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Supporting Visual Artists since 1980

Black Hole Club Artists from the Birmingham-based development programme unearth the past, probe the present, and look to the future

Artist Interviews Q&As with Sunil Gupta, Keith Piper, and Lis Rhodes

artists newsletter

ISSUE 1/4

*this is non-binding. Responsibility for success is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. Better results may be achieved by trying harder.

Are you *still* failing? Try smiling!

Having forged our own path through sheer positivity, we are leading a generation of creatives through our life-changing 'SELLOUT IN 7-STEPS' programme. Setting out on an art 'career' can be daunting, but our new programme is swapping paintbrushes for ballpoint pens so you can stop signing on the dole, and start signing contracts instead!

We are Sophie Bullock and Sophie Huckfield, founders of Ambience Factory. We always knew we were destined for commercial success after our productivity-enhancing workout routine, *"Drop and give me 20… £MILLION"* and our show-stopping motivational speaking tour, *"The corporate takeover – of your mind"*. Now, we are pioneering the transition to market-led art practices for struggling artists. Read on to see how you could uncover your full economic value.

What does Ambience Factory do?

We founded Ambience Factory after noticing a gap in the market for goal-oriented practitioners who could compete in the global market. We reorientate success for artists from introspective feelings, purpose and achievement, to entrepreneurial business strategies to ensure they can deliver the goods!

We also operate at the strategic institutional level, ensuring structural barriers and a competitive environment is at the heart of all creative culture. This model minimises the pool of talent for ease of job selection, and produces adaptable and resilient artists ready to fit into the mould of the institution's choice. Simple!

How do we do it?

We believe in the power of readjusting personal experiences and taking full responsibility for failure and anxiety. Our motivational speaking combats common excuses and self-pity. Take these examples:

You say, ***"I'm stressed."***
We say, ***"You're excited."***
You say, ***"I'm a woman."***
We say, ***"Do you want kids, or a career?"***
You say, ***"I'm poor."***
We say, ***"Get a loan."***

These excuses are simply imagined barriers that hold you back from reaching your potential. And since our environment is impossible to change, change must come from within you.

THINK your way to SUCCESS!

What do artists get if they SELLOUT in 7 STEPS?

The holy trifecta:
Success. Fame. Fortune.
That's a guarantee*

Join us. There is no better time to *be you, but better.*™

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Introducing Artists Newsletter #1: The 1980s

Black Hole Club, *Press On and Play*, 2019. Photo: Cathy Wade.

Guest Editor: Black Hole Club

For Black Hole Club, returning to the cultural landscape of the 1980s for this anniversary issue prompted many questions. The most pertinent of which was the realisation that our activities were not to be framed by nostalgia.

We were split between wanting to connect with a time that is now historical, or for those of us who experienced it, articulating memories that felt visceral and still present. We found echoes – conversations that are still needed to create equity and access. We also recognised surprising elements – for all of the claims about digital technologies being millennial, we found a staggering amount of resources and practices connected to computing.

The work we undertook is informed by our collectivity, knowing that we are better working together than apart. In this year of isolation, sociability and exchange, we wanted to build a future. Yet, time also loops backwards. Our activities in the 21st century are founded on the networks and projects that have been distributed by Artists Newsletter. That a-n's work continues is something for us all to celebrate.

Julie Lomax, a-n CEO

In the first ever Artists Newsletter, published in September 1980, a-n founder Richard Padwick described the publication's role as 'the support of the visual artist – fine artists, printmaker, photographer, craftsperson'. It's a simple mission statement that has remained at the heart of the organisation ever since, guiding a-n through four decades of political, cultural, and technological changes.

Importantly, what was also made clear in that first editorial was that Artist Newsletter would be 'an open-line communication shared by all interested parties'.

Introduction

Cover and pages from launch edition of Artists Newsletter, September 1980.

Padwick continued: 'It has not the resources nor the wish to be a one-way information service. It will be a clearing house for practical information and a means of raising issues significant to visual artists.'

It's in this spirit that a-n's new series of four, quarterly guest-edited Artists Newsletter digital publications has been conceived. Presented as part of our 40th anniversary celebrations and the result of an open call to a-n members, each one marks a different decade of a-n's existence and will be guided by a different editor/editors. The first sees Birmingham's Black Hole Club taking on the editorship as we begin, of course, in the 1980s.

That formative decade was a time of Thatcherism and the GLC, the Miners' Strike, New Romantics, Goths and Acid House. A period, too, of LGBTQ+ rights campaigns and opposition to Clause 28; of CND and the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common; of urban riots against institutional racism and unemployment. It was also a time of the Blk Art Group, and of artists emerging or establishing a practice – artists including Sunil Gupta, Lis Rhodes and Keith Piper, the latter a founding member of the Blk Art Group and now a member of a-n's Board.

Gupta, Rhodes and Piper are all interviewed for '40 Years, 40 Artists' our series of Q&As with artists who have been featured by a-n over its lifetime. These have been conducted by Louisa Buck. Black Hole Club have chosen to include two of those interviews – Gupta and Rhodes – in this publication, with Piper also represented in a specially commissioned interview by Birmingham artist De'Anne Crooks. (Online at **www.a-n.co.uk/an40** you'll find more interviews with artists from the 1980s a-n archive, including Anne Bean, Chila Burman, Antony Gormley, Mona Hatoum, Richard Wilson, Magdalene Odundo and Brian Catling.)

Elsewhere, Black Hole Club artists reference, reflect and explore the 1980s through the lens of their own contemporary practice. From the witty satire of Ambience Factory's '80s-themed 'motivational' adverts to Emily Scarrott's letter responding to an artist's a-n classified from 1981, here the past, present and future mingles and aligns.

As an art student in the 1980s these were mine as well as a-n's formative years. It has been a pleasure to revisit this time through Black Hole Club's editorial eye.

a-n continues to be the sum of its members voices, and as we celebrate 40 years of supporting visual artists, it's now more important than ever to join a-n and add your voice **www.a-n.co.uk/join/**

Contents

[Paik] [words] [sex] [nostalgia] [...kruse]

INFORMATIONAL

History: Media Arts + (1980-)
Request for Comments: Null
Updates: None
Category: Informational / ish
Location: B'ham / West Mids

USP: Minor lols
Errata: 40
Client protocol: a-n newsletter
Authored: ...kruse
Incept date: November 2020

You are standing in a Dark Wood, two paths lead away from you through the trees. Which one will you take? L / R
(You Love Surprises and Adventure)

"What's all this then?"

You are standing in a Dark Wood, two pa..

"Yes, I read that, but what's going on?"

I'm writing an article about the rise of DIGITAL in the 1980s in the style of a 'Choose Your Own Adventure Story.' It's called **Back to the Future™** *Again*.

"Oh, good grief!"

What?

"Well, it's a bit naff!"

Hey, the 1980s were naff! Koons! Saatchi! The Glass Spider Tour!

"Ugh. Horrible decade."

It was not so bad. After all, it started with the ZX80 and ended with The World...

C:\>_

You are standing on a straight-as-a-dye road that glows with neon lights and is lost far ahead in the darkness that surrounds you.
A Korean American gentleman stands beside you, smiling.

"Do you like it?" he says, pointing at the road. "I made it. It's called the Electronic Superhighway,"

"Where does it go?" you ask.

“Forward,” says the man, pointing. “Don’t go that way,” he says, pointing back, “it’s in a Flux and there’s a Cage.”

You look at the glowing road, it seems a long way to walk.

“It *is* a long way to walk,” the man agrees, reading your mind. “It goes all the way **Back to the Future™**.”

“Don’t you start,” you growl.

C:\>_

As you begin walking the road starts to pulse with coloured lights moving along under you and away into the darkness. The ground around you is absolutely flat, coloured in gradients of pink and purple. Above, the sky is black and tiny stars fall from it over and over, twinkling brightly before vanishing halfway down the sky. It’s pretty and very annoying.

As you walk, a greenish light looms out of the darkness. As you get nearer it resolves into words, hanging in the air:

```
Current date is Tue 1-01-1980

The IBM Personal Computer DOS
Version 1.10  (C) Copyright IBM Corp 1981, 1982

A>dir/w
            PROTOCOL  COM    RUNTIME   EXE    MATRIX  COM
            KEYBOARD  COM    MONITOR   COM    BUGS    BAS
            MOUSE     COM    PARTITION COM    HACKER  BAS
```

You reach up and touch one of the glowing words... Nothing happens. You touch another word. Still nothing. Then the words blink out and are replaced by the legend:

Error 501 Not Implemented

A disembodied voice, friendly with a hint of Brummie, says: “Sorry about that, bug in the system. Old tech. Just carry on down the superhighway will you?”

Feeling that this article is not going the way you expect it should, you stand, hand on hips and say,

“Look! I’m a busy artist, I haven’t got time to waste on this guff. Are you going to inform me about 1980s DIGITAL and its relationship to contemporary practice, or are you just going to keep mucking about?”

“Sorry,” says the Brummie, “I know no one has enough time anymore. Shame, we had loads of it in the 1980s. Hang on though, I thought you were in the middle of a global pandemic? Aren’t you all stuck inside?”

“That’s beside the point.”

“We had our own epidemic in the 1980s. People tend to forget about it now, but we lost a lot of very beautiful, creative people back then and many of us were scared. No lockdowns though.”
...

