

TERROR IN THE AGE OF THE ARCTIC MONKEYS

FOREWORD

This show is unique in so many ways, it is the first time that the BALTIC has shown a private collection, the first time that we have shown our Collection in a Public gallery and the first time that Mustafa Hulusi has installed the Expander posters, not only in a Public institution but with the work of over 30 other artists in the same room. *When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever* contains art works by some perhaps familiar established contemporary artists such as; Gilbert and George, Richard Prince and Jim Lambie in a way that that supports a young generation of artists both conceptually and metaphorically; Guyton\Walker, Richard Hughes, Olaf Breuning and of course, Mustafa Hulusi. The Zabłudowicz Collection has been growing for over 12 years, concurrently with this exhibition we have opened *176*, a project space in London to work with the Collection in much the same we have worked with Jerome Sans and Mustafa Hulusi on this exhibition and publication; inviting curators and artists to produce new exhibitions with the content of the Collection.

This exhibition fulfils an ambition of mine, to bring my art collection back to my hometown. Home is a state of mind, a sense of belonging that is hard to describe but this is what Newcastle is to me, Home. I am a Geordie first and a UK citizen second, which is why, when BALTIC proposed a presentation of the Collection we were more than happy to invite them in and share our works and enthusiasm with them.

I would like to extend my thanks to the people who have made this exhibition and publication possible, firstly to my husband Poju who has helped us every step of the way; to Peter Doroshenko, Jerome Sans, Esther McLaughlin, Alessandro Vincentelli, Chris Osborne, Kate Lewis and Katherine Welsh at BALTIC, Elizabeth Neilson, Ginie Morysse, Johanna Mannerfelt Empson and Marc-Antoine Filippini at the Zabłudowicz Collection; Max Wigram, and Gina Buenfeld at Max Wigram Gallery; as well as JJ Charlesworth, Jonathan Miles and Matthew Galvin for all their input into this publication. Last but by no means least I would like to thank Mustafa Hulusi who has created not only an intense and visually overwhelming space in which to show art works but also this publication which is an artwork in its own right.

Anita Zabłudowicz, September 2007

**I AM NOT A CURATOR,
I'M A COLLECTOR**

*Interview between Jerome Sans and
Anita Zabudowicz – June 2007*

Jerome Sans:

When did you start collecting?

Anita Zabudowicz:

I started collecting in about 1994/95. I was inspired by a show at the MOMA in 1990. It was called *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*. We never had anything like it in Newcastle. When I studied art in Newcastle, we never really learnt about contemporary art. We were never really informed about people like Oldenburg and Lichtenstein and all this kind of thing, so I didn't really know it existed. When I got to London, I did not really see any of this either.

JS When was this? When did you go to London?

AZ I was 19 years old and I moved to London to study interior architecture. Then I was working for ten years. I was a hard worker because I am a Geordie! Then, I wasn't really interested in art – I was more interested in boys, going out partying and working hard. Then I married my husband and I found the man of my life. I then had my first kid and the minute I left work, I fell back

into art. That's how we [my husband and I] found that there was a whole world of art to be discovered.

[We lived in America for a few years and] when I came back to London from New York, it was very difficult to break into such a world at the time, because it wasn't as open as it is now. The only thing I knew to do was to go to lectures. I went to Christies – I did a year's course in auctioneering and contemporary art and I learnt quite a lot that way. I then used to go to Sotheby's and Christies and I looked around there and I saw some great Modernist art which I really liked. I then started looking at Modernism, and then soon, there were introductions.

We met Nicholas Serota through Vanessa Branson and he was amazing, we were introduced by Nicholas Serota and Faye Ballard to Thomas Dane, who advised us on buying a Wolfgang Tillmans. We were then introduced to Edward Lee and his wife Agnes who were fantastic. Edward introduced us to Barbara Gladstone who in turn introduced us to Matthew Barney. It was very exciting times. These were artists who, at the time,

I had never heard of. It was all new and emerging and really that is what it is all about – emerging art. New things, new discoveries, moving forward, freshness – and I've kept on that track from day one.

JS What was the first thing that you bought?

AZ The first thing that I bought was a Modernist work by Ben Nicholson. I was at Sotheby's and I bid against myself. I was so nervous because I went out for a while because it wasn't coming up. I had never been to an auction before, but I put my name down just in case I missed it for some reason. And when I came back I bid against myself. That was my first time and we still have that piece. We never sell any of our work, we love what we have. There is a history to every single piece of art that we have.

JS So you bought this first then it took you to where?

AZ Well, we bought an Auerbach, and then we went to a Mayfair gallery and we said that we would like to buy Nicholson, Freud, Bacon and they kind of just looked at us like, 'yeah right'. And that was the end of that! So that was kind of a dead end.

