Street Signs
Centre for Urban and Community Research: autumn 2006
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**edited by**  
Michael Keith  
Emma Jackson  
Britt Hatzius  

photograph on front cover by Britt Hatzius
INTRODUCTION

Michael Keith, Head of CUCR

[Centre for Urban and Community Research]

Welcome to the autumn 2006 edition of Street Signs, the magazine of the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), a small research centre at Goldsmiths College University of London. CUCR is the location of ongoing funded research on the dynamics of contemporary urbanism and also the home of two MA programmes (Culture, Globalisation and the City and Photography and Urban Cultures) and a significant number of doctoral projects.

The intention when we founded CUCR was to develop work that addressed a burgeoning interdisciplinary debate in the 1990s that took the city as a principal organising theme. Central (but not reducible) to this was the sense that both the dynamics of city culture and scholarship that treated culture seriously were beginning to inflect debates and realities in cultural politics, city economies, programmes of city transformation and an ongoing contestation of the inclinations and exclusions of the rights to the city. Our work treats local knowledges seriously but sets ethnographic engagement in research that encompasses Shanghai, Berlin, Barcelona and Hong Kong, as well as London.

CUCR likes to suggest that our students, contract researchers and full time staff form a community of research and at the heart of the Centre’s work is a commitment to make slightly more permeable the boundaries between the ivory tower and the dynamics of city localities. This has led to a number of studies around invocations, constructions and representation of ‘community’ in policy related analyses of community development programmes (such as the recent evaluation of the Home Office ‘Together We Can’ programme by Marj Mayo and Alison Rooke, completed in 2006), studies around Surestart, neighbourhood renewal and participatory democracy and written work that considers these issues (such as Marj Mayo’s Global Citizens, Zed books 2005) and action research projects working with community and third sector organizations.

Most recently, in mid 2006 Ben Gidley, Marj Mayo and Kalbir Shukra have been successful in bidding for Joseph Rowntree support (2006-2007) for a project on ‘Governance and Diversity: Fluid Communities, Solid Structures’ that considers the dynamics of city diversity.

CUCR’s continued focus on the centrality of the politics of race, migration and multicultural to the settlement of the city has developed against the backdrop of the 7/7 bombings of London in 2005 and the slew of debates around the nature of contemporary multiculturalism. Paul Goodwin describes in this edition of Street Signs the development of a new strand of work and events at the Centre around ‘Revising Black Urbanism’ and the completion of an ESRC project in the Democracy and Participation programme is leading to a book by Les Back, Michael Keith, Kalbir Shukra and John Solomos (CUP forthcoming) and the already completed volume ‘After the Cosmopolitan’ (Michael Keith, Routledge). This links with a longstanding interest in issues of asylum and refuge in the city. Caroline Blunt was involved with both Home Office funded work and arts based attempts to engender dialogue in sites of asylum settlement. In this edition she critiques the work of Artangel in Margate in the summer of 2006. Three ESRC funded projects run by Moira Inghilleri (the most recent of which is ongoing) and Roger Hewitt’s work have also developed this strand.

Roger Hewitt has completed a series of projects that have related to the pace of city change. In part this tied into a strand of debates about the nature of white flight and forms new inner urban spaces of whiteness that were at the centre of his two books on ‘White Talk, Black Talk’ (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) and more recently ‘White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism’ (CUP, 2006). Intellectually this links in to other work carried out by past and present members of the Centre including Garry Robson’s book on white masculinity and Millwall football club ‘No-one likes us we don’t care’ (Berg, 2000), work on the far right funded by the Guggenheim Foundation, Les Back’s landmark work on whiteness with Vron Ware ‘Out of Whiteness’ (Chicago, 2002) and smaller pieces of work addressing the challenges of the rise of the far right more recently in London’s 2006 local elections (Michael Keith).

We are also interested in the extemporised cultures that emerge from the crevices and invisible spaces of the city. The forgotten spaces of the city are commonly the sites of some of the more important forms of social change, creativity and cultural politics. Students have produced some fantastic MA and PhD dissertations,
inspired by the narrators of these uncanny spaces of the city such as Sinclair and Raban (and Kureishi, Rushdie and Zadie Smith), whilst we also have a number of projects that have developed ethnographic readings of London’s complex cultural landscape. In the past, Les Back has written about the cultural surprises of the suburban, the Croydon roots of punk and in an ongoing project with Paul Halliday developed some writing and multi media work around the question posed by London’s biographer Peter Ackroyd – ‘Where does London end’. Much of our work draws us inevitably from readings of identity and being to contested senses of the rights of the city in studies of belonging and becoming. Most recently we have developed funded projects around the rights of travellers in the city (Ben Gidley and Alison Rooke), studies of childhood (Karen Wells) and the politics of ‘trans identities’ discussed by Alison Rooke in this edition of Street Signs. This also links closely with research conducted in the Centre by graduate students, partly reflected in Brianne Selman’s discussion in this edition of the ‘Failing Better’ conference that addressed subjects ranging from the Deleuzian and metaphoric sense of ‘piracy’ and nomadism in the city to discussions of the politics of ethnography, the uprisings in the French banlieus and ‘lowrider’ car cultures of New Mexico.

The development of ethnographic engagements with the urban led the Centre into a number of projects that address the dynamics of cultural production in the city that encompass a ‘democracy of the senses’, with studies at graduate level of soundscapes, musical production and virtual urbanisms but foregrounds a port folio of projects that consider the interplay between forms of visual culture and the changing city. Starting with a range of pieces of photographic work by Paul Halliday that passed under the general rubric of ‘Visible Cities, Invisible Lives’ (and in part came together in Paul’s talk at Tate Modern in summer 2006) CUCR has developed a number of pieces of work that have considered diverse topics such as the use of portraiture in mediating relations with newly arrived refugee communities (Ben Gidley) to work considering young peoples’ representation of their neighbourhoods linking Barcelona, Berlin and London (Britt Hatzius, Paul Halliday and Michael Keith) and collaboration with the arts organisation HiBus (Ben Gidley, Marj Mayo and Imogen Slater).

Street Signs attempts to give a flavour of what goes on at the Centre but to find out more about CUCR’s work see http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr.

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One Thing Tales

by Britt Hatzius

These photographs are part of a collection presented at the Viewfinder Photography Gallery in Greenwich, 7th July - 12th August 2006 more on www.britthatzius.co.uk
Voices from the Sidewalk: Ethnography and Writing Race

Part Two

*Mitchell Duneier in conversation with Les Back*

(for part one see previous edition of *Street Signs*: spring 2006)

New York is a city of such contrasts, a friend commented – “on the same block you’ll find the best and the worst the world has to offer.” It is also a place where fact and fiction melt into each other. Across the street from Mitch’s apartment at 401 Bleecker Street is the Magnolia Bakery made famous by being featured in the HBO television series ‘Sex and the City’. People are queuing up around the corner to buy cupcakes. “It’s like that all the time,” says Mitch. “Hundreds of people will wait in line during the spring and summer for a cupcake.” He takes me inside to view the array of cherry topped morsels before we hail a cab and head downtown to have lunch. He explains that many local residents resent the bakery. He fantasizes about making t-shirts that say “Fuck the Magnolia Bakery,” so convinced is he that street vendors would “clean up” selling them all over the Village.

Bound for the Soho area of Lower Manhattan, the conversation is interrupted by the ring of Mitch’s Blackberry mobile phone. It is one of the book vendors featured in ‘Sidewalk’ called Warren. “I have a friend from England with me who I’d like you to meet,” says Mitch. “Why don’t you get someone to watch the table and jump in a cab?” Warren, one of Sidewalk’s minor figures, is going to meet us at the restaurant. Mitch has remained in close contact with the people he has written about. The ongoing nature of his connection with the booksellers is impressive and this includes offering them a share in the royalties of the book. He tells me that Hakim Hasan’s mother has just died but otherwise I would have been able to meet him too. Mitch plans to attend the funeral in a few days time. The cab pulls up. The restaurant Mitch has in mind is full, so we relocate to another of the districts many trendy places, Café Gitane. A tall African American man wearing a thick winter coat, scarf and woollen hat gets out of another cab. Mitch greets Warren warmly and makes the introductions. The affection between them is self-evidently genuine and they catch up on news as we take our seats.

The restaurant is packed. I can’t help but overhear the conversation between two women at the next table. They are like two characters from ‘Sex and the City’, obsessing about a potential love interest,”a hot man who lives in the West Village.” We order our couscous and Algerian sausage. It is a classic ‘Duneier moment’, an encounter that you just could not make up. Surrounded by chic young New Yorkers, a homeless African American man sits with two sociologists huddled around a tape recorder talking about ethnography amid the almost deafening restaurant chatter. Before we start taping Mitch gets up to go to the bathroom.

I take the opportunity to ask Warren what he thinks about ‘Sidewalk’ now. “I think the same now as I did then – fantastic! I mean who could believe such a thing could happen and that someone like Mitch could tell the story of how we had to live on the street. Man, it’s cold out there and I am not just talking about the temperature, it’s a hard life, and he told it how it is.”

No longer homeless, Warren still sells books on Sixth Avenue. “We’re just trying to make a living, man. Just trying to make an honest living.” Warren is warm and gregarious, sharing stories of his visits to University campuses to talk about the making of ‘Sidewalk’.

“We had a hell of a time doing that, I loved doing that,” he tells me. Mitch returns to the table and confirms that Warren was a commanding, funny and charismatic speaker in front of a lecture hall packed with undergraduate students. “He stood up in front of them at the end of his lecture and said ‘What’s the greatest nation in the world!’.” The students looked at him and started yelling out, “The United States” and then Warren corrected them. He said, “The greatest nation in the world is a donation. And then Warren sent his hat around the room and the students put dollar bills in it. There were 700 students in the class, so he made a good chunk of change,” recalled Mitch.
I ask Warren about the impact that the bombing of the World Trade Centre had on the booksellers. “There was no-one on the street, no-one buying books or magazines” he recalls. I tell him that one of the things that I found very moving in the film that Mitch has made about the impact of 9/11 on Sixth Avenue was that the booksellers took to selling surgical face masks to protect people from the dust that hung in the air for weeks following the attacks. “Yeah, some people said we were exploiting this thing but, you know, we were just trying to make a living best way we could” Warren reflected. It wasn’t the answer I expected, and reveals again the precariousness of life on the street and the depth of the precariousness of life on the street and the depth of the disavowal that is directed at the homeless.

