

# STREET SIGNS

Centre for Urban and Community Research Newsletter

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URBAN AND  
COMMUNITY  
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## CUCR NEWS

Last summer was fairly productive in terms of research grants and other developments at the Centre for Urban and Community Research. There are currently fourteen ongoing research projects based at CUCR and we have also been lucky enough to receive more positive news.

Roger Hewitt and Moira Inghilleri (Department of English) have been jointly awarded a further ESRC grant of £35,000 for research on 'Translation, interpretation and asylum adjudication'. This complements the ESRC funded work by Roger and Saulo Cwerner on refugee dispersal already taking place at the Centre and visiting artist Paul Halliday's longstanding connections and work with the British Refugee Council. We are currently interested in expanding this stream of work and if anybody is interested in developing similar research we have put together an informal working group to think through ideas for larger proposals in the near future, so please get in touch. Roger and the Health Action Zone team of three have had their contract renewed for an extra six months, which will bring another approximately £50,000 of research funds.

Michael Keith and Rob Stone (Historical and Cultural Studies) have also been awarded an ESRC grant to convene a seminar series on 'Rethinking regeneration through, commerce, planning and art'. This will be run jointly with the Cultural Studies Department at the University of East London and the Department of Geography at QMC and will involve invited speakers from the UK and internationally in a set of events in one day conference format between 2002 and 2004.

Dr Kalbir Shukra has been awarded a grant of £12,000 to work with The Monitoring Group in Southall working around the development of their

resources for aiding victims of racial harassment. The project came out of the ESRC Democratic Governance and Ethnic Minority Participation work (Back, Keith, Khan, Shukra and Solomos) which has continued field research throughout the summer. A series of conference papers have been given in Geneva, Brussels, Manchester, Essex and Sheffield from the project and a stream of publications are beginning to follow.

In September Michael Keith and Marjorie Mayo were awarded £65,000 to work with the London Borough of Lewisham to work on their programme of democratic change and neighbourhood renewal. A small part of this contract will involve employing Susan Angoy, the former Chief Executive of Deptford City Challenge, to carry out one strand of this work whilst based in CUCR.

In August the first McColl Scholarship was awarded to Sally Brewer to study on the MA in Culture, Globalisation and the City. The award generated a lot of interest in the MA and the field

### Inside this issue:

Wine, Song and Speech: the first MacColl Scholarship	2-3
A Flame Immune to the Wind: The songs of KirstyMacColl	3-4
New MA in Photography & Urban Cultures	5
Bad Memories: Remembrance in Britain and Russia	6-7
Responding to September 11th	8-9
From Silence to Window View	10-11
Changing lives, changing democracy? A study on Social	12-13
Archaeology of seeing	14-15
An American (student) in London	16-17
Book Review	18-19
Active Listening	20-21
Scandinavian Adventures	22-23

*(Continued from page 1)*

was extremely strong. Most of the people who did not receive an award were still committed enough to stay to do the course. The scholarship attracted considerable press and media attention and Les Back was asked to do a series of interviews as a result which served as good publicity for the work of CUCR. We have 28 students on the MA in Culture, Globalisation and the City this year which pays tribute to all the work done by Les towards increasing student numbers on this course.

A new course is also being run from CUCR this year. Paul Halliday's workshop course on Photography and Urban Culture started in the first week of the Autumn term and was well received with 20 students (and rising) in the first time of running.

Over the past few months Saulo Cwerner and others have put together a seminar series on 'Sensing the City'. Look out for further details of speakers and times which will be publicised in the near future and will be on our website also.

It was with great sadness that we all heard the news of the premature death of Professor Roy Porter. Roy Porter gave a lecture to open the Centre for Urban and Community Research in 1994 which will be long remembered by all who were there.

Finally, it should be noted that Les Back was released on parole from his sentence as Acting Head of CUCR this Autumn. It goes without saying that everybody owes Les an enormous debt for the amount of work he has carried out in this role over the last two years.

**Michael Keith**

**February 2002**

### **Wine, Song and Speech: Celebrating the first MacColl Scholarship**

On All Souls day - November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 - CUCR hosted a party to celebrate the award of the first Kirsty MacColl scholarship. The award was set up in memory of the singer and songwriter who died earlier in 2001. The recipient of the award receives fees for full-time study on the masters degree in Culture, Globalisation and the City taught within the remit of the centre. The first scholarship was awarded to Sally Brewer and Jean MacColl - Kirsty's Mother - attended the evening.



*Jean MacColl congratulates Sally Brewer*

It was a fantastic night that combined moving musical and spoken tributes with celebration and revelry. Michael Keith hosted the event and Eddi Reader performed two songs, including one of Kirsty's, as a tribute to her friend, accompanied by Boo Hewerdine. Les Back gave a short talk about Kirsty MacColl's music and the launching of the scholarship.



*Eddie Reader sings, accompanied by Boo Hewerdine*

The text of Les Back's speech is reprinted below.



*Michael Keith*

## **A Flame Immune to the Wind The Songs of Kirsty MacColl**

In Medialand breakfast consists of black coffee and mineral water. At least six different brands of the clear fizz are available on this dark morning in White City. I was in this strange and alien world to talk about the scholarship set up at Centre for Urban and Community Research in memory Kirsty MacColl. The reaction to news of the scholarship which was for the *MA in Culture, Globalisation and the City* was incredible. The story was covered far and wide from the *Essex Courier* to here at the nerve centre of BBC.

A fresh-faced usher guides me from microphone to microphone. The attitude of the presenters is very telling. An unnaturally tanned man from Radio 5 asks dismissively "why are honouring a pop singer?" The question is delivered with a muted snarl that makes his contempt for 'crackpot academics' evident. "What do the applicants have to do?" I explain that it involves writing a 1,000 word personal statement and sending a CV. "And smile sweetly at you..." he says searching for a soft place to have a dig. I tell him that the scholarship will be adjudicated by a panel. The last stop is for Radio London Live and this time the interview is "down the line." I can hear Kirsty's 'In these Shoes?' playing in the head phones. The female journalist makes no secret of her admiration for Kirsty MacColl. "Just love that" she says as the music fades down. In the mediaworld of

bloated male ego's Kirsty's music - in which men are so often cut down to size - clearly spoke volumes.

Outside in the morning sun a driver waits. Its over. The scholarship has been made public. Tony - the BBC chaffeur - takes me home. We get to talking. "Did you hear the thing about Kirsty MacColl on the radio?" he asks in an East End brogue that's tattooed on his tongue. I explain that's why I am here. "I always liked her music, you know. Great voice. 'Cause you feel like you know the kind of people she sang about. You can recognise them, like listening to your friends talk?"

Tony, the son of a stevedore, tells stories of what the river was like in his youth in the sixties. Now he's a chauffer for the BBC.

"They've all been in 'ere, you know" he says proudly.

"Barrymore, John Humphries, Cilla."

The imprint of these antecedent arses make the plush seats somehow less comfortable.

Tony drops me off in New Cross. He's right about Kirsty MacColl's music. In fact, he could be a character from one of her lyrics.

Many of Kirsty MacColl's songs are astutely observed portraits of London life, family and relationships - always from her own unique and sometimes irreverent - point of view. These aspects of her life and career resonate with the issues of city life, culture and politics that are key themes within the MA. She was born in Croydon. The largest borough of the Metropolis but a place that is paradoxically not exactly in London but not outside of it either. Viewed from centre of urban cool, Croydon is, and was, thought of as a place of living torment. A culture vacuum, an example of where it is not.

Her career began when she joined a band from a large council estate called New Addington, close to Selson where she lived with her mother Jean. It is a place where the city and the country cut into each other like the teeth of a saw. In 1956 Sir Hugh Casson, architectural director of the Festival of Britain, said of this place that it was "cut off, not only from Croydon and London, but even from life itself." It may well have been, but this corner of the urban fringe also produced figures like artist Jamie Reid who went on to design the Sex Pistols' art work.

The fortunes of her first band were short lived but through them she came to the attention of Stiff Records who signed her.