However, fortunately the emerging contemporary art world opened up to us thanks to Thomas and we started to meet really interesting characters. We bought a Wolfgang [Tillmanns] and I went to LA and I met a guy called Marc Foxx, who sold me Gregory Crewdson and now he deals with people like Ruby Stirling. He also taught me about a lot of these people like Nicholas

Logsdail, who was also amazing. They were like teachers and they taught me so much when I was younger and I learnt a lot through them about collecting. They were really great and very supportive and these gallerists, including Maureen Paley who was part of that group and looked after me, [who] introduced me to Gillian Wearing, Hannah Starkey. They were really, really interesting times.

JS What does collecting mean for you? You collect intensively, where do you think you want to go with the collection?

AZ I feel that we want to stick to the artists that we are collecting. It is about finding maybe at the most six new young artists each year – one or two a year is more realistic – but to really support those artists and hopefully, if they find a good gallery with their feet on the ground, they will be sensible and I will be able to afford and buy the artist's work for many years, to follow those artists throughout their careers. That is where we want to go.

JS At the same time as the show in the BALTIC, you are opening up your own space. What is the idea behind this space?

AZ It's very unfair if you collect young artists and they do not have a platform, I mean what is the point if you just put things in storage and it is not seen? I mean, I am a Geordie so I am very, very open. When we were kids, all of our houses and doors were open and we are a friendly bunch of people and it is about sharing: you have to show things to your friends, you have to share with them.

So I believe this is very important. You get such enjoyment from it; it brings me such joy I want to share the collection with other people.

JS What will you do with the new space?

AZ The new space is called *176* because it is a space which is curatorially-run – the idea is that the collection is used within the space. It will have not more than three shows a year, the first show will be by Elizabeth Neilson who runs our collection and she also runs the space itself. She will be basing the show on artists in the collection who deal with histories and especially art history. There are a lot of female artists in that show, it's totally different to the one at BALTIC – the opposite! Maybe Elizabeth would like to say a few words about it?

Elizabeth Neilson:

The first show, *An Archaeology*, looks at the idea of how a collection tries to capture a history. The shows at *176* and the show at BALTIC are an extension of looking at how you can embody many histories at once. As a contemporary collection you are always trying to capture the moment that is going to become the history – trying to capture the now.

So the show that we are doing at *176* is in some ways oppositional to the one at BALTIC, aesthetically it is very different but in essence it is the same collection. By doing these completely different exhibitions together at the same time, we can show that this collection has many strengths and can be used in different ways. And that's, as Anita

was saying, the idea: *176* is curatorially-led so that the collection can be used as a resource by curators and artists to do shows that they feel have a currency today.

AZ It's very important because I think the collection has many strands – it is a curatorial heaven. I think it will be very educational to young people as well, and to older people, because a lot of emerging art is ignored and it gives us such pleasure to be able to show artists that I believe are really strong, but nobody has ever seen before.

JS What does it mean for you to show your collection both in your own space in London and outside of London in Gateshead. What does it mean for you to show your work up here in Newcastle/Gateshead?

AZ Well, it's pure excitement to be honest. It's an incredible thing to be able to return back to your home town and show what you have been up to. There is still a lot of the Geordie in me. If people ask me where I am from, I say I am from Newcastle. I am very proud of it. It is a great honour to go back and show my collection to some of the Geordie public! London is a fantastic place, and the reason for opening *176* is that we want to show our collection to new audiences, people who may not have seen some of the artists who we collect. Some, not all but some, of the artists in the collection are from London but have not shown that much elsewhere. Then there are others who are from overseas but have never shown in the UK, let alone Gateshead. I think it's about getting art, and new art, to as many people as possible.

JS What is BALTIC for you?

AZ BALTIC for me is greatly exciting. Actually, when it first opened and I went to the opening, I sat there and there was a beautiful vision of the Tyne in front of me. I had always worked on the Tyne. My Dad had a warehouse and I used to work there and I would spend many months, weeks and days there. On the preview, I sat there and I just burst into tears. I began crying and crying and I couldn't stop, and there were all these people and it was so embarrassing, but I couldn't stop! It was so emotional for me that these two worlds had come together – my past and my present had come together. It was a very emotional moment for me. I get an amazing feeling when I walk into BALTIC, I can't really describe it. I probably need to go and see a shrink to find out what it all means!

JS For the exhibition at BALTC we decided to work directly with one artist from the collection, Mustafa Hulusi. Why do you choose to work with an artist? Who is this artist? What does this artist mean to you?

AZ Well, the whole of collecting for me is an amazing and incredible journey. It is like a quest and I'm finding all these wonderful artists. And then you meet all of these amazing people and Mustafa, I met him along the way. He was running a space called *Neon* in a basement in the East End, showing work by really emerging artists. Immediately I connected with him, he was really on the same wavelength as far as collecting.

He is a fabulous curator as well as a great

artist. There was just so much that we had in common and he was just there at the right time [and] it seemed that he was just part of the collection. A lot of the art he was looking at was a lot of the same things I was looking at, and he was an inspiration and I learnt things from him. He has curated some really interesting shows in the past: one in particular was at the Royal Academy a few years ago called *Expander*, which was wonderful.

