

A Place of Pleasure:

Woodwork, Vauxhall Spring Gardens and Making Audiences for Art

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Verdant Vistoes, melting Sounds

Magic Echoes Fairy Rounds

Beauties ev'ry where surprize:-

Sure this Spot dropt from the Skies!(1)

The Spring Gardens in Vauxhall is a curious place—an open expanse of green where nothing much seems to happen lying in the middle of a busy neighbourhood. On one side there is a flat area of grass, on the other some strangely shaped hillocks. At one corner, horses and donkeys monitor the space from a paddock, at another a little games field is scooped out of a bank, but both cling precariously to the edges of the open space. The Gardens fit uneasily into their surroundings of road and railway, office blocks and houses, as if created by chance, as if dropped from the skies amongst the ordinary urban fabric.

Although it is far from obvious now, the Gardens are, in fact, a relic of another era. For two centuries they were used as a pleasure ground by Londoners who went there to enjoy music and entertainment in an exotic display of illusion and architectural folly. Before Westminster Bridge was built, they would arrive directly at this magical land by boat, sailing up river from the centre of town, though now the Gardens are severed from the Thames by a railway line and a major road. Today the passing of trains, whose steam-driven ancestors drove out the pleasure ground, is the most prevalent noise in the Gardens. That there is a park

here at all, or that it roughly follows the boundaries of the old Spring Gardens, is accidental, for in the nineteenth century they were torn down and built over. The resultant buildings stood until they were destroyed by German bombs and rockets during the Second World War. Now people use the area for walking dogs, for sports, as a shortcut and, in the summer, for having lunch. Adults tend to stick to the paths, so the grounds are little traversed except by birds, dogs and children. People without homes also spend much time in the Gardens, sleeping there day and night. Today, if this neglected space has a reputation, it is as a dossers' park—for the homeless can always be seen there, sticking together for company and protection.

For three days one May, the Gardens underwent a change: visual artists, artists, musicians and choreographers held an event called *Woodwork*.⁽²⁾ The title of the collaboration is curious, too. There was plenty of work with wood and trees, as might be expected and also the hope that, from it, something might come of the dense 'woodwork' of the contemporary art scene. In the eighteenth century, 'woodwork' also meant an artificially laid out grove or plantation, so the old pleasure ground was remembered in the title. During this event, the change made to the Gardens was sometimes very slight, and people hurrying through would hardly have noticed. It was not that the Gardens once more became a place of spectacular entertainment, but more that there were diversions which might side-track people from their customary thoughts and actions, and that, sometimes inadvertently, historical spectres were raised against the grass banks and office buildings. Passing through the Gardens on these days, you might have noticed ribbons fluttering from trees, or flower girls, or some potted trees moving about, or an eccentric figure in a frock-coat haranguing a small crowd. Or you might not.

Woodwork was a marginal event if ever there were one—under-funded, little seen, receiving almost no press attention, and quickly forgotten. Why, then, remember and think

about it? Because *Woodwork* previewed some later developments in British contemporary art and more importantly because it provides an example of an alternative model of artistic practice—one which, for all its faults, was collaborative and open to a wide public.

Vauxhall Spring Gardens

Woodwork, which was made for the Spring Gardens, cannot be understood without knowing something of the place. On the face of it, the Gardens have an illustrious past and a degraded present, but each is not quite what it seems. The present Gardens, with a slight amputation on the east side and a more substantial one on the west, separating them from the river, map out the borders of the old, magnificent place of pleasure. Hillocks hunched strangely about the grounds are the rubble of bombed buildings heaped into piles and grassed over. They provide vantage points over the bare ground, just as supper boxes and pavilions once did over the decorated pleasure garden. In the old Gardens, the theatrical wood and canvas constructions, some of them meant to give the illusion of ruined ancient cities, were premonitions of these current amphitheatres, the actual ruins of London.

The Gardens were devoted to an assortment of pleasures, some innocent. From around 1660 Londoners went there to wander in a rustic setting. One writer described the early Gardens before they became a place for organised entertainment:

Foxhall, where there is a large garden of matchless elegance called the Spring Garden, because it is most agreeable in spring, when vast quantities of birds nest and sing there. It consists entirely of avenues and covered walks where people stroll up and down, and green huts, in which one can get a glass of

wine, snuff, and other things, although everything is very dear and bad.

Generally vast crowds are to be seen here, especially females of doubtful morals, who are dressed as finely as ladies of quality, most of them having a gold watch hung around their neck.(3)

In the late seventeenth century, the Gardens were formally laid out. Elms were planted in straight lines, forming avenues which bordered triangular ‘wildernesses’ where visitors would happen upon pavilions and architectural follies. From 1728, under the direction of Jonathan Tyers, the Gardens became yet more organised, with pavilions, supper boxes—and entrance charges. A fashionable crowd came to enjoy performances, music, painting, architecture and the spectacle of one another.

Some of the best descriptions of the Gardens are found in novels. Tobias Smollett describes the reaction of an impressionable girl seeing the Gardens for the first time:

Image to yourself ... a spacious garden, part laid out in delightful walks, bounded with high hedges and trees, and paved with gravel; part exhibiting a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottoes, lawns, temples and cascades; porticoes, colonnades, and rotundas; adorned with pillars, statues, and paintings; the whole illuminated with an infinite number of lamps, disposed in different figures of suns, stars and constellations; the place crowded with the gayest company, ranging through those blissful shades, or supping in different lodges on cold collations, enlivened with mirth, freedom and good humour, and animated by an excellent brand of music.(4)

This gushing account gives a rosy, uncritical impression of the place, but also an idea of its impact on a public unfamiliar with such sights. Although there were many such descriptions, the old recreation ground should not be imagined as a lost paradise. Its reputation was always morally ambiguous, and from the beginning the art shown there was political.

The Gardens were far from being just a place of fun—they were a product, a mirror, and in part a cause of profound changes in the nation. From the time of their formalisation until their demise in 1859, Britain had made of itself a self-conscious and powerful nation, concentrated its population in cities and factories, traded and enslaved across the globe, becoming in the process the pre-eminent world imperial power. The current Gardens have a melancholy resonance, as Britain lives with the legacy of its pernicious greatness, fumbling with or sometimes just forgetting the past, sometimes recasting it in saleable heritage form.

Why stage art here? In many ways the setting was highly inappropriate. The present Gardens seem to have little focus or coherence. The passing audience, one might think, is unlikely to have the time or inclination to appreciate contemporary art. With each of these considerations, what could have been weaknesses were taken as strengths. In the long preparation for *Woodwork*, the artists discussed the environment and history of the place. Vauxhall Spring Gardens was thought a suitable setting for a collaborative venture because of its history of performance, music, painting and spectacle. The scrappy, contingent space of the Gardens proved a suitable backdrop to an art which did not impose itself on its audience and gave people time to arrive at their own conclusions. The public, it was hoped, would in large part create the event.

Underground

Woodwork started early one morning, not in the Gardens, but in nearby Vauxhall Underground station.⁽⁵⁾ As rush-hour built up, the confined atmosphere was thick, only stirring when trains pushed the heavy air out of the tunnels. Strip-lighting made colours look sickly and passengers bilious; grime covered everything, even the over-cheerful ads, and on top of all this, there was the noise of the aged trains, sighing and screeching.

