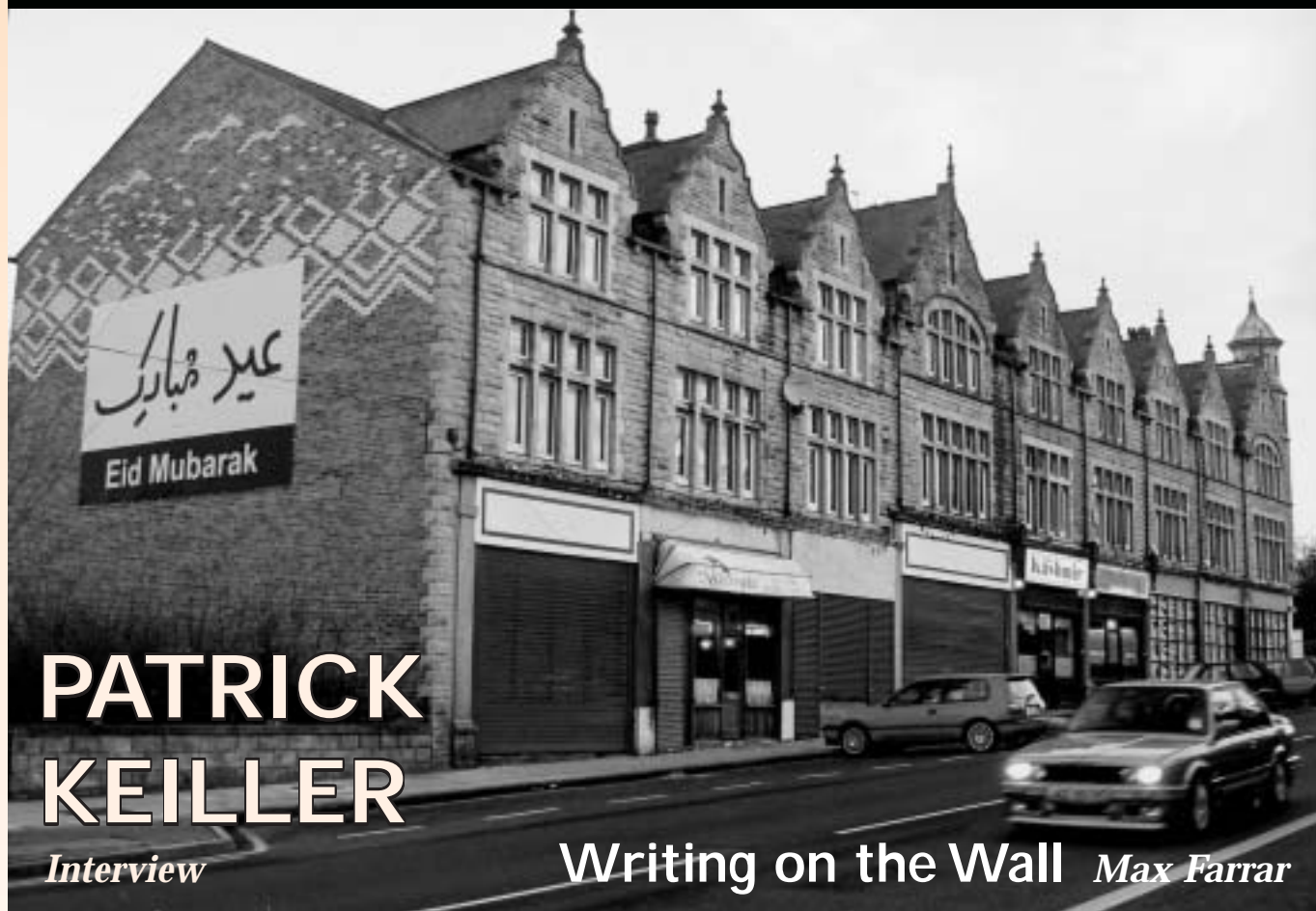


STREET SIGNS

SPRING 2004

Centre for Urban and Community Research Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 6



**PATRICK
KEILLER**

Interview

Writing on the Wall *Max Farrar*

'Classy' *Emma Jackson*

Zygmunt Bauman's City *Ben Gidley*

Private Address *Ada Nwosu*

London by Bus *Tine Blom*

All White Now *Les Back*

Plus CUCR news and reviews

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

centre for
URBAN AND
COMMUNITY
research

STREET SIGNS

SPRING 2004

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Editorial: Les Back.

INTRODUCTION

Michael Keith, Director CUCR

Welcome to the Spring 2004 edition of Street Signs, the newsletter of the Centre for Urban and Community Research. CUCR attempts to draw together interdisciplinary interests academic in research on cities and urbanism and an engagement with the processes and politics of change in the contemporary metropolis. Since the last newsletter there has been continued development at the Centre. We now run two MA programmes (MA in Culture, Globalisation and the City and MA in Photography and Urban Culture), both of which are recruiting strongly. When combined with PhD students the graduate population of the Centre has grown close to 100. A number of research projects have drawn to their close and new work has received funding (for further details see our web site on www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr).

The current policy vogue for models of participatory democracy has spread directly into some of the new work developed at the Centre. Issues of community power and social movements developed in sites of major city transformation have long been of significant interest to the work of several of the researchers based at CUCR. At some times this work echoes the interests of another decade, at others the vocabularies of social capital, capacity building, modernisation and new forms of governance appear to conceal as much politically as they reveal conceptually. As a result a number of new and ongoing research projects have focused on similar themes that address the dynamics of city citizenship at times of significant change. Marj Mayo and colleagues at the University of Western England have been funded through the ESRC to consider ethical dilemmas in practices of urban regeneration. Ben Gidley has developed a number of small funded projects that examine the particular role of childcare in the changing welfare landscape through the introduction of new 'Surestart' policy programmes. The long running action research Pepys project on a South London estate that works with local third sector organisations in the delivery of a £ multi-million 'community led' regeneration programme is now in its fourth year. The Pepys project generates both a sustained engagement with one initiative and also important insights about the forms that urban regeneration has taken over recent years. We have also continued to do further work in projects around neighbourhood renewal and area based policy programmes that take as their focus the transactional boundaries between state and civil society.

The Centre has also expanded its work through a series of collaborations with other individuals and interests concerned with contemporary urban regeneration. Our work has always attempted to draw together university

academics with policy professionals and some of our work has grown at the boundaries of academic research and policy practice. In this context Sean Baine, John Eversleigh, Susan Angoy, Jane Foot and Bob Colenutt are just some of the individuals with distinguished records working in the field of local government and urban regeneration that have linked to ongoing and developing work at CUCR. We have also initiated a series of workshops and discussions with the organisation Renaissi - whose roots were in Dalston City Partnership - but currently focus on freelance work around regeneration.

The continued interest in issues of race and multiculturalism in contemporary city contexts is also moving on. Moira Inghilleri was successful in developing a new project examining the practices of interpretation in the consideration of the cases of asylum seekers. Moira received funding from the ESRC for two years until 2005 and also survived being interviewed on Radio 4's Today programme by John Humphrey's in coverage of her first project based at CUCR. The three year ESRC funded project on race and political participation (Les Back, Azra Khan, Michael Keith, Kalbir Shukra, John Solomos) concluded and is currently producing 'the book of the project'. We also concluded work with The Monitoring Project in Southall with a report forthcoming in March / April 2004.

The strand of work identified with the new MA programme in Photography and Urban Culture is also beginning to grow. Paul Halliday is developing a conference with Kirsten Campbell in the Department of Sociology on the relationship between the photographic image and 'evidence'. We are also attempting to link the Centre's work more extensively with other photographic projects and work across London. Also in progress the Centre has now moved into a new stage of project development with proposals for funding in key areas of interest currently being considered by the major research funders (see website for details).

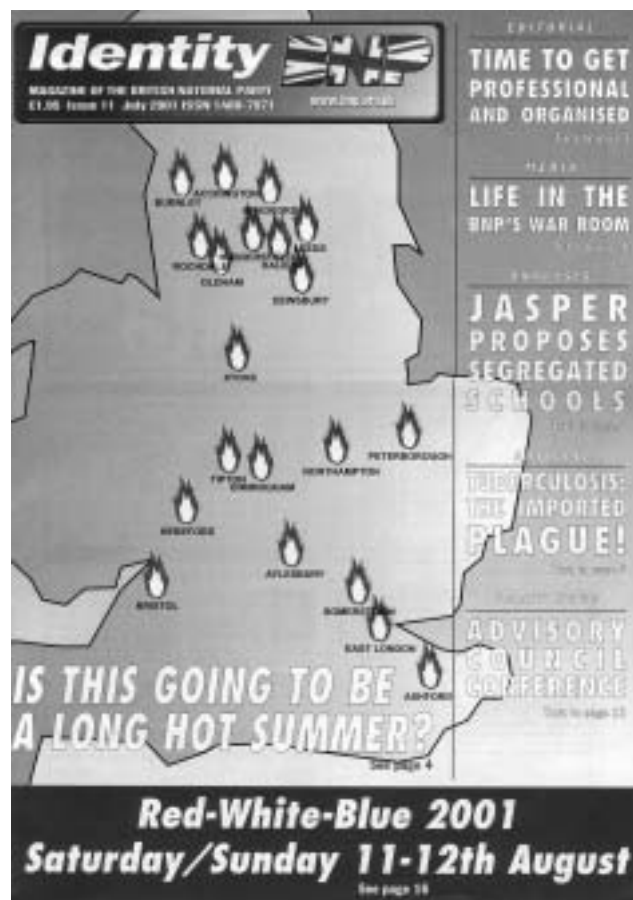
We have also developed our links with innovative organisations concerned with city change. For the last six months we have hosted the Belgian situationist inspired group City Min(e)d. Jim Segers has written a piece in this newsletter about the work of City Min(e)d, whose residency at CUCR will hopefully culminate in an artistic intervention in the landscape of east London with the help of pneumatic power, table tennis balls, plastic pipes and unexpected connections!

The newsletter provides an outlet for the work of students, visiting researchers and associates of CUCR. Steven Hanson and Katherine Bourke have been particularly helpful in this production. If you would like to make a contribution or would like to know more about the Centre please do not hesitate to make contact (m.keith@gold.ac.uk, l.back@gol.ac.uk, or c.keegan@gold.ac.uk).

ALL WHITE NOW?

Les Back

*Twenty years ago I remember sitting in a local pub in New Cross talking about politics in the heyday of Thatcherism. I had just discovered cultural studies and was wading through the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies collection *Resistance Through Rituals*. The bar-room conversation turned to matters of culture. I made a comment that it was ‘dangerous’ to dismiss some aspect of popular culture that had been pointed out to us in a lecture by Ros Coward who was teaching in the Media Department at the time. A friend of mine, at the time a self professed Trotskyist, responded passionately. “That’s not dangerous... Guns are dangerous!”*



It strikes me now that this argument was really about the breadth of the spectrum of ‘The Political.’ On the one hand, my revolutionary friend – who’s gone on to be a successful filmmaker – insisted that the political struggle was very clear and palpable, that there are hierarchies of priority and significance – some things were important, other things were trivial. Collecting for the Miners Strike was political, convening a meeting on Baudrillard was not. Maybe, he was right about that after all. On the other hand was the suggestion that there is a cultural politics to be found in the mundane aspects of everyday life.