Somewhat chastened you ask, *“What was that thing with the words back there?”*

“The green words? Well I was going to do something clever with hypertext and then I didn’t.”

Why not?

“Oh, you know, it’s probably a bit passé. So I thought I’d do something with words. The way words changed in the 1980s.”

“They changed?”

“They did, and for a few years only a few people knew about those altered words and then suddenly, really suddenly, those changed words changed the world and a lot more people knew about them. Then even more people, everyone really, was affected by them, even if they didn’t know it.”

“What words?”

“Oh, bus, browse, bugs, mouse, drive, cache, network, spam, scan. Floppy. Once upon a time those words meant something very different.
Now they mean something... other.
And we made up new words: hard-drive, word-processing, dial-up, graphical-interface, operating-system, vector-graphics.
They were good, those words, they were harbingers of a New Era of publishing and there were comparisons to the Gutenberg press and how important that had been in disseminating information (Europe-centrically because there had already been printing in China for hundreds of years) and how this new technology would change things.
And it did change things.”

“How so?”

“Well back in the day, if you printed a newsletter it was an expensive, professional affair; plates had to be made and letters typeset and distribution was difficult. More difficult than now anyway. But then DIGITAL arrived (though we didn’t use that word so much back then) with desktop-publishing, word-processing, and home-printing.

Stuff got cheaper to produce, though distribution was still an issue, until... Until *The World*."

"The World?"

"The World. The first commercial Internet Service Provider. I think in some ways it was the Most Astonishing Thing That Happened To Humanity, although it only happened because of All That Went Before, you know, with the new words, 'partition,' 'protocol,' 'command' and so on. I suppose if it hadn't been The World it would have been some other ISP."

"What's with all the Capital Letters?"

"Oh well, The World ushered in the Internet and the dawn of the DIGITAL Age and after that a lot of things were given capital letters, or became acronyms. I think it was a way of showing how Important DIGITAL was."

"Like what?"

"Let's see; WWW of course and computers running various OS and using OMS hardware and all the RAM, REM, DPI, JPG, GNU and WYSIWIG; the DIGITAL world is full of TLA's. IT came to stand for more than it actually means and back in the day there was more FTTP and we still use HTML although it's so much better now we have CSS.
And then there's the companies who became household names like Apple and Microsoft and the one that also became a verb. They're not just Capitalised, they're capitalised (LOL). There's PC and RGB and EVERYONE is talking about AR and VR and AI and wishing the pandemic would go away so they could do something fun IRL but until then they'll just RT that funny GIF."

"Oh."

"Yeah. But funnily enough the stuff that people *do* on the internet tends to come without caps. Like blogging and social media and streaming and screen-time and posting and tweeting. Maybe it's not so Important, now everyone can do it? Except that texting and podcasting and sharing and influencing and going viral has MASSIVE political implications, hashtag ArabSpring."

"So it's been good for disseminating information then?"

"It's been GREAT for disseminating information! Now you can send people newsletters through email, or build a website and blog or put up podcasts and videos and photographs. Oh my goodness, it's been great!

And artists *love it*! They all have social media profiles and Facebook pages to promo their events and Instagram feeds and have esoteric rants on twitter and sell stuff online and like everything and binge-watch Ru Paul and explore their identities and have their own channels and

reach their audiences and go global and viral and it's just great!
...
Of course, no one's got enough time for it all and mental health is an issue and everything changes all the time, but our work is interactive and we can create new worlds in VR 'cos this one is doomed and one day we'll all be DIGITAL anyway…"

"OMG that sounds awful! Get in the car."

"What car?"

"This imaginary car here.
We can't have an ending like that, we're going to fix it!"

"We're going Back?"

"Yeah, Wayback."

40 Words That Changed The World	
operating-system	software
BASIC	desktop-publishing
microcomputer	Command
cyberspace	Trojan
keyboard	dial-up
Unix	hypertext
mouse	network
bugs	browser
downloading...	word-processing
cookie	web
hard-drive	wifi
graphics-card	spam
user-interface	google
Linux	virus
monitor	chat-room
modem	open-source
memory (out of)	mobile
cache	smartphone
hacker	gamification
partition	data-mining
bus	

40 Errors That Could Be Metaphors For Your Sex Life

400 Bad Request
401 Unauthorized
402 Payment Required
403 Forbidden
404 Not Found
405 Method Not Allowed
406 Not Acceptable
407 Proxy Authentication Required
408 Request Timeout
409 Conflict
410 Gone
411 Length Required
412 Precondition Failed
413 Request Entity Too Large
414 URI Too Long
415 Unsupported Media Type
416 Range Not Satisfiable
417 Expectation Failed
418 I’m a teapot
421 Misdirected Request
422 Unprocessable Entity
423 Locked
424 Failed Dependency
425 Too Early
426 Upgrade Required
428 Precondition Required
429 Too Many Requests
431 Request Header Fields Too Large
451 Unavailable For Legal Reasons
500 Internal Server Error
501 Not Implemented
502 Bad Gateway
503 Service Unavailable
504 Gateway Timeout
505 HTTP Version Not Supported
506 Variant Also Negotiates
507 Insufficient Storage
508 Loop Detected
510 Not Extended
511 Network Authentication Required

40 Middle-Aged Reminiscences

Pac-Man
Aldus PageMaker
Commodore VIC-20
Youth
R-Type
The Legends of Zelda
Neo-Expressionism
Defender
Autodesk Animator
Affordable studios
Donkey Kong
Letraset
i-D
Grayscale Scanner
Hope
Adobe Illustrator
Polytechnics
Super Mario Bros
Income Support
Elite
Free Education
Tetris
Appropriation
Commodore 64
BLK Art Group
New Wave
Perms
ZX Spectrum
IBM PC 5150
Polaroid
Council houses
Signing on
DPaint
Amstrad CPC 464
BBC Micro
The Face
Walkman
St Martin’s
The Other Story
A future

40 Years
40 Artists

Sunil Gupta
Interview by Louisa Buck

Sunil Gupta (born 1953 in New Delhi, lives and works in London) is a photographer, artist, curator and writer who has been using photography as a critical practice since the 1970s, focusing on family, race, migration and queer issues. In 1988, Gupta co-founded Autograph – the Association of Black Photographers. He is currently Visiting Tutor at the Royal College of Art and Professorial Fellow at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham.

Sunil Gupta wrote the feature 'Autograph Photographers', Artists Newsletter, December 1989, p 31, which detailed the setting up and development of Autograph the previous year.

'The aims of the Association were and still are to promote the work of Black (as in non-European) photographers in the UK primarily, and to create a building-based National Centre for Black British Photography. What has been clarified during the first year of operation is that membership is clearly open to anyone who supports our aims, although we can, by definition, only promote work originated by Black photographers.'

What did the 1980s mean to you personally and professionally?

It was a big turning point for me both professionally and personally. I graduated from the Royal College of Art (RCA) in 1983 and back in those days there were fewer of us and we were being groomed for the art world. My RCA year organised the first student-led Black art show, and as a result of inviting the Greater London Council's (GLC) Race Equality Unit to attend, I began spending time on their Anti-Racist Arts sub-committee. This introduced me to town hall politics. So as opposed to going to Cork Street, I went across the river in a very different direction to learn how to work with public policy at the GLC and to live in Brixton just after the riots.

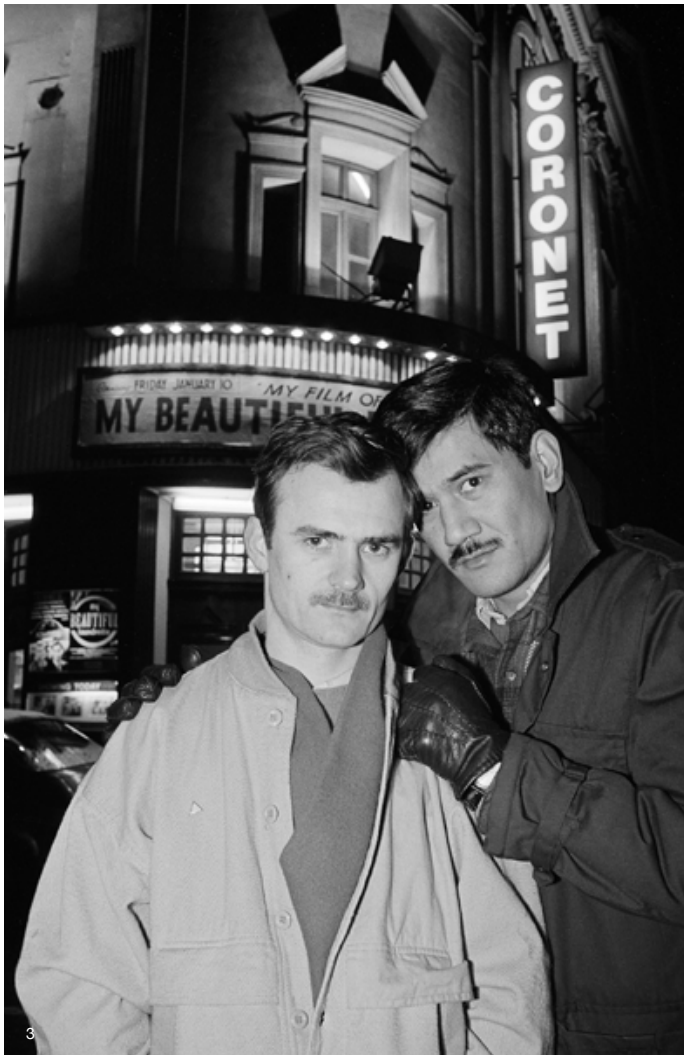
Directly after graduating from the RCA I'd made a momentary attempt to return to Canada, where my family lived, with my newly graduated portfolio, but I came back to England and got an artist visa. This gave me the status to be self-employed here, so for most of the 1980s I was a camera for hire, shooting editorial in Fleet Street. That was my living. And at night I did politics.

