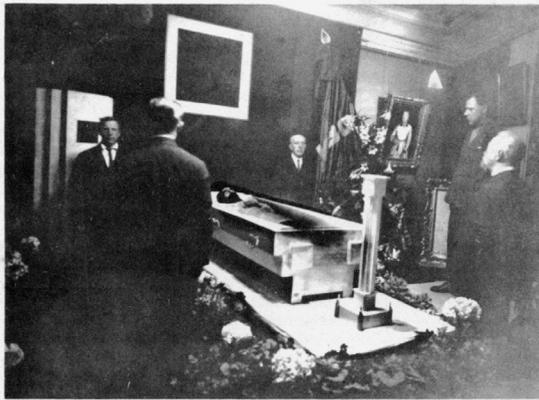
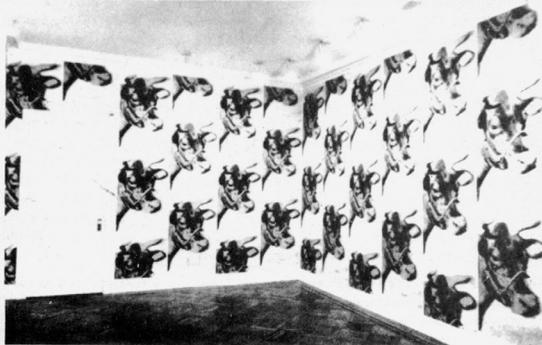


## Descent Into The Street



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2

This PDF contains two related texts in circulation; 'Fragments of a conversation with Ron Hunt' and 'PlayTime'. The former is an edited transcript of a conversation between Ron Hunt, Matthew Stuart and Andrew Walsh-Lister, recorded at RH's home in Hastings, East Sussex on Wednesday 10 December, 2014, while the latter, is a text written and read by Ron Hunt at *Poetry will be made by all!*, an exhibition co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Simon Castets and Kenneth Goldsmith at the LUMA Foundation, Zurich in 2014. Both were first published in *Bricks from the Kiln* #1 (December 2015) alongside contributions by Natalie Ferris, James Langdon, Ralph Rumney, Mark Owens, Jamie Sutcliffe, Iain Sinclair, Traven T. Croves (Matthew Stuart & Andrew Walsh-Lister), Parallel School, Catherine Guiral, and Max Harvey, He Pianpian & Li You. The texts are reproduced here in April 2020 as a free PDF distributed via the BFTK website ([www.b-f-t-k.info](http://www.b-f-t-k.info)).

In March 2020 BFTK published *As Celebration, As Critique, As Play: Ron Hunt, Selected Writings (1957–2020)*, the first standalone title on its imprint. The culmination of a number of years of work and research, *As Celebration, As Critique, As Play* pulls together writings by Ron Hunt across his varied career as a writer, librarian, curator, critic and self described 'lapsed anarchist'. Structured as a 'biographic bibliography' supplemented with annotations and contextual notes, it combines commissioned writing and previously unpublished texts that range from exhibition catalogue essays and détourned Q&As, to A–Z indexes and cherry-picked readers. Writings reproduced in full include:

Francis Picabia: Introduction (1964)  
Yves Klein: A Mythopoeic of the Plurisignative (1967)  
The Arts in Our Time (1968)  
We Are Revealing New Pages of Art in Anarchy's New Dawns (1968)  
Interview with Brigitte Bardot (1969)  
Poetry must be made by all! / Transform the world! (1969)  
An Interview with Pontus Hultén, Stockholm 1981 (1971)  
For Factography! (1976)  
Andreas Gursky (1999)  
Kalf: A Late Perspective (2000)  
Dreams of / Fears of ..... Flying (2009)  
Fourier / Breton / Cherries (2017)  
Hélène Cixous or Waiting for Tears (2018)  
Some Books of Barbara Bloom (2019)  
A Very Brief Dictionary in the Vicinity of Situationism (2019)  
'Recovery' / Is Recovery Possible (2020)

The scan pictured overleaf is the cover of the catalogue for *Descent Into The Street*, a documentary exhibition compiled by RH and installed in the Physics department at Newcastle University, 1967.

Bricks from the Kiln is an irregular journal/multifarious publishing platform edited/ run by Matthew Stuart and Andrew Walsh-Lister. For information on forthcoming issues, titles, events and updates please visit [www.b-f-t-k.info](http://www.b-f-t-k.info), join the mailing list and/or follow on twitter @b\_f\_t\_k

I thought we'd get into it, because it's getting late, as it were. After National Service I began working in a public library. Then I moved to the V&A as a library assistant, running around fetching people's books for them, but I had a lot of time for reading. And I was also working — devilling — for Herbert Read on the modern section of *The Dictionary of Art and Artists*. That's how I got my knowledge of Modernism. I'm an autodidact, my qualifications being four O levels.

At the V&A I was assigned to look after periodicals. Besides all the classics like *Minotaure* and *Cahiers d'Art* I started to read the new mags every time they came in. In *Architectural Design* I came across a reproduction of Richard Hamilton's *Hommage à Chrysler Corp*. He did it for reproduction in the magazine so there's no kind of original. I really liked it. This must have been '58, I should think. So I got his address and went to see him and we got talking. I bought a lithograph of *Chrysler Corp*. from him for five pounds and he said "Don't take it yet, I'm going to do some collage on it". He collaged a bit of silver foil onto this lithograph and then brought it into the V&A for me one day and said "would you be interested in a job in Newcastle?" I had never been near an Art School. I just had this idea that art students were all wannabe Duchamps, sitting there making notes about wild projects.