EN Is that where you first saw the *Expander* posters?

AZ No, actually I saw them in his studio. I actually didn't understand what his work was about at first. Now I understand, but it took time; it's really about identity and boundaries. I learnt in time about his work: he makes work about beauty, it's really visually very aesthetic and pleasing, and also thoughtful. It's been a really interesting relationship with Mustafa. We knew that he would be the perfect person, using his *Expander* ideals for this show to blend my collection together.

JS How do you select the work? And the artists which you want to show?

AZ You selected it! What are you talking about? [Laughs] I put things in your direction.

JS Exactly, yes, it was a dialogue between us.

We chose works which we can present with a dramatic background making something which will create some vibration in the room. Also, we will show some major distinctive

pieces and present them isolated. It will be the overall setting which will make each work appear more isolated and much more visible and more spectacular. Bringing it all together, we are making something unique.

EN The works really stand up to being put in this kind of situation as well. Mustafa has made a very challenging situation to show [any] other artists' work. We were very aware of that when we asked him to do it. It's going to be a challenge, for both the collection and for BALTIC.

AZ At the end of the day, I am not a curator, I'm a collector. Maybe subconsciously I am a bit of a curator, but at the end of the day, you and Mustafa and Lizzie are really the guys who are putting it together.

JS It is a very interesting story in fact. Much more than curating but creating a relationship with you, Lizzie, now with Mustafa – and with your collection – and spending some time together. Because we have been to different places in the world: Miami, New York, London... So it is about spending one year together in different places in the world, learning from each other and sharing time. It is a very interesting process listening to your story... I want this, this and this, and working together. It is very exciting. Making something different.

AZ Absolutely, it has been a very interesting journey and actually being with you, I have actually learnt from you. I have looked at things in a different way; which is lovely, which is all part of the journey. Even the collection has been affected through meeting

you. I began to look at new form and new ways of collecting, so it has been really exciting for the collection itself.

It's the first time we have ever had this platform – that we have been able to show work apart from our own space. Apart from it being in storage at home and being able to put it in a public space, it's totally, totally awesome. We have had such problems with that in England and probably the world – private collections do not get enough platforms and are not shown enough to the public, so it's a big thing for myself and I suppose for other collectors as well.

NOW IMAGINE AN ART GALLERY

JJ CHARLESWORTH

Now imagine an art gallery. Now imagine an empty art gallery. Now imagine a gallery after an explosion.

Now imagine a supermarket. Now imagine an empty supermarket. Now imagine a supermarket that has been looted.

Now imagine the high street of an English market town. Now imagine the empty high street of an English market town. Now imagine the high street of an English market town under three feet of water after flooding.

Now imagine a billboard high up on a wall. Now imagine an empty billboard high up on a wall. Now imagine a billboard that has been torn down from high up on a wall.

Now imagine an art gallery.

There's a way in which spaces and objects go together, which tells us what they are, what they are for, and what we should do with them. For example, we know that when we're in a supermarket, the objects presented to us are there for a reason, and we know what we are going to do when we encounter them. In a supermarket, the things on the shelves are there for us to walk away with and consume in our day-to-day life. We don't tend to spend a lot of time staring at the things on the shelves, only to walk out without having bought anything.

Why talk of empty galleries or flooded towns, or empty billboards and looted supermarkets? Because the fact that we understand what an object and a situation is means that we know immediately when one part of the equation isn't functioning. An empty supermarket doesn't function because it needs the objects it contains to be what it is. A flooded town continues to be made up of buildings and possessions but the space itself is damaged and can no longer function.

Perhaps the same applies to an art gallery. Imagine an empty art gallery. Nothing but a space, four walls, a roof. What makes it a gallery? Only our knowledge that it normally contains art. If we didn't know this, we'd be unable to specify its function. So while a physical space may not indicate its function, just by knowing that it *should* be an art gallery, we can make the assumption that its function has merely been suspended.

This sounds technical, but it is a dynamic that lies at the core of contemporary art's ability to function as art, in which the question of what we see is anticipated by the knowledge we impose on it in advance. It's important for art because art today no longer can claim to be a particular kind of object that licenses a particular kind of place. It's important because Mustafa Hulusi's intervention into the exhibition *When We Build, Let us Think that we Build Forever* directly questions the system of distinctions by which we recognise artworks as artworks; but more significantly, Hulusi's intervention questions the nature of what we ourselves expect from the experience of art, and where we expect to look for it.