I got formally involved with [the radical photography magazine] Camerawork. The GLC's Monika Baker organised a Black photo show, 'Reflections of the Black Experience', at the Brixton Art Gallery in 1986. This brought together a group of individuals who, when Mrs Thatcher shut the GLC in that same year, developed into a loose grouping that met at the London New Technology Network (LNTN) in Camden Town. We approached the Arts Council for funding: Black photography was a new idea on the scene and they gave us seed money for a research study. This resulted in Autograph – The Association of Black Photographers being launched at The Photographers' Gallery in June 1988. A co-op, Autograph had an ambitious vision around education, photo agency, exhibitions programme and publications.

1

Hauz Khas.
It must be marvellous for you in the West with your bars, clubs, gay liberation and all that.

2



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Another reason why I got involved with organising Autograph and accidentally curating was because, in an earlier life before art school, I took a business degree in accounting and I could do numbers. Administration came naturally and I was like God's gift to the Arts Council: I could do cost accounting and their money was safe!

How did your work develop during this time?
My own work was very much responding to whatever was happening in my life. In 1976 in New York I'd made pictures on Christopher Street of gay men, and in the early 1980s I tried to make similar pictures in London. But as there was no equivalent single street, the project went from Earl's Court across to the King's Road to the West End. In 1984, in an attempt to understand a breakup of my own, I made *Lovers: Ten Years on*, a series of lesbians and gay men in long-term relationships. Then in the late 1980s I made a series of 'pretended' family relationships, collaging photographs of gay male and lesbian couples, both real and imaginary, in response to Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which in 1988 banned the promotion and teaching of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship.' I added pieces of poetry and sections of black and white photographs of demonstrations against the clause. I also went back to India to make a series that visualised the experience of gay men in my hometown of Delhi, a Photographers' Gallery commission, which I shot not as a documentary but using gay actors against a backdrop of real places, often historic sites. I called this 1986-7 series, which included quotes from the subjects, *Exiles*.

How did you become aware of a-n as an organisation. Why did you want to get involved?
I knew about a-n because I was freelance and it was where all the jobs in the arts were advertised. It also had listings and information on all kinds of services – where to get insurance or studio space, or where to buy paper. Then once we had projects going, it became a place to disseminate things.

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How significant was a-n in raising pressing issues at the time?
During the 1980s I saw art production as a kind of politics and in a-n there was likeminded writing and sympathetic discussion. Otherwise I'd meet a lot of resistance from most other mainstream outlets who didn't think that the two things went together.

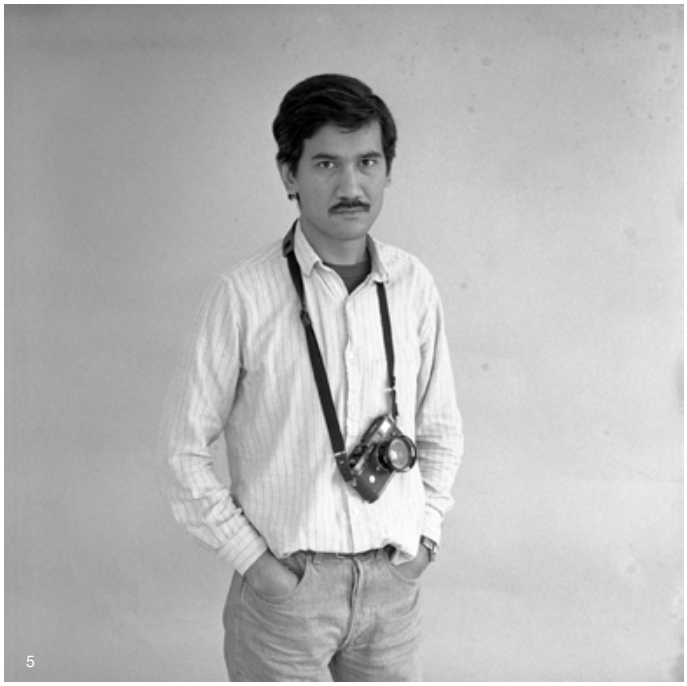
40 years on, what do you think are the key changes for artists starting out now?
I don't know how you sustain those initial few years after art school, because the atmosphere when I came out from art school – of little jobs, workshops and small publications and self-help groups – seems to have pretty much gone. There are these pop-up things and I see young graduates try to get together and maybe share a space, but without the larger infrastructure it's never usually more than six months before it starts to disband.

In the 1980s I allowed myself to be economically very free in the sense that I didn't need a lot of money and I would also sign on. And the housing scene is so much tougher: I would live with people and move around to various places, and that all seems to have changed too.

Since I started teaching in 1990 I have seen us move into a period where MFAs became like MBAs and a lot of the classroom discussion has become about success. But that's not how we were taught. Overall in the 1980s politics was simpler, there was a common enemy in Margaret Thatcher, it was very straightforward and it brought everyone together. But that was all killed off by Tony Blair – things have become much more complicated and fragmented.

What advice would you give your younger self?
I've often wished that I'd taken up some kind of trade so I could have a cash income stream. I think a trade would have been good, like carpentry or plumbing or something, where you'd be enormously in demand, but just for an hour or so.

Read more 40 Years 40 Artists interviews online at www.a-n.co.uk/an40



5

1 Sunil Gupta, *Hauz Khas. It must be marvelous for you in the West with your bars, clubs, gay liberation and all that*, 1986
2 Sunil Gupta, *Dylan and Gerald, London*, 1985, from the series 'Lovers: Ten Years On'.
3 Sunil Gupta, *Untitled*, 1986, from the series 'Reflections of the Black Experience'.
4 Sunil Gupta, *Lisa and Emily, London*, 1984, from the series 'Lovers: Ten Years On'.
5 Sunil Gupta, self-portrait in his studio at Collier Street, Kings Cross, London, 1986.

Art Workers between Self-Organising and Resistance: A Short Politics of Disidentification

Three artists based in Minerva Works, Birmingham on the benefits of replacing competition with cooperation.

The contributors of this text are all based at Minerva Works, Birmingham, within the artist-led group Black Hole Club and Modern Clay cooperative. Uneasy with the long-held narratives of solo visibility and hyper-production that we feel expected to meet as individual artists, we believe existing together as artist collectives is a way of avoiding the often isolating and competitive conditions that artists so commonly end up working in.

This text offers compassion and encouragement to like-minded artists and continues with a collated resource list on Are.na.

Mutuality, Art and the 1980s

For a school leaver in the 1980s at the time of the Miners' Strike and mass-unemployment, art education was a route into a culture that was self-governing and self-determined. At a time when dreaming of a career was dependent on your location, anywhere north of the Watford Gap existed outside the territory of possibility. This blight produced opportunities for creativity to seed itself – while stark, the environment offered both time and space to use as you wished. Culture emerged from unexpected places: Cabaret Voltaire playing music to the steel works in Attercliffe from the back of a van; Yorkshire Artspace moving to Sydney Works in 1982; the life of FON (Fuck Off Nazis), a studio and record shop that later became Warp Records; the eruption of SCR (Sheffield Community Radio) fusing reggae and techno in its broadcasts. These practices formed dialogues and networks. The spaces in which you engaged with art, music and creative expression evolved their self-sufficiency with ambition and commitment. Encounters in pubs, studios, record shops, galleries, clubs and projects built a burgeoning understanding of how you could be an artist, in ways that your education did not prepare you for, or recognise.

The North/South divide was near physical. In the North, Conservative policies were acts of total annihilation – they dismantled, overturned and spat out husks. In the 'People's Republic of South Yorkshire' (a hyperlocal pun), South Yorkshire County Council worked in focused opposition to the Thatcherite government. The county became a nuclear-free zone and was demilitarised; Sheffield twinned itself with Donetsk and flew a red flag above the council buildings on Mayday. Spaces for creativity were collectivised: Red Tape Studios, The Anvil Civic Cinema and The Leadmill. Such activities occurred nationally. In London, the GLC's Community Arts sub-committee commissioned Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn's Docklands Community Poster Project, a work focused on collaboration, not participation. The unions invested in creating access to media technology, which in turn enabled artists to develop works.