I'd got into Duchamp while I was at the V&A. Probably as an antidote to the material I was having to write about for Herbert Read and Thames & Hudson. I was overwhelmed by the Lebel book on Duchamp in '58, then Richard's version of *The Green Box* the next year left me in a complete daze. Richard gave me Duchamp's address and I wrote to him — to ask if he had a *Green Box* for sale. He didn't, but sent me a set of Rotoreliefs through the post for nothing. I had also come across a thing Richard had written on Dieter Roth; he gave me Dieter Roth's address. I wrote to Dieter Roth, bought a couple of books and a painting, which is downstairs. Everything was five pounds, it was amazing. Dieter Roth just said "send me five pounds", so I sent a fiver to Iceland, where he was, and he sent me this painting. The difference between the art world then and now is incredible. And depressing.

So anyway, I went to Newcastle, and they weren't all there making Duchampian things, they were into Pop Art at the time. But Richard

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1

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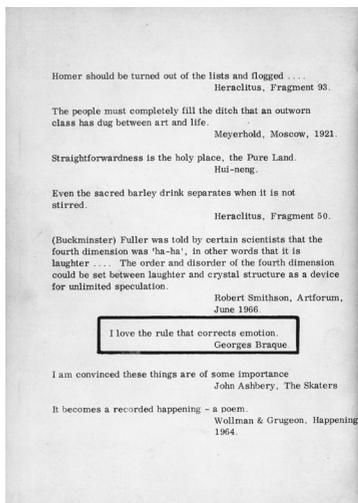
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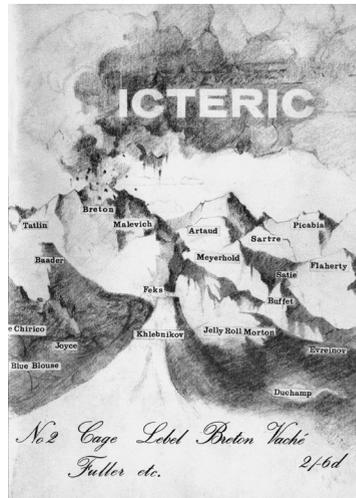
knew I was a Picabia fan, and suggested I do a Picabia exhibition, which I did. It was shown in the Fine Art Department, then went to the ICA in London. *Artforum* contacted me about it, and I started writing articles for them. Then there were these two students called the Wise Twins and they were, and are, totally engrossed in butterflies, and the idea of using nature in their work. I liked what they were doing and we started thinking we would somehow work together. This was a time when people were talking of events or happenings, so we did a couple of things that were half lectures, half happenings and then decided we could make some of this public. I guess this was partly to do with my time in the V&A, reading all the little magazines from the twenties, like *Telehor*, a Moholy-Nagy magazine, which I was always wild about.



So I thought why not do our own? We decided to do a magazine, which we called *Icteric*. Trevor Winkfield had come to see me because I was writing about Yves Klein for *Artforum*. He was also into much of the same material that interested us, so he became part of the group as well. Winkfield collected some of the material; he was in touch with Méret Oppenheim and John Ashbery who both featured in the first issue. The cover was a photograph taken in my back garden; it was a sculpture by the Wises that had a base with grass growing in it and

these weird green lights suspended above. It was functional as well as it showed people how to get into my house. I really liked it, but I don't know what happened to it.

The first issue featured all the *Icteric* people. My contribution was an interview with Yves Klein's widow. We had it printed in the University and paid for it ourselves. The University had no say in it whatsoever. I had come across a copy of the André Breton and Jacques Vaché letters and David Wise's girlfriend translated it. That was a kind of scoop for the first issue, nobody was into Vaché at that time. By the second issue we had made a few more contacts. I'd met Jean-Jacques Lebel in Paris and we did a questionnaire with him, and when John Cage came to London for a concert, we all went down as a group and colared him in the interval and interviewed him. That was the time when people were walking out on Cage; there weren't many there to start with, and by the end there were very few. The whole issue comes across as somewhat anarchist.



A lot of talk at that time was about art and life, though very crudely theorised. This was largely due to the fact that there was very little theory available. You couldn't have read Adorno, Benjamin; the whole Frankfurt school was unavailable. Other than Marcuse, who had been



translated, and who became very important to me. So whatever it was we were doing was rather untheorised. But somehow, and I was trying to figure out how it happened, the Wisers met up with the people who became King Mob, in London. They had just been expelled from the Situationist International, largely because they supported the Black Mask people in New York. And David Wise also got in touch with Black Mask and went to see them, and suddenly, everything got thrown up in the air and everyone thought “Hell, we’ve got to read Marx”, and that’s what happened.

I always think it was partly the fact I came from a working class background. The whole notion of class had never struck me until I was there in Newcastle and it hit me, “Oh yes, I come from a working class background. Well, fancy that.” Whereas nobody at the V&A ever talked about class or anything like that, you just didn’t know what people thought. One of the nice things that happened early on in Newcastle was a conversation with a student, one of Richard’s protégés, called Roger Westwood. I had seen him in the Young Contemporaries and I got talking to him and said “what are your politics?”, a really naive kind of question, and he responded that he was “a lapsed anarchist” — this must have been in ’63. And that’s what I think of myself as now. I remember going away and reading stuff on nineteenth century radical politics. So, slowly as it were, within a couple of years everything had moved away from a notion that somehow you were pushing the boundaries of art, to the notion that you were attacking art itself, and its context — let’s say the bourgeoisie. It always struck me that we took Dada deadly seriously, we thought that attitude was absolutely spot on: anti-bourgeois, anti-art. So it was coming together and then we discovered the Situationist International, and that this was a tradition running straight through their whole trajectory.

