a series of specials unpicking facets of *Rear/View*'s different areas of coverage, John Hytnyk digs into Music with a review of *The South Asian Sound of Britain*.

Your interest in South Asian sound and culture extends beyond a late night curry. Your designer taste extends to more than a sari wall-hanging. And your multicultural cred amounts to more than an occasional visit to some nightclub with a Bollywood film as atmospheric backdrop... Your patronage of Asian cultures is not just some superficial ethnic thing, is it? You need to know a little more, and fill in that gnawing feeling that tells you the South Asianisation of Britain did not just start with George Harrison's sitar plunking at the feet of the wizened Maharishi. Depth you want. Well, look into this folks: first Asian MP in Britain, Dadabhai Naoroji, elected 1892. And better yet, Mr Shapurji

Saklatvala was the first communist elected to the British parliament. He was, 'Indian' – but this is not a 'Goodness Gracious Me' sketch. Asians have been participating in parliamentary politics in Britain for more than a century.

We've moved on past the new Asian kool. But the very idea of knowing the variety of South Asian music begs a big question. What is South Asian about it? There is a huge distance between the Qawwals and the Bauls, between Mumbai and Brum, between UK Apache and Zee TV. What makes it plausible that this diverse repertoire be gathered together and classed Asian? It would seem clumsy to imagine that what we have is a post-hoc grafting of social and political character onto particular rhythms, yet we continually identify musics as having cultural provenance, and from this association of sound and culture go on to worry about appropriation, exoticisation, misrepresentation, and so on. A vexed questioner might even ask if in mixed or hybrid styles there can be any sort of misrepresentation? And if everything is mixed, surely there is no pure anyway. Except for those who live in the weird world of commerce, it's probably clear to all that no-one actually 'owns' music – neither individually or as a cultural group. Why then so much fuss if not for economics?

Much ink spilled. The proprietary status of sound. But there is a world of distance between some borrowings or mixings and others, and three stories follow to illustrate the point: they have to do first with Madonna and Cornershop, then with West London's Fundamental and a certain Paul Simon, and finally with the East End's own Asian Dub Foundation (ADF):

#1. If you've got money you can make it with Asian flava. Back in 1998, the materialist girl knocked Cornershop off the top of the charts with her mix of decontextualised Hinduism floating in ethereal new age mush, seasoned with embarrassingly clunky bharatanatyam dance imitations. Sanskrit lyric passages – Shanti-Ashtangi – led to interviews where Mother Madge professed her great interest in 'religions' like Kabbala, Buddhism and Tibet (the smorgasbord of the East doesn't require genre coherence here). Kitted out in a new stylee, Madonna took on the old imperial frock (tea estates back in the day, music the message now) and got herself up like a space-age version of the colonial memsahib, lording it over the plantation workers (bell hooks first named Madonna a plantation overseer, appropriating gay exotica that time round). Well-resourced and grasping opportunism enables international interests to exploit options when local producers don't get a look in. Madonna capitalised on the popularity of the new Asian dance music because she (or rather her corporate organisational existence) had the resources to get to market, press, TV everywhere.

#2. If you wrote it you can keep it for yourself. Reinvented world music impresario Paul Simon's follow up album after Graceland was called The Rhythm of the Saints. It used recordings of a town square performance by the percussion ensemble Olodum, which were taken back to New York where Simon "improvised music and words over them and added other layers of music" (this interview statement was quoted in Timothy Taylor's 1997 book Global Pop). Timothy Taylor complained that: "it is Simon who profits – his position in a powerful economic centre – the United States, a major corporation – means that he cannot escape his centrality, despite his assertion that he works 'outside the mainstream.'" Compare this to the moment when the South Asian inflected hip-hop outfit Fun-damental recorded a version of Mr Simon's song 'The Sound of Silence' – you know the tune – for inclusion on the album Erotic Terrorism. Their request to clear the sample was refused. Asked for permission once again, Simon was offered the publishing rights for the new version, which included an additional backing vocal but, as Aki Nawaz told me in an interview, Mr. World Music again said 'no.' The track was renamed 'Deathening Silence', the sample removed.

#3. Or you could use 'Asian' media modalities for some other project. ADF trade visibility and pop acclaim for the chance to put public campaigns across to those who might not otherwise know that Satpal Ram remains in prison at the time of writing, unjustly sent down for defending himself from

racist attack in a restaurant. The track 'Free Satpal Ram' declared support for the man:

Self defence is no offence

... An innocent man forced to carry the can

Free Satpal Ram

Satpal Ram remains in prison still after 13 years, even though the tariff was ten – since he was defending himself, he has refused to admit any wrongdoing or guilt, and so is refused parole. Issues of 'culture' seem quite lame in the face of this reality – where is Saklatvala now?