In the West Midlands, Birmingham's Trade Union Resource Centre (TURC) and the Birmingham Film

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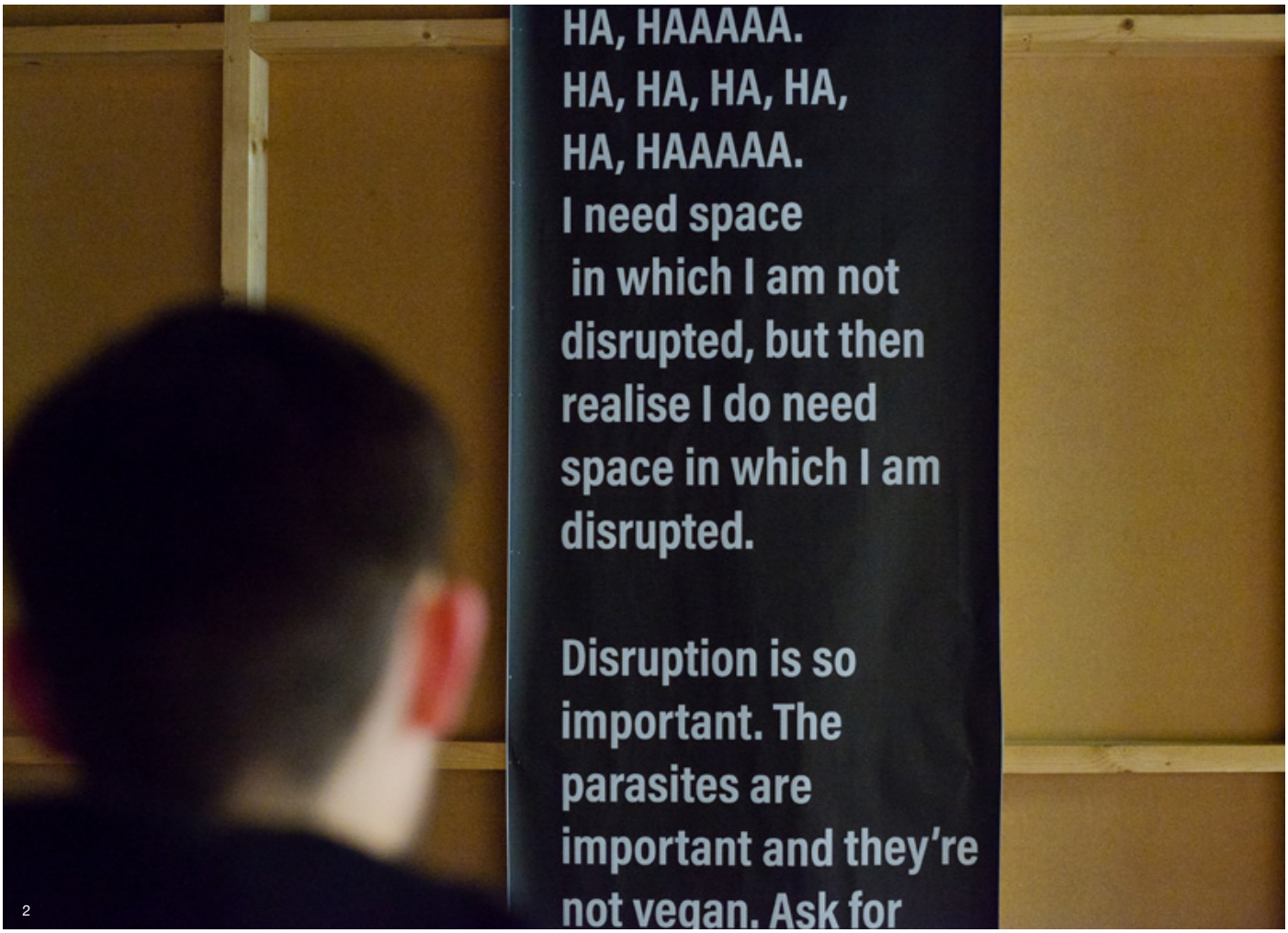


2

and Video Workshop were spaces that democratically held the means with which you could create. From this emerged Yugesh Walia's Arts Council-funded African Oasis (a co-produced work on the Handsworth Cultural Centre in Birmingham) and Heather Powell's 1988 film Paradise Circus. Vivid Projects now hold Birmingham Film and Video Workshop's archives along with those of Wide Angle and the Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre. Looking back through these works, the lasting impact is that it's the continued provision of freely mutual spaces for dialogue and production that enables artists to grow.

Cathy Wade

Making Connections, Collective Solutions

Reko Collective (Stockholm), W.A.G.E collective (New York), Raqs Media Collective, Ragpipers, The Invisible Committee, Precarious Workers Collective (London) – all are largely occupied with monitoring art institutions, advocating for fairer working conditions and the payment of substantial artist fees. Many initiatives have emerged to push against precarious working conditions, with artists and art workers adopting strategies that exert pressure on a foundational level, forming a domino effect that forces art institutions into fairer systems for artists when contracting artistic labour.

The Precarious Workers Brigade has articulated that the "boss" of a precarious art worker is often the artworker themselves. By relearning from past (un) successful attempts and struggles, current generations of art workers can better imagine their own collective liberation where trust and cooperation counterbalances competition.

As freelance, and in many cases 'unemployed', artists have been particularly impacted by the pandemic – I

especially feel on a lonely table where I am increasingly bitter and sceptical about every application-based call out, and unsure how many will come to sit on my table in a post-pandemic art worker society. By applying for 'opportunities', I am, in turn, batting down fellow artists in the same uneasy situations – moving away from comradeship and collectivity and further into neoliberal territories of competitiveness.

ArtLeaks is an activist art worker group similarly concerned with counterbalancing competition with collectivity. Through the organisation of their cooperative artist membership in loose, non-hierarchical structures, ArtLeaks operates independently from institutional support or funding. This is not to say the group does not have resources to gain institutional support, but subordinates itself from such conditions of funding. In doing so, ArtLeaks is reacting against the limitations of institutions, pushing them into rethinking and rewriting missions. ArtLeaks navigates alternative working conditions independently and creates dialogue with other artist groups. It provides a model for how better working conditions can be achieved by artists, while also impacting the attitudes of institutions towards artists providing labour.

The domino effect such changes in attitudes have initiated can be seen in a wave of art workers' collectives across the art world. This wave is marked by an aspiration to create alliances with other precarious social groups. One example that represents a political practice, rooted in social movements not only in the art field, can be seen in a 1980s news story about the issues facing Estonian nuns, which became an inspiration for artists fighting for a fairer system. The 1989 article in the Postimees newspaper highlighted the plight of nuns at the Puhtitsa convent in Tallinn and the problems they were having accessing health insurance. As the nuns received no income they did not benefit from the 'Social Tax Act', which covered health insurance costs. While the Estonian government responded to the article by allocating money directly to the convent, the nuns' story resonated with art workers who found themselves in a similarly precarious situation. The nuns and artists came together to raise problems in the Estonian healthcare system in order to make change, showing how a greater impact can be made when isolated social groups work collectively.

Today there are many international examples of self-organised collectivity in brigades, assemblies, forums, and worker groups that strive to remove the difficulties around tightening webs of unfairness, precarity and competition. Groups are tackling the issues of precarious conditions, (self-)exploitation and unfair/no payment, establishing their own working conditions in the process. There is clearly still a genuine desire for great change in the art world.

Larissa Shaw

Breaking the Neoliberal Network

Working within Neoliberal structures means that you are constantly networking – every interaction is a possible opportunity for networking that can be capitalised upon (Psychopolitics, Byung Chul Han). We find ourselves immersed in a situation that values communication between individuals, yet promotes active competition with these same peers.

Roland Barthes first published his essay 'The Death of the Author' in 1967, a text which denounces the idea of the author as an individual. Attaching importance to the 'person' of the author is, Barthes stated, the culmination of capitalist ideology. The importance lies not in the singular writer, but rather the multiplicity and potential excited by the reader(s).

Continued on page 20

3

Ambience Factory's *Futurevision*

We asked the dynamic duo for their two cents on the year 2020. What will the future hold for the artists of tomorrow?

Pinstriped Players:

Artists will become the **ultimate** entrepreneurs. They will be respected and remunerated for their creative innovation, ultimately becoming the highest earners in society. Artists **ADD** value.

The Brand of *you*:

The future of art practice won't be about your art – but about YOU. Learn the art of branding first and let your art do the talking after!

All together now!

Art galleries and institutions have always been a level playing field. We believe they will continue to pave the way for equal access. This feels like a no-brainer… **but** we believe women will be equally represented across the sector! Why stop progress now?

The Rat Race:

We can only reach our peak through competition, and we believe artists will embrace this mindset with creativity! Artists will move away from working together to competing together: this will lead to the creation of a better and more innovative art world. More me and less team!

There is no such thing as society:

In the future we will no longer need to rely on handouts from others. We will be able to **help ourselves** to a brighter, richer future by working harder!

The future is plugged in!

Technologists will be the new gods. We believe that robots will liberate us from thankless tasks, freeing up time for us to get to the real work. Every emotion, social issue and world war will be solved with the power of the microchip. Technology will be the answer to ***everything!***

The end of work/life balance:
We believe our true value is spiritually entwined with our work, and to be happy we must move to a 24/7 culture of non-stop working to reach our goals. Weekends will be a thing of the past: Live to work!

Shh…
The money making secret:
It is a perplexing yet fascinating phenomenon that artists love to exchange many hours of unpaid labour for the sweet sustenance of exposure. However, we believe that Ambience Factory will be at the heart of a future art industry injecting **BILLIONS** into the economy, enabling artists to be paid a fair and regular wage!

