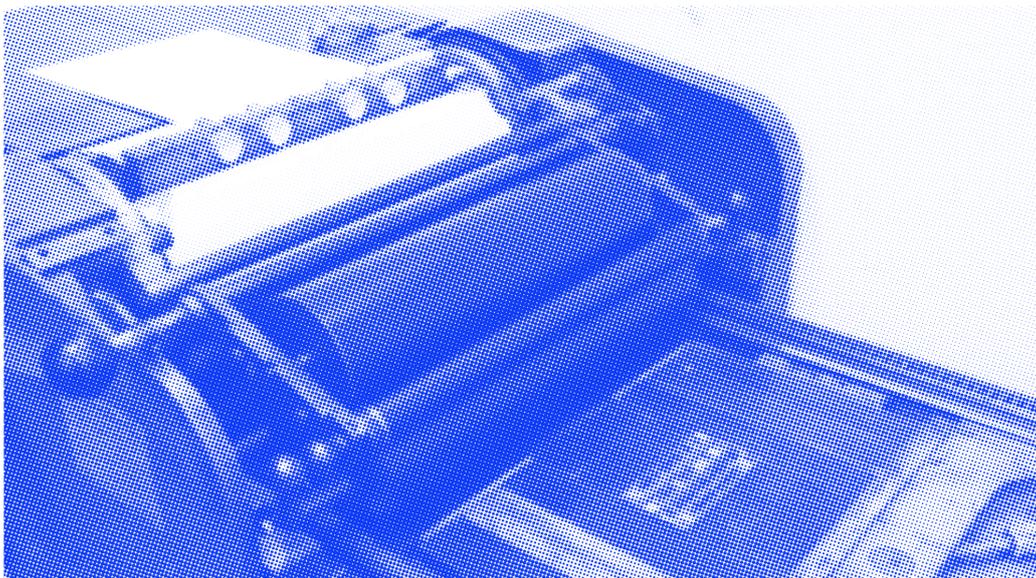

MOVEABLE TYPE

2016

The UCL English Department
Graduate Journal



Contents

- 4 Editorial
- 6 Dissidence, Compromise, and Submission in Higher Education Today
– Scarlett Baron
- 11 Patrick Keiller, Stonebridge Park, and the ‘subjective transformation
of space’ – David Anderson
- 23 Off the Beaten Track: Jack Kerouac on Robert Frank – Elsa Court
- 33 ‘Unexpected fruit’: The ingredients of Tarr. – Rachel Murray
- 41 ‘Accidental Archaeology’: the resurrected texts of Iain Sinclair and
Derek Jarman – Jess Chandler
- 48 ‘A very long list of things I’m not doing’: An interview with
Philip Horne – Leo Robson
- 54 Self-Portrait in a John Ashbery Book
- 55 ‘Grumping away quite happily’: Karl Miller and Dan Jacobson at UCL
– Simon Hammond

Contributors

David Anderson is a PhD researcher at University College London.

Scarlett Baron is a lecturer in English at University College London. Her next book, *A Genealogy of Intertextuality*, will be published in 2017.

Jess Chandler is co-founder of Test Centre.

Elsa Court has just completed her PhD at University College London.

Simon Hammond is a PhD researcher at University College London.

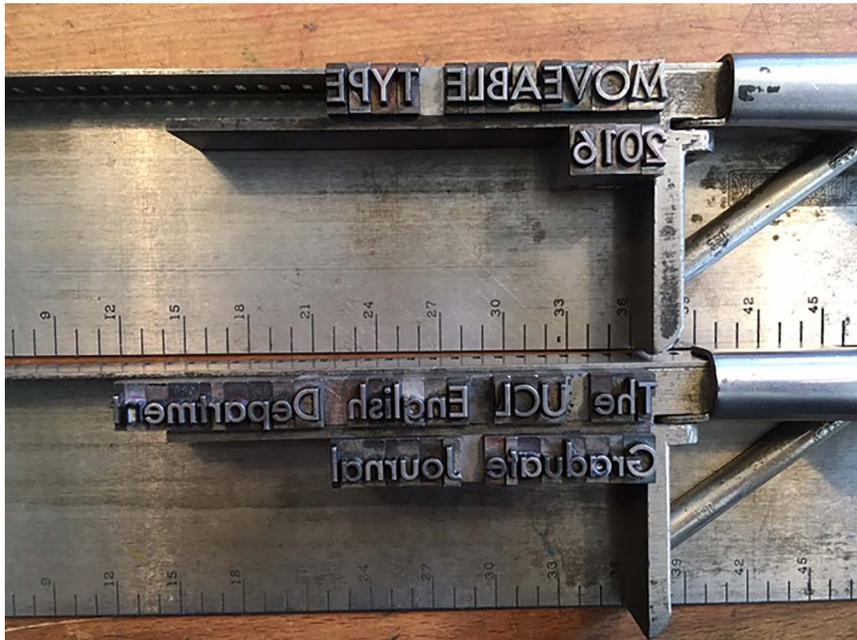
Rachel Murray is a PhD researcher at the University of Bristol.

Leo Robson is the lead fiction reviewer for the New Statesman.

About the Cover

Cover text printed using a Vandercook Universal I press, hand set with original Futura lead type. Cover photograph taken during the printing process.

Many thanks to Julia Lee Mayer for graphic design, printing and photography.



MOVEABLE TYPE

Editorial

A casual observer might well tell you that the materially printed word is at its lowest ebb. The patter of keyboards that resounds throughout the British library has all but smothered the scratch of graphite; today bookworms are more often found staring at glistening Apples than pouring over yellowing pages. This is the case even in the atria, where the recent installation of plug-point-equipped desks signifies a resigned acceptance to their unofficial colonisation. Clattering typewriters, such as the Underwoods on display in the gift shop, have become as anachronistic as a twenty-a-day habit or career employment.

Computerised text means that the activities of Sherlock Holmes in *A Case of Identity* (1891) are today something out of an ancient, tactile past. His discovery of ‘some little slurring over the “e”, and a slight defect in the tail of the “r”’ on a typewritten note help solve the mystery, and prompt Holmes to consider devoting one of his famous monographs to ‘the typewriter and its relation to crime’. These days such a thesis might well risk doctoral study. After all, as litterateurs still prizing the undiscover'd manuscript as the grail of scholarly endeavour, we are all necessarily closet antiquarians. But with writing the question is complex: to live is to leave traces, yet, as Roland Barthes so concisely put it, ‘Has not writing been for centuries the acknowledgement of a debt, the guarantee of an exchange, the sign of a representation?’. An i.o.u. note, that is, for an experience that has already happened, a *thingness* that has never been there in the text itself.

Johannes Gutenberg’s revolutionary idea of placing moveable metal letters in a frame was met with howls of protest; the Fin de Siècle revolution in the literary market provoked fears that the newly-literate, newly-enfranchised masses would turn to socialism (they didn’t). But if scholars at work in the British Library can console themselves that the ghosting of digitization is just another shift in the typeface, an evolution not an extinction, can they do the same for the radical changes underway in their universities, in our case just a short walk away on Gower Street?

We fear not. The government’s white paper on higher education, published earlier this year, sets a bleak course for the privatisation of the ‘knowledge economy’. Scarlett Baron takes up this subject in our issue’s opening essay, giving a personal account of the instrumentalisation of the Humanities. In despair she turns to Michel Houellebecq’s *Submission* (2016), a novel where the battle for the soul of higher education is but one element of the monetisation of every fact of human experience. What role, Baron asks, can literature and literary criticism have in articulating or providing a space for resistance?

Baron's essay was originally delivered at the department's 2015 graduate conference, *Dissidence*, in response to a keynote by Stefan Collini on the future of the university. This issue – online only, ghosted by financial pressure on our department - includes academic papers from both this and the previous year's conference, *Transformations*, covering artists and writers including Wyndham Lewis, Jack Kerouac, and Patrick Keiller. Also featured is an interview with Philip Horne about his career studying Henry James, an essay by Jess Chandler about her publishing house, Test Centre, where text and tactility meet in thought-provoking ways, and a found poem from the dust-laden stacks of Senate House Library. The issue closes with reminiscences about Dan Jacobson and Karl Miller, important figures in the history of UCL English, and champions of the value of literature and literary study, who both sadly passed away in 2014.

David Anderson, Simon Hammond, Charlotte Jones, Elizabeth Mills

Dissidence, Compromise, and Submission in Higher Education Today

by Scarlett Baron

Is dissidence possible in higher education today?

Three years ago I became a lecturer in a friendly, well regarded, and sensibly run English department. Since then, the pleasure and relief of having joined such an institution – magnified by the intense employment-related anxieties of my doctoral and postdoctoral years – have not abated. And yet to a degree such feelings endure in spite of the day-to-day realities of university life. Indeed, these resilient sentiments sometimes seem but vestiges of a conception of academia I have already been forced to relinquish.

Academic life has turned out to be substantially different from the exalted visions of rigorous teaching and arduous scholarship I once entertained. I feel as strongly now about the value of literature and its study as I ever did. And yet my experiences within an institution which might be expected to provide an ideal environment for such a pursuit instead conspire to foster a strong sense that my work, and my reasons for making it central to my life, are misunderstood, devalued, and actively interfered with at every turn. With startling regularity, I find myself disheartened, aggrieved, or incensed by the bureaucratic obstacles and administrative guff that are thrown in my way.

The story is a familiar one – one told in the numerous books penned in defence of universities in general, and the humanities in particular, in recent years. It is the story told by Stefan Collini in *What Are Universities For?* (2013), by Helen Small in *The Value of the Humanities* (2012), by Thomas Docherty in *Universities at War* (2014). It is a story of misrepresentation and disempowerment – the story of the imposition of what Collini calls ‘an increasingly economic agenda on universities over the past two decades.’ In practice, this imposition takes the form of managerial insistence that all academic activity be translatable – and indeed swiftly translated – into indices of relevance to the worlds of policy and commerce.

Like many of my colleagues, I spend a fair amount of time publicly complaining and privately fuming about the way things stand – about the need to think about the ‘delivery’ of syllabi, the inculcation of ‘transferable skills,’ the ‘impact’ and ‘relevance’ of research whose aims are frankly incommensurate with such

governmental watchwords. But neither of these activities amount to meaningful dissidence. And for all the swelling chorus of frustration emerging from the country's universities, no truly effective channel for dissidence appears to have yet been found.

The difficulty is partly that the problems and parties involved are impossibly numerous and inextricably intertwined. For one thing, it is very hard to know to whom, or to what, academics should in fact be mounting resistance. Should we be expressing dissidence from the government? From the electorate it claims to represent? Or does the root of the problem lie in something far more abstract and intractable – in what Fredric Jameson famously termed the 'logic of late capitalism,' with its infinite ambit and concomitant ring of utter irreversibility? Or is the enemy – as one is tempted to call a faceless problem in beleaguered times – on the inside? Should one's ire be directed at the high-ranking university administrators who demand that such measures as are set out by the government of the day be implemented – that the game promptly and efficiently be played, the rules swiftly abided by? Have our high-fee-paying students themselves become the source of some of the problems we used to be able to locate outside the academy? Have they themselves, to a degree, become the mouthpieces of a view of education structured and supersaturated by economic thinking? In a sense, how could their expectations and demands not partly be shaped by the economic transactions that subtend their studies and that will govern their financial arrangements for some years beyond? Certainly, a number of them already seem to speak of their studies in the same instrumental, quantitative language – asking for more contact hours, more handouts, more guidelines and guarantees – as dominates public discourse about education. Finally, the enemy may be within the walls in an even more perturbing way: it is worrying but realistic to suspect that the language of business, with its 'outputs' and 'deliverables,' may have begun to colonise our own minds.

Aside from this uncertainty as to where responsibility lies – often the only answer seems to be 'everywhere' – it seems difficult to know what can concretely be done to alter the status quo without seriously endangering what sound and untrammelled teaching and research one can still get away with.

It is risky to teach or conduct research in ways that depart from certain modish formulae. To teach in ways which do not fit the assessment-focused, packaged-learning formats that are currently in vogue is to risk jeopardising one's own standing within a department, but also, via the National Student Survey, to damage that department in the eyes of the faculty, the school, the university, and of course the media and its league tables. And to carry out research into areas of thought or knowledge that are not currently fashionable (that is, easily convertible into mercantilistic political clichés), is drastically to reduce one's chances of obtaining external funding, the securing of which is key to the realisation of major scholarly projects.

So by and large we muddle on, teaching in ways we hope are worthwhile whilst also (or despite) satisfying fee-paying students; and writing often preposterous research proposals which make promises about ‘impact deliverables and milestones,’ gush about ‘leadership development plans,’ and detail unique ‘project management skills.’

One dreams of not compromising in such ways – of making dramatic statements, undertaking sensational action, leading mass rebellion. And yet when soberly considered the large majority of such plans promise only the temporary alleviation of anger expressed, and the likely dissatisfaction of harming the wrong people: one’s own students, one’s own department, oneself.

The temptation, in the face of all this, is to play the ostrich and bury oneself in books. The remedy is only partly escapist – for fictions about higher education do have some counsel to offer. David Lodge’s satires of the educational policies of the 1980s are a case in point. In *Nice Work* (1988), the Head of the English Department at Rummidge University receives a memo about a new Industry Shadow Scheme. ‘As you are no doubt aware,’ it begins,

1986 has been designated Industry Year by the Government. The DES, through the UGC, have urged the CVCP to ensure that universities throughout the UK [...] make a special effort in the coming year to show themselves responsive to the needs of industry [...] There is a widespread feeling in the country that universities are ‘ivory tower’ institutions, whose staff are ignorant of the realities of the modern commercial world. Whatever the justice of this prejudice, it is important in the present economic climate that we should do our utmost to dispel it.

The mindless acronymic bureaucratese, the knowledge that the whole exercise is conceived of as a deceitful pretence from the start, and the disgusted academic helplessness which follows the launch of the new scheme, are all painfully familiar. Little has changed it seems, and this is in itself a depressing observation. Indeed, in spite of the nebulous but widely shared sense that the requirement to justify the humanities in terms of practical usefulness is a new phenomenon, the pressure – framed in the kaleidoscopically shifting and reforming jargon of succeeding political fads – has in fact been exerted for decades.

Lodge’s depictions of university life are full of such crisp renderings of the plight of literary academics. His fine accounts of ridiculous government initiatives and absurd academic situations play a large part in making his campus novels the comic delight that they are. Yet in a sense the laughter Lodge so successfully arouses diminishes the satirical bite of his parodies. There is

something comforting and cosy rather than dissident about Lodge's clear-sighted ventriloquy.

The same cannot be said of the satire of France's academic institutions published by Michel Houellebecq last January. True to his reputation as an uncompromising debunker of entrenched assumptions, Houellebecq's portrayal of the decadence of France's universities strikes a disturbing note. As was widely reported at the time, *Soumission* was published on the very day the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks took place – a bizarre coincidence which propelled the seemingly prophetic book to the top of French and European best-seller charts. Amid the outrage that followed, little attention was paid to the fact that the novel, as well as seeming to adumbrate a clash of civilisations between secular France and its Muslim citizens, is about the country's higher education system and its relationship to the country's governing classes. In the book, the election of an intelligent, highly educated, moderate, and likeable Muslim to the country's presidency leads to what is in effect an annexation of the country's universities by the government. The universities are briefly closed down; when they re-open, they have been redecorated with calligraphed suras from the Koran and pictures of Mecca. More importantly, conversion to Islam has become a condition of continued employment. Those who resist the overtures of the university's new governance are generously pensioned off and effectively silenced. The change to the new regime happens surreally smoothly. The new academic year gets underway under the auspices of submission – the submission of women to men, the submission of men to God, the submission of higher education to its new political masters.

The narrator, François – his name evidently chosen to indicate his metonymic function as the symbolic representative of his country – is a respected professor at the Sorbonne. At first, François is a low-level collaborator with the new regime. He does not convert to Islam, but he does take the generous pension offered him. After a period of intense wooing by the powers that be, however, François is persuaded to return to the Sorbonne by promises of an astronomical salary and multiple nubile wives. His submission is complete; France is on its knees.

The relevance of this scenario to the situation of academics working in England today emerges more clearly when it is borne in mind that one of Houellebecq's very strongest preoccupations is with the corrupting force of capitalism – its monetisation of every aspect of our lives. (In 2014, his friend Bernard Maris, one of those killed in the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, wrote an analysis of this obsession entitled *Houellebecq, économiste*.) As much as an interrogation of religion and democracy, Houellebecq's indictment of France and its higher education system is an attack on the capitalism which, in his view, corrupts as acid dissolves, making love and clear thinking all but impossible. The facts of the narrative invite such an interpretation. Indeed, the reason the pension and

salaries offered by the Sorbonne's new administrators are so princely is that the Sorbonne has been bought – literally bought – by Saudi Arabia. In other words, it is money, quite as much as ideology, which enables the new education regime to be established virtually unopposed. In this light, Houellebecq's fiction of France in 2022 comes to seem legible as a fairly transparent satire of a state of affairs all too familiar to us in this country. Capitalism, privatisation, the instrumentalisation of education, its subjugation to the purposes of ideology, its reduction to economic reasoning, its demand that academics sell themselves to the catchwords of the day: these are all recognisable aspects of the situation here too.

