

Pingadwa  
1978



ART WORKS NEVER EXIST  
IN TIME, THEY HAVE  
"ENTRY POINTS"

## ENTRY POINTS

*Resonating Punk,  
Performance, and Art*

Stevphen Shukaitis

Penny Rimbaud

Dharma

Awk Wah

During the late 1960s and early 1970s as members of the performance art group EXIT Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher turned to creating outside of the gallery system and existing artistic conventions. Taking inspiration from eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism and Taoism, they searched for ways to push beyond the boundaries of Western art practices and rationalities. This resonates with Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa's 1974 manifesto and exhibition Towards a Mystical Reality, which likewise sought to find a way out of the limitations of modernist art practices and rationalities. Entry Points takes up Piyadasa's statement that art does not exist in time but only has entry points. What entry points might we find in the resonances between different attempts to utilize conceptual and performative gestures as a way to escape from the constraints one is faced with, aesthetically and politically?

Contains an essay by Stevphen Shukaitis, a dialogue between Shukaitis and Penny Rimbaud, and a recording of an improvised performance by Dharma and Awk Wah responding to footage of the Stop the City Protests.



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Essay on pages 1-25 by Stevphen Shukaitis

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### **Audio**

There is no authority but yourself... and there is no self

Recorded at The Substation, August 19th, 2017

Improvised as live soundtrack to the Stop the City 83-84 film by Mick Duffield and Andy Palmer

Dharma – guitar, efx and objects

Awk Wah – Percussion, electronics, vocals

Stevphen Shukaitis – soundtrack manipulation

### **Image Credits**

p1, Living well is the best revenge, Bryan May, 2010,

<http://cargocollective.com/bryanbrybry>

p6/32, Dial House, 2017

p9-10, Landscape for Fire (1972-1973)

p11, International Carnival of Experimental Sound (1972)

p14, Towards a Mystical Reality, Kuala Lumpur (1974)

p23, "A Configuration Can Never Have a Literal Existence," with addition of a flower (2016)

p26, Penny Rimbaud at this desk (2017)

p39, Flyer from the "Stop the City" demonstrations, London, 1983-1984

p41, Flyer produced by Crass, early 1980s, from the archives of Dial House



What can be learned from  
of the  
how do  
in Singapore?  
What

AUTONOMY



ANARCHO-PUNK  
these histories



the politics  
scene?

speak to the present?

today could stop the city?

Topic & Policy

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# Entry Points



Several years ago, I was starting background work for curating an exhibition of fifty years of Gee Vaucher's artistic work. Given that Gee is someone who works across multiple forms of media and themes, I thought that it would be desirable to organize a varied range of people writing about her work rather than a usual 'who's

who' of either the art world or the punk scene. Thus, I thought to ask Godwin Koay to see if they would be interested in writing something. Godwin always has something interesting to say about art and politics. And in particular, I thought of them because for years their Facebook account has used as its icon an image with a Crass logo, with the slogan

“living well is the best revenge,” placed on some sort of William Morris-esque background.

I was surprised by Godwin’s response: that they was not terribly familiar with their work, didn’t know enough about it (or Gee’s work), and thus wouldn’t be able to say very much. I told Godwin that made it an even better idea, as then they could start with the story of how such a logo had become part of their digital avatar despite knowing little about them. Godwin was not won over by this argument and declined. But this raised a number of questions for me: how is that Godwin, living and working in Singapore, ended up coming to identify and use an image such as this, but without much of a connection to its source? It turns out that image, an adaption and reworking of the Crass logo, was produced by an artist in the US. The quote itself was taken from 17<sup>th</sup> century English writer and poet George Herbert. That intrigued me even more. During the previous few years I had been spending more time in Singapore

for a variety of reasons, and thus ended up going to a number of punk shows. And there I would see, as you probably see at basically any punk gig around the world, people with jackets emblazoned with Crass symbols, as well as numerous other bands from the UK in the early 1980s anarcho-punk scene.

What do these symbols, these histories and references to anarcho-punk, mean when they travel across the world? What do they mean when they are deployed within a much different social and cultural context? Clearly, they could not mean exactly the same thing, as any symbol is always changing its meaning in time, even staying in the same place. I was interested in thinking more about what happens in those chains of translations, as ideas and images get used, re-used, and re-interpreted. These questions formed the basis for the residency I did at Grey Projects in August 2017 as well as shaping the “Stop the City... Revisited” installation that I put together as part of The Substation’s “Discipline the City” series in Fall 2017.

These explorations were motivated by a desire to engage with various artistic histories, but not in a way trapped within a narrowly art historical approach. In what ways can these histories of punk, counterculture, and performance art in the UK and Southeast Asia resonate with each other?

These points of resonance between different artistic practices do not have to be literal connections. It could be more along the lines of what T.K. Sabapathy gestures to when he describes the relationship between de-colonial movements and the beginning of teaching and researching art history in Singapore in the 1950s-1960s. For Sabapathy the important aspect was not really finding direct links, but rather how he argues that there was a mutual influence through their respective role in the university, which he describes as “a site on which these forces met, contended with one another and left their mark.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, if there is a literal point of connection between histories of punk and performance art in the UK

and Southeast Asia it was through an institution. Both Mick Duffield, who was a member of Crass and worked with Gee and Penny on other related projects, and Redza Piyadasa, arguably one of the most important figures in the development of conceptual and performance art in Southeast Asia, attended Hornsey Art College. Hornsey is perhaps best known as being the location of a very well-known student sit-in and occupation that took place there in 1968. I have not been able to find out whether the two ever actually met each other, but in any case, the broader is clear: historically there developed different current and ideas that were in the air which influenced people and moved around.

It would be difficult to give a neatly encapsulated history of performance art as a whole. More importantly the goal here is not to attempt to give an overview of these histories. Rather I'd like to explore possible points of resonance through a more personal narrative. At the same time, I was starting to work on



the Gee Vaucher book and exhibition when I happened to visit the *A Fact Has No Appearance* exhibition at the National Gallery. This exhibition, unfortunately shoved into a small section of the gallery's basement, brought more attention to what I took to be a lesser known history of experimental and performance art in Southeast Asia. Perhaps somewhat naively I was surprised by how new ideas around experimental and performance art traveled, managing to arrive in Southeast Asia through the activity of people who had studied at Hornsey, or artists such as Tan Teng-Kee, who had studied with Joseph Beuys in Dusseldorf.

In describing these regional histories of performance art, Tay Swee Lin suggests it has had a much shorter history, existing mostly as forms of street theatre (and as a method for deconstructing and demystifying theatre). In attempting to chart out a history of performance art in Singapore Lin touches on the best-known, even if perhaps not 'canonical' performance, from Tan Teng Kee's

"Fire Sculpture" (1979), through Tang Da Wu's earthwork pieces, and its eventual recognition and bringing into the limelight with Da Wu's "Tiger's Whip" (1991) piece. Lin suggests that this "shifted the role of the artist to that of an activist."<sup>2</sup> Ray Langenbach suggests that performance art in Southeast Asia arises during the end of colonialism and works by tapping into precolonial rituals (Shamanism, Taoism), flourishing in times of social disruption, instability, and change: performance art was "utilized by a generation of artists who were born during or just following independence, and experienced the trauma of rapid industrialization and economic expansion."<sup>3</sup> Given this it is perhaps not so surprising that in a politically and cultural conservative context performance art would sooner or later run into difficulties in one way or another, which it did in a most spectacular fashion with the over the top government response to the Josef Ng affair<sup>4</sup> and the ensuing ten year de facto ban on performance art.

In this way, reading different histories of punk and performance together can begin to make sense. There is a naïve cartoon version of punk that reduces it to the story of a handful of bands, basically all blokes, who came out of nowhere and somehow magically changed the nature of music with three chords, safety pins, and a good heaping of (mostly negative) press attention. This strikes me as wrong in multiple ways. There are much broader and inclusive accounts of this history, and almost all histories, where they are not reducible to the story of a few blokes and their adventures.

And there is another way to approach these histories that rather than treating them as a year zero, as something coming from nothing, looks at the way that new developments in art, music, and culture often take up and continue the dreams and desires of those who came before them. Members of Crass, and particularly Penny Rimbaud, have made this point repeatedly, saying that punk was really more of a continuation of all kinds of counterculture, from surrealism and the

beats to Zen, than a total break from them.

Here we can find some points of resonance to begin from and explore. Both Piyadasa and the inhabitants of Dial House (who would go on to form Crass) during the early 1970s looked at Zen Buddhism and Taoism for ways of thinking outside of and escaping from rationalism. Likewise, they both turned increasingly to performance and conceptual art to find ways to extend and expand, as well as escape from, the boundaries of traditional artistic practices. Searching for new ideas and methods, but living on different sides of the globe, they both end up turning to similar sets of resources and ideas. Piyadasa would often talk about how art does not exist in time, rather there are entry points to it.

Art is an entry point. What entry points might we find in the resonances between different attempts to utilize conceptual and performative gestures as a way to escape from the constraints aesthetically and politically one is faced with?