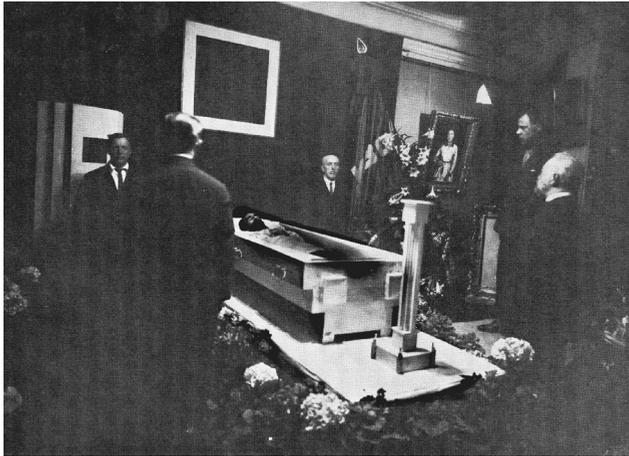
In the University library at Newcastle I couldn’t just order stuff myself, it had to go through the Professor and a Reader in Art History. I got the odd thing in, but generally speaking it was pretty conservative. What I did do though — and I’m not quite sure how it happened — was act as a little salesman for Dick Higgins from Something Else Press. He would send me a pile of stuff and I would sell it in Newcastle or wher-

ever I was doing a lecture, which I'd started doing by that time. The thing that was so odd though was that I was never an expert. I knew a fair bit about Picabia, a bit about Duchamp, Dada and Constructivism — but somehow I was treated like an expert. It was very strange. Before the show I might have known fifty Picabias, mainly through black and white illustrations, and suddenly people were asking me to authenticate his paintings. There just weren't the books, the art world in terms of book production has just expanded exponentially compared with what it was like then. Maybe you could have got Troels Andersen's translations of Malevich's writings, but there wasn't a monograph, and now I go to Brighton University and they have several shelves of books on Malevich.



I didn't read Russian, but realised there was information in other kinds of areas. In literature, in books about Russian film, in books on Russian theatre, so I was going around the peripheries of Constructivism. Then I suddenly realised it was the peripheries that were really interesting. I was totally knocked out by things like Blue Blouse, which was this theatre group going on buses, acting out the news for commuters. Absolutely no one seemed to have cottoned onto this stuff in the peripheries. In *Kino* by Jay Leyda, I read about Dziga Vertov and *Man with a Movie Camera* and thought it sounded interesting, so I got it to show at the Fine Art department. For me that's where Constructivism was going

all along, that's it. So, when I used to do lectures on Constructivism I would get people to order that movie in. When we got it in Newcastle from the BFI no one had looked at it since the forties. I wasn't very interested in the Rodchenko sculptures or Constructivist sculpture, but when they abandoned those ideas and everyone thought they were finished as artists, that's when I thought they became really rather interesting. Again it tied in with that anti-art thing, in fact people around the *LEF* magazine were even more anti-art than the Dadaists. So I just got caught in this: the anti-art camp at that stage.



As part of *Icteric* we also put on events, one of which was called *Why not indeed toys, incense and death*. We were planning to do a third issue of *Icteric* on death, so we started collecting material and somebody came across the line in Rimbaud's *Illuminations*: 'why not indeed, toys and incense', to which we decided to add 'death'. We had a reconstruction of Malevich's coffin in a little room with all these red fabric panels behind it. There was a train shunting up and down beneath the coffin, with flowers all around it, and stuff hanging down covering up the light fittings.

One of us would lie in the coffin at night. It was open for an hour a night, in the Students' Union — we were still avoiding the Fine Art department, no longer a place we wanted to be. People would just sit there and listen to the Beethoven quartets, watch the toy train etc. It all

came from the Malevich photograph of the coffin with people standing at the side, so we had a reproduction of the *Black Square* leaning against the wall and one of us lying in the coffin with the lid open. There were five members of *Icteric*; four of us just stood around and the other person lay still in the coffin for an hour. Odd things happened. When Trevor Winkfield lay in it one night — he'd travelled all the way up from London to lie in the coffin — after about forty minutes I walked round to the reproduction of the *Black Square* and kicked it in. It went off like a rocket, Winkfield thought it was the end of the world. The third issue of *Icteric* never materialised, it kind of fizzled out as people left. By that point the Wisers had moved to London and they would have had nothing to do with it. I was anti-art, but they were anti-art squared. They still won't have anything to do with it.

At Newcastle I also organised a little exhibition called *Decent into the Street*, again outside of the Fine Art department. In fact, it was exhibited in the Physics department. Once Richard Hamilton had gone I never felt I belonged in the Fine Art department, I had very little to do with any of the staff other than Richard. I remember sending him the catalogue for *Decent into the Street*, which was in '66 and I think he'd left that year.

In '66 I realised that the things I was interested in all had this notion that people were moving out of the art field and into something on the periphery or vaguely related. Even Yves Klein did the odd public thing with the architectural project — 'air architecture', with jets of flaming gas and air, and working with nature directly — and the rain paintings (*Cosmogonies*). So I just thought I'd put them all together as I had been lecturing about all this stuff anyway. Actually, the first lecture I ever did was called *Some Ways Beyond Art* and it included all those kinds of people. The Students' Union did an annual arts festival, so I said I'd like to do something for them and would they pay for it, and they agreed. This was *Descent into the Street*. I was quite happy for it to be shown in the Physics Department, rather than the Fine Art Department.