My particular interest has been the places in everyday life where racism and intercultural dialogue co-exist. All the things I’ve been up to share a concern with the fleeting moments when people reckon with and move beyond the circumscriptions of race. Yet, at the same time there is – dare I say - a danger in the notion of the political being broadened to the degree that everything and nothing is seen to be political. I think this is captured well in Jodi Dean’s phrase “Under the overwhelming weight of a political everything, we become mired in world-weary knowingness and cynicism.”

There are a couple of points that I want to pick up from both Kate Nash and Jodi Dean’s work. Kate Nash has argued that there is an epistemological case for the ‘cultural turn’ in social theory. This she suggests is “the idea that culture is constitutive of social relations and identities” and by extension that the times and places of politics are mediated through the cultural. The question then becomes, as Jodi has pointed out, “how things become political.” In this sense she has argued for the necessity of problematizing the normative categories – or the we/ I - of politics, pluralizing the spaces of political engagement, specifying the nature of that discourse and contextualising the sites of political contest.

“My particular interest has been the places in everyday life where racism and intercultural dialogue co-exist. All the things I’ve been up to share a concern with the fleeting moments when people reckon with and move beyond the circumscriptions of race”

It’s here that I think the seemingly abstract cultural politics of identity and difference become very much everyday concerns. In the 21st Century, languages of love and hate are being transformed and mutated. I think we may be moving into an era in which the narcissism of identity and loathing are entering into a ever more tragic relationship. It’s with this in mind that I want to move onto some examples of these issues as they relate to a project I’ve just finished on examining whiteness and racism. There has been a proliferation of writing and interest in this topic, largely - it has to be said - in America. Part of the crisis of the debate about multiculturalism on both sides of the Atlantic is an uncertainty about how to deal with the issue of whiteness. In large part the coverage of the Parekh Report by the Commission for the Future of Multiethnic Britain was an outrage about the suggestion that British nationalism has been racially coded and by implication exclusive. In America too there has been some suggestion that a new place needs to be found to discuss white identities.

What are ‘White Identities’? Should those who are ‘lighter than blue’ – to borrow from Curtis Mayfield - seek to recover, or discover in themselves, or create anew a ‘white identity.’ Is it possible to think about white identities in a way that is commensurable with other cultural identities? Should another place be set at the table of multiculturalism for such forms of personhood? The short answer, I want to suggest, is an emphatic ‘NO’. For whiteness as a discourse and practice of power needs to be reckoned with but I want to argue not recuperated.

These are not just theoretical questions. There is an impulse within the debate about youth and anti-racism – for example - that argues that white young people need to be offered cultural identities that are in some way equivalent to their black and brown peers. Also, there is a strong current within recent political discourse on the right that asserts that ‘whites’ are being treated unfairly, that they are not granted equivalent forms of cultural understanding and self expression. The main point to also make here is that race as a visual regime of power, has regulated and governed the understanding of



culture. To say that whiteness should not be recuperated as ‘cultural identity’ is to resist the reification of race as a way of defining the social subject.

Under the leadership of their new chairman – Nick Griffin – the British National Party have attempted to repackage themselves as a ‘respectable’ electoral organisation along the lines of the Front Nationale in France. In many respects the nature of the BNP’s political message has shifted. The racial nationalists of today deny that they hate anyone, but rather that they merely love themselves and want to preserve whiteness as an essentialised social identity which they say is under threat. The house publication of the British National Party has been re-named as - you guessed it - ‘Identity.’ Their dominant motif is that whites are now the victims. Griffin wrote recently that in northern towns:

“White residents on the ‘front line’ have felt it necessary to stand guard over their properties night after night and even to build burning barricades at the end of the street [...] When ordinary people feel like that – and they do, in white working class estates on the edges of Muslim areas all over the country – the liberal fantasy of multi-racial harmony is dead and gone forever.”

In a postmodern twist racial nationalists have also assimilated a kind of brummagem multiculturalism. They claim that white identity is being lost, their cultural rights violated and whites are invoked as a beleaguered minority. Indeed, this is a strong trope in the trans-local whiteness that is present on the internet. Here, there is the minoritisation of whiteness within the rhetoric of white power activists. Whiteness is seen to be under

threat, to have been superseded demographically on a global scale. This is exemplified in the white power band New Minority, whose recording “White, Straight and Proud” complains that white men have become a lesser part in “their” world. George Burdi, who signed this band to the Resistance Records label, reinforces the lament: ‘Look at the global population levels. Whites account for only 8% of the planet’s population. Only 2% of the babies born last year [1995] were white... It’s WHITE PEOPLE that are the ‘new’ minority.’ The British National Party’s recent appeal to ethnic minorities is part of this move, although they make it clear these are relationships of “Friends not family, cooperation not membership.”

It is precisely this strategy of preying on white fears that has reinvigorated the BNP’s electoral fortunes in northern towns. During the general election Nick Griffin polled 16.4 % of the vote in Oldham West & Royton, while in Oldham East and in Burnley the BNP took 11% of the vote. In total the BNP secured 12,000 votes in Oldham and one news report claims that 50% of the voters in one working class ward had voted BNP. The appeals to ‘white identity’ were clearly heard as an answer to the frustrations of working-class residents who felt abandoned and let down by the metropolitan ideas of New Labour’s London-based elite. Perhaps, there is another lesson here in that I think that the discussions of racism and ethnicity in this country have assumed that Britain is a suburb of London, or at best the other big cities like Birmingham and Manchester. This is clearly not the case.

The kind of reckoning with whiteness - that I want to argue for - is always ongoing, incomplete and provisional. The language of the debate limits an appreciation of the way time and politics intersect. ‘Anti-racist’ and ‘racist’ positions are spoken of as if they are consistent and homogenous moral entities that exist out of time. This mis-

“Countering white supremacy is not simply a matter of disavowing whiteness. Rather, it is a matter of focusing on ‘what whiteness is, and what it can do’ Nealon focuses on the conditions of emergence that result from a critical interrogation of whiteness”

represents or conceals the complex interplay of racist and non-racist sentiment. It is possible in one moment to step out of whiteness, in another to be caught within its web.

To end I want to come back to the central point I want to make about ‘white identities.’ Sanjay Sharma in his excellent study of multiculturalism and pedagogy has drawn on Jeffrey Nealon’s notion of ‘becoming white.’ Nealon argues that countering white supremacy is not simply a matter of disavowing whiteness. Rather, it is a matter of focusing on “what whiteness is, and what it can do”. Nealon focuses on the conditions of emergence that result from a critical interrogation of whiteness. Emergence out of whiteness need not necessarily signal a shift to ‘becoming otherwise.’ Sanjay Sharma points out that: “It may be the case that in a particular pedagogic situation, ‘becoming-white’ has nowhere productive to go, unable to form affective ‘alliances’ which enhance the capacities of others, as well as itself.” This is the rub. For Nealon there is a sense that it is possible to re-direct ‘white anger’ or ‘ressentiment,’ make it productive and shift its performative and

political coordinates. I am not sure if this is possible because the register of this identity is in a different key.

For Deleuze and Guattari all becomings are ‘becoming-otherwise’ i.e. that they shift to ‘the minor,’ or what is referred to as minoritarian. For Deleuze and Guattari negations are always avoided because they insist on the proliferation of difference. But, I want to suggest that some becomings are major. In many respects, the racist movements of today – be it in cyberspace, or on the electoral hustings – have assimilated performative tactics, they are often cultural hybrids and are, in many ways, quintessential examples of the postmodern condition.

The difference between a major and a minor chord is one note: the flattened third. I want to argue that there is an equivalent in the conceptualisation of identities and becomings. It is here that I think negation is crucial. What is needed is a becoming that is also a negation i.e. ‘becoming not white.’ It is a kind of becoming that can acknowledge the place from which it has emerged but cuts its root, like a pianist lifting her finger from the major third to make a minor chord. The major third engenders the musical force in the chord’s structure, it serves here as a metaphor for the territorializing logic of race that fixes us within the visual lens of racial classification and colonises the correspondence between culture and subjectivity. Therefore, for whites becoming otherwise necessitates a shift to the minor, a negation comparable to the flattening of a third. This is ultimately about embracing a sense of loss, a loss of power and a loss of privilege. Like the minor keys this might result in mournful tones. Yet, it must equally pre-empt a slip into a melancholia that licenses hate and as a compensation for this passing. Anton Gramsci once posed the question: “is ‘humanity’, as a reality and as an idea, a point of departure – or a point of arrival?” Thinking of humanity as a point of arrival allows for the possibility of thinking about ‘becoming human’ outside of the circumscriptions of the second-

hand 20th century universalisms. Perhaps, letting go of whiteness may enable those who have been governed by its allure to contemplate what the 'arrival lounge' of humanity might be like. In short, it is important to avoid planting new or old 'whitenesses' in

the arboretum of identity politics. The challenge is to work against its normative power. Rather than curating of museum of distinct identities, it might be better to argue for a multiethnic Europe where connections are established between human subjects that have no

necessary relationship, that refute roots and essences while spawning adventurous growths. Along the way such tangles might provide a mooring for what Stuart Hall has referred to as 'a species of multicultural drift.'

Jodi Dean 'Introduction: the interface of political theory and cultural studies' in Jodi Dean (ed) *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2000) p. 6

Kate Nash 'The cultural turn in social theory,' *Sociology*, 35, 1, 2001 p. 78

Jodi Dean op cit. p.6

Nick Griffin, 'A Long Hot Summer,' *Identity*, July 2001, p. 4-5

Quoted in Susan Zickmund, "Approaching the Radical Other: The Discursive Culture of Cyberhate" in Steven G. Jones *Virtual Culture: Identity & Communication in Cybersociety* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 198.

'Family not friends, co-operation not membership,' *Identity*, July 2001, p. 9

Jeffrey Nealon *Alterity Politics: ethics and performative subjectivity* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 160

Sanjay Sharma *Towards a pedagogy for alterity: rethinking multicultural education* PhD Manchester University, 2001

Quoted in John Berger *A Fortunate Man* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967) p. 166

after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1989)

Stuart Hall 'The Multicultural Question' in Barnor Hesse (ed) *Unsettled Multiculturalism* (London: Zed Books, 2001)



London Through the Lens

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THE ART OF NAVIGATION

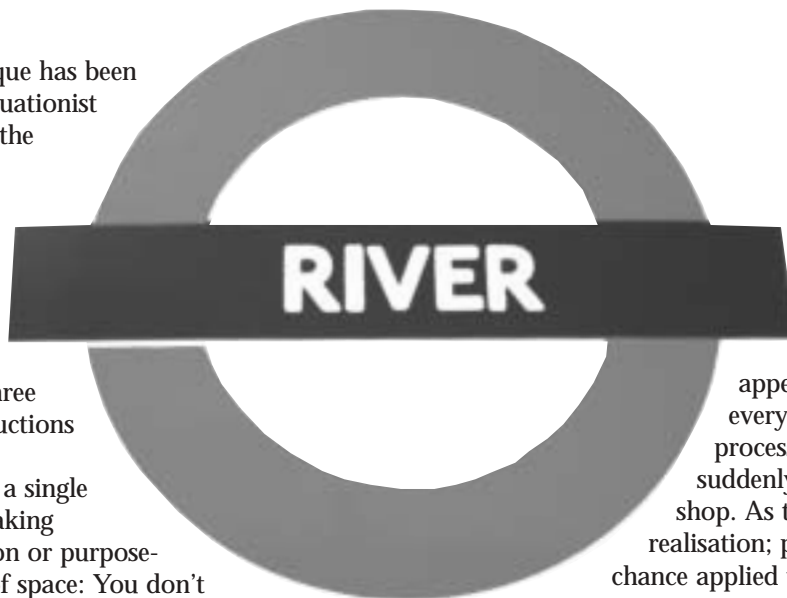
If writing about music is like dancing to architecture what is an account of a walk?