# The Door to the Garden



During my first visit to Dial House I was very struck by just how much it was not what I expected. That's strange to say because I knew that I was going somewhere located in a rural setting, i.e. somewhere radically different from what you would typically imagine as the setting that gave birth to the chaotically noisy and joyfully angry music that Crass made. Instead you

find yourself confronted with something that looks more like the archetype of a country cottage with an immense and stunning garden. It is truly one of the most impressive gardens I have ever seen. And I say that as someone who is not a big fan of gardens. What strikes me most is how it is organically impressive, and not showy. Rather than giving the impression

of being a manicured and formal design it comes off more as something which has evolved over time, with new paths, forms of seating, and artistic installations being added by many different hands.

While I was working with Gee on the exhibition and book project it was very clear that this garden is extremely important to her. She would repeatedly say that all her ideas and inspiration came to her when gardening. This is not surprising given the amount of time and care that she and Penny, as well as many others, have put into this garden. Penny and Gee have lived at Dial House for more than fifty years, during which time they have consistently maintained it as an open house and space for artistic experimentation and living. In that sense, the garden is very much a space where it has been possible to cultivate an 'outside': outside of the constraints of the art world or the music industry, as a space for finding new ways of living and creating together. While Crass is the best-known project to come out of Dial House

there is quite an extensive range of artistic projects that have emerged here, made possible by different people being able to find each other and use the space to grow something new. These range from the creation of performance art collectives, such as Exit, to the creation and planning of the free festival scene. In many ways, Dial House plays a similar role to the Artists' Village in Singapore in terms of opening up a space that was not possible before it.<sup>5</sup>

This image of the garden as a space for cultivating new possibilities does not remain uncontested. I was struck how, when reading about the government response to the Josef Ng affair, the image of the garden was used quite a bit. But in this formulation the garden was represented not as a space for cultivation of new possibilities, but rather as somewhere that unchecked growth presented itself as a problem. In 1996 George Yeo, who was then Minister for Information and Arts, gave a speech in

which he described Singapore as a garden, with him as the gardener. This draws on a much longer history of use of garden imagery in Singapore, one that was used extensively by Lee Kuan Yew among many others. The difference here is that George, responding to the controversy around challenging forms of art and performance, uses this image in a different way: Singapore is garden, yes, but not all the plants are good – some of them must be removed and destroyed. In this image of the garden growth is just as much a problem as a possibility.

Responding to this Ray Langenbach questions whether art and cultural production works like that: “does cultural production really resemble a bunch of plants with shallow and discreet root systems that can easily be pulled up if they come up wrong? Is such containment possible at the world’s largest port”? <sup>6</sup> Clearly, he does not think so, with the important point being about the root system. It is one thing, and usually

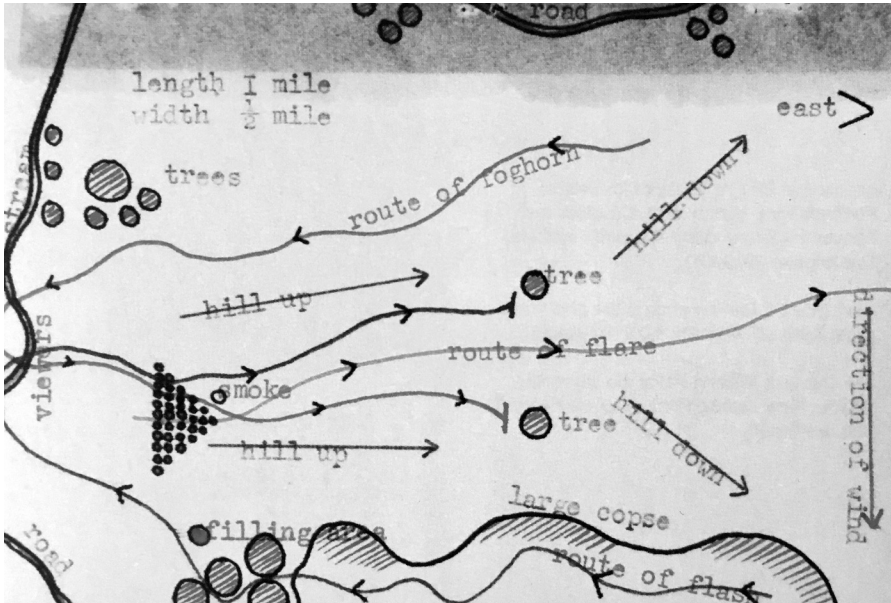
relatively easy, to remove a plant with discrete roots. But what about vegetation that grows through subterranean networks?

Against the conception of Singapore as a neatly trimmed and contained garden of cultural production, Langenbach instead uses the metaphor of the lalang plant, which for him represents “the erotics of information transmission, the promiscuity of a single continuous, uninterrupted, infinitely repeating connectivity. It is a notion of communication without imposition or imperative: *art at the margins of the state.*” <sup>7</sup>

The attentive gardener, or cultural policy administrator, may constantly attempt to pull out or prune elements which they do not find desirable. But there will always be something, a growth, that exceeds what they control (unless more drastic measures are taken, such as attempting to burn down or destroy the entire root system).

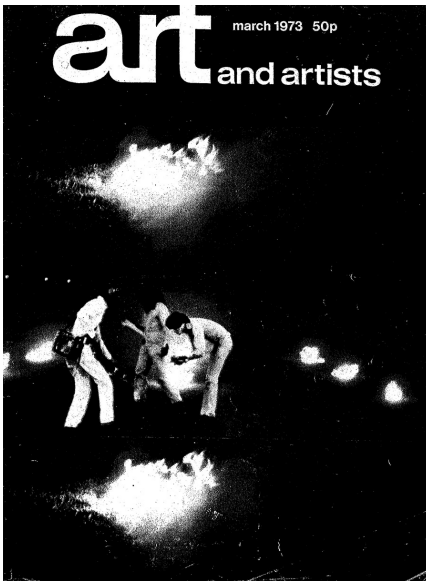


# Exit, a Landscape for Fire?



In the later 1960s and early 1970s both Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher were involved in forming Exit, a performance art group that was influenced by various radical artistic currents including Fluxus and the Situationists. Exit operated much more as an artistic experiment than as rock group, and the few remaining recordings

of their performance bear this out clearly. Membership varied widely by the day, being open to anyone who wanted to show up and take part. In his biography of Crass, George Berger notes the way that Exit developed many ideas which Crass would use later in time, and that it could be considered as "a musical extension of the open house



policy.”<sup>8</sup> In the sense, it’s much easier to understand Exit within the history of the avant-garde, for it was literally a space of experimentation that might not be well known today, but developed practices which were taken up and adopted by others.

Exit performances were held at various spaces at universities, squats, galleries, and elsewhere, but mostly

not at traditional music venues or performance spaces. As Gee Vaucher explains it, this was part of the influence of Fluxus motivating their desire to “taking something out of the four walls and off the canvas.”<sup>9</sup> This led to Exit collaborating with experimental artist Anthony McCall, in particular on *Landscape for Fire*, a series of performances which involved choreographed movements of containers of burning petrol through a space.<sup>10</sup> Although there is no connection between them, this is what I immediately thought of the first time I saw Tan Teng Kee’s “Fire Sculpture.” There is a shared desire to find a way new way to create and to experiment with form and sculpture. The collaboration with McCall would continue to influence Penny and Gee. Years later Crass would adopt aspects of his light works into their performances.

Exit was also heavily involved in the organizing of the International

Carnival of Experimental Sound, which took place at the Roundhouse in London over several weeks in August 1972. Organized around the thematic banner of “Myth, Magic Madness and Mysticism” it involved several week or performances and events, including participants from experimental arts worldwide including John Cage and influential improvised music collective

AMM. It was billed as something of an “avant-garde Woodstock.” Penny and Gee were heavily involved in the organizing and logistics, including design and printing for the event, along with rather colorful figure of Harvey Matsuow, who instigated and drove the event forward. Currently only some of the performances from the event, including Exit’s set, an hour long semi-structured improvisation billed as “The Mystic Trumpeter,” a phrase taken Walt Whitman’s book of poetry *Leaves of Grass*. Reflecting back on it in a recent book collection about the event, Penny describes the event as “it was magic, in the truest sense.”<sup>11</sup>

Penny and Gee would continue engaging in similar ways in their better-known work as members of Crass, both in terms of engaging with spiritual and mystic themes, as well as pushing the boundaries of performance through the arts. If one of the goals of moving towards performance art



was taking art off the page, or canvas, many Crass performances were self-organized DIY affairs taking place in community halls and other spaces in towns that often did not have regular music venues (or would not have welcomed performances by punk bands). Performances were not just musical but were veritable forms of multimedia involving the decking of venues with banners and the installation of multiple temporary screens for showing film and video during the performance. This continued engagement with mysticism and related themes may not have been anywhere near the most prominent ones, as the band more overtly focused on problems of militarism, violence, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression. Still it was there for those who looked. As described by George Berger, in their recordings and performances can be seen “an invisible but eminently apparent vein of spirituality.”<sup>12</sup>

In a recent conversation with V. Vale from Re/Search Publications, Penny responded to the suggestion that people would not be likely associate Crass with mysticism by saying:

one of the reasons we were strangely unique in the genre is because a) we meant what we said, and b) what we said came from a much deeper force than it appeared to have. If you look at some of the work... although it shows all the deprivation, the horrors, etc. of that era... at the same time it projects through its love and its care, through its precisions, through its beauty, *something else*. I believe that’s where the mysticism, the connection, was. I can hear it myself when I listen to our own work and compare it to the other work that is considered to be of the same genre. Well, it’s completely different because actually there’s a quality of *search* in everything we did.<sup>13</sup>