Whilst extremely funny in places, Houellebecq's book is not characterised by that gentle bonhomie which runs through most other campus novels, whatever the acuteness of their observations. There is something much more troubling about Houellebecq's vision. The typical detachment and affectlessness of the narrator does not disguise the despair he feels – about the end of France as he knows it, the end of his academic career, the end of his intellectual life, and of course (he is a Houellebecquian character after all), the end of his sex life (until, that is, a new harem of young wives is offered him). He suffers interminable fits of weeping and inches closer and closer to suicide as the novel unfolds. His revulsion at his own circumstances steadily grows to encompass all humanity: 'Humanity didn't interest me,' he notes, 'it even disgusted me.'

As the furious responses to it made clear, the book is typically Houellebecquian in its sardonic darkness, daring to say what most do not dare to think, let alone to say. It is a dissident text. Houellebecq writes for freedom – for the right to think and write uncomfortable things, outwith the straitjacket of political correctness. Like all his books, this latest has garnered much vitriolic abuse – and in this very sense may show one way in which to be dissident in art, and jolt a readership into awareness.

On the other hand, Houellebecq has himself several times – including, memorably, on the night before the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks – publicly doubted the power of art to be anything but a personal salvation. As he states or dramatises in most of his books, art is a way of staying alive in this world, a reason – the only reason, in fact – to live on. But whether by saving himself he can do any more than provoke lucid thoughts and arouse passionate sympathies – whether dissident art, however excellent, can make anything happen – is, alas, an entirely different question.

This is an edited version of a talk given on the occasion of the Department's annual Graduate Conference on 5 June 2015. It is republished here by the kind permission of Review 31, where it first appeared on 10 July 2015.

Patrick Keiller,
Stonebridge Park, and the ‘subjective
transformation of space’

By David Anderson

Patrick Keiller, an architect ‘diverted’ into making films in the late 1970s, is best known for his ‘Robinson’ series, a loose trilogy running from *London* (1994), through *Robinson in Space* (1997), to 2010’s *Robinson in Ruins* (2010). Often situated within the capacious genre of the ‘essay film’, these works occupy a formal space some distance away from conventional narrative cinema, and almost as far-removed from straight documentary filmmaking too. They stand as a rare extension of the English ‘legacy of “poetic” documentary cinema’, as the late producer Keith Griffiths characterised it, referring above all to the director Humphrey Jennings (1994). Yet Keiller, avowedly a disciple of Jennings, also intended his films to constitute a kind of cinematic research into what he ultimately called the ‘*transformative potential*’ contained within ‘images of the English landscape’, and how this visible surface variously displays or conceals social and political relations (Keiller 2012, 3). In doing so, the films record and bear witness to the explorations of an eponymous, unseen protagonist, while a separate narrator figure — the protagonist’s former lover — describes their journeys in a tone that undulates between camp whimsicality, luxuriant distain and mordant jeremiad. All this is set over a sequence of almost exclusively still-camera shots. The vision of these films is so startlingly complete that it can almost seem to have arrived from nowhere, and Keiller’s handful of early works are rarely studied in detail. This essay seeks to correct that, augmenting our understanding of Keiller’s practice by paying closer attention to how the ‘subjective transformation of space’ is cultivated in his very first short films, 1981’s *Stonebridge Park* and 1983’s *Norwood*.

To return to this beginning, it is necessary to step back even further – to the late 1970s – when, already disillusioned with the architectural profession, Keiller began assembling a ‘collection’ of slides depicting ‘found architecture’ – ‘old industrial buildings, scaffolding structures, air-raid shelters, and so on’, motivated by ‘the desire to find, already existing, the buildings that I wanted to build but for a number of reasons was unable to’ (1982, 75). Describing these activities at a later date, Keiller sounded a despondent note, presenting photography as a kind of default mode of engagement with the built environment: a practice resorted to in lieu of the ability to actually acquire and make use of the sites in question. Writing later in Iain Sinclair’s collection *London: City of Disappearances*, he observed of his subjects that ‘none were for sale, but even if they had been, acquisition seemed at first neither appropriate nor

practical, and so the collection consisted of 35mm colour slides' (in Sinclair (ed.) 2006, 292). Hence, his 'encounters' with these structures marked the point of his diversion in careers: a shift in focus from the actual construction of buildings to their subjective re-construction in the imagination.

In 1978 Keiller began a course at the Royal College of Art, hoping – as he put it – to 'develop' his photographic practice (2002, 125). There he discovered that his creatively melancholic approach to the London cityscape had a history, albeit one mostly derived from Parisian traditions – from the 'flâneurs and daydreamers' of Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire and Apollinaire, to the 'profound despair' of the Surrealists and their 'tours' through rundown quarters of the French capital, precursors to the Situationists' *dérives* of the 50s and 60s. Keiller wrote about this heritage in a 1981 essay entitled 'The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape, and Some Ways of Depicting It', whose opening sentences declare a newfound confidence in the validity of non-material transformation, achieved by activating and foregrounding the sensibility of the artist:

The desire to transform the world is not uncommon, and there are a number of ways of fulfilling it. One of these is by means of the adoption of a certain subjectivity, aggressive or passive, deliberately sought or simply the result of a mood, which alters experience of the world, and so transforms it. (1982, 75)

Such a mood might be the result of 'reveries, revolutions or the poignant aspects of war'. But given the unlikelihood of the latter two (within an atmosphere of political stagnation that would later inform *London*), it is normally subjective by necessity. The difficulty, then, lies in communicating such a sensation, but, simply enough, Keiller found this element to be coterminous with the activity of moving-image-making. The subjective part aligned with the filmmaker's cultivation of 'photography as a way of seeing', while the communicative part was satisfied by film's mode of presentation, for 'the experience of having seen a film', he wrote, 'is nearly always a collective experience' (1982, 75).¹

Keiller was keen to distinguish between 'depicting space, and depicting experience of space' although, he claimed, 'this is in a way an unnecessary distinction: nearly all films depict space and in doing so establish, if only inadvertently, a presentation of how that space is experienced, an atmosphere', the result of 'narrative, editing, camera movement and so on'. Still, there was a key difference between the use of locations 'not as spaces, but as signs' in films like *The Long Good Friday* (1980), 'conceived as a television movie', and the possibilities afforded by the cinema-screen, whose scale 'permits depictions of

¹This section, though crucial to the sense of the essay, was curiously removed from the subsequent reprinting in the 2013 edition of Keiller's collected essays, *The View From the Train*.

space that approximate to life size', granting the possibility for 'a sort of realism'. Asserting that, in this format particularly, 'the hollowness of space is what characterises the experience of it, and is what must be depicted in order to depict this experience', Keiller concluded that '[t]he first way that occurred to me ... was the device known as "subjective camera"'. Accordingly, 1981's *Stonebridge Park*, his first film proper, was composed of two long 'subjective camera' shots in which the camera 'walks' across a pair of footbridges, overlaid with a first-person, stream of consciousness narration voiced poker-facedly by Keiller himself (Keiller 1982, 81-2).

Set in the bleak west London district denoted by its name, *Stonebridge Park*'s genesis can be traced to an encounter with a landscape seen from a train window, on the main line out of Euston station in late 1980. Passing swiftly by, Keiller saw a landscape that 'seemed to present a Nordic aspect, uncommon in London', and thought it might respond well to monochrome photography. Returning by bicycle his attention was diverted by a footbridge, which he had not seen from the train. 30 years later, in the essay 'Imaging', he described its seductive effect – seductive in the fullest, Latinate sense of *seducere*, or 'leading astray':

About 200 metres long, it carries pedestrians over both the main line and a branch that passes underneath it, at an angle, in a tunnel. The longer of the bridge's two spans is oriented so that Wembley Stadium is framed between its parapets. The bridge's architecture suggested a renewed attempt at moving pictures: its long, narrow walkway resembled the linearity of a film; its parapets framed the view in a ratio similar to the 4x3 of a camera, and its elaborate articulation, with several flights of steps, half landings and changes of direction, offered a structure for a moving-camera choreography.

A few weeks later, he returned with a hand-held cine-camera to record a walk across this bridge, one continuous take lasting ten minutes, recorded on 120 metres of 16mm, monochrome film stock. Such a method recalled early cinematic 'actualities', such as those of Alexandre Promio and the Lumière Brothers, but '[b]y this time', Keiller noted, 'I think I had already decided to write a fictional narration to accompany the picture' (2013, 182-3).

But the image-making itself was not yet complete: *Stonebridge Park* is, as its opening titles make plain, 'A film in two parts', and the footage so far accrued became its second part. The other, composed of two takes totalling just over 8 minutes, was made in response to the discovery of another footbridge, this time over a nearby junction of the North Circular road. This other bridge's quadrilateral arrangement does not appear to be so instantly suggestive of the medium's 'linearity', and in this part of the film the camera traces a circumlocutory path around it, absorbing the surrounding landscape and the

‘tin hulks’ of the cars rushing below, before finally teetering over the railings towards the traffic in a highly unsettling manner. The structure’s non-linearity necessitates this sequence’s solitary cut, made to enable the camera to cross the road.²



Stonebridge Park (01:36)

After a muffled burst of Beethoven’s third symphony, a first-person tale of theft, robbery and attempted murder by a disgruntled and recently dismissed employee at a second-hand car dealership gradually unfolds. The narrator’s marginalised state of mind sits neatly with the location’s anonymous peripherality, although an overtly philosophical, stoical register seems at first to be oddly bolted-on to both the mundane turpitude of his acts and the oppressive ordinariness of the setting. From the opening meditation on ‘promiscuity’ a self-conscious, essayistic poise (the ur-form of Keiller’s later work) is gradually revealed.

Promiscuity, in my case, results from an inability to recognise that it is not necessary to do all the things that I possibly could do. Such compulsive behaviour is not confined to acts that come about as a result of feelings of lust. Hate, greed, envy: all these passions can promote actions of a more or less consequential nature which may result in greater or lesser feelings of remorse. A thoughtless blow with a bottle; a casual theft; a hastily written fraudulent cheque; the impulsive purchase of a desirable and inexpensive second hand car; the subsequent disobedience of a traffic signal, owing to its faulty brakes, and the resulting fatal injury to a pedestrian crossing the road. Any abandonment of oneself to sudden passionate desires can conventionally be reckoned to end in tears. (Keiller 1981)

²The practical necessity of this is discussed in a 1981 Funding Application to the Arts Council of Great Britain, held at the British Film and Video Artists’ Study Collection, Central St Martins College of Art, London.



Stonebridge Park (08:07)

As the tale continues, the measured flow of images keeps pace with meandering digressions in the narrative. Taken together, they generate a mesmeric effect, something which becomes particularly clear when the film is projected at anything approximating a full cinematic scale. As the camera works its way across the bridge, the space is soaked up as if by the vacuum cleaner that a passer-by carries (and to which the narrator alludes). In the process, we might think of the claim of Henri Lefebvre — whose *The Production of Space* was then seven years old but yet to be translated into English, that ‘[s]pace appears as a realm of objectivity, yet it exists in a social sense only for activity — for (and by virtue of) walking or riding on horseback, or travelling by car, boat, plane, or some other means’ (1991, 191). Likewise, as the similarly disembodied voice of Keiller’s film relays the narrative, the sense of interiority effected by the ‘subjective camera’, compounded by a lack of environmental sound, is reminiscent of the Surrealists’ enthusiasm for ‘film language as an analogue of oneiric thinking’ (Hammond 2001, 9). The form establishes a rhythm conducive to acute introspection, just as this marginal public space becomes an empty vessel into which private anxieties are poured. The setting becomes a ‘crime scene’ even if its relation to where the actual murder took place is only indirect: as our narrator contemplates the inescapability of his own sense of guilt, ‘written everywhere on the surfaces of things around me’, we scrutinise the image, confronted by the clash of intense narrative subjectivity and grey, indifferent objectivity of the everyday surroundings. In fact, for the narrator, the environment becomes not only a crime scene but a parallel of that ‘prison-world’ which film, according to Walter Benjamin, was supposed to have ‘burst asunder’ (1969, 236), and all of this is mollified only by the assertion that ‘[e]very man, after all, lives in his own prison to a greater or lesser extent, whether he knows it or not’ (Keiller 1981).



Stonebridge Park (13:54)

So locked is the narrator into his private reverie, that there is only occasionally a direct reference to what we can see. One of these comes at the point when the vacuum cleaner-bearing figure passes, and the voice refers to people ‘finding strange objects on which to fasten their desire’ (Keiller 1981). An allusion, perhaps, to Keiller’s own diversion into exploring these footbridges, this moment produces a vertiginous effect by suddenly telescoping the temporalities of text and image into explicit unison: a point which is immediately followed by a renewed longing for a return to safe, voyeuristic distance. In tandem with the passing of a train in the upper part of the shot, the narrator mourns:

Oh, how I longed to be on that train, in the safe world which exists only between railway stations, and demands only the passive acceptance of the view out of the window. Why was it that existence always implied that one should intervene in the world? Why could one not somehow contrive to remain a spectator of the picturesque bunglings of others?

At this point time, to him, seems to be ‘slowing down, or more probably, I thought, my own frantic perception of it was speeding up’ (Keiller 1981). And as the riveted sheets of the bridge move past in measured rhythm, we might be reminded of the individual frames of the film passing through the projector and cinema’s most basic form in the photographic image, that which Laura Mulvey has called its ‘secret, ... hidden past’ (2005, 67). For us, however, there is a different ‘hidden past’: developing the metatextual suggestiveness of the vacuum-cleaner moment, the reference to the train can be readily inferred as an echo of Keiller’s original encounter with his visual subjects, so that the narrator’s yearning to undo his ‘crime’ becomes synonymous with a desire to unravel the creative acts of film-making and return to that original, indifferent glance from the train window — to be disentangled from the troublesome

project of constructing a film at all. The narrator's agonies thus become an ironic send-up of the aberrational act of making the film in the first place, drawing on the notion of art-making itself as a hubristic, possibly (in the light of contemporary politics) even an anti-social act. Any contemporary allusiveness is tempered, however, by a longer-reaching historical reference: in this moment, we might also find an echo of one of Keiller's favourite texts, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in which Robert Burton repeats Plutarch: 'Seek not after that which is hid; if the contents please thee, "and be for thy use, suppose the man in the moon, or whom thou wilt, to be the author"' (Burton 2001, 15).

The involvement of the train and the suggestion of subjectivity as a 'prison' also recalls the writings of Michel de Certeau, whose 1974 book *The Practice of Everyday Life* characterised rail travel as an 'incarceration-vacation' that 'generalises Dürer's *Melancholia*, a speculative experience of the world' (1988, 111). Meanwhile, the whole *mise-en-scène* seems also to draw on works like Giorgio de Chirico's 1914 painting *Gare Montparnasse: Melancholy of Departure*, in which, as the Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov wrote in 1953's 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' 'an empty space creates a richly filled time' (2006). Indeed, Keiller's 1981 'Poetic Experience' essay referred to the 'deeper sensation of place' cultivated by de Chirico (1982, 75). It also featured photographs by Eugene Atget, whose own desolate Parisian landscapes pictures — desolate, in fact, out of the necessity for long exposure times — were anecdotally compared with crime scenes. Walter Benjamin picked up on this in his 1931 'Little History of Photography' — 'It is no accident that Atget's photographs have been likened to those of a crime scene. But isn't every square inch of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a culprit?' (1999, 527) With rather more restraint, Keiller wrote that Atget's photos 'captured, in the most modest way (this is surely their strength), the sense that anything could happen' (1982, 78), but his film testifies to the validity of Benjamin's interpretation.



Stonebridge Park (18:12)

When the camera finally reaches the view of Wembley Stadium, the narrator experiences a moment of resolution correspondent with the neat ‘framing’ of the stadium by the bridge’s walls, and the subsequent escape from that frame as these walls slip out of view. At this moment, visual and narrative temporalities conclusively coincide, and the effect of resolution is reinforced by the arrival of a satisfying landscape, complete with football players in the foreground and a refreshingly extensive perspective.