Take a chill pill:
Customers who opt into our program will become harmonious individuals through our unique vision and services. We will lead the way to the suppression of stress to create productive and happy workers, ultimately leading to **world peace**. Watch this space!

Raise the bar:
We advocate that the bar to the art world remains high. If you're not elite, **get beat!**

Photo: Yuliiapedchenko, stock.adobe.com

Ambience Factory.
Be you, but better.™

4

Raqs Media Collective express similar frustration over the concept of the 'artist as individual' in their text 'Additions, Subtractions: On Collectives and Collectivities'. Here, they describe this solitary figure as "a momentary blip in the long human history of deviated practices" which "may have prevented a consciousness about the space of art-making as a commons from emerging". Within their practice they do not subscribe to individual ownership of ideas or a formal division of labour among the group.

Working as part of the co-op Modern Clay is for me a way of neutralising the competition inherent within art and neoliberal capital. The co-op is a shared undertaking, which we all take responsibility for. Through its membership different possibilities are opened up by the energies present within the group – although being a co-op also means operating within a framework of legal and economic terms which may at first seem alien to the open nature of the situation you're trying to facilitate.

Similarly, as a freelance art worker you may often find yourself operating in ways that feel unfamiliar – as a hyper efficient 'business-professional freelancer'. In the world of the art technician, for example, pay rates are closely linked to time, yet value is not necessarily placed on the time of the artist in the same way. How often has a technician earned more installing an exhibition than the artist who created the content? Sometimes, an artist installing their own work in a show is the only sure fire way to get paid.

So why would an artist agree to work for free? We're back to the Death of the Author, who is very much alive and well – except the concept of the artist as an individual is now tied to the neoliberal responsibility for networked self-promotion.

Suzi Osborn

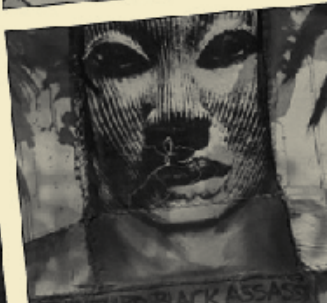
1 Yugesh Walia, *African Oasis*, Birmingham Film and Video Workshop, 1982.
2 Black Hole Club, *Under Different Stars*, 2019. Photo: Marcin SZ.
3 Sarah Taylor Silverwood leading a 'ceramics and illustration' workshop as part of the Modern Clay Summer School, 2019. Photo: Modern Clay.
4 Outcomes from the 'ceramics and illustration' workshop as part of the Modern Clay Summer School, 2019. Photo: Modern Clay.

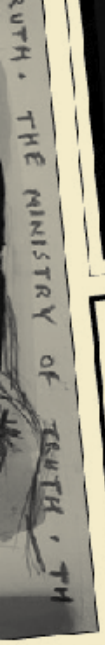
“Art practice can and should have an actual ‘function’ in the real political struggles beyond the gallery.”

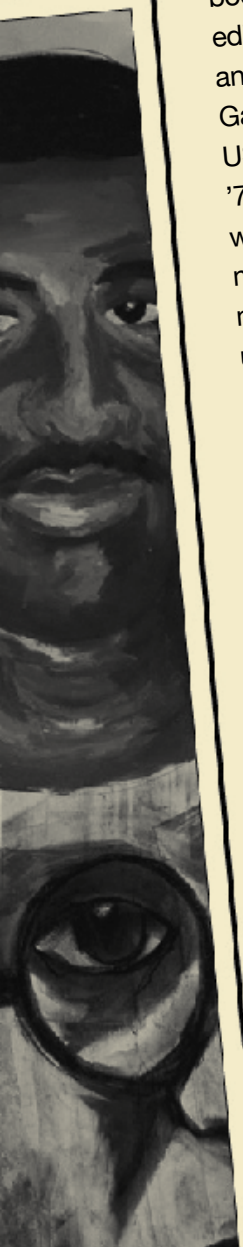
De’Anne Crooks in conversation with Keith Piper

Though he would modestly refute the sentiment, Keith Piper’s career and body of work from the 1980s onwards has undoubtably laid a foundation for practising contemporary artists of the Black diaspora.

My own practice has been significantly influenced by the conversations had by the Blk Art Group, making this meeting all the more extraordinary. In addition to bantering about our love for the West Midlands, our shared cultural values and our mutual belief of what art should and can do in complex times, Keith and I discovered remarkable parallels within the intricate areas of our practice. One of the most humbling and important conversations of my life, unpacking the politics of art and Blackness with the formidable Keith Piper has been an unforgettable moment that confronts the purpose of my own artwork, some of which is featured here alongside works by Keith from the 1980s.







For the poster advertising 1983's 'Pan-Afrikan Connection' exhibition at Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry, you are quoted as saying, "Let us bend our art into an ensign around which to rally the people". Can you tell me more about this quote?

I am very interested in the ways artists speak and write about their practice, and this is an intriguing example, because it is indicative of a particular political and developmental moment. At that time in the early 1980s, we were highly influenced by the books on Black art and politics that we could access through the network of radical Black and left wing bookshops, mostly in London, but also one or two scattered in various other large cities. I remember being heavily influenced by two books in particular: *Black Poets and Prophets* edited by Woodie King and Earl Anthony (1972), and *The Black Aesthetic* edited by Addison Gayle Jr (1971), both of which came from the US 'Black Arts Movement' of the 1960s and '70s. However, if I can remember, these books were far more focused on the work of poets and musicians than visual artists. As such, I became much more engaged in the poetic language used by writers such as Ted Joans, Ron Milner, Ron Karenga and LeRoi Jones, and I think this type of grand poetic statement owes a lot to their influences.

What interests me about the statement is that it doesn't speak much about the work itself – I don't think we did much of that in those days. It more sets an aim for the ideal functioning of all 'Black art' practice, to become an "ensign around which to rally the people". But embedded within this is the idea that art practice can and should have an actual 'function' in the real political struggles beyond the art gallery. I think this idea of the 'usefulness' of art was something that we were grappling with a lot in the early 1980s. We were working a lot alongside young Black poets and musicians, and could often witness the 'aesthetic euphoria' when a particular poem, lyric, bass-line or musical 'anthem' was dropped in a dance hall or auditorium, and everyone would be on their feet, fully engaged, 'rallying' in a collective cultural moment. I always wanted to imagine a potential parallel moment for the visual art work as a 'rallying point' around which the consciousness of an audience could coalesce – hence my interest at the time in works which became almost 'banner-like' in their aesthetic. However, in retrospect, this was an incredibly difficult agenda for what were essentially static 'wall-based' art works to successfully fulfil.

A lot of Black British artists are making work that is deemed political and I think there's a common assumption that Black art is always activism art. What are your thoughts on art having a responsibility to rally and ignite; is there room for art to be anything other than political for Black practitioners?

The art that especially interests me is art which is research driven – art that concerns itself with the excavation and exploration of ideas, histories, social and cultural relationships that enhances my awareness of the complexity of issues beyond the gallery. Some time ago I resolved that this was my core interest, irrespective of the 'racial' identity of the artist. I suppose an early example of this, which has recently been revisited, is the 1992 project 'The Trophies of Empire', when I proposed inviting artists to explore the legacies of Empire in the slave trading ports of Liverpool and Bristol, and in Hull. Artists were selected not on the basis of their 'ethnicity' but on the quality of their proposals as site-specific, research-driven work. I don't argue for a form of 'race-blindness'; I feel an artist's ability to deeply excavate a site or topic can be enhanced by their 'subject position' and the particular insights that this may provide. But I would not, for instance, exclude a white artist from producing work contributing to the struggles against racism. In fact in many ways I feel that these works are important acts of coalition building and 'allyship', as well as creating a space for the artist to also examine and interrogate issues around the construction of their own 'whiteness'.

Equally, within this, I celebrate Black artists engaging in creative activism, but I resist the notion that an artist has a 'responsibility' to use their creativity for 'political' ends because they happen to belong to a particular racial or ethnically-defined group. All of us as artists need to choose what it is that interests us and pursue those in terms of our practice. I think that simply because an artist is Black or comes from an African background, it doesn't mean that they are obliged to make work which is political. Part of the package of being free is being free to make abstract paintings if you want to – not to say that 'abstraction' can't be a deeply radical form – and as a teacher, I fully support the desire of students regardless of their 'race' to explore the creative forms and language systems that interest them.

So much of what you make feels as if it was made yesterday and the premise could apply to our current climate. This has made me look more closely at what has changed within Britain since the 1980s. How would you quantify that word 'change' in relation to political art over the last 40 years?

There is always change. There is always room for change. To say that no change has happened would be to ignore all of the struggles and all of the interventions that have happened over the last 40 years. There are obviously long histories of activism stretching back into the 1950s, '60s and '70s, and there were artists doing some really important and decisive work. Artists from the Caribbean Artists Movement, as well as individuals such as Rasheed Araeen and others have been challenging galleries and taking institutions to task. So, things have changed, and through those struggles and through that work, there are people in directorial and curatorial positions, and there are galleries having to account for what they do in very particular ways. Clearly there are huge amounts of work still to do. The artworld is at its core about the cultivation of an elite and about the value through rarity of the artwork, so it is a difficult space to democratise. However, we have all of you young people coming through now, full of energy and pushing things further and further. That is encouraging.