Perambology?

The swarm technique has been used by pseudo-Situationist Groups, including the Manchester Area Psychogeographic Group, and has been called the “algorithm walk”:

Randomly generate a set of three left and right instructions and repeat them methodically from a single starting point, breaking habitual, destination or purpose-based navigation of space: You don’t take a walk, the walk takes you. Transit and those in it become separate, the walk becomes autonomous, walker becomes passenger, minus the usual prosthetics. When undertaken with several individuals or groups, each with different sets of instructions, chance overlap is possible and noticable. As natural solipsists, it’s easy to see the crowd as ambient: not a process we’re part of. Greenwich that Saturday afternoon should have been swarming already, but the Cutty Sark meeting point was unusually quiet, the first assumption to be challenged by the walk. Confusion surrounding the “noon” rendezvous was perhaps ironic, as the walk took place just below one particular omphalos of time. One more delightful confusion; when in the open space of the park, what constitutes “left”? The binary nature of the walk illuminates the non-binary nature of all space. But emancipation from traditional walking “genres” is perhaps impossible. Situationists, Psychogeographers, (LPA, MAP) all were cut from avante garde cloth, but is referencing them any less traditional than the Ramblers’ association or a city history walk?

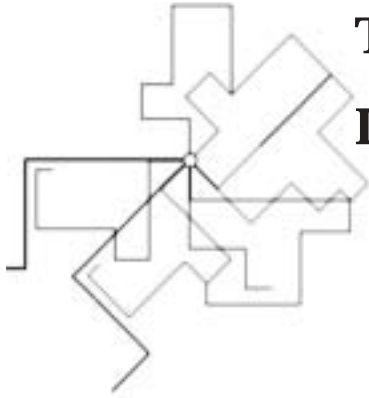
The poster advertising the event bore an illustration of overlapping root-like structures working outward, to mirror an earlier experience of swarming. This illustration would later be attacked by the very walk it championed, it sprawled on a future pub floor, a punch-drunk octopus. The flyer included a quote from A Thousand Plateaus by Deleuze and Guattari: “The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms,



Steve Hanson

from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other.” Pre-walk, these rhizomic forms appeared in cracks and branches everywhere. A simple mental process, if you need to buy a fork, suddenly you see them in every other shop. As the walk took over, a realisation; presumptions are questionable, chance applied to landscape creates its own movement, expectations are not the point, yet to have those expectations challenged validated the technique again. The walk initially moved through an underground car park, its passengers wondered how far “descent into the underworld” metaphors could be pushed, balked. The walk followed the rhizome presumption here only, as deep structure breaking out into surface structure. Once outside and above the car park it spiralled into a closed, repeat loop around the Cutty Sark and entrance to Greenwich foot tunnel. The tunnel was built in 1909, to allow people from south London to work in the Isle of Dogs, amenity improvement as heart surgery; another artery to the pump house. The foot tunnel entrance is appropriately cylindrical, with a spiral staircase inside, yet the walk refused to go in, always around. It displayed the tunnel, without allowing its use. At the bottom of the staircase is a straight route under the Thames, existing only in the minds of the passengers, and all the straighter there because the walk’s route was oppositely cyclical. In this sense the walk might as well have been in pre-foot tunnel Greenwich, it indulged a kind of time travel, broke its laws right under the noses of its judges. The walk’s passengers talked of metaphors for its movement; life spent within community boundaries (Greenwich? the south east generally?) before the foot tunnel made the opposite bank of the Thames accessible. Exclusion overturned for capital only. Yet comparisons could be drawn with post-1909 work patterns, commuting out of the area and returning, familiar, cyclical rites-of-passage. The clipper Cutty Sark, permanently dry docked in its own tourist aspic, as stuck as we were, built almost into redundancy on the threshold of the steam age. The passengers thought of migrating from Greenwich to work every day, travelled back further in time, from slavery days to the migration of the Windrush generation. The idea of circumnavigation (maritime or otherwise) of setting off from one point and returning there; escape, adventure, and its

urban exploration N°1



Time: *Saturday October 11, noon*

Location: *Cutty Sark, Greenwich*

Swarm!

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Contact CUCRstreetwalker@hotmail.com for further information.

"As soon as we begin to find our bearings the landscape vanishes at a stroke". Walter Benjamin - 'One Way Street', 1926.

negation, all exist in the Cutty Sark, as the walk moved past it again, and again, and again. Celebratory, millennial Greenwich, on the meridian, east meets west, yet poverty rarely meets wealth. The lacuna we were stuck in became a metaphor for other lacunae. Lacunae of information and of exclusion, "a cunning phrase", Michael Moorcock once railed, "can burn a town".

With dreams of escape, the walk's passengers talked themselves further out, to other loops; circle line, M25, with their links elsewhere, more rhizomes denied. They began to see something perhaps tautological - closed systems - everywhere. If your washing machine breaks and you need a replacement, you see them at every turn. The circular underground sign cut in half by the Thames signified the pre-1909 block to the Isle of Dogs the walk was experiencing right here in 2003. It took on increasing significance at each pass. The circular shape of the foot tunnel entrance mirrors that of the observatory overlooking it, which Charles II intended "for the perfecting of the art of navigation". Beyond the foot tunnel lay its successor, the Docklands Light Railway, another expected rhizome: The walk showed the network by denying it, if "rats are rhizomes" the walk's passengers were lab rats, stuck on a wheel in a self-administered experiment, adherents to the instrumental rationality of some nuthouse exercise yard. But was their "art of navigation" perfected or utterly flawed? The DLR is an assembly line, its product is a workforce to run an information-age assembly network. Fordist, a time and motion study with no operator as subject, drivers on

permanent leave. No surprise the walk looped this area of tourism, "tour" being derived from the latin "tornus", to turn, as in a lathe: Labour, travel, time and leisure. The lathe was the ultimate machine; it alone made other machines. The DLR's construction makes Canary Wharf viable, each commuter finding the right desk, just as the emails they send or receive find an in or outbox. Loops are here too, in the lacuna of empty office space (all the emptier since the walk refused the passengers' gazes: unwanted private space never equals public space) in the closed system of communications since WW2, behind all of which lies the clock, the cyclical time Greenwich lays scientific claim to. Yet the passengers experienced time like a déjà vu seance, not some efficient measure of space or rut cycle. The walk would have run the loop dogmatically, infinitely, but its worms turned, the passengers skived off to the boozier early. With all the metaphors of time and labour, they refused to clock in or out, especially not here. They escaped their cycle only after the swarm technique demonstrated its very nature.

This has not been the walk, its passengers, or the swarm. This has been a separate kind of perambulation which refuses to admit how many of its meditations were made in retrospect, whilst acknowledging that no meditation would have been possible without the strategy (passenger, walk, swarm) to unlock it. This perambulation bore no relation to any Greenwich, living or dead.

Please join us for future walks, (watch out for posters) or create one yourself, email scapescape@hotmail.com or steven.hanson@virgin.net

LONDON BY BUS

Tine Blom writes about her experiences of travelling around London on its celebrated red buses, a continuing source of fascination and curiosity. Her photographs concentrate on her spatial relationships with other commuters during her journeys to Goldsmiths College. Tine works in Lillehammer College, Norway and is based in the CUCR as an Associate Professor and is currently completing research in the politics of European integration.

Tine Blom

In London there is something which I have not seen anywhere else in the world - that is the red double-decker bus. With childish joy I place myself in the front of the upper deck - above the driver - and with a good view of the streets below. It feels like floating around high above the ground, always something new around the next corner.

I feel curious about the Londoners. I admire their variety of hair- and dress-styles; people of different colours, ages, clothing, a variety of languages, and they are all mixed together - by co-incidence - on their way to their different destinations. I place myself further back and begin to play with my camera.

Buses are supposed to be a means of transportation, not meeting-places. We all come from somewhere and are on our way. Still, sitting in our seats, we spend our time together, staying there until we arrive at our planned destination. Normally, we do not notice the streets outside nor do we notice each other. Rather, we dis-connect from our surroundings and the people next to us, withdraw into ourselves and let our thoughts flow, and just wait. But our eyes meet and sighs are shared when something interrupts the movement of the bus, like traffic-jams or construction-work.

The bus-culture is polite and egalitarian. Everybody agrees - without saying a word - that no one has any right to stick themselves in front of others, neither when entering the bus, nor when paying nor or capturing seats. But there is also a tacit agreement that those who are least privileged elsewhere - like those who have responsibilities for others or some physical disability - shall have priority. These are the only criteria for being privileged. As such, the bus-culture is different from the rest of the society; probably it is Britain's most inclusive and cosmopolitan culture.

We are there together, but still not together. A protected private space is respected and interaction is consciously reduced to a minimum. At least, that is what one may expect. But sometimes, one curiously wonders who is sitting next to you? With broken English, I make a small and careful invitation that would not be impolite to reject, like "nice weather today", "now it is spring", "that was an honest day's work", "oh, that horrible war", "what language was that, was it Portuguese?" And then the conversation starts.

A young boy is on his way to work at a local theatre that raises money for drug-addicts. A man newly arrived from Nigeria - deeply concentrating in his French-English dictionary - explains that he is looking for a wife. A bus driver says he is working to raise money so he can travel around the USA. A tired school-teacher tells me about his worries for his class and the youngsters growing up in central London. After listening to the noisy laughter of a group of schoolchildren, an elderly woman argues that parents should be fined for their behaviour. After small-talking about the English spring, a man says that our conversation has changed his day. A big woman says "God bless you" when she gets my seat. Nobody has said that to me before! And if you are confused about where you are getting off, an honest question is never rejected - is this The Elephant? Then suddenly the "whole bus" is eager to help.

Altogether, there is a calm, relaxed and polite atmosphere on the bus. It doesn't feel like a strange place anymore, rather, a great source of stories.

*Tine Blom, November 2003
(Text and Photos)*





Since July, an organisation called City Mine(d) has been using a hot desk in the research room of CUCR.

Repeated attempts to have them explain what they stand for were unsuccessful; but now we manage to intercept an outgoing email, which unveils something. It is supposedly sent to a person in Brussels who proposes to bring together information on Stichting/Fondation Pied de Biche/Open Deur, an epochal campaign in Brussels, in which under the impetus of several organizations and neighbourhood groups a vacant housing block destined to become a monolithic hotel complex in Brussels' historic city centre was squatted. During ten days, 5.000 people visited the occupied building, 120 organizations in Brussels and Belgium signed the manifest, and the campaign received attention from local, national and international media. The campaigners used every opportunity to link their struggle with other speculation projects in the city. They were aiming to re-invent the city and shift the Bruxello-negativism into Bruxello-positivism. The message is sent by Jim, one of the founding members of City Mine(d).

*From: jim@citymined.org
Subject: Re: Pied de Biche 11 years*

Hi,

Indeed, in January it will be eleven years since Stichting/Fondation Pied de Biche/Open Deur. I agree that it provides a good opportunity to see what became of whom, and I am happy to contribute my share to such a project.