And then it hit me! A revelation. Though it was perhaps less a revelation than a realisation that at last the panic had subsided. The boys who passed noticed my elation. I have never been a believer but I am bound to say that I felt it as a message from God. I would escape. My disconcerted ambitions were finally united to this end. I knew what I had to do. I was absolved. I gazed transfixed at the view, secure in the knowledge that I would now transcend the iron grip of history. (Keiller 1981)

At this moment we might finally acknowledge the unassuming footbridges as elaborate visual puns on the ‘bridge between imagination and reality’ which the Belgian Situationist Raoul Vaneigem insisted ‘must be built’ in his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967, in Gray 1974, 111). It seems highly likely that Keiller should have been thinking of this kind of ironical pun, since his narrative, complete with its mock-serious intertitles like ‘SOME TIME LATER’, veers constantly towards bathos: as Stonebridge Park comes to a close, the narrator’s agonies turn out to have been largely unwarranted; his crime ‘perfect’, in the sense that, like the act of film-making, it left no trace of itself.³

Soon after my arrival I made enquiries in London, and it turned out that my employer’s wife had recovered consciousness unhurt, and that not an hour after my dismissal from the garage, the bank had installed a receiver. My employer had been subsequently declared bankrupt, and as the money I had taken was the result of his having defrauded his own company, he never reported the theft. (Keiller 1981)

* * *

Keiller’s second film, *Norwood*, takes up the same narrative as *Stonebridge Park*, although in the space between the two films the narrator has died, and speaks in the second mostly not from Norwood at all, but ‘quite another plane’. Subtitled austere ‘an idyll’, the film recounts the narrator’s murder and subsequent return to physical form, and in it Keiller hoped to capture ‘the atmosphere of unemployed reverie peculiar to certain parts of South London on sunny days’.⁴

³ c.f. Baudrillard (1996).

Whilst still alive, our narrator had returned to London and built up a substantial property portfolio, his financial assets having been put to increase in the ‘criminal underworld’ of Nice, France. After spending a long (latterly realised as ‘unnecessary’) time there, ‘I packed up and came back to London, settling in Norwood, after the example of the painter Camille Pissarro, who had done so 111 years before’ (Keiller 1983).

Though inspired by Pissarro, he is keen to counter the suspicion that ‘I had any idea of a new life as an artist’: ‘I came not to paint the streets of Norwood, but to buy them, for I have never felt that a picture is really any substitute for the real thing’. Throwing himself with gusto into the London property market, he is ultimately murdered by an ‘unscrupulous’ contractor, during the failed redevelopment of a triangular cul-de-sac called Bloom Grove (a real place, about 100 yards north of West Norwood station). The contractor turns out to be the brother of the former employer ‘whose stolen money had become the foundation of my wealth. This unwitting benefactor was my murderer’s brother – my death was his revenge’.



Bloom Grove, in Norwood (12:09)

As with *Stonebridge Park*, the film does not actually show us these things, but recounts them whilst showing the sites on which they supposedly took place, as if on a location scout, although in this case the narrator’s imminent position as the camera itself, ‘haunting’ the areas in which he has formerly lived, is implicit. In such a state, ‘I tried to concentrate on the present. I was beyond death, but not yet resident in eternity. A fragile condition, to be sure, and the one in which I steeled myself to face oblivion’. The narrator’s comment that ‘I have moved to quite another plane, but Norwood persists’, apart from being a send-up of the banality of Norwood as a place, might also be taken as *Norwood* the film,

⁴Keiller, July 1981 application to the Arts Council, held at the British Film and Video Artists’ Study Collection.

which, too, stubbornly persists and endures. This combines with the way in which *Norwood's* anonymity, its spatial peripherality, acts as an analogue of the narrator's ambiguous state of existence, on the threshold of physical form.

Structurally more complex than *Stonebridge Park*, the film's internal rhythm of recurrence and return to already-visited places is established early on by the structure of Handel's air, *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth* (from his 1741 oratorio *Messiah*) where the organ follows the vocal melody, always a short distance behind, as if tracing its steps. Following its use here, in the film's preamble, the same music recurs at the point in the narrative immediately after the narrator relates his own death-by-hammer. At the point of his reincarnation – after realising the true identity of his murderer – we witness an abrupt moment of formal self-reflection: 'There, I am observed!', declares the narrator, accompanied by an incursion of the camera's lens into the visible frame. *Stonebridge Park* had made the spectator self-aware by its oblique references to a voyeuristic visual pleasure separated from any need to 'intervene', and the tension between this experience and the narrator's subjectivity. Here, the process is embellished with the apparatus of film-making, its artifice, suddenly revealed to the audience.

* * *

A contemporary review of *Stonebridge Park* noted the 'inevitable re-creation of a transformed world which comes into existence at the moment of re-counting' (Danino 2003, 105), whilst another of *Norwood* stressed a 'surrealism [...] where the stress is on the real' (O'Pray 1984, 322-3). Their images depicting a townscape that, like Atget's Paris, 'looks cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant', Keiller's cinematography perpetuates that proto-Surrealist 'estrangement between man and his surroundings' that Walter Benjamin wrote about in his discussion of 'aura' — a modernist defamiliarisation of space which sets the scene for its radical rediscovery (1999, 519). The perambulations of the camera-consciousness certainly resemble the Situationist *dérive*, 'with its flow of acts, its gestures, its strolls, and its encounters', whilst also drawing on the Surrealists' notion of film-language approximating to the forms of dream-language, of man being 'soluble in his thought', and the preoccupation with a 'haunted' sense of self that is radiated by texts such as André Breton's classic *Nadja* (1928), also presented in a reportage form.

What we are left with is the figuration of space as crime scene: but by this is not meant solely the putative crimes of the films' narratives. Rather, these offences need to be read as analogues for the idea of film-making itself as a kind of unwonted transgression, a superfluous act of dubious validity, fuelled by an extreme melancholic diffidence on their maker's part, and a correspondently mordant humour centred on perpetual, bathetic clashes between triviality and high seriousness. It is from this basis that Keiller's first two films experiment

with a transformation of space that attempts to smudge the border between the fictional and the real. In absorbing their drama into ‘camera-I’, they toy with the insertion of fictional pasts into a cinematic document that, like photography, is ‘at once reality in a past state’ or, in other words, ‘an hallucination that is also a fact’ (Barthes 2000, 82). These are ‘imagined’ events and experiences which are also real, and this liminality corresponds with the narrator’s own marginalised, even spectral, state. Keiller’s first two films may have been overshadowed by attention paid to his later work, but in them we find the clear lineaments of his attempt at a depiction of space that also reaches towards transforming it, and it is in this respect that *Stonebridge Park* and *Norwood* vault from the peripheral to the critical.

Works cited

- Barthes, Roland. 2000. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1996. *The Perfect Crime*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. ‘A Little History of Photography.’ In *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927-1934*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone et. al. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap. 507-530
- 1969. ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.’ In *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken. 217-252.
- Burton, Robert. 2001. ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader.’ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. New York: NYRB Classics.
- Chtcheglov, Ivan. 2006. ‘Formulary for a New Urbanism.’ Trans. Ken Knabb. <<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov.htm>> [Accessed 26th November 2015].
- Danino, Nina. 2003. ‘On “Stonebridge Park”: a film by Patrick Keiller.’ In *The Undercut Reader*, In *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists’ Film and Video*. Ed. Nina Danino and Michael Mazière. London: Wallflower. 105-6.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Griffiths, Keith. 1994. ‘Anxious Visions.’ *Vertigo* 1.4 (Winter) <https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-1-issue-4-winter-1994-5/anxious-visions> [Accessed 26/8/2016]
- Hammond, Paul. 2001. *The Shadow and its Shadow*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Keiller, Patrick. 2013. ‘Imaging.’ *Restless Cities*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart. London: Verso, 2010. 139-156. Reprinted in *The View From The Train*. London: Verso. 173-187.

- 2002. Interview with David Martin-Jones. *Journal of Popular British Cinema*. No. 5. 123-32.
 - 2012. *The Possibility of Life's Survival on the Planet*. London: Tate.
 - 1982. 'The Poetic Experience of Townscape and Landscape, and Some Ways of Depicting It.' *Undercut 3/4*. In *The Undercut Reader*: 75-83.
 - 1983. (dir.), *Norwood*. 'The Department of Inversion'.
 - 1981. (dir.), *Stonebridge Park*. 'The Department of Inversion.'
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Blackwell.
- Mulvey, Laura. 2005. *Death 24x a Second*. London: Reaktion, 2005.
- O'Pray, Michael. 1984. Review of *Norwood*. *Monthly Film Bulletin* 51.609 (October): 322-323.
- Sinclair, Iain. 2006. *City of Disappearances*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Vaneigem, Raoul. 1974. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Extracted as 'Self-Realisation, Communication and Participation.' In *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International*. Ed. Christopher Gray. London: Free Fall Publications. 106-122.

Off the Beaten Track: Jack Kerouac on Robert Frank

By Elsa Court

Robert Frank had just returned to New York from a Guggenheim-funded cross-country road trip of two years when he met Jack Kerouac in September 1957, at a party given by their mutual friend Lucien Carr. Frank had been seeking to get in touch with the writer on the advice of another friend, the independent filmmaker Emile de Antonio, who had anticipated that Kerouac's name, recently brought to fame by the publication of *On the Road* (1957), would bring attention to Frank's collection of road photographs, *The Americans* (1958). Frank showed Kerouac a dummy of his book, asking if he would write an introduction for it. Kerouac liked Frank's road-trip pictures and accepted his request.

Within a few days, Kerouac had produced a short ode to travel in America for Frank, praising the photographs which, according to him, captured no less than the spirit of the American road. Though Walker Evans, Frank's mentor, had already written an introduction for the book by that point, it was Kerouac's piece which was retained, so clear was it that it would be a selling point to future American editors. Joyce Johnson, whom Frank obliquely refers to as Kerouac's then-girlfriend, was instrumental in foreseeing the connection between their respective work. In her 1987 Beat generation memoir *Minor Characters*, she wrote about witnessing Frank and Kerouac's first encounter, seeing for herself, immediately, Kerouac's themes epitomised in Frank's pictures:

Robert Frank walked in with a couple of boxes of his work. For several years he'd been going around the country taking photos for a book he planned to call *The Americans*. He was hoping to convince Jack to write an introduction. The first one I saw was of a road somewhere out west – blacktop gleaming under headlights with a white stripe down the middle that went on and on toward an outlying darkness. Jack's road! I thought immediately (241-2).

The picture which Johnson describes presents a frontal confrontation with a portion of two-lane highway, which stretches vertically rather than horizontally to the viewer's eye. It is an inviting but equally daunting vision of the road through the motorist's perspective, evocative of the endless expanses of the travelled territory.



Robert Frank, U.S. 285 New Mexico, *The Americans* (1958)

The viewer, presumably at the command of the car whose headlights illuminate the road, confronts the unravelling of a vast territory which, though offered to exploration, seems to resist any kind of comprehensive representation in the stilled moment of the photograph. It was their mutual fascination with this difficult American landscape which initiated Frank and Kerouac's collaboration. Looking at the photographs alongside this and other examples of Kerouac's writings about Frank, we can highlight their echoing perceptions about post-war travel. Separately and then together, both authors travelled the American road to define the socio-economic revolutions happening in the periphery of the democratisation of car travel. This essay will look at Kerouac's reception of Frank's practice in such a context, and examine the way the photographs refined his attention to America's roadside landscape.

Kerouac's Introduction

The style of Kerouac's introduction to *The Americans* evokes his excitement on discovering, through the photographs, something of a kinship between Frank's vision and his own. From the opening line, he describes the overwhelming feeling of excitement which he identifies, broadly, with the American experience, and which, he argues, is palpable at the sight of Frank's photographs: 'That crazy feeling in America when the sun is hot on the streets and music comes out of

the jukebox or from a nearby funeral ... that's what Robert Frank has captured in [his] tremendous photographs' (1993, 19). Throughout the piece, Kerouac maintains his focus on this ambivalent 'crazy' feeling: a mixture of restless excitement and melancholy, here introduced in the unclear origin of the music, which could be 'the jukebox' or, just as plausibly, 'a nearby funeral'. Kerouac is sensitive to the melancholy undertones in Frank's representation of the era's longings. In some pictures, says Kerouac, the jukebox – a recurring motif – does in fact look as black and imposing as a coffin. Kerouac suggests, as he describes 'that crazy feeling in America', that the perspective of death lingers on the era's fetishisation of new commodities, which would distract post-war American citizens from the finitude of existence by denying the finitude of pleasure.

Through these introductory words, America appears as a combination of tangible, prosaic matter and illusory promises. Kerouac wonders at the way a roadside café table is illuminated by a halo of sunlight through the window, while in another shot, a cluster of 'monster' gasoline pumps on the side of a road is imbued with anthropomorphic qualities. He notices how election posters, overlooking a gaming table in a 'luncheonette' in Butte, Montana, give the scene a sense of sour 'editorial' truth, suggesting that public trust and power, in this country, are as good as games (1993, 19-23). Signs or crosses by the side of the road, in the eye of Frank's democratic camera, also appear as culturally resonant to Kerouac: seemingly incidental, they form a subtle portrait of a vast country that lives through and for the automobile. In his description of the collection as a whole, Kerouac keeps oscillating from the abstract feeling to the material detail and back. On the one hand he praises '[t]he humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-ness and American-ness of these pictures!' On the other he delights in Frank's attention to what he calls 'the low level of the world': telephone poles, tarpaulin shrouds in 'green unexpecteds', 'ditches by the side of the road' – an alternative space which he describes as the 'orangebutted westlands of Arcadia' (1993, 21). In Kerouac's legendary road-trip novel *On the Road* (1957), visual attention to the physical space of the road is often compromised by the narrator's forward vision, which is always projected ahead of the present moment, to a physical or spiritual destination. In Frank's photographic project, attention to the road as a physical place brings the roadside into focus, as it is the margin of the road that makes space for the vehicle to stop and for the photographer to take pictures of the surrounding landscape. The introduction to *The Americans* suggests that, through Frank's pictures, Kerouac begins to contemplate the roadside as a landscape where symbolic meaning may be found, derived for the most part from material culture: signs and found objects, as well as the structures of the road's vernacular architecture.

Kerouac's praise of America's 'orangebutted Arcadia' implies that legendary 'westlands' contain material 'wastelands'. Junk, in the works of many writers of the Beat generation, becomes an icon of the counter-culture: in Kerouac's

introduction to *The Americans*, traditional ideals of pastoral beauty are invaded by consumer culture, which also assimilates material refuse. The roadside Arcadia that is revealed through Frank's road pictures speaks to Kerouac's romantic sense of an alternative America, an America which only gives itself to the apprehension of the drifter: 'the crazed voyageur of the lone automobile,' writes Kerouac, who 'pressed his eager insignificance [...] into the vast promise of life' (1993, 21). One of the most vivid illustrations of Kerouac's Arcadian America is, however, one which captures the end of the 'voyage'. Half-way through the collection, *Backyard – Venice West, California* presents, in Kerouac's words, a 'madman resting under [an] American flag canopy in [an] old busted car seat', in a 'fantastic Venice California backyard' (1993, 20). The figure in the centre of the photograph, whom Kerouac describes as a 'madman', is transfixed in his evocation of interrupted mobility. Yet the photograph as a whole presents the outcome of the photographer's exploration, evoking an 'eager' though directionless progress, on and off the main road, which has led here to a pocket of hidden 'insignificance':



Robert Frank, *Backyard – Venice West, California*,
The Americans (1958)

In this picture, material icons of American culture have turned to junk: a man sitting in an overgrown backyard is almost concealed from view by the abundance of vegetation, his face shaded by an American flag which he uses as parasol. Right between him and a white clapboard house in the background is an old rusty car which looks beyond repair, reinforcing the sense of immobility which the picture communicates. Describing the picture, Kerouac suggests that it is the car's 'busted seat' that the man is in fact sitting on, recycled into a canopy chair with an overhanging American flag. The silent oddity of the scene inspires Kerouac to write: 'I could sit in [this backyard] and sketch 30,000 words' (1993, 20). The angle from which the picture is taken presupposes a

physical closeness to the scene which, because it is set in a private backyard, feels somewhat intrusive. One wonders how the photographer could have stumbled upon this scene without attracting the attention of the man who, in the picture, looks pensive, undisturbed by the photographer's intrusion. His peaceful stance presumably leads to Kerouac's intuition that he must be 'mad', so suggestive of psychological remoteness is his oblivious attitude to his surroundings. Kerouac's response suggests that, in capturing this figure of aloofness among the uncontrolled backyard – overgrown, littered with junk and, on top of everything, intruded upon – Frank has ventured as close as he could to defining social inadequacy in post-war America's terms. The marginal, the picture suggests, is the man who makes no distinction between new and old, private and public, inside and outside. Physically and metaphorically, this man has been stranded, led off the road of social progress.