Unpacking the thoughts you've shared about change, I want to talk more specifically about political art, its purpose then and now. Why do you think the conversations that were being had 40 years ago are still unfolding now, in regard to Black art and political art?

That's an excellent question, because I think those issues are always there. We are currently living through a moment of backlash. If we look at events since 2016, with Brexit, the election of Trump, the escalation of the visibility of police violence that led to the Black Lives Matter movement. All of this shows that there are not only ongoing issues, but there are also new issues because we are also living in this moment where old empowered groups are aware that they are losing that power. They are aware that they are losing ground to all these people who are coming in and wanting their voice and their rights. So you get the people who used to hold power, empowered white men, engaging in backlash. So, there are new issues, and there were issues which were really important to us in the '80s and '90s like the struggle against apartheid, for instance. That's now history. But there are other struggles, other moments, things that need to be addressed. Then you see the ongoing continuity around things like policing and other complex things within our communities which we need to have conversations around. So, you know, all of those things are still important to artists.

Images on pages 21, 24 and 25 feature detail from:

Keith Piper, *THIRTEEN DEAD*, mixed media on hardboard, 46x122cm, January 1982.

Keith Piper, *Another Nigger Died Today*, acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 183x122cm, May 1982.

Keith Piper, *THE BLACK ASSASSIN SAINTS*, acrylic paint on stitched unstretched canvas, 183x366cm, April 1982. Collection: Museums Sheffield; Photo: Ilona Zielinska

Keith Piper, *THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE*, acrylic paint on unstretched canvas, 4 Panels, 274x152cm each panel, November 1984. Collection: MIMA; Photo: Ilona Zielinska

Keith Piper, *MAU-MAU COUNTRY,* acrylic paint on stitched unstretched canvas, June 1983. Collection: Arts Council England

Keith Piper, *THE SEVEN RAGES OF MAN* (detail), plaster cast heads and mixed media, approx 915cm, May 1984. Photo: Ilona Zielinska

You mentioned conversations that are still happening and still unfolding, but when you speak of new conversations that have also entered the field, how do you feel about the ways in which these conversations are being had. Do you think that new tools are required within art to have these new conversations?

We have got amazing new sets of tools for artists. If you imagine that in the ‘80s the way in which artists could make their work visible was either through putting it on a gallery wall somewhere, or perhaps ‘flyposting’ or publishing a ‘fanzine’. The ways of artists connecting to each other were difficult. And it’s hard to imagine now, because we have the internet where we can just sit down with people from all around the world in a virtual meeting and engage in conversation.

All of those things are now made easy in the way that we circulate ideas, the way in which new spaces can be established, especially virtual spaces for artists to show work.

Access to tools, in terms of video making, film making and sound, all those kinds of things were expensive and inaccessible back in the 1980s. So the range of languages and the range of tools that you can use, and the kinds of spaces that you can establish to talk with other artists, form collaboration and engage audiences – all of that is new.

How do you feel about those new tools, would you say that you’ve embraced them?

I am interested in a range of approaches. I am interested in looking at the kind of tools that have been traditionally used by artists: painting, drawing, collage, sculpture and the like, but I am also interested in new digital tools. That’s why I was involved in the ’90s with an organisation called ‘Digital Diaspora’, a group of Black artists with a shared interest in media and technology.

We were thinking about ways in which we use new tools such as the internet and digital technologies, to articulate messages across the dispersed communities of what has been called the ‘Black Atlantic’ or West African Diaspora. Asking questions like, ‘can these new tools offer artists new ways of working and new ways of forming communities across distance, in this case, between the Caribbean, America, the UK and West Africa’? And so I have always been interested in how we use those technologies.

Bearing in mind that we also know that these technologies also come with their own oppressive frameworks, and many of them have evolved from military research and are being used for surveillance and other oppressive functions – even as they allow us enhanced access to information and services.

All of this we know is true, but at the same time, how do we in fact hijack those tools and use them? If you read some of the early Blk Art Group stuff, we often talk about ‘hijacking’ the gallery, and I think the ‘hijacking’ of digital mechanisms and networks has a similar intention.

Images on pages 22, 23 and 26 feature detail from:

De'Anne Crooks, *Great-ish: The Gaslighting of a Nation,* 2020, film still

De'Anne Crooks, *Reparations*, 2019

De'Anne Crooks, *The Ministry of Truth*, 2019

***The Ministry of Truth* (2019), along with two of my other works, were significantly influenced by the tone and execution of your show 'Body Politics' at Wolverhampton Art Gallery last year. Engaging with this body of work was an emotional experience because it's so personal and revealing of who you were at that time. How has the personal evolved in your practice?**

That's an interesting question, now that I'm thinking about recent work maybe the personal thing hasn't been that much of an aspect of it. When I think back to work like 'Body Politics' where I was playing with the placing of my own body into the space of the artwork, I'm not sure if I've done work like that recently – I will have to think about that… I know that one of the key things in the '80s was the emergence of a strong Black female presence within what has come to be described as the 'British Black Art Movement'. There was a consolidation of the 'personal' being discussed in a really deep and intricate way within art work by some of the female artists, and there was a perception that male artists were sort of shying away from this type of subject matter. However, I remember that Sonia Boyce and others were vocal in arguing against the simple gender-based dichotomy, pointing to the work of artists such as Donald Rodney as spaces in which the body and the personal were being intricately discussed.

40 Years
40 Artists

Lis Rhodes
Interview by Louisa Buck

Lis Rhodes (born 1942, lives and works in London) is a pioneer of experimental filmmaking and a major figure in the history of artists working with film in the UK. Her practice extends into installation, performance and sound, and her writing addresses urgent political issues as well as film history and theory from a feminist perspective.

Rhodes was a founder-member of Circles, the first British distributor of women artists' film, video and performance in the UK.

What did the 1980s mean to you both personally and professionally?

remember it's not free
to question what you see
i drew breath and smiled at her
she yelled my name to me
1984

We had just been arrested. I was reading some of my writing from the 1980s and as I expected personal and professional were difficult to untangle – as an artist, quite impossible.

One of the most significant strikes took place at the Grunwick Film processing plant 1976-78. Workers across race and gender divides came in their thousands to support South Asian women in a small factory in north London, and so to the Miners' Strike in the 1980s. Neoliberal economics depends on low-paid workers. The 1980s saw the implementation of years of feminist struggle and felt the strength of women globally. It was also the moment of struggle for unions and equal pay.

When I joined the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians as a sound recordist

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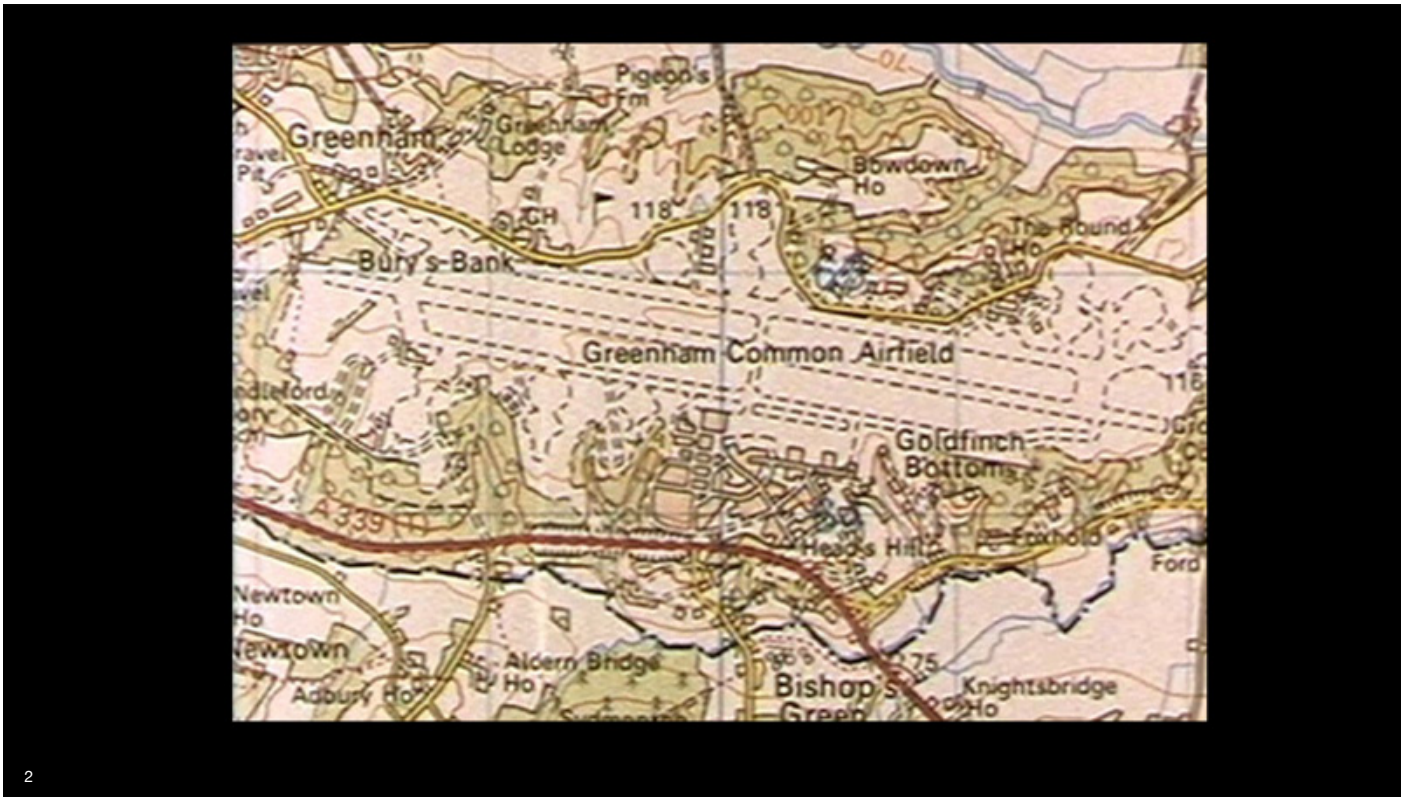

2

there were only about six women sound recordists in the union. This is the foreground in which I was making *Pictures on Pink Paper* (1982), a 16mm film that speaks to the fundamental problem, 'it's all a question of who makes real – whose ideals, whose values are valued as the nature of things'. This question runs through Nawal El Saadawi's writing and in 1980s publications such as Trouble and Strife, the newspaper *Outwrite* and the Delhi-based magazine *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society*.