You probably know that after Pied de Biche most of us were involved in other urban challenges, like Nathalie Mertens' Stichting/Fondation Legumen, for which she occupied a empty site in the city centre and turned it into a vegetable garden, (you should try to contact Nathalie as well); or Stichting/Fondation Sens Unique with which for ten days we lived in a huge circus tent on vacant land between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, to make a case against the institutions' squeezing out of residents from what used to be a popular area, and to invite employees and authorities –one commissioner and many MEPs- from the institutions to meet local residents. It was also the time of VrijstadBXLVillelibre, the network of groups 'self-determined to realize their projects in the city' (like Cinema Nova was already doing at the time, and still is), and that aspired to be an Urban Movement.

In 1997, about twenty of us contributed to setting up City Mine(d). Working in the fault lines of the legal system (with 'Foundations' that had the lifespan of a single campaign) was becoming very demanding, so we conceived a structure that could offer the same free space for different urban initiatives. We called it 'a production house for and by the city', by which we emphasized our ambition to re-invent the metropolis and to do so with the ideas and opportunities 'provided by the city'. Our focus was on the public spaces of the cities, because that is where exchange and interaction between city dwellers, decision-makers and artist of the city takes place. In other words: that urban movement.

In the course of five years, we managed to contribute to more than sixty projects, like PleinOpenAir -the ambulant open air cinema that last year attracted a crowd of over a 1.000 to several residual spaces in Brussels-, Bara-ke -where Benjamin Verdonck lived in a tree house on Place Bara-, or Limite Limite -a diverse coalition of local residents, unskilled workers, shopkeepers, schools, an architect and a corporate bank around the building of a semi-transparent tower. (you can see details of most of these projects on our website, www.citymined.org, but we are in the process of updating this site).

At the start, City Mine(d) worked on a neighbourhood level (with Palais van Schoor and the football ground in Kurgem), but metropolitan ambitions rapidly shifted the focus towards a larger scale (for instance with Hugo, the fruit juice bar that travelled through Brussels). We noticed, however, that public spaces in multi-cultural cities like Brussels are embedded in networks that go well beyond the metropolitan territory. So we started working on our own inter-city network. Although the group of like-minded organizations that came together for the first time in 2000 is still active -and meets three times a year in what it calls Salons, where information, ideas and strategies are exchanged-, it would not provide the local embeddedness City Mine(d) was after for its International Urban Movement. Therefore the bold decision was taken to set up our own local networks of institutions, individuals and self-determined groups in other cities. The contexts would be very different, but at least the methodology -which we think is City Mine(d)'s greatest asset- would be the same. And that's how I ended up in London, and Tom in Barcelona.

A rather successful project we did here in London, was Bubblicious in September of last year in the Kings Cross area. With the Architecture Foundation, and a local girls group called the Young Black Women's Group, we set up a huge plastic bubble the size of a basketball field in Thornhill Square, a well-maintained garden park on the opposite side of Caledonian road from where the girls normally meet up. The road is both a physical and a social divide through the neighbourhood, so showing their dance act on the more prosperous side meant a giant leap for the girls. The extraordinary setting

brought their work in the spotlight, to the extent that afterwards a professional dance company asked them to attend a workshop in their theatre.

In the meantime we are creating our London networks. Since this summer City Mine(d) London is no longer a one man band, because I am joined by a person called Elizabeth, and no longer homeless, because the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths University was prepared to host us for our latest project. Prof. Micheal Keith from CUCR gave an inspiring talk during a conference we organised in Brussels in February last on Global Urban Interventions (you can still hear it on <http://www.citymined.org/globalbruXel/>), so that's how we met.

Our project for 2004, called 5PP, consists of 5 local modules of urban interventions that relate to other cities. We are finishing a promotion brochure, of which I will include the text.

The purpose of 5PP is to

capture the imagination and the diverse creative potential of the city by encouraging cutting edge artwork.

re-appropriate public space -roads, airwaves, stations, estates, parks, squares, virtual space- and make it the arena for social, cultural and artistic encounters.

contribute to new forms of urban citizenship by combining the empowering qualities of culture with dynamic alliances and collaborations - at all levels from the very local to the inter-city .

encourage the propagation of knowledge and experience acquired during development of the projects.

City Mine(d) believes that urban interventions are a powerful way to the address social, economical and environmental questions faced by cities.

5PP is a framework for an arts project consisting of 5 inter-connecting clusters of urban interventions, each involving a mix of installations, performances, tactical media, cinema, music, and so on. Clusters will be produced collaboratively by individuals, artists, communities and institutions from Barcelona, Brussels and London.

Each cluster is to be hosted by a single city, starting in April 2004, and will draw together creative work, practices and opinions from the three participating cities. By focusing each time on a topical urban issue, to the project should reveal some of the forces that shape the metropolis and its public spaces.

Residual space (London):

Are the unclaimed spaces in the city a breeding-ground for urban creativity?

Public sphere (Barcelona):

Can creative action promote public space as a site for participation in the shaping of the city?

Urban fissures (London):

Do conflicting urban interests create room for artists to take a mediating role?

Imagineering (Brussels):

Can urban localities be re-envisioned through artistic means?

Tactical Media (Barcelona):

Can new technologies create a new (virtual) public space?

Sounds a bit like 'business', doesn't it? Well, the thing is that we can't afford the project yet. Therefore we will have to get partners on board with more financial strength. The brochure should help us to convince them. We asked for support from the European and some local governments, so fingers crossed.

We are also producing a 'compendium of urban initiatives' in London, as we already have done twice in Brussels in 1998 and 2000 (where the booklet produced – under the name Bunker Souple – was called Repertoire).

We're researching groups who are concerned with the condition of the metropolis and its public spaces and are involved in projects that attempt to realize a new and positive attitude to the city. These might involve the production, performance or distribution of art or art-like activities.

It's going to be a small book which will serve as a means for the groups and individuals included to pool resources and also to make their work more accessible to the public. We're publishing it ourselves, and will sell it at events, in independent bookstores and over the web.

To reach less connected people, we put up the following poster in most communities centres and libraries of North London:

DOING IT FOR LOVE, NOT MONEY

art, sport, dance, tactical media, radio, music

in public spaces

(roads, airwaves, stations, estates, parks, squares, virtual space)

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Showcase your work and collaborate with others.

Contact City Mine(d) by phone on 07905/933311 (Jim)
or email elizabeth@citymined.org (Liz)



One of the urban initiative compendiums published in Brussels

We will publish the booklet at the very beginning of 2004, with some 50 initiatives, all working in public space, all doing it for love not money. We hope the network will start leading its own life after the publication, with people contacting each other and setting up initiatives together on the basis of what they know from the booklet. We will also propose things ourselves, of course.

I'm not sure this is the information you are after. I tried to give an overview of what happened with some of the ideas and ambitions that sparked off Pied de Biche. You can find more information on City Mine(d) on our website – the text Erik Swyngedouw wrote in 2000 is still very interesting I think, but also articles like a recent one by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi help to understand where we are. You can find them all under Info on our site.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have more specific questions. Best of luck with your investigation, hope to hear from you soon,

Yours,

Jim

PATRICK KEILLER



Interview *Steve Hanson*

I first came across Patrick Keiller via his two widely celebrated films, 'London' and 'Robinson in Space'. Since then I have tracked down his written and visual work wherever possible. 'The Dilapidated Dwelling' was a study of the UK housing market, which he directed in 2000. Patrick is currently working on a project entitled 'City of the Future', using documentary footage from the turn of the last century. I was honoured that he agreed to an interview during November 2003. Patrick is currently an AHRB Research Fellow at the Royal College of Art, a partner institution in the AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies.

SH: *'London' and 'Robinson in Space' almost contained stills within film, in that each shot was static. Were the immediate visual influences or predecessors for the aesthetics of those films found in the 1900s films you are now working with? Recently you said "The earliest films offer a kind of window" (Freize, issue 78). This long gaze or long exposure to one part of territory seems to be a preoccupation for you, would you agree? In light of your new work, I'm tempted to see the London and Robinson films as the post-1900's splicing together of single reel silents, with the addition of a War of the Worlds-influenced radio broadcast (fiction meets "fact" in phantasmagoria)...*

PK: The films were about modernity, but I have always seen them as inevitably rather postmodern, if only in that they are largely the work of one person, which is a postmodernist trait, no? I'm not sure what you mean by "stills within film". It seems to me there is quite a big difference between a "still", which is generally an instant of arrested movement, and a shot in which the camera doesn't move, but elements within the subject do (a crowd, say, or just the wind in the trees). People sometimes suggest that the shots in the Robinson films are long - the average shot in 'London' is about 14 seconds, in 'Robinson...' about 12 seconds - but this is much less than the average for most narrative cinema, in which dialogue often extends shots for as long as a minute. It is rather more than the usual length of landscape shots in such films, but compared with, say the films of Jim Benning, or Chantal Akerman's 'News from Home', never mind the films of Andy Warhol, 'London' and 'Robinson in Space' are really quite conventionally paced. My recent interest in c1900 films arose mainly as a result of seeing the early films, especially the street scenes and tram rides etc., but I did notice the similarities between the forms of my films and the evolution of early cinema. You can certainly see the Robinson films in this way - as assemblies of (rather short) single shot films - but this isn't how they were conceived or evolved - I never made any single-shot works, for example.

SH: *I found it interesting that you mentioned (Freize, issue 78) how everyday life is largely absent in the films of the 1900s. My own experiences viewing old footage of Bradford and Manchester are similar; representations of flag waving civic pride etc. Perhaps your use of that era's longer, less edited or interrupted meditation on space was coupled with an opposing preoccupation with the everyday, and a questioning of Britain's economic situation?*

PK: Everyday life (non-fiction everyday life, that is) is absent from nearly all films, isn't it, not just those of c1900? Even present-day surveillance cameras record relatively untypical circumstances, and moving pictures, especially those originated photographically, have generally been reserved for special occasions, often not the special occasions we most want to know about. (There is, for example, hardly any film of the General Strike, and almost all of what there is is footage of "volunteers" doing the strikers' jobs etc.) However, there are many early films (in particular those of the collection of 800 or so Mitchell & Kenyon films which were rediscovered in 1994) which do offer extended glimpses of everyday life in the 1890s and 1900s, much more so, it appears, than in films made since. There are 99 factory gate films in the Mitchell & Kenyon collection, photographed in towns and cities all over the north of England, and I have been looking at various series of views from moving trams. There are three films of Nottingham, for example, which together offer a spatio-temporal continuity of over 6 minutes. In many cases, the film-makers sought out or created situations where there

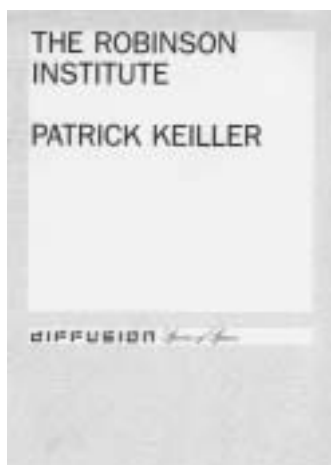
would be plenty of people around, so that their films would appeal to the largest possible local audience, but in others one does seem to be witnessing fairly ordinary scenes. I don't find it too difficult to look at this material without becoming preoccupied with the UK's economy and the imperial moment, especially as many of the most interesting films are not those made in London. I am interested in the films because they offer a glimpse into another world - a world which existed before that which moving pictures themselves subsequently helped to create. The world we live in now is being transformed, perhaps in a similar way, so that the early films might tell us something about this.