At the sight of Frank's backyard picture, Kerouac evokes personal journeys: not, as one might expect, on the road, but by train. In parentheses, he writes of his work experience as a railroad brakeman and recalls that, while riding trains between East and West coasts, he used to see similar backyards alongside the tracks. He would occasionally lean 'out of the old steam pot' in order to see these backyards, wondering at the sight of garbage in roadside ditches such as 'empty tokay bottles in the palm weeds' (1993, 19-23). It is significant that Kerouac remembered having seen those backyards from the window of a train instead of a car. Travelling by car on better and newly expanded roads in the 1950s, motorists would be spared a trip through the impoverished residential areas or settlements that frequently surrounded railways on their way into the city. While new highways would enter the city through the 'miracle mile', an expansion of the main street which provided larger shopping centres and drive-in services, the sight of the backyard became associated with older routes that were gradually being bypassed. In this case, the backyard stood for the social inequalities which persisted through the rise of the middle class, which road users were becoming better equipped to ignore. The backyard is, in fact, a recurring image for the Beats, who tend to use it as a symbol of alternative American culture. At the beginning of *On the Road*, for instance, as Sal Paradise sets off hitchhiking for the West, the whole of the American continent is imagined in anticipation, and compared to a vast backyard. The narrator and all his friends, then scattered all around the country, virtually share this vast continent by simultaneously dancing to the same bop tunes in their respective backyards (Kerouac, 2000, 13). Backyard images also echo, for instance, through Allen Ginsberg's poetry. In *Howl* (1956), Ginsberg evokes the sexual escapades of Neil Cassady, 'cocksman and Adonis of Denver', which he performs in a series of overlooked public places:

[...] joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings

& especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys
too [...]. (2007, 136)

These lines form a song of praise to human bodily functions that society conceals from public view. They anticipate the poem's footnote, in which the totality of the human body ('The skin [...] the nose [...] the tongue and cock and hand and asshole [...]'), the troubled human mind ('the madman [...] as you my soul [...]') as well as the residues of once desirable commodities ('junk') are all deemed to be 'holy' (Ginsberg, 2007, 142).

Diner and gas station, icons of mid-century mainstream culture, also invite chance sexual encounters through their backyards and public toilets, making room for desirable social values to coexist with the public expression of sexual impulses. Both kinds of public spaces maintain, within their structure, the separation between consumption and waste, which parallels a virtual cohabitation between the social and what it considers deviant behaviour. As Kristin Ross has argued, cars and public sanitary spaces are the dominant features of post-war modernisation in the Western world, whereby the consuming habits of post-war societies show an obsession with personal hygiene and the technological advances of independent mobility. In this context, Western societies (American and Western European) undermined the realities of accumulating waste, pollution and road casualties that would become prominent issues in the 1960s. Describing the assimilation of American culture in postcolonial France, Ross identifies increasing domestic control and subjectivity, linked with the privatisation of sectors of public life and the enclosure of the home as well as the private car (1996, 7-11). Things that may require fixing or adjusting are an unwanted source of embarrassment in the societies that Beat generation writers describe, where commodities are not built to last but to be periodically replaced with new and improved versions. The social isolation of the man in Frank's picture is evident from his making no apparent distinction between the comfort of the home and the open junkyard, wearing, as he does, a suit; but also from his strange lack of control over this space and his willingness to recycle broken utilities, suggestive of economic desperation. The car, which is a central feature of the post-war modernisation described by Ross, is doubly symbolic in the light of Kerouac's reading of the photograph: though he writes that the idea of sitting in the backyard inspires him, his own perspective remains that of a narrator on-the-run, entranced by the 'crazy feeling' of mobility in America. His praise of marginality romanticises what is presented in a slightly colder light through Frank's camera. The stranded car, for instance, an image that may evoke sexual exhaustion, does not catch his eye, and he does not linger on the fact that the man in question is, unlike him or Frank, socially and financially immobilised.

In his last paragraph, Kerouac concludes that Frank has taken rank 'among the tragic poets of the world' (1993, 23). Having in fact used the metaphor of

poetry to describe *The Americans*, Kerouac seeks to elevate Frank's work above distinctions of form on the grounds of the artist's epochal sensitivity: his perceptiveness in dealing with a fleeting cultural moment in the social history of the United States is, from Kerouac's point of view, what makes Frank an artist. Praising his photographs, Kerouac distinguishes between two kinds of images: he suggests that, as a viewer, you are either appreciative of Frank's work, which contains 'poetry' or, alternatively, someone who may as well go home and 'see Television shots of big hatted cowboys being tolerated by kind horses' (1993, 23). Kerouac's assumption here that the poetic form is, above all others, suited to define the essence of the artistic enterprise, regardless of medium, may seem hackneyed, at odds with the democratic ideals of the Beat generation. It is telling, perhaps, of Kerouac's intuition that Frank's photographs must acquire artistic legitimacy: that they must be praised for working against the codes of an image-crazed consumer culture. His choice of metaphor also anticipates his acknowledgement of the influence Frank's vision and practice has on his writing: by annihilating distinctions between Frank's work and his own, Kerouac eases the conception of written word and image as working in the same spirit. The introduction insists on the fact that Frank's photographs capture the essence of contemporary life in America better than contemporary photographers had done – a comment which the comparison to poetry extends beyond the visual arts. Kerouac writes, in fact, that Frank photographed scenes that he 'never thought [...] could be caught on film and 'much less described in [their] beautiful visual entirety in words' (1993, 19). As a writer, he expresses his envy of the ease with which Frank is able to record first-hand encounters with the world 'with that little camera that he raises and snaps with one hand' (1993, 23). Even his insinuation that he could write '30,000 words' about the man in the backyard suggests that he would have to produce at least as much in order to attempt to describe the same scene in sufficient detail.

On the Road to Florida

In 1958 Kerouac wrote another, slightly longer piece about Robert Frank and photography which, incidentally, was also a piece about the American road, as it detailed a trip to Florida he had taken with the photographer within the year that followed their first meeting in New York. Reading this text alongside the introduction to *The Americans*, Neil Campbell argues that 'Frank photographed what Kerouac wanted to write but could not' (2010, 114). This article-length feature, simply titled 'On the road to Florida', details the trip Frank and Kerouac took from New York to pick up Kerouac's mother in Long Island, and then with her to Orlando, Florida, and back. While Kerouac needed to pick up some manuscripts and take his mother with him to Florida where he would write for the next few months, the trip was also taken as a provisional *Life* magazine assignment which, Kerouac writes, gave them 'two hundred bucks for gas and oil and chow both ways' (1993, 24). Again, Kerouac's seemingly spontaneous prose produces praise for Frank, though this time he describes not so much

the photographer's pictures as his practice, which he witnesses as they travel together. He writes, for instance, how, having stepped out of the car, Frank would move about the side of the road taking pictures, 'prowling like a cat, or an angry bear, in the grass and roads, shooting whatever he wants to see,' as he, the writer, remained seated inside their parked car, bewildered, looking at him (1993, 26). Describing Frank as a predatory animal or, playing on the ambiguity of the verb 'shooting', a hunter, Kerouac wishes he himself had a camera of his own, 'a mad mental camera', so that he could take a photograph of his friend in the act of taking photographs. 'Prowling', constantly attentive to the trivia of his surrounding environment, Frank takes pictures the way Kerouac thinks writers of the American road should write: he is, in Kerouac's words, 'catching those things about the American road writers should write about' (1993, 24). Kerouac generally implies that writers fail to catch what they 'should' about the American road. He justifies this assumption by describing Frank who, from the start of their trip, takes pictures of things to which he himself would not have paid attention. It is Frank's activity as a photographer which reveals these details to him as they travel on the road: his eye falls on easily-consumed commodities, unremarkable roadside landscapes and structures of the American roadside, which inspires Kerouac to describe them in turn, as in the following passage:

We started off in New York at noon on a pretty Spring day and didn't take any pictures until we had navigated the dull but useful stretch of the New Jersey Turnpike and come on down into Highway 40 in Delaware where we stopped for a snack in a roadside diner. I didn't see anything in particular to photograph or to write about but suddenly Robert was taking his first snap. From the counter where we sat he had turned and taken a picture of a big car trailer with piled cars, two tiers pulling in the gravel driveway but through the window and right over a scene of leftovers and dishes where a family had just vacated a booth and got in their car and driven off and the waitress not had time yet to clear the dishes. The combination of that plus the movement outside and further parked cars and reflections everywhere in chrome glass and steel of cars cars road road. I suddenly realized I was taking a trip with a genuine artist and that he was expressing himself in an art form that was not unlike my own and yet fraught with a thousand difficulties quite unlike my own. (1993, 24)

Whether 'prowling' in the roadside weeds or neglecting his meal to take a picture of leftovers at a neighbouring table, Frank's receptiveness to the 'dull but useful' landscape of the highway appears as both surprising and inspiring to Kerouac. As they exit the diner, Frank continues taking pictures of vernacular architecture on the roadside. Walking alongside him, Kerouac continues to pay attention and to be surprised by what he sees:

Outside the diner, seeing nothing as usual, I walked on, but Robert suddenly stopped and took a picture of a solitary pole with a cluster of silver bulbs way up on top, and behind it a lorn American Landscape so unspeakably indescribable, to make a Marcel Proust shudder... how beautiful to be able to detail a scene like that, on a gray day, and show even the mud, abandoned tin cans and old building blocks laid at the foot of it, and in the distance the road, the old going road with its trucks, cars, poles, roadside houses, trees, signs, crossings [...] little details writers usually forget about. (1993, 25)

The capacity of photography to produce an image that exactly conforms to a vision showcases its superiority over visual memory, which cannot retain the same richness of detail. This indiscriminate precision, suggests Kerouac, exhibits photography's superiority over writing in documenting the trip. Kerouac's report also highlights Frank's especially open-minded attitude as a photographer: his sensitivity to structures and artefacts that are so engrained in the texture of everyday life that they would not be noticed by a more casual observer or a more traditional photographer. Travelling with Frank, Kerouac sees how photography may return the obvious to the common passerby, better than the writer could, even the kind of writer who distinguishes himself by showcasing a phenomenal memory: a Marcel Proust type of writer; someone, in fact, like Kerouac himself.¹

Conclusion

It is not often remembered that *On the Road* was not originally intended to stand alone as a novel, but to be part of a multi-volume project, which Kerouac had started devising in his early twenties as an autobiography as well as a 'contemporary history record' (qtd Barnett 2013). The idea of this long serial novel, *The Duluoz Legend*, was inspired, says Kerouac, by Proust's seven-volume autobiographical work, *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927). In a letter to his editor Malcolm Cowley, Kerouac wrote that the finished project would be 'like Proust, but done on the run... like a Running Proust' (Kerouac, 1995, 515). Kerouac's proposal reads as if the project would reconcile two contradictory impulses: movement, on the one hand, and contemplation on the other. Describing the experience of speed, Kerouac's prose would often also display a restless rhythm, ever suggestive of a will to transcend the moment: speaking for the Beat generation and for Kerouac in particular, Jonathan Day calls this metaphysical quest the 'experimental transcendent': a form of trance which negates time and death and which, in Kerouac's work, is most famously captured by the image of the car in motion and the seemingly endless road (2014, 128). Yet his interest in Proust, on the one hand, and Frank, on the other, spring from Kerouac's desire to bring conscious attention to the small details, and to anchor his viewpoint in the subjective perception of the present, which seems at odds with

¹ Gerald Nicosia's influential biography of Jack Kerouac, *Memory Babe* (1994), derives its title from a nickname Kerouac was given, as a boy, due to his unusual capacity for observation and his memory.

the ‘experimental transcendent’. Though Dean Moriarty is himself a dedicated Proust reader in *On the Road*, his travelling companion, Kerouac’s narrator, muses, by the end of the novel, that while driving with ‘frantic Dean’ he had been ‘rushing through the world without a chance to see it’ (2000, 187). In ‘On the road to Florida’, on the other hand, Kerouac describes the way Frank travels with ever-open eyes: photographing the roadside, Frank displays a curiosity which excludes nothing, embracing even the ‘things writers usually forget about’: ‘roadside houses, trees, signs, crossings’, and ‘telephone poles’. Kerouac, who famously practiced free association in writing, would praise the kind of spontaneity that allowed the ‘free deviation (...) of mind’ (1993, 70). His recognition of Frank’s talent, therefore, acknowledges that the photographs are the record of the photographer’s ‘free deviation’: Frank’s attention to roadside trivia is as culturally marginal as the position of the roadside itself is physically marginal to the road. In search of the American road’s landscapes, Frank has in fact deviated, physically as well as ideologically, from the beaten path of the open road.

Works cited

- Barnett, David. 2013. “Visions of Jack Kerouac ... in an Epic 13 Volumes.” *The Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/24/jack-kerouac-13-volume-memoir>> [accessed 11 May 2015].
- Campbell, Neil. 2010. “Robert Frank and Jack Kerouac: ‘You Got Eyes.’” In *Writing with Light: Words and Photographs in American Texts*. Ed. Mick Gidley. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Day, Jonathan. 2014. *Postcards from the Road: Robert Frank’s ‘The Americans’*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
- Ginsberg, Allen. “Howl.” 2007. In *Collected Poems, 1947-1997*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Johnson, Joyce. 1994. *Minor Characters* [1983]. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Kerouac, Jack. 1993. “Introduction to Robert Frank’s *The Americans*.” In *Good Blonde and Others*, pp. 19-23.
- “On the road to Florida.” In *Good Blonde and Others*. pp. 24-30.
- 2000. *On the Road*. London: Penguin Classics.
- *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters: 1940-56*. ed. Ann Charters. New York ; London: Viking, 1995.
- Nicosia, Gerald. 1994. *Memory Babe*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ross, Kristin. 1996. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*. MIT Press.

‘Unexpected fruit’: The ingredients of *Tarr*

By Rachel Murray

In Wyndham Lewis’s first novel, his mouthpiece, Frederick Tarr, argues that the ‘condition of continued enjoyment is to resist assimilation’, before concluding: ‘A man is the opposite of his appetite’ (1996, 26)¹. Throughout Lewis’s body of work characters often experience revulsion or a lack of appetite before meals, and are often nauseous or sick after eating. Only the most perverse of Lewis’s characters, Otto Kreisler in *Tarr* (1918) or Julius Ratner in *The Apes of God* (1930), appear to relish their food, and the sheer aggression of these eating habits is closely associated with other, more monstrous appetites. Lewis’s prose is rough, at times impenetrably dense, and often unappetising in content – full of violence and cruelty, a callous indifference to suffering, and in the 1930s a troubling predilection for fascist ideology. How can we stomach the ideas of an individual who, in 1931, published a forceful defence of Hitler, describing him as a ‘Man of Peace’? I suggest that we can develop a clearer understanding of this much-maligned modernist by engaging with, rather than attempting to either suppress or sublimate, these distasteful qualities.

Prior to enlisting as an artillery officer in 1916, Lewis travelled extensively, later describing his experiences in Brittany and Spain as the ‘raw rich visual food’ (1950, 117) for his writing. The ‘raw’ phase of Lewis’s early writing can be dated between 1909 and 1919, during which Lewis wrote a number of short stories as well as his first novel, *Tarr*, which he finished shortly before departing for the frontline. Lewis would later attribute his early fascination with primitive individuals and his pursuit of the ‘crudest textures’ of life to the fact that he had ‘remained, beyond the usual period, congealed in a kind of cryptic immaturity’ (1950, 118). Tellingly, Lewis suggests that his creative output was augmented by his tendency to, in Tarr’s words, ‘resist assimilation’ to social norms, recalling ‘this surface obtuseness on the one hand, and the unexpected fruit which it miraculously bore’ (1996, 118).

Tarr is set, and was largely written, in Paris, and is a cultural melting pot of German, Polish, Russian and English artists and émigrés. As with his short stories, much of Lewis’s novel is framed by the table, with events often taking place at mealtimes either in claustrophobic domestic settings or cafés. In an early scene, shortly after announcing that ‘a man is the opposite of his appetites’,

¹There are three 1918 versions of *Tarr*, but I cite the amalgamated Paul O’Keeffe version, which retains the rough textures of early Lewis. These are smoothed out somewhat in the 1928 version. All further references will therefore be to *Tarr: The 1918 Version*, ed. Paul O’Keeffe (1996).

Tarr goes to the home of his German fiancée, Bertha Lunken, to break off their engagement. Eager to keep relations amicable, Tarr brings food with him. This strategy bears fruit: when Bertha becomes upset, and is likened to a leaky vessel releasing a flood of ‘psychic discharges’ (1996, 60), Tarr diverts her attention by suggesting that they have lunch. The formality of the meal is a means of ‘clear[ing] the air of electricity’ and dragging the heightened, ‘unreal’ atmosphere back down into ‘ordinary’ life (62). During the meal, conversation is continually obstructed by mastication, and amid the heavy silence Tarr begins to ruminate:

To cover reflection, [Tarr] set himself to finish lunch. The strawberries were devoured mechanically, with unhungry itch to clear the plate. He had become just a devouring-machine, restless if any of the little red balls still remained in front of it.