Mitch added: “These guys, they’re trying to make an honest living by whatever means they can. At Halloween they sell crates so that people in the Village can see the procession. They can’t sell magazines, so they sell crates, right. And then after 9/11 they can’t sell magazines so they sell masks. They basically sell what they can to make an honest living and it is better than selling drugs.” Warren gets up and goes outside to take a call on his cell phone. When he returns he doesn’t stay long, he’s got to get back to his table. This will be the seventh year that he has been selling books on Sixth Avenue. We say our goodbyes and he wishes me a safe journey.

Back at Mitch’s apartment we talk about working with photographer Ovie Carter, the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and what sociology is needed for in today’s world.

Les: Going back to ‘Sidewalk’ one of the things that you constantly do is ask the reader to consider what it’s like when some of the most fundamental things in life are difficult to the point of impossibility. For example, the chapter in the book about how difficult it is for a homeless man to take a piss with any dignity.

Mitch: I feel that for me one of the tasks of ethnography is to disentangle what is the same and different about people who have been exoticized. One of the things that ‘Sidewalk’ is trying to do over and over again is to look at the process through which people start out being like many of the readers of the book and end up being completely different. This is not the same as saying that they are the same as middle class people or ever were but that they start out sharing certain characteristics with almost any conventional person and end up being totally different. An example would be the way a man goes to the bathroom, sleeps in a cardboard box or on the hard pavement rather that in a bed, both apparently by choice. How is it possible that any person could make the choice to sleep on pavement when he’s offered a bed? How is it possible that a man could actually make a choice to urinate in a cup when he can get into a bathroom? How is it possible that he has come to feel it is natural for him to do this? These are all men who started out going to the bathroom in conventional ways. And they are all men who started out believing that it was natural to sleep on a bed. And so over and over again the book is looking at these processes. And in the case of the bathrooms, it’s a very complex thing.

There’s a complicated dynamic as men get constrained from their use of bathroom resources and then end up urinating in a cup. It comes to feel natural for them to be in that situation, so documenting that process of transformation is a really important task of the ethnography. It is part of the larger task of showing the ways in which people who start out like ‘us’ and become ‘them’. Finding out how people go from being ‘us’ to being ‘them’ is one of the warrants of ethnography, especially in a sociological context where we’re talking about members of one’s own society I think in the anthropological context, ‘the us’ and ‘the them’ has a different meaning.
Les: How did the photographic aspects of the book evolve? Ovie Carter’s pictures provide such a strong vision, such a strong visual story. In some ways, the powerful arguments that you make are so powerfully supported by him.

Mitch: Well, Ovie Carter is a collaborator of mine and one of my closest friends. He’s someone that I’ve worked with now since I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago. He was a photographer for the Chicago Tribune during his long career. He’s retired now, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting. He won that for work that he did in Africa and India but he also spent most of his career documenting the inner-city of Chicago for the Chicago Tribune. When I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, Ovie’s photographs appeared regularly in the Chicago Tribune and I would look for them. When I was writing my doctoral dissertation I called him on the phone and I asked him if he’d be willing to take the photographs for it. And it didn’t even occur to me as a graduate student how much chutzpah it took for a graduate student to call up a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer and ask him to take the pictures for his dissertation. But I was obsessed with ‘Slim’s Table’ and I thought it was important and I wanted him to make the photographs and so I called him up and he said no. He’s a very generous man he’s also a very humble man and he said to me, “I’m really sorry but we’re working on a series right now for the Tribune about Black men and it would be a conflict of interest.” So I just figured, ‘well I’ll call him up again after the series is published because these things come and go’. But his refusal wasn’t really about the series and he said no again. Finally after many months I must have worn him down because he came down to the cafeteria and just took a few photos and after that lunch he sent me the photos and those photos essentially became the ones that I was going to put in the dissertation. A few weeks after that - before I graduated - I got a letter from the University of Chicago Press saying they were going to publish the dissertation. So I called Ovie and said “It’s going to be a book now. Would you be willing to take the photographs for the book?” He said “Why don’t you just use the ones that I gave you?” And so essentially that’s what we did. We used those pictures, though he did come back and took another photo of the cafeteria from the outside, which became the cover photo. When that book came out it got some attention in Chicago so the editors at the Chicago Tribune asked Ovie about it when they saw the reviews. “Who is this guy that you worked with, this collaborator, Mitch Dunester?” And he told them, “He’s a student at the University of Chicago and he’s a decent fellow” and so they said “Why don’t we bring him in to write for the newspaper?” So they hired me to do a series and we worked together for the newspaper for a while and at the end of that we published a six-part series on inner city Chicago, which got nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. At the end of that I was already working on ‘Sidewalk’ so I said to him: “Ovie, I would be honored if you’d be willing to work with me on this book.” I told him it was about unhoused scavengers who sell books and magazines that they take out of the recycled trash and he looked at me and said “This one I’m not interested in, Mitch. I’m really not interested in this at all!” After accepting his decision not to do it, I sent him a copy of one of the chapters because I respect his critical judgment and wanted to know what he thought. Upon reading it, he said he had changed his mind and that he would like to come and try to take some photographs. So that was the beginning of a very long process of working together where he make numerous trips to New York to do the photographing and we ended up working very closely, so that his photographs had a very big impact upon the way upon the way that I wrote the book. I would pin them up in my office as I was writing and then I would see things from the photographs that I had not seen with my own eyes. Ovie is a sixty year old black man and he developed relationships with the men on the street that were different than my relationships with them. Ovie is a very religious man and there’s a lot to be said about that because every relationship between a photographer and an ethnographer if they work together has to be a relationship of mutual respect and understanding. He can’t just be a vehicle for my conception of the world. His view needs to be taken seriously, so that I also need to be vehicle for his conception of the world. I come at the world from the point of view of a secular Jew who’s spent most of his life now in universities and Ovie comes at the world from the point of view a black man who migrated from Chicago from Mississippi and St Louis and is a born-again Christian who got his education through his work of photography and so a lot of our interaction about the book was about Ovie pushing me to consider the more religious dimensions of these men’s lives. I’ve had to take concerns about spiritually much more seriously as a result of the relationship with him and we had arguments about these things sometimes and serious discussions, intense discussions where it was really very hard for both of us. But the discussions, which I would have never had with a university collaborator, have taken the work to another level.

Les: In a way I read your books and the people you write about as in a struggle to live an ethical life in circumstances of extreme divisions and inequalities of wealth and status, is that right?
**Mitch:** Yes, a fundamental theme of my sociology has been about the struggle to live in accordance with standards of moral worth. The intellectual challenge for me in 'Sidewalk' was to look at how so-called moral behaviour is and is not constructed in a setting seemingly unfavorable to such behaviour. The men in 'Sidewalk' had come out of prison and had been basically cast off by the society. In the United States, once you have a felony conviction and you're a black man and you come out of prison, you can't get housing. You can't get an interview for a job in the formal economy. There are so many ways in which you're blocked from living a conventional life and these are men who live under that burden and how then do you construct a so-called moral life for yourself? How do you make that happen?

**Les:** But you show us this is not some simple notion of individual decency, is it?

**Mitch:** I'm not really interested in decency. I'm interested in the social construction of decency. From the beginning of my time as a sociologist I've been interested in the struggle of human beings to live in accordance to moral worth. And one of the reasons that Sixth Avenue was a strategic site for me was that the challenges to living a moral life there were greater. Here was a setting where you had people coming out of prison with felony convictions and no ability to get jobs or housing. So the question was how you survive in those circumstances and still struggle to live in accordance to standards of moral worth? How could a homeless person construct those standards of moral worth in the shadow of this society's standards and definitions?

**Les:** One thing that you did in this book was to share the royalties with the main participants. How does that work?

**Mitch:** Basically what happens is that every year the royalties are divided among the people in the book. So every year right around this time I'm supposed to send the royalty checks out to the people and they're all waiting for me to send them out. In fact, that whole issue of the royalties in some way for a while changed my relationship to the people in the book.

**Les:** Did it?

**Mitch:** Immediately after the book came out there was a real sense among the men that this book was a big best seller and they had a sense of it being a much bigger best seller than it really was because they were seeing all these people in Greenwich Village walking around with it. The book gets used every year at like five or six classes at New York University because it's about the neighbourhood of the school. And they see the kids from the University walking by with the book. Although it's used in many other campuses across the country, the truth is that used copies come into the market very quickly, something that they should know and understand because they sell used books. But nevertheless, they see people walking around with these books and in the first year I think they thought that they were going to get rich and I kept telling them, look you're not going to get rich on this, you know, you'd be lucky to make a few hundred dollars at the most. Every year since the book has been out, its five years now or six, they've each gotten between one and two hundred dollars and last year it was as high as two hundred. This year it was as low as $100. But I did feel as though my relationship with them changed when suddenly they saw this as an entrepreneurial venture and like any other venture that they engage in where they're trying to get over and now I was kind of The Man who was paying out the money, the Jewish guy you know and I think, this may be my projection, but I felt as though they had to have evidence they were being treated fairly, that I was telling how much the book was even making. I mean no one ever said that to me but I was just a little paranoid about it so I produced royalty statement for them showing them exactly how many copies were sold and how well the book had done each year and how much the amount of money would be divided by all the people in the book. And then I would send each person - over thirty people in all - their money. For some people it felt like my relationship to them had become solely about money. One day I walked down the street returning from Wisconsin and somebody yelled across the street to me: "Hey, Mitch, when is my money coming? I want mine in cash!" And he yelled this out to me across the street and I felt so embarrassed. Was that what my relationship with them was now about? And then I would find that whenever people would see me all they would ask me is when's the next payment, when's the next payment. Not, "How are you?" Nothing. Whereas before it would be "Where have you been?" or "What have you been up to?" Now it was just, "When's the next payment?" That was hard, but it did die down over the years as this has become more routinised and regularised and now they know that every December the payment comes. These relationships today are closer than they ever were. But it hasn't been easy by any means.

**Les:** That's an incredible irony, that your commitment to share the financial fruits of the work actually ended up drawing a line between you and the people you've written about?

**Mitch:** I guess the irony of it would be that in the process of working so hard to establish relationships between a white ethnographer, a white middle class Professor and poor black men on the street, after all the hard work that went into establishing those bonds and those relationships that it did feel that some of that was undermined by the
effort to avoid exploitation and thus necessarily establish a monetary relationship with the men. I could have imagined other ways it could have been done, it could have been handled by the publisher. It has worked out in the end and it didn’t affect all my relationships with the people I worked with in the same way, and today — years later — nobody ever asks me about the money.

Les: I wanted to mention if there’s a way of thinking about the value of ethnography or sociology more broadly?