SH: *Do you have any faith that the further popularisation of photographic media (digital/phone cameras/cheap disposables etc) will leave us an archive of any wider importance than the ones from previous eras? I am thinking of John Tagg who wrote "there is little to support interpretations of the advent of mass photographic practice either as a triumph of democracy or as proof of the poverty of popular imagination".*

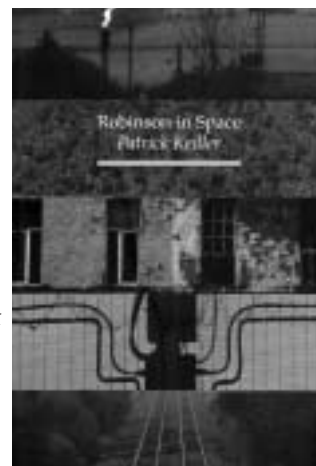
PK: If video made it any easier for people to make and exhibit films, I think we would have noticed it by now. In my experience making films for little money is more a question of time than technology.

SH: *With regard to your preoccupations with urban renewal, I'd like to invite you to comment on Walter Benjamin's statement that Haussman was "an artist of demolition"...*

PK: My interest in the replacement of buildings revived as a result of my own experience of the UK housing market etc. during the last ten years or so, as well as the observation that the film 'London' had become part of a largely London-centred, 1990s phenomenon in which the strategies of Situationism, the *dérive* and so on, were often referred to. The Situationists saw their explorations



The printed version of Robinson in Space is published by Serpents' Tail. The Robinson Institute is available for download free from www.diffusion.org.uk



at least partly as preliminary to the production of some kind of new space, but in 1990s London, they seemed to have become an end in themselves, so that "psychogeography" led, not to avant-garde architecture such as Constant's 'New Babylon', but to, say, the 'Time Out Book of London Walks'. There's nothing necessarily wrong with that - the replacement of buildings, especially residential buildings, has usually been more or less traumatic, and since about 1973 "redevelopment" has become largely discredited, following the writings of Jane Jacobs, Marshall Berman etc. and successful campaigns to oppose it as in, for example, Covent Garden in London. However, buildings don't last forever. I suspect that many people who (like me) live in old, hard to maintain, poorly insulated houses etc. wonder how they will manage in future when skilled building workers have become as scarce as judges, and the price of gas goes up by a factor of, say, between two or perhaps much more, as it quite probably will. At the moment, it is practically impossible for most people to replace their old dwelling with something slightly less inconvenient. I wouldn't like anyone else to come and knock my house down, but I wouldn't mind being able to do something similar myself. The housing market effectively prevents this. In a wider sense, it does seem that the production of successful domestic space (or, in fact, successful built space of most kinds) is something that many "advanced" economies find increasingly difficult,

despite gains in wealth during the 20th century. Although GDP per head has increased since the 1970s, on the basis of an "Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare" (ISEW) assessed by the UK's New Economics Foundation and others elsewhere, people of the advanced economies are now, on average, worse off than they would have been in 1976, and no better off than they would have been in the 1950s, so perhaps the predicament of the dwelling is part of a much wider environmental impoverishment.

SH: *The "collapse of the geographic" has been discussed, with regard to new media communications impacting on social or built space. In the meantime we have seen the advent of "flashmobbing", which I personally see as a kind of populist Situationism. Any thoughts on these phenomena?*

PK: The more I experience electronic interconnectivity etc., the more peripheral its effects seem compared to, say, the railways and telecommunications in the 19th century (see Schivelbusch, Kern etc.). On the other hand, alienation isn't what it used to be. Perhaps electronic connectivity has played a role in this (and perhaps replaced alienation with something else). Meanwhile, the geographic seems resilient. There is an essay by William J Mitchell 'The Revenge of Place' (in the book 'This is not Architecture', ed. K. Rattenbury, Routledge, 2002) which addresses

this rather better than I can. He doesn't write about "flashmobbing", but about "electronically mediated swarming", and gives a number of examples, including "a visit to Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli with a large group of friends and colleagues" and the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle. On "the revenge of place", he writes: "...the less the attractions of a place can be replicated or substituted for electronically, the more desirable and expensive it will be." He goes on: "Take the beach, for example. There is a fixed quantity of it, you cannot reproduce it (except in very imperfect form), and you cannot move it. You have to be there... etc." I don't know if this is an intentional reference to "Sous les pavés, la plage". Probably not.

SH: *Perhaps we could draw comparisons with the statement that, in the age of casual telepathy via technology, a modernist utopian engineering project such as Concorde has become virtually unviable at the same time as parts of our public transport system. How do you figure the links between these phenomena?*

PK: Well - let's not get onto Concorde. It was always unviable, and about as utopian as 'Thunderbirds'. I can't understand why people keep saying it was "beautiful". The only people I know who flew on it said it was cramped, rattled terribly and smelled of aviation fuel, rather like the wrong sort of fast car. Also, in many countries, public transport works very well. I was in Argentina earlier this year, and found the public transport quite good, which one might not expect given Argentina's economic predicament. People who had visited the UK were rather surprised by the state of public transport here. In Paris the public transport is pretty good. The UK certainly has a problem producing artefacts etc., which is why fixed items like infrastructure and housing appear so problematic, as these can't easily be imported. One explanation which is offered for this is that the UK is "peculiarly capitalist" (rather than "a peculiar capitalism" - see Ellen Wood's 'The Pristine Culture of Capitalism'). I oversimplify, but you might see this long established "traditional" aspect of the UK as being also characteristic of present-day postmodern capitalism. For instance Lord Revelstoke, senior partner of Barings Bank, in 1911 famously declared: "I confess that personally I have a horror of all industrial companies ... I should not think of placing my hard-earned gains into such a venture." On the other hand, Revelstoke was present at the inauguration of the London United Tramway's first electric network, in 1901, so presumably Barings had invested in it, as had many other City concerns. The network was officially opened by Lord Rothschild.

SH: *When reading your work I think often of "Moore's Law", the reduction of chip size/expense acting as a catalyst for social change. On one hand society appears to be becoming more fluid, yet people work longer hours than ever, the gap between rich and poor is historic and large areas of our physical environments appear to be neglected (the latter point you have already addressed).*

"The more I experience electronic interconnectivity etc., the more peripheral its effects seem compared to, say, the railways and telecommunications in the 19th century. On the other hand, alienation isn't what it used to be"

Do you think that the promised technological autonomy (every desktop as a combined printing press, radio broadcasting studio, communications centre etc.) has simply not been taken up by the larger majority in a way that will cause a revolution in our physical environment?

PK: Many things (some food, domestic equipment, cars, air travel etc., the usual list) have become much cheaper/"better", especially during the last thirty years, so that people's purchasing power appears greater, but the cost of other things - often things that are probably much more important, but are not susceptible to mechanisation and automation - has increased: the built environment for example, housing in particular. (This is not to mention the negative impact of commodification and consumerism on people's relationships, and on children.) People often predict a technological transformation of building (see for instance the recent 'Building Futures' initiative by the RIBA and CABE) but it doesn't seem to be coming any nearer. I think successful building is probably too difficult, too local, too material, too intimate for present-day technologies to have much of a positive impact. Perhaps there are other technologies that will change this, but they seem a long way off, and the building industry as a whole is very unimpressive. Where I live, it is very easy to read the negative effects of computers etc. on the design of, say, current school building, much of which is astonishingly poor. It seems that computers etc. make it possible for developed economies to increase their level of consumption (through automation etc.) when many people don't produce much of value (though obviously one can argue about what that might be), even though they are employed, often for long hours. Much of what is gained in productive capacity seems to lead to only marginal benefits. To try to look at this more positively, a great deal of time and effort is now devoted to economic and other activity in the virtual realm, some of which does offer a kind of emancipation. Even if much of the visible, material, "public" realm (everyday surroundings, for instance) is disadvantaged physically by this, it's very difficult to argue that nothing is gained. As usual, the question is not whether to argue for materiality or virtuality, but how best to negotiate their reciprocity.

Many thanks to Patrick for his time and patience.

THE AIRPLANES, THEY'RE NORTH...

Upon arrival in London I've been thinking about a growing number of meanings for the word North. Is it something to do with the North side of the river? Is it split by East and West? Is North the location of the Swiss Tower? Is direction no longer relevant whilst walking? Is North the place up there from down here where the black and white birds soar slowly? Is to be Northern to be elsewhere and beyond?

Location and direction. It is difficult to separate my experience of London, a new location, from an awareness of location and direction, from North and South. The meaning of these directions and locations were altered along with my postal code. North refers to both a particular direction in relation to location, and to places and ideas synonymous with the phrase. Coming from Canada, a country identified with North, I have become aware of the term and my fixation with its meaning in London. In Canada North is associated with location, direction and identity; Canada is North of the United States, it is Northern as a geographic location and as concept about Canadian identity.

Location, in my observations of London, is a notorious topic of conversation. "Hi ya, I'm at Tate, where are you?" Unless you're about to meet up with the person on the other end of the phone I find the relevance of location and desire to be located puzzling. What happened to the beautiful anonymity of the mobile phone? Prior to London I've resisted mobile phone use because I hadn't wished to be reachable at all times living in London; I desired some time and space to be not found, not known, lost in the city and even to myself. Whilst enjoying an anonymous private space within public I don't wish to reveal my location. "I'm with my mobile... I'm mobile, in transit, neither here nor there."

Despite my desire to remain anonymous, I too feel a need to locate myself in London and remain fascinated by the accounts of others. One south Londoner describes a constant longing to be a real Londoner again... in the North. She goes home at the end of the night and often can't be bothered to go back to London; she dreams of living in her Northeast London flat, once again on the tube line. Is North a psychological reaction to the flow and speed of transit in London? I know my three months in Stretham Hill last year stirred up an incredible envy for those on the tube and a ridiculous fear of buses due to falling asleep, missing my stop and ending up lost late at night.

Katherine Bourke



Another account of North describes Hackney as more central and accessible to the action as opposed to New Cross all the way down Old Kent Road. Is the action in the North? In a city as diverse and made up of many villages as London, there are as many versions of location and direction, centre and action as there are people. South London feels like a retreat, a place to observe the North in its absence.

In the south, on the hill in Greenwich park, and from my 5th story window in New Cross – my vista offers Canary Wharf flashing on a clear day, a sea of brick and trees, and London in the distance. Does this mean London is the North? No matter which direction I look or am looking from I tend to think of London as distant, something that is over there, North or South, East or West. A sense of London, this incomprehensible mass that is the city, is permanently elsewhere.

Sitting back from the road in Deptford Memorial Park on Lewisham Way down the road from New Cross (already location challenged by numerous place names) this particular eyelevel reveals the blue sky, airplanes and birds. The airplanes move slowly and hypnotically – my gaze follows their path across the sky.



The airplanes, they glide. The birds dance and sing. Sometime loners, sometimes a crowd... these birds and airplanes lift my glance north of a ground location. I notice and observe, transfixed for a moment. In this space of bird watching time flows differently – I can't help but think I've slipped into somewhere else. I look around to see if anyone else noticed these gliding signs.

Direction. Walking North. During a wander-walk or even on some destination-based walks, I tend to lose my sense of location. Direction and location seem less relevant whilst moving. Time, space, and identity collapse into an in between space in my experience of walking.

We seldom look at our surroundings. Streets and buildings, even those considered major monuments, are in everyday life little more than backgrounds for introverted thought, passages through which our bodies pass... in this sense cities are felt rather than seen, moved through rather than visually taken in.

Anthony Vilder Dead End Street, Warped Space.