On this particular morning, commuters first noticed the music: David Crawforth was working with a stereo and microphone to produce first classical music, sometimes with an ecclesiastical air, then interference noises. Around 7.30 Simon Whitehead, positioned in the passageway between the two platforms, stripped to the waist and began to wash himself from a tin bowl. Most commuters, as they hurriedly passed by, looked on with bemused suspicion. Yet the speakers set up on each side of Whitehead, and the London Transport staff standing around calmly, gave them some slight pause—maybe he was meant to be there after all.

Later, when the station became busier, and there was a gap between the trains, Whitehead's washing suddenly became accepted as a spectacle, and people no longer looked at him furtively. Some started to laugh, clustering about the entrances to the platforms, peering back at the artist. Someone said, 'What's the point? It's just meant to be arty is it?'. Another quipped, 'I love my saucepan too'. Whitehead offered passengers bread rolls with tightly wound messages hidden in the dough. Hardly anyone would take them from his hand. Even when they were offered from a box, he was largely ignored. People were right to be suspicious for the messages in the rolls were potentially poisonous: they read 'Making Bread', 'What's your Role?', 'London to Tivoli, 2 hours', and other holiday destinations and flight times. They asked questions about why people were using the tube, and what they spent their time and money on. Most people are, after all, as they very well know, coerced, grumbling, below ground on their way to earn a crust.

If the overriding response was suspicion, it is because commuters are already assailed by so much—beggars, newspaper and leaflet distributors, one another. On that morning, a homeless man sat begging in the passageway above the platforms, nursing a can of Tennants; later he started to sell *The Big Issue*. Further down, two buskers were playing guitar and flute. It was natural that people should regard the performance as just another obstacle, or as a request for money. An air of ritual hung about much of *Commuter Action*, as if some religious ceremony were being performed before a congregation of heathens. It was deliberately inappropriate, turning an act of necessity into the appearance of a willed communal gathering.

There were other actions on the Underground. Bruce Gilchrist made endless trips around the platforms carrying a large suitcase which periodically emitted odd noises. When people noticed the noises, which came from no obvious source, they looked about in confusion. Ian Hinchliffe hung around the platform as though waiting for a train. He was dressed in the kind of suit which seems to imprison its occupant and was reading a *Beano* album with fierce intensity. No-one paid him much attention. Both Gilchrist and Hinchliffe's work took the form of diversions which were intermittently effective, disorientating people and perhaps making them more aware of their environment and actions.

In *Vauxhall Vanitas*, Naomi Siderfin worked on the stairs between the escalators, gilding the little spikes that stop people sliding down the railings. Above her, Tennants Extra cans, dipped in gold, were suspended from springs and swung lightly in the breeze made by passing trains. Tiny fragments of gold leaf blew down the stairs on to the stained floor. Siderfin's work was slow and painstaking, and people standing on the escalators were carried past it, having a few moments to wonder what she was doing and why. In contrast to Whitehead's more direct approach, this was a gentle interaction with an audience. But the meaning of these works was not so gentle—the gilded spike, like the gilded cage, is a loaded

image. The act of gilding gave value to the undervalued Underground, a public space done down in favour of private affluence. The tube tells the people who use it that they are not worth much. In one sense, Siderfin's decoration of this space with valuable material was in direct opposition to this neglect, but in another it was ironic. She used gold leaf, covering the steel spikes and the tin cans with the material which is the basis of all value. There were echoes of false gold in this work, of a glittering veneer that masks, but none too effectively, a degraded reality, allowing one to stand out sharply against the other.

Blossom and Jetsam

On Thursday morning, people passing along Kennington Lane, or through the foot-tunnel to Vauxhall Cross, were confronted with several strange occurrences: a large banner reading 'How Does Your Garden Grow?' had been run over the railings of the foot-bridge (the way pedestrians cross the lethal entrance to Kennington Lane), buckets containing flowers were being set out in single file, and the air smelt strongly, and most unusually, of Parma Violets. Eventually, as more flowers were added, the line which began at the entrance to the tube, ran over the foot-bridge and continued through the tunnel to the entrance of the Gardens. Women in elaborate hooped skirts tried to sell the blooms.

The light, whimsical air of this fragrant piece by Clare Palmier was undermined by its setting. The Arcadian image of delicate blooms—flowers and maidens—clung to the periphery of one of the busiest junctions in London; perfume competed with traffic fumes, and wind chimes swinging from the bridge's railings were drowned out by the noise of trucks. It was as though some bizarre flotsam, a floral tide-mark, had been washed up by the sea of traffic. The work took on an even more disturbing feel in the foot-tunnel—a sinister

place, dark, decorated with graffiti, embellished with excreta, beer cans and the remains of fires. Here the flowers' hues struggled to enliven the gloom, and the perfume sprayed on the pavement was overpowering, and obviously served to mask the tunnel's usual stink.

The aroma of the old pleasure Gardens was often remarked upon: 'When I considered the Fragrancy of the Walks and Bowers with the Choirs of Birds that sung upon the Trees, and the loose Tribe of People that walked under their Shades, I could not but look upon the place as a kind of *Mahometan Paradise*'.(6) The perfume returned and that loose tribe, who had never really left, had decorated the tunnel walls. Those who passed through the tunnel might have taken it as a gallery, enjoying the flowers and viewing the textual works: one would come across choice examples of skinhead and Nazi graffiti, along with vigorous responses, SWP posters partially ripped away, reminders of diverse sexual preferences ('Black rent boy', followed by a phone number; 'Mickey is a poof'), declarations of passion ('Kelly Hilton is the one I love so go and fuck your mum') and other dedications in a similar vein.

Palmier's work was an ironic introduction, a flowered path, leading people to the Gardens and to *Woodwork*. It was also a deliberate confrontation with the area which offered an ironic glimpse of something better. The fragility of this alternative and its immersion in noise and grime were poignant comments. Moreover, *How Does Your Garden Grow?* was a critique of nostalgia, of those sweet, TV-induced images of the past, of the fancy-dress figures employed in the heritage industry, of looking back and seeing only lost perfection. Bringing kitsch dreams into touch with urban reality, it criticised them both.(7)

The first activities which took place in the Gardens themselves were planned to continue throughout the day, and sometimes over the entire event. They formed a backdrop against which briefer performances could be seen. One of these activities was Alastair MacLennan's *Treework*, which lasted two days. On the first day, he tied a long white ribbon

to each of the Gardens' many trees. This was a deliberately slow, quiet activity, done with great care. On the second day, he tied leaves into the ribbons. In doing these things, MacLennan spent time caring for a neglected space and evoked the formal Gardens of the past. Part of the importance of this work lay in his constant presence in the Gardens. Dressed in a long black coat and black hat, he made a striking figure against the damp greens and greys. Sometimes he approached or crossed over other works, acting as a recurring motif against which other pieces were set.