Mitch: I definitely think that we change the world, but that we change it in subtle ways. We change it through bringing about awareness and understanding, not necessarily through public policy. I think that we become part of a dialogue. American society looks really bad right now from the standpoint of having just re-elected George Bush but at the same time if you look at American society since the 1960s, it’s a better place than it was. I think, certainly in terms of what the readers of Ethnic and Racial Studies would think is important. You know, explicit segregation has ended. There is a sizable black middle class in the United States today. Now did any one or two sociological studies bring that about? No. But we’ve been part of the dialogue that has raised the kind of consciousness in America that has made it possible for these kinds of transformations to occur. Every single study that gets done is part of that dialogue. Every dissertation that get written by a graduate student in a department of sociology in the United States or in England becomes part of that dialogue, and together we build upon one another to enter into a framework, to create a framework that makes it possible for the society to be better than it was before, more humane. I hope my studies help people understand that the folk conceptions that make them feel that there are no common elements of humanity are false, e.g. not supported by the evidence.

Les: So, understanding in and of itself becomes a kind of vocation that adds to that conversation, that dialogue. It can’t produce a manifesto, but it can contribute to that conversation.

Mitch: I mean, yes, it contributes to the conversation but that is the limit. You can’t point to any work that’s transformed the world. Another question is how has it affected the lives of the people in it? And I think that’s a very legitimate question. I mean part of my criticism of ethnography as a frame theory for doing theory for theory’s sake is not simply that the people in the studies can’t recognize themselves in the work but they don’t even have any sense of how they mattered. I mean how did it matter, why did it matter that this ethnographer spent all this time with me? So he could enter into a dialogue with a theory that is utterly trivial, even by academic standards?

What is the ethics of that? So I think it’s a legitimate question in the same vein of thinking to ask why did you write this book about me and how does it affect my life? I mean if my subjects ask me this question and I can’t answer it in any way, shape, or form that they can understand, I feel embarrassed. I want the books I write to contribute to a greater understanding of the world. I want to be able to say to them — the people in my books — that students are going to be able to read this book and they’re going to understand homeless people in a better way. To me that’s a perfectly legitimate minimal warrant for this work, and in fact the best that I’ve been able to come up with.

Les: Thanks, Mitch. I think that’s a good place to end.

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An edited version of this article appears in the journal ‘Ethnic and Racial Studies’, 2006, Vol.29, no.3 pp.543-565
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at the Grant Museum

Emma Jackson

The Grant Museum is one of the oldest zoological museums in the country. This wonderful Victorian collection of skeletons, things in formaldehyde and mounted animals resides in the basement of the Darwin building at UCL.

From the instant that we chanced upon this extraordinary place we knew it would be the perfect venue for the first High Horse event. (The High Horse is a quarterly newspaper journal containing stories, poems, essays and assorted bits and bobs edited by myself and Isabel Waidner).

We selected nine specimens from the museum and allocated them each to a writer. We provided the writer with the name of their specimen and a photo. The brief was to respond to the specimen in some way.

The event, which took place on 2 consecutive nights, consisted of the writers reading their responses and included: a letter, a song, an email exchange, a poem and short stories. Some of us chose to write from the specimen’s perspective, some used the specimens as characters in a story. The email exchange pondered the urge to anthropomorphise animals.

The event exceeded our (high) expectations.

There will be more.
Extract from ‘Mavis and the Librarian’
(response to Sus Scrofa)
Emma Jackson

[..]
The library had doors on two opposite sides of the building. Mavis exited by the door that led to the numerous possibilities of town, rather than the door which led to the certainties of the bus stop, the journey home and pasta and pesto for tea. Stepping into the light, Mavis saw something shiny on the pavement, a pound coin. ‘At least today has been financially successful,’ considered Mavis, as she bent to pick it up. She pressed the coin into her hand and thought about what to do. She needed to do something that would mark the end of the ridiculous library escape and the beginning of the evening. A film was too much of a commitment, so she decided to go to a nearby museum.

‘Mummies or bat skeletons?’ She turned the coin in her hand and decided that if she opened her hand and the coin was facing upwards on heads she would go to the British Museum (mummies) if it was tails she would go to the little museum of anatomy (bat skeletons). It was heads but she decided against it and pressed on to the smaller museum.

Mavis fixed her eyes on the stained pig foetus suspended in a cylindrical jar. It was a startlingly fleshy pink amongst the other more bony exhibits. At first glance it resembled a penguin but the more Mavis stared at it the more human it became. The pig must be biologically similar to the human, she considered, ‘after all, they give pig hearts to humans these days.’ Mavis didn’t like to think about hearts or innards of any kind. She had never found the sound of the beating of another human heart comforting. She began to feel queasy. The museum was a mausoleum. It was then that she saw a body stretching down from the pigs head to the floor. She moved slightly so that the head on the other side of the glass was level with the pig. A human head with a pointy chin, blurry through all the jars and cases but recognisable nonetheless, peering at her, peering at the pig, ‘Jesus Christ!’ she exclaimed involuntarily, shattering the silence. It was the librarian. She ducked and then felt foolish. She stood up and walked briskly out of the museum doors. She ran down the street, she needed to hide. Her (human) heart beat fast in her chest.

[..]

Unidentified Specimen
Kevin Hendrick

IT: With tentacles flailing I descend. My deepest grace. I plummet at my silent speed. I spin a blur like a spinning web. I turn a twitch in your eyes but I hold you, I know that, I hold you like I got electricity on you.

YOU: What gives?
So quiet in here. So static. A hundred heritages, a million questions. The silence is volume. I swear I can hear the dust settle. I swear I can hear the very particles shuffle and shift. And the dust falling on this museum is a collection on a collection. An invisible snowfall, snowflakes of infinite lives. Dust is skin. Life is finite. There’s no such thing as an empty museum. What gives?
You, such a solid show of intent. You, your tentacles flung up wide, all reach, all celebration. What do you celebrate? Are you partying in your anonymous celebrity? Your non-fame? You’re so knowing.
Have you actually seen yourself below those euphoric tentacles of yours? Where are you going?

IT: Behold! I’m corkscrewing. I’m side-winding. Are you still with me? Are we too deep? Look harder as I chop up deep blue clouds. Gently breathe as those heaven-shot shards of remarkable light jilt the scene. I’m inspiring awe!
Let’s grab some inertia here. Tread water with me and see how these multi coloured tiny stars blink about me, and just watch how they softly figure-of-eight around my hour glass form, all sentient, all curving. Feel it with me, feel it like the softest light, the kindest heat blushing at your cool waist. Close your eyes and let it coil upwards, close to you as it streams above and away. These brilliant tiny stars reflect the quickest dew as they scatter and are pulled like neon filings to a magnet above, that we don’t want to see.
They are gone and we are going deeper.

YOU: Why am I still here?
I don’t see my reflection anymore. I don’t feel the ground anymore. I breathe a shared breath. I feel no plunge. I move as I breathe, as I breathe I shimmer.
There is no descent when there’s no ceiling.
I look up as I look down.
I reach with my drop.
The rhythm is flat and it moves me.
I surrender to the greatest drone.
The blue is bright... these are many blues.
I have no questions.
I’ve forgotten my name.

IT: Turn me upside down and see my tentacles rooted. See me solid, as grounded as you, our roots reaching. Our terror firm.

YOU: I feel my feet again, a cool at my ankles.

IT: Just know me unknown.
street signs: autumn 2006

Riga, Latvia
May 2006

Cristina Saez, Riga 2006
Introduction

The idea for this project (by the Photography and Urban Cultures MA students) followed on from a field trip to Brick Lane and resulted in a trip to Riga, my home town and a place none of the other students had ever been.

Being photographers with different levels of proficiency, how do you represent a city? Or more importantly, is it possible to represent something that can be called a city, a neighbourhood, a habitat or even a life?

The photographic medium claims its right to be a tool of representation. We cannot argue with that. But what we can do is subject this claim to the critique that our knowledge allows for. That is, to question both the process and the result. In the former, we deal with the experience of being in a certain situation. In other words, the very process is experience. In latter, we have to look at the relationship between the two: i.e. the process of experiencing something and the result of this experience.

At the time, I could not judge the participants’ visual work but I could be involved in the conversations that revealed some particular aspects of their experiences. I was told that Riga is a very melancholic city where the faces of people often appeared sad and worried; that the chicken in mustard sauce in Café Istaba was the best; that people answer “No” to English questions that they don’t understand; and that the slowest food ever is available in a Ukrainian restaurant a half an hour away from Riga.

What these twelve people can do, in my opinion, is claim the ability to represent their experiences of Riga as opposed to claim to represent Riga, its space or its people. I am now able to see the work presented here as a compilation of different experiences (what is usually described as points of view) of different people which took place back in those five, unusually cold days of May.

Andris Kupriss
street signs: autumn 2006

Laura Cuch, Riga 2006
Riga, Genealogy, History
Nicola Foster

Since early 19th century writers and thinkers interested in phenomenology as a philosophical methodology have articulated a range of approaches of what could be described as conceptual archaeology of the written word as opposed material objects. Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of the Spirit’ can be interpreted on one level as an early attempt, followed most famously by Nietzsche’s ‘On the Genealogy of Morals’. Freud’s short essay ‘A Note Upon the “Mystic Writing Pad”’ might fit here with its example of the mystic writing pad standing metaphorically for human memory. It was followed by Heidegger’s detailed methodology of phenomenological ontology followed by Husserl’s account in ‘The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology’ and especially in his essay ‘The Origin of Geometry’. This was followed by Derrida’s response in his book ‘Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: an Introduction’ and by Foucault’s response to Nietzsche’s above work in his essay ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’.

All the above written texts share an interest in what could be called, and Foucault calls it, archaeology. However, this archaeology is not of found material objects but an archaeology of written accounts to be found in written texts. The underlying assumption they all share – in some of the above texts this is offered as part of a complex philosophical methodological account – is that the written text can ‘show’ what otherwise does not ‘show’ itself and thus we cannot otherwise see. For example, Husserl in his essay ‘The Origin of Geometry’ says:

[...] as in the case of memory, what is passively awakened can be transformed back, so to speak, into the corresponding activity; this is the capacity for reactivation that belongs originally to every human being as a speaking being. Accordingly, then, the writing-down effects a transformation of the original mode of being of the meaning-structure within the geometrical sphere of self-evidence, of the geometrical structure which is put into words. It becomes sedimented, so to speak. But the reader can make it self-evident again, can reacivate the self-evidence. (Husserl, Crisis, 361)

Since photography is but a form of writing - writing with light (photo means light, graph_ means writing) - could the same be said of photographic writing? Could a visual writing ‘show’ in the way that written words might? Could visual writing with light allow us to re-activate meaning beyond its sedimentation to turn it into active self-evident again? Might this be used as a methodology for sociological research or historical research?