Along a walk from New Cross to the Swiss Tower in the city a sense of London gets closer with every bi-ped movement. During the hour and a half walk I shift between observer of my immediate surroundings, Swiss Tower gazer from afar and spacey-inner-thoughts walker.

My sense of being North has become an in between space; North is looking up at the birds and airplanes - separate from the location on the ground; North is the distant never-ending London to the north.



North becomes an in-between space, not here nor there, it is an idea or phenomenon and not a location. To be North on this walk is to enter another dimension with the birds and airplanes and spacey inner thoughts of the walker. The Swiss Tower becomes a symbol of North from elsewhere in the south of London. Just as the towering argyle sock floats in and out of vision/existence – so does my awareness of presence in place.

The oscillation of awareness is also triggered and by the floating airplanes. Looking at the airplanes is a much appreciated distraction which simultaneously dislocates me from and reminds me of the here and now.

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www.citywalker.ws

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Max Farrar

There was a strange silence in Havana. Fabulous old Pontiacs growled, Spanish voices chattered, and of course Buena Vista Social Club music was everywhere. But the semiotic silence was slightly disconcerting. No Mini Adventures climbing up tower blocks; no H&M women smiling seductively out of bus shelters. Nor was the iconic sign of Fidel in fatigues much to be seen. Che Guevara's face was the closest you got to a marketing operation for the revolution. When the occasional revolutionary slogan shouted across rooftops, I found myself longing for more. I realised that I need the cacophony of signs in the city.



Figure 4



Figure 1

The walls are exceedingly noisy in Chapeltown, the multi-ethnic, inner area of Leeds. Thanks to Saussure, Pierce, Barthes and company, we think we know what to do with signs. We search out their referents, work out their meaning, and investigate the myths they circulate. Despite Baudrillard's insistence that signifiers now float without meaning, most of us force some sense into the signs we encounter. Otherwise, we feel a little mad.

Thus some of the writing on the wall in Chapeltown makes me feel extremely uncomfortable. What do I make of **PSYCHIC LAWLESSNESS TAMPERING**? As good semiologists we treat signs in relation to each other. Near to **PSYCHIC** we see **PLANET** (in blue paint) with **NONE SENSICALLY SICK** Figure 1 (in black) underneath. This makes sense to me - so much of what I see all over the world is sick, and without sense. It's possible that the author is part of the anti-capitalist movement. Already, to write about these words on the walls, I seem to need to configure its author. Since these three words could be a line from a 1950s Beat poet, and since I don't want to leap to an interpretation of the meaning of this sign based on assumptions about his or her mental health, I'm going to refer to the writer as The Poet. An almost arbitrary choice, but not quite.

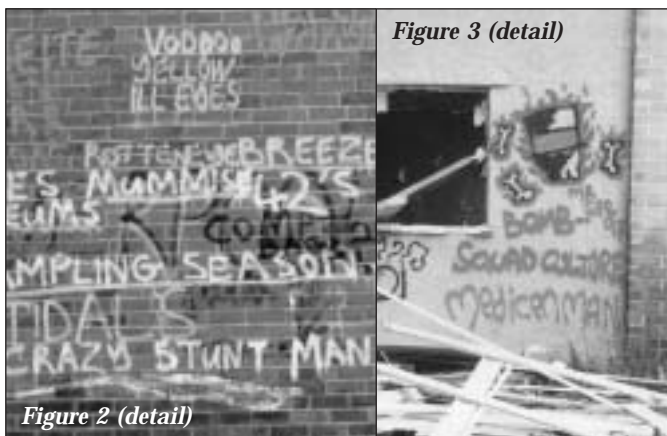


Figure 3 (detail)

Figure 2 (detail)

These short, punchy slogans face on to Chapeltown Road, the main road through the area, so that people in buses and cars will read them. A few hundred yards away, a whole gable end was carefully painted with phrases which seem related in form to **PSYCHIC** and **PLANET**. There are possibly 22 slogans here, some slightly overlapping. Figure 2 (September 1997) shows a section of this wall. It includes **VOODOO YELLOW ILL EYES**, **ROTTEN EYE** and **CRAZY STUNT MAN**. Nearby it says **BRAIN ENSLAVEMENT**, **TRAMPLING SEASON** and **ZOMBIE MAKERS IN PROGRESS** and **DON'T BELEIVE IN HEADACHES**. These are interspersed with lots of other words in yellow and white and green paint on this wall. I photographed this wall some years ago, but new ones appear on other walls up to the present day.

I initially read these slogans as being the work of a single writer, but Philippa Boyce, the graphic designer who scanned the photos for me, pointed out that the shape of the Y in Figure 1 is quite different from the shape of the Y in Figure 2. She is certain that there are two different people at work here. Can we make sense of these works by imputing madness to their authors? **ILL EYES** and **CRAZY STUNT MAN** might imply that this is the author's definition of himself. But 'crazy' was a term of approbation in 50's jazz circles and it has positive connotations today when young people say they've just had a 'mad night', meaning a wonderfully enjoyable night. Graffiti can be seen in which "Crazy" and the Bomb Squad seem to be referred to with approval (Figure 3, May 1998). If 'crazy' does not imply a negative self-definition as mad, perhaps the references to Voodoo will allow readers to impute either paganism or insanity? Western ethnocentricity certainly facilitates such a move. But Julio, our humourous, Catholic, anti-communist host in Cuba was highly sympathetic to Santeria (a term used by adherents to what the West calls Voodoo). When we strip away Hollywood Zombie mythology it's easy to see Santeria as meaningful and valuable.

A careful, rational reading of these words as the work of poets who stretch the usual boundaries of normality doesn't provide the full story, at least for me. Unease runs through my body when a new slogan appears. My discomfort is visceral. I have a dread-full sense that this



Figure 6

person - initially I wrote 'man', but why do I make up the author's gender? - is in mental turmoil. This sensation, this fluttering in my stomach and chest, reminds me that I am projecting my own disturbances into these signs. I am imagining a black man suffering in the 'psyche wing' of St James' Hospital, the place that my friend Elton had categorically refused to enter the night he killed himself by setting fire to his flat, a few hundred yards from these signs. I just hope these graffiti artists can keep on working.

Let me see if I can calm myself by thinking about other writings on other walls. Figure 4 (August 2001) puts me on the more comfortable ground of radical political art. The Bankside Mural Project is the work of Peter Turner, aka Peanut the Clown, who scrapes bits of funding together to paint the wall at the back of his house. An early work was a huge mural celebrating the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. Figure 4 is in narrative form: the story line is composed in conjunction with people who talk to him while he's working. He insists that the message is positive and uplifting; he places an embargo on personal comments and "isms".

T Shirts are mobile signs which sometimes inspire resistance. 'This machine kills apathy' said a young woman's chest at the demonstration against George Bush's visit to London in November 2003. Chapeltown's Palace Youth Project produced a T Shirt for the 1989 Carnival in support of the Anti Hard Drugs

Campaign. White and black people had these African Pledges running down their backs: “We will remember the humanity, glory and sufferings of our ancestors . . . We will strive to bring new values and new life to our people . . . We will be loving, sharing and creative . . . We will be free and self-determining”. Our struggle against hard drugs had been lost by 1995, but there was another T shirt at the Carnival reminding people, without any Foucauldian irony, to regulate their selves (Figure 5, August 1995).

You don't need to be a Situationist to know that the spectacle of signs is, very often, just a symptom of the relentless, all-embracing march of commodification. Remember how bling-bling Naf-Naf was only ten years ago? Its street wear was, it proudly announced, “On the point of revolutionizing the world” (Figure 6, August 1992). Did you know that, when you drink a bottle of Red Stripe beer you are improving the world's ecology? (Figure 7, September 1995). But whereas the purveyors of this admittedly excellent beverage also argue that there is “No redemption in cosmology”, the huge gable end you see as you enter Chapeltown from the city centre nearly always invites you to celebrate the world of the Spirit, as blessings for Eid and Divali greet us at the appropriate times of the year.

Religious signs are no longer static. Flash cars (Figure 8, November 1997) and naff cars proclaim their devotion to Allah, while a Land Rover champions the love of Jah (Figure 9, August 1996). A quote from a speech by Haile Selassie, immortalised by Bob Marley, is carefully inscribed on the side of this vehicle. Here are some of the verses from War (Rastaman Vibration):

*Until the philosophy which hold one race
Superior and another inferior
Is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned
Everywhere is war, me say war*

*That until there are no longer first class
And second class citizens of any nation
Until the colour of a man's skin
Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes
Me say war*

*That until the basic human rights are equally
Guaranteed to all, without regard to race
Dis a war*



Figure 9



Figure 5



Figure 7

This vehicle's package of words and images in praise of Rastafari ('Lord of Lords Conquering Lion of Judah') reminds us that all religions entwine progressive and reactionary politics, and all devote themselves to a remarkably similar God. But religious architecture in Chapeltown and its signs on our walls function, as all sign systems do, in stark relation to one another. We know Rastafari because it isn't Protestantism which isn't Sikhism which isn't Islam. The symbolic machineries of these religions grind louder and louder as each one strives to make sure that its difference from the others is thoroughly embedded in our consciousness and rooted in our practice.

I think the owner of the mobile advertisement for Jah Rastafari is a white man with dreadlocks. Maybe that's why he's carefully painted in Rasta colours on the war-like camouflage background the sentence beginning 'Until the colour of a man's skin'. I'm pretty sure that he, like people of peace all over the world, will subscribe to the whole package: there will be a war until all the people of the globe have equal rights and justice.

That radical message can be found, if you look hard, among the riot of signs in Chapeltown, but so too can sectarianism, craziness and commercialism. Sometimes the signs seem too slippery for sense, but usually they tell us the simple stories that humanity constructs for itself as it goes about the daily business of buying and selling, loving and loathing, and dreaming of paradise.

Max Farrar's book about Chapeltown, The Struggle for "Community" in a British Multi-Ethnic Inner City Area – Paradise in the Making (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), is in stock in good libraries.

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Figure 9



Figure 8

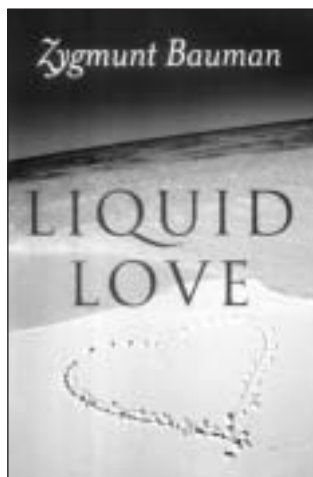
ZYGMUNT BAUMAN'S CITY

Review *Ben Gidley*

CUCR's critical urban studies occasional paper series, edited by Saulo Cwerner and previously by Jane Tooke, has expanded considerably in the last couple of years. We have recently made the series available in pdf form on our website. We are very proud to welcome as an addition to the series Zygmunt Bauman's City of Fears, City of Hopes. Bauman has been an external examiner for Goldsmiths' Sociology Department and our debt to his thinking was registered in 2002 with an honorary doctorate given to him by Goldsmiths. City of Fears, City of Hopes deals with issues which are also explored in Bauman's recent book Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds (Cambridge: Polity 2003).

