



JOHN LATHAM AND APG – A PERSONAL
MEMOIR.

NICIHOLAS TRESILIAN

Wednesday, 14 August 2013

A photograph taken in the summer of 1966 shows John Latham, on the bombsite which was shortly to become the National Theatre, burning a tower of a dozen or more books formed into a smoke-stack – a Skoob Tower in his inverse idiom – in front of a small but diverse group of lookers on. It was the year of DIAS – the Destruction in Art Symposium. Auto-destructive art had been the brainchild of the attractively demented artist-polemicist Gustav Metzger. It was embraced with enthusiasm by Latham and others, seeking a way out of the elegant academy of 1960s Modernism. Traditional high culture (=books containing words) was seen to be committing suicide in John Latham's Skoob Tower. Inevitably for such an inveterate wordsmith, John had it in for words – saw the visual as their natural replacement.

In that small group of variously motivated on-lookers was the painter Derek Guthrie and a television presenter currently then of no fixed employment – myself. Guthrie was a highly sophisticated English 'primitive', formerly of the St Ives school with a strong Newlyn bias, then resident in some style in Hampstead. Over several days in the mid-60s he had spun me an impressive tale of the politics of post-war art, in which a conspiracy of abstract artists and their dealers – Gimpel, Lefevre, Marlborough, Leslie Waddington, Kasmin and others – had heisted the London art market in favour of abstract art, to the disadvantage of figural painters like himself. I had read Eng. Lit. at Cambridge a few years earlier and had no basis of direct experience with which to contest his tale. I spun the story in turn to Tony Godwin of Penguin – at the time the most exciting publisher in London. Godwin gave us a substantial sum of money to research the project under the deliberately mystifying working title *Touring in London, Cornwall and New York*. The visit to the South Bank to watch John Latham burning his Skoob tower was our very first research assignment.

Some ten years in the cauldron of art politics that was St Ives in the days of Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Willie Barnes-Graham, Peter Lanyon, John Wells, Patrick Heron, Bryan Wynter, Roger Hilton, Terry Frost, Karl Weschke and many others had left Guthrie with a taxi-driver's knowledge of the street-map of the British art-world. We set out to interview the entire hierarchy: painters, sculptors, print-makers, dealers, critics, educators and art administrators – the rising stars, the established figures and the living legends. Our aim was to piece together the story of the arrival of abstract art in the UK. Our method was systematically to ask our interviewees what they knew about the migration of new ideas across the British artworld, when they came to know about it and what they had done about it. By now the influence of the New York School on the younger British artists was a well-known fact. Whence the New York in our working title, alongside Cornwall and London.

Within a fortnight it was clear to me that there was no conspiracy of artists. For sure in the 1930s, as Henry Moore remembered with some relish, Ben Nicholson had set out to launch an abstract art crusade on the deeply conservative London artworld of the day in the form of the 7&5 society. “You and I, Henry“, Ben said to me. “could tie up London between us.” But he, Henry Moore, was having none of it – or so he told me.

At any rate, far from being a band of conspirators in dark conclave with a cabal of cynically-motivated dealers, the leading figures in contemporary British art during the 1960s one by one revealed themselves as men and women of high intelligence and highly independent motivation, disinclined to too-close collusion with dealers who routinely took a 50% commission on the sales of their work. As for the dealers themselves, there was no discernible sign of collusion between them either. On the contrary, they all seemed – in a more or less polite way – at each others’ throats. Professional risk-takers every one, they too lived or died, commercially, on the judgment of their own eyes..... **Alan Bowness...

The realisation that modernism, as practiced at the highest level, was not a conspiracy, left me with the question which was to haunt me throughout my life. Why had modern art happened? Why after four centuries of classically-inspired painting and sculpture based on systemic closure, optical compactness and noiseless aesthetic complexity – the ‘three pillars’ of classical idealism in art - had leading artists throughout Europe migrated en masse, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, towards ever more parsimonious forms of aesthetic simplicity? Why had the figural been replaced by the abstract – the complex by the chaotic - in the work of the most innovative artists of their age?

