

Art

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Mirror Images

Douglas Gordon interviewed

Reality Check

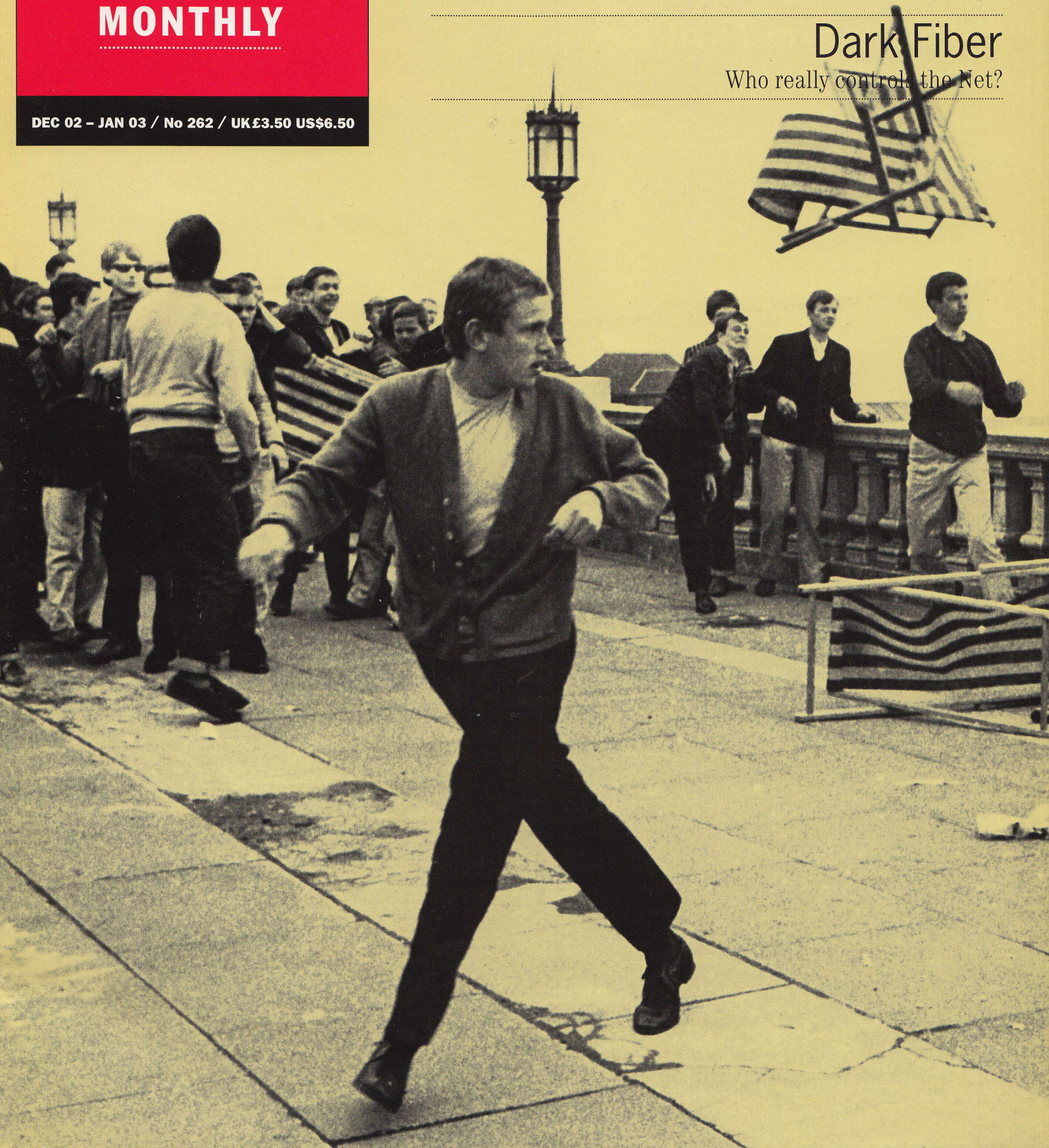
Photography and the Real

Theft, Lies & Videotape

Whose copyright is it anyway?