(If you want to send a message of support, the campaign address is : Free Satpal Ram Campaign (London) P.O. Box 30091 London SE1 1WP tel: 07947595367. Email: freesatpalcampaign@hotmail.com. Discussion on the ADF website: [http://www.asiandubfoundation.com] )

It's not what you take, it's who you take it from, what you give in return, and what you do with it.

John Hutnyk teaches on the Visual Anthropology Programme at Goldsmiths College and his latest book is called *Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry* (Pluto Press, 2000) (see Mute19).

Best buys:

Remix. Nation Records are to release a remixed version of ADF's first album:

The album might have been overlooked by those who thought the 'Asian Underground' started when it first popped its head over the parapets at Talvin Singh's Anokha club. This shows the efforts of the first years of ADF 'conscious militant science'. Lyrics are not the be all and end all to music – but it would be a good thing not to get the message wrong: when Deedar sang 'We ain't ethnic, exotic or eclectic ... the only e we use is electric' (on 'Jericho') he meant to counter that tendency that would read this music as merely 'Asian'. There was more: 'this militant vibe ain't what you expected, with your liberal minds you patronise our culture, scanning the surface like vultures, with your tourist mentality, we're still the natives, you're multicultural. we're antiracist' An open question as to the merit of reworking all this again, but listen up anyway. – Frontline 1993-1997, Rarities and Remixes Nation Records 2001 NRCCD2006

Rewind. Ten years ago, Bally Sagoo produced an album of the late great Qawwali maestro Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn. It was called Magic Touch and for many was the most popular record of the year. You've heard of both these guys of course, and the album includes the great 'Kinna Sohna' and a huge favourite 'Jhoole Jhoole Lal' ('Musst Musst' to you?). Nusrat was a fantastic voice, a very big bloke and immensely prolific. There may be others, but – as a sample in the album says, 'its gonna be very popular'. If you don't have it, get it.

Magic Touch // Oriental Star // 1991 CDSR030

Relevance. And then compare the Sagoo mix with the excellent new release by Fun-da-mental. The Last Gospel is a haunting version of 'Dum Dum Ali Ali', which Nusrat had offered up on Magic Touch, but reworked in the inimitable FDM manner. The vocals are by nephews of Nusrat, Rizwan and Muazzam. Check out the advances and enhanced format, rhythms, production values – you be the judge. And if you need two decks to switch between each track, so be it. This is not to say you must go out and buy new technology just to listen to these tunes. I'm sensitive to the way the market drives difference. But you really do need these tracks – if only to be up to date with the history of Qawwali in the UK.

The Last Gospel // Nation Records // NRCD2007

Revelation. Clinton. In case you missed it, Clinton is the dance offshoot of the justly famous long time songsters Cornershop. Sub(disco)continental rhythms.

Disco is the Half Way to Discontent // Virgin 1999 // CDHUT56 8 48191 2 5

## **Them: Adventures with Extremists**

ByJF

JF reviews *Them: Adventures with Extremists*

Jon Ronson's done something really, really cool. In the on-going battle between him and Louis Theroux – the one for best faux-naif TV journalist – he's just pulled ahead. You've probably seen evidence of this on TV; by the time you read this article the series accompanying his new book *Them: Adventures with Extremists*, a series entitled 'The Secret Rulers of the World', will have come and gone. But if it passed you by, fret not, for the book is better. In it Ronson presents his despatches from five years' worth of hanging out with nutters of one flavour or another, nutters that include David Icke, the Rev. Ian Paisley, the victims of Ruby Ridge and acquaintances of Timothy McVeigh's. What's wonderful about *Them* is that it doesn't try – or even pretend to try – to ridicule these people; rather, by encouraging them to speak clearly, and for themselves, Ronson draws some kind of sense out of the bucket of justified paranoias that is the world of the conspiracy theory. A clearer picture of this increasingly crucial cultural force I've yet to see.

[JF]

*Them: Adventures with Extremists* // Jon Ronson // Picador // May 2001 // 352 pages (hbk) // ISBN 0-330-37545-8 // £16.99

## **Four Tet Classique**

ByJames Flint

Opening with the rattle of a spray can and ending with the quiet tones of a music box, Four Tet's new album, *Pause* is a complete delight. Don't take my word on it: *iD* called it "a contender for album of the year"; in *M8* it was the album of the month; the *NME* labelled it a work of genius (yeah, okay, so that's the *NME*). But as good as *Pause* is, it's also difficult to describe. Four Tet is Kieran Hebden, formerly of Fridge. Hebden is both young and prolific – by the age of 21 he'd released three albums with Fridge and one on his own, the latter being the Four Tet debut album *Dialogue*. You could think of his new album as melding the musical imagination of Brian Eno with the harmonic sense of Susumu Yokota, and then grinding this admixture up with the rhythmic drive of DJ Shadow. Or you could think of it as a perfect aural mural, an elegant piece of sonic graffiti art. Or you could think of it as a bunch of pits and troughs on a printed CD. But the truth is that familiar, light-on-its-feet and self-assured as *Pause* is, it doesn't sound like anything, really, other than itself. Which, they tell me, is the hallmark of a classic.