This is what makes clearest the sense of mysticism and spirituality here. Not in terms of anything approaching a religious sense, but more this sense of looking for a sense of beauty, of *something else*, that motivated attempts to escape from the horrors of the world that they confronted, and the limitations of existing art forms and approaches. In the discussion with V. Vale Penny went to explore Penny's conception of "devotional intent" in everyday practice, which is described, very much in a Zen-like fashion as a "*complete engagement* in whatever it

is one might be doing, whether it's sleeping or walking, living or dying." <sup>14</sup>

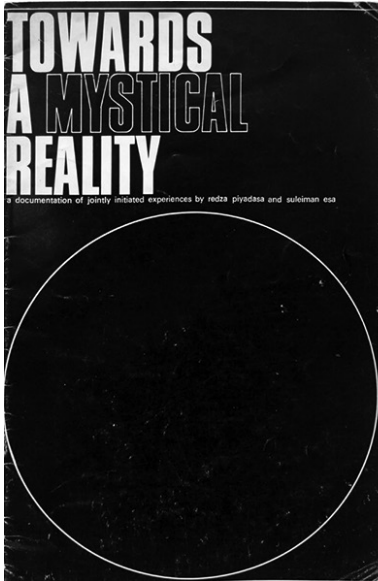
This spiritual and mystical sense has, if anything, only become more pronounced since the formal dissolution of Crass as a performing ensemble in 1984. This can be seen in the way that Penny has re-written the album *Yes, Sir, I Will*, drawing out a more affirmative sense of being drawing from Taoism. The search for something else continues, though it continues to come along with a desire to push art and expression beyond its current boundaries.

"I am not a poet in the same way I imagine that Pollock wasn't a painter. The poems that I have written have been written *before* me. I don't think "Oh, I'll write a poem." I'm not able to do that. They *happen*... poetry comes from nowhere. It simply manufactures itself." – Penny Rimabud <sup>15</sup>

"... if you're a painter or a writer, a cake maker or a musician, whatever – it just happens. It is just there. And if it's your experience, if it's your length of life, it's an *immediate* thing. The minute you start tampering and start trying to make it do something – as Penn says – *clever*, then it fails. It's very hard to get that timing, to allow it to do just that. You are the *medium*." – Gee Vaucher <sup>16</sup>



# Towards a Mystical Reality



Let's now turn to look at a similar process of searching, but from another direction. This is a searching coming from another geographic and cultural location, though at a roughly similar time period. In 1974 Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa held an exhibition entitled "Towards a Mystical Reality," which is now regarded as a pivotal

moment in the development of conceptual and performance art in Southeast Asia. Held at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a casual visitor entering the gallery at the time without having previous knowledge about avant-garde arts or performance might very well have concluded that the exhibition

was nothing more than a collection of randomly and somewhat haphazardly placed items brought into a gallery, with little that they would recognize as containing artistic merit. What does this birdcage, or these random items, mean? There were likely numerous confused, or aggravated, responses to this event. And these responses to the exhibition as event may have very well been the entire point.

The exhibition was accompanied by an extended catalogue-manifesto that was more important than the exhibition itself. In it they proclaimed that as artists they wanted to reject the idea of the humanist subject, which was understood as a hangover from colonialism. They wanted their work not to be understood within a framework of Malaysian art, but rather as part of an emerging Asian modernism. By doing so they proclaimed their desire to any “work outside Western-centric attitude towards form,” leaving behind dependence on

Western aesthetics or philosophical considerations.<sup>17</sup> They argued Asian artists adopted concepts and practices from other traditions but without adapting them to their context. Likewise, they argued that Asian artists were tending to adopt scientific and rationalistic attitudes in their work, ignoring mystical considerations as a possible basis or influence. From this argument, they declare:

the crucial issue in modern art today is not the problem of how we “see” things (visual /retinal) but how we “conceive” reality (conceptual). This new attitude in art today demands we requisition the very validity of a codified Art Criticism which has so far been founded upon aesthetic and formalist criteria.<sup>18</sup>

This declaration echoes Marcel Duchamp’s rejection of art that was only retinal. The question of re-seeing then was not a visual one, but rather

developing other ways to approach art. This call for a new approach to making and encountering art can be found across Piyadasa's work, such as in the way that he includes the phrase "This art situation is not to be interpreted visually" in at least three different works.

But if the work is not primarily visual, what is it? As Adele Tan frames it, this is a counter-intuitive demand, asking people to "disregard its outward construction as a painting... but to take it as a mental event."<sup>19</sup>

In this sense upset or confused reactions to the exhibition may have been the point. While it was clearly framed and organized as an exhibition (including being inaugurated by the Director of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and

Sport), it was also clearly intended to break a number of expectations and norms around exhibitions. While there were occasional mentions of Piyadasa and Esa as being the initiators of the event, the objects themselves were not signed and did not have any statement about who created them (and many of them were simply found objects).<sup>20</sup> In doing so they sought to work outside a formalist or rationalistic viewpoint, in part inspired by how many 'anti-art' artists such as John Cage, were taking inspiration from Zen and Buddhism.<sup>21</sup> Sabapathy argues by doing so they hoped to "decolonize prevailing thinking and dispositions wherein Europe and the West were routinely emulated."<sup>22</sup>

In retrospect *Towards a Mystical Reality* appears very much as an event, both for

those who were there, and the lingering effects it had on art in the region.

What was presented in the gallery was not just a selection of everyday objects, but a presentation where the intent was designed to highlight the objects' very ephemerality, informed by the proclaimed Zen and Taoist conceptions Piyadasa and Esa worked from and with.

Or, as Abdullah and Ah Kow put it, they "advocated a new way of confronting reality based on how the audience should 'conceive' reality through concepts rather than 'seeing' things through the visual or retinal sphere."<sup>23</sup>

The objects, then, are incidental. Rather than having the production of objects, works on the wall, as their

focus, instead the aim was to instigate a mental process in the audience.

This emphasis on the event rather than the object, on the mystical experience as a basis of production and reception of art, was pursued to find an escape from the dead ends of rationalism or un-thought adoption of Western forms.

But it also picked up a long-standing theme within artistic avant-gardes, namely the attempt to lead art out of Art and back to Life itself.

For Piyadasa and Esa the point is not the object, and ultimately not the event, but rather the realization that art "at its most profound, affords the viewer a mystical psychic experience that leads him directly to life itself."<sup>24</sup>

# Historiographical aesthetics & Nonliteral Configurations

The impulse to recover an archive, to build an archive, especially when this archive is bounded by the nation must always be regarded with suspicion... There is a thin line between being interested in the work of artists obscured by the colonial or early independence past, and contributing to this project of state power – Stefano Harney <sup>25</sup>

At some point, you, the dear reader, may begin to wonder, “So what? What’s the point of all this.” It might further be wondered what has really been shown or proven given that I’m not making a strong case for direct links between particular histories of art, music, and performance as much as suggesting that there were mutual patterns of influence and attempts to

escape from the artistic and political constraints encountered, whether in the UK or in Southeast Asia. Perhaps this is another instance of what folks in the science fiction world refer to as “steam engine time,” or when multiple people all begin working on and developing similar ideas at the same time, even without any apparent direct link or connections between them. <sup>26</sup>

But there is a broader point to make about how we talk about and encounter these histories. This is what Stefano Harney gestures to in the quote beginning this section, that there are dangers to be found in impulses to build archives and commemorate these histories. This is especially the case when commemorating, or building



the official narrative, around artists whose works are described clearly and accurately by Ray Lagenbach as “art at the margins of the state.”<sup>27</sup> Piyadasa and Esa did not want their work to be framed or understood within a Malaysian context, and the work of Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher (particular as part of Crass) took on an event more explicitly anti-statist and anti-national in character. They are routinely credited with having given birth to ‘anarcho-punk,’ even if this is a label that they are ambivalent about.

But these are precisely the processes of historicizing, within the nation-state framework, that have begun to emerge. This can be seen in the way that there now can be exhibitions about earlier histories of experimental and performance art held within the National Gallery Singapore (even if they are in the basement). They can be seen even more blatantly in “Punk. London,” the fortieth anniversary of punk events that were held across London in 2016 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. What better

way to commemorate challenging anti-establishment music and culture than with a series of event backed by the Lottery and Heritage Board and approved by the Mayor and the Queen! The events even came along with official branding guidelines for anyone wishing to self-organize their own event as part of the festivities which included a “Peace Riot” font and a declaration that any violation of the branding guidelines could lead to lawsuits and fines for violation of intellectual property. The results were predictably absurd, like the Sex Pistols “Anarchy in the UK” themed credit card.