Although best known for her shimmering pop songs, Kirsty MacColl developed her own unique commentary on the Metropolis. She assimilated archetypes from the world she encountered, the Elvis impersonators, the cowboys who “never remember your name” and the dishonest lovers of Belsize Park. She drew London’s vernacular into her song writing. “Dear John,” a song that she never recorded, is a good example. Eddi Reader, who we are going to hear later, recorded this ballad which take the form of a ‘Dear John letter’ and explains a failed love affair. This aspect of her songwriting merits recognition and it is why the scholarship is particularly appropriate.

*Still Life*, one of her less well known songs, is equal - as an urban ballad - to her father Ewan MacColl’s epic *Sweets Thames Flow Softly*. In it she portrays a city that is dying as its citizens leave for Milton Keynes but in which a ‘still life’ - that is both mundane and inviolable - endures. I just want to read the lyric.

### Still life

*I walked down by the river where we used to go  
And underneath the bridge where we first kissed  
The old town that we knew is dead and gone  
Gone*

*The sickly sun shines greyly through the mist  
And like the love we used to know  
The poisoned river waters flow  
And then they're gone  
For some of us still life moves on*

*Our love is just a relic of the past  
You'd never recognise the old town now  
Somewhere behind the concrete and the glass  
The monuments of England's sacred cow  
Where are all the human beings?  
Have they been sent to Milton Keynes?  
They used to live round here but now they're gone  
For some of us still life moves on*

Bono of U2 described her as the “Noel Coward of her generation.” She had a tremendous ear for what was going on around her. Many of her lyrics possess the quality of so many conversations overhead. As a social observer she was less dogmatic and ideological than earlier generations of songwriters, she saw through human frailty and foibles – particularly in men – that were passed over by others. Also, later in her career she developed a strong connection with musicians in Cuba. So, her music possessed both global and local registers. A fund has been set up for Cuban musicians and a library is to be built in Cuba in her memory.

Last and not least are her qualities as a singer. Morrissey has commented that “Everything shows in The Voice.” Unlike the circus of the talentless in today’s pop world, her voice didn’t need the digital assistance of pro-tools tuning. Rather, it possessed the paradoxical qualities of frailty and power, of innocence and worldliness - a voice that was both true and unique.



*Les Back*

John Berger has written that “the killing class cannot sing.” They have no voice. They only take those of others and through this theft make them still. But the miracle of the song is that it can never be taken. The song lives again in the voice chords of its singers now and those to come. The song is eternal, like a flame that is immune to the wind. It is with that in mind that I like to thank Eddi Reader for agreeing to come here tonight to sing some of Kirsty MacColl’s songs for us.

**Les Back**  
**Transcript of speech given**  
**November 2001**

## New MA in Photography and Urban Cultures

A new MA in *Photography and Urban Cultures* will be added to the range of postgraduate courses on offer in CUCR from October 2002. The MA will build on the Centre for Urban and Community Research's reputation as a leading research centre in the area of urban sociology and particularly our work in relation to visual ethnography. The programme will also augment and complement the established and successful MA in *Culture, Globalisation and the City*.

We feel that this MA will be attractive to a range of potential students. It will include: on the one hand, offering working photographers, visual artists and media practitioners space to reflect critically on their practice; and, on the other, it will be attractive to sociology, cultural studies and anthropology students who are interested in combining visual forms of representation with standard forms of research techniques in investigating urban life and the physical environments of the city.

Through the MA, students will be encouraged to produce a portfolio of photography that will also form the basis of an annual exhibition. Staff will both work with and through students to produce a visual research document of the state of cities like London. We have already piloted this approach through the *About the Streets Project* conducted as a collaboration between CUCR and the Higher Education Centre, Croydon College. This project focused on street portraiture and resulted in an exhibition held at Croydon College in July 2001. The exhibition consisted of the work of professional photographers like Paul Halliday and Ingrid Pollard alongside student work. In this sense we aim to link the MA with a wider research initiative utilising photomedia and this will be accompanied with a strategy for raising external funds. As part of CUCR's future research programme we are developing a new area entitled the *City of the Senses*. This programme will focus on utilising visual technologies alongside sound, smell and touch in representing and documenting urban life.

### CUCR Current Projects :

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Funder</b>
Pepys Community Forum Evaluation	5.5yrs to March 2006	PCF (SRB)
New Life for Paddington Programme Evaluation	3 yrs to March 2004	SRB (Paddington Dev. Trust)
Democratic Governance and Ethnic Minority Participation	36 months to end 2002	ESRC
Health Action Zone Evaluation	2 yrs to August 2002	HAZ
Gender & Construction	2 yrs to Nov 2002	WEB (European Social Fund)
Evaluation of Thamesmead Abbeywood Renewal 'Building Bridges'	1yr to April 2002	SRB
Asylum Seeker Dispersal	6 months to Nov 2001	ESRC
Evaluation of Action Learning in the Community	4yrs to Jan 2002	LET (DfEE)
Evaluation of Creekside Renewal	3 months to end Nov 2001	SRB
TMG (The Monitoring Group)	6 months to June 2002	TMG
Lewisham Neighbourhood Renewal - CONSULTANCY	4 months to Jan 2002	Lewisham NR Fund
Renaisi - Hackney Evaluation Project	2 months: Dec 01-Jan 02	SRB
Translation, Interpretation and Asylum Adjudication	1 yr - Mar 02 - Mar 03	ESRC
Public Perceptions	Mar 02 - Nov 02	Home Office

### **BAD MEMORIES : Remembrance in Britain and Russia**

One month after September 11<sup>th</sup>, my radio documentary, 'Feeding the Bear' was broadcast on Radio 4. It told the stories of merchant seamen of the Arctic convoys who supplied Russia with essential supplies between 1941 and 1945, braving Arctic seas and the constant threat of Nazi attack with no training and precious little equipment. These men received no British campaign medal for what Churchill described as one of the most hazardous actions of WWII and yet are feted and decorated by Russia. The programme explored this anomaly of remembrance, but scraped the surface of the complex and politically charged history my research and interviews uncovered. This article sheds light on that difficult and distressing story.

When I interviewed Tony Benn for the programme on September 12<sup>th</sup>, he told me 'If you forget your history, you can't learn from it.' Two weeks earlier, in Russia, I'd come uncomfortably close to the drama and pathos of forgetfulness and revision. Both Britain and Russia airbrushed the convoys from history during the grim Cold War consensus that demanded ideological enemies and the consolidation of post-war power-blocs. No place then for the recurring nightmares of men who served on the convoys, or for the people of Leningrad, Archangelsk and Murmansk who remembered the relief from siege, hunger and death that those convoys brought.

But with Glasnost began an era of ritual expiation of Russian historical guilt and the sudden bringing to light of the officially forgotten. This shift has worked to the benefit of Allied convoy veterans. Since 1983, Russia has welcomed them with official receptions and medals commemorating 'The Great Patriotic War'. They now regularly meet up with old Russian friends and comrades-in-arms

while in Britain, they remain officially forgotten and undecorated. As source of potential assistance for an ailing Russian economy, it seems British officialdom has less need to recover lost memories.

A layer of this 'memorial politics' was played out in edgy Anglo-Russian diplomacy this August. Russia was celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Arctic Convoy - probably the last ever large-scale commemoration. (Veterans are now in their 70s and 80s, many in failing health). Every day during the 10-day visit, interviews with British and Russian veterans were screened on national television. Hours of reminiscence were broadcast. Veteran Ernie Kennedy commented 'You wouldn't get this back home. No way'. But Russia has more need to draw on memories of a war won half a century ago, more desire to fix a brief alliance in popular memory. Partly that need for inward investment from Britain and the US, partly a project of nation building including State, Church and History in a tentative new configuration.

The veterans were not unaware of their role as mascots in a diplomatic initiative. At a Mayoral reception in Archangelsk, a small party of veterans accompanied by the British Consul General exchanged gifts with local officials. The Mayor, flanked by advisors, spoke of a continuity of friendship and mutual aid between Russia and Britain, the convoy veterans serving as living symbols of newly-useful recycled history in the service of a difficult project of rapprochement. But between the official lunches and diplomatic receptions came the events for which most veterans had made this journey. Meetings with Russian compatriots, evenings in hotel bars swapping stories, nights with old girlfriends in crumbling apartments. One veteran's wife tearfully took my arm as we made our way back from one of these informal events. 'I never knew until tonight...they went through hell' she said.