From 1836 onwards the Gardens had been used as a site for ballooning. In *Political Balloons*, David Crawforth tethered red weather balloons to a line, moving them one by one, leap-frogging over one another, tracing old pathways. These paths might be seen as avenues, and the balloons as trees with immensely attenuated and lengthened trunks. The balloons rose very high and were blown far off vertical, sometimes being lost from sight, or becoming so distant that it was difficult to believe that they were still attached to the ground of the Gardens. Each balloon was meant to carry a single painted word but, as they were inflated, the words were stretched out of all recognition and then further wiped out by rain. They were, then, speech balloons, like those in cartoons and in the old prints of Vauxhall crowds, filled not with helium but hot air. The balloons aroused a great deal of curiosity. Some were lost when kids tried to steal them or see how the lines worked. One man on a bicycle accidentally ripped one out. So the political balloons escaped—passing from aspiration and inflation to brief freedom.

In his work *Poop Scoop*, Andre Stitt spent each day clearing up the prodigious quantities of dog shit deposited in the Gardens. In place of each portion of the offensive substance, he left a little 'Poop Scoop' sign, showing a dog with a crossed out turd. Stitt was marking out a grid over the surface of the Gardens, this time tracking the pathways and territories of dogs. One of a group of homeless men seated on a wall shouted to Stitt as he

passed by: 'You've got some dog crap sitting on the wall here'. When at the weekend the sun emerged and the park filled, toddlers assiduously collected Stitt's signs as though they were bubble-gum cards.

In a corner of the Gardens, Naomi Siderfin and her assistants painted vanitas symbols on the grassy banks. An upturned cup, a dagger, a flower, a death's-head moth and a £ sign were mapped out and painted in different colours. Each symbol had a double significance, historical and contemporary. The upturned cup, for instance, is an old symbol of the futility of ambition and worldly pursuits, but may now serve as an emblem for the Gardens' residents.

Bruce Gilchrist, wearing a kilt and an Indian head-dress, was surrounded by potted trees which formed a mobile shrubbery. Throughout each day he endured, dragging the heavy trees about the Gardens, while from within the mobile forest his sound suitcase played a mix of bagpipe music and Native American chanting and drums. Again, his passage over the Gardens carrying trees was a reminder of the formal avenues which once graced them, and a reminder also that Native Americans had been brought there to set up camp sites as entertainment for the public. Gilchrist's link between the Scottish and the Native American was not merely arbitrary. At the time the pleasure Gardens opened, legislation suppressing Highland culture was still very much in force, although some commercial carrots for the population were also on offer. Highland troops were highly prized by the British army, and Scots played a pre-eminent role in the military and in imperial administration, and indeed in constructing intellectual justifications for repressive legislation at home and abroad.(8) Both Scottish and Native American cultures and people were suppressed, but one was also active in the suppression of others. Their experience of being uprooted was expressed by Gilchrist in the movement of trees normally fixed in the soil.

The links with the past went further than these general associations. It was Gilchrist's work, on the surface so far removed in its pursuit of 'hardship art' from the carefree concerns of the pleasure gardens, which came closest to evoking their historical past. At one time in the Gardens there were tall trees in the 'wildernesses' which were the abode of 'feathered minstrels, who in the most delightful season of the year ravish the ears of the company with their harmony.'(9) There were also apparently subterranean sounds produced by a small orchestra concealed in a thicket dubbed 'musical bushes' or 'fairy music'.

In Ben Hillwood-Harris' *Garden Ensemble*, photographs taken from the high windows of buildings surrounding the Gardens were printed on sheets of steel. These were then placed as notices in the park creating a puzzling mismatch between the depiction and the place itself. Their soft, grey tones were set against the rich colour of the Gardens' early summer foliage; their fuzzy, low definition quality resembled the images of security cameras. These pictures were about different kinds of surveillance; sometimes it is casual, the views which office workers have as they glance up from their work over the green area where they might lunch or pass through on the way home. The intelligence services' buildings (MI5, MI6) and those of linked organisations, including British Telecom, overlook the park. In an ambivalent gesture, Hillwood-Harris provided surveillance information to those who are normally watched. This might be a return of images to the people from whom they are 'taken', or equally a repressive reminder that someone is watching, like the security monitors displayed in shops.

The combination of the various all-day events produced both planned and impromptu collaboration between the artists. Each had something to say about the history of the Gardens or their present condition, and each sought to value the environment by working within it. The works were seen against the backdrop of the city and the park, and each other, producing complex interactions. Gilchrist's strenuous labour with his mobile trees was seen alongside

MacLennan's gentle transformation of fixed ones, and Siderfin's vanitas symbols commented on Stitt's Sisyphean cleaning activities.

Mechanical Movements

At lunchtime, passengers in Vauxhall Underground were amazed to see a set of weirdly-dressed dancers emerging from the tube, then out along the foot-tunnel and into the Gardens. These were Melly Still's dancers, performing *Lunch and Tea Dances* each day of the event. The dancers were mere points of activity in a much wider environment of movement and noise. Once, as they passed along the road, one driver swore loudly at another; cars waiting at the lights coughed in the heat; as the dancers entered the Gardens, a group of construction workers leant out of the new MI6 building, laughing exaggeratedly, and catcalling. The dancers' action stopped and started, progressing sometimes swiftly through the Gardens, and paused at a place where the hillocks seem to form a grass arena. Here they ran and capered, marched up the hills, toppled over and rolled back down again. They performed among Stitt's *Poop Scoop* labels, a collaboration which was both aesthetic and practical. Their clothes, a kilt, a cloak and a gown, in colours which complemented the greens of the Gardens, blew in the breeze. At times the work, with its chivalrous gestures and flowing garments, took on a mock medieval air, matched by MacLennan's ribbons fluttering like pennants in the breeze.

Their angular, jerky movements, with frequent abrupt stops, starts and changes of direction, were derived from the actions of joggers. Improvisation in the dance was contained within an eccentric but strict structure. Certain actions were triggered by external events (for instance a train or plane passing), varying according to the dancers' position in the Gardens. A combination of these external elements yielded forms of considerable complexity and

variety so that each performance bore only a family resemblance to the others. Each was modified not only by unscheduled events, but also by the audience and their occasional participation.

Another day, there was a new variation. This time the dancers did not finish in the Gardens but capered off to Vauxhall Cross, that grim junction looking even greyer and grittier than usual, the sky loaded with rain and the air with exhaust. Taxis honked angrily as the dancers skipped across the broad road, even though the lights were against them. The dancers then disappeared for a time, to re-emerge, extravagant figures against a soft grey sky, dancing across the footbridge on the other side of the junction. There was something touching and funny about these tiny points of activity and colour against the expanse of traffic movement and noise, a free, lyrical element against a directed, commercial, polluting procession.

The work also pointed to the mechanical automatism of modern activities, including recreational sport, and to the external events (such as the arrival of a train) which set people off in a particular direction. These voluntary but mechanical acts were echoed in the circularity of the course of the dance, in its apparently unstructured, endless movement in which one thing arbitrarily followed another.