And now, beyond that, a different question was being posed by Latham’s burning of the books: Now that the Modernist break-out from the late 19th century Academies was becoming an Academy in its turn, how to escape from Modernism itself? This was the question which would ultimately define APG

Sometime later I first met Barbara Latham, John’s wife, not yet reverted to her maiden name Barbara Steveni. Daughter of a Russian émigré become British spy: russet-haired, sloe-eyed with Circassian cheekbones, first encountered striding in high boots through the echoing halls of the Royal College – Barbara was at once the champion of artistic non-conformity and its Secret Weapon. An entirely new force in a London art-world already becoming weighed down by art-administrators and curators – boldly representing an alternative principle still not fully appreciated or valued– positioning herself as a creator of opportunities for artists – the executive director of a then newly-emergent APG.

Barbara, John and I met next under the transparent plastic tent – “the Exhibit – at APG’s Art and Economics exhibition at the Heywood Gallery in 1969. The Exhibit

with its long central table, was set up as a site for a running conversation, Gordon Pask-style, about the state of the arts. It stood blatantly for artists taking the future of art into their own hands – it was a declaration of independence from the growing influence of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the state-funded Museums and the dealer-critic system then at the height of its power (though too much at loggerheads ever to be a conspiracy). The conversation within the tent, as I recall, barely lived up to the initial proposition, though the existence of the Exhibit itself seemed to cause the Arts Council justifiable unease. Here were artists and non-artists mingling freely inside an image looking out, in the midst of a gallery designed exclusively for non-artists positioned outside the image looking in, the artist him or herself having been tidied away out of the gallery along with the dirty glasses at the end of the vernissage.

A more poignant memory of the exhibition for me personally was the display of the crashed and telescoped VW beetle in which John Latham had recently nearly lost his life. A tangled metal Memento Mori, presented as a footnote to the main theme of the exhibition, it told an undisguised truth about John himself. Enwrapped in his own thoughts no matter how busy the surrounding traffic, he was a truly terrible driver of a motor-car - made worse still by his habit of steering one-handed by means of a wooden knob fixed to the steering wheel, which he spun freely this way and that, tacking and jibing through city centres like a dinghy in a strong breeze. More than once in later years, when John was holding forth on time-base theory while twirling the knob the midst of some European metropolis, it was necessary to persuade him to give up the wheel to preserve at least our sanity and possibly our lives.

There was a darker note to the presence of the crushed car too: in 1941 John as an ordinary seaman on the battleship HMS King George V, had witnessed two of the most violent events of the naval war: the sinking of HMS Hood by the German battleship Bismarck with the loss off all hands, and the sinking of the Bismarck in turn by salvo after salvo of British shells. Later as a mine-sweeper skipper in the North Sea, John twice escaped with his life when his vessel was blown up by German mines. The crushed car from which the artist had narrowly escaped - survival in the midst of violence seemed an apt metaphor for John's own very personal view the artist's life. At the same time, in its position to one side of the main Exhibit, it would later come to speak to me of John's orthogonal personal relationship with APG itself – the artist as individual was frequently in ideological car crashes with the artist collective he had helped gestate.

It was late in 1976 that John, Barbara and I began to work together within APG. By then, though none of us knew it, APG had already done its best work The Industrial placements had been and gone, leaving within APG the sense that industry (as then practiced) was too sectional in its own interests adequately to host the non-sectional perspectives of an APG 'Incidental Person'. In turn Barbara, now striding through

the echoing halls of government itself, had negotiated the Civil Service Memorandum, an unique laissez-passer to the Ministries of Whitehall, identifying APG as – in effect – an authorised supplier of Incidental Persons to HMG. Using the memorandum to obtain privileged entry to the offices of very senior Civil Servants in key ministries, Barbara had caught British government on its raw side: exciting the imaginations of a generation of administrators disenchanted enough with official procedure to be willing to entertain alternative viewpoints – the political claims of 1968 perhaps still resonating in the backs of their minds. ON this basis Barbara had negotiated the four Administrative Placements: Stewart Brisley at Peterlee New Town, Roger Coward at the DHSS, Hugh Davies and Ian Breakwell in the DoE, and John Latham at the Scottish Office. In the same period the Arts Council had turned down a request for funding from APG and begun shamelessly to punt its own well-financed scheme of 'Art Placement Officers'. The APO's role was to place artists to carry out defined roles within host-institutions. It was a wicked dilution of APG's profoundly original idea: the placement of artists *on an open brief* – assigning to the artist, following a feasibility study, the right to define (and then with APG negotiate) a preferred line of action within the host-organisation in question. All this – and a certain hardening of government institutional arteries in the second half of the 1970s - had left APG feeling somewhat isolated after its decade of largely unsung success. John and Barbara perhaps felt the need for a fresh injection of energy and optimism into APG. I in my turn had exhausted the possibilities of lecturing on art history at the Central School of Art and Design. I now needed a laboratory actually producing the species of event-based art I was beginning to see the need to understand. A curious working relationship was thus born, in which as – in a technical sense - APG's only non-artist, I also informally became APG's own Incidental (or perhaps more accurately Accidental) Person.