It becomes clear that when the state initiates a process to find ways to accommodate histories of experimentation and subversion into its narrative that another approach is required. It requires tampering with the formation of what June Yap theorizes in her brilliant book *Retrospective: A Historiographical Aesthetic in Contemporary Singapore And Malaysia*, as the “historiographical aesthetic,” or one that engages with national histories, or

does so as a part art historical narratives. For Yap these are aesthetics that can be considered to be “examining the nature and production of history,” or perhaps even be engaged in a contestation of theories of history.”<sup>28</sup> There are at least two different levels, two different framings, here, if not more, particularly in the difference between works which take part in shaping approaches to and understandings of history, and one which are consciously doing so. The role of the historiographical artwork then is not just addressing historical narratives themselves, but more importantly, “the subjects of power, efficacy, dominance, and subterfuge as suggested in the theories of history.”<sup>29</sup>

In other words, they offer ways for recovering a sense of agency at the margins even as those margins have begun to become folded back in. And they do so by disrupting and re-orienting this double framing of history.

One way to do this can be found in Piyadasa’s 1978 painting “Entry Points,” which I’ve taken as a starting

point and inspiration for this project. As it states on the painting in stenciled multi-chromatic lettering: art works never exist in time, they have “entry points.” Piyadasa described this as making oblique reference to the history of landscape painting, which makes sense in that it was first included in an exhibition of landscape. What is interesting is that the central image is nothing like what might usually be expected as landscape. The central image is a recreation of Penang-born Nanyang artist Chia Yu-Chian’s 1958 painting “Riverside Scene.” This first generation of Nanyang artists would later come to be taken as very important in the development of art across Southeast Asia.

But years before that historicizing process is accomplished Piyadasa is taking and using this work to raise questions about how these histories and practices are recorded and formalized.

One could also look at this double framing in Piyadasa’s work thinking about the relationship between the

history of landscape in relationship with the history of enclosures, or removing people from common land and resources to make way for the development of markets and capitalism. By including this painting in an exhibition of landscapes Piyadasa is gesturing to the way that the formation of historical narratives can operate to enclose those histories in the same way that common lands were enclosed. But this becomes the very point. For Piyadasa art history itself is a process of myth making, as opposed to any conception of neutral or objective history.

The question then is to find new entry points into those histories, thus creating new openings into the historical-aesthetic realm. There is, and cannot be, any direct access to particular artistic works, or historical narratives. What is needed is developing an approach that deliberately cuts across and fucks with the historiography, with the canonization.

And the purpose of that is not to falsify records, but to interact with them in a different manner.

It is to explore and intervene in the history of what Peter Lamborn Wilson (a.k.a. Hakim Bey) calls “poetic facts”<sup>30</sup> rather than objective or neutral ones (if they indeed are possible). This can be seen in the work of artists such as Zoe Beloff, who describes her approach as “talking with history” rather than as narrating it or studying it as a detached outsider. It can be also be seen in the works and exhibitions by people such as Kin Chui and Ade Darmawan, who work to recover different histories, but why also intervening in them, perhaps to disrupt the drive of historicizing to feed into state and national power.

What is needed is an art history not of nation states but rather one that exists in the cracks between them, in the evasive territories that James Scott calls Zomia.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps this brings us to a conclusion which is not a conclusion at all, but rather a point of continuation:

*What entry points might we find in the resonances between different attempts to utilize conceptual and performative gestures*

*as a way to escape from the constraints aesthetically and politically one is faced with?*

The answer will not be found by answering, but in continual searching, and in gestures that might guide possible ways forward. During my several visits to the *A Fact Has No Appearance* exhibition I was struck by Piyadasa's piece "A Configuration Can Never Have a Literal Existence." Like many of Piyadasa's pieces it features a paradoxical Zen-like statement that has been stenciled, in this case on a panel nailed to a chair. What

mental event did it produce for me as it acted to "throws open the indeterminate gap between text and form"? <sup>32</sup> Perhaps none at first. But during my second, or perhaps third visit, I noticed that someone had placed a small pink flower in the center of the piece. This small gesture, one that went unnoticed by gallery attendants for quite some time, for me completed the piece, making me want to revisit and approach these histories differently, to find ways they could have different, even if not literal, configurations.





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- 2 Lin, Tay Swee (2016 [1998]) “Trimurti and Dimensions of Performance Art,” *Histories, Practices, Interventions. A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art*. Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Art, 353.
- 3 Langenbach, Ray (2016 [1996]) “Looking Back at *Brother Cane*: Performance Art and State Performance,” *Histories, Practices, Interventions. A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art*. Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Art, 181.
- 4 In January 1994 Josef Ng performed *Brother Cane*, a piece of performance art about the entrapment and arrest of gay men. The media uproar that occurred following this led to a ten-year restriction on the licensing and permitting of performance art in Singapore. For more information see: [http://the-singapore-lgbt-encyclopedia.wikia.com/wiki/Brother\\_Cane](http://the-singapore-lgbt-encyclopedia.wikia.com/wiki/Brother_Cane).
- 5 Kwok, Kian Woon and Lee, Wen, Eds. (2009) *The Artists Village: 20 Years On*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum.
- 6 Langenbach (2016), 178.
- 7 Langenbach (2016), 181.
- 8 Berger, George (2008) *The Story of Crass*. London: Omnibus Press, 30.
- 9 Berger, George (2008), 33.
- 10 Eamon, Christopher, Ed. (2006) *Anthony McCall: The Solid Light Films and Related Works*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- 11 Thompson, Dave (2017) *The Avant-Garde Woodstock: The International Carnival of Experimental Sound, 1972*. London: CreateSpace, 70).
- 12 Berger, George (2008), 137.
- 13 Penny Rimbaud. *Interviews by V. Vale*. (2014) San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 120.
- 14 Penny Rimbaud. *Interviews by V. Vale*. (2014), 150.
- 15 Penny Rimbaud. *Interviews by V. Vale*. (2014), 127-128.
- 16 Penny Rimbaud. *Interviews by V. Vale*. (2014), 131.
- 17 Piyadasa, Redza and Suleiman Esa (1974) *Towards a Mystical Reality*. Kuala Lumpur, 4/6. Available at <https://openresearch-rtepository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/105176>.
- 18 Piyadasa, Redza and Suleiman Esa (1974), 9.

- 19 Tan, Adele (2016) “Redza Piyadasa in the 1970s: Cerebral Maneuvers, Cultural Assertions,” *A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object*. Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 37.
- 20 As described by Abdullah and Ah Kow, “[i]n the 1960s, when Malaysian artists seemed to be influenced by the Abstract Expressionist art movement of the West, a group of Malaysian artists known as the New Scene were interested in the “cerebral and impersonal,” analytical and constructivists aspects of art making” (2014: 203).
- 21 This should make it clear that there were multiple and mutual patterns of influence emerging. The ‘West’ was looking to the ‘East’ for inspiration at the same time the ‘East’ was looking ‘West’ for the same, only to find people who were likewise attempting to escape the constraints they faced by looking elsewhere. There are numerous other examples that could give of similar dynamics (for instance in the writing of Hakim Bey). But the main point is that can be understood as possible forms of mutuality and exchange, as opposed to cultural appropriation.
- 22 Sabapathy, T. K. (2012) *Intersecting histories: contemporary turns in Southeast Asian art*. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 43.
- 23 Abdullah, Sarena & Chung Ah Kow (2014) “Re-examining the Objects of Mystical Reality,” *Jati*, Volume 19: 210.
- 24 Piyadasa, Redza and Suleiman Esa (1974), 14.
- 25 Harney, Stefano (2018) “Singapore and the Anti-Colonial,” *Place Labour Capital*. Ute Meier Bauer and Anca Rujoiu, Eds. Singapore: NTU CCA Singapore, 192.
- 26 Bridle, James (2018) *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. London: Verso.
- 27 Langenbach (2016), 181.
- 28 Yap, June (2016) *Retrospective: A Historiographical Aesthetic in Contemporary Singapore And Malaysia*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 6/274).
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- 30 Wilson, Peter Lamborn (1993) *Sacred Drift. Essays on the Margins of Islam*. San Francisco: City Light Books.
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# **Zen, Punk, and the Art of Actionless Action**

Discussion with Penny Rimbaud, Dial House, July 2017



**SS:** Over the past few years I've been spending more time in Singapore. While there I've gone to a number of punk gigs. And one thing that has struck me to see there – perhaps as you might see almost anywhere – are people wearing leather jackets with Crass logos, as well as other bands from the UK from around the same period. But that made me wonder, standing in Singapore, thousands of miles away from the UK, and in a much different cultural context: what do those symbols mean there? How do the meanings of those symbols and iconography change as they travel around the world and are borrowed, readapted, and mutate? But not just Crass itself, also everything around it, such as Dial House being an open house. How do you relate to those chains of translation? And what can be made of them, especially in a much different context, such as a very top down and authoritarian social context like Singapore?

**PR:** The key is what I term as appropriate action. Appropriate action is that which has no reference to past. It has no

reference to future. It only has reference to the sort of immediate circumstances, and the immediate demands of those circumstances. The only action that can be appropriate is that which takes no account of a past or a future, otherwise it's liable to be – if not inevitably inappropriate, because it is not actually dealing with the situation as is – but dealing with it in a perceived way, in a cognitive way. It is using the past or the future as a reference. Therefore, it isn't actually dealing with the situation. You're dealing with an idea of a situation.

For example, when I went to Brazil, where it was thirty degrees, to a festival on the coast. It was a three-day festival. Everyone there, almost without exception, was wearing black. Not just wearing black, but wearing black leather jackets with studs, black gloves, and big heavy black boots. It seemed absurd. I'd got off the plane wearing black because I tend to wear black all the time. But in my backpack, I'd got all white, which is what I wear in the tropics, because it's comfortable to do so.