We don't need to thank Marcel Duchamp for having in 1917 signed an ordinary urinal with the name 'R. Mutt', upending it and titling it *Fountain*. *Fountain* is a sort of founding myth of contemporary art: Duchamp's gesture challenged the presumption that only specified kinds of objects could be considered as art objects – paintings, sculptures and so on. By doing so, he was able to demonstrate not so much that 'anything can be art', but rather that the sense that something is art is produced by a context of attention; when we walk into a supermarket and buy a box of soap powder, we don't set it apart, contemplate it for a while, then leave. If we enter an art gallery, contemplating a urinal produces a sort of feedback loop, in which we notice that the thing that we are looking at somehow rejects or rebuffs the way we anticipate looking at it. Or, to be historically correct, that would have been the case at the time that Duchamp first presented his urinal, as a hoax submission to an exhibition for which he himself was one of the selectors. Now, of course, we know the story, and that knowledge itself orders our new perception of the work.

What *Fountain* revealed for the first time is that the condition for artworks being understood as artworks, and being seen as artworks, was a matter of *discourse*, which legitimates or excludes certain kinds of act or object. This discourse is what produces the institution of art, which in turn produces the spaces and objects that we encounter as the context and content of art, which in turn reproduces the way we pay attention to them, and which finally reconfirms the discourse, in a closed loop. The short-circuit that *Fountain* caused was in its pointed interruption of *visual* interest; if the discourse of art at that time was entrenched in the visual qualifications of certain types of objects over others, this was nevertheless underpinned by a set of intellectual justifications, about what kind of visual object could carry the name art. Duchamp's transgression was to

refuse to participate in the habitual discourse about *how* to look, presenting an object which was supposed to carry no visual interest, that would not confirm the intellectual habits of what, visually, counted as art.

Yet the history of art since then has also revealed the flexibility of the institution; the discourse surrounding art has absorbed Duchamp's transgression – ordinary things can be seen to be art, because thinking about art has expanded to accommodate it, producing a new discourse which allows us to look at ordinary things in terms of art. That's the historical answer to Duchamp's question.

There is however another dimension to this situation which rests outside of the interaction of objects and discourse – that of the space in which that interaction takes place. That we should concentrate *visually* on visual artworks seems self-evident, but such a formula masks how that attention is the outcome of the situation in which visual concentration is encouraged and enforced. Brian O'Doherty deals with this extensively in his seminal *Inside the White Cube*: "The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics."

And with regard to the ordinary object as art, O'Doherty follows with an important observation: "So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that, once outside it, art can lapse into secular status. Conversely, things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them."¹

What O'Doherty astutely recognises is that the *space of presentation* influences the form of the attention we give the objects placed there. That's why art can 'lapse into secular status' once outside the space, whilst 'things become art' when we attend to them as such.

But these insights about how presentation, object and attendant discourse fit together to produce art can be extended beyond the space of the gallery. If art 'lapses' and ordinary things 'become art' according to the space of presentation, it's also possible to think that other spaces – which are not necessarily art galleries

– may produce similar effects.

The famous photograph of Duchamp's *Fountain* by Alfred Stieglitz shows it on a plinth. The plinth is the visual cue that allows it to correspond, however antagonistically, with the context of presentation which declares 'art' to be present. In terms of concentrating our visual attention in a certain way, the techniques of presentation of the gallery are critical. The white spaces of the gallery, the 'gaps' between works, indeed the clinical and austere nature of the presentation encourages a concentration on the visual aspect of an object.

However such terms aren't exclusive and they can and are applied in other contexts. The most ubiquitous of these is the luxury goods shop. Think of an expensive pair of women's shoes, presented on a plinth or shelf, with a lot of white space around it, brightly lit. It's clear that the technique of concentration on an object to be contemplated never was exclusive to the space of the art gallery. And the perceptual and psychological effect is not arbitrary. Most of us who have been to a shop during a sale understand the difference between the chic presentation of a covetable object and what happens when we see that there are in fact dozens of identical copies of these objects, piled up and marked-down, jammed on shelves, side-by-side.

This effect of visual concentration, therefore, is part of the habits of the context of how art commands authority in the space in which it is presented, but this is an effect common to other forms of 'privileged' object. In commercial culture, the paradoxical dynamic is that the more valuable, desirable or expensive the item, the more the space around it has to be evacuated of all other meaning. This is the moment at which visual concentration – as a way of actively attending to a work – merges with the objective concentration of visual meaning into the object at hand by eliminating all other meaning from the space in which it exists. The art object might then be thought of as an entity which sucks all visual activity into it, by stripping its context of any competing visual event. This is what Doherty means when he declares that "in a peculiar reversal, the object introduced into the gallery 'frames' the gallery and its laws".

This visual over-concentration, the black-hole fashion in which the art object negates all visual event around it in order to leave an empty white space has an economic logic to it, as well as a visual one. Luxury is the opposite of scarcity,

and the visual paradox of the luxury object, when it is presented, is that it demands a zone of visual scarcity around it. Luxury however needn't equate directly to monetary value, but can also be thought of as visual value – intricacy, workmanship, visual detail, *aesthetic* event. They are of course often interlinked – the connection between visual craft, economic value and cultural value is a familiar point of criticism. But it's also important to note that *intellectual value* can itself become translated into economic value. This means that the techniques of visual concentration that have evolved to exaggerate our attention to the visual properties of artworks can be applied to the *absence* of visual properties in artworks, as long as the attention to that absence involves an awareness of an intellectual question. To look at *Fountain* is to contemplate the problem it poses. *Fountain* may be visually uneventful, but it is intellectually eventful, and that eventfulness – because it refers to the negation of the conditions of visual value – is what the urinal acts as place-holder for.