I was by no means the first. In the early years of APG Barbara had been exceptionally skilful in recruiting distinguished/ interesting /entrepreneurial APs and/or IPs to the APG masthead - most notably Lord Esher, a former Chairman of the Arts Council in its more honourable days. These names had conferred their own credibility on APG's deeply unorthodox proposal to place artists in industrial and administrative organisations. Now nearly a decade later a more pro-active organisation was needed to push events forward. APG Research Ltd – a charitable company limited by guarantee – was formed. From now on its board of management would be the main centre of activity. There was no Chairman per se. Barbara was the executive Director. John Latham, Stuart Brisley, Ian Breakwell, Roger Coward, Hugh Davies and I were what nowadays would be called non-Executive directors. The musician David Toop was a significant fellow-traveller (when asked at a Whitechapel gallery debate why he was interested in APG, he replied memorably that he found time 'subversive'). From the start the APG board was an explosion waiting to happen – and often it did not have to wait long. John Latham had the habit

of interrupting the flow of meetings with long expositions of time-base theory: a subject which he always expounded from first principles, invariably running out of time long before he came to the point of the argument where some practical application of the theory to the activities of APG and the role of the Incidental Person might have emerged. Theorists of course often do seem to feel a certain *pudeur* about putting their theories to the test of reality, for fear of crimping their wider vision. But it is a matter of great sadness to me that John could never be persuaded to bring his time-base theory to some kind of pragmatic conclusion – a Latham equivalent for instance to Hawking’s beautiful equation for the entropy of a black hole, which unites entropy (S), gravitation (G), the speed of light (c), Planck’s constant (\hbar), the Boltzmann constant (k), the area of the black hole (A) and the value π in a single statement, in which thermodynamics bridges the scalar gap between quantum physics and general relativity.

$$S = \frac{\pi A k c^3}{2 \hbar G}$$

(In this context it is worth noting that John Latham’s Time-base roller, the great physical symbol of his thought, was entirely linear – ascending in regular steps from very small to the very large durations. Hawking on the other hand, faced with the real difficulty of reconciling the quantum world with the relativistic, seemed to acknowledge a qualitative difference – a non-linearity - between the micro and the macro – this being a defining characteristic of the mesosphere or middle world, where life exists in a continuous state of torsion between the very small and the very large, a torsion which can only be mediated by exchanges of information, not all of which are likely to be successful. To put it another way, John’s Time-Base theory lacked any sense of tragedy – which was in a sense John’s own tragedy, because it prevented him ever coupling his theory successfully with the broader stream of life itself.)

For fear of imperilling creative spontaneity APG would never think ahead about potential new IP contexts. John stood adamantly against any suggestion that one might pre-rehearsal of potential IP strategies – analogous to the military TEWT (‘Tactical Exercise without Troops’) where officers on a hill-top or round a sand-table rehearse the eventualities of a notional battle . The result of this constraint was – once again – that APG always began its placements from the same start-line of elective ignorance vis-à-vis the possibilities of the IP role. In to-day’s jargon APG

was not an efficient 'learning organisation' It vigorously promoted its product – artist placement on an open brief – both to other artists and to potential funding organisations. But its consumer research was weak or non-existent. This was clearly demonstrated in an APG seminar at the RCA in 1977, when a range of the placements was described with the artists present, and a number of APG's former 'clients' from the host-organisations were present to add their comments. From the permanent Secretary of the Scottish Office downwards, no one seemed clear what had been achieved. As a result of its own institutional *pudeur* about querying and quantifying the value of its own achievements, APG failed to move with its market when its market moved in the harsher 1980s and '90s, and its original optimistic proposition gradually lost relevance. The darker-hued APG needed by a darker-hued world simply never appeared.