I was then faced with this sort of awful predicament. I was shown my room, where I was going to be staying for the three days for the festival. Well do I change into white and dispel the whole myth? Of course I did. It feels ridiculous to say it, but I sort of felt nervous or slightly uncomfortable when changed into my all white and wandered down the steps of the place I was staying into the crowd. I didn't want that "ooh he's sort of playing at something" or "who the hell does he think he is?" Because in a strange way, by wearing white, I became different in that situation.

That is an utterly inappropriate adaption of a set of ideas. It's the most glaringly absurd for people to be wearing that clothing in that sort of climate. To my mind, that's what almost demonstrated the absurdity of exported cultural forms. There was a time when Crass said it wasn't going to play anything more than the radius of thirty miles from Dial House because to do so would be to invade other cultural developments. It would actually disempower the

indigenous populations of places further than a thirty-mile radius from here.

Thirty miles is probably where I can operate. I can get there in a day by foot. The weather is going to be pretty much stable across that area, et cetera. In terms of sort of indigeneity, in terms of how native populations exist, that's their world. Now because of IT, and all the other forms of communication, we're able to exist in a sort of far more global scale.

But I do profoundly believe that a lot of cultural influences are inappropriate and damaging. I don't think it helps for feminists to go over to Africa and actively attempt to put an end to clitorrectomy. Clitorrectomy is obscene, but that's my idea of it within this culture. I don't know what its roots are in African cultures, but I do know that the only way in which it will ever change is through insights of the people within African cultures. These might be slightly assisted, it has to be said, by people from other cultures imposing or applying their logic. But at the same time, in

doing so, one's always heading towards a hegemony of some form or other.

**SS:** Which has its own set of problems of contradictions.

**PR:** Cultural hegemony is certainly what America sees. The adoption of American street culture, without the gun, which is how it is in this country, is silly. The manner in which American street culture has developed is very much aware of and engaged with guns. That's why it is how it is. Well do that here and it's empty... like a Samurai without a sword.

So not only in Brazil did I wear white, but I also, in a country which assumes violence as a sort of cultural subtext, absolutely concentrated on unity and commonality. The idea there was no enemy; your greatest enemy is your greatest friend, which is what I believe anyway. But within a culture which had so completely misappropriated, what Crass was trying to talk about, or I was trying to talk about within Crass. I would just go back to that simple thing:

appropriate action. American hardcore, for example, totally misappropriated the sort of punk that people like Crass were portraying, or misunderstanding it. To make an aggressive program out of things which were gentle reminders – or sometimes quite forceful reminders – that you have a choice in your own life.

I don't think you make a choice to become vegan and then become exceedingly aggressive about anyone who might not make that choice. That isn't actually quite getting the message. And it's a bit like the misappropriation of "there is no authority but yourself." You can very easily pick up "there is no authority but yourself" as a licence for hedonism. But who is yourself? It's meant to ask the question. We know who they are, but who are we? Who am I? It doesn't mean, or it shouldn't mean, that "oh that's great, I can do whatever the hell I bloody well please within the existing narrative." It's much more trying to suggest that we create our own narrative. It isn't at all promoting any specific about that. And it's only since, and certainly in Brazil, I



realised that one had to completely re-establish the meaning of that phrase, because it was being so misappropriated.

**SS:** To go back for a second, I'm quite struck by the idea of appropriate action in a situation not being stuck in the past, or into the future, but only being oriented to the present. That sounds to me like a very Zen, or almost Taoist sense of action. It also sounds very demanding. Is it more feasible to act that way, going back to your idea of having a thirty-mile radius, of somewhere where you're grounded and know very well? Is it more possible to act in that sense when holding the present in that space?

**PR:** No, it's not only possible. It's a lot easier, of course. There's far less unpredictability within one's own immediate surroundings. You know what insects are, you know what plants are, you know what represents thread. Or what represents food. Or what represents all those things which could be perturbations in other environments. One of my problems in Africa, when I

first travelled there, was knowing which insects are harmless, and which aren't. And my brother, who lives in Africa, said "don't ask questions, just whack them."

In some respects, that's pretty sensible, because some of them are lethal, others are just unpleasant, and some of them are just sunbathing. And the opportunity of whacking many of them is pretty obscure.

I remember I was in Northern Kenya. I had just gone strolling in the bush, and a little group of kids joined me, or trailed behind me. I reached a spot where I thought would be a nice place to sit. You can tell when someone's going to sit. They look around and move one or two things. The kids suddenly stopped following me and ran quickly towards me. And as I lifted a stone, beneath the stone was a huge scorpion, which they immediately killed.

They knew it was there. I didn't know that. That's a case where they operated on the appropriate action. I'm thinking about past and future. You could say I cognitively know, I'm aware of

scorpions, and what they might do. But I would argue that for indigenous people – a native people – there's no separation between the two. They know of each other prior to them cognitively knowing of each other, in the same way blue tits were able to take the cardboard lid off of milk bottles, in the days of milk bottles, to drink the milk. How did they know the milk was there before pecking through the cardboard? That used to be a real problem when I was a kid, the Blue Tits and the milk. When you come around and leave milk bottles on the doorstep, and if you walk down the street, all the milk bottles would have been pecked through. That's not a cognitive thing. I would argue that that's how those kids in Africa were responding. Not from any cognitive thing. The precognitive is there.

**SS:** The things that you know, not necessarily know consciously, but know from being somewhere for long enough.

**PR:** Yes. But it's not through being there, because you are there. You are it. You've never separated from that. And

that's the great beauty of indigeneity: that you know. They're not apart from the land in which they move, they are the land. I've seen that in various other cultures, where people are the land. You can't separate the people from the land. At the moment one does separate the person from the land, then they become isolated. That's Cartesian thinking really. I'll give you that possibly prior to him, Descartes, people were actually much more within the belonging-ness, or of-ness of indigenous cultures.

**SS:** Could you look at different kinds countercultures and subcultures, from punks, to hippies and beats, or whoever, as different variations of people trying to find that belonging-ness because they had been separated from the land and the place where they live?

**PR:** Yes, certainly. That whole sort of cultism is a sort of replacement for tribalism, which was a development from natural community. We have a community of birds in the garden. There's sparrows, blue tits, and woodpeckers.

They are a community. They don't relate to each other. They simply are of this land. And they're absolutely intrinsic to that. They make this land, and this land makes them. They are a true community. Most human communities are not actually communities at all. They're ghettos. They're cults.

The ghettos were not communities. They were a result of cultism. And that cultism can be imposed from without or imposed from within. It makes no difference actually, which is why I find it impossible to understand why or how Hasidic communities still exist so rigorously as a separate community within the community. It's exactly that sort of, offensive action, which will always be defended as defensive action. That actually creates the sort of separations and the distancing that is the nature of conflict. Where did that all come from? You asked a question; that was the answer to it.

**SS:** Indeed. We're going somewhere. But let's go back to, for a second, the idea



of misappropriating or taking up an idea or practice out of context. I'm intrigued how you might say there can sometimes be kinds of useful misunderstandings. Maybe that's the wrong phrase. That migration, of a species, or an idea, can have quite interesting effects in a new context. And here I'm thinking about how recently described the way that you rewrote the Crass album *Yes, Sir, I Will*, with the idea that your rewriting was

intended to draw out the more positive energies of the piece and imbue it with a more Taoist sense. Now I know you've had a long-term engagement with questions around and explorations of mysticism. At this point I'm guessing you have a fairly well developed sense of what traditions and philosophies you draw from. But when you draw from Taoism or Zen to rewrite a punk album that's moving the context for both the Taoism and the music. You're taking certain ideas or philosophies and using them in a far different context.

**PR:** Yes. The basic principle within my mystical thinking was... when I was a kid, my father was always saying that I need to get real, to get into the real world. He was always going on about this reality, which I assume he imagined that he represented, with his getting up at six thirty in the morning to go and do someone else's work. Or to go to war, or to do the things he had to do, to maintain his real world. Well that real world was not attractive to me in any way whatsoever. It seemed dull and

conformist. It lacked play. It lacked all of the things that a seven-year-old kid, or five-year-old kid enjoyed, and wanted, and realised were their natural right to exist without those impositions. It was clear even to a seven-year-old kid that all the impositions came from without. I didn't know any moral structure. I didn't have any social structure. I didn't have any conditions. I was just a free thing floating on air, if you like.

I very early on realised no, this is not for me. It was very much a man's world. I didn't like that either. I liked my mum because she was sweet, and warm, and smelt nice. She was much more natural. She didn't put on airs, which my dad had to every morning. She just got on with her life, looking after me, and the garden, and my brother and sister, and the things that mums do.

And that might sound rather aggressive, or reactive, but that's the order. If we've corrupted that, which we have. We can't start then trying to put strictures on to defend that position, or even pervert our

own deeper thinking to conform to these new conditions, which are our natural conditions.