And memories do haunt the veterans. Some were officially too young to join the service; many were in their early twenties. Working class men who'd jumped at a chance for travel and adventure, sexual initiation in far-flung brothels and exotic ports. Freedom with a pay packet. What they found on the convoys was extreme cold, months of darkness followed by months of perilous daylight, constant attack by u-boats and planes and the exhaustion of round-the clock watches. Casualties were high. 3,000 seamen at the bottom of the Barents Sea, burned, drowned or frozen to death. Many more who made it to Russian field hospitals and to the fighting front are buried in Russian cemeteries.

The veterans share painful memories with the people of Murmansk, Archangelsk and St Petersburg (formerly Leningrad). They remember Russian friends and lovers disappeared by Stalin's enforcers, and the hostility, fear and suspicion that greeted them in Murmansk as an exiled population struggled to negotiate this brief alliance with political enemies. Locals in Archangelsk remember port prostitutes being taken out to sea on icebreakers and thrown overboard as war ended – human refuse inconvenient to a project of ideological purity. And veterans and locals alike remember the joyful delivery of military food supplies, relieving hunger and siege.

At a reception in St Petersburg, a Russian Naval officer and documentary filmmaker told us what Russia's new 'openness' and recovery of lost memories meant: 'At last I can have my subjective view of history.' And yet, political and economic expediency informs both this newly relished freedom and the official honour that British veterans now receive in Russia. It was hard not to be cynical in the face of all the careful staging, with secret police parked outside our hotel and a lone protestor ('English Pigs!') firmly hurried away by uniforms and guns.

Back in London, in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, I watched more steps in the clumsy choreography of this 'new relationship' between Russia, the US and Britain, with a jaundiced eye. But despite the exigencies of historical repression and rehabilitation in the service of (trans)national ideology and economic expediency, despite the wars endlessly re-configuring 'international relations', the message from those, British and Russian, who were at the sharp end of decisions taken 60 years ago is 'friendship beyond politics'. This was the toast we heard in St Petersburg and Archangelsk, against a backdrop of neon McDonalds signs and Madonna posters in Nevsky Prospekt and as expensive fireworks lit up the crumbling infrastructure and conspicuous poverty of an Arctic Circle port. A not uncomplicated organic internationalism embraced by British and Russian men and women who've had their fill of deathly politics, exile and the rhetoric of war. They understand that, whether in the heat of battle or the chill of geopolitical enmity, war leaves scars. It disappears lovers and friends, erases histories and debases un-looked-for sacrifices. Yet still memory burns through the joyous reunions, the toasts, the flowers and the gifts. 'We're not heroes' British veterans told us repeatedly. 'We just want to remember our friends.'

**By Sally Brewer**

**MA student in Culture, Globalisation and the City**

### Responding to September 11th

Edward Said has spoken recently about the frustrations of being ‘an intellectual in a world “dominated by people giving advice to governments”’ and characterises his work on Palestine as having the ‘tone of a kind of witness to events that might go unrecorded’ (15<sup>th</sup> December 2001, *The Independent*). Witnessing and documenting while being helpless with regard to actually halting forms of violence: is this the intellectual’s lot? When war rages, the role of writing is placed under question: what use are those tomes on normative theories of deliberative democracy, or those on philosophies of ethics, if the ethico-political world is dominated by violence? After the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and their unfolding aftermath, I think it is right that, privately or publicly, cultural theorists question their role. I was pleased to see that the journal *Soundings* was organising a meeting to discuss academic responses to September 11<sup>th</sup> (explicitly understood as academic debate rather than an anti-war rally) and that Stuart Hall and Chantal Mouffe, along with Guardian journalist Gary Younge, were to speak. I thought CUCR newsletter readers might be interested in some of the points that were made.

Stuart Hall suggested that September 11<sup>th</sup> was an example of the use of terrorism – a weapon ‘of the weak’ - against a world of the superpower. He made a number of points with regard to how we might think about the event. First, he argued that the possibility that everyone has today of seeing great wealth side by side with great destitution and suffering ‘drives people crazy’. There are multiple connections between poverty and terrorism; and the USA – a penetrative power - is not innocent in its role in bringing about current global inequities. Secondly, Hall argued that the current war is not a war of the West against Islam but it is becoming that which it is attempting to avoid. This doesn’t mean, however, that all responses that are tagged ‘Muslim’ are to be supported. It is not enough, Hall argued, to ‘quote the Koran at me’, nor to say that all Moslems are brothers, because there are different interpretations of the Koran and debates within Islam. Thirdly, Hall took a stance close to

Said’s argument that secular people on the left should be critical of the combination of technology and fundamentalism, that is, the capacity to mobilise around an absolute. Fourthly, Hall worries that the USA’s refusal to go the slow route to justice means that we now have a situation of the most powerful states getting together outside any framework of international justice, and that this may have repercussions insofar as it repeats the asymmetries of the new world (dis)order.

Chantal Mouffe lamented the lack of political thinking in politics; she argued that politics is now played out in terms of morality (good v. evil) and suggested that the world needs to be seen in political terms rather than the terms dominating the current military action. She suggested that posing the political question ‘what are the conditions that produced September 11<sup>th</sup>?’ is itself condemned by supporters of the action; thus Susan Sontag’s dissenting intervention was condemned as treason. Mouffe argued that there was a source of resistance in the anti-globalisation movement, if it is secured as an anti-corporate movement and a pro-democracy movement (that does not simply become anti-USA).

Gary Younge suggested that September 11<sup>th</sup> was a huge event not because of numbers killed or speed of their deaths but because of where they took place and because it was seen on television worldwide. In his attempts to think about the attacks, Younge began by recalling some news stories on September 10<sup>th</sup>. First, a boat carrying refugees bobbing about off Australia was refused permission to land; Mary Robinson commented that although Australia was breaking international law there was no higher legal authority to appeal to and the rest of the world could only put ‘moral pressure’ on them. Secondly, there was a UN Conference on racism at which former colonial powers were refusing to acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and someone from the Belgium delegation said that it was not a fact that slavery has always been wrong. The international scene was one in which the world was

coming down on Zimbabwe but not Israel, where the USA's power was apparent in the AIDS drugs patent case, and where international law could be broken without consequence. In sum, he suggested, the world was a lawless place in which we understood that might was right.

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> profoundly challenged that scenario. Younge said he thought the question 'can these acts (of September 11<sup>th</sup>) go unpunished?' a fair and reasonable question; one that academic analyses, he implied, cannot duck. But he cautioned that it is crucial not to separate today completely from yesterday. After all, this was how we 'got into this mess', because the USA thought they would arm those who at the time served its immediate interests. A leftist/progressive response to these events has to consider the question of which countries have the right to intervene outside their territory? Younge argued that this has to be considered in terms of the country's track record with regard to human rights at home and abroad. Thus one has to ask if the USA's track record in foreign intervention good enough for the left/progressives to support its intervention? But in the current world order, who gets to intervene is not about right arguments but a question of strength.

Coming away from this meeting I felt that there is a lot that was familiar about the way in which these speakers were thinking about the impact of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. While many of the points were well made, some were of exactly the sort that makes me uneasy about the role of cultural theory and political philosophy. When Mouffe happens to find examples of what she has been writing about (the eclipse of political language in favour of moral) to what extent is the world provoking her thought and to what extent is she right to be seeing/saying what she 'already knew'? There was little questioning of the role of critical thought, little prioritising of academic reflexivity.