How did your work develop during this time?

It was a time also of nuclear weapons being sited in Europe, in particular at Greenham Common in Berkshire, and the making with Jo Davis of *Hang on a Minute*, a series of one-minute films for Channel 4. One episode, *Goose and Common*, takes its title from an 18th century song opposing the enclosures of common land: 'The law locks up the man or woman / who steals a goose from off the common / but leaves the greater villain loose / who steals the common from the goose.'

These sentiments were reflected forward in recordings made with an American artist, Mary Pat Leece, in 1985, of the conditions of migrant agricultural workers in North Carolina. The film, *Cold Draft* (1988), considers the damage inflicted on social relations that is still apparent today: 'It was dangerous to step out of line and lethal not to.'

You were also active as a co-founder of Circles, the feminist film and video distribution network which featured in a-n in 1981, as well as within the London Film Makers' Co-op and as a teacher at the Slade School of Fine Art. Could you talk about the importance of these activities?

I was teaching at the Slade School of Fine Art, and at the Royal College of Art. This was an invaluable time for discussion and rethinking of representation, bringing sound, writing and image into the same space – paradoxically where the personal and the professional will not be divided. In both institutions there were active women's groups. In 1983-85 the Greater London Council (GLC) supported workshops – particularly involving women and ethnic minorities – in film, video, photography, music and publishing. I was on the GLC's Community Arts Committee.

The absence of women in an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1979 created a moment for establishing a feminist network Circles (now renamed CineNova) to distribute the films, videos and performances of women artists. This – unknown to me at the time – was

coincidental with the beginning of *Artists Newsletter*. I congratulate both CineNova and a-n for their work over 40 years.

Forty years on, what are the key changes for artists starting out now?

I hope that the present young generation of artists – wherever they are – survive outrageous academic debts to create image, poetry, performance and film. Online, offline, out of sight with insight.

Lis Rhodes featured in the article 'Circles – Women's Work in Distribution', Artists Newsletter, January 1981, p 4.

Circles was a distributor of women artists' film, video and performance, initially financed by its founder members: Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Joanna Davis, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Rachel Finkelstein, Susan Stein and Tina Keane: 'Its intention is to expand the idea of specialist distribution services by producing catalogues of films, tapes, slides, video, performance and other related activities to be seen, heard and enjoyed.'

Fees for films started from £2, while video hire rates started at £9, with 70% of hire fees going direct to artists.

Read more 40 Years 40 Artists interviews online at www.a-n.co.uk/an40

1 Lis Rhodes, *Cold Draft*, 1988.
2 Lis Rhodes and Jo Davis, *Hang on a Minute, Goose and Common* (1 of 13 one minute films), 1983-1985.
3 Lis Rhodes, *Pictures on Pink Paper*, 16mm film, 1982.
4 Lis Rhodes at Greenham Common, 1984.

Classified

Despair

ARTIST IN CULTURAL WILDERNESS seeks sympathetic venues, individuals for exhibition, loan, purchase etc. Write to William [redacted]

Lost

HOPE. Last seen Thursday 9 November 1989. Reward given for return. Please send sightings to Angst, PO Box 22

Wanted

TV BRA FOR LIVING SCULPTURE. Size 36a. Prefer black but will consider any colour for the right price. Contact: C Moorman 1181991

Opportunity

TRAVEL THE ELECTRONIC SUPER HIGHWAY! Amazing opportunity for the right person. Must be young and adventurous. Nerds welcome. Phone: Paik 012 92006

For Sale

RABBIT. SILVER/GREY QUITE LARGE. Needs affection, owner has new Puppy. Call Jeff on 910 75000.

Black Hole Club

#BLKHLCLB Artists in the East and West Midlands and Beyond. Join us for adventures in the world of AV, Film, Installation, Collaboration, Sharing and Chat <3

1980s...

THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES may have had many things; but it never had Zoom calls... #Utopia

Cash from creativity!

DISCOVER THE THRILL of ***volatile-employment*** with Ambience Factory! Our experience converting creativity into market-ready commodities is changing the art game **forever**. Our motivational speaking programme, "NO EXCUSES", and meditation videos, "Unlock your inner mogul through the mind", will help you to respond, adapt and thrive in a constantly shifting economic environment with depleting resources. No wonder tens of thousands have chosen Ambience Factory to turn their *CREATIVITY* into *COLD HARD CASH.*

Join our journey by calling 945-45-214 for a bespoke quote to suit your needs.

Letters

ADDRESS REDACTED
[redacted]

Date: Monday 16th November 2020

Dear William,

I am writing in response to your outreach placed in the classified page of Artists Newsletter dated January 1981 and headed '**Despair**'.

Prolonged solitude has become a way of life and all artists now survive in isolation capsules. Although many are anchored to settlements where cultural reprogramming attempts are in process, an unidentified number of artist vessels have drifted further afield from regular contact radars. Whilst authorities have shown little desire to locate solitary artists, a rebel recovery ship has deployed an ongoing salvage mission and it is our task to reconnect remote capsules. Our operation is not selective in terms of quality of artwork – we prioritise the cultivation and prospering of all practitioners.

Ironically redesigned as a security mechanism by authorities preventing circulation of an ongoing health threat, The Cultural Wilderness™ has recently developed into an enveloping fog. Whilst this particular device was introduced as part of several temporary

measures, The Cultural Wilderness™ was not prioritised in the retraction of measures and instead remained in the landscape, becoming stifling. Sometimes, there are sensations of the fog leaking into the artist's body, causing even a simple transmission for other signs of life to become an exertion.

As a recovery crew member, I have been thinking a lot recently about survival amongst the Wilderness™; 'survival' is a word that is applicable to so many current practices. The collision of opposing survival techniques – the need for togetherness and the danger of socialising – has created an unbalanced atmosphere where self-preservation requires concentration. Ahead of the rescue ship's liberation of your capsule, I am providing you with maintenance resources.

Within your isolation vessel, the crew recommend that your nest is reinforced with foraged materials. A nest should be constructed not only to prioritise safety but in accordance with your individual comfort. When neglected, an artist's isolation capsule will routinely factory reset as a white, cubed space as it retethers to a faction of artists. This encoded form can be imprisoning, and so nesting preparation is vital for personal prosperity.

Additionally, may we remind you of the importance of ritual in sustaining your wellbeing during periods of isolation. Your rituals are not required to be ceremonious in nature; instead, the recovery crew recognise how the composition of gestures can be nourishing. Equally, rituals may be used as a canvas or methodology for your artwork but can also exist in the everyday realms of self-care. There are moments, like setting the kettle to boil, when tranquillity comes most naturally. Within this correspondence, we include provisions to be utilised in your ritualistic activities.

In your survival practice, you will have noticed that although physically enclosed, there is an endless, aching space created by the absence of certain activities in your timeline. We recommend that this void is repurposed as an alternative studio space. Take residency in it. Studio time-space should be led by intuitive judgement; the recovery crew suggests that you extract notions of routine or productivity. Sometimes, you will have fresh encounters with material making, while at other times you will feel like a piece of toast with Marmite is the best artwork you've made for weeks.

Whilst The Cultural Wilderness™ remains an immediate threat, it is necessary for artists to fine tune their shapeshifting abilities. When venturing out to gather essential supplies, you will find yourself mutating into beings of other colonies in order to access readily available reserves. The list is endless, but frequent disguises include teachers, service staff and office workers. Artists have acclimatised, becoming chameleons in order to survive.

There are stories of artists who have grown weary of regular transfiguration and abandon their original form in favour of permanent life as a committed member of one of these 'valued' communities. We encourage you not to disregard your artist identity. Instead, recognise morphing as a material-generating component of your practice.

As your capsule is returned to the colony, you may see the commercial anthropoids harvesting the wasteland. Occasionally, one of these mechanisms will discover an isolated artist, swooping in and picking the capsule clean like a vulture, before moving on. We encourage you to interact carefully with these entities. Some consider it an ascension to be chosen by the anthropoids, but many know it to be damnation.