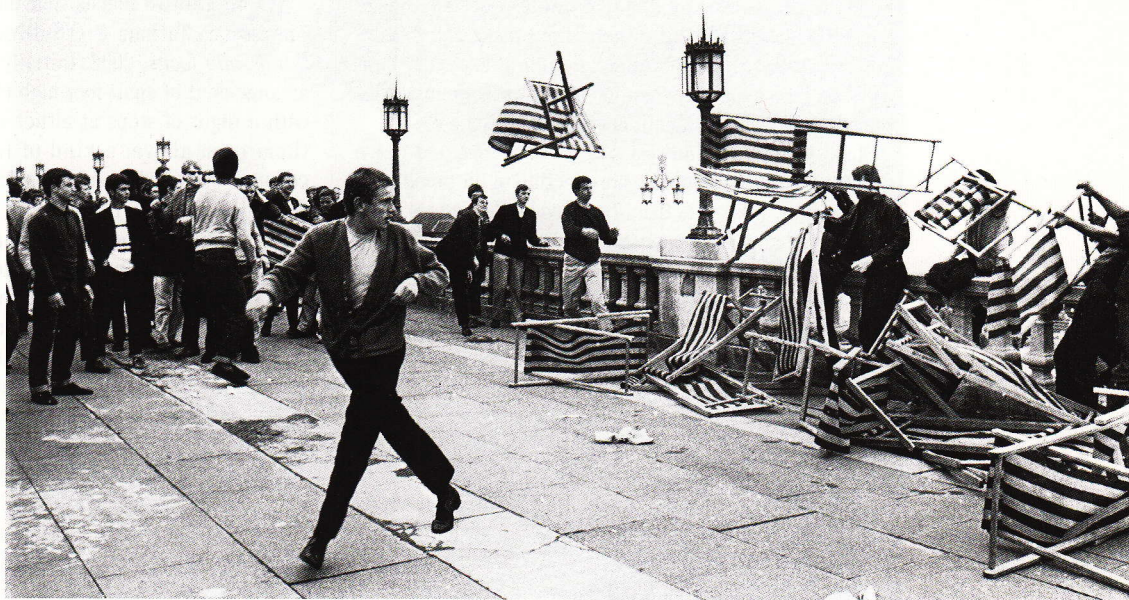
Dark Fiber

Who really controls the Net?



Cornford & Cross*Avant Garde*

1997/2002



fascinatingly convincing. Knowing that it is just a clever combination of light and sound doesn't seem to detract in any way from its presence as a sculptural element in the gallery. In fact the overt fakery of the illusion poses an interesting question in relation to the once fundamental discourse of phenomenology and presence that existed around the subject's body. What does it mean to feel the presence of something that is blatantly not there? Does it matter that the viewer is positioned by phantom reference points and not the tangible devices of the sculptor's repertoire like frontality and scale? Perhaps in the end it comes down to perception. Smith/Stewart successfully reconstruct the ghost of the body within the sensorium of the viewer. If it looks like it's there, sounds like it's there and feels like it's there, then who's to say otherwise? ■

Mark Wilsher is an artist.

■ Cornford & Cross

Nylon London October 19 to November 17

Public space does more than serve the actual publics that happen to occupy it; public space presupposes and calls up a certain type of public – a public known as the public (singular and proper). The actual (plural and conflictual) public does not correspond to the social unity that belongs in public space, which is why public space operates as a crucible for fantasies of social harmony and a mechanism of social control. Public art typically confirms the fantasy and assists social control. No prizes for guessing why.

By suppressing the conflicts within the actual public, public art can address a docile, abstract public rather than the troublesome publics that have divergent experiences and rival demands of the spaces they share with public art. Insofar as knowledge of cultural and social division is conspicuous and rudimentary today, public art that addresses a falsely unified public inevitably comes

across as dim-witted and anachronistic. Since this accounts for the majority of public art, it is almost justified to condemn the whole practice. What holds off the condemnation is the possibility of an art that enters the public domain in order to encounter troublesome publics, not to efface them.

Working primarily in public spaces and predominantly in response to public initiatives, Cornford and Cross (C&C) don't shelter under the concept of a coherent public. C&C are troublemakers. For the 1998 Times/Artangel commissions C&C proposed to build a concrete flyover in the gently sloping parkland of Green Park in central London, entitled *This England*. This is an England to be recognised from frustrations and disappointments, not soft focus nostalgia or blind optimism for an England that has nothing to do with this.

This England was not accepted. Nor were any of the proposals documented in *Unrealised: Projects 1997-2002*, their first London solo exhibition. In C&C's own words, '*This England* raises a monument to a series of contradictions'. Considering that monuments routinely get raised to suppress contradictions, C&C's failure points beyond itself: they fail individually because we are failed systemically.

A failed proposal for Brighton Seafront Public Art Project in 1997 entitled *Avant Garde* would have consisted of a life-sized reproduction of a notorious press photo of the original battle between Mods and Rockers on May Day, 1964. It is, presumably, not the image of Brighton that the Seafront Project wanted to promote, but one that sticks in popular memory, nonetheless. One of the reasons the image persists, of course, is because of the press images. C&C's mural-sized photograph gives the newspaper image a scale that fits its historical and ideological power so that it can physically dominate a location that it has culturally overshadowed for so long.

Of the two proposals rejected by the Liverpool Biennial *The Ambassadors* is the greatest loss. There are three flagstaves on The Cunard Building in Liverpool that C&C would have enlisted to fly flags belonging to nations currently enjoying no diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. The foreign office informed the artists that

there are two recognised states with which it does not have diplomatic relations, Iraq (which severed diplomatic relations with the UK in February 1991) and Bhutan (for administrative reasons). Taiwan doesn't have diplomatic relations either, because the government doesn't recognise the state. So, by sheer coincidence, the three flagstuffs, potentially, have their three flags. *The Ambassadors* overlays the celebration of cultural exchange typical of an international exhibition such as the biennial with the stickier question of political representation.