How can we respond to the shock of September 11<sup>th</sup> so that we acknowledge its specificity without pretending the world has been delivered the ontological revelation that its perpetrators seemingly wished to present to us? The questions I feel are important involve cultural theorists in some profound questioning of the co-ordinants of contemporary theories of the world, as well as of who our audiences are. Where do we begin the analysis of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, that is, with which sociological concepts – power? nationalism and the formation of the nation-state? the subject and his/her allegiances? the thesis of secularisation and its critique? the relationship of modernisation to global inequities? – and with which audience in mind – colleagues? students? politicians? contemporary patriots? future students of history? Maybe intellectual responses are about 'mere' witnessing and recording, and the language by which we do so are details in the more important task of recording; but when so many are currently speaking and recording – these events are not ones going unrecorded – critical thought needs to think itself a different form of critical intervention. This strength cannot be assumed or simply asserted but maybe it can be found.

A more profound intervention might be one that begins to consider whether the conditions by which critical modes of thinking have emerged means they are always suited to the task of responding analytically. The allegiances of the cultural theorist are as much under scrutiny as are those of the terrorist network or the coalitions of the powerful elites. How curious to find oneself back at the questions that so preoccupied early Critical Theory, that is, the relationship of critical consciousness to rationality's 'other' - myth - with the relations between intellectual thought and critique as troubling as ever.

Dr Vikki Bell  
Senior Lecturer, Sociology

### From Silence to Window View

Wittgenstein served at the front in the First World War. In 1921, he published *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*, known as *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in its 1922 English edition. The very last sentence reads, (7) 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'. I like to think that this refers to his experience of the war. A reference to how man has killed man, and no language however soft and sensitive, or hard and coarse can find the words for such acts and experiences. It is better to be silent about such things and leave language to what it can talk about. He argues that this also the case with respect to art and religion. Our words are poor, even porous, with respect to the aesthetic and the mystical. They can only be experienced, (6.522) 'they make manifest themselves'.

If Wittgenstein's position on language and experience is adopted then, (5.6) 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world'. Security is sought and found in the limits placed around what can be said. So for Wittgenstein, to protect himself and release himself from finding words for his war-time experiences, he is led to conclude, (5.61) 'we cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot say either'. This would be precisely Foucault's point: the discourse we use in a certain field of activity or field of practice (e.g. in a teaching hospital, a mental asylum, a prison, a school) is constrained by that activity and precludes thinking differently about the activity i.e. no words exist to support the thinking of the unthinkable.

In Wittgenstein's later work, collected in his *Philosophical Investigations*, it has often been said that he talks of many different language games, each with their accompanying form or forms of life. The view is that he had come to regard art, religion, pain or fighting and killing as different forms of life, each with their own language game capable of adequately describing the activity in question. But once again, the speaker is trapped within the form of life and language game ? there is no opening in each language game for the unthink-

able. One simply learns or better still one is instructed in disciplinary fashion, into obeying the rules of the language game. The language game therefore places a limit on our recognition of new thoughts and experiences ? and this is a limit, perhaps even a tension, which Berger in all his work tries to remove, or at the very least explore.

John Berger's father also served in the trenches during the First World War. And, Berger notes, 'he didn't talk much about it. He couldn't. But I could feel it in him'. Not necessarily an indication that he lacked the words, perhaps more the case that he had of his own volition become incarcerated in himself. As Berger writes in another connection, in his short piece about prison life, *A Man of Discernment*, 'the aim of incarceration is to reduce all exchanges with the world to a minimum'.

What of his mother? In a small piece about his mother, reprinted in a collection entitled, *Keeping a Rendezvous*, Berger tells that throughout his childhood his mother was reluctant to explain things, she had 'a secret loyalty to the enigmatic'. As when he had asked why she had been a vegetarian when young. She had replied, 'because I'm against killing'. She would say no more. Either I understood or I didn't. There was nothing more to be said.

However, it took Berger many years before he understood this. In the meantime while a novelist and art critic, as well as writer of plays, he chose 'to visit abattoirs in different cities of the world and to become something of an expert concerning the subject. The unspoken, the unfaceable beckoned me. I followed'.

Was he looking for words to account for the enigma of experience, of death, of what it had meant for his father to serve in the trenches and his mother to be a vegetarian against killing? In *Pig Earth*, the opening volume in his trilogy of peasant life in the French Alps he tells the story of a peasant killing one of his cows. It is described in detail and in our imaginations we visualise it.

## STREET SIGNS

In protest against the double abandonment by blood and brain, the cow's body twists violently and its hind legs lunge into the air. It is surprising that a large animal dies as quickly as a small one.

The description doesn't reduce the enigma of this act, for we ask ourselves further questions, compare the pig's death to our own encounters with death and killing. We imagine new instances and occurrences.

In his work as a narrator, a story-teller, Berger finds a way of talking about the unspoken, the enigmatic. He reveals mystery after mystery - what Wittgenstein chose, in his early work, to call the mystical and aesthetic and desired to pass over in silence ? but Berger does so in such a manner that the mystery is brought to light and staged, but not resolved. He is clear about the consequences of his position, 'without mystery, without curiosity and without the form imposed by a partial answer, there can be no stories ? only confessions, communiqués, memories and fragments of autobiographical fantasy which for the moment pass as novels'.

The confession that tries to impose a final resolution and a final explanation. The confession that attempts to keep its participants within the thinkable, to stop them thinking the unthinkable. They aren't to imagine. Arguably, the most valued figure in Berger's short piece, A Man of Discernment, is the story-teller. Why? Because the story-teller makes the listener, in this case the prisoner, imagine and visualise what the prison guards want to refuse. Namely, escape:

It was a love story we were reading. A story of passion, crime, interrogations, dream, death forgiveness. Set in a faraway metropolis.

The confession attempts to limit, refusing the unthinkable and the enigmatic. Moreover, while it incites to confession, it is somewhat paradoxically capable of imposing shorter or longer moments of silence, especially after confession has been attained and no further confession is immediately required. The story as narrative attempts the opposite: to imagine, whether by words or by

other visual, tactile means. To find a way of communicating and developing ideas, experiences and events which may not have existed before. Not then to resist and repress the enigmatic ? Quite the contrary.

Surely, the narrative is a form of confession? It is in the sense that it brings to view, supports the revelation. But, even if it is then a movement away from the strategy of Dostoevsky's Underground Man, who cultivates a retreat inwards so that that all exchanges with the world are reduced to a minimum, the narrative is different in the sense that discipline, restriction and constraint are not its goals.

The poem reproduced below is one of my own and carries the title The Window View. It looks for narrative openness, the yet to be imagined, the enigmatic rather than the confession desiring closure and conformity:

*What oaths and obligations do we have -  
In these so modern times what sacraments  
Missed moments  
The shooting stars we never followed?*

*To this table  
Rounded rather than oblong  
Grained with our past  
To smooth the corners of our day*

*We whisper of allegiances, games of strategy  
Declarations of love and deceit  
Who can reveal the Secret Agent?*

*What table to bare?  
Great oak of patience  
Older than old  
The window view.*

**by Stephen Dobson**

**(Stephen is a CUCR Associate,  
based in Lillehammer, Norway)**

### Changing lives, changing democracy?

#### A study on social practices of women in the city of Vienna

‘After reading about these new women of courage who are transforming hopes for democracy, many of you may wonder with a sigh why you are so pessimistic, when they are so hopeful. Are these women merely crazy optimists...?’ (Kaplan, 1997:179)

Global processes of social change, referred to as ‘urbanization’, and more recently as ‘globalisation’ are leading to a reorganisation of social life in the city (Castell, 1977; Knox & Taylor, 1995). Theories, describing these developments, also mention tendencies of individualising processes, and a decline of traditional social samples, such as the ‘classical’ family, by which individuals are forced to set up new forms of social networks (Keupp & Roehrl 1987).

Keupp (1998) defines these developments as ‘risky chances’, as the social capital, needed for setting up such new social networks, is related to one’s social status, and hence to one’s economic capital. Therefore, an increase in social inequality is likely to be expected. According to these considerations, what does this mean for the situation of women, who verifiably lack economic capital, still can be seen as the ‘traditional social networkers’ (Keupp, *ibid.*)?

What effect does social change have on women’s social practice, and their everyday life in the city? Which places and spaces are they going to occupy?