Old Faithful

One of the best known characters of the old pleasure gardens was Mr. Simpson, the Master of Ceremonies, who held his post for thirty-six years. Thackeray called him 'the gentle Simpson, that kind, smiling idiot'.(10)

He was a man of short stature and his plain face was pitted with smallpox, but his manner and dress made ample amends. He wore a shirt with an enormous frill, a coat of antique cut, and black silk knee-breeches and hose. In his uplifted left hand he carried his tasselled and silver-headed cane, and with his right hand raised his hat to everyone he met ...(11)

On the benefit night for his retirement, 19th August 1833, his effigy was built from coloured lamps on a gigantic scale. This character was revived for the three days of *Woodwork* by Ian Hinchliffe, a veteran of performance art since the 1970s. He first appeared in the Gardens dragging several black rubbish bags with great apparent effort. Again the work element in *Woodwork* was to the fore, as Hinchliffe reminded viewers of the generations of servants who worked in the Gardens, catering to the pleasures of the rich. He wore a frock-coat and knee-breeches, decorated with feathers—a fine costume which became increasingly begrimed and tattered as the event wore on. The bags contained plaster torsos. Hinchliffe began by laying them out on the ground in two parallel lines, connected by pieces of string. They were reminiscent of a railway line and an avenue, and of structures dotting a promenade. As in the laying of railway track, progress was marked by ceremonies as various stages were reached. Mr. Simpson's addresses to his Vauxhall audience were described as 'masterpieces of florid humility'.(12) Hinchliffe's speeches and dialogues, as he declaimed over the plaster bodies, were certainly florid but far from humble—suggestive, funny, hectoring and full of strange connections. It was like listening to a radio which drifted across the spectrum, in and out of reception, producing snatches of sense.

Over a long period, bags and torsos were carried back and forth; sometimes slung over the shoulder, sometimes cradled gently as babies. The torsos were laid to rest, each a plaster tombstone, and were decorated by Hinchliffe where they lay. They represented

important events in the rise of the nation as an entity—the struggle between an authoritarian aristocracy and an expanding middle class, the eventual accommodation between them, and with it of a new audience for art: the founding of, in turn, the Bank of England (1694), the British Museum (1753), and the Royal Academy (1769). They were spoof memorials which sent up, not so much the events themselves as people’s memories and forgetfulness about them, filtered through half-remembered lessons at school and heritage dramas. Dotted across the grass, they were the modest graves of history.

The Loose Tribe

In her preparatory notes for *Woodwork*, Clare Palmier wondered, ‘If you see me in Spring Gardens would you say hello?’ On Friday morning, her *Natives* was installed in the subway tunnel leading to the tube. A series of black-and-white photographs of local people or those travelling through the area were stuck to the wall along with an identifying label. Beneath these were a series of pictures of the Gardens in green photocopies. The subjects of the portraits could come into the tunnel to collect their pictures, which would then be replaced by a monochrome photocopy of the same image in red or green. The grouping of portraits and pictures of the locality suggested a communal link between them. As commuters in the crowded tunnel hurried past these portraits, they would glance at them. Sometimes people recognised portraits, and a small, somewhat dubious sense of community was created. The work was obviously a way of conferring an importance on local people but, as in the display of flowers, there was a deep ambivalence about the task. There was an irony in the juxtaposition of these portraits and their bald descriptions. Our assumption is that these portraits tell us something about their subjects—and they may, but we are hard-pressed to say

exactly what. This work was again about the lack of an organic community, and about the divisions in a locality, between rich and poor, black and white, gay and straight, residents and homeless, but also about a general indifference and lack of connection, as powerful within such divisions as across them. The transitory was a strong feature of *Natives*, apparent in the viewers, the subjects and the temporary nature of the work itself.

Portraits in this public space obviously might compete with pictures of the victims of crime and faces in adverts, also seen on the tube. In the latter, unseeing eyes solicit glances from a passing trade; there is a one-way traffic of cursory examination in which attention is exchanged for beauty, or something humorous or intriguing. In Palmier's work, passers-by saw faces like their own which sell only themselves.

Stagflation

Dickens described ballooning in Vauxhall Gardens, making fun of the childish reactions to this novelty, of people gawking at the rising and falling of an inflated bag of air. In this, nothing much has changed. As part of Crawforth's work on ballooning, *Woodwork* included a balloon which was to fly at night and crowds gathered in the twilight to watch the preparations for its ascent. On the playing field, the envelope gradually inflated, lying on the ground like a giant slug, and there was a constant bustle as lines were secured and flames were noisily squirted into its cavity.

Finally, by which time it was dark, the balloon stood up uncertainly in the air, listing drunkenly from side to side. The plan was that the singer Mary Genis would ascend in the tethered balloon and, using a radio-mike, relay her eighteenth-century songs to the people below. Unfortunately, each time the balloon rose to the extent of its tether, it bounced back

from this terminus, and despite frequent blasts of the burner only succeeded in yo-yoing up and down, from ground to the end of the rope and back again. Genis bravely continued to sing from this unstable platform, but because of the radio-mike's malfunction, only faint snatches of her unamplified voice were carried to the audience.

An innovation was produced from this misfortune—a large number of people held the balloon down so that it momentarily became a part of Susanne Thomas' dance, *Field Piece*. At times the flame made the balloon glow like a giant light bulb, momentarily revealing all the detail of the dancers, the Gardens and the spectators. This brief, violent flaring of flame and light, like a controlled explosion, matched the sharp, fast movements of the dancers, and their sudden cries. *Field Piece* was otherwise harshly and partially lit by car headlights. The dancers dashed in and out of the light like moths. On the playing field with its surrounding walls, they rushed, cried, fell and squirmed in the dirt. The burner roared menacingly, the only accompaniment to the dancers' frantic movements. The dance was a reminder of the character of the modern Gardens, for the time being transformed by *Woodwork*, but not normally somewhere one would choose to take a walk at night.

The lighting of the dance again referred to the history of the place, where fireworks had often been seen, and where visitors were drawn from dark London by the lure of its many lamps: 'Here are fine pavilions, shady groves, and most delightful walks, illuminated by above one thousand lamps, so disposed that they all take fire together, almost as quick as lightning, and dart with such a sudden blaze as is perfectly surprising.'(13) When the dance was finished, David Crawforth set off a pyrotechnic display; one very fast burning explosive action, followed by a much slower one which burned along wires, making grids again reflecting the formal layout of the old Gardens. Watching the turning wire burn, imagined letters and words were traced in fire.

Bankrupt

Ian Hinchliffe, once more in the guise of Mr. Simpson, conducted a ceremony which closed *Woodwork*. He declaimed maniacally and drunkenly to the crowd. Someone said, ‘You’ve had one too many, mate’, and this was certainly true—his torsos appropriately made a track towards the beer tent. Their double line formed a railway line which Mr. Simpson shuttled up and down, a manic engine, stopping briefly at each plaster station for a quick rant. They were also Stations of the Cross, at which he was abused, not by the Jews, but by the Philistines. Hinchliffe collected a following of children and young homeless from the Lord Clyde hostel. ‘You’re a nutter, you are’, said one, understandably. Another: ‘Can I have half a gram of whatever you’re on?’ Nevertheless, they ran up and down outside his ‘rails’ and imitated his actions. In his dialogues with them, Hinchliffe matched them in crudity and eccentricity.