I don't exempt myself from this failure in critical self-awareness. Given the open hostility of the Arts Council – which having purloined and mutilated APG's original idea of open brief placement, took its opportunity to withdraw APG's funding on the grounds that APG was doing social engineering rather than art – APG was in a continuous struggle to find further finance, whether in the form of direct funding, or from the administrative fee on placements. The pitch inevitably involved punting the Administrative placements as highly successful initiatives. In the circumstances objective self-criticism seemed out of order. Financial survival was all.

Most of this stress was in the future, however, when APG embarked on its great European adventure. At a time when most younger English artists had eyes only for America the Lathams had already had contact with Josef Beuys and the Situationist movement in continental Europe. It was the contact with Beuys which led to APG's day of *de facto* performance art at the `1977 Kassel *Documenta* – and my own first public appearance with APG.

APG had been invited to take the platform on the opening day of the One Hundred Days of the Free International University of Josef Beuys and Caroline Tisdall. The event took place in the rotunda in the basement floor of the Friedericianum, the main exhibition building. The transparent plastic tubes of Beuys' *Honeypump* installation, glugging gently, were coiled around the space and snaked away through the upper floors. The APG Five – Barbara, John, Hugh Davies, Ian Breakwell, with myself in the middle as facilitator – sat beneath a hand-painted banner with the legend: ARTIST PLACEMENT GROUP – CONTEXT IS HALF THE WORK. The morning was given over to presentations. Barbara talked about APG's way of working. John described his Scottish Office Placements, the composer Hugh Davies talked of the memory recall device he had devised for DHSS old peoples' homes, the diarist Ian Breakwell spoke of his research in the UK's high security hospitals, the results of which the DHSS had perversely placed on the Official Secrets list – but could not prevent the subsequent screening by YTV of a Michael Deakin documentary

prompted by breakwell's findings. I introduced each speaker in the loud, slow voice which we Brits in those days believed the best way to communicate with foreigners. (This may or may not have been helpful since most of the audience, though 'foreign', spoke English, in that maddening continental way, at least as well as we did). The essential information about APG's proposition having been imparted, lunch on the grass followed.

In 1977 Josef Beuys was at the very height of his wealth and fame. His version of the *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* took the form of an immense Persian rug lavishly strewn with sumptuous salads, round the edges of which the participants in the conference knelt or sat eating with the natural hunger induced by a long morning of talk, while Beuys in his landmark felt hat presided in the patriarchal position at the head of the feast. Immediately the air above our heads was abuzz with the snapping of countless cameras, as ranks of the standing formed up around the sitting, straining to obtain their photographs of post-war Germany's first great cultural hero in the visual arts.

The afternoon was for debate on the issues raised in the morning. It quickly resolved into a three-way conversation between John Latham, Joseph Beuys and Herve Fischer, founder of the Paris-based *L'Art Sociologique* with Fred Forest and Alain Snyers. APG had spoken about artists working as Incidental Persons in government organisations. Beuys and Fischer, viewing APG from a Frankfurt Marxism perspective, argued that it was impossible for artists working within the institutions of Capitalist government, not to become corrupted. John, self-evidently one of the great incorruptibles of his age, spoke of the power of the Incidental Person to cross-infect government institutions with the artist's non-sectional imagination – thereby releasing new forms of trans-disciplinary communication within organisations otherwise restricted by the strict separation of departmental disciplines. In reality – and with the possible exception of Breakwell's work for the DHSS which was said to have had significant impact on the architects' group looking at internal communication in Rampton and Broadmoor - there was little sign of this cross-infection ever succeeding in depth. But the creative products of the government placements certainly over-rode the narrow boundaries of intra-departmental thinking. John Latham's two placements provided a case in point. The proposal to redesignate the West Lothian oil shale-heaps ('bings') – officially deemed 'unsightly' – as works of art and recreational environments, was an idea too lateral¹ for the Scottish Office, which subsequently found an alternative use for the bings as a drive-thru' source of