These social developments are linked with a new discussion on citizen’s participation (Rosenberg, 1993; Stark, 1996). Experiences from a pilot pro-

ject on the ‘Local Agenda 21 in Vienna-Alsergrund’ underline once more that women are still underrepresented in such projects. A community analysis, carried out in this area, highlights that especially women with children are using their close urban surrounding to manage their everyday life, and that they are trying to follow what can be called a ‘sustainable point of view’ (Boehm, Ehmayer, et al., 2000). Hence, why do women as ‘experts’ of their community not take part in such a project? Which influences do the community and the urban environment have in terms of support, hindrance, and exclusion in their everyday life, and what does this mean in the wider context of social change mentioned above?

In my research work, based on the Grounded Theory (Breuer, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1998), I was looking at women’s organisation of their everyday life. Also of interest were possible potentials for democratisation and sustainable development. One of the main results describes the importance of having what can be summarized as ‘autonomy’ and ‘community’ (‘Graetzl’/Gemeinschaft). Those fields are highly interwoven, but also dependent on the quality of their coping strategies and their social networks.

The everyday lives of the women I have been interviewing, are characterized by a flexible daily structure, caused by an alternation between different fields and places of action – more than one field and place of (part time) work, family obligations, own interests, etc. – which are changing continually, and therefore require permanent planning adjustment. As soon as women have children, this situation worsens dramatically, as they are still confronted with traditional role models, a restrictive work place policy, and a set of barriers within the urban environment. All to-

gether, this is resulting in a 'lack of time for themselves'. Therefore, they need to follow a 'step by step' strategy, and to keep, at least, what they call a 'piece of one's own life' to be able to realise own perceptions of life in a long term.

The social networks that women have built up for their support differ depending on the needs and ways they are using them. Whereas 'organisational networks' are developed to exchange experiences in terms of everyday necessities and to cope with daily duties, 'emotional networks' are more important to share personal views and interests, to strengthen and support each other regarding the development and success of their own concepts of life, and against social norms.

As a pattern of sustainable behaviour a favouring of 'quality' before 'quantity' can be observed, concerning the choice of women's relationships, material goods, food, etc., which is related to and supported by their flexible daily structure. They also see the increased flexibility of their everyday life as an opportunity to be able to organise their duties, at least to a certain degree, in the way they want to.

In all the points mentioned above, the 'community' plays an important role, as the close surrounding maintains or restricts possibilities to set up 'organisational networks' and to develop 'flee spaces', but is also related to a 'sense of belonging' – feeling 'home and secure', as well as enabling women to meet with certain people ('emotional networks'). The women have been explaining an interest in an active engagement with their own life environment, which is being achieved by and through argument with others, also leading to new insights of their own situation, and allowing them to take more control over their life.

Further, 'public places' as a space, where people meet for recreation and socialising are also places

where exchange of knowledge and sharing similar views and interests can lead to social engagement and political action.

Altogether women are already struggling with what is described as a new flexibility and have to cope with a set of restrictions and disadvantages within the contemporary city, which are trying to force them into traditional roles and excluding them from taking part in political participation. These tendencies are expected to increase.

Hence they are starting to form a solidarity with each other, breaking traditional rules and creating 'spaces of resistance' to make their own way in life, also developing patterns of 'sustainable behaviour'. Herein lies precisely what I would see as a new potential for democratisation. Nevertheless, the question remains what will be left even from the 'piece of one's own life' in the age of 'turbo-capitalism' and the 'global city'?

The quotation at the beginning of this article therefore is summarizing my conclusions. Through the strength and the courage of the women I have been interviewing to hold on to their own perceptions, developing creative ways to get through it, and the will to succeed in the end, is great motivation to focus on those on the margins, still 'crazy for democracy'.

By Ulrike Böhm

MA Student in Culture, Globalisation and the City

## STREET SIGNS

### Archaeology of seeing

A man is standing on the street corner, shielded from the rain by his umbrella firmly grasped in his right hand. He is completely taken by some inner train of thought - perhaps he is praying. I ask myself, 'is he on his way to a meeting where his fate will be decided by some corporate uber-executive, several years his junior, or is he simply lost, and by momentarily concentrating his mind, attempting to get a positional fix on his current location within the area?'

How should we, as the audience, make sense of the image? If we see the man as an ageing executive about to face the consequences of corporate restructuring and rationalization, we may feel some sympathy with, and for him. But what if the shoe were to be placed on the other foot? What if he were about to walk into a meeting with the intention of sacking one of his long-suffering and loyal subordinates. In other words, how should our understanding of his inner state of mind – his intentions – affect the way we read this image?



Metaphorically speaking, all street photography might be thought of as a form of visual archaeology. Photographers such as Gary Winnogrand, Diane Arbus, Martin Parr and the more recently celebrated artist Nan Golding, all share an approach to the street which produces visual narratives imbued with possibilities of ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings. Their images disrupt our expectations of 'how the street works'. We are not given a template of meaning. Rather, we are invited to bring to the images our own expectations, experiences and opinions, and from these, to build our own narrative of the city.

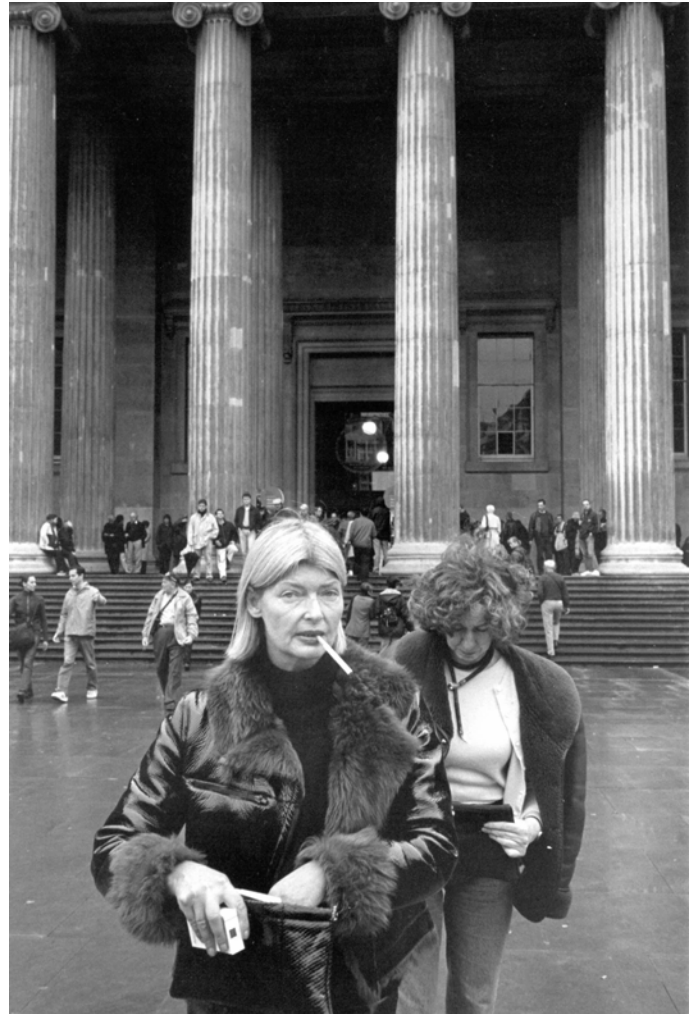
This is a concept explored by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay *One-Way Street*. He offers an image of seeing and *knowing* the urban as akin to viewing a country road from the elevated window of a passing airplane. The road becomes part of a network of minuscule arterial configurations - we have an idea of the form but we cannot see or relate to the details. According to Benjamin, we start to know and understand the road when we walk it, in much the same way as Chinese literary culture places an emphasis on the educational practice of copying key philosophical texts. His is a philosophy of *praxis* – we understand through doing.



## STREET SIGNS

When one walks a street over a period of time, a visual, and for want of a better word, *archaeological* relationship begins to develop. ‘Visual’ in the sense that the photographer builds an intimate knowledge of where people stop to rest, where light best reflects off architecture, where the road widens – thereby allowing more viewing space. ‘Archaeological’ in that a process of sifting, sorting and piecing together found fragments starts to occur as a constituent prelude to meaning.