James Flint <jim AT metamute.com>

# Work Harder Dude, or You Won't Get Paid!

By Simon Worthington

Richard Donkin's *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Evolution of Work* is a revealing genealogy of the inner workings of the corporate system. With its examination of work's histories in serfdom, slavery, forced and waged labour, this is a real page-turner for anyone with an interest in capitalism and/or globalisation.

In the book's foreword, Warren Dennis of USC Business states that "one of the secret scandals of contemporary organisations is the ahistoricity of its managers"; by the end of Donkin's book you grasp why this may be no accident. Its historical examination of work is broad, starting with the use of rudimentary tools 2.5 million years ago and ending with present day management systems of single status workplaces such as the dot com. Throughout this mapping process, Donkin's primary project is an attempt to point to a day political program of 'social capitalism' (which one loosely interprets as something like The Third Way).

Donkin's use of the evolutionary metaphor is thankfully not based on an upward curve of progress (which is a model he seeks to dispel), as much as on the principle of unremitting change. To illustrate structural sophistication, for example, he lifts one example from the work of the late archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. Here an apparently matriarchal, pan-European civilisation, which Gimbutas claimed flourished from 6500 to 3500BC, demonstrates the erstwhile primacy of anti-hierarchical organisations. It is one of many moments in the book where Donkin refers to work that proved relevant to feminist practices being sidelined.

The 'Protestant work ethic' and the manner in which this set of values has been transformed into present day capitalism is central to *Blood, Sweat and Tears*; closest to his heart though is the corporate adoption of a social agenda at a structural level (for example where management is shared among workers). However, he acknowledges that many of such practices have been cynically used to cut costs and, based on their past record, doesn't hold out for either the private or public sector delivering. Somewhere in this tug between profit and ethics sits a job description for what must be the toughest work ever.

Simon Worthington <simon AT metamute.com> is Boss and founding editor of *Mute*. We're not sure what Simon is exactly, but he has a penchant for anything with wires and disks in it - preferably generated by the street.

*Blood, Sweat & Tears: the evolution of work* // Richard Donkin // Texere Publishing Limited // 2001 // ISBN 1-58799-076-8

[<http://www.etexere.co.uk>]

## Code Unknown

By Mike Sperlinger

Michael Haneke's review of new film *Code Unknown*

Michael Haneke's latest British release opens with a continuous ten-minute shot tracing the chain of events which connects, for a moment, the lives of several disparate Parisians: an actress (Juliette Binoche), her lover's younger brother, a Romanian refugee and the son of a West African immigrant. This virtuoso device, underlining a moment of community between otherwise compartmentalised

lives, is the springboard for an account of communication failed and blocked in all its forms – from a lovers’ breakdown signalled by a changed apartment entry code, to the tribulations of a refugee’s border crossing.

*Code Unknown* itself tries to suggest the possibility of new cultural codes through its use of form: a fragmentary sequence of baroque tracking shots which aspire to patient, non-judgmental understanding of the characters as their various tales unfold. Haneke is clearly exercised by the risk of bad faith, of making art the privileged site of a universal code which will render these alienated experiences commensurable and communicable – in one pregnant scene, Binoche turns down the volume on a TV programme about avant-garde art to hear a child’s screams from the flat next door. But the uneven quality of some of the performances perhaps suggests tensions that remain insuperable. For a film so insistent on the ambiguity of gesture – the very first shot is of a deaf girl performing an enigmatic mime – *Code Unknown* seems finally too calculated, underwritten by a faith in the very common currencies it so convincingly suggests are not presently available. A forceful failure, nevertheless.

Mike Sperlinger <mike AT sperlinger.freeseve.co.uk> is a writer.

## Together Forever

By Tiziana Terranova

When we told **Tiziana Terranova** about our sustainable publishing diagram (Mute19), she asked whether we’d heard of the the 1975 ‘onNLine System’. Here, she explains why today’s knowledge management systems are yesterday’s news. On the right, a visual parallel she sent us: O’Reilly’s Linux work model.

[IMAGE]

>> Funnel Illustration from ‘O’Reilly Anatomy of a Linux System Poster’, illustrated by eff Reynolds Design. Used with permission of O’Reilly & Associates, Inc.