Near the beer tent Hinchliffe remarked that something was bankrupt: ‘Bankrupt!?’ echoed one of the homeless in disbelief at so alien and nonsensical a concept. What a word this is for them—it assumes you had something to start with. At one point Hinchliffe foppishly plucked at his long shirt sleeves. One girl wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt complained that she could not do the same. Without hesitation, Hinchliffe reached up beneath his frock coat, ripped off his sleeve and handed it to the astonished girl.

***Woodwork* and Contemporary British Art**

Woodwork passed swiftly out of mind and matter, but perhaps it deserves to be remembered because it raised important issues about the current practice of art. The event was highly site-

specific. The history of the Gardens, mediated through an awareness of their current condition, was approached with more irony than nostalgia, establishing a productive opposition between what might be thought of as the authentic and the sham. There was no attempt to revive the past, but rather to indicate it, bringing it to consciousness for contemporary uses.

Performance and installation work are not usually suited to the entertainment of those with short attention spans. Perception must be adapted and slowed in order to follow a work, and this is part of its point. Those who stayed in the park for long enough would become aware of the changes made by various works, the movement of Gilchrist's trees or Crawforth's balloons. Even Hinchliffe's more spectacular performances were often long, drawn-out affairs—slow, discontinuous ceremonies. Few would sit through the performances without distraction. In the Gardens, though, there always *were* distractions: other people and their participation, other events, dogs, children, changes in the weather, ambient noises.

Aside from a programme leaflet, there was no guidance for the viewer, no labelling, and not much of a centre to *Woodwork*. The lack of managing or shepherding of the audience increased their sense of an encounter with something 'real'. If people were puzzled, they could ask what was going on. The artists who worked all day in the Gardens (especially Andre Stitt because of his overalls and his *Poop Scoop* cart which made him look 'official') had a lot of contact with a curious public. Simon Whitehead had wanted to perform without speaking, but found himself being questioned so insistently that finally he had to give in and reply. From a performer's point of view, there was a lack of control, and of a managed, theatrical space and fixed audience to which the performer could play. The anonymity of art in the Gardens was an aid to its collectivity. Alastair MacLennan and others' self-absorbed activities were ideal in this setting, proceeding quietly but being open to people who wanted to know what they were about. In the noisy and porous space of the Gardens where events

took place under the open sky, improvisation was a necessity. In the hermetic space of the modern gallery, by contrast, a sanctum which turns in on itself and away from the world, viewers are controlled, policed by guards and agreed rules of decorum.

MacLennan has written of collaboration as an ethical practice, and in *Woodwork* there was a clear ethical model operating in which ideas and work were shared, especially in the long, collective preparation for the event. Various unplanned collaborations took place in the unmanaged space of the Gardens as artists came across each other's work, or as performances took place against the background of installations. The audience, too, often improvised their own complementary activities.

To make such a project involved putting some faith in the local inhabitants. Some of the work was intrinsically hard to understand, but was made accessible by the fact that it was created as people watched or even helped, and in this way the work was demystified and made material. The mute, definitively finished art object was dissolved, to be seen rather as a practical thing achieved through ingenuity and labour.

Common to many of the artists in *Woodwork* was a dialectic of positive and negative themes, as seen, for instance, in Palmier's flowers and Siderfin's vanitas symbols. The aspects of ritual and of unmotivated work, which has an organic relationship to the community, was cultivated in the face of the lack of an actual community which would be a ready-made audience for art. A connection between work and life had to be simulated, and there was a conscious irony in doing so, carried over into the work itself. But this irony was intended to be productive and was thus very unlike the toothless grin of so many postmodern productions. Perhaps dominant cultural forms might be infected by non-utilitarian, collaborative, ecological elements. Old and abused symbols might be pushed beyond their revival as commodities, without losing a remembrance of their history and their assimilation by the image marketers.

In a divided society, there is always guilt attached to the pursuit of the luxury and privilege of art. The great length of time which some of the works took to make could be seen as conspicuous consumption ('time is money' was the lesson first pressed on industrial workers in the eighteenth century).(14) *Woodwork* brought together in the Gardens the excess of artistic activity and the depths of a society which undergirds it; art confronted the derelict, the crazy and the poor, alongside the averagely fed. An individual work of art, as opposed to art as a whole, can make this sense of guilt conscious in the form of a contradiction, which is included in its content or material.(15) This is very much what *Woodwork* sought to do, to act as a provocation, a difficult event, which brought separate worlds into contact.

For *Woodwork* the audience consisted of people from the art world, but also local residents, the homeless, office and manual workers. The negative side of this mix, and of the lack of a collective understanding, was manifested in apathy, hostility, ridicule and even vandalism. Alastair MacLennan has written of art as revenge—a society gets the art it deserves, but even from this position the possibility of salvaging the positive from the negative remains.(16) If there was sometimes a desultory edge to *Woodwork*, there was also a positive side manifested by the audience's curiosity, openness, thoughtfulness and a pervasive resistance to being managed.

The people who were present for all of the events in the Gardens were those who live there. They may seem an unpromising audience, yet there were positive aspects about the relationship between *Woodwork* and the homeless. The routine of their lives was altered for a time by the event. There was also much that the artists could learn from them: they were told of the claustrophobia of being indoors after so long outside, of the realisation that the only people who really care for the homeless are other homeless and the violence they receive from people who come to the Gardens at night to bolster the work ethic. The relations between them were close and direct—something that Wyndham Lewis dubbed 'the

freemasonry of the propertyless', and their constant ribbing sometimes concealed a background of affection.(17) A community could be found in Vauxhall, after all, in the Gardens themselves. The homeless have a 'freedom' forced on them similar to that of an uncommodified art—and if art remains uncommodified, this, too, is usually not a matter of choice. They are remarkably free of the cultural flotsam in which the rest of us bathe—radio, TV, popular music, even to an extent newspapers, magazines or shopping. While they are excluded from many places, they alone know a different London which is always walked over, and they venture into places few others know.

The theme of the identity of the onlooker and the quality of their engagement was perhaps the most important thing about *Woodwork*, and is also the most pressing issue facing contemporary art today. To take the homeless as your audience is an extreme solution, and a partial one, but it is no more extreme than that currently taken in the fashionable 'alternative' galleries—to draw entirely upon an enclosed and ironically self-conscious bohemia. If the art shown in those galleries is insufferably safe, it is not because of its content, but because it always talks to itself. The audience for contemporary art has expanded recently but it remains highly homogeneous, and, as we shall see by looking back once again at Vauxhall, such audiences have been constructed many times before.

Creating an Audience for Art

The making of an audience for art was closely tied to the creation of the middle class. The pleasure Gardens flourished at a time when working people were thrown together in ever increasing concentrations and were supposed to be divided by ever more specialised tasks, a time of conquest and systematic plunder, which involved as a by-product the creation of a

modern state and economy. In a well-planned symbiosis, government and business, war and commerce, fed off one another. Imperial conquests and wars with rival powers brought substantial material benefits to Britain and were unequivocally praised. They made luxury goods widely available—silk, rice, coffee, tobacco and, above all, tea and sugar.(18) The exotic styles of the Vauxhall pavilions conjured up the often subject territories from which these goods came.(19) Military successes were celebrated in the Gardens, sometimes by re-enactment (in 1827 the Battle of Waterloo was replayed with one thousand cavalry and infantry) and sometimes in painting. In the only substantial classical pavilion built in the Gardens, historical paintings celebrated British military triumphs and magnanimity in victory.(20) Vauxhall verses inscribed beneath an engraved scene of cricketing read:

Britons, whom Nature has for war designed
In the soft charms of ease no Joy can find:
Averse to waste in Rest th'inviting Day
Toil forms their Game, & Labour is their Play.