The show used photographs and texts on panels. It started off okay, nobody objected to it. But then I discovered Black Mask and I

decided to add another panel at the end with some Black Mask things on. That's when people started to get very uptight. The show travelled to Carlisle because there was an ex-student there who had heard about what I was doing and wanted to show it, but the college wouldn't even put it up. It went to Bristol Arts Centre, a grass-roots kind of place run by the artist Ian Breakwell, and there was talk of it going to the ICA. They came to Bristol to see it, but decided against it. I remember Anthony Hill, an English Constructivist who was part of the ICA, saying "so you've discovered the Situationists".

During this time at Newcastle, we weren't very conscious about working outside of the institution — it was more of a gut feeling that I didn't like the Department anymore, and didn't want to do things for it. I didn't mind doing an exhibition for the Students' Union, but that was as far as I wanted to go and that way I would have complete control. Had I tried to do anything in the Fine Art Department I imagine I would have run up against some form of censorship. Particularly if I'd tried to include the Black Mask material. They would have never had that in the Hatton Gallery.

A few years later, having written a long piece for *Artforum* on Constructivism, which ran across two issues, Pontus Hultén contacted me asking would I like to do a show on Constructivist theatre and film at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. To which I said "Yes, fine". I had started working on it when May '68 happened and I thought "I don't want to do this anymore, there's something more interesting I could do". So, I told Hultén I wanted to redirect the whole thing to show the way the twenties avant-garde was resurfacing in Paris: in the politics, in the street theatre and particularly in the slogans that were being sprayed up everywhere. It seems to me that there's this underground history running through Constructivism, Surrealism, Dada which was resurfacing there, in the way people were talking about play, and the end of art. So I asked Hultén if I could go in a direction that was like a bigger version of *Descent into the Street* — I'd sent him the little catalogue for that, which he liked — but with May '68 material as the concluding section. And he

OUGH THE ATMOSPHERE: ALL WE

NEW TREMORS ARE RUNNING THRU

NEED IS THE COURAGE TO FACE THEM



POETRY  
WILL BE MADE  
BY ALL NOT  
BY ONE

Q. We've heard the events here last May really changed your life. In what way ? Are you still filming ?  
A. Oh yes. Sure. I mean bread can be pretty useful. I channel it all into the Revolutionary organisations. An exposed nipple can become a Revolutionary book (cf. Vaneigem's 'Traite de savoir vivre...') or other weapons. I'd even work for all those pseudo-revolutionaries who are so busy trying to recuperate the revolution as it's made - you know from the Fugs to Lindsay Anderson. That way I re-recuperate; that's real cybernetic thinking - feedback picking up a Capitalist profit.

Q. Why was it May that specifically changed things?  
A. Well, it was all suddenly obvious. You know we want to be able to lead our lives as we think we should; for that the C.R.S. are mobilised against us. At school you learn of the end of the Divine Right of Kings; nobody tells you the right was simply transferred to the bourgeoisie and status quo. I remember thinking we had all but stopped the system - it was based on our passivity; a change of will and it could be stopped. It was then clear to what a systematic suppression our wills had been subjected. Then there was the graffiti - 'Society is a carnivorous flower' - Hell, I should know that. Here am I a living illustration of the Situationist thesis *The Society of the Spectacle*; I mean it extends indefinitely from the obvious examples - you sitting passively watching me on the screen - wanting a flesh that is celluloid; me playing at being somebody else - somebody dead or imagined. Alienation has surpassed itself. Same of course with the other side of alienation - with the workers separation from his product - this has gone even further than Marx could have imagined.

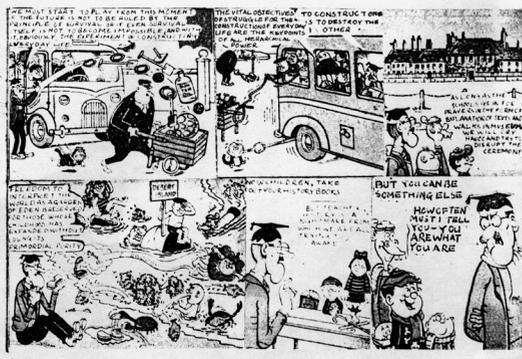
Q. But the system does deliver the goods, can we survive without them ?  
A. We can live without masses of them. Start by distinguishing false needs and real ones. The 'Spectacular Commodity Society' multiplies needs because it can fill none. The 'necessities' that surround us - cars, teles, gear, cameras, paintings, the fantastic acreage of kitch - are spewed out in a never-ending stream; no one thinks of its purpose other than those making a packet out of it. So we really have become a commodity-dominated society; peoples' relationships are made via objects - ton-up kids; stamp-collectors; cottage-in-the-country-owners; pot-smokers.....