The premise of Zygmunt Bauman's latest book, *Liquid Love*, is summed up in this rhetorical question: "Is it not so that when everything is said about the matters most important to human life, the most important things remain unsaid?" In *Liquid Love*, Bauman attempts to use a poetic, aphoristic style of sociological writing to try to get at these important things. On the fall of military hardware in the Balkans, Bauman writes: "The weapons do not speak, while the sound of humans speaking seems to be an abominably weak response to the whizz of missiles and the deafening racket of explosives." The book moves between high and low culture – from Kant to the relationship counselling columns of glossy weekend supplements, from ethical reflections on the Holocaust to TV shows like *The Weakest Link* and *Big Brother*, from Sophocles' *Antigone* to the tragic drama of *EastEnders' Little Mo*.

Bauman's fundamental belief is that there are no biographical solutions to social problems. That is, structural



issues, like class or racial oppression, cannot be addressed through self-help manuals or keep-fit regimes. This book, then, starts with the very personal issue of love – a subject most social scientists avoid and the materialist left shuns – but slowly moves to very political questions about society.

Bauman places love today in the context of what some call "postmodernity" and he calls "liquid modernity". It is a condition defined by a looseness of bonds, a weightlessness of duties. In this condition, the tight, heavy, durable and reciprocal ties of commitment are thrown off and we seek, he claims, connections that can be swiftly unfixed so we can move on to the next one.

For me, this grand narrative of liquid modernity is too sweeping a story, too stark a picture. Bauman has described the left as a "counterculture of modernity", a concept taken up by Paul Gilroy in his *Black Atlantic*. Gilroy's excavation of such subterranean geographies reminds us that, for every cultural shift, myriad countercultures emerge; for every grand narrative, a wealth of other stories whisper from the margins. But if Bauman overlooks these in *Liquid Love*, his analysis of the big picture does resonate with me.

The power of his argument comes through in particular as he moves from love to other human relations, and suggests that we are losing the ability to generate meaningful forms of *communitas*, solidarity and closeness between people.

He develops concepts like "virtual proximity", the illusion of proximity given by the gadgetry of our times. The twist to this "virtual proximity", as Bauman points out, is that when you're actually proximate to someone with your mobile switched on you are always available to others, not fully there: "Those who stay apart, mobiles allow to get in touch. Those who get in touch, mobiles permit to stay apart." Similarly, consumerism is not about accumulating things ("who gathers goods must put up as well with heavy suitcases and cluttered houses") but about throwing them away to make room for new ones.

As a flipside of "virtual proximity", liquid modernity saturates our lives with images of distant suffering and distant cruelty – starving babies and displaced mothers in other continents, who appear to be the victims of impersonal global forces. The distance of their suffering and the impersonality of the storms which rage

through their lives leave us feeling impotent. Our response is all too often "to run for shelter". New technologies of security and surveillance allow the luckier to shut themselves away from public life, in gated spaces of privilege. These spaces house "mixophobic" communities of sameness. Outside the gates teem the "ghost wards" of the favelas and inner cities, the non-places whose denizens are, in Bauman's harsh phrase, the products of liquid modernity's global "human waste disposal system".

"This book, then, starts with the very personal issue of love – a subject most social scientists avoid and the materialist left shuns – but slowly moves to very political questions about society"

A central theme of Bauman's liquid modernity is survival. The practitioners of the liquid love he scorns are above all playing a Darwinian game of survival, refusing the risks of committed love. In a shocking juxtaposition, Bauman suggests that the reality game show *Survivor* and Spielberg's *Schindler's List* share a common logic: the celebration of survival whatever the costs. Countering the logic of survival for Bauman is Primo Levi's life and work, which suggests that survival without dignity and love is ultimately worthless, that the costs of survival are sometimes greater than the loss of humanity involved.

Among the products of the "human waste disposal system", among the weakest links in the survival game, strangers – and above all refugees – have a special place for Bauman, himself initially a refugee in this country. Refugees – confined in "the dense archipelago of nowhereilles", "their identities surviving mostly as ghosts", reduced to bare life, at the mercy of states to which they can never belong – are the true figures of today's dark times. For Bauman (and for Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, whose work has profoundly influenced him), the situation of refugees perhaps also points to a possible future for humanity in general.

The plight of liquid modernity's weakest links leaves Bauman angry. Angry at politicians who goad the fear of strangers under the alibi of being tough on crime. Angry at states which, even after the lessons of the Holocaust, routinely practise such stratagems of power as banishing whole populations to the bare life or social nakedness of camps and ghettos. But if the stranger, the refugee, represents a possible future for all of us (the "nomos of modernity" as Agamben puts it), there is also the

possibility that a new politics of the refugee might emerge. While our refugee-phobic politicians take as the starting point the nation-state as the host, a new politics of the refugee might take as its starting point the suffering, the bare life, of the refugee, the experience of the camp, rather than a political theory of rights or responsibilities. Something of this taking the experience of the camp and of statelessness as a starting point for a politics can be seen today in certain political formations. Groups such as No Borders or Persona Es Illegal take their solidarity into the camp. In Berlin in 2001, for example, German citizens burned their passports in solidarity with immigrants whose freedom of movement within Germany was curtailed by the "Residenzpflicht" laws, and in Spain, under the slogan "papeles para todos", activists voluntarily gave up their identity cards in solidarity with the "sin papeles". Since 1998, a new form of action in solidarity with refugees has emerged: the No Borders camps at the edges of "Fortress Europe", in places such as Wizajny (close to the Polish border with Russia and Lithuania), Bialystok/Krynki (near the Polish/Belorussian border) and Tarifa (at the Southernmost point in Spain). By adopting the form of the camp, these actions create a space of exception, outside the nation-state but within its territory, which mirrors but seeks to negate the space of exception that is Sangatte or Margate.

To think in terms of a politics of the refugee – to think in terms of No Borders, freedom of movement, the right to be here – is to question, in Kant's terms, the distinction between a legitimate right of visitation or asylum (Besuchsrecht) and an illegitimate right of residence (gastrecht), and thus the distinction between the asylum-seeker and the refugee or between the refugee and other migrants. That is, a politics of the refugee goes beyond the conditionality of New Labour approaches to refugees.

The refugee, then, points to a form of post-national political belonging, breaking the links in what Bauman calls the trinity of nation, state and territory, between nationality or nativity and citizenship, between the nation-state and citizenship. The refugees, for Bauman, are the unimaginables who disrupt the imagined communities of nationhood which fill our planet.

Through Bauman's anger, then, shines Bauman's love: the need for dialogue, friendship and humanity. He follows Hannah Arendt and her hero Lessing in arguing that "openness to others is the precondition of humanity in every sense of the word." On the basis of openness to others and "truly human dialogue", we can build a different, loving global community. And the city, even as it is a dumping ground for liquid modernity's human waste, also prefigures this global community: it is the place where strangers "meet as individual human beings,... learn each other's ways, negotiate the rules of life in common, cooperate and sooner or later... find pleasure in each other's company."

While places and times carve their mark on people, so too do inhabitants leave a trace in the urban fabric through the act of making home that is both physical and symbolic. Private Addresses is an attempt to look at this two-way form of inscription through inviting colleagues to write a portrait of a particular landmark. It takes a series of addresses of notable but also obscure citizens and attempts to recover the traces of memory, or



the past in the present, with a view to examining ideas of belonging, exclusion, locality and transnationality. Equally, we are interested in thinking about our ethical relationship to the phantoms of the living and the dead that are associated with each place. The idea is that each address will begin with the physical location. It will take the reader to a particular place of domicile. Each essay will be 'private' in at least two senses of the word. Firstly, they will examine the internal shape of each building and its location with a view to excavating the remnants left by former or present occupants. Secondly, they will be individual accounts of the writer's encounter with each place and the ghosts associated with it.

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FLAT 8a

Ada Nwosu

Innocent (Thesis)

I

At the time, being so young, I thought this place a prime example of the merits of un-fallen dignity. It was a tiny construction, easily overlooked if not for its weighty presence. Some, like my brother, thought it haunted and would cross the road rather than pass it, but I would always stay on its side, walking slowly by. And, like the earth's greatest star, I dared not gaze at it, for a single glance was always enough to remind me of its lasting effect.

It stood prized, behind wood framed sheets of glass, similar to a work of art, requiring both protection and a means to produce an air of detachment. Glazed and buffed to perfection it was hard to distinguish between this form's inanimacy and live corporeality. But despite its absolute stillness, I knew it lived. For, it was a 'she' who embodied this place- the 60-year-old sole resident of flat 8a (road name of little consequence) and the true address of which I write.

Each day, or so it seemed, she would firmly set her dyed black hair into a neat chignon and loosely tie a patterned scarf that matched her dress over it, revealing only an inch or two of her hairline. Her fair skin, further paled by a heavy layer of white loose powder, would form the easel on which she drew her pride: long thin blackened eyebrows, mascara laden lashes, round ultra pink circles representing her rosy complexion, and plum lipstick to characterize her slender lips. Then, placing her petite plumpishness between her net curtain and the corner of her large bay window she would stand, all day, and face the public. And, each time I passed I would become ever certain that, despite her years, she resembled the littlest of my wooden set of Russian Matroyshka dolls.

Was she strange? My brother had thought so, but I considered her quite noble. She was, after all, so well behaved. She exemplified the goodness that I thought parents asked of you, priests prayed for you, teachers demanded of you, and preferably what 'neighbors might say' about you. Being quiet and keeping still was, after all, the generous and dutiful act of a good girl.

II

Words like crackers, bonkers, and dizzy were indelibly etched onto the public exterior of this private address. Such graffiti, that sought to empower its artists, blemished the reputation of its inhabitant. Although unpleasant, I guess I was to some extent, old enough to understand why this address would provoke such hostility, and why some would say it demanded 'that kind of attention'. Its brightly colored appearance seemed gaudy amidst its uniformly utilitarian scene. And akin to a stranger entering a small town, its vitality caused a discomfort born of a fear of difference and the potential challenge of internal change. So this outsider needed to be sacrificed in order to restore a general sense of trust in the habitual comfort of structured belonging.

Its brazen fluorescence disrupted the rows of grays, browns and creams that surrounded this address. Its busyness caused its structure to appear far larger than those that stood in close proximity. Hence, its imposing form applied a cruel pressure on its neighbors to suppress the full extent of their vehement wish to whitewash its appearance. So, instead of watching their interiors fill with faulty fixtures, such as curtained disdain, unhinged anger, crossed wires and insecure brackets; they glossed their attitude with mocking tones and irreverent remarks.

This troublesome address I refer to belonged to a young woman my school friends named Mad Rose. Although I can't say I took to her, I did not think it polite to christen her mad, so in small conciliation I referred to her as Madeline. Madeline, with her bright red lipstick that refused to stay within the confines of her natural lip line and whose silver eye makeup and orange blusher ran into each other; Madeline who drew second eyebrows close to the hairline of her unkempt afro hair; Madeline with her platform shoes and swirls and graphics on her ill fitting bell bottoms & flare collared shirts (it was the late eighties after all); yes, Madeline and her jaunty aimless walk and fluent speech nobody cared to hear.

My upset did not cause me to mock her, but her inability to stay quiet and be still, disorientated me greatly. This was perhaps due to the feeling that I also begrudgingly admired her ability to take the blows inflicted by the sticks and stones that were aimed to break her bones, and how on earth she managed the hurt those names would cause her.



Jaded (Antithesis)

I

As years elapsed I had noticed she spent less time standing by her window, but I could not recall when her appearances stopped altogether. When rumor established she had passed away, I wondered how someone who had such an impact on me could all of a sudden become so insignificant. Time and its paraphernalia (pleasure and pain, hormonal highs and lows, laughter and tears, ins and outs) had taken its toll, and I guess I now took for granted the reason why my brother had been spooked by the woman I regarded as the Littlest Maytroshka.