These sentiments are not as remote from our experience as one might think for the British economy is still highly militarised. Just as in the eighteenth century national identity was partly forged in war against France, under the long Conservative reign the force of arms has twice been used to try to create a sense of national coherence and legitimate government. In another sense, the relation of these verses to the pleasure Gardens is deeply ironic, for British people went there precisely to enjoy the recreational fruits of their military and commercial endeavours. If in the eighteenth century imperialism, racism, the work ethic and games were all found in the themes of Vauxhall entertainment, they are still highly pertinent to the

Gardens as they exist today. Each theme may be turned against the current orthodoxy (just as C.L.R. James showed how cricket could be turned against its creators and disseminators).(21)

The rapidly expanding urban middle class was the main audience of the Gardens under Tyers. No ties of breeding or innate qualities linked the diverse individuals who made up this class. Rather, it was argued, they were an assembly of private people bound by affection and benevolence who, in pursuing their own individual interests, would also act for the good of the whole.(22) This development was part of a wider phenomenon (though at first very much London-based) as the middle class became self-conscious, recognising itself as a social and cultural entity and founding its own meeting places: coffee houses, assembly rooms, spas and, of course, pleasure gardens.

So the audience was new and developed alongside the Gardens. Naturally there were those who questioned its quality and coherence: Oliver Goldsmith has his character Mr. Tibbs, ‘not expect to see a single creature for the evening above the degree of a cheesemonger ...’,(23) while a snobbish character of Smollett’s complained of Vauxhall’s visitors:

The gayest places of public entertainment are filled with fashionable figures; which, upon inquiry, will be found to be journeyman taylor, serving-men, and abigails [ladies’ maids], disguised like their betters.

In short, there is no distinction or subordination left—The different departments of life are jumbled together—The hod-carrier, the low mechanic, the tapster, the publican, the shopkeeper, the pettifogger, the citizen, the courtier, *all tread upon the kibes* [chilblains] *of one another*: actuated by the demons of profligacy and licentiousness, they are seen every where rambling, riding, rolling, rushing, justling, mixing, bouncing, cracking, and crashing on one vile ferment of stupidity and corruption—.(24)

Another of Smollett's characters provides a corrective to the venom, if not the accuracy, of this view: 'It grates old Square-toes to reflect, that it is not in his power to enjoy even the most elegant diversions of the capital, without the participation of the vulgar; for they now thrust themselves into all assemblies, from a ridotto at St. James's, to a hop at Rotherhithe.'(25) Tyers' business was to make his patrons feel that they were part of an art public by virtue of their participation in the sphere of polite discourse, bound by common interest.(26) Strong links were drawn between civility, politeness, virtue and appearance, to the extent that the self was considered as a work of art: 'Let us imagine ourselves, as so many living Pictures drawn by the most excellent Masters, exquisitely designed to afford the utmost Pleasure to the Beholders'.(27) So in this sense, at least, each member of the audience was also a performer, each made of themselves a work of aesthetic civility, believing in the power of art to unite the individual sensibilities with the general interests of society as a whole.(28)

In the eighteenth century, popular carnivals and fairs were still a political force which met with concerted, though far from successful, attempts to stamp them out.(29) Under Tyers, the Spring Gardens took on the form of carnival, but at the same time their middle- and upper-class audience were careful to distinguish their pursuits from those of the general populace.(30) To do this, it was necessary to regulate the performers, exclude undesirables, create a firm distinction between audience and spectacle, and to enforce polite, if not moral, behaviour. When Tyers opened the Gardens after renovation in 1728, a guard of one hundred soldiers was present with fixed bayonets.(31) Music in the Gardens, which before Tyers' direction was impromptu and performed by buskers or members of the crowd, was afterwards managed, programmed and separated from the audience.(32) Large crowds were known to be potentially dangerous and, if Handel was often heard at Vauxhall, his reputation was in part

based upon the supposed ability of his harmony to charm 'even the greatest Clouds into the profoundest Calm and most decent Behaviour'.(33)

The changes at Vauxhall were part of a more general assault on manners. When appearance could no longer be relied upon to indicate status, manners took on increased importance. David Solkin has argued that it was standard in the propaganda of the age to argue that the politeness which accompanied commerce had refined the barbarous past of the nation.(34) An anonymous poem, 'The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens' (1741) described the period before Tyers:

In Times, not yet forgot, this Ground was trod
By *Lust* and *Folly*, this was their Abode;
The Evening Shade that fell but serv'd to hide
The Shame of Drunkards, or the Harlot's Pride.

And afterwards:

The Paths that lead to Knowledge daily swept,
A bright Idea of Proportion kept,
Impertinence and Errors lopt away,
And all is smooth, and uniform and gay.
Thus Art has govern'd here, and by Degrees
Conquer'd the Rudeness of the stubborn Trees,
To equal Heights has taught their Shades to rise,
Stop'd their Ambitious Tendence to the Skies ...(35)

Tyers was commended for 'having chang'd the leud Scene' to one 'of the most rational, elegant and innocent kind'.(36)

Despite these measures and the propaganda that accompanied them, the audience of the pleasure Gardens was often far from ordered and polite. Vauxhall retained its reputation for immoral behaviour—in 1763 Tyers was ordered by magistrates to fence off the walks so that courting couples would be prevented from committing indecencies in the woods. There were regular riots on the last night of the season when, 'the folks run about—and then there's a squealing and squalling! and all the lamps are broke, and the women run skimper scamper'.(37) Yet the intention, at any rate, was that the Gardens retain only the form of popular carnival, including its anti-hierarchical elements which were convenient for the bourgeoisie in its power struggle with the aristocracy, while excluding its vulgar elements. Old carnival, subject to repression in the real world, became a strong presence in satirical verse and prints, and in the very paintings shown in the Spring Gardens, where Hayman portrayed traditional pursuits in which the poor appear as innocent, if frivolous, children, providing a marked contrast to the polite adult activities against which those depictions were seen.(38)

Woodwork participant, Roland Miller, has written of the roots of British performance art, which has always depended on improvised action and dialogue, in music hall and folk theatre, even mystery plays. This tradition was just that carnivalesque activity from which Tyers had sought to dissociate the pleasure gardens whilst assimilating its empty form. Such a tradition cannot be simply recovered. The need to confect a community for the purposes of an event means that now carnival generally serves the prevailing system by providing a temporary release from its constraints. *Woodwork* showed how an open, outdoor art could be anti-carnavalesque yet still radical, taking not the form of carnival without its spirit, but its spirit without its form. In carnival, simple oppositions are set up in order to be subverted:

high and low, birth and death, male and female, lord and serf. At its best, *Woodwork* brought history into this simple subversion, producing a sense of impetus and development, and holding out a promise for the future.