Q. Is this what you mean by the poverty of everyday life ?  
A. Yes, from the factory-worker to the druggie, it's generally a matter of survival, not living; an administered survival kit in place of the realisation of desire. Take the poor sod in the factory who says - like so many do - 'I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't work'. God, it's the apotheosis of alienation when life is so boring people can think of nothing more exciting than the daily 8 - 5 grind to make a profit for someone else. Talk about the colonialisation of everyday life; they pull out of India to entrench themselves a little more deeply in your skull. And what's this big underground society. Just another market area; a variation in the range of consumer goods. There is now a 'Gear' and Arts Lab. in every swinging town; all indistinguishable; the same \*C20 civilisation

processed commodities. The latest goods and poses being exhibited, envied, bought and exhibited again. The city itself is dying; death by commodity asphyxiation; Marx's prediction come true - 'The dead hand of technology strangling humanity.' Everybody knows it and no one does anything about it - they are too damned scared of a little revolutionary euphoria. And even the goods themselves could be one of the means for the initial transformation to a qualitatively different form of life. Think of all the goods stacked along the Blvd. St. Germain. They could transform the city - lampposts swathed in fur coats, the pissotieres hung with jewelry and paintings, all those lousy books put into great heaps for the real 'battle of the books', the trees and houses wearing all the trendy gear from the boutiques... Anything you fancy. I mean no one needs all that junk, so lets free it, and us too from it's domination. We saw the first attempts at transforming life in May and as the U. N. (!) Report concluded--This is only the beginning of the youth unrest which will sweep the world clean. Of course we are working backwards - from youth to children. The surrealists, Buckminster Fuller etc. all knew it - Return to childhood, overthrow the reality principle.

Q. You used to have a largish collection of paintings etc. I remember seeing a photo of your house with a Caro and Poons in it. Now you've sold up ?  
A. Why ? Need you ask. Art now is so patently reactionary. As an aspect of society (arts purity is a real myth) it has always allied itself to the prevailing social conditions or functioned as their negation. Now it is fully integrated into a consumer society, complete with middlemen and market-researchers. The revolt of the avant-gardists is nothing but the cosy spectacle of what passes for freedom in minds stultified by an acceptance culture working at full capacity. One can only realise art by transcending it. Moreover it is important to oppose to the absorbent power of society the fact that one cannot overthrow art without realising it. And the project to realise art is the same as the project to reconstruct everyday life. Those moments of imaginative resistance to the external organisation of life contain at least as much poetry as the best volumes of poetry and prose. Poetry is present in everything that does not conform to that morality which to uphold its order and prestige has nothing better to offer us than banks, barracks, prisons, schools, churches, brothels and theatres. It is a society sick enough to buy back my Bridget Rileys etc. at an obvious profit to me. Again the money goes into the project for the destruction of hierarchical power. Beyond the power structure and the ideologies it has fed us its other reality. Let it flower; a ferocious flower bursting through the shit of the given.

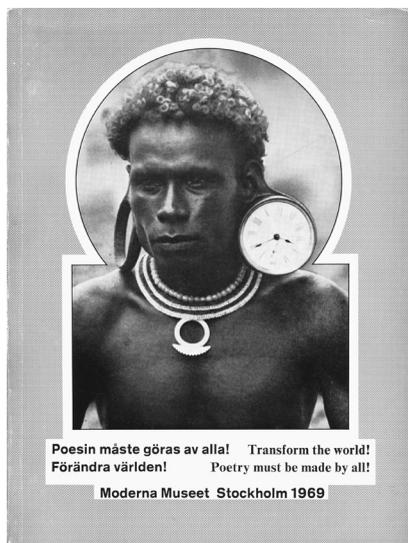
Q. What about.....  
A. No. No more questions about art, economics, politics etc. The day of the partial critique is over. We are asked our opinions of the details so we ignore the totality - but it is the totality that matters. They tell us to look after the pennies, while they look after the pounds. But their days are numbered. The truth is in the whole and the whole is false. Those new tremors running through the atmosphere are in my body. C'mon; lets all get in the action.....



BASH STREET SCHOOL MAGAZINE: NUMBER I

just said “Yes, no problem”. So I whittled down all the Constructivist theatre stuff and added material on Dada and Surrealism and the May ’68 événements — mainly graffiti. Hultén was just wonderful. I said to him “I really like the Marx brothers in *Monkey Business*, can we have a film loop — where Harpo is stamping the customs officer on the head with the latter’s rubber stamp?” and he just said “Sure, sure”. So that’s how it all ended up.

The show, entitled *Poetry must be made by all! | Transform the world!*, went down well in Stockholm. There was a public discussion between Hultén and myself about the show, in front of a big audience and I remember someone asked which was the most important section and I just said “’68”, that got a big round of applause — which indicates the way the wind was blowing back then. I was totally bowled over by the stuff coming in on television. A TV reporter in Paris asking a girl if they wanted to seize power — to which she responded — “No, we want to destroy power.”



The gallery itself was also a space for people to gather and discuss revolutionary ideas, which was Hultén’s idea actually — he was very good that way. The Black Panthers were there, they were in exile in