The photographer begins to recognise tracks and footprints. Similarly, contemporary archaeological practice itself is constantly being re-evaluated in terms of its inherent inclination towards narrative construction. We no longer think of such discourses as unproblematically scientific, but rather as subject to the poetics of interpretation and baggage of cultural politics, academic or otherwise.



In much the same way as the archaeologist tries to put flesh onto the dry bones of distant civilisations and epochs, the street photographer attempts to place together the fragments of visual culture and space. There are moments when the epic and prosaic overlap into an indistinguishable blur, when a sublime release comes with the realisation of the *impossibility* of the activity we call ‘street photography’. For now, I shall continue to look at these particles of silver halide embedded in their uniform strips of gelatine, and think of them as they should perhaps be best thought of, as temporal fragments of a fictional city. And if I look closely enough, from time to time I see the signs, tracks and shadows of people I once recognised as *lost to history*.

**Paul Halliday**

### An American (student) in London

When my tutor, Les Back, asked me to write on my experience as an American student in London, little did I know that it was yet another trap he had set for me. All American residents in London have a complicated relationship with the city, and after spending a year in the city, I was no different. (In fact, the historian Brian Morton, of my hometown—Ann Arbor, Michigan—wrote an entire book called *Americans in London*. I'd like to think myself in the direct lineage of John Adams, Herman Melville, and Henry James, but....) On arrival, my first instinct was to get “off the beaten track”, find the “real” and thus “authentic” London, not realizing that in doing so I was merely following yet another well-worn tourist ploy. The dilemma was how to capture the city so that in some small way it belonged to me.

Looking back, it seems that London offers a perfect setting to engage with lingering and irksome questions about authenticity. The problem, of course, is the sheer weight of received cultural images of London, the way the city is seemingly completely overdetermined and endlessly pre-mapped, either by literary trope or tourist pastiche. In such a tourist mecca, how could I penetrate the commodified veneer and make contact with any sort of “authentic” London? In fact, was there any such “real” city to be discovered?

Almost a century ago, Ford Madox Ford enthused, “England is a small island, the world is infinitesimal amongst the planets. But London is illimitable”. And yet, my received images of such a well-mapped city seemed to place very definite limits on the ways I could interact with and imagine London. Were there any new trails to blaze in a city where everything, to the tourist, seems to fit into tidy, pre-formed categories—a city, as Walter Thornbury wrote in 1880, “every paving stone of which marks the abiding-place of some ancient legend or biographical story”?

Such verbal or visual images often act to suppress the varied social relations and layered historicity of the built and social environments in favour of postcard-friendly urban icons, compact and con-

sumable. I would imagine that it's sometimes tricky even for lifelong Londoners to disentangle the pageant from the prosaic, the self-conscious spectacle from the everyday nine-to-five. So, was there a way for me, as a visitor, to penetrate this veneer and commune with any sort of “authentic” London? Because, while part of the pleasure of the city lay along the beaten path, surely a greater pleasure lay in seeking out the veiled and clandestine Londons of Iain Sinclair or Peter Ackroyd.

If authenticity wasn't to be found in the Changing of the Guard, perhaps it could be found in emulating Dickens's night trolleys through the city, or watching the butchers unload their wares in the small hours at Smithfield Market, or so I thought as occasionally I trudged the distance from the Strand out to New Cross at 2 a.m. “Now *this* is something that the typical tourist never sees.” Yet I was plagued by an endless suspicion that I was a dupe of a Disney-like tourist industry. (“Ahh”, one Goldsmiths friend disdainfully observed after I recounted each of my expeditions through London, “only tourists see *that*.”) As with a Russian doll or an onion, one layer conceals only the next.

Tourists, those legions of postmodern ethnographers, often travel in quixotic quest of *authentic* foreign experience, and yet will only accept as “authentic” those experiences and images which seemingly confirm previously-held notions about a place. (Hence one pundit's formulation of “tourism as tautology”.) The problem and the paradox, as critic Jon Cullers explains, is that to “be truly satisfying the sight needs to be certified, marked as authentic”, but when marked as such, the sight “is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes”. Novelist John Updike encapsulates the predicament in his short story “The Madman”, in which the American narrator, sent to Britain to continue his literary studies, finds an England that “appeared to exist purely as a context for literature”:

The city overwhelmed our expectations. The Kiplingesque grandeur of Waterloo Station, the Eliotic despondency of the brick row in Chelsea where we spent the night..., the Dickensian nightmare of fog and sweating pavement and besmirched cornices that surrounded us when we awoke—all this seemed too authentic to be real, too corroborative of literature to be solid.

Here the physical and social reality of the city is reduced to nothing but text. The city's charm but also its challenge emerge from this rich heritage.

So, I flip the coin over to the side where London the Squalid is more authentic, no doubt due in part to the overwhelming body of dystopian literature about the city. From Ben Jonson's mock-epic sewer expedition in "Of the Famous Voyage" to the sinister city of Martin Amis's *London Fields*, it is the seedy and malignant that seems in large degree to comprise popular images of an "authentic" London. The allure to visitors is apparent in the popular "Jack the Ripper" Whitechapel tours, or in a Dutch company's £300 "Live Like A Tramp in London" holiday package, where tourists receive only a sleeping bag and musical instrument and are left on the streets to fend for themselves.

But one byproduct of my MA dissertation research into Victorian London tourism was my realisation that there never *was* a pristine time before the commodification of the city and its history. Having developed a fondness for the Olde Cheshire Cheese, haunt of Doctor Johnson and—in its pre-Great Fire incarnation—of Ben Jonson, I'd often wished I could visit the pub a century ago, minus the hordes of American spring breakers. My naïveté became apparent to me when I came across a late-19<sup>th</sup> century

guidebook warning that the Cheese had become markedly less pleasant due to the swarming American tourists. When Susan Stewart writes that "[n]ostalgia is a sadness without an object", she underlines the non-existence of the mythologised past that we yearn for.

I don't pretend to have answers for the complex questions that my London experience raised. But I did emerge from the Goldsmiths course convinced that the city itself, along with the library and classroom, is the ideal sphere for engaging with these and countless other issues. The line between the MA seminars in which I sat and the city buzzing all around me quickly became blurred, and I soon realized that in this programme I would *always* be in class, among what Georg Simmel long ago described as "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity within the grasp of a single glance". But, in a more visceral way, since leaving London I've also realised the truth of another insight from Ford Madox Ford: "We never go back, never really and absolutely: London for those who have once, for however short a space, been Londoners, is always on the cards, is always just beyond the horizon." Now in another city and another country—Toronto, Canada—I find myself thinking about when I can next get back to London, and, yes, to my favourite cheap restaurant, the Monsoon on New Cross Road. And I have Goldsmiths College (and Les Back) to thank for that ball and chain!

**By Ben Looker**

**Ben is a former MA student in Culture, Globalisation and the City**

*I was meant to write a book review ... below is what I came up with. Trust me, it really is a book review but it's just written in the style of the book under review. The quote below 'hints at' why I've done this.*

*'Social scientists make up a rationale and a ritual for the alienation inherent in most human observation and intellectual work today. They have developed several stereotyped ways of writing which do away with the full experience by keeping them detached throughout their operation. It is as if they are dead afraid to take the chance of modifying themselves in the process of their work'*

C. Wright Mills (spring 1948)

.....

Below is an extract from Rapley's (2008) *Letters to Bally*. London: Vanity Press. Bally was Rapley's imaginary friend as child, who he could only communicate with by speaking into the petrol cap of his parents' Triumph 2000. Bally became Rapley's academic sounding board, an imaginary audience for him to explore his own thoughts.

.....

In the letter below, Rapley mentions his 'blues'. He had just finished his PhD and was unsure about his future in the 'Academy'. One of the lecturers at Goldsmiths', Les Back, had given Rapley a copy of *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings* (2000) edited by Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills. California:

University of California Press. The book clearly inspired Rapley. The review of the book mentioned in the letter was published in the CUCR newsletter.

**To Bally, from Penge, London, undated (probably Winter 2001)**

*Dear Bally:*

It's been a long, long, long time. I hope you're feeling good. I've been reading a mad \$%^ing book and it made me think of you - so I thought I'd finally get around to writing to you.