I was introduced to Zen by an American artist when I was about fourteen. That made a lot more sense. It certainly made a lot of sense compared to Christianity that was being imposed, with people hanging on crosses, inherited sin, and all the rest of the nonsense that didn't make any sense at all to me. Zen was pure spring pouring into the mind of someone who hadn't seen anything that in any way reflected their own thinking. That was it. And over the years, I adapted it, used it, and obviously imported huge doses of existentialism into it, and anything that seemed to offer a clue of "how do I get there?" I intellectually used all the time hunting for a way to that place which wasn't the real world.

It was really only through Taoism that I came to realise the true potential. And Taoism doesn't talk all this nonsense about enlightenment. It's there, if you don't see it, that's your problem. That's

a nice way of looking at it. You don't need to be sitting on your ass for the rest of your life thinking nothing at all, you know. Those are methods, but they're actually quite unnecessary. And that was even more encouraged, that part of my trajectory, which was even more encouraged by reading about how, in its origin, Taoism was matriarchal. It worked on the feminine principle. That doesn't mean it was a matriarchy in power terms. It was matriarchal in its being, in its process, and in its method of dealing with the world.

And that is the case with the indigenous. Most indigenous communities, they're closer to being the pure animal that we are, rather than the impure human we become, or the corrupted. We are in effect a corrupted animal. An animal moves around completely in harmony, while we're corrupted animals that move around almost permanently in disharmony.

It was the idea that at some point in time a culture had developed around

the matriarchal precept, which wouldn't have even been even precept thinking. And that became corrupted. The moment you move 'ism' into any form, as the Tao will say. The Tao is indescribable. That which can be described is not a Tao. The moment you move out of that, in other words, you start trying to formalise, and if you look at what formalise means, it means give form to. That's what happened. From the formless Tao being, patriarchy, started moving in. Shamanism is the first step out of Animism. It might be that, cognitively, which can be perceived through the Animist mind. In other words, the ancestors are in that tree, et cetera, that nothing ever moves, it simply changes form. Or it doesn't change form because it is there already. Pre-animist matriarchy strikes a very strong note with current quantum thinking.

What Shamanism does is take control of intrinsic knowledge. Well we all know, nothing that we know, which is not known. You know. What Shamanism does is exclusify and take

possession of the known. It moves the precognitive into the cognitive and lays claim on it. And that's the beginnings of power. That's the beginnings of the patriarchy. And it's the refinement of that which has led to modern capitalism.

**SS:** Would you say your centre of mysticism is less a religious sense and more finding an outside to the imposition of the "this is the real world?"

**PR:** There's no religion at all in it. I haven't got any... haven't got a second of time for anything that has an 'ism'. If there is an 'ism' then it's going to be corrupted. In Brazil and Mexico I was actually countering description by saying I'm an inactivist. And that's exactly what I am. If you refer that to the appropriate action, then appropriate action is inaction.

**SS:** Inaction as the Taoist sense of Wu Wei, or actionless action?

**PR:** Absolutely. Wu Wei, yes. Which is one of the profound and early principles of Taoism.



**SS:** I suppose the difficult thing is how you keep open a space, or a sense of being. There always seems to be dynamics pushing towards regularising how things work, or defaulting back into a logic of control in organising.

**PR:** The material world is nothing but a series of practical considerations. I've woken up in the material world. The wall needs mending. My friend needs talking to. That's the practical consideration. Now if you start making that into a religion within its own right then you can justify being a banker with huge bonuses, if you want to.

That's a misuse... That's a misappropriation of the material world as a series of practical considerations. That means at this moment, in the appropriate world, the material world is a series. If you move out of the appropriate world into the material world then you will start misappropriating the practical considerations. You'll start saying yes, well my practical consideration is I need

such and such so I can drive around in a Bentley. Well that's not actually it. That's the same as saying there is no authority but yourself, and going around and booting a grandma in the head. It's exactly the same thing. That's not it.

**SS:** Then it's understanding what are boundaries of appropriate action? And that it's not just whatever you want, it's actually in relation to the context, how you're in relationship with the people in that context.

**PR:** It's knowing the difference between material action and immaterial action. It's knowing the difference between working within the cognitive field or working in the precognitive field. Current neuroscience more than suggests that we work far more within the precognitive than we do within the cognitive field. We like to think that we're making all the choices. We don't like to think that a huge number of those choices have already been made in the precognitive field. But that's the truth of that.

**SS:** The choices being made by the bacteria in your gut that are a large part of how you think even.

**PR:** Totally, yes. It's already happened. It's always been known. And it's self-evident that the event must already have happened for us to be aware of it. Wherever we find ourselves, we're never there. We're always after the event. And that might be nanoseconds but we're after the event. And those nanoseconds are an infinity. Infinity is a grain of sand, as Blake pointed out, because infinity must be all things and nothing. It doesn't matter how you see it, you can see it as a grain of sand, or you can see it as a sort of mighty cosmos. Makes no difference.

**SS:** But even take seriously those nanoseconds between when you think a choice is made and when you previously already made it is to destabilise our conceptions around choice and individual will, because so much if happens before.

**PR:** It's a matter of naturalness, isn't it? You don't decide to be hungry. I suppose even with bad eating habits, we still recognise that we're hungry from some deeper source than not thinking we're hungry. You can think you're hungry as much as you like. You're not going to become hungry. You can only become hungry when you become hungry. That's getting close to appropriate action and appropriate being, to stop engaging in fantasy. The material world is the same as a practical consideration. I'm hungry, I'll go make some bread. Not I'm hungry, I'll go and watch a circus. We don't make silly choices about things that matter. We can't because actually we're not making the choices. If we left our mind to make the choices we probably wouldn't survive much, and longevity would become a thing of the past.

**SS:** Thinking about those bankers you mentioned justifying their actions, I wanted to ask you about Stop the City demonstrations against the City of London that you and other members of

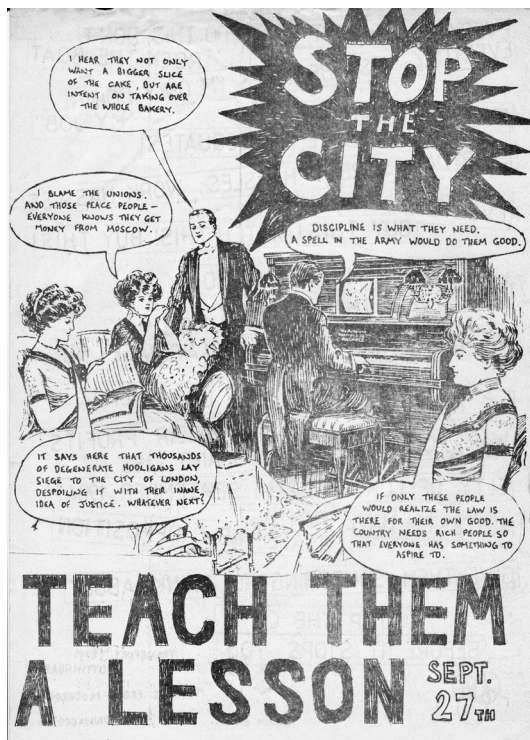
Crass were very involved in organizing in 1983-1984. You could say that the Stop the City is another example where a history, or series of events, is taken up and inspires other people in different times and contexts. You can see that in the way that counterculture movements and protests in the 1990s, or the rise of the anti-globalization movement, took inspiration from that earlier moment. And drew from it not just in terms of content, in terms of questioning the role of finance and money in society, but also in how they were organized. Or as was often claimed, that they weren't organized but seemed to just happen spontaneously. That's a claim that get made repeatedly by apparent protest movements without an obvious form of leadership or someone controlling. Maybe they are appropriate action for that context. I wanted to ask you about that period and what you make of those events now.

**PR:** If a lot of people are saying bankers are bastards, or whatever it is, what's the appropriate action? Simple as that

really. If you don't like banks, what are you going to do about it? One thing is you could not bank, another thing is you could stick glue in cash machines, or whatever... That's a simple and practical response. If you haven't got the question you're not going to do it anyway. Certainly Crass was very much responsible for posing the question. In other words, saying this is going on, what are you going to do about it? It was implied by the fact that we were making a statement about it. It didn't necessarily mean that we had any answers. We just had lots of questions. Actually, we don't have answers, and never did. I still don't have answers. I'm not really interested in answers. I'm much more interested in questions which actually do away with answers. Answers are not the answer. The answer is appropriate action. I know that might sound like I'm being divisive or avoiding the question.

**SS:** No, you're just answering in your own way, Pen. And I'm not sure I would ever expect you to do anything

but that. But I was thinking about the flyers and handouts you made for gigs



and how they would have quite different elements on the same flyer. On one there would be some information about how bankers, or the arms industry, are total bastards making this giant machinery of death run. And on the other side,

or another flyer handed out at same time, there would be information about how to make your own bread. And it's the second flyer, or flyers like the second flyer, that tend to get forgotten. And that's unfortunate because they both resonate with a certain kind of engagement. And it seems important to hold those two moments together, that connection between them. The first is how you're angry about something, and the second is saying here's something you can do together. You need both.