On Thursday 25th of May 2006 Goldsmiths college students and tutors of the MA in Photography and Urban Culture embarked on Ryanair flight to Riga. We were surprised to find that we shared the flight with several groups who chose Riga as their destination not for social research but stag-night. Riga, the capital of Latvia, which recently joined the European Union having been part of the Soviet Union since WWII, has became the fashionable destination for the more upmarket British stag-nights. On one level, the contrast between the austere reputation of Soviet culture and British stag-nights interested us, as was the contrast between a mediaeval city and Soviet rule, the art nouveau architecture and the local timber building, Latvian population and Russian population, Latvian nationalism and soviet ‘internationalism’ and the list goes on.

On arrival at Riga the modern ‘international’ airport buildings and upmarket retail shops not dissimilar to those of any other European city, even ‘international’ city, confronted us. As we looked out of the taxi’s window we saw Parisian style tree lined wide boulevards, large apartment blocks reminiscent of 19th century Paris and trendy shop windows as well as wide range of international restaurants. Only the language and currency suggested we were not in France, Germany or Britain.

Our brief was to document Riga photographically and to visually document our response to Riga. This very process of documentation explored Riga and in so doing also exposed the many layers of Riga the place, its history and the social space supporting the range of cultural layers as well as the economic, political and cultural exchanges in operation at present and in the past.

In his ‘Genealogy of Morals’ Nietzsche says that

it must be obvious which colour is a hundred times more vital for a genealogist [...] namely grey that is, what is documented, what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short the entire long hieroglyphic record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind.

(Nietzsche, 21).
Though many of the photographs are in colour they are reproduced here in monochrome. Of course Nietzsche’s discussion of colour is meant metaphorically; the colour ‘grey’ was contrasted to the ‘blue’ of an account that does not question the present accepted ‘good’, and yet, might this also be interpreted visually? Might this be seen as an added layer of choosing monochrome when contemporary culture is focused on the colourful and recent technology allows for the emphasis of colour; often with suggestions of artificiality and commodity culture? And yet, despite the northerly grey due to the angle of the sun, Riga is colourful and it has the colourful trappings of all other modern cities.

Nicola Foster, Riga 2006

Foucault interprets Nietzsche’s account saying:

Genealogy is grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have scratched over and recopied many times. (Michel Foucault’s opening to his essay ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’)

Might our photographs be interpreted as exposing the many layers of Riga the place, the social space supporting the range of cultural layers and the economic, cultural and political exchanges in operation at present and in the past? Not simply by what they are depicting but also through how the depicted is portrayed?
“Bridging the lost generation”
Michael Tan, Riga 2006

Gesche Wuerfel, Riga 2006
It wasn’t until afterwards, when the film had been developed that I noticed how the pair completely matched their surroundings. It’s as though they belonged to that spot, a rundown area next to the harbour with large warehouses and derelict buildings, many which had been taken over by the young art crowd in Riga. For a brief moment they melted into the backdrop of my image; seconds later they had to rush off as Mahmood had to catch his boat back to Norway.

Lisa Marker; Riga 2006
street signs: autumn 2006

Rina Liddle, Riga 2006

Anna Palma, Riga 2006

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Flânerie in Caracas
Angelos Rallis

From the 1920s foreign oil companies started to exploit Venezuela’s black gold. This gave birth to a huge mono-productive economy concentrated around the region of Caracas - which inevitably became the main employer. One of the consequences of this process of industrialization is the rapid demographic growth of the city since the 1950s, as people from the rural areas migrated to the capital in search of work.

As with most cases of rapid expansion, the urbanisation of Caracas did not follow the urban and state control procedures, instead the city witnessed the collective phenomenon of the creation of the euphemistically called ‘self built houses’, with which immigrants tried to settle and integrate themselves into Caracas. Economic logic, rational governance and the survival strategies of local people pointed in different directions. These illegal ‘ranchos’ - sprawling slums of tin sheds, cheap brick and cardboard boxes covering the surrounding hills - constitute, according to official estimates, 70% to 80% of the housing resources of the country. The ‘ranchos’ is not of course a characteristic solely of Venezuela but of all Latin America; the Venezuelan ‘ranchos’ bear close resemblance to the Brazilian ‘favelas’, ‘los canterilles’ of Uruguay, ‘los tugurios’ of Costa Rica, ‘Villa miseria’ of Argentina. While the housing issue has gained prominence with the election of Hugo Chavez and his manifesto pledges to address social inequality, despite numerous speeches both pre and post election, the housing situation has only seen slight improvement.

As an MA student in Photography and Urban Cultures, visiting a big metropolis in Latin America posed some fascinating problems. How can one approach the impossible task of representing the city photographically? After reading material by Walter Benjamin and being influenced by the figure of the flâneur, I thought about ways of getting to know the city by wandering around its streets in order to document and map urban life.

I set myself the task of engaging critically with city life in Caracas. When outlining my plans to go out and photograph unfamiliar places, my Venezuelan friends bombarded me with stories of crime, warnings and fears, as there is a general common belief among white middle-upper class immigrants that wandering outside of certain areas is not safe.

I was astonished by the fact that most of my encounters with white Venezuelans tended to convince me that they are retaining much of the character of their colonial roots – they seem to be imprisoned in the pseudo ‘safety’ of the central parts of the city while excluding the rest (the indigenous population). This came as a shock to me because people’s knowledge of the city; the streets, the signs, and its inhabitants is generally very poor (though everyone appears to be an expert on the shopping malls and shopping centres!)

So what does this tell us about the relationship between representation, knowledge and experience? What status can a set of images have in this context? What senses of being and belonging can they invoke? Who views the Native Americans with bigotry and fear? Is it the view of the politician, the resident of the skyscraper, the corrupt police officer or the resident of the ‘rancho’?

Changing the social reality of Caracas will not come through creating barriers of safe and unsafe zones and increasing security controls. The contradictions between economics, community survival strategies and urban myths of the ghetto can not be resolved by imagery alone. But the images can maybe speak to the gaps between these logics. What Caracas needs is the presence of a plan that pays attention to social issues as well as educational programmes that will allow the inhabitants to gain knowledge of the city through ground level observations. For me, the question remains, how can one change a social problem without first de-mythologizing the disturbed perception of the city?
street signs : autumn 2006

Angelos Rallis
Thinking Beyond the Binary:
An Update from the Sc:identity Project

Alison Rooke

On the 22nd of April 2006 something quite remarkable happened. This was the first weekend of a series of workshops that I was to be involved in as part of the Sc:identity Project. Just to give some background, the Sc:identity Project is funded by the Wellcome Trust as part of their Pulse programme, which seeks to engage young people in learning about science through art. It poses the question ‘What is the Science of Sex and Gender?’ to a group who are living sex and gender with a degree of complexity. Based at the Central School of Speech and Drama, the Project has been working with a group of fifteen young transgendered and transsexual people aged between 14 and 22 in a creative exploration of how sex and gender are understood by medical science. The Project considers emerging understandings of sex differences in the brain, hormones and their effect on behaviour, chromosomes and their function, hormonal and surgical sex reassignment and the consequential range of moral and ethical issues that are raised. The Project is not one of merely learning about scientific theories but rather one of finding a way of engaging with the authority of science and medicine, and making use of it through art. For a transsexual – someone who crosses from one sex to another – life is profoundly caught up in how the scientific and social worlds produce sexed and gendered beings. Transsexuality might be viewed as a trope for the relationship between scientific and medical worlds, and all sexed identities. All of our lives involve negotiating a world which reinforces restrictive and normative ideas of what it is to be a man or a woman but for trans people life this can present profound difficulties is at every turn, whether in the most mundane and ordinary acts of going to a public toilet and other spaces that are demarcated as ‘male’ or ‘female’, in the instances of physical and symbolic violence targeted at trans people on a routine basis.

The Sc:identity Project is a timely intervention opening up a space of dialogue, recognition and creativity at the nexus between science, arts and the social world. The Project runs for a year and has two main aims: firstly, running a performing and visual arts Project with a group of young transsexual people to explore their understandings of the relationship between the science of sex and sexed identities. And secondly, a community outreach programme of participatory workshops using the film as a stimulus, with school and college groups (in relation to aspects of AS/A-Level human biology and the AS/GCSE Citizenship curricula) running workshops/post-show discussions with
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) youth groups and dissemination of the film and supporting information package to regional and national LGBT organisations and film festivals.

The first phase ended on the 10th of June and culminated in a visual and performance art exhibition/event of the young people's art work. This was attended by an audience of 89 people including arts practitioners, friends and family of the participants, community activists, academics and professionals. The team are now in the second phase of the Project which involves making a short film that will document the creative workshops, present the young people’s interviews with medical experts and incorporate the art work produced by the young people. The Goldsmiths team are conducting a participatory evaluation of the Project in order to hold up a mirror to the process, working with staff and participants to identify key lessons and good practice.

So, ‘what is so remarkable?’ I hear you ask. Firstly, to my knowledge, this is the first time that a group of young trans people from across the UK have had the opportunity to meet others like themselves in real time and space. For some of the participants, this was the first time they had even met another trans person face-to-face. This opportunity to come together and meet others like oneself was a very empowering experience for the participants. As one participant stated:

[The project offered] the chance to be entirely yourself for the duration of the weekends, to not have to hide anything or be worried about being misunderstood. That for me has been the most important thing I think and has contributed to a massive surge in confidence, in being myself and being out. [ ] Actually the most important thing I’ve got is friends.

Secondly, the Project offers a unique opportunity for young trans people to engage with medical science, meet and ask questions to medical experts in person. Finally the Project provided excellent facilities and resources and professional support for making art work. One of the themes that emerged out of the Project from the start was way in which the art work that was produced communicated the humanness of trans people. This was partly in response to a medical establishment which continues to pathologise transsexual people as mentally ill, that is, having a ‘gender identity disorder’ in a social world which clearly desires and works to maintain a very specific gender order. As one participant stated:

“This I’ve pondered how gender and transition relate with other body modifications (piercings, tattoos, cosmetic surgery) because to get your tits enlarged you just need money, but to get them cut off you need a gender shrink. That’s bloody weird! Where do you draw the line between someone who wants non-genital cosmetic surgery and someone who wants genital cosmetic surgery? Why is one more of a problem for society than the other?”