Bertha’s eyes sought to carry her out of this Present. But they had broken down, depositing her, so to speak, somewhere halfway down the avenue. (1996, 70)

The air is thick with nervous energy in this scene, and yet the focal point of Lewis’s prose is not Bertha but the ‘little red balls’, strawberries estranged from their natural form and function. Although they are no longer a vehicle for appetite, these items appear to have absorbed Bertha’s agency, and, equally, Tarr uses food to ‘cover reflection’, as though the strawberries are capable of absorbing not only Bertha’s but also his own ‘psychic discharges’.

According to Gaston Bachelard ‘reality is initially a food’ (2002, 172). Of all the senses, it is taste which grants the individual the closest, most intimate knowledge of the external world, and yet this sense is also responsible for unsettling illusions of individual autonomy. While food is a source of bodily strength – here providing fuel for Tarr as ‘devouring-machine’ – it is during the act of both eating and excreting that we recognise our vulnerability, as the boundaries of selfhood are undermined by these bodily exigencies.² This is reflected in the way that between subject and object alike in this scene there is an overpowering sense of permeability. By likening Bertha to the ‘little red balls’ that are quickly cleared from the protagonist’s plate, Lewis’s narrator tantalises the reader with the thought: if only Tarr could dispense with his lover by eating her. Tarr is torn between his desire to assimilate Bertha into his life, and his desire to detach himself from her entirely. His indecisiveness leaves her feeling only partially digested: although she has been ‘broken down’ and ‘deposited’, she finds herself stuck ‘halfway down the avenue’, lodged in the gullet or the intestine of this painful process of what Tarr terms ‘*dis-engage-ment*’ (1996, 43). Here, the strange prominence of this ‘unexpected fruit’ produces an atmosphere

² For more on the ways in which food and excrement undermine the boundaries of the self see Kristeva 1980, 2-6, 75.

of almost unbearable ontological indeterminacy. Just as the strawberries have more of a claim on Tarr's attention than his fiancée, so does this overcharged atmosphere leave the reader feeling disorientated and perhaps a little sick. Tarr's strategy of alimentary excess is designed to combat underlying feelings of 'indifference', as Lewis suggests that Tarr's engagement with something approaching the 'real' is reliant on feelings of discomfort. In this sense, food materialises Lewis's negative ontology – like *dis-engagement*, it is distaste, rather than taste, that defines this encounter.

W. B. Yeats was perhaps the first reader to acknowledge the curious prominence of food in *Tarr*, writing to Lewis in 1929:

[*Tarr*] is a sincere and wonderful work, and its curious, almost unconscious presentation of sex, those mechanical images and images of food—there also is mechanism, unites itself in my mind with so much in contemporary painting and sculpture. There is the feeling, almost Buddhist, that we are caught in a kind of steel trap. (qtd Lewis 1950, 126-27)

Yeats's sense that in the Lewisian text 'we are caught in a kind of steel trap' crystallizes the atmosphere of violent compression that often accompanies Lewis's depictions of food, eating, and digestion, or more often indigestion. Hugh Kenner also gestures towards the indigestibility of *Tarr* in his reading of its strange 'perfunctory textures' (1954, 36). He examines a scene in which Bertha receives a letter from Tarr at breakfast. In this case, it is Tarr who discharges psychic energy through the medium of the letter. Curiously, the narration focuses on the stove rather than either Bertha or Tarr's message, stating:

The letter had been laid on the table, by the side of which stood the large gas-stove, like a safe, its gas stars, on top, blasting away luridly at pans and saucepans with Bertha's breakfast. (1996, 166)

Other than the word 'blasting' – a possible nod to Lewis's short-lived little magazine – Kenner can see no reason why the stove is foregrounded in such a way. Instead, he argues:

The secret of much of the gripping reality of *Tarr* seems to lie in the artless interpolation of humdrum sentences like these, with their hypnotic mechanical claim on the attention, stirred by occasional quiverings of power. (1954, 36)

Again, a reader of Lewis is compelled to use the term 'mechanical'. Kenner notes the strange prominence of the stove, yet what appears to be occurring is a process of flattening. In both scenes of eating, the unusual textures of Lewis's

descriptions ask us to consider whether there is any essential difference between a strawberry, a stove, and a person. Here as elsewhere, Lewis foregrounds a complete loss of distinction – which, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, is the foundation of our sense of taste, both gustatory and aesthetic.³

A lack of distinction is directly implicated with the palate when the German artist Otto Kreisler encounters the Russian cosmopolite Anastasya Vasek for the first time at the Restaurant Lejeune. The narrator recounts how the restaurant has expanded into the ‘bowels’ (1996, 96) of the building it occupies to cater to the swelling appetites of its clientele. Kreisler informs Anastasya that its menu becomes more elaborate and expensive from top to bottom, despite the fact that each dish has evolved from the same ‘rough materials’. ‘In the last dish’, he states ponderously, ‘you can be sure that the potatoes will taste like tomatoes, and the pork like the sirloin of beef’ (1996, 99). As the menu becomes more convoluted it becomes increasingly overcooked, spoiled in the process of refinement.

Lewis’s preoccupation with the corruption of taste can be traced back to the ingredients of the 1915 ‘Preface’ to *Tarr*, which evokes a sense of cultural degradation. An adamant individualist, Lewis describes how the masses have been infected by revolutionary ideas, citing Italian Futurist literature and Nietzsche’s books ‘of seductions and sugar plums’. ‘They have made an Overman of every vulgarly energetic grocer in Europe’, he asserts, observing how this ‘greedy, fleshy frantic strength’ has led to ‘a fascination’ with ‘material power’ (1996, 13). In this sense, the Restaurant Lejeune appears to function as an analogue for popular literature, expanding in accordance with the vast growth of the reading public. Against the backdrop of the First World War, Lewis identifies a destructive appetite that has evolved from attempts to transform the Everyman into the ‘Overman’.

Although Lewis began *Tarr* several years before Anglo-German tensions erupted into war, his depiction of a ‘disagreeable German’ artist Otto Kreisler who he felt compelled to ‘vomit forth’ (1996, 13) is, he would later agree, apt. Later on in *Tarr*, in a far more overt instance of devouring, Kreisler’s appetite erupts into violence. After a brief encounter at a dance, he invites Tarr’s now ex-fiancée, Bertha, to his room under the pretext of painting her. She removes her blouse and poses for him, and he eventually breaks the silence with the remark:

“Your arms are like bananas!” A shiver of warning had penetrated her at this. But still, he was an artist: it was natural, – even inevitable! – that he should compare her arms to bananas. (1996, 193)

This is not the only time that a body is transformed into food; elsewhere, Tarr compares Anastasya’s fleshy form to sausages in a butcher’s window (297), and

³See Bourdieu 2010, xxix.

Kreisler is also likened to ‘a plate of meat or a banana fritter’ (269) avoided by a seasick man.⁴ There is, however, something frighteningly incongruous about this particular ‘unexpected fruit’ that goes beyond its phallic overtones. Bertha attempts to reassure herself that Kreisler ‘was an artist’, but in fact his words reveal the opposite. By approaching the subject of his art as an object for consumption, particularly one known for its softness as well as the fact that it is shaped to the hand, Lewis exposes the way in which desire has deformed Kreisler’s aesthetic judgement, collapsing any objective or professional distance between himself and his art object. As Carolyn Korsmeyer notes, while the act of looking is predicated on distance, the sensation of tasting is that of extreme closeness to an object (1999, 21). Kreisler’s banana statement signals the complete dissolution of boundaries between the pair, with Bertha’s ‘shiver of warning’ manifesting her body’s outward recognition that it is about to be devoured.

What is so chilling about this scene is just how quickly Lewis shifts from the banal image of a banana to a vicious sexual assault. Rather than undermining the seriousness of the incident, the bathos of this tasteless transition leaves the reader all the more sickened. One of the reasons that this incident is so shocking is that it is so unexpected: because Lewis is only interested in presenting the ‘outside’ of characters and events, the reader is left to feel their way back over the rough surface of the text for hints as to the motivation behind Kreisler’s sudden eruption into violence. Lewis’s denial of access to the insides of characters becomes increasingly pronounced in his subsequent writing. In his 1937 war-memoir *Blasting and Bombardiering*, he explained his ‘externalist’ approach as follows: ‘I enjoy the surface of life because it conceals the repulsive turbidness of the intestine’ (1967, 9). I want to turn now to Lewis’s growing distaste in the interwar period for what he deemed the ‘internalist’ methods of modernist contemporaries, including James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf.

As is indicated by the prevalence of the term ‘stream of consciousness’ in contemporary philosophy and psychology, by the time Lewis returned from the frontline subjectivity had widely come to be associated with liquidity. Finding himself isolated from the main currents of literary modernism, Lewis lambasted the fluid textures of Woolf and the overcooked style of D. H. Lawrence, which, he argued, resulted in a ‘sickly stew’.⁵ *Ulysses*, he argued in *Time and Western Man*, ‘imposes a softness, flabbiness and vagueness everywhere in its bergsonian fluidity’ (1927, 120). Lewis’s post-war writing – *The Childermass* (1928), *The Apes of God* (1930) – can therefore be understood as a reaction against what he felt to

⁴For an excellent essay on meat in Lewis’s writing see Edwards 2011.

⁵In his essay ‘In Praise of Outsiders’, Lewis argued that ‘D. H. Lawrence was plainly an “internalist” of an almost pathologic intensity – a man very much of the “dark Within,” but one who rather oddly gathered his material from the sunlit Without, and then carried it, gnashing his teeth and in a blind rush, into his hot and sticky cave, to cook it up, for the strange carnivore within, into a sickly stew’ (1989, 201-2)

be modernism's privileging of the internal over the external, and his rejection of the notion that the text might obtain mastery of the world through processes of assimilation. The Lewisian subject is instead faced with the 'indigestion of Reality', with the narrator of *Tarr* explaining how the protagonist 'was very fond of reality; but he was like a man very fond of what did not at all agree with him' (1996, 204).

Lewis was also averse to a prose style that appeared to be predicated on reconstituted material, describing with gusto how:

Gertrude Stein's prose-song [*Three Lives*] is a cold, black suet-pudding. We can represent it as a cold suet-roll of fabulously reptilian length. Cut it at any point, it is the same thing; the same heavy, sticky, opaque mass all through, and all along. It is weighted, projected, with a sibylline urge. It is mournful and monstrous, composed of dead and inanimate material. It is all fat without nerve. (*The Enemy*, Volume 1, 82)

Lewis evokes the stodgy textures of Stein in his layering of modified repetition: 'cold, black suet-pudding', 'cold suet-roll', as well as 'the same thing; the same', all the while building up to the overt mimicry of the Stein-stutter that he deploys in *Apes* and *The Childermass*.⁶ Like the menu of the 'Restaurant Lejeune', Lewis suggests that Stein's work is overcooked, spoiled in the process of refinement. Yet while Lewis delights in boiling down his literary adversaries to their essential qualities, the suet-pudding analogy reveals a lot about his own processes. In his novels, as in his criticism, food is intimately bound up with the materiality of form. Paradoxically, his breakdown of Joyce and Stein allowed him to construct a vision of art as a recalcitrant substance, unable to be broken down into its constituent parts. Rather than being incorporated into a stream of consciousness before dissolving into 'moments of being' (Woolf, 84), or transubstantiation into epiphany (Joyce, 213), Lewis's disruption of alimentary processes signifies his assault on the palatability of form, his preference for a reading experience predicated on discomfort or even pain. Yet this process may have brought him closer to the experimentation of contemporaries such as Joyce than he ever would have admitted. Woolf herself described reading *Ulysses* as a process that involved 'considerable pains to oneself' (*Letters* 2, 533).⁷ Lewis's was perhaps not the only form of writing designed to lodge in the gullet.

Lewis was, however, a key early innovator of modernist indigestibility. In 1937 he recalled that his first novel *Tarr*:

⁶ For an example of the Stein-stutter in action see *The Apes of God*, 439. Satters also 'steins' in *The Childermass*, 50.

⁷ In her diary, Woolf also deployed an alimentary metaphor to describe her distaste for *Ulysses* and her confusion as to why T. S. Eliot favoured it so highly: 'When one can have cooked flesh, why have the raw? But I think if you are anaemic, as [T. S. Eliot] is, there is glory in blood. Being fairly normal myself I am soon ready for the classics again', (1980, 188-189).

was not ‘constructed’, as the commercial pundit calls it. It did not conform to the traditional wave-length of the English novel. There was not a lot of soft padding everywhere, in other words, to enable the eggs to get safely to market. Indeed they were not eggs. They were more like bullets’. (1967, 88)

Instead of wave-lengths, the rhythms of *Tarr* are formed of ruptures and spasms that blast away at the conventions of the traditional ‘English novel’. Just as bullets make violent mouths in our bodies, Lewis transforms the boundaries both of readerly consumption and of the self into something hard and unpalatable. In its refusal to ‘conform’ to existing conventions, Lewis presents *Tarr* as having developed a hard outer shell that can penetrate its surroundings while remaining unassimilable. As well as anticipating his subsequent reaction against the more fluid currents of literary modernism, Lewis’s aesthetics of distaste in *Tarr* were part of an attempt to bring to the surface all that nineteenth-century realism tried to either conceal or render appetizing. Transforming some of the more negative attitudes that surround this hostile and recalcitrant writer is no easy task. Yet if Lewis is known for being, in W. H. Auden’s words, a ‘lonely old volcano of the Right’ (qtd. by Smith, 221), then he is also a figure who dared to erupt, turning our insides out, exposing our horrifying contents.

Works Cited

- Bachelard, Gaston. 2002. ‘The Myth of Digestion [1938]’. *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*. Trans. Mary McAllester Jones. Manchester: Clinamen Press. 172-184.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2010. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. London: Routledge.
- Edwards, Paul. 2011. ‘Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock: Meat and Postmodernism.’ *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*. Ed. Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, Nathan Waddell. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate. 223-240.
- Lewis, Wyndham. 1967. *Blasting and Bombardiering*. [1937] London: Calder and Boyars.
- 1989. *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change*. Ed. Paul Edwards. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press.
 - 1931. *Hitler*. London: Chatto and Windus.
 - 1987. *Men Without Art*. [1934] Ed. Seamus Cooney. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press.
 - 1950. *Rude Assignment: A Narrative of My Career Up-to-Date*. London: Hutchinson.

- 1996. *Tarr: The 1918 Version*. Ed. Paul O’Keeffe. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press.
 - 1965. *The Apes of God*. [1930] London: Penguin Books.
 - 1926. *The Art of Being Ruled*. London: Chatto and Windus.
 - 1956. *The Childermass*. [1928] London: Methuen.
 - 1982. *The Complete Wild Body*. Ed. Bernard Lafourcade. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press.
 - 1968. *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature*. [1927] Ed. Wyndham Lewis. Issue 1. Volume 1. London: Frank and Cass.
 - 1927. *Time and Western Man*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Joyce, James. 1956. *Stephen Hero*. [1944] London: Jonathan Cape.
- Kenner, Hugh. 1954. *Wyndham Lewis*. London: Methuen.
- Korsmeyer, Karolyn. 1999. *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *The Powers of Horror*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smith, Stan. 2007. ‘Broad Minded Leftwingers and Marxian Playboys: Wyndham Lewis and W.H. Auden and the Literary Left in the 1930s.’ *Wyndham Lewis the Radical: Essays on Literature and Modernity*. Ed. Carmelo Cunchillos Jaime. Verlag: Peter Lang.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1985. ‘A Sketch of the Past.’ *Moments of Being*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- 1980. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 2, 1920-1924*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew MacNeillie. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
 - 1978. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 2, 1912-1922*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson, Joanne Trautmann. Fort Washington: Harvest Books.

‘Accidental Archaeology’:
the resurrected texts of Iain Sinclair
and Derek Jarman

By Jess Chandler

RED EYE is accidental archaeology (it shouldn't be here in this form,
a perky ghost sleepwalking through streets first witnessed many years ago,
tired veins shot with yellow and red inks).
– Iain Sinclair, 'A NOTE ON THE WHY & WHEN OF IT',
RED EYE (Test Centre, 2013) –

The meanings of texts evolve over time, partly determined by the form in which they exist. Publishers, as curators, are responsible for overseeing the process of a text's transformation into something permanent. First edition texts are free from history, while rediscovered or reissued texts must contend with the mythology of their past.

Test Centre, an independent publishing house and record label, was established by Will Shutes and myself in 2011. We are interested in bringing lost forms back to life, and believe in the importance of the physical form of a book and its influence on interpretations of its content. Our catalogue to date is both archival and contemporary; we have published old and new material, spoken word vinyl LPs, magazines and books, by a mixture of unknown and well-established writers.