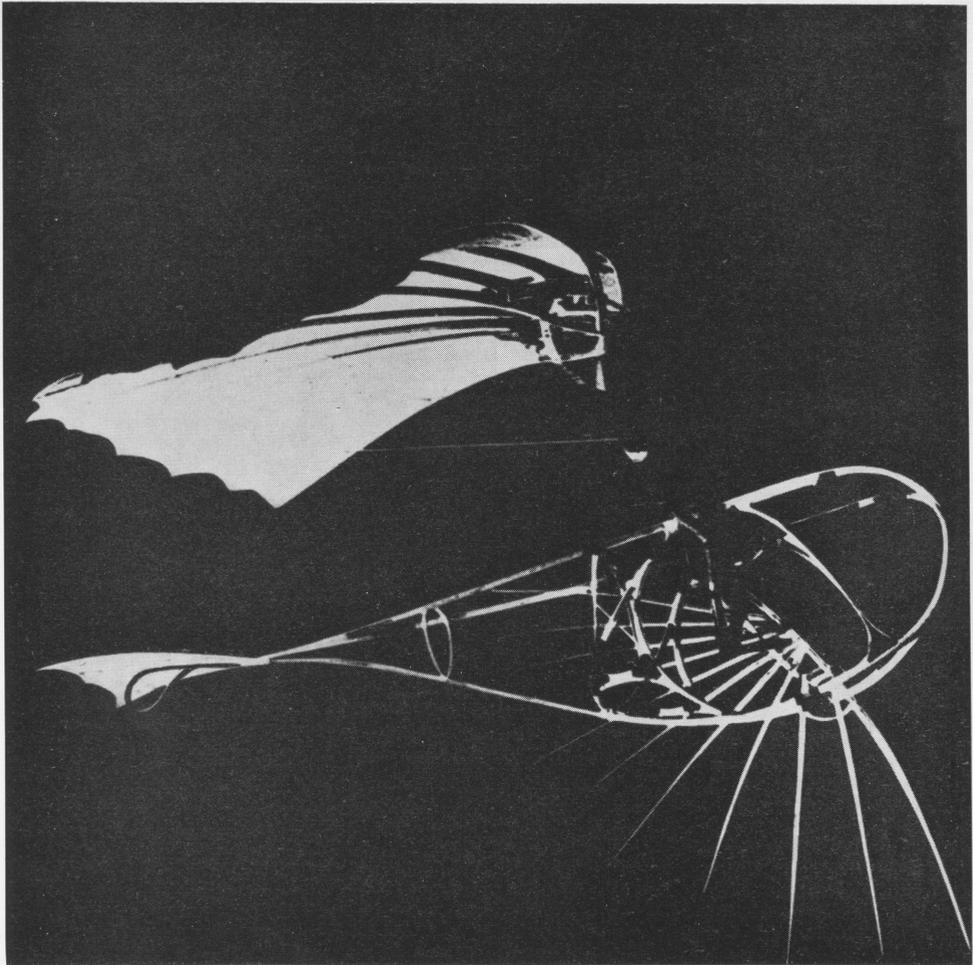
Stockholm. There was also a left-wing bookshop in Stockholm, it was another of Hultén's ideas to ask them in and to let them set up in the middle of the show. There were lectures on May '68 and theatre groups etc. I designed the poster for the exhibition with a détourned Brigitte Bardot and Hultén designed the catalogue. (I'd also done a free broadsheet called *Interview with B.B.*, which I was fond of.) Really, I was just sitting in Newcastle, collecting the texts and photographs. When they were ready I'd send them over. It was all done over the phone, with the girl who was editing it asking "Do you want this on this page? Or this here?" All the assistance I needed I got from students — Raf Fulcher re-constructed the Tatlin glider, other students helped me with translations.

After Stockholm, the exhibition went on to the Kunstverein in Munich, where they took Hultén's idea that they should ask people in to respond to the show. So they asked the local art college to come in and apparently they made a hell of a mess. They basically took it as an opportunity to have a go at certain tutors. The Kunstverein decided it was too much — this mess from the students — and chucked them out. Hultén objected to this, and said they couldn't chuck them out, to which they said "Yes we can". So Hultén closed the show.

From there it went to Vancouver, where I was teaching, although it was nothing to do with me. One of my students, who was very bright and carried a lot of weight in Vancouver, had seen the catalogue and told the Vancouver Art Gallery they should get it over, so they did. Nobody took much notice of it really, it just kind of fizzled out. Vancouver was so hippified at the time.

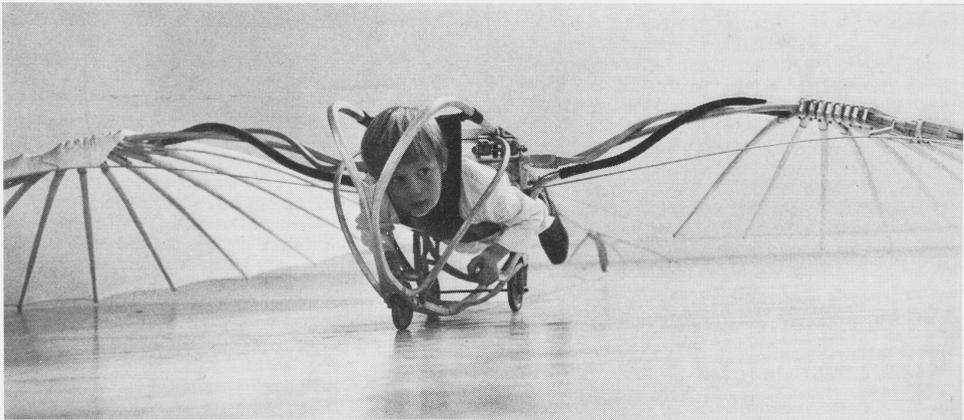
After that I'm not entirely sure what happened. Apparently it went to Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and by that time the panels had got really knocked around and needed restoring. There was an argument about whose job it was to restore it and in the long run RISD didn't put it up, and wouldn't send it back, and I read a few weeks ago that they just destroyed it in Providence.