Why indeed? Perhaps because gender is the precondition of legible humanity (The baby is born. Is it a boy or a girl we ask?). To have one’s breasts enlarged is to augment and even strengthen existing ‘natural’ gender norms, whereas to have them removed is understood as question and upset this order. The project worked to open up a space of recognition for the participants. This was done through establishing ground rules and a working contract which created a safe and creative gender space. From the start participants were addressed by their chosen names and pronouns and were free to change names and pronouns throughout the life of the project. Putting this in place created an open-minded space for the diversity of the group, which included people who identified as male to female, female to male, transitioning, not transitioning and those who identified as genderqueer. To be addressed and recognised in the way one experiences oneself to be is something most of us can take for granted. And Hegel tells us that it is only through the experience of being recognised that we are fully constituted as socially viable beings. The consequences of misrecognition were palpable when the participants arrived on the first day. The space of recognition that the Project opened up created the possibility of communicating the humanness and diversity of trans lives and identities, in a way that is not accommodated in the restrictive categories employed by a medical model which sees transition as a journey with a clear starting point (a psychiatric diagnosis as disordered) and a destination (hormones and surgery) with no possibility of choosing to get off the train at stops in between. This culminated in some excellent and heart-moving performances on the night of the arts event. I was pleased to read this comment in the guest book after the performance:

‘Wow! What an amazing evening – I am humbled and completely blown away by the courage of these young people, who are braver now than I will ever be in my late 30s. More power to you, you rock!’
Historically trans people’s minds and bodies have long been the subject of medical research (arguably to little advantage of trans people themselves) while in recent years queer identities such as trans and intersex have been taken up by theorists of gender and sexuality in a project of which theorises subjectivities, embodiment, identity and an associated range of modalities of being. Indeed within queer theory the category of trans has become a popular trope to think with. The Scidenity Project was established with a different epistemological and ethical approach. It is an opportunity to explore the lived reality of trans lives, giving trans people the opportunity to do their own research and create their own space of representation.

One of the familiar criticisms of trans identities, from both queer and non-queer voices is found in the question, ‘But isn’t gender performance? Aren’t trans people just buying into gender norms that feminism tried so hard to get away from?’ The Project and the participants’ artwork makes a case for rethinking these presumptions. Any critique of gender norms and they ways in which we live them and chose to challenge them must be situated in the complex context of lives as they are lived at the level of the everyday. Some norms are restrictive for some groups yet offer freedom for others. Judith Butler reminds us that

The critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the questions of what maximises the possibilities for a livable life, what minimises the possibility of an unbearable life, or indeed, social or literal death. (Judith Butler 2006, 07)

In many ways we are all improvising our gender within a limited field of constraints (and the symbolic violence of Trinny and Susannah is always there to tell us when we get it wrong!). The project artwork communicated something of the profound difficulties and some of the pleasures of living a gender ambiguous or gender queer life (Sex! male [ ] female [ ] (not sure what gender) [ ] please tick). Maybe we all take the materiality of sex as a given, however through a series of science sessions it became apparent that it is hard to pin point exactly where sex lies in the body and how it is determined. Sex is defined in many ways. Doctors do not consider the biological karyotype when assigning a new born baby with its sexed identity. If we appear male i.e. have male genitalia, we are labelled ‘male’. But is this science? Has all the evidence been gathered? What if the newborn’s external sex organs do not match the karyotype?

Biochemical sex is defined by the absence of the Y chromosome, the main sex hormones are testosterone and oestrogen. When transcribed and translated these powerful substances make profound changes to our physiology. Do chemicals make us who we are? Although the certainties of science are instrumental in reinstating gender norms ironically they can also be used to undo and question them. The project was an opportunity to question these certainties and play with them through art. One of the advantages of working and playing with science through art was that it undid with scientific rigour the presumption that one’s physical sex necessarily correlates with chromosomal sex. The following quote is from one of the participants discussing what he has learnt...

I think it has made me feel less like the female assignment and characteristics I have make me female. I think once you shed the ideal images of what a man and woman should be away it’s easier to accept your own body, when you realise there is no clear line it’s like ok, I’m a short, unusual guy, and there’s lots of them about and not all of them are even trans! the challenge becomes less of an internal battle (mind vs matter), more of a process of getting the recognition of who you are!

And me? I learnt that there is a surprising range of intersexals that walk amongst us, and some of them are Hollywood movie stars!

For further information about the project contact a.rooke@gold.ac.uk

The Scidenity Community Outreach Programme of participatory workshops begins in October. We are looking for school and college groups, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) youth groups workshops who would be interested in hosting a video screening and post-show discussions. Please get in touch with Catherine McNamara (C.McNamara@cssd.ac.uk) or Alison Rook (a.rooke@gold.ac.uk) if you or an organisation you know of may be interested.
Looking at the common differently by illuminating the spaces that blind people live and work in - exploring shifting perceptions of physical space.

Isidro Ramirez
Night Walk - Greece

Zaira-Stefania Konstantopoulou
Neither Last Resort nor Promised Land

Caroline Blunt

Over the past three years, the organisation Artangel has been engaged in the commissioning and realising of two projects located in and inspired by the coastal town of Margate. One project which has exhibited over the last two years is entitled ‘Towards a Promised Land’ and has involved American photographer Wendy Ewald working with 22 children who have moved to the town from near and far. The project involved teaching the children how to capture photographically aspects of their town and places and objects of importance to their experience of home. These photographs have been exhibited in galleries in Margate. This project also involved Wendy Ewald taking portrait pictures of the children, their faces and the backs of their heads. These black and white passport style pictures are displayed, banner size, in prominent places around the town. A public document, ‘Towards a Promised Land’ identifies the children as being from the town and gives their names or pseudonyms. This project has begun to pave the way for the making of a film entitled ‘The Margate Exodus’. Directed by Penny Woolcock, the film is due to be made in September 2006 on location in Margate with residents of the town as actors. Documentation available portends that it will recreate the story of Exodus, plagues and all.

These projects certainly seem to attest to the reputation Artangel has acquired for presenting the unexpected or unsettling the expected, and their making ties in with Artangel’s interest in and commitment to an alchemy between artist, production and place. However, having closely observed the unfolding of these projects, talked to people who live in the town, participants to the projects and a researcher/ interviewer employed by Artangel, I find myself torn between feeling on the one hand that the projects constitute novel, brave and stirring interventions and on the other hand that they have involved undue risk, and invoked and imposed a narrative which is as ominous and undesirable as it is impossible. Ewald’s approach to working with children is described as motivated by a desire to help them ‘realise the worth of their own visions’ (www.creative-partnerships.com). It seemed curious then that the images which strike you as you arrive in and walk around Margate are those taken by Ewald rather than the children. Moreover, on first seeing these pictures it is difficult not to be struck by their mug shot form and the fact that it is indeed rare to see public images of children except when they have been fatal victims of crime and/ or are missing/ wanted. There is no ready explanation for the pictures of the backs of the children’s heads and this along with the location of some of the photographs seems to position some of these children as attempting to hide. I was told by the researcher to Artangel that their aim was to give faces to people ordinarily represented by de-humanising statistics and the pictures of the faces/ backs of heads are intended to symbolise the children looking out upon the places from which they have journeyed and towards the town and land to which they have arrived.

It is difficult to deny that in terms of representations of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, these are stirring images and a bold intervention by Artangel. However, as much as this is admirable, I was struck by the question of who had borne the risk in this project when, following the bombings in London in July 2005, one of these pictures was set alight and walking along the seafront, one can see the marks made by stones having been thrown at the pictures of children’s faces. As much as these acts may trigger a variety of responses of disgust, sympathy, surprise or lack of it, it does not seem to me that the destruction and defacing of children’s pictures are acceptable casualties.
in a process of changing minds and raising consciousness. Although children and families gave their consent to participate in the project and the family of this child agreed for the picture to be replaced, I am struck by the question of whether consent really was informed and whether it should have been sought at all.

Revising the projects for The Guardian, Nicci Gerrard (July 3rd 2005) cites the film’s director Penny Woolcock as saying that ‘in Margate the tensions between communities, the struggle for identity and the search for home and self echo the journey of the Exodus. And for many of the refugees from countries where they’ve seen people burnt in the streets or lain awake listening to gunfire, Margate was the promised land’. If it has irked some local residents that they might be likened to enslaving Egyptians and if it has been a job for the researcher/interviewer to convince local residents that it’s not a project ‘all about refugees’, it has also troubled some refugees that their enrolment in the project plays into the notion that they have migrated with a naive belief that western Europe is some sort of paradise in which they are given ‘everything for free’. The notion of a promised land offers little new to either the popular perception of refugees or to the debate about how people from different countries and cultures might live together in peace and harmony.

Gerrard writes, ‘Woolcock says the promised land is not just a place, but a state of mind. If you let down your guard, put aside suspicions, allow a stranger into your world, people from different countries and cultures can come together in compassion and understanding.’ In Margate, she says this has happened. You just have to look, to listen, so that you see people as people. ‘It just takes a minute. And then you’ve created the promised land’.

The problem with any celebration of, or aspiration to, a notion of a promised land is that it suggests not only the domesticating cloy-ness of a motherland and the usurping sceptre of a fatherland, but it suggests some sort of fulfilment or completion which the Exodus story and its resonance with recent political conflicts show is surely to invoke an ominous utopia. From a notion of Margate as the ‘Last Resort’ (Pawlowski, BBC Films, 2000), it seems no less helpful to conceive of it as the promised land. Whilst Margate may indeed have been a last resort for some migrants to the town, national and international, it is a comment on both human resilience and the humanity of the town that it is rarely only experienced as such. But neither can it be a promised land; as one Kosovo-Albanian man living in Margate remarked, ‘the promised land doesn’t exist’. It takes courage to admit this and live with the uncertainty that necessarily attends life in a globalised world. It would have been a brave project that took that as its inspiration.


* ‘The Margate Exodus’ is commissioned and produced by Artangel with Creative Partnerships Kent, Arts Council England and Channel 4 Television. ‘Towards a Promised Land’ is a project commissioned by Artangel in collaboration with Creative Partnerships Kent/ Arts Council England and supported by the Small Voice Foundation. The film will be made between 30th September – 1st October 2006 in Margate (see www.artangel.org.uk for details of both projects).
We are traffic

‘Critical Mass’ bike ride through London

*Allan Day*

On the last Friday of every month, hundreds of cyclists gather on London’s South Bank. At seven o’clock, accompanied by the tinkling of bicycle bells and the thumping of bicycle-drawn sound systems, they depart on a tour of the city. As the crowd idly weaves its way through London’s streets, its participant’s laugh and joke, and they take the opportunity to sit back and enjoy the sights. This is Critical Mass.

Critical Mass (CM) is a transnational phenomenon. The first ride took place in 1992 in San Francisco, and since then has spread all over the globe. It’s hard to state how many rides regularly occur worldwide, but the figure is certainly in the hundreds. London’s Critical Mass is a long-standing member of this movement. Begun just two years after the original San Francisco outing, it still retains a sense of the DIY-style politics of the era that witnessed Reclaim the Streets’ busiest period of activity.