Two publications in our catalogue exist simultaneously in two periods of time, and are almost contemporaneous in both: Derek Jarman's *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* (1972/2014) and Iain Sinclair's *RED EYE* (1973/2013). Jarman's text unexpectedly found its way to us, while Sinclair's was searched for over a number of years before finally being excavated and handed to us. *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* was first published by the small, Dorset-based Bettiscombe Press. Only a few copies of this edition are still in existence, the rest thought to have been destroyed by Jarman, who was embarrassed by his youthful attempts at poetry. The only publicly accessible copy in the UK, available at the British Library, feels as though it will disintegrate in your hands, delicate and fragile, its cover flaking and peeling, its binding unstuck, its pages drained of colour and stained with age. *RED EYE*, on the other hand, had only a partial existence in the past – if book form is what constitutes formal existence for a work of literature. The typescript of *RED EYE* existed somewhere, and we knew about it from references in Sinclair's other books, but it was only known in fragments, part of the Sinclair mythology: another semi-fictional character.

We published the two books back-to-back: *RED EYE* in October 2013, after many months of scrupulous work and discussion, and *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* in January 2014, designed and printed in a matter of weeks. The processes involved in bringing them back to life raised interesting questions: about the value of reissuing lost texts (were they lost because they lacked value?); the conflict between staying true to the original form and possibilities of that time, and resisting the impulse to be merely archival; the responsibilities to the authors and their relationship with their younger selves and, in the case of Jarman, the absence of posthumous consent.

The texts could not be more different stylistically yet there are strange similarities between them, and surprising overlaps between the writers' lives and artistic approaches. Both texts are cinematic projects, the early works of two aspiring filmmakers experimenting with ways of combining and juxtaposing image and text. Jarman wrote *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* during his formative years as a filmmaker, and the visual quality of the book – each poem accompanied by a postcard image on the facing page – is very revealing about the development of his cinematic methods. The poems are presented like works in an artist's catalogue, and the book forms an interesting investigation into how to construct the interplay between text and image. *RED EYE* developed from a similar interest in experimenting with writing that reflects and builds upon filmic techniques. Sinclair's first years in London were spent at film school in Brixton and *RED EYE* is the most cinematic of all of his books. It was to mark a transition in his career, after which filmmaking would exist primarily as a sensibility in his work rather than an ongoing practice.

RED EYE was written in 1973 and planned for publication by Sinclair's own Albion Village Press in 1974. In his note in the 2013 text, Sinclair observed that the typescript was 'an extension of the compulsive 8mm diary-filming that informed communal life in Hackney after 1969'. A collection of titled sequences, *RED EYE* imitates this compulsive form, capturing everyday life with all its surreal qualities. It was 'an attempt to record the particulars of domestic life ... by testing the limits of the tight circle of locality'. As a prologue to the more mythical structures of the books which would follow, local, everyday life provided the material for Sinclair's early poetic experimentation.

The story of *RED EYE*, its composition, failed original publication and resurrection 40 years later, reveals a lot about Sinclair's methods as a writer, and about the responsibility and influence of the publishing process in defining the legacy of a text. Before its eventual publication in 2013, *RED EYE* existed in different versions, pushed aside yet in a constant state of transition. It eluded definition and finality; the form it needed to take was not yet clear, and not yet achievable. At the time of initial composition, small presses were flourishing and numerous journals and magazines made possible, indeed encouraged, the publication of works-in-progress. Segments from what became *RED EYE*

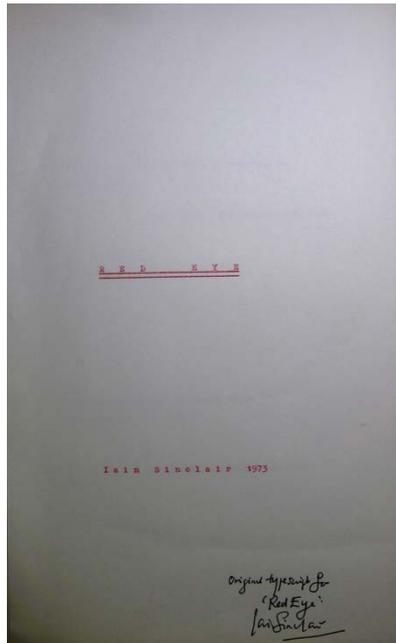
appeared in various places, including the magazine *Turpin* and Tim Longville and John Riley's *Grosseteste Review*. To understand *RED EYE*'s previous existence, 'you would have to understand the world of that time', Sinclair told me; 'there were lots of magazines ... material was being sent out fairly raw, and whether they would have a secondary life and become books was not clear. They were just works-in-progress; overlapping works-in-progress all the time'. *RED EYE* came very close to having a secondary life, but 'it never resolved, it never came to fruition'.

One reason a book never materialised was purely practical; financial constraints limited the possibilities, and Sinclair felt he would not be able to do it justice. He wanted it to have colour images, to represent its inseparability from the 8mm diary films. He envisaged silkscreens – an artist's book more than a poetry book – and just couldn't afford to materialise his vision. At the same time, J.H. Prynne, who Sinclair was in close correspondence with, said that he had issues with the text. Gradually these obstacles slowed the momentum, and 'by that stage the materials of *Lud Heat* [Sinclair's next book, published in 1975] had emerged which very much formed a book that was fresher and hotter in my mind', he explains.

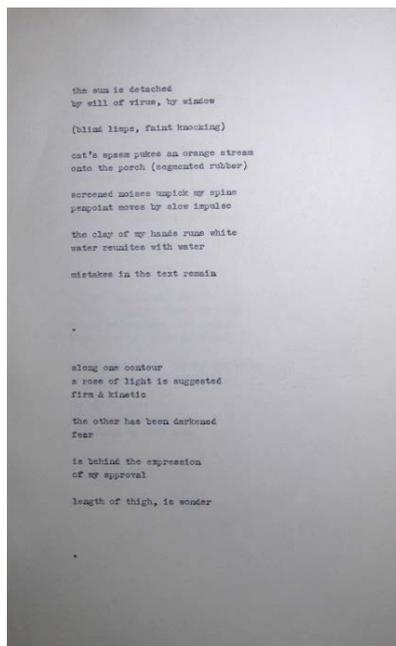
So *RED EYE* vanished into boxes, and over time its existence faded from memory. '*RED EYE* never was there in the past', Sinclair says. 'It was really like a strange ghost, because although it existed in my mind, and was moving towards the point of becoming real, it didn't become real. So it floated away in the amniotic fluids until, miraculously, this other grouping occurred, all these years later' and it finally emerged 'as a new book of old ghostly material'. In his note at the end of the 2013 book, he acknowledges the accidental circumstances of its eventual publication in book form, 'entirely due to the energies of Test Centre who have returned Hackney to a state of readiness and experimental action, both ways in time'. This experimental interaction between past and present texts and formats is now a continuing practice for us, fortuitously initiated by the process behind *RED EYE*'s publication.

What is perhaps most significant about the story of *RED EYE* for anyone interested in Sinclair's work is what it reveals about his methods of composition: the overlap of different texts, the blurring of distinctions between them, and the ostensible randomness of their eventual grouping into published works. Sinclair had written and self-published a few poetry books when he wrote *RED EYE* and had begun work on *Lud Heat* and *Suicide Bridge* (1979), his two great Blakean London texts. *RED EYE* is revealed now as the transitional project which brought a more visionary sensibility to the earlier domestic works, and sections of *RED EYE* appeared in magazines with titles that later became part of *Suicide Bridge*. Sinclair's books emerge from fragments which may not instantly cohere but are later assembled and connected as the output of a particular time and its preoccupations.

The rediscovery of the manuscript of *RED EYE* was partly thanks to the emergence of Jeff Johnson, now Sinclair's bibliographer, whose research led Sinclair to search through every closed box for hidden treasures. One day, almost by accident, he came across *RED EYE*, a 'long thin typescript, comfortably lost among the detritus of the period'. The lost, mythologised text



The covers of the original *RED EYE* typescript and the 2013 book.



sun detached
by will of virus, by window

blind lips, faint knocking

cat's spasm pukes an orange stream
onto the porch (segmented rubber)

screamed noises unpick my spine
penpoint moves by slow impulse

clay of my hands runs white
water reunites with water

mistakes in the text inviolate

.

along one contour
a rose of light is suggested
radiant & kinetic

the other has been occulted
fear

is behind the expression
of approval

length of thigh / is wonder

.

8

The first pages of the 1973 *RED EYE* typescript and the 2013 book.

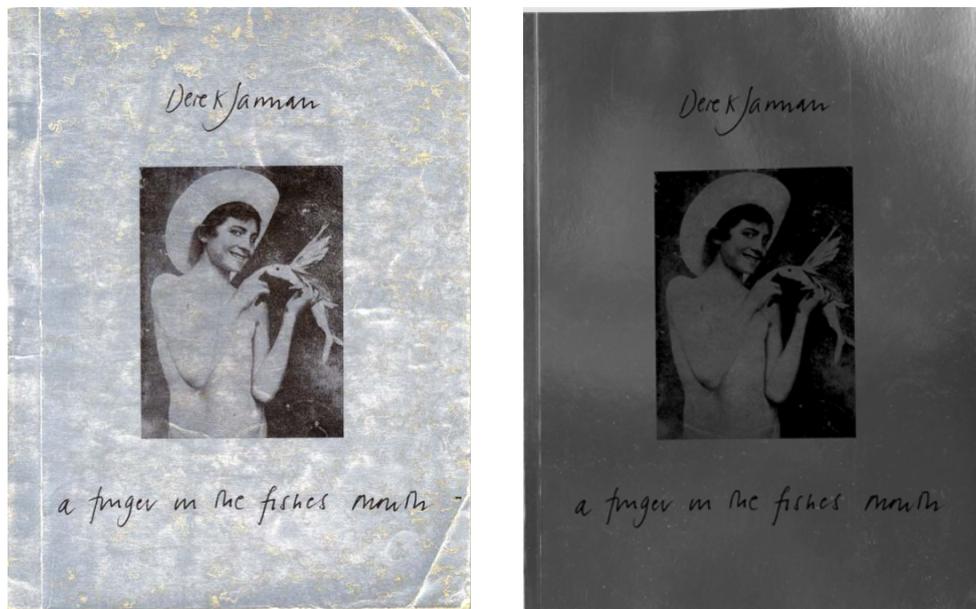
was suddenly real again. I asked Sinclair what the process of editing an old text had been like, and whether he'd had to resist an urge to rewrite and improve: 'I think the process is to respect the mind-set of the period ... rather than saying "well what would I now do"... I was trying to do the original book but to slightly refine it and sharpen it in relation to now', he said. This is the approach we tried to mirror and what *RED EYE*, hopefully, materialises.

During our conversation about *RED EYE*, Sinclair and I discussed Jarman's book, partly as a point of comparison but also due to his connection with Jarman and my interest in their London encounters. In Sinclair's bookdealing days Jarman was a regular customer, often visiting his stall in Camden Passage, Islington. Visiting markets was part of Jarman's London routine and he collected antiques, old bits of junk, books and postcards, some of which found their way into *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth*. When I asked about the similar processes involved in the resurrection of the texts, Sinclair highlighted the crucial difference: '[Jarman's] book was published but equally disappeared. So you've reinvented a published book, given it another life', but with *RED EYE* we were 'inventing an unpublished book ... and I was forced to confront that it does exist, which was quite a difficult thing. In my mind, its status was that it didn't exist'.

The republication of Derek Jarman's book was a more intentional than accidental process, timed to coincide with the anniversary of his death, and with the year-long programme of events planned for 'Jarman2014'. Less than two weeks after the publication of *RED EYE* we were approached by the writer and film curator Gareth Evans, who asked if we would be interested in publishing a facsimile edition of *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth*. We knew nothing about the text – few people did – and were handed a typescript of the poems, with no sense of the striking visual quality of the original book. Our curiosity triggered, the typescript was followed by a Dropbox link to a folder full of jpeg scans of a faded original copy belonging to Keith Collins, Jarman's partner during the final years of his life. The purely digital nature of these first encounters with the book only served to convince us of the value of its reproduction. It was these scans which would be edited to form the facsimile edition, put together entirely from photoshopped images accurately assembled after a few research trips to the British Library. It was a strange process of destruction and reproduction, old forms processed via new technologies in order to be reconstructed in the same old, but materially improved, form.

Jarman's book cannot be understood without a sense of its striking format; the cover is printed on shiny, silver mirror paper, with a Wilhelm von Gloeden photograph of a boy holding a fish with his finger in its mouth in the centre. Above the image Jarman has written his name, and below it the book's title, while on the back cover, also in his handwriting, is a phrase from one of the poems that he would reuse later in different contexts: 'thru the billboard promised land'. Inside are 32 poems, indexed at the back; each has its own

numbered title page which when turned over reveals a bright green postcard image with the poem on the facing page. The book is full of blank spaces, blocks of text treated and positioned like images, an exhibition catalogue of visual frames. The poems show Jarman's immersion in a wide range of historical, geographical, cultural and literary references, from Rembrandt to Rothko, Blake to Coleridge and Cocteau. The arrangement of poems is random, breaking out of their own apparent sequence to see what juxtapositions emerge. It is a playful, youthful book, experimental but unpretentious – a scrapbook of imagery and ideas.



The covers of the 1972 and 2014 editions of *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth*

While *RED EYE* refused to remain forgotten, *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* seemed intended to decompose and disappear, as though to protect the reader, and perhaps Jarman, from the passing of time, as the disintegrating mirror reflects back an increasingly obscured image of whoever looks at it. It is a form appropriate to its adolescent content, a form that would rather disappear than allow the effects of age to be visible. In reissuing the book, were we interfering with its natural lifespan or, by replicating its original format, bringing it authentically back to life and allowing a new generation of readers to experience it and watch it age alongside them? Of course we don't know how this book will age, its legacy or its physical condition. The process of replication was also one of transformation: a new time, new readers, new materials, but the same idea.

Jess Chandler, December 2014

A note on Test Centre

Test Centre is run by Jess Chandler and Will Shutes, both BA and MA graduates of the UCL English Department. Their publications include: *Stone Tape Shuffle* (LP); ‘Austerlitz and After: Tracking Sebald’, *RED EYE* and *Westering* by Iain Sinclair; *Museum of Loneliness* (LP) and *GOOGLEmeGOD* by Chris Petit; *Proletarian Post-Modernism* (LP) and *The 9 Lives of Ray The Cat Jones* by Stewart Home; Derek Jarman’s *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth*; the poetry anthology *I Love Roses When They’re Past Their Best; Within Habit* by Oli Hazzard; *Pedigree Mongrel* (LP) by Jonathan Meades; *To End It All* by Paul Buck; *Dark Islands* by Tom Chivers; *{Enthusiasm}* by SJ Fowler, *Pangs!* by Robert Herbert McClean, *Serious Justice* by Jen Calleja, *Republic Of Dogs/Republic of Birds* by Stephen Watts; *microaggressions* by American poet Erik Stinson, and 6 editions of its fiction and poetry magazine. In 2015 they were nominated as ‘Most Innovative Publisher’ at the Saboteur Awards. Forthcoming in 2016/17 is an anthology of experimental translations edited by Sophie Collins, a multimedia publication with Holly Pester, an LP with Tom McCarthy and books by Sam Riviere and Rachael Allen.

‘A very long list of things
I’m not doing’:
an interview with Philip Horne

by Leo Robson

In his first term at Cambridge, Philip Horne shared a kitchen with a fellow undergraduate who talked endlessly about Henry James. He had studied *The Golden Bowl* at school and expressed the belief that anyone who hadn’t read the book couldn’t understand literature. Horne was left with no option but to do what no undergraduate really wants to do. He spent the Christmas vacation reading *The Golden Bowl*.

If his intention had been to prove his hallmate wrong, the effort was a miserable failure. Horne, now a professor in the UCL English department, devoted the next forty years to reading, rereading, teaching, and editing James’s work. In 1990, he published *Henry James and Revision*, a study of the New York Edition of James’s fiction. Then, after putting together *Henry James: A Life in Letters*, for Penguin, he became general editor of the James titles in the publisher’s Classics series. His work for the publisher has not marked the limits of his editing. He has recently finished a volume containing James’s autobiographies and memorial writing for the Library of America, to celebrate the centenary of James’s death, in February 2016. And he is currently overseeing a scholarly edition of James’s novels and stories, which is being published by Cambridge University Press. Horne will be the volume editor for *The Golden Bowl* and James’s working Notebooks.

Here Professor Horne talks to Leo Robson, cultural critic and the author of an essay about the James industry “The Master’s Servants”, about his obsession with James’s life and work, from inauspicious beginnings to hyperactive present.

Q: You originally started reading James basically out of spite. [Shakes his head.] How did that lead to you writing the PhD which became the book, *Henry James and Revision*?