It's become a bit of a cult now, which is odd. The first time I knew it was resurfacing again was the event in Zurich (*Poetry will be made by all!* at LUMA Foundation, Zurich, 2014. Co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Simon Castets and Kenneth Goldsmith). This was a two day event



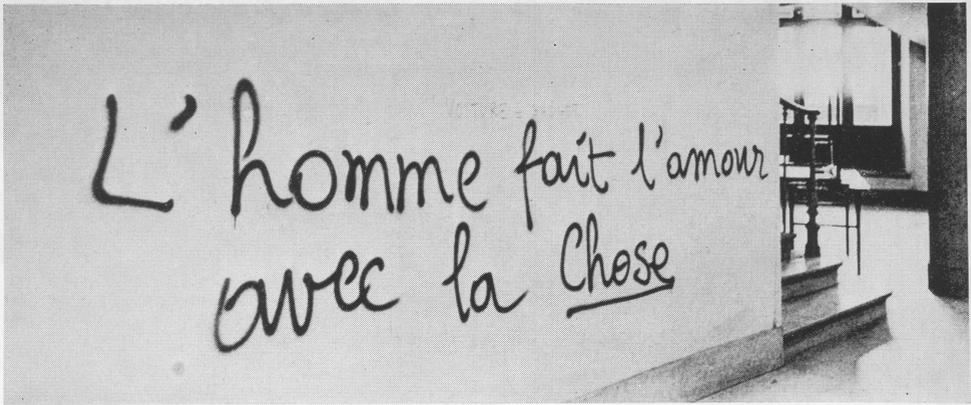
Letatlin, 1931.

Letatlin, 1931.



Letatlin. Rekonstruktion av Roger Fulcher, 1969.  
(Modell för en femåring.)

Letatlin, reconstruction by Roger Fulcher, 1969.  
(Model for a five year old child)



Människan älskar tinget.

Man makes love with things.



Föremål, göm dig. — Böj dig ner och beta.

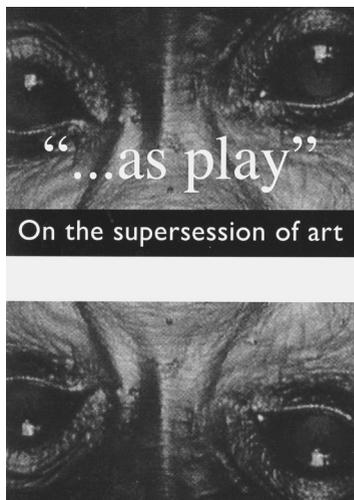
Object, hide. — Bow down and graze.

—like a Serpentine Gallery marathon. I did my bit which was to talk around the cover image to the catalogue,\*\* which, happily, they were projecting randomly all the time on the walls of the gallery. *Icteric* too has made a comeback. There's an exhibition at Manchester Metropolitan on dissent in British art schools—so a lot of my sixties material is there.



It's difficult, this whole thing about recuperation. The Situationists were so aware of the fact it might happen to them; that they might become absorbed, simply become another 'ism', in the great Capitalist spectacle. But had they not been recuperated, they might have just been six people in Paris who very few people ever knew about. But nowadays everyone knows about the SI and their influence is all over the place. Undoubtedly it has become highly academicised. It's a complicated issue, one which I've never really been able to sort out. I don't think it would have done anybody any good had it just remained a little thing involving thirty or so people communicating amongst themselves, talking about revolution and putting out a magazine. As for people writing PhDs on Situationism's impact in Newcastle, or whatever, it's rather strange. I don't see any way out of it though. I never did. I've always thought, you're either a purist or you've just got to accept something is going to happen, over which you've got no control.

I stayed in Newcastle until 1970. It was getting very uncomfortable, I was known as a trouble maker. I was threatened with the sack twice, but I suspect I was only okay because I was writing for *Artforum* and doing the exhibition in Stockholm, at what was then the trendiest museum in the world. It had just had the big Warhol show and the *Inner and Outer Space* show, they were doing a lot of good stuff.



After that I moved to Vancouver to take up another University position. There was an art historian who'd been in Newcastle called George Knox. He'd worked with Richard Hamilton on the translations of Duchamp's *Green Box*, and asked me down to talk about Constructivism when he was in Portsmouth. And then suddenly out the blue he had moved to head up Fine Arts at UBC in Vancouver and needed someone to run a course on Twentieth Century Art, so he asked me. I went out there for a year as a Visiting Assistant Professor and I kept my nose clean. I found teaching quite hard work. I knew certain odd little areas, but I was suddenly expected to do a twentieth century survey: Expressionism, Realism, all that kind of thing, which to be honest hadn't made a great impression on me. So I had to swot up before doing lectures. But I was lucky enough while I was there to get a Guggenheim Fellowship to do something on the Transcendence of Art, in other words to try to add some

theory to the Stockholm catalogue. I did so, but I wish I'd known Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* back then.

I didn't really continue to curate exhibitions or put out publications after that. But then I discovered the web, and with Anna I have a website ([www.ronnaprojects.co.uk](http://www.ronnaprojects.co.uk)) where I can practise a kind of bent art history. Then in 2008 I did a belated third issue of *Icteric*. There was an event in London forty years after May '68 called *Sous les pavés la plage* (Under the paving stones, the beach) organised by Andrew Burgin. Lots of people interested in those events turned up and did their bit. I went along as a spectator, but in the session on King Mob, I tended to know more about King Mob than anyone else at the gathering. And Andrew came up afterwards and asked if I had any '68 material. From that he came to see my stuff and asked was there anything I'd like to publish. Straight off the top of my head I said I'd like to do a third issue of *Icteric*—it had only been forty years since the last one. This is the issue called '...as play. On the Supersession of Art'. A rather Benjaminian collection of citations. So Andrew and I went fifty-fifty on it. A few bookshops took some, but mostly I just gave them away. In a way I thought it would be a chance for me to get the whole 'end of art' thing out of my system, but it keeps coming back. Though now I see it as just one aspect of Modernism (even if its origin lies in Hegel), out there along with abstraction or conceptualism; part of the wonderful world of art, and I'm not being too ironic here.