I knew by now that her solitude was not necessarily sustained by choice. I could now conceive of what rumor had alluded to all this time; that it was just as likely to have been her burden. Rather than prizing her ability to remain distant from the quagmire of rules, norms and conflicts attested by those outside of this space she had constructed for herself, it was probable that it was fear that placed this distance between her and the public. Such a phobia of what the Greeks termed agora- an assembly of people or a public place of assembly, meant that she was either intimidated by crowds or by the very idea of stepping into the vast irregular matrix that is public space.

Although impossible to pinpoint what had been at the heart of her isolation, I feared that being consumed and homogenized by the crowd caused her silent panic. I feared that the ever spreading moss of public expectation, institutionalized in private spaces and interactions, had spread inside her, weighed heavy like an insidious injury and immobilized her will to battle out a space for herself in the crowded matrix. And, at the heart of my conjectures, I also feared that my family, priest, teachers and the illusory neighbors were already doing the same to me. Sometimes when I called to mind her hollow expression, I rather wondered whether the moss she had gathered had eaten away at her and already turned her into the wooden object she feared the lonely crowd or vastness of space would create; after all, seeing that her condition could be named, she had eventually become invisible even to me.

II

It is funny how much you recollect the minutiae once overlooked the more words you amass to help express your latent concerns. After I left secondary school, each time I thought about the highly visible Ms Rose she always appeared a little less intimidating. I recall regularly spotting her treading heavily past the shopping centre, paying no heed to the miniature red man flashing her to wait before crossing the main road, and heading towards the bus station where my class mates and I waited for our vehicle home. And as she wandered by, castigation explicitly aimed at her would ricochet off her exterior as if she were shielded by an abuse resistant force field.

In hindsight she seemed to search for sanctuary in the crowds, talking to people who cared neither for herself nor her words about 'what they had done', 'why she couldn't trust them', and why 'they never cared for her anyway'. And at best, she would face the usual disingenuous chatter of public concurrence: 'hmm', 'yep', 'really', 'that's right', 'ok lady'. But it always appeared as if she profited somewhat from this belligerent identification by strangers. Even indignation, it seemed, was better than being confronted by the true, and essentially bitter, indifference of the crowd to her concerns. It was almost as if she was driven by a claustrophobic craving to avoid the invisibility that often followed isolation. So it frequently occurred to me that before she had ever introduced herself to the crowd, sticks and stones had already broken her bones and names had already hurt her.

Perhaps the injurious moss that she had gathered in these established private spaces could be shaken off as she rolled like a stone through this public assembly of people. For the crowd was an institution like no other, as, despite its supreme drive to categorize people good and bad and squeeze individual ideas into a common shape, it hardly mattered what they expected of her. So long as they recognized her existence she could never be immobilized. At least this is how I chose to view both what I had witnessed and the moss-induced complicity I had allowed myself to gather and hoped to rid myself of.

Illuminated (Synthesis)

There must be a reason why one's memory is marked by the addresses of those who have passed away, or those who remain perpetually distant. When your concerns about someone or something feel so great, yet, for whatever reason you cannot take that step to truly encounter their place, then perhaps what is really at stake is your own identity. It had taken sometime but I had eventually realized that the basis of my reoccurring questions about the pseudonymous- Littlest Matroyshka and Madeline Rose stemmed from an internal battle between their two positions.

Littlest Matroyshka reflected my fears about how gathering moss can begin to carry an incredible weight and menace the more one suspects the habits and routines of structured belonging lend to immobilizing one's just desire to change shape. And Madeline Rose helped me reconcile how ironically this very recognition that boxes can never be round can offer an uneasy reliance on the dependability of this fact. So, perhaps what I had hoped to gain from my speculative regard of these two private addresses was a method to stabilize the maddening swing between these reflective poles of ontological insecurity before fate decided to rest my character on either one of these extremities.

As the particulars of an address can be interpreted both as concrete and symbolic constructions, the idea that where one lives can transcend physical locality helped me reach my fragile conclusion that: If I had no choice but to enter into and operate in spaces where systems were bound to precede me, then I would always leave the best of me at the gate before I would enter, rolling in my favorite private space 'somewhere outside'. And hope, on each return that I could use this momentum to roll off the moss I was bound to have gathered over the course of that day.

Easier said!

Ada Nwosu is a Phd student in sociology

'CLASSY' - KENICKIE, NORTHERNNESS AND FEMININITY

Emma Jackson

*We're on our backs,
looking up at the
stars. We have a
laugh falling down,
scratching cars.
Watch your back,
hide the knives, I'm
the fastest man alive.
We make things out
of sin, With blood
and human skin. We
never see the sights.
We're out too late at
night. 'Classy'*

Picture this: a car travelling along the A19 from Sunderland to Newcastle, the passengers of the car are a young band, comprising three 16-year-old girls and a 19-year-old boy on the way to play a gig. The soundtrack is John Peel's radio show. The driver is the father of the drummer and the singer. The car boot is full of drums, old guitars and half- broken amps. Suddenly a familiar guitar line emits from the radio, the passengers start to shout. He was playing our song 'Rebel Assault', recorded on a 4 track and released on an underground punk compilation LP. This was the moment when our musical 'career' properly



Picture: Elaine Constantine

began. In the summer of 1994 myself and three friends formed a band to relieve the boredom of another long summer holiday in our home town of Sunderland. We organised our first gig at the Broken Doll in Newcastle and set about learning to play our instruments. For the next two years we played gigs around the North East and in 1998 signed to EMI. We released two albums in two years, one of which briefly graced the top 10, and then split up. Looking back on the way events unfolded, I am struck by our struggle over our representation. As Sunderland indie girls (Pete not included) we dressed in a mixture of charity shop-chic and high street fashion, imitating Courtney Love but not wearing coats on the coldest of nights, in true northern fashion. Our call to arms song 'Come out 2nite' proclaimed 'We dress cheap. We dress tacky'. We favoured short skirts, high

heels and synthetic fibres - preferably in an animal print, celebrating our idea of glamour. We identified ourselves as a gang, the word 'We' cropping up in many early songs, such as 'Classy' (above). We invented 'Kenickie' names Lauren Gofton, Marie Nixon, Pete Gofton and Emma Jackson became Lauren Laverne, Marie Du Santiago, Johnny X and Emmy-Kate Montrose. Despite the delusions of grandeur that the stage names imply, and believe me we were deluded, our regional identity was very important to us, the songs demonstrated our revelling in the noisy, often antagonistic, space of Sunderland city centre. "Time goes slow in the dark We're getting drunk in the park We've got our gang, I know we'll always be friends And get chatted up by the lads Bombing down the street, it's a laugh" 'Come Out 2nite' Once our reputation as

'the next big thing' started to arise, we were photographed by Elaine Constantine for 'the Face' magazine.

She photographed us against the backdrop of our city, the skyline of the old defunct shipyards illuminated by a sunset. We were photographed in our own clothes, drinking bottles of cider. This was all very good, here we were, a colourful blip on the post-industrial landscape. However, this marked the beginning of a trend. Every time we went to London to do a photo shoot, the photographers 'vision' would invariably involve us standing in front of something industrial. 'Not urban decay, again' we'd groan as we trudged through yet another building site in preposterous shoes. Our northerness meant this was inescapable. It also came to be obvious that people jumped to the conclusion that we were a working class band, fresh out of the mine, when actually three of us were the first middle class born generation in our families, whilst Marie was our only true proletarian pin-up. Our northerness was also accentuated in the way our speech was transcribed in newspaper articles. There is a tendency in the music press sometimes to write the speech of people from 'Oop North' phonetically - I have never heard anyone say 'oop'. This was matched with the annoying habit of following a quote from one of us, with the something like 'squealed Marie' or 'screamed Lauren'. Whilst we were very noisy, we did not squeal. This had the power to totally transform an accurate quote into something quite different. When these two journalistic devices were used together, what had seemed to be a successful interview could be transformed into a slightly embarrassing feature. Although our status as 'northern lasses' was a novelty for the media, it became a problem for the record company. Once we signed to EMI, stylists, hairdressers and make-up artists were all enlisted to help us manicure our image. We took their advice 'Emphasis on eyes OR lips girls, never both', 'Expose legs OR cleavage' for photo sessions but

when left alone in our own space of the dressing room before gigs, we quickly abandoned their ideas of taste and disappeared in a haze of glitter spray. It became obvious that EMI had worries about our image, whispers about 'tartiness' began to reach the band and increasingly stylists seemed to be steering us towards the knitwear sections in shops. Our maxim 'We dress cheap, we dress tacky' was now a commercial problem. Visually, our rather aggressive northern femininity, which was part of our appeal, had to be watered down. We envisaged our first album cover as being something like Roxy Music's 'For Your Pleasure', us only partly visible in a glamorous night-time setting. This wasn't to be, instead we were photographed dressed in quite sensible clothes, heavily airbrushed and not a leopard in sight. The music however was still very rough around the edges. Perhaps the record company concerns about how our image would be interpreted were well founded. We seemed to confuse journalists whose responses ranged from amusement, to wild enthusiasm, to accusations from one female journalist of dressing up like 'middle aged men's fantasies' - a remark that was apologised for at a later date. It is significant that twice in interviews we were asked if we were in anyway like Viz's 'Fat Slags', 'only thinner', and these were the journalists who liked us! The interviewers seemed bemused by our hostility to their question - 'So what you're asking us, then, is, are we slags?' replied Lauren coolly. The asking of such a question demonstrates the reduction of all their assumptions about our perceived class, gender and regional roots to the grotesque parody of North East women in 'the Fat Slags' comic strip. This ignored our own statements about our identity in our music: ('We don't need you, we go out by ourselves.' 'Break your heart, break your face, not that much to look at anyway' (Classy)) We were not the only female indie band around in the late 1990's. Elastica were the one of the most successful of the so-called 'Britpop' bands but

their image - the boyish new wave uniform of jeans and T-shirts - seemed to allow them to fit in with their male counterparts, whereas our northerness, perceived working classness and noisy femininity made us very difficult to place. Because we were difficult to place, we were therefore difficult to market. It was as if EMI couldn't figure out who our audience would be, our femaleness complicated things, so they just tried to sell us to everybody. My ex-band mate Marie describes the problem of our image- 'They (EMI) marketed us as pop, whereas the music didn't fit with that. Because we were girls, we had to be marketed as pop. No one would have ever asked our male contemporaries, like 'Ash', to model sunglasses on the Lorraine Kelly programme'. We didn't fit neatly into the rock/pop male/female dichotomy so we found ourselves on 'serious' music programmes such as 'Later with Jools Holland' one day and judging colouring competitions in the 'pop' arena of Children's TV the next. We were resolutely in favour of becoming mainstream, we wanted hits not obscurity, as expressed in the lyric: 'Wear high heels get a record deal'. We realised the importance of the visual and from our inception tried to look 'glamorous', in our own way. Whereas concerns voiced about signing to a major label and 'selling out' are usually involved with worries about artistic freedom, I would argue that at least those battles can be fought out in the open. Also these battles seem much more important at the time than concerns about image. We would object more strongly to changing a vocal line than we would wearing a strange top in a photo session. It is very difficult to maintain control over image and, with hindsight, it occurs to me that it was our representation that was a real site of struggle - even though we were sometimes unaware of it - engrossed as we were in the processes of making music and having fun.

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