Now this book made me cry (a lot). It made me laugh (a lot). It made me smile, smirk and gawp. Well maybe that is not that remarkable but this wasn't just any book, it was an academic text !!! (or maybe, to be more precise, it is the reflections of an academic). Now it comes to something when an academic text brings me to tears - although saying that many of them bring me to a version of tears, either tears of boredom, frustration or anger ...- but this was different. It is just, kind of, beautiful. One of the lecturers at college gave it to me as a 'congratulations' for doing this PhD thing ... and then he asks me to write a review of it for one of the internal college magazines (!). Man. I really just wanted to read it, not read because I'm (supposed to be) an academic.

It's 'just' a collection of letters that this American sociologist, C. Wright Mills, wrote to various people and some letters he wrote to his imaginary Russian friend (so some autobiographical stuff as well). He is one of those academics you vaguely know about and you may have flicked through one of his books, maybe because you had to for some undergraduate course you were doing. After reading it, I'm still unsure if I want to read all his work but, above all, he's inspired me to keep on keeping on with this 'academic life'.

So why did it excite me? Well here's an outline of the book (the plot):

C. Wright Mills, a sociologist (or maybe a social thinker) [or maybe 'just' a thinker] writes some letters to his acquaintances, colleges, family, Fidel Castro, friends, himself, negative reviewers, and publishers. He covers assorted topics, including:

- \* *Life* - 'The whole notion of growing up is pernicious, and I am against it. To grow up means merely to lose the intellectual curiosity so many children and so few adults have'
- \* *Motorbikes* - preferably German with big suspension
- \* *Travelling in Europe* - 'London: horrible place from every angle. Blighty has had it. ... So England really is an unknown. One thing is clear to me the similarity is misleading. This is a foreign country to me.'
- \* *Designing and building your own house*
- \* *Money* - finding it and spending it
- \* *Politics* - 'To what is it that we ought to belong? Mere loyalty alone is less a virtue than an escape from freely thought-out choices among the many values that now compete for our loyalties'
- \* *Where to live, where to work*
- \* *Writing* ...

It seemed to offer me many things. The book gave me a massive insight into what it *might* mean to become an academic - the mundane stuff that goes unnoticed, or, maybe, just unsaid - book contracts, building a file on a research topic, dealing with publishers, interviewing, plagiarism, reading and reacting to other reviews of your work, researching stuff, the art of writing, worries about 'not being good enough'.

However, above all, the man can write. As he says, 'I am a man who feels truly alive only when working - researching and writing - and who otherwise tends to become an irritable and unpleasant creature'. Remind you of anyone?

He is just damn passionate and his passion kind of rubbed off on me. Equally, he was useful in breaking my current 'blues'. Anyone who shows that it is possible to 'raise a little impolite hell' through academic work gets my vote.

Reading this 'wordy little trail of a North American aboriginal' reminded me of listening to wonderful music - you listen, you enjoy and then your mind slips onto another, related, topic ... you start to think.

Take care, speak to you soon,

*Tim*

.....

*'One thing we ought to remember, which I always tend to forget, is that we must not underestimate what even a small circulation of ideas can do, especially - if I may say so - comical and inane ideas'*

C. Wright Mills (fall 1959)

**By Tim Rapley**

**Researcher, CUCR**

### Active Listening

Ove Sernhede is one of the foremost writers and critics within sociology and cultural studies in Europe today. Yet, much of his work is little known outside of Scandinavia and his native Sweden. This is, in part, the result of a paradox. While people in Gothenburg, Oslo and Copenhagen have been tuning into every subcultural shift and theoretical development in London, few here take the time to re-set the dial and listen to what is going on in those cities. This in part is the result of the colonising effect that the dominance of the English language has had on the sociological imagination within academic circles. Recently, Ove visited CUCR for six months and showed us how much we have to learn from re-tuning urban and culture theory to a broader wavelength.

Now the Head of the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Gothenburg, Ove grew up in a working-class district of the city. Gothenburg is a port town, the main harbour in Scandinavia, with an internationalist sensibility that has always looked outwards to the west across the sea. It is also an industrial city with strong proletarian traditions in cultural life and political organisation. In Sweden, Gothenburg is referred to as 'Lilla London' (little London).

London holds a mythic allure, particularly for the young people in Gothenburg. In the sixties the Capital was seen as the centre of music and pop culture. Ove was part of that generation. "I was just fifteen years old when I came to London for the first time" he remembers. "The ferry landed at Ipswich and my friend and I built a special tandem bicycle, with a strange box in the middle of it. This was a place where we could put records. I remember my friend and I brought back forty records each. We didn't have room for our clothes, so we posted them."

The music emerging from London during the sixties through bands like the Rolling Stones, Small Faces, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Cream and Alexis Corner had a deep resonance with young people in Sweden. These bands themselves were a white translation of blues and rhythm and blues

music. A parallel music scene developed in Sweden. Ove was a member of one of the better-known rhythm and blues bands and played the clubs of Gothenburg. His interests in music then became to converge with his interest in youth culture as a place in which larger social and economic transformations were registered.

Sweden was hit by a severe economic crisis during the mid seventies. The conflicts and tensions reverberated in youth style and in particular in the emergence of punk. Groups of young people were literally living on the streets of Gothenburg without families. Many of these kids spent periods in borstal and prison only to return to a life on the streets. By the early eighties Ove was working as a social worker with young people. At this time he had been introduced to the Frankfurt School writers and Freudian Marxism in particular the work of Thomas Zeihe. He reflected, "I started to apply some of those theories to what I saw on the street. I didn't talk about Zeihe and Negt with the youngsters, but I kept those ideas in the back of my mind."

"Social workers always look for problems but these kids had solutions in their life world so to say. One of the things they all were interested in was music. Many of them didn't have any home at all. What we did was ask them what they wanted to do. The politicians needed to do something. They said to us 'do what you want, but just do something. Music was a way of representing their lives. So we took them into the studio and after twelve months we had four rock bands composed of young men and young women who had been sleeping on the streets before. It was like 'we are as tough as this guitar riff.'" The result was an extraordinary youth music project called "let a thousand stones roll." The youth centres of Gothenburg were transformed into rehearsal spaces and involved thousands of young people, and the former street kids were turned into teachers.

Central to the theoretical underpinnings of his work was the idea that the modernisation process limits the expressive potential of students or work-

ers. Ove developed the notion that music was a way of expressing these excluded or repressed parts of the self. In 1985 he wrote a book entitled *From Dreams You Weave* that picked up these themes in combination with an account of his experience as a social worker. This led to him to collaborate with musicologist Johan Fornäs on a research project into the place of rock music in young lives. The book that was written from it has been translated into English and is entitled *In Garageland: Youth, Rock and Modernity* (Routledge, 1995).

In recent years Ove has been working on racism and segregation in the suburbs of Gothenburg. Unlike the UK, Sweden suburbanises its poverty and new migrants are settled on the edge of the city. As a result much of the debate about ethnicity and racism has focused on the suburbs. His research in the Gothenburg suburb of Hammar Kullen (Hammer Hill) has looked at the ways in which young people from a variety of diverse cultural backgrounds use music, this time hip hop, to find a place for themselves in Swedish society.

“Their parents come from all over the world: over fifty ethnic groups in the suburbs. But, even then there is a pattern of mixing and building new kinds of identities. The young ones don’t see themselves as Swedes, or Somalis, or Argentineans, they see themselves as part of the hip hop nation. They see hip hop as a global tribe. To me there is something interesting about this ‘local culture’. They consider the area as a ‘reservation’ and they make connections with excluded people around the world. Hammar Kullen is not part of Sweden but part of the excluded peoples of the world. They blend Aztec mythology with Malcolm X and hip hop as part of their heritage to form a dissident political culture. Music is the thing that invites people into this Third Space.” As part of his research he has organised a group of young people from Hammar Kullen to visit hip hop organisations in Cape Town, South Africa. Music provides the key thread in Ove Sernhede’s theoretical, political and cultural work. What is extraordinary about this is the degree to which he

combines research and writing with organising and developing practical forms of intervention.