The fable of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' is often derisively used as a criticism of the visual emptiness of contemporary art. This should not come as a surprise, but those who use it as a term of abuse are missing a point. The reason everyone claims to see the Emperor's non-existent new clothes is that they are subject to the Emperor's power. They would still be subjects to his power if he were wearing his usual finery. This relationship of power is what informs how the spectators attend to the emperor's garments, regardless of what he is in fact wearing. Viewers of contemporary art sometimes feel cheated or frustrated because they find that they cannot position themselves as the kind of spectator they would wish to be, because the object doesn't offer them what they assume an art object should be offering them. Assuming the position of spectator involves choosing to consent to particular terms of engagement with an object. The point is; one can contemplate ideas in forms of visualised, materialised *absence* that act as the place-holders of ideas, if one chooses to.

Forms of visual concentration; forms of visual luxury and scarcity; the possibility that visually uneventful objects can operate as the place-holders for intellectual activity which reflects on the spatial context in which a certain kind of subject positions him or herself; these are habits of encounter which, even after a century of critical reflection by artists on the condition of presentation of artworks, still persist. White spaces are the context in which luxuries, not commodities, are presented. (One last box of soap powder on an empty supermarket shelf isn't

a luxury; it is the sign of scarcity and austerity.) The activity of concentrating carefully on an object becomes the act of concentrating on a set of ideas as if they were more important than others. The art object and its market is, let's face it, a complex and often uncomfortable negotiation between cultural significance (intellectual, critical, etc.) and the market significance attributed to the object. But it should also be noted that cultural, critical significance is *also translatable* into economic value, and as such no longer has any necessary connection to the visual identity of the object.

What does this have to do with Mustafa Hulusi's intervention in this exhibition? An immediate visual parallel to the 'Expander' pattern that Hulusi applies to the entire exhibition space might be found in the work of French artist Daniel Buren. Buren's now-signature 'stripe' surfaces and installations have become, since the 1970s, a canonical example of 'institutional critique'. By placing a form which has minimal visual content – equal stripes of white and some other colour – Buren's installations bring attention to the situation in which they are installed. The stripe operates as a kind of visual 'almost-nothing' which inverts the business of attending to the object or surface in order instead make the situation an object of contemplation.

Buren's installations have often required some form of non-gallery context in which to perform this operation. We can see that by attending to the lack of event of the stripe, in contrast to the visual and spatial eventfulness of the place it inhabits, it is able to draw an attention that might be normally be confined to the gallery and the object, to address spatial and presentational contexts beyond the gallery; an attention to an art object that becomes an attention to everything else, through the place-holder effect of the object.

By contrast, Hulusi's Expander Posters colonise the entire space of what is already a gallery. And by using the uncompromising, aggressive motif of the starburst – the visual 'opposite' of the parallel stripe – the Expander Posters impose their own type of 'visual concentration'. Whereas a motif such as parallel stripes can be serially extended without any finite limit, emphasising repetition and modularity, the Expander motif is the perceptual distillation of optical focus, as well as a compelling, abstracted summary of the illusion of single-point perspective. But more importantly, while a Buren stripe may refer itself to the non-art objects and non-gallery environment around it, Hulusi's Expander Posters act as backdrop

to other works of art.

The disappearance of white space under the surface of the Expander motif has a number of consequences: it demolishes the apparent neutrality of the space which other artworks exist in, creating a uniform backdrop whose binary motif exists as a sort of contentless symbol for extreme visual presence. By doing so it reduces the visual authority of each given object, as it strips artworks of the blank surroundings through which they normally appear concentrated. Because of that, the Expander installation compromises and questions the appropriate limits of an artwork. Hulusi's Expander Posters recall the controversy that surrounded Buren's installation of *Peinture-Sculpture* at the Guggenheim Museum's International Exhibition in 1971, which took over the whole of the museum's atrium, and was removed after protests from other artists in the exhibition. To dominate the space of presentation in this way breaks another rule of the visual presentation of art objects; that the distinction between artwork and art gallery be clearly demarcated. Such a gesture, one might argue, is an act of unjustifiable egoism, but this merely confirms the particular etiquette that determines how different artworks are to coexist in the same space of presentation. How can an artwork also be a backdrop? It is interesting to recall that Stieglitz's photograph show's Duchamp's fountain against the backdrop of another painting.