The rides have a distinctly anarchical flavour. They are often described as an ‘unorganised coincidence’, with accounts stating that the cyclists are ‘just on their way home’. This spontaneity is highly valued by CM’s participants, who celebrate, almost revel in the rides’ apparent lack of leadership. There are no fixed routes and no organisers per se. Instead, the crowd often comes to a halt at junctions while the group tries to make up its mind as to which way it wants to go. When the authorities or journalists request to speak to the organisers, they are proudly told that there aren’t any.

When people see Critical Mass, one of the questions that frequently gets asked, is ‘What is it?’, or ‘What are you protesting about?’. In answering these questions, it would be inaccurate to ascribe a set of singular aims or even a common understanding of the event. For some, CM does reflect what would commonly be called political motivations, though reviewing historical evidence relating to London’s CM, it would seem that that was truer in the past than it is today. Nevertheless, one of the more prevalent understandings of CM, one that is even held by those with strong political views, is that it is an apolitical event. Indeed, CM skirts around common notions of the political, its participants facing the difficult job of working out where the realm of politics ends, and where Critical Mass sits in relation to that boundary.

For many, however, CM is simply a chance to celebrate urban cycling and to experience moving through the city in a way that isn’t available to them at any other time. Cycling is, after all, a great way to see the sights, and the event is great fun to take part in. These aren’t trivial matters in trying to explain CM’s existence either. In fact, having fun is central to what CM is all about. People wear costumes, wave banners and blow whistles, turning the event into a kind of carnival. The sound systems pump out upbeat music, with riders attempting to bounce up and down in their saddles to the beat. That the rides happen on a Friday night is also important. CM becomes a way to unwind, a way to mark the end of the working week, and a nice alternative to going to the pub. It is as much a celebration as protest.

Part of the enjoyment of participating in Critical Mass is, it must be admitted, the excitement of being subversive. CM is an essentially conflictual practice. Indeed, if the term ‘Critical Mass’ refers to anything in particular then it is a set of tactics for the occupation of space. For those who regularly cycle around the capital, this subversive occupation is often welcome. It is a grand act of table-turning for the often vulnerable, isolated cyclist. Taking part in this act can be exhilarating, a feeling which is enhanced by the experience of being in such a large crowd.

The major physical presence which is central to CM also provides a spectacle. There is much pride to be had in contributing to the often impressive sight of five or six hundred (sometimes even over a thousand) cyclists unexpectedly flooding London’s streets. This is something worth turning out for just in order to see. Actually contributing to the phenomenon is also extremely satisfying. There is a certain kind of grin you often catch on the face of someone taking part in CM.
Part of it is the mischievousness one feels in undermining the normal order of things; but it is also the feeling of cleverness that comes from the ride being such a shock to passers by - deep down, you get the sense that you know something they don’t.

Critical Mass enacts an alternative vision of the city’s streets. It is a protest through doing, a demonstration. The pageantry and noise of the rides is a serious element of this, the latter especially so. Motorised traffic colours city streets in many ways, including through sound. Accordingly, the bells, horns, and music of Critical Mass represent a radical subversion of the normal city soundscape. At the same time, this noise can also be seen to represent something more - a collective demand to be recognised as having a right to the road. It is an invocation of CM’s slogan, ‘We are traffic’. As such, a dual claim is being made, both to the use of a public good and to a legitimate place in a particular space. To be ‘traffic’ is to have a right to be on the road.

Critical Mass London meets under Waterloo Bridge between 6 and 7pm on the last Friday of every month. Bells and whistles are welcome.

Listen to Allan’s Critical Mass soundscape on www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/
Fourteen petrol stations alongside the highway between Airport Schönefeld and Alexanderplatz, Berlin, 2006

Travelling from or to the airport seems to be no longer a starting point in an adventure or holiday trip, but like an endlessly monotonous repetition of the everyday in which the uniform landscape is populated by identical and endless copies of signs.

[i] The photographs were taken in memoriam to Ed Ruscha and his „twenty-six petrol stations“ on the route 66 highway which connects Oklahoma to Los Angeles.

Gregor Stephan
‘The Silent Doors’
In this series, initially made for a guidebook of London, the emblematic sonic spaces of London nightclubs are shown when the party is over. Instead of being entrances to busy and noisy places of pleasure, the doors become curiously cold and anonymous – evoking a sense of silence.

Joel Vacheron
Four photographs taken during the first workshop session of ‘Live Sociology’ at Goldsmiths College: a year-long UK-wide five-part project on the use of new media in ethnographic research. Deptford (‘Deep-Ford’), on the south bank of the River Thames, is a lively multicultural area of London.

Chris Brauer

Paolo Cardullo

‘These two photographs are part of an ongoing project and were taken by my son, Luca Ruben aged three, on my Nikon D70’.
REVIEWs

A Search for Disorder in the Ideal City for a Conference:
A review of the 2006 International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA)
conference, Urbino, Italy.

Alison Rooke

In July this year, I attended the annual International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA) conference which was held in Urbino Italy. Having an under developed sense of Italian geography I was pleasantly surprised to find that Urbino is a small medieval walled town sitting on top of a hill, lying between the mountains and the Italian Riviera. Urbino, now a world heritage site, experienced a great cultural flowering in the 15th century, attracting artists and scholars from all over Italy and beyond. Owing to its economic and cultural stagnation from the 16th century onwards, Urbino has preserved its Renaissance appearance to a remarkable extent. Between seminars we wondered through cobbled streets, while small alleyways to the left and right offered glimpses of the surrounding countryside between towering ancient walls. At the plenary we were told that the city of Urbino was based on the famous painting 'View on an ideal city' by an Unknown Central Italian artist (active ca. 1490-1505). This was the city imagined by renaissance intellectuals which exemplified Renaissance principles of urban planning. The imaginary cityscape in the painting represents three main aspects of communal life: military, recreational, spiritual. The whole composition can be read as an allegory of the well-ordered, 'ideal' city.

This rather grand setting was the backdrop for this year's conference which had the theme of 'Eyes on the City' as its focus. The conference aims were to examine, de-construct and re-construct the layers of the city, observing how the social is embodied in the built environment and how the built environment influences contemporary human interaction. I have to say that, although there were some excellent contributions, I was somewhat disappointed in the quality of the papers and the subsequent discussion. At the conference I was struck by the ways in which visual materials were employed and interrogated. While most of the papers focussed on photography I was struck by the ways in which photographs were primarily used unproblematically as evidence. My main criticism of the conference was the way in which photographs were used and analysed. I listened to lots of papers where photographs were used to illustrate a paper by providing some complementary visual information. While other papers argued how photographs could be analysed quantitatively and be used as data providing evidence of social events and phenomena. In my work I often use a method which is generally described as 'photo elicitation' which is a method that involves asking interviewees to discuss photographs. In these situations using photographs in this way opens up spaces of reflection and self-interpretation. At the conference I went to many sessions where 'photo elicitation' was discussed as a method, however, many of the presenters discussed the content of the photographs as straightforward evidence which was analysed statistically (for example analysing the choices made 'five people photographed their pets, six people photographed sports equipment') rather than examining the significance of these choices to the participants and interpreting these choices. Few papers examined the ways in which photographs construct truth, or indeed, how visual
sociology was constructing itself as a discipline. I was troubled by the attachment to positivist epistemologies and methodologies which reduced the visual to evidence and the lack of discussion of photographs as ambiguous and emotive spaces where complicated, aesthetic decisions about frame, depth of field and focus come together in the production of the image.

Three days of the familiar conference format of three 20 minute papers followed by questions took its toll and left little space for dialogue. I was not alone in feeling disappointed that this international gathering offered little workshop space which could have opened up a valuable opportunity for some focussed dialogue with other theorists and practitioners working on similar concerns.

There were some highlights of the conference. Several sessions engaged with the politics of vision. A panel on Visualising Hurricane Katrina, included papers on the visual regimes at work in the media representations of Hurricane Katrina, which examined media representations of the disaster to show how the ways black Americans are made visible excludes them from occupying the position of legitimate victim in the national imaginary; a paper on the loss of black cultural capital and the potential Disneyfication of New Orleans black cultures in the rebuilding of the cultural quarter which addresses the USA’s national ambivalence about New Orleans as an immoral classed, racialised and sexualised city. We also had the opportunity to see how photographers and sociologists working together can produce powerful insights into social worlds and the ethical and legal dilemmas when ‘studying up’. Alejandro Tomas is a photographer who works with the sociologist William Donhoff. Alejandro had gone from recording the effects of the decisions of the American power elite when working as a concerned war photographer in Vietnam to studying ‘Visualising the American Power Elite at Play’ at ‘Los Rancheros’ – an annual camp where the US power elite such as Ronald Reagan, the commander of the Marine Corp and top politicians amongst others get to play at being cowboys for a week. This involves drinking copious amounts of alcohol, wear black face, keep large numbers of prostitutes busy and push the boundary between homosociability and homosexuality.

However, between the highlights I sat through a lot of papers that seemed to either falter at the point of analysing the visual sociologically or a discussion of the epistemologies of vision that visual sociologists face in their work. Caroline Knowles reminds us that visualizing the social world, what we see and how we see it, is like social theory itself (2004:02) and that seeing, theorizing and writing are acts of interpretation. I was left wondering what kind of a sociological imagination is at work in International Visual Sociology?

The conference did offer some insights into understanding the ‘Ideal City’ and the different ways in which cities are conceived and lived. On the last evening I was fortunate enough to be watching the Italian Football team win a 2-0 victory against Germany in the World Cup semi final. The moment the game was won the well ordered city of Urbino immediately erupted into the kind of public revelry its planners may never have imagined in their dreams of civility. Urbino became the kind of ‘open-minded public space’ celebrated by urban theorists such as Marshall Berman. The narrow streets were quickly filled with mopeds, motorbikes, vans and cars all rushing at a dangerous speed down very narrow cobbled streets to the main square. We pressed our backs against the city walls to let them pass. The square quickly filled with hundreds of people of all ages singing, blowing horns and whistles, waving flags, letting off fire works and throwing each other into fountain. As the cars entered the square they were surrounded by people who then rocked the cars so hard they almost turned over, before letting them pass out of the square. Even the police cars with sirens and flashing lights were not exempt from this treatment. Everyone had a high old time until the early hours of the morning. In the midst of this I spotted quite a few visual sociologists taking photos of this remarkable spectacle from the edge of the square (I include myself amongst them). I couldn’t help wondering whether we would open up our visual sociological imaginations learn more about this city by momentarily putting our cameras down and being open to getting thrown in the fountain by the locals!
Comment by Tine Blom:

The papers and presentations of the IVSA-conference in Urbino were broad in scope, quality and in the use of visual medium: most used it to support their main theory and arguments using the visual as “evidence” and illustration, fewer saw the visual as the main topic of analysis, and even fewer used it as- a subjective expression of people’s lifeworlds. Still, the conference gave inspiration to the possibilities of further visual work and ways to combine it with research.