Douglas Engelbart’s NLS (oNLine System) appeared to have died in 1975, when federal funding into networked, intellectual team work dwindled and XEROX Parc’s computer scientists shifted the paradigm to a ‘one user one computer’ model. NLS was an advanced file-sharing, multimedia system which allowed users to communicate by means of shared, visual displays of information. Conceived as a working tool for intellectual collaborations, Engelbart’s NLS was based on a fundamental, cybernetic intuition: the nature of intelligence does not exclusively depend on or originate from the individual capacities of the human brain. Intelligence is a cybernetic system that Engelbart named the “H-LAM/T system” or “Human using Language, Artefacts and Methodology in which He is Trained.” Engelbart dreamed of a total system “of a human plus his augmentation devices and techniques... This field constitutes a very important system in our society: like most systems, its performance can be best improved by considering the whole as a set of interacting elements rather than a number of isolated elements.”<1>

Engelbart understood from very early on that the process of thinking could no longer be modelled on that of the isolated genius and that computers could be much more than simple number-crunchers or static memory banks. The increasing amount of information available and the increasingly complex nature of the problems faced by intellectual work demanded an internal reconfiguration of the H-LAM/T system. For Engelbart, any intervention at any level of the system would automatically engender, through a system of feedback loops, a resonance which would propagate and challenge the whole structure. Even the simple introduction of a low-level capability like text-editing and word-processing was bound to alter the overall structure of thinking, freeing up a surplus of labour

which could be qualitatively reinvested in the process.

NLS was eventually funded by the Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO) which implicitly tied up research into augmentation with existing research on time sharing (Engelbart Augmentation Research Centre was one of the first original nodes of ARPANET, another key project funded by the IPTO). In 1964, the IPTO provided Engelbart with a million dollars a year to run a time-sharing system and half a million dollars a year for his augmentation research. With time-sharing, and following Engelbart's encounter with Peter Drucker's work, the emphasis shifted to intellectual team work, which the ARC team identified with the future of knowledge work. The ARC was an infinitely hot and dense 'dot' comprising all the components that would later disperse into the far, but connected galaxies of the digital economy: an 'engine room', where the new time-sharing computers were located; a hardware workshop, where the constantly upgraded computer system and experimental input-output devices were built and maintained; and, as Howard Rheingold states in his book *Tools for Thought*, a model "intellectual workshop that consisted of an amphitheater-like space in which a dozen people sat in front of large display terminals, creating the system's software, communicating with each other, and navigating through dimensions of information..."

An intensive open source workshop, NLS conceived of its users as the 'designer-subjects' of the experiment. Using the system meant being involved in its evolution, a machinic enslavement which was also a new mode of subjectification based on higher-than-ever levels of positive, transformative feedback. Pioneers of open source and burn-out syndrome, the ARC team would be tested to the limits by the creative destruction of proliferating positive feedback loops. *Tools for Thought* describes how, at the end of the project, a psychologist had to be brought in to consult on "those parts of the system that weren't to be found in the circuitry or software, but in the thoughts and relationships of the people who were building and using the system."

Tiziana Terranova <tterra AT essex.ac.uk> lectures in media, culture and film at the University of Essex. She is the author of *Network Culture: collective politics and digital media* (Pluto Press, forthcoming).

<1> Engelbart, Douglas C. (1963) 'A Conceptual Framework for the Augmentation of Man's Intellect.' in Paul W. Homerton and David C. Weeks eds. *Vistas in Information Handling. Volume 1. The Augmentation of Man's Intellect By Machine*. Washington Dc: Spartan Books and London, England: Cleaver Hume Press, p. 5.

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## Serial Unhappiness and the Comic Art of Reproduction

By Esther Leslie

Chris Ware's inaction packed but formidable comic book takes the twinkle out of make believe and the POW out of POW ZAP. **Esther Leslie**, author of *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory, and the Avant-Garde*, reports.

Comic books used to be about superheroes with extraordinary powers and, judging by its title, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth* appears to be no exception. But one glance at the sloping shouldered sap on the cover gives the lie to the misleading epithet; none of the three generations of Jimmy Corrigans, each one more retarded than his father, could ever win such an accolade. The grandfather, Jimmy Reed Corrigan, was beaten and neglected as a child in Chicago in the 1890s, and lives a century without expressing emotions towards his son. The father, James William

Corrigan, a charisma-less and misogynist bartender in Michigan, loses touch with his son Jimmy Corrigan, an agonisingly shy Chicago office worker. Son Jimmy is in his mid-30s but looks 60 and acts like a now bashful, now vicious 6 year old. He has never kissed a girl and phones his Mom every day until, one day out of the blue, he receives an awkward pally letter from his Pop after 30 years of silence. The aching stories of three generations of men intertwine in this examination of American history and homelife, fantasy and disappointment.

The title turns out to be ironic, highlighting the distance between reality and the perennially disappointed hopes or never-fulfilled sadistic fantasies of the Corrigans. The connection between these men, their hopes and reality rips apart repeatedly like a wound that will not heal, and the avenging force of the superhero is commuted into the unwarranted power of the patriarch. The youngest Jimmy, who reads superhero comics while eating his cereal every morning, has to learn over and over that Superman and all the other American superheroes live on the page, and that their real life counterparts are only dressed-up pretenders. Like the one who has a sordid one-night stand with his mother after some show, or the suicide in a Superman costume who jumps to his death from a skyscraper opposite Jimmy's office, or the lying dads who wear T-shirts with the logo 'Top Dad, No. 1 hero'.