But for all this, what Hulusi's Expander Posters propose is actually strongly affirmative, understanding the limitations of the legacies of twentieth-century critiques of the art-object and art-space: while it doesn't propose a resolution, it forces once again attention at the way in which old conventions die hard. It is clear that the habits of attention that reinforce the fetishistic aspect of looking at artworks cannot simply be argued away – not merely by modifying the object itself, that is. As the gallery re-imposes its logic on the visual luxury of artworks, it empties once again into the arid white space of visual scarcity. The Expander motif explodes that logic of visual 'non-event' by pouring-in absolute 'visual event', in its purest form. By doing so, it doesn't seek to transform the objects that are presented against it, but rather to activate and energise the business of looking at those objects in that particular space, and to make less passive the presence of those objects within the gallery. It imposes a pressure on the works themselves, and on the spectator. But if this succeeds, it is because it forces those works and those spectators to become responsible for their role in wanting to be 'left alone'. In that sense, the Expander Posters, in their unifying background

presence, demand a sort of *community* that the blank open spaces of the gallery – with each separate work floating like an island in a sea of nothing – tend to suppress. Ultimately, the logic of the unique object set in a white space – whether a urinal or a pair of shoes, whether in a gallery or in a shop – implies not only the inaccessible value of objects, but also the isolation and separation between people. Artists don't necessarily intend this to be the final destination and function of their work, but it is an unintended consequence of how artworks are burdened with the contradiction between their cultural and economic value. Precious, fragile and irreplaceable, they become quasi-sacred objects when they themselves often aspire to an ideal of cultural democracy. It's what Walter Benjamin once described as the 'aura' of the artwork,² the transferral of the habits of religious reverence to secular artworks. But it is a habit which persists because the conditions that support the production, circulation and presentation of artworks also persist, and unless those change, such habits will always re-emerge. Hulusi's Expander Posters do not present an 'alternative' but instead force a disruption which reactivates and reenergises a form of encounter which – however apparently radical the actual artwork – is always in danger of slipping back into the passivity of the spectator, and the authority of artwork and gallery. Artworks don't require our reverent attention, or our morbid preoccupation with their economic value and the power it fetishizes; artworks require our playful, energetic questioning, our desire to participate in their community, and for them to participate in ours. Hulusi's Expander Posters are an explosion in the gallery.

1. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* 1986 p14

2. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), in *Illuminations*, pp217-252, London: Fontana, 1992

THE DAZZLE OF THE LAST IMAGE

JONATHAN MILES

“Today, the image covers the earth – in addition to the surface of the eyeballs (des globes oculaires) of the inhabitants of the world – only insofar as it produces itself, multiples itself, and expands without restriction or reference.”

Jean-Luc Marion – The Crossing of the Visible

When Michael Landy produced his work 'Breakdown', performed in an empty department store on Oxford Street, he was left bereft of possession on a material plane but his standing as an artist had been immeasurably amplified. Perhaps he had understood that the entire culture was running on metaphorical empty. His next exhibition was in turn surprising, a series of delicate drawn prints of urban weeds found growing in pavement cracks. Strangely there was something consistent within these two distinct events, a sense of vulnerability perhaps but also a willingness to develop unexpected encounter. Something speaks here but the text might not be written for it is closer to the rapture of sense as opposed to logic. Passing back in time I remember hearing an account of the work 'Spiritual America' by Richard Prince in New York. A nerve was touched by this work but it couldn't be replicated as a form. Rather it helped defined the more overtly transgressive spirit of the 'New Image' work of that time, assuming a paradigmatic importance over a period of time. The question is not only how do artists create

eventful work, capable of touching the nerve points of the culture, but how in turn is this given a mode of presentation? Art carries forward its own gesture and the extent to which it does so defines significance, but these gestures do not always assume presence in ways that are immediately self evident. Collecting in turn attempts to assemble works in which such gestures might start to cohere into a sense of period or order, making evident the force lines of the period.

Mustafa's intervention into the presentation appears as extreme, as if he wants to create an event which will place the whole assemblage of the exhibition on an edge, even to the point of suggesting a total work of art. Adorno talked about the work of art containing a 'shudder' beneath its appearance (for Adorno art is true to the shudder) and it is as if the whole exhibition will take on this quality of either shuddering or trembling. I asked him about this but he had no answer, it was just one of those intuitive things. Anyway I said that I thought that he is intruding into the ethos of the space of presentation. My guess is that he might be probing the foundation of the autonomy of the work of art, that almost sacred corner stone of modernism. Also there is an oblique suggestion in the all over geometrical pattern that will cover the entire space, represents a fusion between the aesthetic and the technological. It is both a foreground and a background simultaneously (or even nothing and everything at the same time). If it is the case that such a fusion has actually occurred then the entire condition of the culture is undergoing mutation (perhaps it is image culture that is at the heart of the mutation). Nothing would thus be able to secure remoteness because of the constant background hum or noise that touches the condition of all things, thus everything becomes inclined toward presence. This is why everything feels double, as if in the instance of appearance, the after-glow of exhaustion also occurs. The dazzle of these geometric patterns either stands for a state of blindness in which nothing can be really seen, or it is the dazzle that follows from an acute state of awareness that a hidden totalising logic has invaded the visual field. Somehow this is an aggressive statement relating to the idea of art not really having a place that it might settle within.