A: I read James in my spare time through the rest of my degree. I did an American paper, which was taught by Tony Tanner, among other people. Tony taught him in relation to Hawthorne a bit. I remember reading Tony’s book *The Reign of Wonder*, which contains a lot about the novella *A London Life*, which I later edited. I expected him to be my supervisor but a friend of mine was doing Hawthorne and they thought that had to be with Tony. So I got Philip Gaskell, the author of *From Writer to Reader*, a bibliographer, who had an interest in Ezra

Pound, an interest in James Joyce, and no interest in Henry James. He was a nice man, very keen on gadgets. I'd go to see him for twenty minutes every two terms, he'd correct some punctuation, and then show me his gadgets.

Q: Was he interested in revision?

A: Not noticeably. I think as a bibliographer he wouldn't have been very interested in my very Cambridge close reading interest in what I had got by collating the different versions of the texts. In a way, that was alright. It was a blessing in disguise. It gave me an excuse to go back to people who had taught me as an undergraduate and even people who hadn't, like Christopher Ricks. I'd ask people to read bits and pieces: Adrian Poole, Howard Erskine-Hill, Eric Griffiths. This was 1979 to 1983-ish. I got a separate grant to travel to Yale. I can't remember where it came from. I may have got a grant from the college or a prize of some sort. I was never in America for longer than three or four months.

Q: Do you just sit in the library all day long?

A: The nice thing was that you were kicked out at four-thirty and then you couldn't do anything. You could watch a movie. Play video games.

Q: Were you conscious of the rest of the James community squirrelling away on related topics?

A: I certainly knew of Ruth Bernard Yeazell. I think the whole academic world was a bit insular and Cambridge especially. There were already quite a few graduate students – already too many in the sense that there was a job dearth. It was really in 1993, at the conference for the sesquicentennial of James's birth, that I met the rest of the James community. The book was already out by then and so I thought I should show my face and it was an excuse to go to New York. I met a lot of people there – people I've collaborated with since.

Q: Back then, though the universities had expanded, James as a field of study was relatively open. How did you decide what to study?

A: I was a bit of a Ricksian. I'd been going to his lectures. So I knew I wanted to read James with as much attention as you'd read poetry. Revision is a way you can do that – but also you have to do that to get anything out of it.

Q: Was there a particular Eureka moment during the process?

A: My Eureka moment was to do with the convergence of revision and allusion. James revises in order to allude. There's a revision in *Daisy Miller* where Daisy and Winterbourne are coming out of the Coliseum. [Horne takes the book down from the shelf] In the 1883 version, he writes, "He felt the young girl's pretty

eyes fixed upon him through the thick gloom of the archway; she was apparently going to answers.” But the revision goes, “He felt her lighted eyes fairly penetrate the thick gloom of the vaulted passage – as if to seek some access to him she hadn’t yet compassed.” There was something about the revision. The words “passage” and “access”, as well as “thick”, which was there in the original version. It puzzled me for some reason. I suddenly realised it was Lady Macbeth’s soliloquy: “Make thick my blood,/Stop up th’access and passage to remorse”. I thought that James was remembering this speech and drawing on it for his rewriting – the use of “thick”, “passage”, and “access” calling up the idea of “remorse”, and therefore putting an emphasis on the repentance for hardness which comes over Winterbourne. He alludes more when revising the work.

I think the style changes quite a lot in the course of the 1890s. I know there’s a famous moment when he starts dictating, but he also starts feeding in poetical language. Quite often you will look up a phrase – we have been doing that a lot for the Cambridge Edition at the moment to trace allusions - and you’ll see that it is poetic, but it’s in one hundred and fifty minor poems from the nineteenth century but not in any good poetry really. He seems to be using it as part of a conscious way of making people read prose differently. It’s basically become possible to do work like this now. Well you could do it before. I got obsessed with this subject in the early 1980s and wrote a thirty-thousand word essay on James and allusion. I basically just sat for ages in the university library. It’s never been published. I’ve drawn on it quite a lot. I’m thinking of going back to it. I’ve collected rather a lot of them ever since. In the past you had to think quite seriously that something was an allusion before you bothered to look it up in the concordances. You’d think “Keats? Shelley? Wordsworth?” It was amazing I found anything really. It wasn’t that I recognised them from a poem. I just thought there was something about them. I suppose I’ve got an ear for it.

Q. Do you think that Pound and Eliot saw James as a predecessor in allusion?

A. I think James doesn’t allude in that jagged way. They don’t allude in a polite way. With James, you don’t have to get the allusion to see what he’s talking about. Very often they are for his own amusement. Have you looked at Christopher Ricks’s edition of *What Maisie Knew* in the Penguin Classics edition? It’s an amazing thing, the notes are done as an essay – he says you don’t need notes for Henry James because he’s always explaining everything you need to know when he alludes to something you might not be familiar with.

Q. So isn’t that just borrowing, and not allusion?

A Well, he’s playing with it in some way. It’s never inert. He obviously thinks they’re great images, I suppose. The stuff I notice is the stuff that he’s made stand out. It’s a different register. He’s using words and phrases with more weight than the others – they’re coming from somewhere. I’ve got this runaway

James reading group at UCL, which started a few years ago, with graduate students, colleagues, academics from elsewhere, a novelist or two. I needed to find a way to read *The Golden Bowl* very carefully, for the edition. In the end, it got about six sessions and then we went on to other things – like the essay on D’Annunzio. Reading D’Annunzio is what makes him think he can write about the Prince. Once we did *The Golden Bowl*, we moved onto other things.

Q. Why did you choose to edit *The Golden Bowl*?

A: Well, low motives—it’s textually not so complicated. I thought: I can’t face doing all that again. Plus it’s the summit of James. And I was interested in what it would be like to annotate it. People say it’s abstract, but it’s full of references to particular things. I’m supposed to be doing it at the moment. Well, it’s on a very long list of things I’m not doing.

Q. What are the others?

A. I’m also trying to organise things for the James centenary. I’m going over to America because the Library of America volume is coming out. I’m doing a couple of talks and I might do something as well. I’ve got a talk on James and Roosevelt’s autobiographies.

Q. The subjects of a book you’re writing?

A. I’m supposed to be. That’s another thing I’m *not* doing.

Q. Is it almost finished?

A. In some senses. I’ve got fifty thousand words.

Q. A comparative study?

A. It’s sort of biographical, literary-critical, a bit of cultural studies, quite political. If I weren’t doing the Cambridge Edition, that would be done. But the volume editors keep sending them over. The big thing is the notes and the edition. It’s very hard to read a book and just look for notes. When you’re editing a book, you’re thinking about so many things at once and it becomes very easy to be distracted. We’re trying to do things like – if he names a town in Italy or the United States, it’s kind of interesting/relevant to know whether he had been there at that point or if he went there later. If he had been there, what did he say about it? If he hadn’t been there, what would it have signified – was it an industrial town? In scholarly editions, it’s not particularly conventional. We did *Confidence* and Gert Buelens came over because he’s editing it. His edition is coming in so I thought it was a good way of getting me to read it again.

The famous ones have had critical or scholarly editions. But they wouldn't have the full variants. Our remit is historical. The introductions are about genesis, sources, inspiration, composition, publication, and reception, with some idea of the context – the expatriate community in Paris, that kind of thing.

Q. How does a scholarly edition come about?

A. They write to you – in this case, to me. It was about seven years ago. They were doing a fair number of editions – Austen, Conrad, Lawrence. They asked me if there should be a scholarly edition of Henry James and I said, Yes. So I put in a proposal and then they said Yes. And then I panicked and didn't reply for about six months.

Q. Do people get paid?

A. They are supposed to, though not yet. It is an honour to be doing it. And we hope that this kind of edition will count as a monograph. There seems to be a view that editing is just donkey work. Well there is donkey work in it!

Q. Tell me about editing James's autobiographies for the Library of America. What did it involve?

A. The text is just the first edition – he didn't revise it. The main contribution is the additional material. I asked various people for suggestions – memorial pieces, though nothing that was in the Library of America edition of the criticism done by Leon Edel and Mark Wilson in 1985. Some that got left out of the criticism. His essay on Charles Eliot Norton, for example. They were incredibly good, those volumes. But if they left something out, it was because there was so much. And I wrote a note on the text. I consulted some previous books and saw there could be a bit of style to them – they can be expressive, whereas we've got a fairly austere remit on the Cambridge Edition. It is a very good operation. They give you somebody to work with – in my case, James Gibbons. We were almost collaborating on the notes.

I was very glad to do it. I never thought I'd get to do one, mainly because I'm not American. And with the Cambridge edition, you put in all this work. You feel you need to do something with your name on it.

Q. Was writing an autobiography a natural thing for a novelist to decide to do?

A. Well, he wasn't supposed to do it in the way he did it. It was supposed to be about his brother. For him, it was "the family book". Obviously by the time of *The Middle Years*, he's on his own in Europe. It comes to be all about him, but it's still about his relationships.

Q. Did novelists do that sort of thing though?

A. I hesitate to say that they didn't.

Q. Do you have any particular thoughts on why Henry James matters in 2016?

A. The closest I could get to an answer is the reading group. There are six or seven members of the MA who join the group each year. It has this very loyal following. James's sense of humour – if you get it, you want more of it. It is a training in reading. Paul Armstrong wrote about James's writing as being didactic in an enlightened way. The level of pleasure is very obvious from this group. We all have a drink at the start. I don't want to exaggerate the effect of the alcohol, but it's not a graduate seminar when you drink afterwards once the serious work is done. We're all enjoying it, even if it gets a bit rowdy sometimes.

‘Self-Portrait in a
John Ashbery Book’

Discovered pencilled in to Senate House’s copy of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*.

Looking into the back of a spoon (as Parmigianino did it)
Trying to pronounce elliptical French at four in the morning
(Or was it German? or Italian?
It was one of the Modernists’ stolen tongues, anyway
And I think that might be the point.
Probably French)
As the sun rose like the moon, or
Like a yawning man’s bald head hugged by
The parenthesis of the clouds
A *boules* lawn was being planted from grass seed
By tortoise men and turtle women, who
— in some months —
Will be closer to the dirt than the tips of the blades ever were.

‘Grumping away quite happily’:
Karl Miller and
Dan Jacobson at UCL

by Simon Hammond

My interviews about Karl Miller elicited a few of the same things: chuckles accompanying anecdotes and quoted witticisms; attempts to do justice to a personality that was both ferocious and generous; praise for his ardently holistic vision of journalism, criticism and creative writing; and accounts of trepidation and outright fear giving way to deep affection.

‘Have a lot of people said that?’ Mark Ford asked me after admitting that he found Miller ‘quite scary’. ‘It was a persona he kind of cultivated’, Ford reflected, ‘and I’m sure it worked well for him as an editor, as it meant people were always trying to do their best for him’. This was certainly the case for Ford himself when he began contributing to the *London Review of Books* in the late 1980s. He remembered trying to make every sentence that he wrote ‘Karl-proof’, and the ‘absolutely terrifying’ visits he made to their office to discuss his work. The same was true when Ford subsequently joined the English department at University College London. He told me about an unscheduled visit by Miller to enquire whether he had finished his thesis, which Ford had bluffed was further along than it was to get a teaching position. ‘I literally went home and wrote ‘Chapter 1: John Ashbery and ... no idea...’

When I spoke to René Weis he was particularly effusive about Miller and how much he had felt his influence, perhaps because while Ford and the other longstanding members of the department that I spoke to first encountered him as an editor or senior colleague, Weis was taught by him as an undergraduate. More often than not Weis referred to him as Professor Miller. ‘He was simply inspirational’, Weis told me, ‘formidably clever’. Weis found Miller’s teaching revelatory - ‘literally every sentence, every word mattered!’ - and he spoke fondly of standout moments from those early years: being encouraged to join a discussion about some work-in-progress poetry between Miller and Seamus Heaney, going to Miller’s house for a dinner party and spending the evening talking to Christopher Ricks. ‘That’s the kind of thing you remember later on and think “Well, have I done that?” Anyway...’

‘Emphatically yes, instantly yes’ was his answer when I asked whether he thought that Miller’s tenure as head of department, which lasted from 1974 until 1992, was a golden age. I had been paraphrasing John Sutherland, who once wrote in an essay about the history of UCL English that it was ‘a departmental

high point – only equalled, in my view, by the 1870s.’ This is in spite of the fact that when Miller applied for the position, at the age of 44, he was hardly an obvious candidate. He was not a scholar; he had no postgraduate education, having abandoned further study in favour of literary London (via brief stops at the Treasury and the BBC); and he had not a single book, scholarly or otherwise, to his name. ‘It was certainly an audacious appointment’, Peter Swaab told me, ‘a brilliant one, but rather surprising’. Ford was more definitive: ‘It wouldn’t happen, I can say almost categorically’, while Weis, who described the appointment as ‘visionary’, said that ‘it would be unthinkable now’.

It helped that Miller had backers in high places. He was encouraged to apply by his old friend Noel Annan, who was then Provost of the College, as well as the outgoing head of department, Frank Kermode. ‘Kermode admired Karl’, Weis told me, ‘and Kermode didn’t admire very many people’. With stints at *The Spectator*, the *New Statesman* and *The Listener*, Miller had established himself as the pre-eminent literary editor of his generation, and Kermode was one of many estimable contributors to his pages. Miller drew on the best writers from both in and outside the academy – other scholars on his roster included Ricks, John Carey, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and William Empson. As an editor he combined a modernising, eclectic, egalitarian ethos with an unwavering commitment to what Ford called ‘the highest standards of the higher journalism’.

It was the maintaining of these standards that had prompted his stormy departure from the *New Statesman* a few years before, after the new editor, Paul Johnson – who disapproved as much of Miller’s use of scholars as his coverage of pop culture – objected to a piece by Empson. Swaab explained to me that ‘as Empson got older his pieces became wonderfully eccentric and uncompromising. They might have been great journalism but they weren’t really good journalism’. Miller, who would years later publish Empson’s final pieces in the *LRB*, was defiant and resigned in protest. ‘Karl quite liked to pick fights!’ Swaab explained. Among the many signatories of a letter in support of Miller were Kermode and Annan.

As far as they were concerned Miller was the best person for the job even if his background was unorthodox, though Kermode did warn that the appointment of a journalist wouldn’t please everybody. Miller had a capacious, unsegregated view of culture, but he knew the lie of the land, and admits in his memoir that his move to the academy required ‘a certain amount of gall’. Complaints that he was ‘not one of us’ were indeed forthcoming, from scholars who in many cases had actually contributed to his pages. But these were not from within UCL, where Miller remembered feeling welcomed. The department has an unusual tradition of close ties with the wider world of letters going back to the Victorian era. In recent years Kermode had brought both Stephen Spender and A.S. Byatt into the department, and the chair that Miller took up, the Lord Northcliffe

Professor of Modern English Literature, is renowned in part for being endowed by a press magnate.

‘Coming after Kermode a lesser person might have really felt the need to prove an awful lot’, Weis told me, remembering that at Edinburgh, where he studied for a year before coming to UCL in 1974, there were four of Kermode’s books on the first year reading list alone. Along with the linguist Randolph Quirk, with whom he happened to have been at primary school on the Isle of Man, Kermode had made drastic changes in the department, breaking from the control of the wider university and remaking the syllabus. Miller entrenched this transformation, becoming a fierce defender of the department, while gradually adapting things to his liking. The head of department had more autonomy in those days, and many I spoke to jokingly used the word ‘fiefdom’ about Miller’s premiership. Swaab, who joined at its tail end in 1990, told me that by then ‘the department was, in a considerable way, made in his image’.

The department’s remit was broadened – films and bestsellers were added to the syllabus, as well as lectures on foreign and ancient literatures, and a stronger emphasis was put on social and commercial contexts. It is perhaps not surprising that a fastidious editor like Miller would give practical criticism a more essential place in the curriculum. Weis described criticism classes where two members of staff would fight over a passage, with students encouraged to join in. ‘They were bloodletting occasions’, he said gleefully. Miller was also wedded to the tutorial system. Clive James, who wrote a pioneering TV column for *The Listener*, has written that Miller preferred to edit ‘with the author present, so that obscurities could be explained to him by their perpetrators’, and likewise Miller put great emphasis on one-to-one teaching. Weis told me that the speech Miller gave when he was made an honorary fellow of the university in later life was principally an impassioned defence of the tutorial.

Miller brought with him an ethos of journalistic clarity and an aversion to jargon – this was among the reasons he had little time for literary theory. Though he later became something of a sceptic, during his time in the department Kermode was a conductor for new, principally continental currents of theory, not least through a now famous seminar where Roland Barthes, among others, was a guest speaker. The seminar didn’t last long after Kermode left. Philip Horne offered the explanation that ‘Karl was very keen on people and characters’ and so would have been averse to anything ‘abstracting or monolithic’. Weis remembered once receiving a dressing down from Miller for praising Stephen Heath, a renowned post-structuralist who had been a regular attendee of Kermode’s seminars. ‘It was a bit unfair really - Stephen Heath was brilliant. But it was a time of ferment, remember’, Weis explained. ‘Literary theorists would have seen UCL under Karl as the dark ages’, Ford responded when I brought this up, ‘and probably still do’ he said with a laugh, in reference to the department today.