During his stay in London he has returned to his love of sixties music and rhythm and blues. “I am returning to the roots of my own interests. When I heard Bo Diddley at the age of fourteen it was like someone knocked me in the head. I was amazed. To do this research in London was, so to say, returning to my own past. I didn’t know that when I wrote the application, but just now I can see it was. I have spent hours in the British Library listening to the oral histories of musicians involved in this scene. I don’t know what I’ll get out of it but something keeps me listening. I am still fascinated with London. It has been inside me all my life.”

Ove Sernhede is a great listener with a capacity to hear the important voices in their own terms with integrity. He also has a gift for combining intellectual work with activism that mobilises the people most directly affected by social exclusion in the city. While his new project on the blues scene is clearly a labour of love, it also develops his long-standing concern to understand how people ‘live with music’ to use Ralph Ellison’s phrase. He shows that in musical cultures we can find the traces of the past in the present and open up new ways to think about modernity and its counter-cultures.

### Les Back

*List of Ove Sernhede’s publications in English on black/white youth and Hammarhill:*

*"White youth, black culture" i Peter Mikkelsen (ed): Facing Modern Youth and Subcultures, Copenhagen: ETEN - Report - European Teacher Education Network, 1996.*

*"Waiting for Mandela", in Soundings nr 8 1998.*

*"Exoticism and Death as a Modern Taboo" i Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg & Angela McRobbie (eds): Without Guarantees. To Stuart Hall, London:, Routledge.*

### Scandinavian adventures

On the 16-18 May about twenty researchers from Norway and Sweden will be descending on the CUCR. They will expect to be impressed. Working on issues around ethnicity, identity and urban space they have a great respect for the ideas that come from the UK. They are coming to Goldsmiths as the final leg of a three part series of workshops. The first was in Gothenburg, Sweden on cities and relations to public spaces. The second was in Bergen, Norway and was on national identity.

Les Back, Lez Henry, Hiroki and I have just returned from Norway and three days of back-to-back papers. This project was designed for people who have just finished or nearly finished their PhD's to allow them to present their final ideas to a fresh audience. I think it was also with some networking purpose maybe towards future employment. But ultimately it was because these departments are making choices about their direction and need to reinvent themselves as international research centres.

What I have got from this, so far, is a renewed sense of the specificity of what I am doing and where I am. It's easy to underestimate the effect that being in London has on us, and our work. We just don't move around in a small town, or have to deal so much with small town mentalities. It is so easy to take for granted the fact that we live in a place that is constantly changing, that is very busy, where things happen and where it seems possible to 'be something'. As my work is on a company it is easy for me to become subsumed in the conservative aspects of corporate culture and forget that in London it is not difficult to find liberal people, millions of people who are open, about many aspects of cultural difference.

One of the guys in Sweden whose name was Bjorn gave a paper on young people in public spaces. He mentioned a group of people called the 'Jackets'. He went on with his paper taking for granted that we would know what they were. You won't believe it – 'Jackets' are parent's groups that go out and loiter around in town centres and outside

nightclubs protecting the cities youth. Yes, it gets better. The reason they are called 'Jackets' is because each group has it's own name, for example the 'Night Owls', all wearing jackets specially made with owls embroidered on the back! These groups have been in existence in Norway since the mid eighties. And of course the 'Jackets' are continually disappointed that young people don't turn to them when they feel unsafe. The thing was, that Bjorn was really very surprised that we found this social phenomenon so amusing, because Jackets are so normal to him.

We went all around Gothenburg commenting on how clean it was. We made jokes about missing London and the litter, overflowing from bins, blowing down the streets into our faces. The roads and shops, the university grounds, everything in Gothenburg seemed spotless. The university building where we met every day was on a small hill, looking over a landscaped garden and pond. The windows were shining from floor to ceiling. You could go to a club and come back without clumps of grey matter on the bottom of your shoes. And it wasn't just clean, it was also new. Even people's clothes were new, no faded colours or holey elbows. And in the conference room where we had our seminars, the tables and chairs were brand new. Maybe it was the weather, the bright blue sky against the red brick, but this is what we noticed.

And then a woman called Katrina gave a paper on homeless women's experience living in Gothenburg. She used Mary Douglas' idea that dirt is matter out of place. She described Gothenburg's dirt as its non-consumers. She linked the emphasis on cleanliness to the need to enhance the commercial appeal of the city, making it the ideal place for retailers and businesses. She described the planning and policing strategies of the authorities trying to push out unwanted elements. It is those who are made to feel like the city's dirt, she argued, who are best able to see the increased militarisation of the city and the efforts that go into prescribing the way we live and move. Homeless women in Gothenburg have to undergo training to

be given a council flat. They have a 5 year probationary period where they go through four separate stages until they graduate to freer and more comfortable apartments. At the start of this 'training' council workers are able to walk into their apartments at any time of day or night to check on them. The women have to do courses in flower arranging and baking. Some women took pride in the lack of attention they paid to their flats refusing to accept they could ever be a home. In the interviews they spoke of home not as a physical place but as a powerful state of being, the ability to shut the door and exclude people, to be free from the judgement of others. Hiroki, Les and I found this paper really interesting, because Katrina was brilliant and also because it was such a new angle on exactly our experience of Gothenburg.

In Bergen the papers were more interdisciplinary. We had anthropologists, philosophers and political scientists speaking on the subject of national identity. Some of it was like being back in time when third world cultures were spoken of as backward and 'pre-modern'. But we heard Mette Anderson talking about the Norwegian press response to racist violence, which was very interesting. She stressed the importance of narratives about Norway being an innocent country, and a brave country for fighting the Nazi's for so long. In this way racism and racial violence is constructed as an extreme anomaly something completely separate from being an 'ordinary' Norwegian. Racism is also separated from the idealised version of Norwegian national identity though this remains exclusively white.

Aside from learning a bit about Norway and Sweden, and feeling myself more located in London than ever, one of the nicest things about this project has been getting to know Lez H. and Hiroki better. As they are finishing I hardly ever see them around at college. In fact until I went to Sweden I'd never really spoken to either of them. Now we bicker like we've been married for ages. In fact this time we all had a row. In a smokey and expensive Bergen pub I had a heated argument with both Hiroki and Lez H about whether a person's ability

to adapt and transcend accounted for 'success' more than their place in 'the system'. Amazingly the next morning a man called Eero gave a paper on exactly these issues. He was working with ideal types constructed according to their attitudes to money and consumption. During his paper, in his description of the ideal types, he quoted almost word for word some of the views expressed in our argument. It was a really nice moment, a weird coincidence, and allowed us to broach the subject again and laugh about it.

In Gothenburg we were lucky enough to be there for a cultural festival, which meant there was more going on in terms of music, art and street events. On our way to see a ska band play in a ceramics shop (!) We walked along a street covered in whoopee cushions. It was some kind of art installation that wouldn't have been out of place in Goldsmith's. In Bergen the nightlife was quieter and wasn't helped by the fact that a beer was £4 and you can't order any spirits in bars. Everything but beer and wines is still sold by state owned supermarkets, which apparently offer the best choice in the world (but have limited opening hours!). We compensated for this by taking our own huge bottle of vodka into the snowy mountains and drinking it with icicles.

I am personally really looking forward to when our friends come to London. They are really nice people and hugely interested in London, our institution and what we are doing here. I think they will be up for going out a lot too. I hope lots of people will come and join in the debates and social outings. And if you have a spare room, we might need some assistance with putting people up. Please contact Les Back for more information on the next instalment of the Scandinavian adventure.

**By Emma Nugent**

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## CUCR Seminar Series 2001-2002

In the summer term, we will be organising a number of seminars on the topic of Sensing the City. This will mark the establishment of a new research area in the Centre, based on the past and present work on visual urban cultures. Dates and full programme will be available early in the summer term, but we have so far confirmed the participation of Jamie Reid (Artist), Patria Roman-Velazquez (City University), and Bill Schwartz (Goldsmiths College). Keep an eye on the website and notice boards for full details or, to join the CUCR mailing list, contact us on <cucr@gold.ac.uk>.

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