¹ The influence on APG of Edward de Bono's *The Power of Lateral Thinking* (1967) was never as I recall acknowledged, but in retrospect can hardly be denied: the Incidental Person concept essentially advanced the case for the artist to be considered as a primary source of lateral thought – obtaining creative results unobtainable by traditional step-by-step logic.

road-fill for Britain's then fast-growing motorway system.² As for the idea of fish-farming in the Clyde estuary to regenerate the rust-belt area left by the collapse of the Scottish ship-building industry, that seems to have been an idea ahead of its time - while the notion of accelerating the breeding process by farming in the warm water outfall from the cooling towers of nuclear power-stations had perhaps been an irony too far for the bureaucrats.

The afternoon discussion at Documenta was finally fought to a draw: ending equally in mutual incomprehension and mutual respect. Herve Fischer became a lasting friend of APG. He was remarkable himself, inter alia, for bringing to his work the trained scepticism of a former pupil of the *École Normale Supérieure*, college of many of France's administrative elites. Art Sociologique's projection of art as an *interrogative process* also ran strongly against the grain of contemporary modernist art with its reverse spiral of reductionism – the progressive stripping away of aesthetic complexity.

But it was Josef Beuys who in the longer run seems most fully to have accepted the APG argument for the artist as Incidental Person – though Germany's Green Party which Beuys helped to found could in its early years, before the acquisition of significant political power, perhaps be better described as an Incidental Institution - a lateral thought about politics in a world where the main debate was still between the red and the blue principles, and where the green principle – at least at the beginning – seemed orthogonal to both

APG was feeling chipper after what seemed like a successful first appearance on European soil since the UK entered the Common Market in 1973. The arts were under-represented in Brussels. The original Treaty of Rome made no mention of culture per se. The EC, forced to recognise cultural production as a burgeoning area of economic activity, but reluctant to give much leeway to what it clearly saw as a potential Trojan horse within a smooth-running bureaucracy, had squared this awkward circle with a small department which went under the emollient title '*Problems of the Cultural Sector*', whose Director was a Luxemburger Robert Grégoire. As the French-speaker amongst us, I rang Grégoire (whose number we had somehow obtained), to my great surprise got through, and fixed an appointment with him for midday in three days' time – we were driving back across Germany and Belgium and would drop in at his office at the appointed time.

² It is not clear whether John ever got wind of this alternative redesignation of the bings for commercial uses. He always maintained that he had potentially saved the UK government the sum of £1 million which it would notionally have cost to remove the 'unsightly' bings from the landscape altogether - and that the government therefore owed him this money. He claimed to have deployed this argument also in acrimonious notions with the Inland Revenue. In turn the million-pound claim provided the foundation – if a somewhat notional one – for APG's argument that artist placements should be funded on a Payment By Results basis.

With immaculate punctuality the four of us arrived in Gregoire's office – John, Ian, Barbara and myself (Hugh, an associate of Stockhausen, had a concert elsewhere in Germany). Gregoire was recovering from a skiing accident, a foot in a large white plaster cast propped us on a stool. He listened to our story, then explained that in order to exist in EC terms, APG would have first to get itself inscribed in an EC administrative document. Just such a document was under production for his office in the form of an EC Expert Report currently being compiled in Paris by a labour relations specialist, Marie-Madeleine Krust. He would furnish us with Mme Krust's address and a letter of introduction from himself. Barbara and I would visit Mme Krust in Paris. APG would subsequently appear in the report as an unorthodox but creditable source of employment for cultural workers. Once the report was published we could appeal to the EC for project funding. Gregoire finished this short peroration with a piercing cry of pain. Ian Breakwell had short-sightedly mistaken the plaster-cast round his foot for an ash-tray and was vigorously stubbing out his cigarette on Commissioner Gregoire's protruding toes.