Repeated failure; the lessons that are habitually retaught but never learnt; the relay of emotional mutilation from generation to generation; the recurrence of racial hatreds and miscommunications: these are the themes that bind Ware's book and the weekly newspaper strip that was its first incarnation (run in Chicago's *New City* from 1993(99 and intermittently serialised in Ware's own periodical, *The Acme Novelty Library*). The most popular comic strips and cartoons are frequently based on repetition. Sometimes their characters undergo the same humiliations at the hands of the same antagonist – Tweety Pie versus Sylvester, Tom versus Jerry, Bugs Bunny versus Elmer Fudd, Road Runner versus Wile E. Coyote. Repetition is necessary in order for the scenario to default to zero, enabling the next circular instalment. Unlike Tom and Jerry and their flat mates, the Corrigans move in historical time but, just as in regular cartoons, the set up is predictable, the violence repetitive, handed down through the generations like a sturdy winter coat. The sons suffer, mete out emotional violence and display accident-proneness – a sign of dislocation from the world.

Men fall and hurt themselves throughout this story, and the son Jimmy hobbles around on a crutch, the one thing he dares lean on. Each Jimmy Corrigan is harmed by the proximity of his father, and equally by his distance. Parents are the Jimmys' downfall. Comic book superheroes should be orphans – orphaned Billy Batson turns into 'world's mightiest mortal' Captain Marvel, while orphaned Bruce Wayne avenges the death of his parents as Batman, and their abandonments confer both secret powers and the justification for compulsive (and therefore repetitive) revenge that the Jimmies do not have. Doomed to be victims, they have nothing up their sleeves.

Repetition inhabits the book's very frames. Rather than comic strip tableaux which blast into focus action-packed moments of significance, here a banal image gets repeated, identically or with the smallest shifts, in order to express muteness, stuntedness and embarrassment. These dumb durations carry echoes of the metro-loneliness of Edward Hopper paintings. Inactions do not need the dynamic stellar climaxes of 'WHAM!', 'POW!', 'ZAP!'. Peppering the silences is a sonic world of banality: Pop twanging a Coke can ringpull 'pkpkpk', Velcro ripping 'shhhrik'. These are sounds from the synthetic modern world. The book parallels the transient plastic world of 'Pam's 'Wagon Wheel' and the 'Stop 'n' Spend' with the elegant, spindly and pastel shaded world of the turn of the 19th century. Grandfather Corrigan's story of his brutal childhood in the 1890s is folded into the story of Jimmy meeting his Pop at the end of the 20th century. In both time-worlds everything and everyone is trapped inside black outlines and doused in pure washes of colour. Turn-of-the-century Chicago lingers in the mind perhaps because its look seeps out into the design of the book's spine and into the painstakingly neat instructions, cutouts and excursions – Ware admits a penchant for the period 1890-1910.

The book is a compendium of New World design styles. Ware says that the original look came from the advertising drawings of a depression-era Chicago cosmetics firm, where all the typography had been hand-done in brush and white ink. But there are also hints of the older language of Winsor McCay, whose elaborate comic strips and hand-drawn animations, such as Little Nemo in Slumberland from the first decade of the 20th century, likewise segue reality and dream in an urban wonderland. But while Little Nemo always wakes from his manic dreams, in Ware's universe the transitions are less secure, the symbolisms woven magically into the fabric of reality.

Take his depiction of the urban wonderland of Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893, a celebration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the New World. Here was a record-breaking fairyland of lagoons and fountains and a shimmering White City made from plaster of paris that emulated marble, and, at nighttime, twinkled under the newly channeled energy of electricity. The fair lasted only six months, its evanescent structures fading into memory and urban myth, a fantastic moment, a bubble of promise floating awhile on the air, only to burst into nothingness. 'On top of the world', grandfather Jimmy is abandoned by his father at the fair. This nosedive foreshadows another, when, in a rare, touching moment, son Jimmy's newly found stepsister Amy tells him she likes him, only for the unexpected happiness to be annihilated by the death of his newly found father, which Amy blames on Jimmy.

Chicago's glorious exposition of 1893 was ephemeral, as are the moments of joy that flit by here, like the birdsong that young Jimmy tries to record. Ware knows the significance of transience – his story having originated in the week-by-week throwaway press – and its value has to be differently calibrated, not index-linked to eternity (though in this deluxe hardback edition, posterity crooks its index finger). As Ware notes in his definitions at the back of the book in a section called 'Corrigenda', reproducibility, in the context of art, renders a work valueless. Ware's is a different practice to art, one based on reproduction rather than uniqueness, on design rather than sketching, and at one with his maniacal aim: 'I want every drawing that I do to be stylistically as flat and dead as possible, as if it was killed on the page.' This is not art but artfulness. The comic strip frame becomes crime scene awaiting forensics. The autopsy, one suspects, would reveal the causes of death to be entirely mundane.