**PR:** That's absolutely right. The other day I went up to see what Class War was up to. They were standing outside Boris Johnson's house, shouting "cunt" time and time again mostly. That's the protest. This was the degree of intelligence being demonstrated by being utterly offensive to half the population of the world. They saw themselves as making some sort of pertinent action. At it's very best it's impertinent. I mean reaction and it's actual reality within the material world, which is nothing

but a series of practical considerations. That is an impractical, ineffective, gestural piece of pointlessness. It didn't even pose questions. If something isn't a metaphor, if it's being posed as a profound and concrete reality, then I'm not interested, because there's no such thing as profound, concrete realities. There are 1001 metaphors, which in turn has 1001 an infinitive process of 1001s. Unless we get off of that trajectory onto the one, not the 1000, then we're in the same problems. The whole idea of solution is a ridiculous fantasy. We live within the solution. We are the solution. Our action, and our inaction, that is the solution. We are all at all moments; the solution. And this is the result of the solution. The solution and the result of the solution are one. You can't separate them. There's nothing more than just where we're stood right now. And that's already gone, so there's nothing more than where we're now stood.

What did we do in that time? Bugger

all generally speaking. Well the bugger all is part of the all. It doesn't stop, and it doesn't start. It simply is. For me the material world is nothing but a series of appropriate responses, or the material world is nothing but a series of practical considerations, which is the appropriate response. It's an absolute liberation.

**SS:** Perhaps to re-inflect that Crass slogan, there is no authority but yourself, from a Taoist angle, might we say that there is no authority but yourself, and that there also is no self. Or if there is a self, it's he self that's going to emerge through drawing water, and carrying wood.

**PR:** I think so, yes.

**SS:** It's not being, it's a kind of doing. In the content...

**PR:** 'Is-ing'. The moment you're doing, then you're being. It is if you're trapped. So it's 'Is-ing'. Most of the time we are 'Is-ing', in the times in between cognitive thought, which is a lot of our time. Sitting on the tube train, and



there's nothing there, you're not even aware of the fact that you've thought. And you're certainly not aware of the fact where you've been not thinking. Most of the time we're there. We're just moving around. We don't walk into people, or collide with doors. We might stop at a snack bar because we're hungry. We might nod off, because

we're sleepy. We're certainly breathing. That's 'Is-ing'. And all the rest is really largely bullshit. "Ooh I wonder if that girl's looking at me." Or I wonder if I'm looking at that girl. That's not Is-ing. Looking at the girl, because that's what you're doing, is Is-ing. It's the moment you start wondering about it that the problem starts.





**SS:** Is this your space for Is-ing?

**PR:** I is everywhere. The Is-ing hasn't got an 'I', which is why there is no problem. It's only when the 'I' comes into the equation that the problems start. You can be looking up a girl's skirt Is-ing. You're looking up a girl's skirt. 'I' is thinking you can do more than looking up a girl's skirt, because you're looking up a girl's skirt.

**SS:** Is the imposition or emergence of the 'I' on the Is-ing equivalent to where the Shaman emerges from the sort of formless being?

**PR:** Exactly. And it's another shift in biblical terms: it's the Garden of Eden. It's the removal from the Garden of Eden that is the fall from innocence. And is it possible to lose the sort of licentious, or avaricious, all of this sort of highly sophisticated impositions on our naturalness. Our natural inquisitiveness which is our natural survival, which is our appropriate nature. Watch any

animal moving across a space it doesn't know, and it's either completely aware, or it's completely open because it doesn't know what's going on. You can only close down if you know precisely what's going on. You know, which is going to be in some form of cell, because there's nothing is going to go on. But that's the cell of the mind. I'm confident; I'm moving; I don't need to look; I know where I am. You know because one so defined it. And acting shocked, and suddenly actually where you think you are, your cell, gets punctured in some way, which it can do very easily because someone's insulting or someone picked your pocket. Or it picks your mind. It's the same thing.

**SS:** But I suppose there is a certain value of occasionally getting out of your usual milieu in a way that forces you to actually look more intensely at where you are. And this is one of the things I always notice when I travel: I notice a lot of things that I wouldn't otherwise.

**PR:** Yes, but that's the precognitive trying to sort it out. Probably. We rationalise around it. That's certainly true. Especially if you go to very extremely different cultures you become very aware. Where the cognitive knows very awareness only in a sort of very minor form. You know, if you are, "I bet there's a lot of muggers around here," or whatever it is. There's all those reservations. which actually instantly make you vulnerable to all the things that you imagine yourself to be thinking. The precognitive mind sees the shadow behind the tree. We don't. Our cognitive mind hasn't even got there.

One of the things I've had been happening to me, notably in the last few days, is noticing other presences that I would describe as ghosts, or spirits, or whatever. On one or two occasions just recently, I think I joined the precognitive mind in visually, because I'm beginning to see what's actually there, rather than what you know. One other thing is that the cognitive mind is a massive censor.

It absolutely creates static, creates form within formlessness. Emptiness is form; form is emptiness. It's the cognitive mind that determines the nature of form. I think therefore I am. That's the archetypal, the great anthem, of materialist enlightenment thought.

**SS:** Could it be that it's not that the cognitive mind that determines form much as it needs there to be form in order for it to operate? The cognitive mind wants to see a pattern, even if it's not there, in order to make sense of something.

**PR:** Yes, that's because the ego, which is the base at the sort of control device of the cognitive mind, has no form. There is no such thing as an ego. It's a pure construct. As a construct, which is then ascribed certain things by the deeper mind, or the deeper being is we ascribe the ego its role. We actually control the ego, not us. We've created it. It's not a Frankenstein's monster. Well it is actually a Frankenstein's monster.

It's exactly that. We create something. We're encouraged to do so. That's become a sort of conditioned... That is the condition of conditioning. We have a depository for it. Because you will not, you cannot, hypnotise someone to go against deep instinct. You can hypnotise them to do an awful lot, like give up smoking, for example. But you cannot hypnotise them to stop breathing. We exist as do all things within that framework. We are a complete symbiosis.

The conscious mind can think what the hell it bloody well likes. It will not affect that symbiosis. It cannot affect that symbiosis, because the symbiosis has no ethic or moral structure. The symbiosis cares not one iota whether or not, we as part of that symbiosis, are creating climate change. It's of no concern. It's adapting fine, thanks very much. The only people who aren't are those who created it. And the only people who can perceive it are those who created it. Which is why the indigenous people just do whatever

they do, whether it's survival or not. I'm concerned they're not going to start determining a reality out of it. Because the reality is what's happening, not what appears to be happening. And the reality that is happening is precognitive. The reality which we like to think appears to be happening is the cognitive.

Current neuroscience suggests that it's something like 70% of our being is actually in the precognitive domain. You can almost prove that through the amount of time that we spend not within the cognitive domain. I haven't tried to look at that because if I were trying to look at it then I would be constantly in the cognitive domain trying to look at it. But maybe to sort of try and analyse a day when I'm not thinking about it. Then out that of just how much time I was actually cognitively operating.

**SS:** I suppose it's like icebergs where the tendency is to mistake the little bit sticking above the water for

the whole thing and missing the sort of all the submerged section.

**PR:** Yes. That's absolutely true. And if you come to navigation then that's even more the case. You can't sink a Titanic with a small amount of an ice berg above the water. That's true. You can't actually operate as a boat on top of the surface with icebergs. That's the material world. This is what we can see. And that's absolutely correct.

Once we believe what's not there it is actually what's really there. We are like that. The material world very much operates on event horizons. A soap opera manifests that entirely, where people have got to be either arguing or making love to make any sense. Sex and violence, that's the event world. We're just living between the peaks. There's hours and days can go between the last time I fucked or shot someone and the next time I'll fuck or shoot someone. Days, and days, years, and

years. Well that's where we actually exist. Not in the occasional actions we make. But the soap opera, which is endless action, or most movies, which are endless action, have created this idea of the endless action. That's why people are involved in constant drama.

**SS:** I love how we've gone from neuroscience and Taoism to soap operas. Perhaps that is the failing of activist politics: mistaking that there's moments of political equivalent of shooting or fucking for the real world, where the real politics happens somewhere. And the 95% of life outside of that, which is most of life, is in fact not important. It becomes too focused on the event, on the action. Which again is the mistaking the iceberg problem.

**PR:** Absolutely. And that's why appropriate action as a practice is pertinent and relevant. Appropriate action very rarely requires shooting or fucking. One can just send me away. In

terms of the cognitive material world, one can sit. Graphically that's the past and that's the future, and that's the moment. It just constantly moves there. Not shifting here, or there, or both. Just here. And nothing's happening ever. And the chances are, nothing will happen.

And if it does happen, then you, at the same speed, which is infinite, yet not at all. That's the great swoosh of a Samurai's sword. And then a return to that. There's never a break from that. Between the swoosh, and that. Because it's immediate, direct, it's momentary, and it's exact, and precise. And it's that precision, that is what people avoid. They don't want that precision. They don't want to know that precision because then what the hell are going to do in between? People can't sit, they don't know how to sit. I'm using sit in the sort of Taoist Zen sense.

**SS:** It's doing nothing which is much more difficult than it seems. Last night

I was sitting down, in the regular sense, thinking as I write out questions to ask Pen. But then I decided, or maybe it didn't decide, to just start with a general idea and see where things went. It'll emerge. Things will emerge anyways.