Last year, the Imperial War Museum turned down C&C's proposal to install a short section of oil pipeline in Afghanistan. Taking its title, *The Treason of Images*, from Magritte's painting of a pipe above the words 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', C&C's project, if it is not a pipe, is an act of global hostility, 'as the project can only be realised ... within territory protected by military force'. Despite this, the selection panel at the Imperial War Museum, apparently, could not understand the connection between an oil pipeline and war. The guardians of the public interest are expected to be remote from the real world; it protects their neutrality. Proposing to build an oil pipeline as a monument to war, on the contrary, shatters the division between warfare and the political decision-making process that brings war about.

The anodyne conception of public space that provides untroubled public art with its alibi is a worthless fiction that C&C put through the shredder with a performative politics that unearths social conflicts in the most genteel situations. The strategy could backfire if its politics didn't issue from scrupulous and intricate thinking. People are failing public art but C&C for once are innocent. ■

Dave Beech teaches at the University of Wolverhampton and is co-director of the Floating IP gallery, Manchester.

■ All you need to know

Laing Art Gallery Newcastle October 5 to January 5

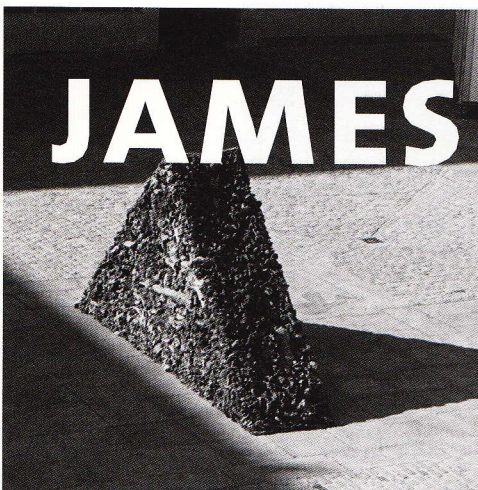
The title 'All you need to know' comes from Keats's celebrated (but actually pretty suspect) equation of beauty and truth at the end of his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Earlier this year the curator, Andrew Patrizio, brought together a number of artists to ruminate on the nature of beauty. Here he has asked Sarah Tripp, Lucy Orta, Marko Peljhan, Rod Dickinson and the duo Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan to think about various types of information

– political, geographic, biographic, mundane – and the kind of trust we can, or should, place in them. Which probably makes this exhibition sound like a slightly numbing spin-off of a more than slightly numbing university seminar. But actually it's not.

There are two pieces that make it particularly vivid. The first is Tatham & O'Sullivan's *This is what brings things into focus*, 2002. Initially this seems like a dumb arrangement of eight-foot high elementary forms in MDF with a flight of steps at either end to allow you to view them from above: a kind of lumpen, unfortunately-coloured variant of the kind of minimalist sculpture that Robert Morris used to exhibit at the end of the 60s. However, as quickly becomes apparent, there is a built-in problem in the shape of a notice in standard art gallery sans serif peremptorily telling you not to climb the steps. This is a problem because a moment later when you come across a wall text explaining what you would see if you were to climb the steps (a cheeky Halloween-pumpkin face), you begin to feel pretty cheated. Meekly doing as you are told, you realise, has got you nowhere; it has prevented you from enjoying whatever aesthetic pleasure or enlightenment the piece has to offer. Yes, of course, as Keats's ode famously declares, unheard melodies are particularly sweet. In this instance though it would have been good to have a few to listen to, nevertheless. Which of course is the point. The artists have obliged viewers to muse productively on the way that institutional protocols and assumptions serve to frame their experience of art.

The second piece that brings the exhibition alive is a vast brand new contraption by Rod Dickinson (he of crop circle interventions fame) squeezed into one of the Laing Art Gallery's Edwardian-vintage, narrow, high-ceilinged galleries. Initially this strange but intriguing object seems as though it's a particularly whopping example of one of those quaint, 18th-century, Joseph Wright of Derby-type bits of scientific equipment in wood and brass that one stumbles across in the Science Museum. Gradually, however, it becomes apparent that actually it is something rather different. It is a painstaking realisation of a well-documented 200 year-old delusion: James Tilly Matthews' Air Loom, or Human Influencing Machine.

A book published in 1810 by the apothecary who treated Matthews for the mental illness from which he was suffering is the source on which the artist has drawn. It also provides the information to which we as viewers ideally would have recourse. Matthews was a London tea-broker who migrated to Paris during the French



JAMES DARLING

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Image: Triangle 1
Centro Culturale Conde Duque, Madrid, Spain