Ron Hunt, Hastings, December 2014



## \*\* PLAY TIME

Given (1) the exponential expansion of the art world, and (2) the reclamation work practiced on the art of the 1960s; I wasn't too surprised (a couple of years ago) to be contacted by a young Irish artist on placement in Frankfurt — Patrick Keaveney. He was planning a piece which took as its starting point an exhibition I had curated in 1969. The show was *Poetry must be made by all! / Transform the world!*. Two other artists, Liam Gillick and Christopher Williams — with whom Keaveney was familiar — had already taken the catalogue as a source. But what turned out to be very surprising was the extent of the research undertaken by him.

The exhibition had originated in Stockholm at the Moderna Museet; Keaveney went there. It had travelled to Munich; he visited the Kunstverein, and even went to Switzerland chasing a connection. He got to know far more about the show as 'show' than I ever did. Mostly we exchanged e-mails, but one evening he phoned, and in the course of a very long conversation he asked me about the cover image. I explained that while working on the show in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1969 I had wandered into the University Anthropology Department (they had a one room collection of masks, ornaments etc.). What startled me was an alarm clock in one of the cases. Then I looked up, and on the wall was the photograph you see here. I had found the cover illustration for the catalogue.

Much of the exhibition focused on the 1920s and '30s avant-gardes — this image was roughly right in terms of date and had all the hallmarks of a montage with the added cachet of its entering into 'real life'. That idea was taken up in the last section of the exhibition which posited the prolongation of those earlier vanguards erupting in the May 1968 revolt in Paris, particularly the graffiti, with its markedly 'cultural' aspect "Live without dead time"; "Play without fetters"

As I told Patrick that evening I was doubly pleased because at the time I had just read Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* who quoted Walter Benjamin (this was the first time

I had come across the name of Benjamin) to the effect that during the July 1830 revolution in France rebels had shot at the clocks on the clock towers; '[...] wish(ing) to break the continuum of history'. Patrick then said he'd like to know more about the image. My reply was that this would be impossible since the Anthropology Department had been closed twenty years previously.

The next morning I had an e-mail to tell me the photo was by George Brown, a missionary. It was now in the British Museum, and the clock — without its hands and decidedly non functional — was now in a museum in Osaka. I was overwhelmed. This was another event on a parallel with the initial shock of seeing the clock in 1969.

What struck me was the way it dislocated time and space: Newcastle, Frankfurt, the Solomon Islands; Dada, cargo cultism etc; 1930, 1969, 2013. Rocketing round my mind, like one of those great montages from those earlier avant-gardes. It had all the hallmarks of an aesthetic revelation, the whole thing dependent on the new technology. It was a startling cosmology: the catalyst for a jump into another dimension — almost a parallel universe — one we have seemingly forgotten, unearthed by a simple query about that lovely image. A query I thought impossible to answer.

So I am back in the late 1960s, absorbed by the 1920s, and simultaneously stunned by the ever present, ever-burgeoning web, with its contempt for the categories of space and time. I am back with Dada — Heartfield, Huelsenbeck, Man Ray (clocks make regular appearances). Back with Marcuse and *Eros and Civilization* — written in 1955 — and his repudiation of Freud's reality principle: the latter's concept that civilization is, and will be, built on repression. For Marcuse Eros could overcome what Freud had seen as a-historical. He finds support — not only in the relative freedom from work promised by automation — but in Schiller, Breton ('Imagination alone tells me what *can be*'), Stendahl ('Art is a *promesse be bonheur*'), the Surrealist idea that we 'practise' poetry. Marcuse even tackles 'Time' '[...] the fatal enemy of

lasting gratification is time, the inner finiteness, the brevity of all conditions. The idea of integral human liberation therefore necessarily contains the vision of the struggle against time [...] if the "aesthetic state" is really to be the state of freedom, then it must ultimately defeat the destructive course of time. Only this is the token of a non-repressive civilization.' However, it has to be pointed out that in his 1961 preface he wonders if his conception of non-repressive civilization is 'frivolous'. In 2014 it certainly seems even more frivolous.

And yet... what we experience in such a state — an aesthetic state — are moments, moments that don't yet constitute a totality. Like the clock before its appropriation by a gentleman in the Solomon Islands they are elements of a montage waiting to be put together — awaiting their monteur or monteurs. Even if the wait seems nigh interminable. But we have phrases, lines of poetry that have become slogans:

Laurentmont's 'Poetry must be made by all'. Marcuse's non-repressive society. "Play without dead time."

These may be mapped on to each other. They have something in common. They may have different authors, but they point in the same direction, the Utopian. Art remains one of the ways in which this Utopia may be visualized.

Without that visualisation, with its *promesse* — inherent in art and poetry and praxis, without that 'principle of hope' as another Frankfurt (Ernst Bloch) calls it, without a certain 'optimism of the will', as Gramsci wrote from prison; without a certain 'frivolity': the daring to suggest in the face of the particularly invidious performance principle of 2014 — that 'Imagination alone tells me what *can be*', then we are diminished.

Ron Hunt speaking at *Poetry will be made by all!*, an exhibition co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Simon Castets and Kenneth Goldsmith at the LUMA Foundation, Zurich in 2014.