Karner from USA presented her project on “Visualizing Selves: Auto-Photography as Participatory Research”. People were asked to take 20 photographs accompanied by a caption telling us who they are. Main aspects of self-presentation were the physical (body), social self, reflective self and the “oceanic”- which is floating and vague with no behavioural expectations. She found that self-presentation through photography was much richer than written descriptions, among other things because they also included signs and symbols.

Chalfen from USA presented his project on mobile camera phones “Can you see me now” “Urban Camera Phone Use”. He found that there was an enormous increase in the production of images, that the scope of amateur photography was broadened and that the youth are leading the way. He argued that this use of technology changes the notion of what is worth looking at.

Lapenta from Italy and Denmark presented “A Methodological Approach to the Analysis of Photo Elicited Interviews: A Comparative Case Study”. Language is the tool for producing action, so what then exactly is the effect of using photographs? The use of photographs alters power-relations. The visual is less subdued to discourse genres than language, turning it into a conversation where the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is more egalitarian. It does not fundamentally break with the discourse of the interview, but changes its quality: the use of photographs produces richer, more consistent and coherent answers.

There was also a photographic exhibition by Capovilla from Milan entitled “Fragmented Urban Views”: large photographs of Italian squares composed by several smaller photographs, taken from different angles and at different times of the day, giving an excellent portrayal of the daily life and activities in the squares.
Another Side of Surrealism

Victor Venetsanopoulos

The recent exhibition ‘Undercover Surrealism’ at the Hayward Gallery emphasized a side of the surrealist movement which had not yet been adequately explored. Bataille’s ‘Documents’, a revolutionary journal which gathered a number of dissident surrealists, as well as other surrealist journals such as ‘La Revolution Surrealiste’ and ‘Minotaure’ provide a drastic and mind stimulating approach to social issues concerning the urban landscape.

‘Documents’, perhaps the most unorthodox and controversial journal, merges writing and works of art that cover a diverse number of subjects ranging from poetry, painting, photography and film to anthroplogy, archeology and musicology. However, most importantly, ‘Documents’ exemplifies how other forms of representation like painting, photography or sculpture can be incorporated within a social analysis in order to construct and deconstruct our society.

Unfortunately, the surrealist movement is not usually associated with these works of the earlier period which are much more revolutionary and certainly very different from the later manifestations of the movement which became popular through the paintings of Dali and Magritte, Bunuel’s films, and led to the wider assumption that surrealism was all about frenzy, dreams and the subconscious.

What makes the early period of surrealism, and especially Bataille’s ‘Documents’, exceptional is their primary concern to transgress social boundaries by revealing the surreal in everyday life. In fact, it is their inventive and imaginative spirit that transforms the urban landscape in an inexhaustible source of subjects to investigate and deconstruct. For example, Hollywood becomes a modern myth maker and a place of pilgrimage, the slaughterhouse becomes a religious temple for sacrifices and words are granted a taste.

Moreover, some of the recurring themes in surrealist circles were chance, surprise and accident in the streets; useless and outmoded objects of mass culture in the flea market; and finally, the Zone, a hybrid area at the outskirts of Paris where no construction was allowed, which eventually became a place where homeless and marginalized people settled.

However, Surrealism is not only interesting because of its revolutionary insights into modern society that often shock and surprise the reader but also because journals like the ‘Documents’, ‘Minotaure’ and ‘La Revolution Surrealiste’ encourage the juxtaposition of language with other forms of representation - mostly photography, a medium that was often privileged, like Brassai’s photographs appearing in ‘Minotaure’ next to Breton’s writing or Atget’s Photographs published in ‘La Revolution Surrealiste’ next to the writings of Marcel Noll. Another good example is ‘Nadja’, Breton’s book which was accompanied by Boiffard’s photographs.

The reason the photographic medium is often privileged in the surrealist journals is not accidental. The fact that we see eponymous or even anonymous photographs appearing is because, unlike painting which needs the imagination of the creator to reach the surreal and thus the outcome is filtered through the unconscious of the painter, photography has a more direct and often vulgar access to reality that permits it to record and document the surreal in every day life.

The camera, by stopping the natural flow of time and by capturing fragments of reality is more capable in revealing the surreal in the everyday, since its existence couldn’t be more present than in the real world. As Jan Svankmajer, a well known surrealist filmmaker, said “Surrealism exists in reality, not besides it” (in Walker 2002:21) or, to borrow Ian Walker’s words, who writes on the relationship between photography and surrealism in his book City Gorged With Dreams, “photography could anchor the surreal in the real” (Walker 2002:11).

Reference: Walker, Ian City Gorged With Dreams 2002 UK ManchesterUniversity press
Brianne Selman

As many joke titles as I came up with (and I'm still hoping somebody runs a graduate conference called Pre-tensions!), I'm glad we went with 'Failing Better' (a Samuel Beckett quote with the mildly facetious subtitle of The Greatest MA Conference on Earth). In the end, despite the stress we all shared in preparing for it, I think the subtitle held true. Intended as a forum for students to share our research and ideas, as well as to participate in an all day conference, an incredibly high standard of scholarship and interest was displayed. It was a collective effort and there was a great audience turnout of fellow MA students, PhD students, faculty and people from the community.

We invited students from MA courses that had 'culture' somewhere in their title (Culture, Globalisation and the City, Cultural Studies, Anthropology and Cultural Politics and Photography and Urban Cultures) – panels came together remarkably well, demonstrating the convergence of interests. The morning panel, with myself and Paul Hendrich talking about Pirate Politics and Gregor Claude chairing, helped set up some of the themes that recurred throughout the rest of the day – politics of centre and periphery, inclusion and exclusion (as well as the possibilities for 'restoring' Deptford Town Hall – keep an eye out for the pirate campaigns in 2007!). This was followed by a panel that was linked together by the theme of sound (no small coincidence that this was when we discovered the lack of sound in our 'new' room – saved by uber-chair Ben Gidley's quick AV-speaker-run), starring Katina Saurili, Maria Dumas, and India Macweeney. From French Rap, to car hipping, to a living-dead Adorno, we were not only entertained, but also genuinely provoked to think about notions of community and representation.

In the afternoon, Rui Miguel Cepeda and Claire Heafford started off the panel on art – Rui's film on Mexico and Claire's description of an installation at the ICA provided a foil for an extended discussion of some of the themes running through the papers up until that point, kicked off by chair John Hutnyk wondering about cars as obscure objects of desire.

The sheer variety of presentations should be commented on. Robert Jeffery's presentation contained my favourite slide entitled "This Man is Disingenuous" - a reference to Tony Blair's double standard in terms of alcohol licensing and condemning binge drinking. In a panel that traversed issues of class and gender in interesting ways, Craig Edwards and Eleanor Lindsay-Fynn also presented strong photographic work, again negotiating the delicate subject of identity and transgression. Chair Alison Rook provided stimulating links between the papers.

The final panel was chaired by Michael Keith and was a series of papers by Erdem Erven, Simon Cole, and Tara Blake-Wilson that addressed many subtle and honest questions about the practices of anthropology. Indeed, in a manner far more refreshing than the jaded and bitter critique that often emanates from the well established scholars in the field, all three offered sharp and insightful critiques – and Simon's invocation to get brave enough to incorporate politics into anthropology should be well heeded. The day ended with an incredibly searching film by Tara that helped to set a tone for another discussion that could have easily lasted for days (and hopefully will).

A post-party at The Foundry in Shoreditch was the perfect stress-relieving social event to carry on many of the conversations started throughout the day in a less formal atmosphere. Special thanks to Claire Heafford and John Hutnyk, who provided the sumptuous spread in the basement (and must have sweet talked the establishment, to make our tab stretch so far!) The space, part gallery, part giant spinning metal manhole, all grunge, was fun, relaxed and definitely friendly.

The conference was a terrific learning experience. Not just in terms of getting over the nerves of presenting (for many of us) our first paper, but also actually listening to the innovative and interesting work done by our peers across the departments and engaging in debates and discussions. I think we proved the high quality of research and writing occurring in the Masters programmes at Goldsmiths. As an opportunity to extend beyond our disciplinary boundaries, and engage across departments, it was an invaluable experience, and a genuine step in the direction of cementing an academic community of interested and interesting people. And, all AV technical difficulties aside (and I will never snicker again at a Prof that cannot get their PowerPoint to work) it was fun!
Book Review:
‘Londonstani’ by Gautam Malkani;
‘Tourism’ by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal

Anamik Saha

With the recent protests surrounding the filming of Monica Ali’s Brick Lane, the debate concerning authenticity and representation that persists in discussions of black and Asian authors once again entered the public sphere. It seems a shame that novels produced by anyone of ‘ethnic’ descent are reduced to these racialised discussions but sometimes framing texts within such discourses is unavoidable. This is particularly the case with two debut novels recently published by British Asian authors: ‘Londonstani’ by Gautam Malkani and ‘Tourism’ by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal.

Set in the bleak post-war suburbs of Hounslow, ‘Londonstani’ is narrated by Jas, an awkward teenager who has managed to gain acceptance into a small gang of Sikh and Hindu ‘rudeboys’. The story centres on these young men and their various entanglements with gang-fights, girlfriends, domineering mothers, flash cars, Bollywood, R&B, izzat and an over-elaborate mobile phone heist. In particular, the novel follows Jas’ development from an initially insecure and self-loathing “gimp”; to a more assertive, independently-minded individual. His relationship with a Muslim girl and involvement with organised crime lead to an unnecessary melodramatic conclusion that overshadows the underlying tale of a young man’s unravelling relationship with his masculine and racial identity.

Desi culture and sociocultural relations is at the heart of ‘Londonstani’. Somewhat predictably, Malkani’s subject matter has led to accusations of stereotyping. Certainly, plotlines involving arranged marriages, interfaith relationships and gang warfare make these criticisms difficult to dispute. However it is the style of the narration that has generated the most discussion. In its first person narrative, Malkani adopts a rudeboy dialect that is an aggressive hybrid of Punjabi, cockney and gangsta-slang. While this style initially sits uneasily, the sharpness and inventiveness become more apparent and the lines become easier to digest. However, that is not to say Malkani fully succeeds, and the occasional slip into Ali G-isms undermines the actual depth of the characters.