Notwithstanding, Gregoire courteously offered us lunch in the restaurant of the Berlaymont building, and went ahead of us down to the cashier by the till at the far end of the lavish buffet. The APG party, unfamiliar with the niceties of EC protocol, assumed that the Commissioner was briefing the cashier to allow us a free lunch. We exchanged a cheery farewell and Gregoire left, no doubt for a rather grander lunch upstairs. It was with a certain dismay that when we reached the cashier we learned that Gregoire had simply given permission for us to eat in the staff canteen, and that we were going to have to pay the full price of the meal. EC officials were paid well and could afford the canteen prices. but APG travelled on a slender budget in those forever hard-up days and most of the delicious dishes had to go back . . .

Later Barbara and I did travel to Paris and met the charming Marie-Madeleine Krust. In time APG duly appeared in her Expert Report, masked as an employment agency for cultural workers. Some months later I re-appeared in Gregoire's office with APG's carefully formulated appeal for project-funding. 'Dondini...' Gregoire called out to his assistant in the next-door office, 'Give me 20,000 ecus!' For a brief moment I saw myself leaving Gregoire's office with a money-bag bulging with notional euro-currency. Then Dondini replied: 'Fifteen thousand pounds sterling'. Months later the £15,000 did eventually arrive. As I recall most of it went on survival as usual.

The Documenta event had some other more immediate consequences. Present at the meeting had been Margarethe Jochimsen, a leading light in the Bonn Kunstverein ('Friends of Art'), an important generator of cultural activity at what was then the political Capital of the DBR, and herself wife of the current West German Secretary of State for Education Reimut Jochimsen. Between them the Jochimsens engineered an event in the city of Bonn Town Hall, brokered and facilitated by Reimut himself, at which APG again presented its case and invited participation, this

time in the presence of a mixed group of senior Civil servants from relevant Government departments, and a dozen or so of the more radical German artists of their day. With broadly the same APG party as before came Rolf and Ros Sacchsse, artists from Bonn itself, also recruited to the APG cause during the Documenta day. Rolf and Ros were then living in the last house in their suburb of Bonn with unrestored plaster walls still splattered by shrapnel and cannon-fire – an act of ostentation not appreciated by their neighbours all of whom had made good their war-damage long ago.

The division of Germany into East and West after World War 2 was an unexpected consequence of that same madness – substituting cold war for hot war in the perilous years of MAD-secured peace which followed.

One consequence of the division of the two Germanies was that academics and teachers in West Germany had to sign a document – the Berufsverbot – a sworn declaration of loyalty to the DBR. This set particularly heavily on the shoulders of West Germany's current generation of visual artists, most of whom had to teach in public institutions to earn a living. The inevitable result was that German artists were both occupationally radical and professionally prickly. They were interested in APG's ideas, but not welcoming to APG itself. We later learned that the artists in the Town Hall meeting had subsequently formed up to suggest the DBR fund artist placements for them – bypassing the APG initiative. One offer did come APG's way however, from a government official by the name of Vogel. At the time there existed a Bonn government policy document, known to APG, which referred to the 'usages' of art in a social context. Vogel seemed willing to acknowledge that APG was ahead of the game and might have something innovative to contribute under this head. APG, prepared to engage pragmatically with any area of imaginative potential so long as it was on an open brief, responded with interest. In the process it ran head-on into questions about its own artistic identity

From 1977 onwards it could be argued that APG with its various platform presentations in Kassel, Bonn, the RCA, the Whitechapel Gallery, Paris and Vienna was carrying forward the genre of performance art which it had initiated with The Exhibit at the Hayward gallery. Artists on a platform engaging with mixed audiences of industrialists, government administrators and other artists. But within APG these ventures into the discursive were never seen as ends in themselves, certainly never perceived as 'art', were always intended as marketing exercises for the placement process, even if the term 'marketing' as such was never used between us.

A bigger question hung – and perhaps in many minds still hangs -over the placement process itself. Was placement on an open brief a manifestation of conceptual art – the creation of a wish for a new form of art without its concrete fulfilment in the emergence of authentic new art forms? Or was the open brief placement an

authentic pathway to new forms of artistic creation rooted in context ? In short, to quote a favourite APG saying, was context 'half the art'?