The audience for art has been created and recreated as the middle class stirred and grew over the centuries. Vauxhall in the eighteenth century had its radical aspect as the interests of the rising class worked against aristocratic authority.(39) The same can hardly be said of the current audience for ‘new British art’ which defines itself only against suburban philistinism. The audience for live art is even more restrictive, the work often being seen only by a narrow circle of other live art practitioners and critics. A paradox of performance art has been that, while it shifts the emphasis from object to audience which should open up a plurality of interpretation, the actual audiences tend to be highly enclosed and homogeneous. For *Woodwork*, as for the audience of the eighteenth century, there was an assumption that the power of the aesthetic can unite people—but it did not first require uniformity in its audience.

The Belated End of Illusion

With great regularity the pleasure gardens were described as being characteristically British, yet descriptions often compared them to mythical Eastern pleasure grounds. Oliver Goldsmith enthused:

I must confess, that upon entering the gardens, I found every sense overpaid with more than expected pleasure; the lights everywhere glimmering through the scarcely-moving trees; the full-bodied concert bursting on the stillness of the night; the natural

concert of the birds ... all conspired to fill my imagination with the visionary happiness of the Arabian lawgiver [Mohammed], and lifted me into an ecstasy of admiration.(40)

Here Vauxhall, become a Muslim paradise, is presented as a realm of unbounded sensual delight.

This middle-class heaven, and the wider national success which it embodied, was achieved at great human cost at home and abroad. As one critic of the system succinctly put it, 'The veiled slavery of the wage-workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the New World' .(41) European economic superiority was partially founded on the exploitation of the New World from which profits were regularly repatriated, above all from sugar plantations.(42) In Britain wealth also exacted its price. Generations of ordinary people were sacrificed to the creation of an industrial base, a process which created a general impoverishment of the working population as wages fell, prices rose and customary privileges were withdrawn. A landless population was created that had few options outside the factory or the ever-expanding army.(43) This was accompanied by the spread of radical ideas and political organisation among artisans, and expressions of discontent over food, tax and working conditions.(44) One response to this development was straightforward repression: Daniel Defoe noted the curious fact that, 'There are in London, notwithstanding we are a nation of liberty, more public and private prisons, and houses of confinement, than any city in Europe, perhaps as many as in all the capital cities of Europe put together...(45) A similar boast could be made today. In the late eighteenth century, these developments are reflected in changing representations of the poor who had been pictured as an idealised, happy class of innocents, but were increasingly seen as a collective, troubled mob, a problem for the propertied.

Like the skin of a postmodern office building in which cladding and smoked glass conceal the structure and activities beneath, the Gardens were a fragment of the luxurious gilding produced by, and laid over, the workhouse beneath. So it is hardly surprising that time and again the pressing feeling was expressed that the garden paradise was a mere illusion: ‘the imagination full of the enchanted groves and rose-bowers of eastern lore, we eagerly passed the barrier, and found ourselves amid illumined groves and fountains playing in beautiful unison with the soft strains of unseen music. Alas! that the creative poetry of infancy should be so readily dispelled by the stern realities of after-life!’(46) In the newly born middle-class brain, the objective fabrication of an earthly paradise, which cannot quite be admitted, is transferred on to a subjective yearning for childhood.

Both the entertainment and the decorative schemes played on these themes of illusion and vanity. In the Vauxhall paintings, the most recurrent themes were those of chance and imbalance; the subjects included leap-frogging, people losing their balance on a see-saw, blindman’s buff, sliding on the ice, and flying a kite.(47) Illusion was central to Vauxhall. The Gardens were a vast *trompe l’oeil* assemblage; the landmarks, mere stage scenery, were flimsy affairs. This was well recognised by some of the visitors. Smollett has one character complain (and let this stand for the culture as a whole):

Vauxhall is a composition of baubles, overcharged with paltry ornaments, ill conceived, and poorly executed; without any unity of design, or propriety of disposition. It is an unnatural assembly of objects, fantastically illuminated in broken masses, seemingly contrived to dazzle the eyes and divert the imagination of the vulgar—Here a wooden lion, there a stone statue; in one place, a range of things like coffeehouse boxes, covered a-top; in another, a parcel of ale-house benches; in a third, a puppet-show representation of a tin cascade; in a fourth, a gloomy cave of a circular form, like a sepulchral vault half lighted; in a fifth, a scanty flip of grass-plat,

that would not afford pasture sufficient for an ass's colt. The walks, which nature seems to have intended for solitude, shade, and silence, are filled with crowds of noisy people, sucking up the nocturnal rheums of an aguish climate; and through these gay scenes, a few lamps glimmer like so many farthing candles.(48)

The structures at Vauxhall were nevertheless at least partially effective, because the Gardens were only visited from the late evening onwards, and the lighting was managed and selective. When, in the nineteenth century, the Gardens were opened in the daytime for displays of ballooning, the sense of disillusionment was intense. Dickens wrote of the contrast, sardonically describing the Gardens by night:

The temples and saloons and cosmoramas and fountains glittered and sparkled before our eyes; the beauty of the lady singers and the elegant deportment of the gentlemen captivated our hearts; a few hundred thousand of additional lamps dazzled our senses; a bowl or two of reeking punch bewildered our brains; and we were happy.(49)

And by day:

then we saw, for the first time, that the entrance, if there had ever been any magic about it at all, was now decidedly disenchanted, being, in fact, nothing more nor less than a combination of very roughly-painted boards and sawdust. We glanced at the orchestra and supper-room as we hurried past—we just recognised them, and that was all. We bent our steps to the firework-ground; there, at least, we should not be disappointed. We reached it, and stood rooted to the spot with mortification and astonishment. *That* the Moorish tower—that wooden shed with a door in the centre, and daubs of crimson and yellow all round, like a gigantic watch-case! *That* the place

where night after night we had held the undaunted Mr. Blackmore make his terrific ascent, surrounded by flames of fire and peals of artillery, and where the white garment of Madame Somebody (we forget even her name now), who nobly devoted her life to the manufacture of fireworks, had so often been seen fluttering in the wind, as she called up red, blue, or party-coloured light to illumine her temple!

... We walked about, and met with disappointment at every turn; our favourite views were mere patches of paint; the fountain that had sparkled so showily by lamp-light presented very much the appearance of a water-pipe that had burst; all the ornaments were dingy, and all the walks gloomy.(50)

Yet this awareness had always been held at the back of visitors' minds, and perhaps the very fragility of the illusion contributed to its loaded charm. One writer acutely described the diversions of Vauxhall as having 'an effect desired before it is felt!' (51) As we have seen, many of the Vauxhall paintings illustrated idle pursuits, parables about fate, vanity and ambition. Apparently harmless objects could become tokens of futility and death, like Siderfin's superficially charming paintings on the grass banks.

For a brief time, the *Woodwork* artists pointed to another way: a way of living which is less bound up with material things, which is more aware of its surroundings and their inhabitants, a way of living which values sharing, participation and development. An event such as *Woodwork* may create for those involved a brief tear in the unitary garment of the culture industry. Again the site could not have been more appropriate, for in its stimulation of all the senses, its mix of theatre, music and visual arts, Vauxhall was an early development of phantasmagoria, that all-embracing culture from which there seems no escape. There is undoubtedly vanity involved in even attempting to break with it, like trying to rend water with a blade, but this was a theme of the work itself. *Woodwork* was an attempt to go back

beyond modern illusion through the use of archaic devices—bricolage, ritual, contemplation and the deliberate slowing of action and perception.