Romanticism proposed that art might reflect and speculate upon its own condition, making this part of its procedure of making. This process of self reflection was viewed as being infinite in possibility and through this art could be its own end and thus autonomous. The notion of a Romantic schema relates to the principle that art contains its own speculative content, rather (or more essentially) than

a concern with certain types of imagery that might in turn pertain to sublimity. Some of the recent preoccupation with Romanticism relates on one level with the anxiety that Romanticism is part of a submerged project within the impulse of modernity; is the impossible other of modernity. Connected to this, is the notion that art is subject to decline. Partly it might appear that art itself raises the stakes of this process of decline, or death, but cannot find the power to realise the completion of this process. In effect, art continues as a shadow realm that contains its own depleted essence. Whereas Romanticism saw art as an infinite form of extension, it is now only possible to mediate on the impossibility of extension. To appropriate, in some way, the time we circulate within, we necessarily start with the sensation of immobilization. In this sense I would agree with the claim of Jean-Luc Nancy that we live in the time of a 'suspension of history'. If knowledge fails to open out a future, then history becomes 'the unending production of effects – but never the effectivity of a new beginning'.

If we take elements of this situation then it of course has a profound impact on the trajectory of what might be termed serious collecting because collecting as an activity has always posed itself as having an historical trajectory, hence the rhetoric of telling truths about our time or versions of this. What happens if the contemporary condition is purely 'the unending production of effects'? This would render collecting as an activity without destination, and perhaps this, hints in turn, the reason that art appears to be entering capitalist circulation as an economically speculative force. The other element which underwrites this is the possibility that art and nihilism have become co-extensive. If we take the main tenants of institutional aesthetic discourse we find the Duchampian maxim of the found object, the Beuysian proposition that all subjects are potential artists, the conviviality of Relational aesthetics, all combined within a framework of open play that touches upon the condition of nihilism. Ironically this freedom secures the collapse of the very ontological difference that anchored a place for art as a practice that might oppose social norms. If art now appears to display democratic availability, participation, educational potentiality, freedom of encounter, it is surely not because art is now a repository of truth's not available to other sectors of a more repressive society. Collecting cannot exist in a space between market and institution because it is an attribute of both, nor be a third force beyond these forces, but instead it may offer a mobility of thought that is not purely bound by the interplay of the two forces. In a strange way the collector has to face the same exposure that art has to face in order to expose the riddle of the modern

period in regard to art. This undoubtedly pertains to art's absorption into aesthetics, the very thing that grants art its speculative function. (If art is to be its own object then it requires a speculative function and this is secured by art's absorption into aesthetics.)

I remember discussing the extraordinary price of that Peter Doig painting in Sotheby's with Mustafa and I had said that what was perhaps overlooked was the extent to which the works of art that surrounded it appeared to lack any sort of resistance to the present, somehow they appeared as equally available products, very expensive, but as the kind things you might possess without any strain of intellectual resource, or demand, upon the modern constitution of being in a marketplace. I suspect the Peter Doig painting just appeared as intended, as felt, or as a manifestation of a difference which had faded in the other works, and that the price was abstractly an attempt to register this order of difference. Indeed if this was the case then the situation of the market is strangely desperate because there might be an acknowledgement that no matter how much money you might possess there is still little of much consequence to purchase. If everything is product, then everything can be circulated and exchanged, thus difference is eradicated from this open circularity of things, because it has the power to interrupt circulation. Our view of the world is essentially technological because we treat the world as open availability, we cover the earth with concrete, spread lines of electronic circuitry through all things, create projectiles to penetrate space, transform all kinds of matter, because we have the will and the means to do so and feel that it is a type of destiny to do so. We used to call this process civilisation, but now we suspect otherwise. This thought of the 'otherwise' to that achieved by the power of will, has invariably been the domain of aesthetics. I mean, why dwell on issues such as beauty, when you know that it lacks purpose? The whole point of talking about beauty is that the dimension of meaning and beauty are not quite compatible, or for that matter, reducible to another. I suspect many think beauty to be conservative because it appears as something slow moving, a force perhaps of preservation, interruption, or even solace in the face of passing time.

Novalis had argued that it was the constitutive power of the imagination that was able to create a 'sphere outside of time', and in so doing make a space for an opposition to the world as it presently stands. Art was for Novalis the capacity of world making, but the issue of our own contemporary context relates to an

understanding of thinkers such as Adorno he stated that art should function as 'a utopian blink'. (Art does not exist purely within the present but represents a future yet to come.) There is a dark thought which would suggest that the very notion of the death of art relates not so much to the reality of concrete works of art as much as the very schemas that support the potentiality of art. (If this were to be the case, then it supports Nancy's claim that all that remains of art is its 'vestige'.) Perhaps the very persuasiveness of the technological world view is such that bestowing a sense of otherness within the function of art has been dulled to such an extent that art is only capable of displaying itself as yet another amalgam of presence, and in doing so, making of its domain something that is purely symptomatic. I guess I am writing of such a possibility in order to resist such thinking, yet the thought must surely be entertained.