Malkani’s choice of narrative style has been criticised for othering Asian cultures and reinferring notions of difference. But these arguments appear to ignore the major twist at the end of the book that rather unexpectedly, pulls the rug from under the very notion of an authentic British Asian identity. This ending was no doubt intended to highlight the possibility or representing the Other and the inherent flaws in judging a text based on its representation of an authentic identity. However the end revelation is unconvincing and instead causes the reader to question the plausibility of everything that preceded it. Malkani’s intentions were worthy, but his skills as a storyteller are not yet fully developed as to pull off such an ambitious manoeuvre.

‘Tourism’ by Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, does not engage with the politics of representation in the same direct way as Malkani – this is not necessarily a book about being Asian - but his expression of second generation Asian identity emerges through his attack on politically-correct liberal white society. The novel follows the story of Bhupinder ‘Puppy’ Singh Johal, a cynical, emotionally-detached Southall-born thirty-something Sikh. Depressed with his status as a struggling journalist, Puppy infiltrates the wealthy metropolitan circles of west London where he falls in love with wealthy lawyer Sanupa who, unfortunately for Puppy, is engaged.

Also adopting a first person narrative (which seems more autobiographical than ‘Londonstani’), Dhaliwal’s style is nihilistic and unflinching and revels in his defiantly un-PC observations. His explicit, detached descriptions of sex are clearly influenced by Michel Houellebecq, and the ambiguous misogyny and homophobia are deliberately designed to offend the reader’s own liberal sensibilities.

We begin to sympathise with Puppy however when he describes his upbringing as a young Sikh in a racist British society. However Dhaliwal manages deftly to avoid a caught-between-two-cultures orthodoxy that is prevalent in depictions of Asian youth. Instead Puppy’s various journeys between his filthy Hackney flat and the rich surroundings of Notting Hill, take extra symbolic value. Puppy identifies himself as a tourist which allows him to participate in both worlds with a detachment that helps him manage what is essentially a typically masculine existential crisis. His working-class Asian identity means that he will never be part of the status quo, but he believes that taking advantage of British society’s postcolonial melancholia can lead to some form of reparation.

Despite a surprisingly poignant ending, the central character of Tourism is still not a particularly sympathetic one, which can leave the reader with an ambivalent feeling about the book. Additionally Dhaliwal’s cutting prose can quickly descend from superior wit into plain facetiousness, which is equally frustrating. However, where Tourism succeeds is in writing about an Asian character that manages to avoid a reductionist debate about authenticity. Instead, a particular desi identity emerges secondary to the story. Puppy is a complex, fully rounded character; ‘Asian’ is just one axis in the many complicated intersections of his identity. That is not to say Malkani made a mistake in deciding to address these issues head-on. But whereas ‘Londonstani’ leaves itself open to troubling debates about hybridity and authenticity, ‘Tourism’ manages to sidestep these pitfalls altogether.
Book Review:
Low Down: junk, jazz and other fairy tales from childhood' by A.J.Albany
Roger Hewitt

Being one of Charlie Parker's favourite piano players could have been part of his downfall. It was Joe Albany that Parker always sought out in L.A. They roomed together, gigged together, did the white powder together. Albany was a jazz legend at an early age, oblique in music and life, in and out of jails and hospitals, re-surfed in the 70s, died in 1988 leaving a handful of recordings and a few scattered children. One of these A.J. has written a book about herself as a little girl brought up entirely by Albany during a fragment of his life, once her mother – an even worse heroin addict than her father – had quite lost the trail, never to find it again.

So we see this little four-year-old kid curled up on chairs in the corner of smoky bars, overseen by kindly hookers and bartenders, covered with other people's overcoats till the early hours when her dad finished playing and took her back home. We see her in poorly-lit rooms with sparse, broken furniture, a big-eyed little girl looking at the world through apartment windows, cracks in doors, glasses of flat cola, someone else's mirror. Beautiful little vignettes. She may never write another book. It's ok to write a book and not then be a writer. This one's a statement. It catches a life on the shore of another. It catches pain and beauty and comedy and a view from below table level. You really don't doubt its truth. It's called Low Down: junk, jazz and other fairy tales from childhood, and, for some reason, has not been readly available in the UK even though Bloomsbury are the publishers and it's now been out for three years.

She has some memories when her mother and father were together; Mr and Mrs Hipster, dishing out the cool – mom had been Ginsberg's last heterosexual lover before Neal Cassady – then through the bars of her cot trickled the sordid images of all they consumed. Neglect. Wandering the nearby streets one night, looking for help when her mother was out of her head on her latest chemical, "I was all of five years old and half naked, one would assume that a friendly face might emerge from behind a blank door – but that was not the case. It was my first lesson in humanity. Terrified women peeked out from their curtains shooing me away. My parents had developed a reputation as the local lunatic druggies … I was simply their demon spawn."

She did develop her own tastes in music and she did, despite his hopeless attempt to bring her up on his own, love her father and remembers her years with him as a tangle of special visions, not all of them unpleasant. None of his stream of girlfriends proved to be any obstacle to their closeness. One time her dad and a girlfriend called Jackie were having a fight "over matters of dope and sex so lurid that I felt my head would explode if I heard another word." So A.J. turned up the stereo and listened, her ear crammed to the speaker, to Marlene Dietrich singing Cole Porter's 'You do Something To Me' at maximum pitch. Jackie rushed over, snapped the record away and sent it sailing out the window. "What's wrong with your fucking kid? She's as crazy as you are!" Crossing that line was the end for Jackie, who Dad pushed down the hall and out of their lives. He returned to nurse A.J. in his arms and sing the song. "Over and over he sang, and I quietly rejoiced that we were both as mad as each other."

As she grew older she also developed her own fantasy world which mingled very well with the surreal splendour of her actual existence. One of the earliest objects of her emergent maturity was an entertainer who was, though some thirteen years older than her, only forty-eight inches high. A.J. and her dad were hiding from the law and holing up in the apartment of a friend and Alain was an occasional visitor: "Perhaps I was a sick and devious nine-year-old to be so enamoured of a twenty-two-year-old morphine addicted porno-movie dwarf. It's a possibility that I have always been comfortable with."

When she committed her fantasies to her journal it was found one night and exposed to a small party of guests by Nadine, another of Dad's girlfriends, who read aloud: "Alain my love, I long for the day our lips meet, and we run away on a silvery horse and …" Dad silently snatched the book away. The silence that ensued was punctured by one of the guests: "Ha! That's cute. Kids are something else."

"Well, I'd keep them apart. Isn't there a word for people who like midgets?"

"He's a dwarf, and fuck you, Nadine. She's an empathetic kid – always for the underdog, picks out the runt of the litter."

"Oh, sure, no worries, man – she's a sweet kid."

There are also some lovely photos in this little book. It's a very nice read. A.J. Albany, the sleeve tells us, 'lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their two children, Charlie and Dylan' – what else!
LISTINGS

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism
Seminars and Events

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism is a series of special inter-disciplinary seminars and events exploring new modes of inhabiting, imagining and making cities from progressive black and culturally diverse perspectives. Black urbanism is defined here as the impact, contribution and engagement of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities with the physical, economic, social, political and cultural environment in urban areas.

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism is the title of a research project being developed at the CUCR by Paul Goodwin a research associate in the centre. The project aims to: re-think the way black communities have been conceptualised in urban thought; develop perspectives of black urbanism as forms of 'dissident' socio-spatial interventions in cities; and explore alternative visions of urban life by black artists and thinkers. The project will initiate scholarly debate, stimulate community dialogues and produce original research reports.

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism (seminars and events) will address issues of black urbanism in the UK with a focus on London as a key 'laboratory' in the evolution of forms of urban multi-culture. There will be two major series. Series 1 – The Regeneration Game: challenges of black urbanism - will critically examine current urban regeneration agendas in light of the impact on and contributions of black communities to the urban landscape in London and beyond. With major urban projects in Elephant and Castle, Thames Gateway and the 2012 Olympics set to radically transform London's architectural and socio-cultural environment this series will constructively question the engagement of urban regeneration with black urbanism (defined above) from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Series 2 – Re-Visioning the City - will take a broader view of black urbanism and explore how black artists, writers, musicians, cultural workers and urban practitioners are re-thinking and re-visioning processes of urban change and the creation of new urban spaces, real or imagined. The emphasis here will be on questions of improvisation in black creative practices and how black artists have imagined utopia/ dystopia.

Punctuating this themed series of half-day seminars will be a number of programmed activities and special events: a curated exhibition around the themes of Re-Visioning Black Urbanism; various architectural and urban themed music events and a programme of talks and debates with urban movers and shakers: architects, artists, designers and community organisers.

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism will be a collaborative venture between the CUCR, Goldsmiths and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. These major research and cultural institutions are based in the heart of areas undergoing profound and long-term urban transformations. Greenwich and Deptford are also historically significant areas in the urban history of black communities in Britain in terms of slavery, trade and black settlement. The series will begin in October or November of 2006 extending throughout 2007.

Paul Goodwin is a geographer and urban theorist based at the CUCR.
To find out more about Black Urbanism visit www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr
Reggae Dancehall Culture:
The Hidden Voice of the black experience in London

In July 2006 Goldsmiths College hosted the introductory presentations by Professor Les Back and Dr. William (Lez) Henry for an exciting new Heritage Lottery Funded project entitled, 'Reggae Dancehall Culture: The Hidden Voice of the Black Experience in London'.

A group of young research volunteers (15-17 year olds) will raise awareness of the importance of Reggae Sound System culture and its role in documenting the cultural practices of Caribbean migrants and their subsequent generations. The researchers will focus on personal testimonies, photography, music, fashion, and the cultural politics of the 1970s and 80s in order to produce a 45-minute documentary, an interactive CD-Rom, a website and an educational booklet.

The project will be launched during Black History Month at the Albany in Deptford South east London on October 21st in the afternoon, followed by a live event during the evening featuring artists such as Tippa Irie, Lorna G, Papa Levi, Top Cat, Tenor Fly, Peter Hunnigale and a host of others.

The project was conceived by co founder of Nu-Beyond Ltd: Learning By Choice! (www.nubeyond.com) and long-time Goldsmiths’ affiliate, Dr. William (Lez) Henry, whose book 'What the Deejay Said: A Critique from the Street!' will be launched in tandem with the ‘Reggae Dancehall Culture’ project.

There will be an exhibition of photographs of Riga taken by the MA students of Photography and Urban Cultures at

The Viewfinder Photography Gallery
Greenwich
1st December to 11th January 2007

See www.viewfinder.org.uk for more details

For all news, events, seminars and conferences organized by the CUCR please refer to website:
www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/html/news.html
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