Esther Leslie <eleslie AT globalnet.co.uk>

*Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth* // Chris Ware // Random House/Jonathan Cape // 2001 // 380 pages // ISBN 0 224-06210-7 // £18.00.

*Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory, and the Avant-Garde* // Esther Leslie // Verso // August 2001 // ISBN 1859846122

## Strange Disclosures

By JJ King

JJ King explores the possibility of UFOs and the project that might reveal them

You might think it unlikely. A set of high-ranking witnesses putting their careers on the line and risking professional approbation in order to speak out on their UFO experiences. But that's exactly what the Disclosure Project [<http://www.disclosureproject.org>] is all about. Witnesses to date include a former US Air Force Intelligence Major; a retired US Navy commander pilot with top-secret clearance; a former Air Traffic Controller for the US Air Force; a United States Army Sergeant and former SAC Launch Controller; and the former Division Chief of the Accidents and Investigations

Branch for the Federal Aviation Administration. One witness, Major George Filer of the US Air Force, was cleared as “mentally fit to carry nuclear weapons” before reporting his sighting – a psychological qualification which, like it or not, most ‘rational’ sceptics would fail dismally. Ever afterwards, like every single other witness in this list, Filer will be classed by most people as certifiable or, at best, psychologically suspect.

Dr. Steven Greer, director of the Disclosure Project and a former emergency room doctor, thinks that the absence of evidence of extraterrestrial visitations is lacking largely because the governments of the world are collaborating to keep it from the public. “There is a classified operation that sanitises evidence,” he says. Having interviewed some 400 people claiming firsthand sightings of UFOs or contact with evidence of alien life, he ought to know. The Disclosure Project is calling for congressional hearings into UFO sightings reported by its witnesses, many of whom – given the well-documented history of abuse that many UFO-witnesses experience – will not come forward without congressional immunity. Could there be something in it? On that the rational sceptics, perhaps unfortunately, will have the last say.

JJ King <jamie AT metamute.com> is contributing editor of *Mute*. His ‘They came, they bored, they conquered’, on ICANN is in the ‘main’ section of this issue. Futurefarming satire ‘The Greenish brown and unpleasant land’ by contributing editors James Flint and Hari Kunzru is in the same section.

The recent Disclosure press conference at the US National Press Club, at which 20 high profile witnesses gave testimony and demanded a Congressional hearing, is available in two parts as a Real Audio stream until Nov. 9th, 2001 at –  
[<http://www.connectlive.com/events/disclosureproject/disclosureproject-050901-28k.ram>], and –  
[<http://www.connectlive.com/events/disclosureproject/disclosureproject-050901-28k-2.ram>]

You can purchase the edited transcripts of the Disclosure interviews with governmental and military witnesses at [<http://www.drgreer.com/>]

## Goodbye to 20th Century’s Sonar?

By Quim Gil

Eight years ago three young guys from Barcelona who were into electronic music and multimedia arts organised an event they decided to call Sonar.

It set about scanning the intelligent life under the surface of mainstream music and visual arts. Through persistence, hard work and dedication, these founder enthusiasts have succeeded in bringing their sounds, images and interactions to a growing audience. But, this year’s ‘audience’ equalled 75.000 people and the ‘advanced music’ was in many cases assimilated by the mainstream standards of the very mainstream sponsors. Success or defeat? Scanner for the masses or rave for the cool connoisseurs? Choose your place in the grayscale.

Quim Gil <qgil AT metamute.com> is a multiversatile non-specialised anartist/anarchist primarily obsessed by chaos, emancipation and networked decentralisation. Once a journalist, now not so sure. *Mute* staff member anyway.

Sonar – Barcelona International Festival of Advanced Music and  
Multimedia Arts, 13-16 June  
[<http://www.sonar.es>]

# André Stitt's Homework (Scores, Statements, Notes for Akshuns 1976-2000)

By Stewart Home

Stewart Home reviews Stitt's newest book

In live art circles André Stitt has a violent and uncompromising reputation. This book will hopefully change perceptions and allow a broader audience to see that there is more to him than outrageous performances in which rabbits are dissected with chainsaws. From Stitt's early days the humour that is such a crucial element of his work has often been overlooked. This sense of fun is perhaps most evident in ongoing works such as *The Geek*, which were initially responses to challenges thrown by veterans of the 'marginal' arts such as Blaster Al Ackerman. In the seventies, US based Ackerman provided inspiration and lyrics for Throbbing Gristle. By the mid-eighties he was suggesting Stitt should be known professionally as 'Stan The Geek' and wear "a colourful costume of fur, feathers and filth." This was all the encouragement Stitt required to immerse himself in the confrontational shamanism of a trickster figure. Collected here are photographs of performances, alongside notes and drawings by Stitt, as well as excerpts from Ackerman's letters. All of which provide a hilarious insight into how the pieces developed.