From a topological viewpoint, traditional works of art, easel-paintings and free-standing sculptures, were closed systems, adiabatically isolated from the world of events going on around them – an isolation emblematised by the frame or plinth, though valued by the attentive eye as a function of the aesthetic 'self-sufficiency' of the work itself, its capacity to resolve its own tensions entirely within its own optical boundaries. Conceptual art challenged that traditional systemic isolation, explored a threshold where the perceived object intersected with a perceived event – where the 'particle' of traditional art entangled with the 'wave' of an untraditional topological alternative: the image as open system. Conceptual art, with its entanglement of particle and wave has its own place in the canon of art-history. But it also and simultaneously functioned as a bridge across which many artists have since migrated, to explore the alternative creative potentials of open-system images per se: images which reposition the attentive eye inside the image looking out and invite interaction rather than contemplation. A first step to an art of open-system images was Installation art, in which the open image was still isolated within the closed topological boundaries of a gallery or museum. The riskier next step was to embed the open-system image in some real-time context in the external, non-art world. This was the creative potential offered by contextual art: art which emerged out of the transactions of an artist with the world as it exists in real time – that is to say, the irreversible time within which the whole panoply of physical, biological and cultural evolution has unfolded, from the Big Bang to Justin Bieber. It was into this region of actively contextualised art that APG's proposition pointed. The question is: to what extent effectively?

It may be argued that the Arts Council was in a narrow sense correct in claiming that APG did social engineering rather than art. The national and local government placements of the mid-1970s, by far its most ambitious placements, all generated innovative social 'products': Coward by involving the public in planning decisions affecting their own environment at a time when this was usually left to the planners (DHSS); Brisley by creating an archive of a vanished coal-mining past (Peterlee); Latham by proposing the conversion of derelict land into public parks and the regeneration of an industrial rust-belt by innovative industries (both Scottish Office); Hugh Davies using old Pathe News as memory-recall aids for the elderly (DoE). All these were all pioneering ventures in their day, much replicated since. Even though Breakwell's initiative to bring about improved communications in high-security hospitals, even though the report still slumbers under the official secrets act, the artist's own actions, sleeping in the cells, talking freely to the inmates, arguably anticipated a more general 'enlightenment' promised in penal institutions, even it never fully took place.

Equally however, the presence of artists in these rampantly 'non-art' environments, and their positive acceptance on-site, was deeply radical for its day. In this sense APG certainly fulfilled the conceptual art 'brief' – it realised the wish to take art out of the traditional art-environment, even if it could not decisively prove the fulfilment. In this sense APG clearly holds its place as a pioneer of the 'discursive' form of art – art which talked about changes it could not yet properly deliver. In Germany APG's venture effectively stalled at that point. I once spent the better part of a night arguing with our Bonn colleagues, Rolf and Ros Sachsse, whether APG's proposition for the artist as Incidental Person was purely conceptual, or could exist in reality. For the Sachsses APG's proposition was conceptual rather than real. When the aforementioned Vogel offered a placement in camps where Vietnam 'boat-people' were accommodated, prior to being in some way integrated into German society, the proposition seemed to founder on that reef – the Incidental Person viewed as a concept rather than a concrete reality. Another proposed placement, in the featureless residential suburb of Tannenbusch went the same way. In the DBR the Incidental person was conceptualised, but not contextualised – in this the German initiative fell short of the pioneering UK achievements.

Yet for me these were fascinating times, full of stimulus. It was during this period that, seeking a model for the systemic transformation which might flow from contextual placement, I wrote an internal APG paper – now in the APG archives – on the flow-dynamics of hydraulic jumps, with their sudden release of energy, followed by a tapering trail of fluctuations as the initial added energy was absorbed into the flow. (At a Royal Society conference on fluctuations at around this time, the then Treasury Economist now Lord Burns observed that the 1973 Yom Kppur war 'oil-shock' had caused the UK economy to 'bounce' in a similar way.). As visual artists increasingly transfer their attention from objects to events – from the particle to the wave as the physicist might say - it seems inevitable that the propagation of wave-forms (and their mutual interference) will emerge as a core idiom of art itself.

It was also in the period of APG's European outreach that I wrote an internal paper on Self-Organising Artist Networks ('SOANs'), a theme on which I shall wind up this brief memoir of my participation in the APG initiative.