Being on different sides in the theory wars, though, did nothing to diminish the relationship between Kermode and Miller. Kermode remained a regular visitor to the department for many years, and was given an office to work in whenever he stayed in London. Philip Horne remembers Kermode borrowing his typewriter on one of these occasions, and after a few days asking for it back only to have Kermode reply, Horne paraphrased, ‘actually I’m working on a really important book so I’m going to keep it for a bit longer’. Sheepish, Horne waited until Kermode had left for the day, at which point ‘I got the master key and retrieved my typewriter’.

Though Miller took a hard line about theory, the predominant spirit of his leadership was one of openness, generosity and loyalty. Swaab praised him in particular for fostering an ‘intellectually liberating environment’ – ‘he prompted people to trust their own character, to follow their own projects rather than conforming to protocol’. Miller led from the front in this regard. He had a long-held ambition to run his own review, one where he wouldn’t have to answer to anyone, and not long after joining the department an opportunity arose. In 1979, together with two former colleagues from *The Listener*, Mary-Kay Wilmers and Susannah Clapp, Miller founded the *LRB*, published ‘marsupially’ within the *New York Review of Books* until it became independent a year later.

In the early days the review was known as ‘the house mag’ in the department, and many of the staff were frequent contributors. ‘Probably it was quite difficult if you didn’t write for it’, Horne told me. Traffic also moved the other way: Horne was one of a number of scholars who joined the department after first writing for the review. Horne was still a postgraduate student at Cambridge when he was recruited by Miller, who had been impressed by a piece he had written about horror movies for the *Cambridge Review*. Horne described to me how in those days the desks of the three editors were set up in such a way that ‘you’d be hovering in the middle taking fire from all directions, sort of wondering what you were doing there and whether it was time to go yet’. It would be Horne, a few years later when he began working at the department in 1985, who would lead UCL English’s study of film.

Swaab pointed to a shelf in his office stacked with aging copies of the review when I ask him about it – ‘I keep thinking I should chuck them out but then sometimes as a work avoidance thing I’ll pull one out...it’s amazing when you look back at it’. He told me a similar story to Horne’s. His piece in the *Cambridge Review* that caught Miller’s eye was an appreciation of Empson. He remembers being filled with both ‘pleasure and alarm’ to pick up the phone and hear ‘Hello, this is Karl Miller’ and be asked to write for him. Only an unexpected call from Harold Pinter has had the same effect since. ‘He had a playful way of doing his own formidableness’, Swaab explained.

‘Literature was a way of life for him’, Weis told me when I asked how Miller managed to run the department and the review at the same time. ‘He was a workaholic’, Weis continued, ‘he worked all the time, but never in a flashy way’. Everyone I spoke to remembers Miller editing proofs constantly, often while sitting in lectures and seminars – ‘he was just always doing something’ Horne said. Swaab remembered finding it ‘a little disconcerting’ when presenting a paper to have Miller listening ‘with a bit of his mind’ while editing with the rest of it. Speaking about Miller’s own lectures, Swaab joked that they would sometimes consist of ‘one of his greatest hits’ from an old issue, ‘often not entirely adapted to the occasion’. ‘His lectures were wonderful performances’, he went on, ‘but I don’t think that they were absolutely pedagogically utilitarian to the highest degree’. They were full of ‘side lights and ironic reflections’, and ‘if you had been called on to summarise them afterwards it wouldn’t have always been that easy’.

Perhaps Miller was the only member of the department who could say ‘I’m going down the road’ at around three o’clock and walk to his other office in nearby Tavistock Square, but he wasn’t the only one moonlighting. Others with literary or journalistic ambitions were encouraged and supported. Michael Mason founded the publisher Junction Books, later to become 4th Estate, while he was a lecturer. Two others, Jeremy Treglown and Allan Hollinghurst, took up editorial positions at the *Times Literary Supplement*. Successful writers also emerged from the student body, including Mark Lawson, Amit Chaudhuri, Blake Morrison, and Lynne Truss. ‘Doubleness really was the theme: double lives, everybody doing two things’, Horne told me. It’s an image of the department he’s reluctant to relinquish; he emphasised how liberal it has remained in spite of the increased pressure to specialise.

Horne was making a reference to Miller’s critical study of ‘the double’ in literature, *Doubles* (1985), one of a number of books Miller published after joining UCL. Miller was particularly interested in Scottish literary culture – a biography of Henry Cockburn, which he had been working on for a number of years, was completed shortly after he arrived. Rather like his lecturing style, Miller’s prose in these books is eccentric and entertaining – though he fostered clarity and directness in others, his own work could be wilfully idiosyncratic.

As well becoming more of a scholar himself – he described himself as a ‘hackademic’ – Miller also excelled at bringing new scholarly talent into the department. In his life as an editor Miller was particularly known for his acumen, having been an early champion of VS Naipaul, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie and many others. Weis told me about a visit Rushdie made to the department the night after winning the Booker Prize for *Midnight’s Children* (1981), where he explained to gathered students that he owed a great deal to Miller as ‘he used to publish me when I was just a businessman in a sharp suit’.

As head of department Miller was just as prescient; Weis listed the many brilliant scholars Miller spotted, among them David Trotter, Danny Karlin, Henry Woudhuysen, and Rosemary Ashton. ‘I think his nose for appointments was flawless’, Weis said, and admitted how proud it made him to be one of those selected by Miller. His break came when the scholar who was supposed to be delivering the *Anthony and Cleopatra* lecture fell ill, and Miller asked Weis to step in. He talked of himself as one of a great many people who owe their careers to Miller.

One of Miller’s canny appointments was the South African writer Dan Jacobson. Jacobson had lived in London for most of his adult life, but made his name with a series of precise, compassionate novels preoccupied with the inequities of his homeland. This period of his work, which began in 1955 with his debut *The Trap*, culminated with an inter-generational saga called *The Beginners* (1966), after which Jacobson had been exploring new territories, producing work less directed by autobiography and more inclined to obliqueness and sleight of hand. A prodigious writer who had had his share of success, Jacobson nevertheless found joining the department in 1979, at the age of 50, a welcome respite from the struggles of literary life. ‘I remember him saying,’ Ford recalled, ‘that he couldn’t believe it when he arrived at UCL, that a pay cheque came in every month whether he’d done anything or not.’

Though he too had no further degree or scholarly works to his name, Jacobson was hired to teach English alongside the rest of the faculty. There was a sense in the department, Ford explained, that ‘if you could write a good sentence and you were a literary person then you could do it all’. It’s a sense that still endures to some degree – Ford believes it is still ‘less professionalised, less specialised than other departments’. Weis, in a similar discussion, laughed about how David Trotter used to describe it as a department of ‘*amateurs*’ (pronounced with a French accent). This was not to say that Jacobson was anything other than extremely learned, as I had emphasised to me by many I spoke to – ‘Dan was encyclopaedic’, I was told, ‘he had a photographic memory for Tolstoy, for Dostoevsky, for Dickens’; he was ‘one of those old fashioned quoters of big chunks of poetry’.

Jacobson, who taught at UCL until retiring in 1994, did, however, bring a personal intensity to his teaching that most I spoke to associated with his perspective as a writer. His lectures, which tended to be delivered without notes, could be very personal. ‘I think Dan’s engagement with literature was often very direct’, Swaab told me, and he remembered a striking lecture Jacobson gave about Jane Austen’s *Emma* where ‘he spoke very powerfully about jealousy, and about how humiliating it was to experience it’. Horne, who said that Jacobson was a ‘spellbinding lecturer’, described a lecture he gave about Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that ‘made an impression on everyone’, in which Jacobson spoke about race in South Africa. ‘Entertaining and engaging the

audience of undergraduates was a very serious project for him, one that he really cared about’, Anthony Julius told me when I visited him at the offices of his law firm, a short walk south from the department. He recalled a conversation between Jacobson and Miller about their lectures where they spoke ‘as performers might, as stand up comedians’, and where Miller assured Jacobson that ‘he still had it’.

Julius’s thesis, ‘TS Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form’, which he completed in the early 1990s while working as a high profile litigation lawyer, was one of the most famous PhD projects that Jacobson supervised. ‘He was very engaged with the subject, very sympathetic to the project’, Julius told me. The two became great friends in the process – ‘We would have lunch regularly, we talked on the phone once a fortnight, he came to my wedding, I know his children, he knew my children, he was very close’. I had heard from members of the department that Jacobson could be severe, that he could reduce students to tears over colons and semi-colons, and I put this to Julius: ‘I never saw that side of him, maybe because I used semi-colons correctly’, but he certainly agreed that Jacobson could be exacting. An incident where Julius saw a streak of this was in their first ever conversation on the telephone: ‘I said “nice to meet you” and he said “we haven’t met yet”. Give me a break, I remember thinking.’

Rather like Miller, Jacobson could be tough, but this was a product of how seriously he took literature, how much he felt it mattered. Everyone I spoke to characterised him as a warm and generous character who went out of his way to help students and staff, to give advice, to comment on new work. ‘He was incredibly kind and helpful’, Ford told me, ‘and really loyal to people who he sort of took up’. ‘Dan was just a delightful guy’, Julius said summatively.

Miller and Jacobson, presiding figures in the department for many years, in fact had a great deal in common. Both were outsized personalities; both had a fundamentally Leavisite constitution tempered by metropolitan sensibilities; both believed in the idea of the common reader; both saw themselves above all not as a scholar but as a man of letters. Ford, in discussing these connections with me, also emphasised their parallel trajectories. Neither had a propitious background for their chosen careers – Jacobson was brought up in a Jewish household in Kimberley, South Africa, after his parents had emigrated from Eastern Europe, while Miller, who liked to joke that his parents ‘married at leisure but repented in haste’, was brought up by his grandmother outside Edinburgh. Both in a sense came to literary London from the margins, determined to make their mark.

I had heard that they had differed politically, Jacobson tending to the right and Miller the left, but when I suggested to Julius that this may have led to conflict, he smiled: ‘Well, they were not exactly manning the barricades, they were not tearing up the paving stones in Malet Street’. He described their relationship

to me with an analogy: 'I can imagine Dan and Karl being in a room together and other people wondering how they could quite share the space with two rhinoceros, and how could the rhinoceros happily relate to each other'.

Others described them as a kind of double act. Horne remembered spending the majority of his job interview as a silent witness to the two of them arguing jovially about his work, and being unable to figure out if this meant they were giving him the job or that he didn't have a chance. Swaab told me about their rambunctious participation in graduate seminars, where together they would submit the speaker to what Miller called 'disobliging questioning' – 'it was often within the bounds of courtesy but not absolutely', he said.

Jacobson had a 'rabbinical gravity' on these occasions, giving the impression that 'he was bending a very courteous but not entirely impressed attention on you'. His questioning tended to have 'a certain urbanity' – he would politely preface his condemnation of substandard work with the phrase 'My one misgiving'. Miller, Swaab said, tended to ask questions along the lines of 'what were you really saying' – 'inculcating the speaker for having blathered on without getting to the point'. Swaab spoke fondly of these events as much for their comic theatrics as their intellectual rigour. 'Karl enjoyed the theatricality of life', he explained; 'he loved comic personas, he relished character.'

The atmosphere of the department in these years, thanks to the personalities of Miller and Jacobson, had a distinctive mixture of informality and seriousness. Horne, who described Miller as 'funnier than any stand up comedian', spoke approvingly of how 'he made you feel that making jokes all the time didn't stop you from being serious'. Jacobson too was a great wit and joke-teller, with a less dry, more rueful style. Swaab illustrated this lack of stuffiness to me with a story about Miller's enthusiastic participation, despite being in his sixties at this point, in staff-student football matches. Lightness, originality and non-conformism were all encouraged, but 'what was great about them', Ford told me, 'was that they made the study of literature, and writing about literature, meaningful, something that was connected with the whole way you lived'.

Most of those I spoke with felt they only really got to know Miller and Jacobson after the two of them retired. Both regularly saw old colleagues from the department. In Jacobson's case he would often encourage them to join him for a game of tennis, which he played regularly despite his advancing years. 'I always won, not surprisingly', Ford told me; 'I was quite a bit younger, but he loved playing'. A highlight of their matches was inevitably literary conversation: 'He was pretty dismissive in an entertaining way of most of the novels that were published, and would be amusingly denunciatory or withering about the latest this or that. I won't name names, but pretty well everyone...' Swaab played as well: 'I always felt there was a sort of Leaviste tendency to his tennis, issuing limiting judgements about shots that were played'.

Ford also told me about his visits to Jacobson's home in Golders Green. Jacobson apparently liked to joke about how he had financed the extension at the back of the house, claiming it was thanks to money he had received for the rights to his novel *The Rape of Tamar* (1970), a biblically inspired tale that was a tremendous flop when it was adapted. Peter Schaffer's production closed at the National Theatre after only a few weeks.

Jacobson had worked on an increasingly diverse set of projects during his years at UCL – an iconoclastic meditation on the Hebrew bible, a memoir in vignettes, a collection of criticism, and a number of distinct, inventive novels that transposed his concerns into both the past and the future, experimented with fantasy and the counter-factual, and could turn in on themselves to examine the practice of writing. 'He was never better', Julius said about his late work, 'but there was a sense that he was pretty big in the 60s and the 70s and then things sort of tailed off. I think he felt he'd had his moment as a novelist'.

In retirement Jacobson barely let up, turning his attention to his heritage with two travelogues melding memoir and history, one set in South Africa, the other following threads of family genealogy back to Lithuania. 'He said he would be bored otherwise', Ford told me, and as proof of Jacobson's unbiddable intellectual energy reminded me that one of his very last projects before he became ill was a work of translation for which he had to learn a new language – Dutch. Swaab similarly talked admiringly about Jacobson's 'open-minded life of the mind', citing an early example from their friendship when Jacobson had stopped by his office to ask whether he had any books to recommend. 'I was very flattered', Swaab said.

Miller I was told was also always on the look out for new things, and tended to ask a lot of questions when he met up with old colleagues, wanting them to introduce him to things he didn't yet know about. A tête-à-tête over lunch was Miller's preference for these occasions - everyone spoke very fondly of them. His last two decades were quieter than the hectic ones that preceded them. Miller resigned from the *LRB* the same year he left UCL, but he was still involved in literary life, and continued to publish essays and books intermittently, including another biography of a great Scottish man of letters, James Hogg (2003), and a wry memoir of his career, *Dark Horses* (1998).

Swaab was one of those who saw Miller often – 'I would always leave with my spirits raised', he told me. The summer before last, Swaab was 'mainly complimented, albeit a little put upon' when Miller insisted that he would only visit his old friend Christopher Ricks in Gloucestershire if Swaab drove him. They got 'hideously lost' on the drive, Swaab admits, but Karl was 'very patient and quizzical about this'. After lunch in the garden, Swaab remembers returning from a walk with Ricks's wife, the photographer Judith Aronson, to find Ricks

and Miller lying out on the grass, hands on their elbows chatting. They were ‘very affectionate friends’, Swaab said of this scene. On the drive home Swaab says he felt tired, but Miller kept him chatting all the way back to London – ‘I felt he could still outpace me even though he had 30 years on me’.

One member of the department who was very close to Miller, and saw him often in his later years, was Neil Rennie. A Miller protégé who has been at UCL ever since he was an undergraduate – Weis joked to me that Rennie was ‘always Karl’s favourite’ – Rennie spoke generously to me about Miller on a number of occasions, but was reluctant to be interviewed for this essay, finding the experience too difficult. He did, however, hand me a short note with a few thoughts, explaining how it took him a while to realise that Miller ‘was nearly always joking’, and describing Miller as ‘funny and very fierce and a friend’.

Swaab visited Miller at his home in Chelsea shortly before he died. On arriving he was ‘absolutely shocked’ by Miller’s appearance, but Swaab soon found himself reassured: ‘within a few minutes he used the words sartorial and locomotive with really ironic flare. Sartorial was to do with the overcoat he needed to wear because he had become so thin, locomotive to do with the challenges of the wheelchair he was now in’. They went for lunch at a local restaurant, where Miller insisted that the waitress was flirting with Swaab. No, Swaab insisted, it was gallantry addressed to Miller, but Miller was insistent that ‘it was all to do with Swaab, and Miller might as well have not been there at all’. Swaab told me how happy he was to see Miller still so much himself. After lunch they spoke about poetry for another hour or so. Miller expressed concern that his medication had dulled his critical faculties, but Swaab said that ‘I was happy to reassure him that he was full of mental life. It was a wonderful last meeting’.

Karl Miller 2 August 1931 – 24 September 2014

Dan Jacobson 7 March 1929 – 12 June 2014

‘Grumping away quite happily’ was VS Pritchett’s description of Miller at UCL in a letter he wrote to their mutual friend Daniel Aaron in 1974. VS Pritchett: A Working Life by Jeremy Treglown (Chatto, London, 2004) 316.