**PR:** That's the utter principle. It's been the most in my life. I'm seeing that, the Seven Samurai, all of whom have very different practices, but to the same end. The guy who just sat underneath the tree in a beautiful field of daisies, if you remember, and just waited, he was the one who was the most precise. He was the one who was the most immediate. When I was 14, or whatever I was when I first saw it. It was about the same time as I got introduced to Zen. Just thinking that I want to be like that. I thought that whole idea of waiting for the moment, because the moment might never come. Where do you wait for the moment? You wait for it in a bed of daisies. You wait for it within music, as beauty. When you need to be nasty,

when you need to be uncontrolled, and you need that, you can be that. But that becomes the point of return.

Any action which is made beyond the concept of the point of return, is going to be inappropriate. One simply makes the action to return to inaction. In other words, to return to beauty and silence. And anything that prevails against that, effectively should be ruthlessly eradicated. And most of that's simply through self-practice. Ruthlessly eradicating desire, for example. Ruthlessly eradicating avarice. Ruthlessly eradicating false emotion and false affection. All of the things where informed by soap operas are perfectly normal, to be endlessly arguing, endlessly wanting, endlessly needing. In proof of our emptiness, used in the negative sense.

**SS:** On a slightly different tangent, it reminds me of the first time I came across John Cage's 4'33. I didn't really get it. What's the silence for? How is the silence

music? Is this a joke? Until later I found out, or Cage pointed out somewhere, that when he was put in an anechoic chamber, one that blocks all sound, that there isn't actually silence. He found that when you're in that chamber what then hear is you hear your blood flowing, or you even hear like the electrical pulses of your brain functioning. The idea that there is no doing nothing. There is no silence, there is no nothing. It's just you can't perceive that until you stop.

**PR:** It's moving from observation into happening. That's very much that the materialists' view of Zen sitting, or the Samurai beneath the tree is of inactivity. Yet that is the absolute symbiotic happening. To be a part of that is oceanic. To be apart from that is self-interest, self-confinement, and all of that implies of imposing self-interest and self-confinement on others, existentially.

Is it better to fight for peace, or let peace fight its own cause? Clearly, it's better to



let peace fight its own cause, because we don't know what peace is, whereas peace does know what it is. All we can do is get out of the way. Get out of your own way. Get out of our own way. Because the symbiosis responds symbiotically, which is why violence creates violence. If violence creates violence, then peace also creates peace. Why fight for peace violently? Where quite clearly that is illogical. I'm talking practically now. The idea that someone who sits is doing nothing is just heartily absurd. It's like saying the rain falling is doing nothing. The rain doesn't fall so it can feed plants. It falls because rain falls, because clouds form. Clouds don't form because clouds want to form. They form because the sun shines on the rain, which makes clouds which rain. The sun shines on oceans, which makes clouds, which... you get the point.

In our own being we are nothing apart from that. We are the coming

and going of it. We are the coming and going of it to the degree that the 'we' doesn't even come into the equation. That's trying to grow out of, or into Descartes's great conceit. And that's been the bugbear. That's been the greatest limitation on human development, greatly enforced by Freud. Or greatly enforced by Dali. Greatly enforced by all the great minds of the enlightenment. All of those things are set to prevail against reason.

**SS:** Does Dial House have a field of daisies? Is Dial House a field of daisies? Or is it your field of daisies?

**PR:** Yes, it is. Everywhere is my field of daisies. There was a time when I had to learn how does it feel to be in a field of daisies. Well, now I know. And I know that I am that field so I don't need to be in that field, because being in it is dualistic. I mean being that field is non-dualistic. It's getting out that dualistic trap. And it is a trap.

**SS:** I was just thinking that sort of situated Is-ing, or being in place, if anything is actually the outside? Or how you get out of that sort of being trapped in that Cartesian sense self. There is no autonomous thinking self that verifies it by thinking. The way to get out of it is understanding yourself as being situated in that symbiosis in a place.

**PR:** Yes, totally. To me, this speaking voice, it's staggering that something so completely illogical, like I think therefore I am, could possibly ever have become almost a precept. Well it didn't come almost. It is a precept. It's the foundation of 400 years of complete illogical madness: the enlightenment.

**SS:** That's one of thing that feminist like Silvia Federici keep pointing out. That Cartesian sense of self didn't just spread as shared understanding because it was really compelling, but because it was backed up by force and violence.

**PR:** Actually, it's worse. You could have blamed anything from the witch hunts to the Holocaust on that way of thinking, quite reasonably. It's not a piece of some conspiracy theory. That sense of sort of victimhood has as its identity is a part of that thinking. One can become a victim if one can perceive of an eye to become one. Not only can you be victimised, as we are through commodity culture, but you can self-victimise through Freudian interpretation. There's an unbelievable tribe. And I know very few people who have found a way of escaping that trap. At some point they will expose their Cartesian underwear. They're the heretics of heretics of the future, because they're committing current heresy. They're committing heresy against the patriarchy.

I wrote a tweet which was "the patriarchy remains intact; all the rest is disempowering propaganda." And it is. What I've been talking about is patriarchal thought. If you want to sort of identify, which is the wrong thing to

do for the sake of the dialogue we're having. Those matriarchal principles are exactly the ones I'm promoting. If we look at the results of what has happened since the matriarchy, and if you read sort of Taoist history about the move from matriarchy, from peaceful, symbiotic coexistence, into a warring world of what came and then Confucianism... trying to make some stupid moral order of that which requires none. We just need to start breaking down the word. We've got so many words for ignorant. I really liked it when Trump commenting on the Manchester bombing, where "these people aren't monsters, they're losers." That's it. Let's start using the right words.

Most enlightenment thought is divine ignorance. Mechanistic thought is ignorant. There's no two ways about it. It's ignorant because it quite clearly doesn't work. If you get onto a bicycle, the best thing to do is to see that it's the right way up. Then you sit on the saddle, turn the peddles, and it goes along. It's

almost like enlightenment puts the bike on its handlebars, ground and try to peddle forwards by spinning the wheels. It's not going to happen. It's not actually engaging in the nature of what it is of the vehicle we exist within, or are. It doesn't even make sense within its own terms, which is why its government is being so tragically damaging. It is why we've got global warming. It's why we've got all of things we claim we don't want. We created them.

**SS:** We'll have to step back from the idea of a sense of self which controls the world rationally. I don't control the world. We exist in relationship with the world, rather than in control of it.

**PR:** Absolutely, yes. Yes. If one was to follow the Cartesian logic, I, you'll find... where do I belong in the world? The simple answer is you don't. You don't because you've already divided yourself from it. Game over. Sorry. And that is the case. I've seen the results. No thank you.

You could say that there're one or two things, which is why I've got a certain amount of time for physics. The governance within physics is advanced mathematics as I understand it. Largely so you have some sort of crazy thought, but then until you can actually present the formula, then it's not actually going to cut any eye. I'm willing to give a small amount of respect to mathematics, physics, and law. Now I don't agree with a lot of laws. What I agree with is the logic of it. I'm not interested in philosophy. I'm not interested in your emotional response. This is what it says here. Fine, that's good. You can take it or leave it. It has a... At least it has a system of working. It makes some sort of sense.

But anything outside of that within the material world makes no sense whatsoever, to my mind anyway. I just can't get it. I can't engage with it. I can't read novels. Most novels are engaged with psychological dramas. Psychology, as we know it, is governed by Cartesian

ideas. It's the bringing of thought into being, the magnificence of the governing property. Of the thinking of Is-ing: The thoughts are so random; they're so obscure; They're so corruptible; They're so inaccurate. They're only a manifestation. They can never be more than idea. From the formless we move into a sort of fabricated sense of form. We become informed, to go back to what something you said much earlier.

**SS:** There's this linguist, Carlos Lenkersdorf, who wrote this quite interesting book about the nature of grammar and language for Mayan people. One of the things he suggests is that there's a whole different kind of worldview found in the way their language is structured. In English, and many other languages, there are subjects and objects. That's why you can say something like "I am talking to you." In Mayan languages there are no objects, only subjects who act in relation with each other. So instead you'd say something

that would be translated roughly as “I am talking while you are listening.” Everything is relational and active. And there’s much less emphasis on the ‘I’ aspect, and more on that relationality.

**PR:** That’s interesting. I was inspired to a way of thinking through a line in *Wuthering Heights* where Cathy, on one of the occasions Heathcliff had done a runner, says “but I am Heathcliff.” And I always thought romantically, how beautiful. There was some resonance in that. Over the last good many years, when my response to someone saying “how can you say that?” – my response is “because I am you.” When I was in Mexico, just recently, I was in the market. This woman came up who’d obviously been at one of my talks. She couldn’t speak any English. And I couldn’t speak any Spanish. She was a Mayan in fact. I just did a thing about eye, signifying that, we know through the eyes. And

then I said to her, I am you. I tried to put it into Spanish. And then some guy passing by noticed our difficulty.

So he translated for me. And he explained to the woman that I was saying that, but I am you, and you are me. And then he explained that that is the Mayan form of greeting. I wrote it down somewhere, I can’t remember where. I certainly can’t pronounce it. But it was, in the same way as *enchante*, or those greetings. It is a form of greeting. When people meet, they go ‘I am you, you are me’. For me, that was incredibly, and deeply moving. If you understand what I mean, it confirmed. I go out into the material world with a bunch of acorns and really don’t know what’s going to make sense or not in any given dialogue. But to have it confirmed by an ancient culture was really lovely. Something which was understood out of that Heathcliff and Cathy.