Meanwhile, finding itself a world becoming increasingly unresponsive to its message as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, APG Research Ltd deliberately wound itself down and ceased trading, reinventing itself as Organisation and Imagination (O&I) – as such, more like a consultancy and less of a statement about art than APG itself. Partly this was to liberate its activities from John Latham himself, by now in prolonged and bitter personal contestation with the British state, a struggle in which he was always ready to co-opt APG on his side, thereby implicitly undermining APG's own artist-in-government project. Partly it was also to 'normalise' – or at least claim a separate legitimacy for – the idea of the artist as a catalyst for change in society at large. O&I even had a brochure – I wrote it myself – I still have a copy – but when John placed a £5000 debt on its balance sheet as a deferred creditor from

APG, though this was substantively less than the £1 million John maintained he was owed for services rendered to HMG, it was more than O&I could bear, and once I had persuaded John to remove the charge so as not to bankrupt the company at birth, I said my good-byes and withdrew into the media.

I wrote the paper on SOANs because it was already clear in the late 1970s that if the compact physical forms of traditional painting and sculpture were to make way for the much bigger wrap-around walk-thru' environments of installation and contextual art, then the solitary artist in the north-lit studio would need to give way to some form of artist-co-operative, with the capacity to co-ordinate altogether more complex relationships between art and the outside world. Furthermore this was not just a matter of scaling up physically to produce the bigger structures to accommodate eyes now *inside the work of art looking out*. It was also a matter of achieving a wider scan of global events than the artist as solitary individual could him or herself accomplish. In this context APG Research Ltd with its board of directors populated mainly by artists, had all the appearance of a SOAN. In reality it ceased to be a SOAN at the point of delivery: the artist placed within an institution in the role of Incidental Person was our old friend the individual artist as solitary sensibility once again. The 'Incidental' emphasis was still on 'person' rather than 'people'. The wider question of the placement a network of artists went unaddressed – not least, clearly, because the culture for that kind of collaboration did not yet exist. Art-education and the art-market were still set up to provide for aesthetic contemplation rather than immersive participation. The economics of art favoured the creative individual over the creative collective.

APG's track record invariably invites the question: 'Where was the art?' My own view is that the presence of artists on open brief placements in institutions where artists had never been admitted before was itself a hugely significant step in the evolution of art, and therefore constitutes a form of 'art' in itself. Looking round the individual exhibits at the Raven Row retrospective the 'art' is less easy to discern – if only because there have been so many cover versions since of the ideas first expressed in those wobbly films and life-stained documents produced more than 30 years ago. Yet all those diverse initiatives, if brought together and taken as a whole as the Raven Row installation implicitly invites the visitor to do, do seem to add up collectively to something quite different: the end of the ivory tower; a shared willingness to engage with new cultural risks inside rather than outside the flow of daily life itself; a return to the first principle of imaginative work – the exploration of new creative potentials. It seems to me that there is enough 'art' in that at least to justify the inclusion of the word 'research' in *APG Research Ltd*. It is worth remembering however that pure research – whether in science or art - seldom produces the answers society wants from it. APG may not have found many answers at all. But it first raised questions which still don't easily go away.//

© NT: 1 Nov. 2012

6,700 wds. Incl. CV

Nicholas Tresilian, art-historian, broadcaster and media entrepreneur, was from 1977 to [1990. In turn a member of the boards of directors of APG Research Ltd and Organisation and Imagination Ltd He was founding chairman of GWR Radio, a leading UK independent radio group; a founding director of Classic fm, the world's largest commercial classical music station, for which he also broadcast for 10 years; also Chief Executive of Central European Broadcasting Ltd, through which he worked on radio development in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria and former East Germany, . His series Private Landscapes of TV documentary films on the work of Joe Tilson, Richard Smith, Peter Blake and David Inshaw was produced for BBC-2 in 1974, He is a former Vice-President of the US-based International Institute for the Study of Time. He writes and lectures on the relationship between visual art and cultural evolution. He lives in Oxford (UK) and Córdoba (Spain). In Spain he is the founder of a company, Parques Virtuales S.L., working closely with the Junta de Andalucía on conservation issues for Doñana National Park, one of the world's mahor biosphere reserves.