The victims of tyrannies other than our own have been obsessively counted and recounted. For the most part, the millions who were and are the victims of capitalism remain uncounted and unaccounted for. Their shadows, decked out in festive garb, entertained the middle classes. The vanity of this entertainment was intimately linked to the fragile structure on which the means to entertain was supported. The Gardens are a palimpsest linking these peoples past and present—the hungry, the dispossessed, the exiled, those exhibited as exotic specimens, the derelict and the homeless.

When the old pleasure Gardens finally closed, *The Times* published an article about the demolition of the pavilions, ‘the wooden edifices that look like spectres of dead ‘fun’ to the travellers by the South-Western railway’.(52) The Gardens are still overlooked by the railway and spectres may still be seen for those who care to look—the banks of grassed-over rubble, and the forgotten inhabitants. An art event like *Woodwork* is by its very nature temporary. Returning even a week later, remarkably little was left, the event already having faded into an archaeology of the recent, appropriate to the Gardens. Someone had cut every ribbon from the trees. The only remnants were Siderfin’s hill paintings, already beginning to fade, and the foot-tunnel which still smelt perversely of perfume.

Performance art vanishes like flame in air, no sooner produced than lost. Forgetfulness was a theme of much of the art in *Woodwork*, which placed emphasis on states of mind rather than material goods, on trajectory rather than position. There is a danger, though, even in remembering—that photography falsifies the event by presenting a series of particular moments, ignoring the space between events, and the expanse and air of the Gardens, all of which are very difficult to represent. Writing also threatens to turn what was a matter of process and becoming into something fixed. The effort to keep *Woodwork* in

memory, to fix it like a photographic print, involves interpretation and reduction. The story I have told is only one set of memories—in itself a performance and an orchestration, and, like the works described, uncertain, and aware of its own likely futility.

The history to which *Woodwork* drew attention to is not that of costumes and clichés, but a knowledge which is necessary to gain a sense of direction, of place, of evolving identity and, most of all, of current potential. Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, washes nightly through people's living rooms, a constant flow of images and sound erasing the traces left by previous ones, a manufactured and continuous present. Against this, some forms of impure art can offer resistance by using physical presence, actual space, slowness and an openness to an audience who participates in its creation. Material and audience may seem unsuitable, but such activity is a necessary first step and, as with working wood, the process is slow, much is discarded along the way, and one must work with the given material.

Notes

(1) Longman, cited in Lawrence Gowing, 'Hogarth, Hayman, and the Vauxhall Decorations', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. xcvi, no. 598, January 1953, p. 6.

(2) *Woodwork* was curated by Nosepaint (David Crawforth and Naomi Siderfin) and took place on 27-29 May 1993.

(3) *London in 1710 from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. & trans. W.H. Quarrel and Margaret Mare, London, 1934, p. 131.

(4) Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), Penguin, London 1967, p. 124.

(5) This account of *Woodwork* is necessarily an abbreviated and selective one; it omits some of the events and actions, and does not consider the open workshops which preceded it, the community events involving local schoolchildren, and an evening event held in a nearby railway arch.

(6) Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 20 May 1712; cited in T.J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens*, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 1983, p. 11.

(7) After the work was taken down, the unsold flowers were sent to local institutions, including Bondway and St. Thomas' Hospital.

(8) Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1701-1837*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992, pp. 119, 120; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged. Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Penguin, London, 1991, p. 273f.

(9) Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century*, MacMillan, London, 1896, p. 302.

(10) Thackeray cited in Wroth, *Pleasure*, p. 320.

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) Ibid.

(13) England's Gazetteer, 1751; cited in Wroth, *Pleasure*, p. 293.

(14) E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common. Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, The New Press, New York, 1991, Chapter 6.

(15) Fredric Jameson writing of Theodor Adorno in *Late Marxism. Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1990, p. 130.

(16) Slavka Sverakova, 'Alastair MacLennan', *Alastair MacLennan. Is No, 1975 – 1988*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, 1988, p. 9.

(17) Wyndham Lewis, *Rotting Hill*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1952, p. 10.

(18) Colley, *Britons*, p. 69.

(19) David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money. The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993, p. 135.

(20) Ibid., p. 150.

(21) C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, Hutchinson, London, 1963.

(22) Solkin, *Money*, p. 157.

(23) Goldsmith, Letter LXXI, 'The Citizen of the World'; cited in Edelstein, p. 13.

(24) Smollett, *Clinker*, p. 119.

(25) Smollett, *Clinker*, p. 148.

(26) Solkin, *Money*, pp. 190, 191.

(27) Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures*, London, 1735, pp. 3 & 4; cited in Solkin, *Painting for Money*, p. 31.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 212.

(29) This is one of the major themes of E.P. Thompson's *Customs in Common*.

(30) Solkin, *Money*, p. 115.

(31) Wroth, *Pleasure*, p. 290.

(32) Solkin, *Money*, pp. 114, 15.

(33) *London Daily Post*, 18 April 1738; cited in David Coke, *The Muse's Bower: Vauxhall Gardens, 1728-1786*, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk, 1978, p. 76.

(34) Solkin, *Money*, p. 95.

(35) *Ibid.*, pp. 108–110.

(36) Edelstein, *Vauxhall*, p. 26.

(37) Sudbury citing a character in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778).

(38) See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Methuen, London, 1986, pp. 16, 103, 104; Solkin, *Money*, p. 144.

(39) It has been argued that the rococo eclecticism of Vauxhall architecture was an expression of opposition to the official Palladianism of the government. See Marc Girouard, 'Coffee at Slaughter's. English Art and the Rococo, I', *Country Life*, vol. cxxxix, no. 3593, 13 January 1966, p. 61.

(40) Goldsmith, Letter XXI, 'The Citizen of the World', 1760; cited in Solkin, *Money*, p. 120.

(41) Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I; cited in Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th-18th Centuries*, trans. Siân Reynolds, Vol. III, *The Perspective of the World*, William Collins Sons & Co., London, 1984, p. 392.

(42) Braudel, *Capitalism*, p. 429. There has been much controversy about the extent and type of contribution made to the development of British industry by profits from slavery and the colonies. For a review of the debate, and an argument that the contribution was highly

significant, see Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery. From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*, Verso, London, 1997, Chapter 12.

(43) Braudel, *Capitalism*, pp. 614, 615.

(44) Colley, *Britons*, pp. 283-4; Thompson, *Common*.

(45) Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (1724-6), Penguin, London, 1971, p. 321. On the increase in gaols, see Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, p. 52f.

(46) Cited in Sudbury.

(47) Edelstein, *Vauxhall*, p. 27.

(48) Smollett, *Clinker*, pp. 120, 121.

(49) Charles Dickens, *Sketches by 'Boz' Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People*, John Heywood, London, n.d., p. 94.

(50) Dickens, 'Boz', pp. 95, 96.

(51) *Scots Magazine*, August 1739; cited in Coke, *Bower*, p. 78.

(52) *The Times*, 26th July 1859; cited in Coke, *Bower*, p. 97.