From his native Belfast to London and now Cardiff, Stitt has come an awfully long way both personally and artistically. Despite minimal support over much of the past twenty-five years, it's inspiring to see how he's pushed the boundaries of his project. He happily shares with us not just his triumphs, but also his mistakes and insecurities. There isn't much critical signalling in this book, just two short prefaces, but it quickly becomes apparent that Stitt is obsessed not just with art history, but with moving beyond it. His emphatic appropriation of the old Russian avant-garde slogan "art isn't a mirror, it's a fucking hammer," is just one example of this.

Stewart Home <[www.stewarthomesociety.org](http://www.stewarthomesociety.org)> is, among other things, author of *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* and *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (both AK Press).

*Homework: scores, statements, notes for Akshuns 1976-2000* // André Stitt // Krash Verlag, Cologne // 2000 // ISBN 3-927452-97-1

Also forthcoming...

*Small Time Life* // André Stitt // Black Dog Publishing // July 2001 // 144 pages // ISBN 1 901033 67 8 // £16.95 // US \$29.95

## Mobile Movements

By Rachel Baker

Rachel Baker on Infrastructural Interzones

So we've discovered the mobile – and with SMS we are nostalgically re-living the kind of neurotic joy first felt with the arrival of email. TelCo proprietorship notwithstanding, the mobile is now firmly installed as a social and cultural communication phenomenon, able to punch further holes in the media landscape. Out in the public realm of the street we carry around powerful personal mini-computers featuring a database, a set of relationships, and a transmitting/receiving device. Used in conjunction with other transmitter mediums like Internet and Radio, the mobile is compelling – not so much in the technological, but social sense, i.e. where public and private converge. Individual SMS and voice

messages can, spontaneously and *in situ*, be channelled into public broadcast and distribution mechanisms (including print publications) and offer intriguing opportunities for public content generation.

Tigertxt, an SMS service for the fans of Hull City FC that I co-developed earlier this year, is one of a number of projects exploring this schema. For me, it showed evident political potential in allowing the immediate publication of ideas among a group of people with a specific agenda. Like Tigertxt, Irrational's Cellular Pirate Listening station – which combines the powerful mediums of FM-radio, Internet and cellphone – also deals with a specific circle of users. Irrational.org have installed a scanner in central London which picks up the pirate radio signals and rebroadcasts them as a live stream via the Net. The website's interface allows users to retune to different live stations, add their own London stations and, crucially, see lists of pirate radio cellphone numbers to contact and send shouts.

As far as I'm aware, pirate radio in London is unique in its ubiquity and style, and offers one of the first instances where SMS communication was introduced into the broadcast mix. All conventional radio stations give out a phone number but, because of their legal vulnerability, pirates always use cellphones. Different DJs will use different cellphone numbers on the same station – it's an integral ingredient of the format. The pirates have not yet been directly informed of the scanner, but the reaction so far – when somebody rings in to request a 'shout for the Bristol massive' for example – has been one of pleasant confusion.

The main problems with this online service are that many London pirates don't come alive until the weekend so there is a lot of dead air during the weekday, and also Irrational's streaming server in Canada makes for delays when retuning to different stations. So, if anyone is willing to donate a 24 hour streaming server get in contact with the frontman, Heath Bunting: [heath@irational.org](mailto:heath@irational.org).

Rachel Baker <[rachel AT irational.org](mailto:rachel AT irational.org)>

Irrational.Scanner [<http://scanner.irational.org/scanner>]

Tigertxt [<http://www.newmediacentre.com/baker/tigertxt>]

In the radio/SMS vein look out for Matt Fuller's TextFM project.

## **Fashion + Demonstration = PrÃˆt-a-RÃˆvolter**

ByQuim Gil

Concerned with fashion while demonstrating? Want to wear something other than casual clothes, but find yourself intimidated by the aesthetic extravaganza of well organised groups you don't belong to? Las Agencias has developed a solution for such worries: a collection of suits and pieces ready to wear in demonstrations, created in several sizes and adapted to the specific circumstances of such performance acts. This group of artists explore the area between arts, politics and humour with these and other actions in Barcelona, like the 'Money for Free' campaign. Put in context, the actions were part of the campaigns against the World Bank's meeting in Barcelona, a campaign that resulted in the Bank deciding to suspend the physical meeting scheduled for 25-27 June and move it to a chat online... The punchline to this gag is that Las Agencias itself is funded by the deeply institutional Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA).