Finally, whilst waiting for the recovery ship's arrival, we urge you to keep watch for feral outsider practitioners who will benefit from your solidarity. Your recognition of other secluded artists will allow the recovery ship to make multiple capsule retrievals in our journey to you. Through the shared language of the isolated, you will find kinship with these artists, providing significant mutual support bonds as you wait for rescue.

The recovery route has been established and reconnection is imminent.

We wish you well.

Faithfully,

E Scarrott
On behalf of [REDACTED]

Contributors

Black Hole Club
Now in its seventh year, Black Hole Club is Vivid Projects' artist development programme. Participants are selected from an annual open call and use the year to collaborate, test and present new aspects of their practices. The programme enables fluid cultural practices and fosters new dialogues between early-career and established practitioners.

The 2020 cohort includes 15 individuals and groups from across the Midlands region. They are: Ambience Factory, De'Anne Crooks, Formuls, Ambie Drew, Rosa Francesca, Kühle Wampe, ...kruse, Leanne O'Connor, Alis Oldfield, Rosa Postlethwaite, Jas Singh, Emily Scarrott, Larissa Shaw, Albert Smith and Symoné.

The cohort is based at Vivid Projects' production and exhibition space in Digbeth, Birmingham and supported by producer Cathy Wade and company curatorial associates. Areas to be explored include digital art, live performance, experimental audio, film and video, rethinking archives, collaborative and social practices, and digital cultures.

www.are.na/black-hole-club-22g42f7uyaq
www.facebook.com/blackholeclubvividprojects
www.instagram.com/blackholeclub
twitter.com/blackholeclub

Ambience Factory
Ambience Factory – Sophie Bullock and Sophie Huckfield – is a satirical organisation critiquing the sale of 'enlightenment' to the workforce as a way to generate profit under the guise of wellbeing. It 'inspires' audiences with its jargon-packed TED talk, critiquing work practices and methods employed by neoliberal corporations and institutions to increase productivity. Ambience Factory promotes its vacuous self-help brand whilst subversively criticising co-opted mindfulness practices for economic gain.

As members of Black Hole Club, Ambience Factory is researching ways to push beyond satire towards developing contemporary forms of activism and unionism relevant to contemporary labour practices.

ambiencefactory.com
www.instagram.com/ambiencefactory
twitter.com/FactoryAmbience

De'Anne Crooks
As an artist-educator, De'Anne's practice considers the collaborative and collective experiences of others. Engaging their practice as a form of activism and an investigation into cultural pedagogy, De'Anne is intent on using contemporary art as a space to play with the politics of identity.

De'Anne's recent writings and commissions has allowed them to test the praxis of contemporary art adjacent to and in harmony with Blackness. Using video, performative and fine art, De'Anne continues to focus on the oracy of marginalised persons.

deannecrooks.com
www.instagram.com/de4nnecrooks
twitter.com/de4nnecrooks

...kruse
...kruse is a visual artist, writer and neurodiversity advocate whose practice crosses boundaries into storytelling, performance and phenomenological research. ...kruse is currently working on a multidisciplinary, speculative fiction project exploring the border between invention and reality, investigating where present realities and future dystopia collide.

www.krusework.info
www.instagram.com/___kruse
twitter.com/___kruse

Emily Scarrott
Emily Scarrott is an artist currently researching her PhD at Birmingham School of Art. Her performative research praxis explores the absurd as a non-cis-male protagonist. Emily's work culminates in repetitive manifestos, experimental speculative fictions, performance and rapid response making. Emily has worked with Black Hole Club and Vivid Projects since 2018.

emilyscarrott.co.uk

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Larissa Shaw

Interested in ungoverned libraries and non-hierarchical education, Larissa's work playfully documents common interest as places of sanctuaries, prioritizing trust and cooperation over competition. Using self-documentation and lists of useful things that have been said to her, Larissa orientates her practice in its own self-governed and self-described 'non-artist' prescription, working solo and collaboratively, with a variety of materials such as textiles, metal and text.

Using machines and process to illustrate research, Larissa navigates personal, transgenerational and socio-historical narratives. Her work is presented as installations, webs of [re]imagined engagements surrounding language and knowledge [re]production – which is [un]written, [un]performed, made [in]visible."

www.larissashaw.studio
www.instagram.com/_____ris

Suzi Osborn

Suzi is a freelance art technician and maker based in Birmingham who studied sculpture at the Slade School of Art. She is a maker of functional ceramics and a member of Modern Clay co-op; a co-working and public project space run by its artist members.

www.instagram.com/suziosborn
modernclay.org

Cathy Wade

Cathy Wade is an artist who investigates how practice can be created and distributed in collaborative partnerships and through the creation of commons. Their work seeks to understand the experience of contemporary conditions through exchange with others. They run Black Hole Club, Vivid Projects' artist development programme and the MA in Arts Education Practices at BCU.

Wade has undertaken residencies & fellowships with Longbridge Public Art Project 2013-2017 and Birmingham City University Wheatley Fellowship for 2015-2016. Publications include Slide Tape (2018) Edited by Mo White, Delineator (2014), After Carl (2014) and As We Alter It (2017).

cathywade.co.uk
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Keith Dodds

Keith Dodds designs identities, books, posters, exhibitions, publications, flyers, and more, in print and occasionally on screen, for Verso Books, Vivid Projects, Greenpeace, and others.

keithdodds.com

Louisa Buck

Louisa Buck is a writer and broadcaster on contemporary art. She has been London Contemporary Art Correspondent for The Art Newspaper since 1997. She is a regular reviewer and commentator on BBC radio and TV. As an author she has written catalogue essays for institutions including Tate, Whitechapel Gallery, ICA London and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In 2016, she authored The Going Public Report for Museums Sheffield. Her books include Moving Targets 2: A User's Guide to British Art Now (2000), Market Matters: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Art Market (2004), Owning Art: The Contemporary Art Collector's Handbook (2006), and Commissioning Contemporary Art: A Handbook for Curators, Collectors and Artists (2012). She was a Turner Prize judge in 2005.

1 CUT COPY REMIX, Leanne O'Connor Pick and MIx workshop, 2020. Photo: Marcin CZ.

Credits

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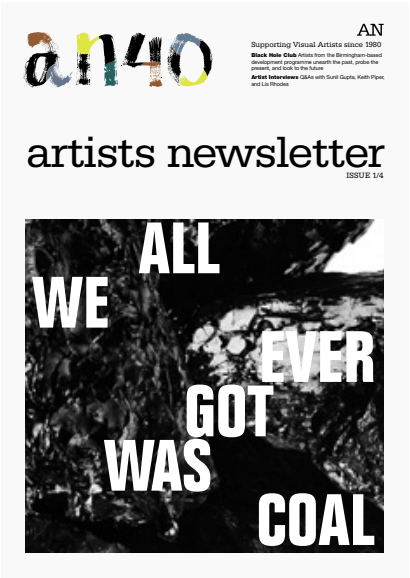

Guest Editor: Black Hole Club
Black Hole Club Producer: Cathy Wade
Series Editorial Advisor: Chris Sharratt
Production support for a-n: Stephen Palmer
Design: wearefounded.com

Black Hole Club artists:
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De'Anne Crooks, *40 years on and the need for art to rally*. Design: wearefounded.com

ISBN 978-1-907529-27-6

Published by a-n The Artists Information Company
Registered in England Company No 1626331

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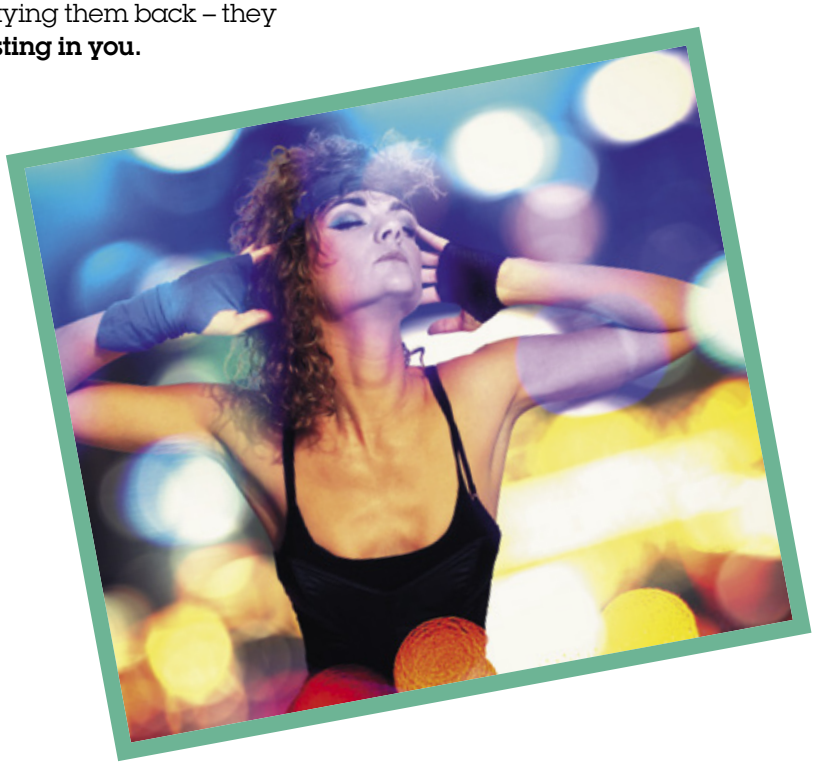

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