The paradox of the present is surely that the material conditions for making art have never been better; expanded markets, expanded showing space, expanded audience, expanded discussion and publication, yet within all of this, a curious set of limits appear to impose themselves upon the making of art. Some would call these conditions decadent because they offer little by way of demand upon the trajectory of art. If we entertain all conditions for the making of a work of art then there is little by way of critical import that we can return upon art. Collecting then is no longer simply a process of evaluating the qualities within the present, but necessarily an attempt to find a relationship to the various riddles that the period of late culture inaugurates if there is to be any ambition inscribed within the process.

We assume that we are a culture of the image, after all the image appears as a ubiquitous power. If art had held the promise of a revelation of newness, it is now mass culture that delivers the reproduction of the ever-same. Rather than this gap between cultural forms being opened out, late culture is a mutation of forms, creating in turn, the circulation of the loss of difference which would otherwise enable the syntax of the culture to develop. Images stand as a form of democracy, a system of value, or measure, even our etheric realm of transport (let us admit the relationship of mysticism to the image realm), to the extent that there is nothing outside the tyranny of their address, for they are without origin, and as such create their own reality. We can ask how it could be otherwise, but what harbours within this question of the image relates much more to the fundamental transformations of the nature of the image itself. The image reveals

little other than the fact that it appears to both circulate and radiate. Within the realm of aesthetic thought in the late twentieth century, the image has invariably be related to death, absence, void, lack, violence, the loss of meaning or ground, and the shadow realm in order to sustain a negativity within the functioning of the work of art. Yet the very resistance to the idea of the image as a source of presence has given way to an almost kitsch like embrace of this very network of values (just note the extent that artists appear to evoke that their work is either about death or the void, as if it itself this would be the central claim of it being serious art). Late modern art is now pressed into the service of these values to the point that they are the mass advertisements of the signification of art. Part of the paradox of this is indeed the paradox of the working of the image. The corrective resistance to the image is now reassembled as its affirmative power and thus its own power extends into what was seemingly designated as its realm of otherness. This is the very basis of the creative dialogue between mass culture and the fine art sphere, but at the same time this could also speak of an opportunity of the present. Within the work of art there is always an impulse related to breaking away, estranging, a cutting into, and as such is in search of the principle of heterogeneity. In effect restlessness as at the root of art as a practice and if there is a claim of truth within the work of art it is realised in not being reconciled to the social structure which paradoxically incorporates the trace of negativity as a value. Indeed restlessness is distinctly evident within art because so much of what we see is without bounded form and is thus much more focussed on qualities of passage which are in turn propelled by this spirit.

Of course we should not expect from art something that approaches the nature of direct speech. It is also an empty gesture to list the qualities and attributes you might wish of this dimension. Personally writing feels closer to circling around issues and problems because I think that it not really possible to talk as if there is an agenda that is possible. Thought and art do indeed appear as co-extensive but the nature of this co-extensivity is evasive. I like the quality of risk contained in this exhibition, its adventure into not knowing or even the courting of minor disaster. It is not a tight or correct gesture, but one designed to disturb both context and sense. Much as been written about either the works or the artists showing so little might be added by way of commentary, likewise I do not wish to express opinion about the collection other than note the adventure contained within this exhibition.

I am simply left asking a question of what a radical gesture might be like within this strange time we inhabit, for surely it is a strange time in which nothing is as it appears, or even the condition of otherwise to this appearance. We cannot of course assume any position of exteriority from which things might be judged, but instead we might invest in unexpected encounters, that might, within its own constituency, posit the possibility of an otherwise held within the backward glance of the eye. Perhaps modernity continues within an apparitional form, that is a form without a ground, and if so, it is another mode of presentation stripped of the possibility of finality or essence. (Here, I am using the notion of 'apparitional modernity' to indicate a form of modernity without a self-evident telos thus able to visit other times as an absent event.) Whatever the passage that we experience, we are still required to detect the rhythms through which sense can become explicable. In this moment in which I am writing it is this issue of rhythm that takes hold of my attention and the way I start to think about rhythm relates to new ways of configuring thought and vision into other forms or networks that are capable of opening out new types of spacings.

Maybe this exhibition will simply introduce a simple thought, which combines with a production, a new type of spacing born out of interruption. I feel that I have for my part simply followed the gesture of the exhibition, or at least the presentation, which is to detect the signs of what lies beneath, around, in and beyond works of art pushing within the limits of the present. It might be impossible to think of the destination of such a project, but there are interesting signs of risks being taken.

Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Athlone 1978

Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Stanford 1999

Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Stanford 2005

Nickolas Kompridas, ed *Philosophical Romanticism*, Routledge 2006

Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* Stanford, 2004

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, Stanford 1996

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, Stanford 1993

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