Quim Gil <[qgil AT metamute.com](mailto:qgil AT metamute.com)> is a multiversatile non-specialised anartist/anarchist primarily obsessed by chaos, emancipation and networked decentralisation. Once a journalist, now not so sure. *Mute* staff member anyway.

Las Agencias [<http://www.lasagencias.net/>]

MACBA [<http://www.macba.es/>]

## **The Fame & Mixed Fortunes of...Christy Malry's Own Double Entry**

ByStewart Home

A star vehicle for Nick Moran of *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* fame with a script by ultra-hip playwright Simon Bent (Goldhawk Road, Shelter etc.) based on a cult novel of the same name by B. S. Johnson. The plot involves urban terrorism, perverse sex and the malign influence of the Italian renaissance on life in contemporary London.

“Malry has all the ingredients of a blockbuster, as well as a nifty line in art house tricks that add resonance and depth. Unfortunately, a national release date has yet to be set because the industry is dominated by people who lack the vision and the bottle to make a killing from the first great film of the twenty-first century. Since abandoning his training for the Jesuit priesthood, the career of director Paul Tickell has been dogged by controversy. His hard-hitting 1995 television mini-series, *Zinky Boys Go Underground*, about Afghan army veterans and drug running in Moscow is the only BAFTA award winning drama never to be repeated by the BBC. Tickell's first feature, *Crush Proof*, wowed critics back in 1999, but his uncompromising portrayal of Dublin kids doing their own thing was still considered unsuitable for UK national release. This, despite *Crush Proof* doing brisk business in Europe and resurfacing recently on the Sky movie channel. Likewise, Tickell's Arena documentary, *Punk & The Pistols*, didn't enthral the BBC hierarchy, but Julian Temple was sufficiently impressed to rip it off wholesale in *The Filth & The Fury*. Fortunately there are other industry insiders who believe Tickell deserves more than backhanded compliments. Virgin has released Luke Haines' stunning soundtrack for Malry, and with the help of PR firm Savage & Savidge they've been involved in organising private screenings at Soho House, as well as public ones at places like the ICA. Catch it if you can!

Stewart Home <[www.stewarthomesociety.org](http://www.stewarthomesociety.org)> is, among other things, author of *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* and *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (both AK Press).

*Christy Malry's Own Double Entry* // Paul Tickell

Until now, the only UK screening has been at the ICA, London, 7th June.

For more information, contact production company Vine International Pictures,

T: +44 (0)1689 854123

## **Contagious Art (A Virus in the Biennale)**

By0100101110101101.ORG

0100101110101101.ORG, the anonymous Italian net art pranksters of artists and programmers exhibit a new computer virus

Normally in our Pin Code section, Mute's favoured 'celebrities' are asked, in a ridiculously intimidating sort of way, to present their conceptual KEY to THE UNIVERSE. Most choose to employ words. When we invited **0100101110101101.ORG**, the anonymous Italian net art pranksters, to contribute a Pin Code, they turned the page into another platform for spreading their art virus 'biennale.py'. This super bug, that can seemingly attach itself to any host, can't really be explained in

words nor would we want to give the game away by explaining what it ‘does’. Instead, place this techno-conceptual gun to your head and say, “My computer is dead, long live my new computer”.

A virus is usually considered evil, chaos. But what happens when a contemporary art temple starts spreading the chaos? In response to our invitation to participate in the 49th Biennale, we conceived and compiled ‘biennale.py’ as a work of art and computer virus. The source code of the virus was publicised and spread from the Slovenian Pavilion on the opening day of the Biennale, June 6th 2001. The main anti-virus software companies have been informed about the technical specifications of ‘biennale.py’ and the disinstallation instructions are attached to the virus.  
(from the press release)

[<http://www.0100101110101101.org>]  
<biennale.py AT 0100101110101101.org>

## Web-based Spookery

ByJJ King

Invicta Networks has announced a new technology for creating secure websites.

Invicta Networks ([www.invictanetworks.com](http://www.invictanetworks.com)) – a company that has on its board both a former CIA director and a former head of the KGB 8th Chief Directorate – has announced a new technology for creating secure websites. Established approaches to computer security – encryption, data scrambling, firewalls, and so on – are vulnerable to determined hackers, but Invicta is claiming that its ‘Variable Cyber Coordinates system’, which cloaks a site by shifting the IP address of its server up to several times per second, means that only surfers who are party to the predetermined pattern of the shifts will be able to access VCC-protected sites. Invicta begins shipping a beta of its system to paying customers at the end of June.

JJ King <[jamie AT metamute.com](mailto:jamie AT metamute.com)> is contributing editor of *Mute*. His essay on ICANN is in the ‘main’ section of this issue. Futurefarming satire by contributing editors James Flint and Hari Kunzru is in the same section.

VCC, from the horse’s mouth: [<http://www.invictanetworks.com/>]